

## **Management capacity at sport and recreation facilities on local government level**

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### **Abstract**

The mandate of public local government is to provide services to constituents to improve overall quality of life. Local governments are increasingly pressured to provide services that reflect value for taxpayers' money and promise sustainable development. Sustainable development is, in turn, dependent upon quality decisions by political leaders and management capacity of civil servants. This study aimed to (1) determine the management capacity profile at sport and recreation facilities on local government level; and (2) identify areas of concern related to management capacity. The research design used was a quantitative, case study with a non-probability purposive sample (n=8). Although the purposive sample of eight recreation and sport facility managers is small, these respondents are responsible for managing 68% of the sport and recreation facilities within the scope of this investigation. Data was collected using the criteria-based Capacity Analysis Tool self-administered questionnaire consisting of 88 sub-elements over eight dimensions of management (leadership, governance and strategy; administration and human resources; finances and budget of the facility; project design, management and evaluation; technical capacity; advocacy and networking; community ownership and accountability; and fundraising) and has a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.89 ( $\alpha=0.89$ ). Results indicated that the internal systemic management capacity of the particular department in this investigation measured unsatisfactory ( $\bar{x} \leq 2.50$ ) in five of the eight management dimensions. While three dimensions scored satisfactory ( $\bar{x} \geq 2.50$ ) the overall collective management capacity score for all eight dimensions was unsatisfactory at  $\bar{x} = 2.33$ . As scholars proved a link between management capacity and organizational performance, the management capacity profile obtained from this study can be used as baseline from which management practices and capacity at sport and recreation facilities can be further developed.

**Keywords:** Management capacity, local government, sport and recreation facilities.

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### **Introduction**

Management capacity is important to policy implementation and local government performance as it provides a catalyst for translating policy goals into quality services (Donahue, Selden & Ingraham, 2000). The connection between

management quality, management capacity and government performance has been the topic of a growing body of scholarly work (Mead, 1981; Clark, 2000; Meier & O'Toole, 2002; Coggburn & Schneider, 2003; Jennings & Ewalt, 2003; Hou, Moynihan & Ingraham, 2003; Brown & Potoski, 2006; Adams, 2008, Provan & Kenis, 2008; Andrews & Boyne, 2010, Misener & Doherty, 2013). Jennings and Ewalt (2003) provide evidence of the link between management capacity and outcomes in public education, healthcare, welfare reform and employment and training. The authors hypothesized that the quality of management affects the performance of public programmes and quote Ingraham and Kneedler (2000) in this regard: "Governments with more management capacity have the ability to perform better than governments with less management capacity, all else being equal."

Before attempting to measure management capacity at sport and recreation facilities, it will be useful to clarify the concept "*management capacity*". Misener and Doherty (2013) define management capacity as an organisation's inherent ability to anticipate and influences change, make informed, intelligent decisions about resources, develop programmes to implement policy, attract, absorb and manage resources (e.g. financial, human and physical resources) and evaluate current activities to guide future action. According to Donahue, Selden and Ingraham (2000) effective administrative procedures, systems and infrastructure underlie and facilitate management capacity. These procedures involve performing generic management activities such as financial management, human resources management, capital management and technology management. Activities, collectively performed, constitute management capacity within specific governmental departments or contexts (national, provincial or local), for example, sport and recreation, health or library services. In this study management capacity is defined as the degree in which sport and recreation facility departments' management practices, structures and systems are in place to achieve policy outcomes.

The mandate of public local government is to provide services to constituents to improve overall quality of life. As such, local governments are increasingly pressured to provide services that reflect value for taxpayers' money and promise sustainable development. Sustainable development is, in turn, dependent upon quality decisions by political leaders and management capacity of civil servants. Provision of public services on the local government level is structured according to specialised fields of service (e.g. sport and recreation). The rationale for including specific fields of service in local government depends on its potential benefits to all citizens of a particular community. Participation in sports and recreation activities has the ability to contribute to the quality of life of individuals and communities as a whole. The potential benefits of sport and recreation on community level have been extensively researched and debated. Mclean, Hurd and Roger (2007), for example, concluded that sport and

recreation are both critical components of a balanced and healthy lifestyle in communities as they provide significant personal benefits in terms of physical, emotional, philosophical, and other important health-related needs of community members. Participation in sport and recreation programmes has also been shown to improve a range of cognitive and social skills such as self-discipline, self-confidence, cultural identity and pride, goal setting and delayed gratification and cooperation and conflict resolution (Lonsdale, Wilkinson, Armstrong, McClay, Clerke & Cook, 2011). Participation in sport and recreation programmes could also lead to economic development through direct training in specific job skills, for example, sport coaching or indirectly by encouraging increased tourism according to Higgins and Burchill, 2005.

Enabling environments for sport and recreation participation are, nonetheless, vital pre-requisites to achieve potential benefits ascribed to sport and recreation participation. Although enabling environments for sport and recreation participation may consist of a wide spectrum of formal and informal spaces and structures, sport and recreation facilities play a vital role to create access and opportunity to sport and recreation participation. The mere existence of sport and recreation facilities does not, however, facilitate the desired benefits automatically. Sport and recreation facilities need to be effectively managed by sections or departments with satisfactory management capacity (Sere, 2014).

### **Theoretical setting**

Measuring management capacity in public government is founded in the organizational capacity and performance literature. The link between organizational capacity or management capacity and performance received significant attention from researchers like Ingraham and Donahue (2000), Cogburn and Schneider (2003), Bryan (2011) and Andrews and Brewer (2013) in the so-called “*management matters*” scholarly debate.

Ingraham and Donahue (2000) pose the question how management capacity influences performance of public organisations. Their work explore key variables in the performance equation that relate resources (management capacity) to results (quality of government management). In their attempts to answer the posed question they dissect the “black box” that traditionally has been used to describe government management and identify dominant relationships between essential elements of government performance. The researchers conclude that effective performance management is divided into administrative functioning and policy implementation stating that the former is a precursor to the latter. Administrative functioning refers to the ability and capacity of managers to perform generic management functions. They continue to argue that the level on which administrative functions are performed provides potential energy to

achieve goals. Conversely, if administrative functions are not performed adequately, the organization loses energy and often fails to accomplish goals. To improve public management performance the quality of management capacity, therefore, deserves attention.

Cogburn and Schneider (2003) examined the relationship between management capacity and organizational performance in public government from a quality of life framework. According to these researchers, quality of life focuses on the overall social and economic wellbeing of citizens. Their underlying premise states that governments with higher management capacity have the ability to influence factors that contribute directly to a higher quality of life living environment. These factors, for instance, include better health services, economic conditions and education opportunities and improved sport and recreation services. They concluded that quality of life and a live-able environment for citizens are by-products of governmental management performance and management capacity. Rosenbaum (2003) emphasised that the management capacity of local governments should be significantly enhanced to develop and maintain citizen confidence in service delivery. The author argued that local governments, in both developed and developing countries, lack adequately trained staff. Managers often lack the kind of information on citizen needs that is necessary to respond effectively to them, as well as a lack of basic financial practices. The resulting influence on organizational performance could lead to a decrease in public confidence and trust in government practices and ability to achieve goals.

Hou, Moynihan and Ingraham (2003) proposed that the internal systemic capacity of government is one of several critical preconditions for performance. If management capacity is not present or sufficiently developed then overall performance of the unit or government organization is highly unlikely. Government's initiatives regarding management reforms in general focus on either increasing accountability or improving performance. Increased accountability usually translates into more rules and regulations while improved performance focuses on increasing management capacity. Hou *et al.*, (2003) argued that in order to improve a public organisation's overall management capacity, determining the current level of management capacity becomes important. Once this baseline or management profile has been established the question "How does strengthening a public agency's management capacity and management systems lead to improved performance in terms of servicing its mission, delivering services, or generating appropriate policy outcomes" (Hou *et al.*, 2003) becomes increasingly important.

In the work of Bryan (2011), the link between organizational performance and management capacity is explored. The author suggested that organizational capacity consists of a number organizational resources and capabilities that

impact the functioning of the internal organization as well as its relationships with other relevant organizations and external stakeholders. Bryan (2011) concluded that management capacity in six dimensions were significant contributors to organizational performance: human resources, financial resources, information technology, knowledge, stakeholder commitment, and collaborative initiatives. Despite stating a link between performance and capacity, Bryan (2011) does, however, warn against fuzzy measurement of capacity in the mentioned dimensions. Andrews and Brewer (2013) also contributed to the “*management matters*” literature with their research on social capital, management capacity and public service performance. They posited that human resources as social capital and management capacity are associated with better public services. In testing their postulations, they explored the independent and combined effects of social capital and management capacity on the performance of major public services on state level government in the United States using Putnam’s index of social capital and the Government Performance Project’s (GPP) index of state management capacity. It was concluded that social capital is associated with higher performing public services and that strong management capacity enhances its positive effects.

Performance measurement and performance indicators constitute a facet of public organisations’ management capacity and performance literature. Scholars (Donahue et al., 2000; Björk, Scüzs & Harenstäm, 2014) seem to agree that one of the overarching issues in management capacity and performance literature is the need for a criteria-based measuring system. Donahue, Selden and Ingraham (2000) asserted that measuring the capacity of governments to translate resources into services is a long-standing issue in public administration. The authors argued that criteria-based measuring of management capacity is needed and developed the Government Performance Model (GPP) to rate the quality of management in local governments, amongst other levels of government, in the areas of financial, human resources, capital and information technology management. This type of report card-based model provides valuable profiles and assertions on characteristics of good management. By applying a scheme of criteria that represents the desired characteristics of government management systems and the various functions and activities they comprise, it becomes possible to uncover particular strengths and weaknesses individual managers and collective management systems. The core of their argument stated that the performance of organisations depends on human skills and abilities. Human capacity thus becomes an enabler of organizational performance and needs to be measured. Björk, Scüzs and Härenstam (2014) stated that even though many scholars have contributed to the literature on measuring organizational and management capacity there still seems to be no universal agreement on how to measure the notion of management capacity. This constitutes fertile ground for exploring different angles of measuring management capacity and proposes that

using managers' own assessments on their capacity could be a valuable contribution to develop measures that can be used to evaluate management capacity across local governments' areas of service delivery. From the literature, it is evident that management capacity is regarded as an antecedent to effective management performance.

### **Research context, problem and objectives**

The significance of sport and recreation participation as community builders is recognised in South Africa by government policies and plans. Provision of sport and recreation facilities is specifically mentioned as enablers to achieve the vision of an active nation (SRSA, 2012). According to the South Africa White Paper on Sport and Recreation (SRSA, 2012), local government has the obligation to provide sport and recreation facilities, programmes and services to its communities through accessible and safe facilities and spaces for participation managed by appropriately capacitated facility managers.

The obligation regarding sport and recreation facility provision as stated in in the South African White Paper on Sport and Recreation (SRSA, 2012) also applies to the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is responsible for 350 sport and recreation facilities ranging from informal sport and play areas to sport stadia and recreation centres (Sere, 2014). Observation and experience of the authors suggest the quantity of sport and recreation facilities are adequate, but the quality of and capacity to manage these facilities effectively appear lacking. Internal systemic capacity of governments is a critical precondition to performance. It can be argued that if management capacity is not present, performance is highly unlikely and local government might not contribute optimally to the strategic priorities of the White Paper on Sport and Recreation (SRSA, 2012). In line with Ingraham and Kneedler's (2000) premise that governments with more management capacity have the ability to perform better than governments with less management capacity, measuring management capacity at sport and recreation facilities in the research context becomes imperative. Measuring performance of sport and recreation facility managers against parameters of management capacity could establish a foundation for future foci of improvement. The research question for this study was thus posed as "*What is the management capacity at sport and recreation facilities in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality?*" Based on the research question, it was hypothesised that:

H<sub>0</sub>: The management capacity at sport and recreation facilities in the City of Tshwane is satisfactory.

H<sub>1</sub>: The management capacity at sport and recreation facilities in the City of Tshwane is unsatisfactory.

This study aimed to (1) determine the management capacity profile at sport and recreation facilities in the research area under study; and (2) identify areas of concern related to management capacity at the of the said managers.

## **Methodology**

The research design used was a quantitative, case study with a non-probability purposive sample (n=8). A quantitative approach is appropriate as management capacity requires criteria based measurement (Björk *et al.*, 2014). Managers at sport and recreation facilities are the conduits for translating policy into service outcomes and were therefore used as respondents to provide their perceptions on the set of objective criteria in each management dimension according to Donahue *et al.* (2000). All managers with the job designation of “sport and recreation officer” responsible for managing sport and recreation facilities employed in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality on middle management level were included in a purposive sample. Middle management level was deemed appropriate for data collection in line with Hou *et al.*'s (2001) findings on the responsibility of middle management for effectiveness and performance. On average respondents had 15 years of job related experience and all respondents had at least a first university degree in the field of sport management. Although the purposive sample of eight recreation and sport facility managers is small, these respondents are responsible for managing 68% of the sport and recreation facilities within the scope of this investigation.

The stated hypotheses were examined using the criteria-based Capacity Analysis Tool (CAT, 2007) as a self-administered research questionnaire in line with researchers' (Björk *et al.*, 2014) suggestions on criteria-based assessment of management capacity and utilising managers' input to determine management capacity (Björk *et al.*, 2014). The criteria-based research instrument (CAT) consists of 88 sub-elements over eight dimensions of management capacity (leadership, governance and strategy; administration and human resources; finances and budget of the facility; project design, management and evaluation; technical capacity; advocacy and networking; community ownership and accountability; and fundraising) and has a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.89 ( $\alpha=0.89$ ). The first section of the CAT focused on general information regarding numbers, scope, location, and frequency and type of use of sport and recreation facilities. Sections B to I of the CAT required respondents to evaluate statements related to eight management dimensions. Statements, for example, measured sport and recreation facility managers' perceptions on levels of staff and volunteer development, availability of offices and equipment, existence of clear mission and value statements, approaches to gender equality in programme and service provision, effectiveness of financial administration and income generating skills, access to new knowledge in the field of sport and recreation

facility management and advocacy and networking initiatives.. Collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics: means ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations according to the methodology of CAT as research instrument. Respondents evaluated sub-elements on a 4-point Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree.

## Results and Discussion

Results obtained from the first section of the CAT indicated that the scope of sport and recreation facilities included community recreation centers, sport stadia, formal and informal sport grounds, sport complexes, gymnasiums and community halls. From this broad scope and the fact that respondents were collectively responsible for managing 68% of the available sport and recreation facilities it can be deduced that the collective management capacity of the purposive sample could have a significant impact on the performance of the Department of Sport and Recreation in this investigation. All respondents indicated that in accordance with their particular job description, key performance areas included planning and delivery of sport and recreation services and projects, managing the budget, liaising and communicating with internal and external stakeholders using available technology. These key performance areas correspond with the areas of measurement of the CAT, thus making it an appropriate tool to measure management capacity. Respondents experienced six main challenges: (1) a lack of community ownership; (2) limited operational and maintenance budget; (3) low qualifications and experience of supervisors; (4) a lack of equipment that is in working order; (5) continuous changes in community sport and recreation club management structures and executive committees; and (6) poor workmanship and work ethic of contractors.

### *Overall management capacity*

An overview of mean scores and SD for the eight management dimensions of the CAT is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Collective overview of mean scores in CAT management dimensions

Management Dimension	Mean score ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
Leadership, governance and strategy	2.55	0.86
Administration and human resources	3.19	0.99
Finances	2.38*	0.76
Project design, management and evaluation	2.10*	0.83
Technical capacity	2.25*	0.89
Advocacy and networking	2.69	0.71
Community ownership and accountability	1.70*	1.19
Fundraising	1.77*	0.92
Collective overall management capacity score	2.33*	

\*Management capacity unsatisfactory ( $\bar{x} \leq 2.50$ )



For this research study a mean score below 2.5 ( $\bar{x} < 2.5$ ) represents unsatisfactory performance while a mean score above 2.5 ( $\bar{x} > 2.5$ ) represents satisfactory performance. Results from Table 1 indicate that the internal systemic management capacity of the particular department in this investigation measured unsatisfactory ( $\bar{x} \leq 2.50$ ) in five of the eight management dimensions. While three dimensions scored satisfactory ( $\bar{x} \geq 2.50$ ) the overall collective management capacity score for all eight dimensions was unsatisfactory at  $\bar{x} = 2.33$ . It also has to be noted that although three dimensions scored satisfactory, two of these dimensions were marginally higher than 2.5. This tendency is ascribed to an inability to satisfactorily implement criteria set for each dimension as pointed out in the work of Hou *et al.*, (2003). These authors stated that the internal systemic capacity of government is one of several critical preconditions for performance. If management capacity is not present or sufficiently developed in all relevant dimensions, then overall performance of the unit or government organization is highly unlikely. When these unsatisfactory management capacity scores are interpreted in the local government context of the findings of Hou *et al.*, (2003), they could, therefore, significantly impact the overall performance of the particular division on local government level. The unsatisfactory mean scores ( $\bar{x} \leq 2.50$ ) recorded in the management dimensions of finances, technical capacity, project design and evaluation, community ownership and fundraising correlate with the challenges expressed by the sport and facility managers in the first part of the CAT.

#### *Areas of concern regarding management capacity*

Capacity to manage finances and fundraising are two areas that recorded unsatisfactory management capacity scores with a  $\bar{x} = 2.38$  and  $\bar{x} = 1.77$ , respectively. These outcomes could be problematic in the context of the findings of both O'Toole and Meier (2010) and Suarez and Marshall (2014). According to these researchers, the intrinsic capability of managers to get things done is identified as one of the drivers to organizational performance. Intrinsic capability refers to managers' potential energy to collect, develop and direct resources, particularly financial resources. Management capacity in this dimension becomes a significant indicator of a unit's organizational performance. Suarez and Marshall (2014) argued that capacity to manage finances should be viewed in tandem with capacity to raise funds in order to supplement the local government budget aimed at delivering programmes and projects. Donors and grantors viewed financial management capacity as a basis for making donations or grants. According to Hou (2007), effective financial management is fundamental to meeting the requirements of accountability to key external stakeholders, such as taxpayers and regulatory agencies. Below average management capacity scores recorded respectively for the dimensions of finances and fundraising in this study

could contribute to decreased trust in local government being able to deliver a consistent level of services.

Project design, management and evaluation as management dimension similarly recorded an unsatisfactory score of  $\bar{x} = 2.10$ . The low scores in the sub-elements of this dimension namely targeting diverse groups ( $\bar{x} = 1.00$ ), and the presence of a functioning programme evaluation system ( $\bar{x} = 2.17$ ), are particularly alarming. Coggburn and Schreidner (2003) asserted that local governments, directly and indirectly, have the ability to influence the factors that contribute to quality of life. Indirectly, they establish context or enabling environments within which social activity such as participation in sport and recreation occurs. Coggburn and Schneider (2003) suggested that direct services provided by local governments affect citizens fundamentally. The most direct contributions the public sector makes to quality of life come in the form of policies and programmes in areas such as sport and recreation programmes and projects. Indirectly, local governments affect quality of life through encouraging private investments in amenities, programmes and projects that result ultimately in enhanced quality of life. Based on the preceding findings of Coggburn and Schneider (2003), it is reasoned that high levels of management capacity in this particular dimension could directly contribute to improved quality of life. Results, however, indicate selective targeting of groups and an absence of functioning sport and recreation programme evaluation systems, and an unsatisfactory ( $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ) overall management capacity score in this dimension. Coupled with the unsatisfactory score recorded in the financial management dimension, it is evident that the management capacity in the projects and evaluation dimension will affect the quality of life of constituents.

The respondents recorded the lowest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 1.70$ ) in the dimension of community ownership and accountability to stakeholders. Bryan (2011) postulated that management capacity is multi-dimensional, especially relevant to local social service delivery organisations, for instance, local governments. Bryan (2011) further emphasised stakeholder commitment and ownership and collaboration as significant, interconnected dimensions of management capacity and capacity in one dimension, therefore, directly impacts performance in other dimensions. Policy implementation on local government level requires collaboration with the community as external stakeholders to create joint ownership and public value through sport and recreation programmes and projects. The ability of sport and recreation facility managers to collaborate effectively with the community and other external stakeholders to achieve policy outcomes, therefore, is an important capacity for local governments. Satisfactory levels of management capacity in community collaboration and ownership enable managers to perform more effectively resulting in social trust, promoting diversity and engaging in meaningful relationships with the community (Foster-Fishman & Berkowitz (2001) in Bryan, 2011). The unsatisfactory management capacity score ( $\bar{x} = 1.70$ ) recorded in this dimension implies that sustainability of

programmes and projects are seriously compromised. The latter statement is supported by the unsatisfactory score ( $\bar{x}=2.10$ ) also recorded in the management dimension of project design, management and evaluation. This finding was indeed anticipated as respondents identified lack of community ownership as one of their significant challenges in the first section of the CAT. The interconnectedness of management dimensions proposed by Bryan (2011) is corroborated by these results.

Respondents identified technical capacity as one of the challenges experienced at sport and recreation facilities in the research area. The unsatisfactory mean score of  $\bar{x}=2.25$  was, therefore, also anticipated. Government's management capacity is dependent on supportive technological systems and infrastructure as pointed out by Bryan (2011) in her findings on interconnectedness of management dimensions. Heckman (2007) also referred to interconnectedness of management dimensions and argued that sound technological and administrative systems are critical to transmit information to managers in order to make decisions on resource distribution. In this regard, Doherty, Misener and Cuskelly (2013) reiterated that, broadly understood, management capacity is the ability to draw on various assets and resources to achieve an organisational mandate and facilitate policy implementation. As technological management capacity is regarded a management resource, it can be deduced that sport and recreation facility managers recording unsatisfactory management capacity scores in this particular dimension can be expected to experience challenges to perform effectively.

### **Limitations of the study**

The research context of this particular study was limited to sport and facility management of one particular local government. Although results can, therefore, not be generalized due to the size of the non-probability sample it could be generalized to the specific research context.

### **Conclusion**

The capacity of local governments to implement policy is becoming increasingly important. Taxpayers are demanding high returns on taxes in the form of effective public services. Effective delivery of public services, including sport and recreation, is dependent on the multi-dimensional management capacity of sport and recreation facility managers. The study set out to determine the management capacity profile of sport and recreation facility managers and identify areas of concern relating to management capacity of the respondents. This was achieved using the criteria-based CAT. From the mean capacity management scores recorded over eight management dimensions as well as the

overall mean management capacity score, it was concluded that management capacity of sport and recreation facility managers in the investigation area is unsatisfactory. This confirmed H<sub>1</sub> set for this study.

### **Recommendation**

As scholars proved a link between management capacity and organizational performance, the management capacity profile obtained from this study could be useful as a baseline from which management practices and capacity related to sport and recreation facility management could be further developed.

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