

Repositioning the research services unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature from an outside-in perspective

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ABSTRACT

A provincial legislature is often judged by the manner in which it carries out its Constitutional mandates of law making, oversight and scrutiny, facilitation of public participation and cooperative governance. The mandates call on the legislature to work towards effectively ensuring that the government meets the needs of South Africans citizens through meaningful service delivery. The Research Services Unit plays a pivotal role in this regard. However, the current status of the research services unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature suggests that the legislature does not receive maximum research benefits from the Unit. This article argues that having a large contingency of individuals does not necessarily translate into an efficient research unit or the production of reliable and credible research output. The findings of this article suggest that, in order to be able to deliver on its mandates, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature needs a rejuvenated Research Services Unit that could lead in transforming the legislature into a vibrant people-centred law making and oversight organisation, thereby contributing towards an accelerated improvement of the lives of the people of Gauteng.

INTRODUCTION

This article is premised on Graham Kenny's argument on the reasons why managers are unable to identify the essential ingredients of their organisations. Kenny (2005:3) argues that "... managers insist on looking at their organisations' performance from an inside out, rather than the outside in". He further notes that "... we are like the fly in the honey. We become entrapped by our own organisation. We become weighed down by policies, procedures, systems, processes, practices and they become our world. What is worse, they become the world. And like the fly in the honey, we cannot escape. If we are not careful, we become blinded to reality, the reality of what it takes to be successful". Kenny's theory is applicable

in the study and practice of Public Administration. As such, this observation is prevalent in managers of both law making and oversight organisations (legislatures) and the policy implementing agencies (government departments). The Gauteng Provincial Legislature is by no means excluded in Kenny's analogy. Therefore, this article presents an analysis of strategic planning in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature from an outside-in perspective, with specific reference to the positioning of the Research Services Unit. The article is divided into sections of literature review, problem statement, hypotheses and research questions, research methodology, discussion of the findings in the form of the mandates of the Research Services Unit and its current status, recommendations and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is acceptable for public institutions to strive towards performing better than they did in the previous occasions. This statement brings to light the imperatives of showing a greater concern for improving the effectiveness of the institution. In management sciences, this is referred to as *strategic orientation* to the operational issues (Matshabaphala 2007:246). In Public Administration, Cohen *et al.* (2008:256) elaborate that effective strategies do not solely target the outputs of the government of the day, but also articulate visions for delivering outcomes that increase public satisfaction. Through strategic planning, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature can continuously re-orientate the Research Services Unit to play a meaningful role in the Legislature's quest to improve on the carrying out of its constitutional mandates.

Strategic orientation postulates that the Research Services Unit needs to proactively serve the research needs of all components of the legislature. This entails a perpetual analysis of the research needs of the legislature, with the view of strengthening the capacity of the legislature to make appropriate laws, exercise oversight over the executive, streamline public participation in all its programmes and activities, and leverage on cooperative governance. From this perspective, this article offers a strategic plan to transform the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature into a productive research and information centre that might improve the Legislature's ability to successfully carry out its mandates. But before dwelling much on transforming the Research Services Unit, some definitions of strategic planning are worth noting.

On the one hand, Gr nig and K hn (2006:9) define strategic planning as "... a systematic process that defines the way to guarantee the permanent accomplishment of the organisation's overriding goals and objective". In the case of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the overriding goals refer to the constitutional mandates. The Legislature has to constantly strive towards guaranteeing the accomplishment of its constitutional mandates. On the other hand, the Foundation for Community Association Research (2001:4) defines strategic planning as "... a systematic planning process involving a number of steps that identify the current status of the organisation, including its mission, vision, operating values, needs, goals, actions and monitoring plans". The two definitions stress the aspects of a process which is *systematic*, as well as the importance of the *accomplishment of goals*.

Strong (2005:4) complements the two definitions when stating that "strategic planning utilises a methodical, gradual step by step approach to determine who you are (mission), what you are not willing to compromise (values), where you are going (vision), and how you are



going to get there (planning). Coulter (2008:49) explains a vision statement as a comprehensive picture (*big picture*) of what the organisation wants to become. According to Carpenter and Sanders (2007:39), a mission declares what an organisation is and stands for – its fundamental values and purpose. Coulter (2008:50) stresses that a mission is a statement of what specific organisational units (like the Research Services Unit) do and what they hope to accomplish. While the Gauteng Provincial Legislature has a mission, a vision and values, it cannot be argued that it has a vision and a plan for its Research Services Unit. Strong (2005) elaborates that the strategic aspect of planning implies a structured process, creative thinking, teamwork and flexibility. Anybody can plan, but not everybody can be strategic about it. Strategic planning, therefore, facilitates a process of directing and redirecting an organisation towards the realisation of the desired outcome. Thus, strategic planning should be visionary, conceptual and directional. Planning is said to be strategic when it focuses on what the organisation wants to accomplish, and directing it towards the realisation of the set goal. Organisations, including the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, do undertake strategic planning. The question is: can we establish any effectiveness in their strategic planning? Before attempting to answer this question, it is important to determine what effective strategic planning entails.

In essence, strategic planning is concerned with determining what is important in the long term for the organisation. It is about identifying key priorities that should be pursued today for realisation in a long run (Adair 2002). It is worth noting that although strategic planning is future oriented, effective strategic planning is also influenced by the current and past status of the organisation. The current status of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature thus influences strategic planning and the direction that the Legislature needs to take. Alberts (2008) writes that effective strategic planning emanates from a continuous strategic discourse in an organisation. Effective strategic planning is, therefore, a rigorous activity of debates and knowledge sharing that gears organisations towards design business unit models that increase the capability of delivering higher performance levels.

The objective of strategic planning is to develop a practical tool that can guide an organisation into a defined future and provide important measures of success. The process includes a review and possible revision of the mission statement, research and analysis of the organisation's services, environmental threats and internal capacity to achieve established goals. Following this analysis, strategic planning practitioners develop outcomes, outputs and inputs objectives. These statements describe what effects the organisation wants to have on identified opportunities and threats and how it will go about accomplishing them (Burns 2009).

The purpose of strategic planning is to encourage managers to think about the organisation's *bigger picture*, its broad goals and priorities, and how well they are being achieved. Unfortunately, the emphasis on possessing a strategic plan, as is the case of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, has received a fair share of criticism since many of the strategic plans are never implemented while others have proven to be unimplementable. Inclusive in these strategic plans is the positioning of the Research Services Unit and its service offerings. The mission of the Research Services Unit as stated in its Research Agenda (2008) as "to proactively respond to the research needs of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature" is the central focus of this article. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to provide a critical analysis of the status of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature and recommend an approach that might see the Unit being repositioned to enhance the

Legislature's mandates of effective law making, exercising oversight, facilitating public participation and promoting cooperative governance through conducting empirical studies. This article argues that the members of the Provincial Legislature and the Legislature at large are not adequately served by the Research Services Unit, as far as research and information provision are concerned. The Gauteng Provincial Legislature has the potential to transform its Research Services Unit into a research entity that can be used as an ideal model for the legislative environment. This statement points to the existence of a problem in the delivery of research services in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Members of the Provincial Legislature (MPLs) have to deal with an unprecedented barrage of challenges: unlimited needs of the people; shrinking budgets; exercising legislative powers; conducting oversight and scrutiny responsibilities; inundation and/or lack of information; new information and technology infrastructure; transformational needs; and the ever growing demands of stakeholders. MPLs often face a dilemma in attempting to respond to these challenges. Their dilemma is exacerbated by the challenges of the day-to-day operational hassles that demand continuous attention and often stretch their problem-solving capacity to the limit. Therefore, MPLs require the assistance of researchers who can provide them with reliable and credible facts in their decision-making processes. Research is critical to effective problem-solving and decision making. Robinson (2002) stresses that reliable facts and analyses can contribute to both a better understanding of problems and more realistic and effective legislative solutions. The Gauteng Provincial Legislature has a Research Service Unit which is expected to conduct research, present their findings, and table recommendations to the MPLs to enable them to make informed decisions. Yet, MPLs appear not to be deriving reliable research assistance from the Research Services Unit upon which they can base their decision making. MPLs are lamenting the lack of credible research output, the absence of empirical studies and field work. Researchers are viewed by the MPLs and senior managers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature as in one way or the other duplicating the roles played by the senior information officers, i.e., as conducting information searches instead of empirical studies. MPLs argue that researchers in the Legislature are simply summarising reports and other documents provided by the provincial government departments, and in some instances *copy and paste* from existing literature. Thus, no value is being added by the researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

The legislature is continuously faced with challenges that require empirical studies to enable it to respond in the best way possible. Challenges and obstacles can be effectively managed. Research thus plays a vital role in this regard. Cohen, Eimicke and Heikkila (2008:3) posit that the driver of effective management is "... an aggressive and innovative effort to overcome constraints and obstacles". Effective managers are not trapped in the rigid application of existing policies, procedures and processes that they are comfortable with. Instead, public managers are open to innovative thinking, new ideas, pursue programmatic goals and objectives by thinking out of the box and acting strategically. In view of the above-mentioned status of research in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, it is argued that managers in the legislature cannot be convincingly categorised as effective strategic



planners. The problem is even evidenced by the inability of the Legislature to attract and retain research managers. Research managers do not stay for a longer period in the employ of the Legislature since their expertise seems not to be effectively and strategically utilised. On average, research managers spent at least two years in the Legislature before they tender their resignations; and it takes almost the same period, if not longer, for the legislature to employ the suitable candidate. The impression is that the senior managers to whom research managers are reporting are threatened by the research managers' constructive contribution in strategic planning and operational processes, among others, let alone their competencies in research management. As a result, research managers quickly leave the Legislature for other institutions where, upon arrival, they are often accepted as excellent scholars and strategic thinkers. This problem statement yielded two main hypotheses.

HYPOTHESES

The first hypothesis (H1) is that although the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature has a clear mandate and a well-crafted research agenda, senior management fails to strategically position the Unit to enable it to effectively deliver on its mandate. The second hypothesis (H2) is that the Research Services Unit is not well-positioned to cater for the Legislature's research needs, especially those of the MPLs. In expanding these hypotheses, the article contextualises the role of the Research Services Unit within the strategic planning of the Legislature. It is from this perspective that this article posits that the tool that can assist the Legislature to effectively address the shortcomings of the Research Services Unit is strategic planning. The hypotheses of this article are premised on the below research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Good thoughts are no better than good dreams, unless they are executed (Ralph Waldo Emerson, not dated). Madue (2012:439) writes that "... a legislative research service prepares and provides information dossiers, in-depth subject studies, pro and contra arguments, briefings to MPLs and other services or outputs of similar breadth and scope, published or not". These mandates, mission and objectives may appear good on paper, but they need to be translated into action, outputs and outcomes. Thus the research questions that have guided this article are:

- How well is the Research Services Unit performing in terms of leading up to its mission of proactively responding to the research needs of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature?
- How far is the Research Services Unit with the objective of publishing research articles in accredited journals and creating a research library?
- Why are there no tangible research outputs, apart from the summarising of departmental reports, given the mandate and objectives of the Research Services Unit?
- Why are the MPLs lamenting the absence of proactive, reliable and credible research output in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature?
- Does the Gauteng Provincial Legislature have a strategy to recruit and retain research managers?

Although the mandate, mission and objectives of the Research Services Unit are well articulated, the above research questions do not automatically yield positive answers. The following section provides an outline of the research methodology adopted to respond to the above research questions and confirm or reject the stated hypotheses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Gauteng Provincial Legislature is expected to translate its constitutional mandates into meaningful action. The Gauteng Provincial Legislature prides itself as the *number one legislature* among its peers in the South African legislative sector. As a vital unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the Research Services Unit has to live up to its mandate, mission and objectives. Thus the Research Services Unit has adopted its research agenda as a tool to translate its mandate into practice. Given the above problem statement and the research questions, the objectives of this article are to:

- analyse the extent to which the Gauteng Provincial Legislature utilises strategic planning to leverage on the services rendered by the Research Services Unit;
- assess the effectiveness of the Research Services Unit in implementing its research agenda;
- identify factors that might be inhibiting the Research Services Unit to effectively translate its research agenda into action; and
- to propose the repositioning of the Research Support Unit for effective rendering of services to the community of the legislature.

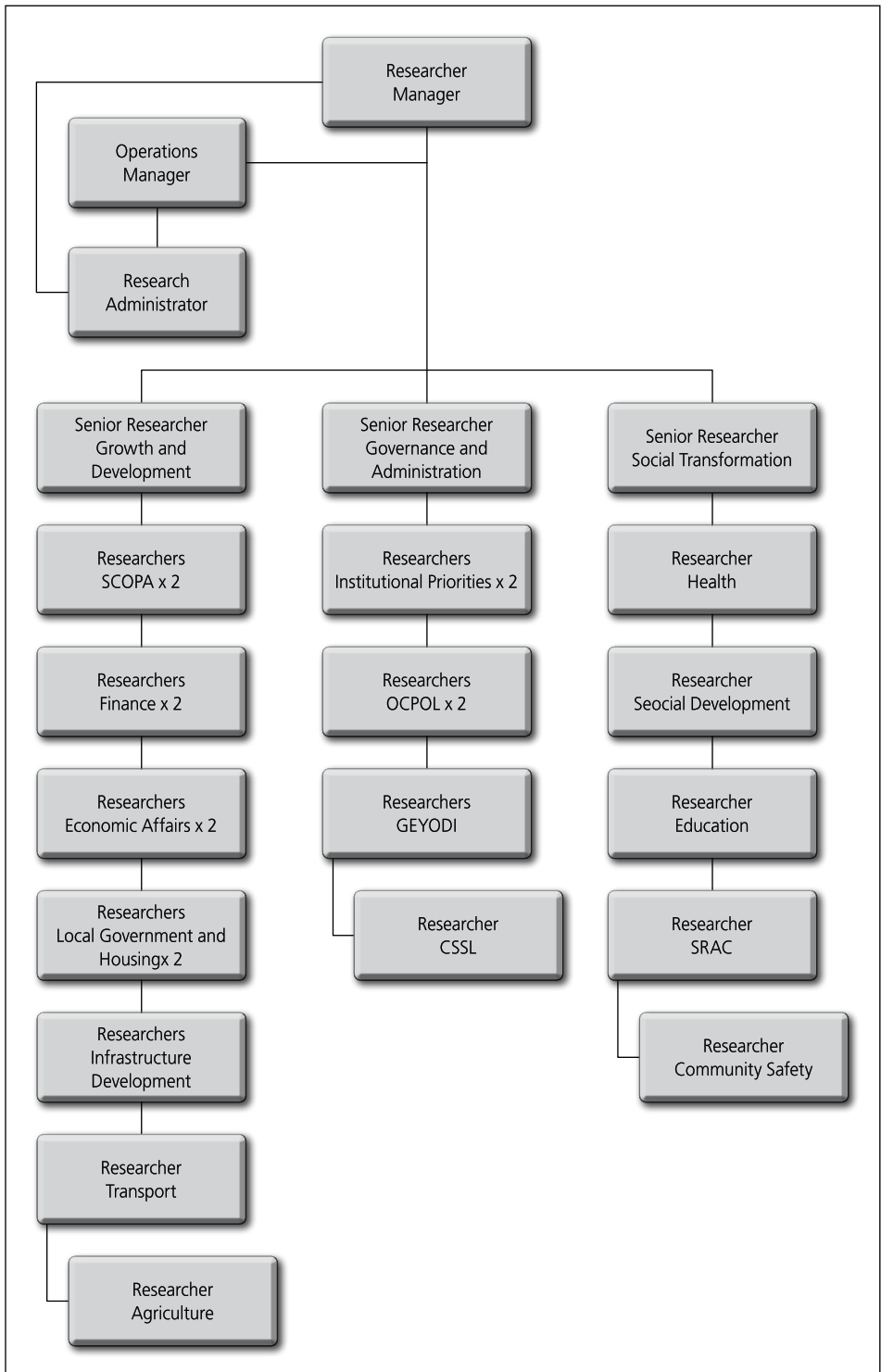
From an outside-in perspective, this article has used the phenomenological research paradigm and thus adopted an observation, descriptive and analytical approach to assess the status of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature in the context of strategic planning. Babbie and Mouton (2009:xxiii) write that observing and attempting to interpret what one observes as conscious and deliberate human activities (thus, a phenomenon), leads to scientific knowledge. The researcher deemed phenomenology as the most appropriate research paradigm for this article since he has served as a staff member in the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature and thus have observed the utilisation of the Unit by the MPLs and senior management from both internal and external perspectives, hence the use of the term *outside-in perspective*. Although the focus of this article is the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the findings of this article may be of interest to senior managers and policymakers in the South African legislative sector. Therefore, the findings could be generalised to the entire sector, since legislatures are generally grappling with the same problem of the effectiveness and efficiency of their research units. It is from this view that the following section discusses the mandate and current mission of the Research Services Unit.

MANDATE OF THE RESEARCH SERVICES UNIT

The following functions and powers of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, as derived from the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*, inform the mandate of the Research Services Unit:



Figure 1 Organogram of the GPL Research Unit



- to exercise legislative power – including law making and determining internal arrangements;
- to perform oversight – in terms of the Provincial Executive;
- to facilitate public access and involvement – in the legislative process; and
- to promote cooperative governance.

The Research Services Unit is mandated to assist the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to translate the above functions and powers into implementable programme. It is from this context that Bayat and Meyer (1994:3) argue that public administration is primarily concerned with how well the implementation of government policy and programmes are performed within specific standards. The above functions and powers suggest that the Legislature plays a strategic role of law making (policy development) to enable the executive branch to administer and exercises an oversight (monitoring the implementation of government policy) over the executive. The mandate of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature is stipulated in its research agenda as:

To proactively and reactively conduct credible research for the legislature's committees, Senior Office Bearers and the entire organisation in pursuit of excellence in their service delivery duties (Gauteng Provincial Legislature 2008:3).

The above mandate can be said to resonate with Joel-Ikoko (2009:246) who defines the word *research* as the aggregation of knowledge beyond that found in traditional library and information services. Malefane (2008:709) stresses that major development interventions and programmes of government are informed by the findings of research across a variety of sectors, and governments spend large amounts of money on the implementation of such findings.

According to the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (2008:3), the goal of the Research Services Unit is to collect, analyse and disseminate its research findings through an iterative process in collaboration with the public, higher education professionals and policy makers. The above mandate of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature is arguably well crafted to respond to the research needs of the Legislature. However, the question is: why then are the MPLs continuing to lament the poor provisioning of research services in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature? Perhaps, it is important to consider the current organogram of the Research Services Unit to get a picture of how the unit is structured in the context of strategic planning. The following organogram depicts how the Research Unit is structured.

In view of the above organogram, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (2008:4) states that "... the Research Services Unit has to create an arena for discourse through seminars, conferences, opinion editorials and journal articles on the evolution of the South African Society and of the people of Gauteng in particular". The Unit has to monitor the channelling of these issues into decision making by the Gauteng Provincial Legislature and the Gauteng Provincial Government. From this mandate, the mission of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature becomes apparent.

Geyer (2006:14) argues that the mission statement explains to the world what it is that the organisation does. Stroh (1992) is of the opinion that a mission statement is a clear, concise



statement (25 words or less) of the unique reason or purpose for existence and efforts of an organisation. In simple terms, the mission statement describes the overall purpose of the organisation. According to the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (2008), the mission of the Research Services Unit is:

“To proactively respond to the research needs of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature thereby enhancing its capacity to make informed decisions” Gauteng Provincial Legislature (2008:3).

The above mission statement of the Research Services Unit indicates the value that the Unit endeavours to add in the overall performance of the Legislature. The mission suggests that the Unit is not reactionary, but strives to understand the needs of its principals and stakeholders beforehand and conduct research that would enable them to carry out their constitutional mandates. However, considering the problem statement discussed earlier on, it appears that the Research Services Unit does not deliver on its mission. Then what are the objectives of the Research Services Unit?

Knowing where you are and where you want to be requires concerted efforts. It is not always a straight and simple line. To be effective then, visions and missions should be spelled out in terms of specific quantitative and qualitative goals and objectives for directing the strategic actions. Often, organisations will also state a super-ordinate goal to serve as an overarching reference point for other goals and objectives (Carpenter and Sanders 2007:43). Objectives are specific goals that the organisation endeavours to reach. The objectives should be challenging but achievable. They should be measurable so that the organisation can monitor its progress and make corrections as needed. Cohen, *et al.* (2008:125) elaborate that “... objectives should be as specific as possible, and it is important that the objectives be measurable and simple”. In the case of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the objectives of the Research Services Unit are to:

- enhance the maintenance of a modern, dynamic legislature which reflects the values, aspirations and cultures of the South African people;
- facilitate the creation and sustain of the most competent, accessible, transparent and accountable legislature;
- proactively conduct timely research and analysis for the specific needs of various business clusters of the legislature;
- provide reliable, accurate and impartial information to enhance informed decision-making; and
- publish research articles in accredited journals and create a research library (Gauteng Provincial Legislature 2008:3).

The Research Service Unit elaborates that in terms of the intellectual property that will accrue to the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the goal of the Unit is to publish at least one article per researcher per annum. This means that the researchers in the Gauteng Legislature are free to conduct independent research and make their findings known outside the confines of the South African legislative sector. Therefore, the starting point for safeguarding the Gauteng Provincial Legislature’s intellectual property is to convert current research documents into publishable material.

Analysis of the current status of the Research Services Unit

The present-day effective strategic planning entails a systematic interaction whereby various elements and functions of the organisation or a business unit are critically discussed and deeply understood. Information relating to the organisation or business unit, the environment in which it operates, its immediate stakeholders, its human capital capacity and requirements, its operating systems and processes are interpreted to get more insight about the Unit and the possibilities for long-term success. As such, debates about the ideal Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature constantly crop up, yet such debates do not yield any tangible results (First confirmation of H1). For example, the Parliamentary Report (2009:70) stresses that the present administrative structure does not allow researchers to develop the necessary technical skills to service the needs of members of Legislature and committees properly. No endeavours or measures are put in place to strategically reposition the Research Services Unit towards a state of the art research entity that fully serves the Legislature with all its research needs (First confirmation of H2).

Strategic planning has moved from simply introducing the right tool or model, but has grown to a process that needs to be professionally facilitated. In resonance to effective strategic planning, effective facilitators cleverly read and stimulate the thinking process to move participants into a higher level of insight, debate and understanding. Alberts (2008) stresses that effective strategy practitioners have come to realise that the successful execution of a business strategy depends not only on the content of the plan but also on the process that shaped the plan. For the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to simply state that the plan is to encourage the researchers to be proactive and conduct independent research does not translate into effective strategic planning on the part of senior managers and tangible research output on the part of the researchers.

The achievement of mandates, goals and objectives of public organisations depends on the ability of public managers to convert plans into patterns of action that deliver goods and services to the public. To be effective, public managers must develop strategies which align the resources, outputs and tasks of their organisations or units with the needs of their principals and stakeholders. Strategic plans remain mere dreams if they are not transformed into specific actions and operations that yield results. A key focus of any public manager is to ensure that the core activities and functions of the Unit work in congruence with the organisation's strategy. If daily operations do not reflect the Unit's strategy, then the public manager forfeits substantial authority and ability to guide the organisation. Equally important for the public manager, is to sift out the projects that do not contribute to the organisation's or unit's strategic choices. In the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the senior managers fail to realise or choose not to appreciate the pivotal role that the Research Services Unit needs to play (Second confirmation of H2).

The Research Services Unit is mandated to respond proactively and reactively to the *research needs* of the committees of the Legislature, the senior presiding officers, as well as of the entire organisation (see Gauteng Provincial Legislature 2008:3). The specifics thereof are clearly detailed in the research agenda. However, the challenges outlined in the above problem statement suggest that limited research (empirical or otherwise) is conducted by the researchers of the Legislature. Most of the Unit's outputs are not the results of a rigorous scientific process. The bulk of the researchers' deliverables is not



actual scientific research (empirical studies) but analyses and summarising of provincial department's budgets and performance reports (Third confirmation of H2). It is argued that Gauteng Legislature's researchers are not conducting research in a true scientific sense of it; hence their output cannot be regarded as credible but mere opinion pieces. The current researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature are more content analysts than actual researchers who conduct systematic scientific studies. While the researchers are said to be proactive, innovative, conduct fieldwork, create new knowledge and publish their findings, as stipulated in the research agenda (2008), only a limited number of articles were published by the researchers of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature from 1994 to 2013. On average (see the organogram), the Gauteng Provincial Legislature has 22 researchers. Apart from the occasional manuscripts published in the in-house outlet (Policy Brief), only seven articles were published in peer-reviewed journals for the period under review. Yet, the research agenda clearly calls for publishing of one article per researcher per annum. This implies that Gauteng Provincial Legislature's researchers must publish articles for the Legislature and that there are no constraints preventing them from doing so. As such, funding is readily available for each researcher to submit manuscripts to accredited peer-reviewed publication outlets and to participate in research conferences where their manuscripts can also be included in the conference proceedings. Considering that on average, the Research Services Unit has 22 researchers, at least a minimum of 22 peer-reviewed articles could have been published per annum which would have translated into 110 articles since the adoption of the research agenda in 2008 that is between 2008 and 2013 (five years).

The research agenda states that an arena for discourse has to be created through seminars and conferences among others. Again, the Research Services Unit performs dismally in this regard. Firstly, the researchers themselves are not supporting their own in-house seminars, also known as *Brown Bag* sessions. In cases where such seminars are held, only a handful and regular researchers are making presentations, with little critical input from the participants and/or their peers. Senior managers also seem to view seminars organised by the Research Services Unit as nice to have exercises that do not add value to the legislative work. Senior managers do not attend these seminars to engage researchers on topical and strategic issues being presented (Second confirmation of H1). With regard to participating in conferences, again only a few researchers participate and present papers in local and international peer conferences. In fact, the very same researchers presenting in the in-house seminars are the ones that sometimes present papers in conferences. The other researchers would rather attend conferences identified by the committees that they serve which in most cases are even not organised by professional associations. And in such conferences, most being international, researchers do not present papers but are merely accompanying MPLs.

As far as conducting proactive and independent research is concerned, no evidence of progress can be tabled. Furthermore, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature seems not to have any confidence in its own researchers' capability for conducting credible research. The excuse that is often cited is that "the legislature does not have capacity to undertake research" and as such, it opts to outsourcing research to external contractors (Third confirmation of H1). An example is the recent project of the "Impact of laws passed by the legislature since 1994". The impact study was outsourced instead of giving the internal researchers the opportunity to prove themselves. Ironically, even though the contracted company has successfully concluded the commissioned study, the Legislature's senior management has

disputed the findings thereof, since they appear not to be favourable to management's expectation. A consequence of this impasse is that the results of the impact study have not been made public when this article was published.

Furthermore, senior managers tend not to consider the views of the research managers who, based on their experience, expertise and the need to fully implement the research agenda advise that such projects be handled by internal researchers. The lack of appreciating the expertise of research managers is but one of the reasons for the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's inability to retain them. As indicated in the problem statement, the failure of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to attract and retain research managers, suggests that the Legislature is not strategic in its planning. It can be deduced that the Gauteng Provincial Legislature does not leverage on strategic planning as a management tool that might assist in responding to its research services challenges, including the retention of research managers (Fourth confirmation of H1). No efforts have been made by the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to determine the reasons why research managers do not stay for long in the employment of the legislature. The Gauteng Provincial Legislature does not have a retention strategy, especially for the research managers. The absence of a retention strategy is but one factor contributing towards the poor offerings of the Research Services Unit. Other factors that contribute towards the Research Services Unit's inability to live up to its expectations need to be highlighted as recommendations for further action by the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

In order to address the above shortcomings of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, contributing factors thereof are identified and discussed. The factors that are discussed below are not definitive but are considered to be the most critical. *Firstly*, the background and minimum qualifications of current researchers of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature are the major contributors to the lack of research expertise. The majority of the researchers, particularly those with relatively long service in the Legislature, do not have a sound grounding in research methodology and thus do not deliver research outputs (Fourth confirmation of H2). The highest qualification of many researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature is an undergraduate degree and in some cases just a mere diploma. Furthermore, some senior researchers have not even authored a single credible article but are expected to oversee the work of juniors who sometimes possess higher qualifications and research experience than them. In this instance, the senior researchers are unable to critically review papers authored by their juniors. Instead of providing feedback on technical research aspects, they rather concentrate on language issues. This explains the senior researchers' lack of confidence to conduct research and deliver seminar or conference papers. While it might be argued that some of these researchers have attempted to submit or at least have published articles in the internal publication, the *Policy Brief*, their articles are baseless opinions rather than researched policy input. Nevertheless, those with postgraduate degrees are very few. They are the ones participating in seminars and conferences and the seven published articles referred to in the above section.

Secondly, researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature hide behind their committee work where they are merely summarising documents for their respective committees. Their emphasis is on content analysis without complementing that with independent research (fieldwork). *Thirdly*, researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature keep themselves busy with non-research activities such as writing and/or editing committee reports, speeches,



draft documents, motivations for study tours, and in some instances taking minutes (Fifth confirmation of H2). The aforementioned activities are actually the deliverables of the committee administrators and coordinators. The focus of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's researchers is, therefore, derailed and misplaced. This explains the MPLs' lamentation of the absence of proactive research and independent verification of facts.

Fourthly, senior managers do not have background and appreciation of research. On the one hand, they confuse the roles of researchers with those of the information officers and sometimes with those of the officials in the Public Participation and Petitions Unit (Sixth confirmation of H2). Information requests are addressed to the researchers and when researchers redirect them to the senior information specialists, senior managers somehow view that as insubordination. Researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature are viewed as mobile libraries yet there is no proof of their contribution to the knowledge economy. On the other hand, no support is provided to the researchers to undertake independent research and participate in relevant conferences, even though funds are budgeted for such activities on an annual basis. In this instance, senior managers view the researchers' participation in conferences as only benefiting the researchers concerned and not the legislature. As such, when the researchers apply to access the research and conference funds, their applications are often declined by the senior managers. Again, senior managers fail to see the *bigger picture*. For instance, they tend to only support conference papers that have the four mandates of the Legislature in their titles. If the title of a research paper does not have the words "law making, oversight, public participation or cooperative governance", chances of them receiving support from senior management are very low. This is a stereotype view of the research world and discourages innovation and independent thinking.

Fifthly, senior managers overload Researcher Services Unit with the work that belongs to other units such as the Public Participation and Petitions Unit and the Communications Unit (Fifth confirmation of H1). Researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature are expected to develop draft papers for public participation, conduct public participation campaigns, educate the public on legislative work, write speeches for the presiding officers and develop media briefing papers. Yet, there are public education officers and media relations officers in the aforementioned two units. Senior managers fail to deal with the staff members who do not perform their duties in other units but resort to dumping non-research activities in the Research Services Unit. In essence, researchers are used to cover up other units' non-performance, all in the name of collaboration and strengthening stakeholder relations.

Lastly, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature may appear to be attempting to attract highly-skilled research managers. However, research managers are not given the freedom to properly guide and direct the Research Services Unit towards effective implementation of the research agenda. There is too much interference from senior managers in the affairs of the Research Services Unit. The inputs of research managers in strategic planning exercises of the Legislature are not fully appreciated. Research managers are often seen as threats to senior managers. As a result, the research managers' expertise and wealth of knowledge are underutilised, thereby leading to them resigning from their posts. Furthermore, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature prefers to listen to the external service providers even though they simply repeat the inputs made by the research managers. In some instances, the senior managers deliberately bypass the research managers and give instructions directly to the researchers, particularly those who do not have the passion of engaging in actual

research. This might explain the high turnover rate of research managers and the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's failure to retain them since the environment is not enabling them to constructively develop the researchers and the legislature at large.

The above five key factors inhibiting the functioning of the Research Services Unit require a complete review of the attitudes of both senior managers and the researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature. A strategic plan that might transform the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature into a hive of research activities is urgently required if the legislature is serious about addressing the above stated shortcomings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Repositioning the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature requires total commitment from senior management to strive towards changing its attitude and that of the current researchers. The starting point is to recognise the pivotal role the Research Services Unit could play in enabling the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to effectively carry out its constitutional mandates. Senior management needs to view the Research Services Unit as a unit that requires highly qualified, experienced and well-published human resources, in the form of research managers, researchers and content analysts. Therefore, this calls for a revision of the minimum requirements for being appointed as a researcher. The same approach should apply to senior researchers. Researchers with relevant prerequisites will then be able to confidently deliver on the envisaged research output.

Senior managers should refrain from overloading researchers with non-research related assignments, to afford them the time to engage in research projects (including proactive and reactive research). Researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature should be given some space to conduct extensive research, present papers at relevant national and international conferences and not be restricted to only write papers that have the four mandates of the legislature in their titles. Furthermore, researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature need to translate rhetoric into action. There is an urgent need for the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's researchers to strengthen their collaboration with researchers in the higher education institutions with whom they could jointly conduct research, co-author articles and co-present papers in seminars and conferences. In this case, researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature could be able to deliver on the research agenda's commitment for publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals. Again, this move might address the MPLs concerns of the absence of independent, proactive and reliable research.

The Gauteng Provincial Legislature could consider two sets of professionals working together in the Research Services Unit. That is, the Unit should have content analysts and researchers who complement each other. On the one hand, analysts could, therefore, concentrate on basic analysing and summarising of key documents provided by the provincial departments, identify gaps which might require research. On the other hand, researchers would in this instance, respond to research gaps identified by analysts and conduct empirical studies or independently verify some facts to support the work of the MPLs. Alternatively, the Research Services Unit could be merged with the Information Services Unit (Library) whereby some of the researchers and information specialists could be converted into content analysts while those with research acumen and the required qualifications could focus on research.



In the context of strategic planning, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature could also conduct a skills audit to determine whether some staff members are perhaps wrongly employed. It may be found that other units of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature have people that can be moved to the Research Services Unit and be more gainfully employed there while some of the current researchers might productively serve the legislature in other capacities.

As far as the recruitment and retention of research managers are concerned, senior managers refrain from interfering in the management and affairs of the Research Services Unit and treat research managers as professionals in their own right. Research managers recruited by the Gauteng Provincial Legislature are usually well-established researchers with a strong passion of knowledge creation and dissemination. They are creative thinkers who should not be reduced to implementers of rigid processes and/or serve as postal managers for assignments that are not research oriented. Senior managers need to leverage on the wealth of expertise that the research managers might have. Alternatively, the Gauteng Provincial Legislature should simply employ administrative managers who do not have any research background. Their role would then be just to take instructions from senior managers and cascade them down to the researchers irrespective of them being research-related or not in accordance with the post manager mentality.

CONCLUSION

The above recommendations and the preceding discussions are the outcomes of the observation of the status of the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature as observed from an outside-in perspective. While the Gauteng Provincial Legislature has a sizeable Research Service Unit in terms of the headcount of its human resources, the research outputs are far below average and the MPLs are still not deriving value from its offerings. This article has argued that the Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature needs to be repositioned for the MPLs and the Legislature at large to fully appreciate its relevance and outputs. The two hypotheses of this article (H1 and H2) were confirmed five and six times respectively, which indicates that the need for the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to use strategic planning to reposition the Research Services Unit to address the challenges discussed above is rather urgent.

Without a mind shift from senior management, the Research Services Unit might continue to be faced with challenges of implementing the research agenda that was adopted by the Gauteng Provincial Legislature in 2008. Senior management should take a lead by recognising the uniqueness of the Research Services Unit and offer researchers full support to enable them to conduct proactive and reactive research for the benefit of the entire Legislature. Strategic planning requires the Gauteng Provincial Legislature to transform the Research Services Unit through among others; revising the criteria for appointing researchers, conducting a skills audit in and outside the unit, redeploying human resources, and providing research managers with a conducive environment to effectively perform their duties. The lessons learned from the exercise of repositioning the Research Services Unit in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature can thus be used to review other units such as the Committee Support Unit, Public Participation and Petitions Unit, and the National Council of Provinces and Legal Advice unit. Furthermore, lessons learned from the repositioning of the

Research Services Unit of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature could be useful for the entire South African Legislative Sector.

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