

Contextualising leadership challenges in municipalities

A developmental impression

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ABSTRACT

Municipal services are imperative in maintaining a reasonable standard of living of the people in a particular area of jurisdiction. In most African states, municipalities have a challenge as they are not achieving their predetermined developmental objectives. The role of a municipality is to inter alia create an environment conducive to the advancement of development by ensuring the delivery of the expected services. The failure to deliver services is often associated with the lack of proper leadership that might exist in municipalities, where both the elected office bearers and administrative officials lack the necessary skills to perform the required tasks. This article will address the leadership quagmire that exists in local government in selected countries.

Firstly the article will explain the local government environment and its purpose in a developing country. This will be done by explicating the nature and character of municipalities. Secondly, a literature review will assist in assessing the different leadership styles and consequently comparing them with the existing municipal officials present in municipalities. The assessment of leadership styles is necessary for the determination of the effectiveness of the delivery of services and the implementation of municipal programmes. Lastly, the article will provide suggestions to resolve the pertinent question of effective municipal government and subsequently ensure equitable service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The primary role of a municipality is to collectively organise the inhabitants according to their area of jurisdiction and provide them with the basic services. In most contemporary



democratic states, governments are aimed at being responsive in addressing the needs and aspirations of the people. Given the historical anecdote of most countries, particularly in Africa, the legacy of the colonial regime is critically impacting on their current systems of government and development. This is evidently shown by the deteriorating quality of life, as well as the ever increasing number of civil protests linked to service delivery, which municipalities experience in some cases.

The article addresses an investigation made into the administrative capacity of the municipalities to execute the electoral mandate provided by the electorate. Furthermore, local government leadership is discussed. The types of leadership existing in municipalities are also explored. The explanation of the leadership challenges in municipalities will assist in determining the best possible method of ensuring the provision of quality services to the people. Local government environment in a developmental state and its purpose and potential to bring change to the quality of the lives of the citizens will also receive attention. Recommendations will then be made in order to improve the delivery of municipal services through an effective leadership force.

LEADERSHIP – A COMPREHENSIVE PHENOMENON

Before attempting to proceed with a discussion on the leadership challenges facing municipalities, a common definition of leadership will be a prerequisite for the discussion. Kuye (2010:262) acknowledges that the concept of leadership is a complex phenomenon, hence it would be almost impossible to create, develop and utilise a universal definition. According to Van Wart (2008:23) leadership is referred to in an administrative context as the process of providing the results required by authorised processes in an efficient, effective and legal manner. However for the purpose of this discussion, leadership is understood to be the characteristics that enable a leader (an individual) to exercise influence over his/her followers. Hence, leadership would clearly be defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of the people in their social environment. In the context of municipalities, leadership clearly relates to the process through which those who are in positions of political and administrative authority *i.e.* executive mayors and municipal managers possess the ability to influence members of the structure they are responsible for, *i.e.* the community members and municipal officials.

Having developed a common understanding of the definition of leadership, it thus becomes imperative to assess the various styles through which their roles are executed. The styles of leadership refer to the strategy applied by those with the ability to influence the behaviour of others in the quest to achieve their collective objective. Heywood (2007:376) identifies the three styles of leadership as:

- *Laissez-faire*
- Transactional
- Transformational

Leaders who employ a *laissez-faire* approach mostly do not regulate performance and, as such they trust the capability and judgement of those performing the assigned tasks. More often, in municipalities the municipal manager, as the head of municipal administration

would delegate functions and tasks to the employees in the lower echelons. Delegation is an administrative activity that emanates from bureaucratic practices and work procedures. Delegation is relevant in institutions and encourages efficiency, but it should always be accompanied by a system of checks and balances, in order to determine if the delegated tasks have been performed diligently. Kuye (2010:265–266) notes the difference between transactional and transformational leadership styles as that which is distinguished by charisma. On the one hand, transactional leadership is defined as a leadership style, characterised by the lack of charisma and the possession of skill and ability required to handle more ordinary, operational transactions of daily life, *i.e.* evaluating subordinates’ performance in relation to the organisation. On the other hand, Naidoo (2010:117) alludes to the notion that transformational leadership is characterised by a leader who uses his/her charisma, vision and inspiration to achieve a specific organisational goal. The combination of both transformational and transactional leadership styles could contribute significantly to improve the quality of service delivery in the local sphere of government, in a developmental state, such as South Africa. This calls for a comprehensive management approach with charismatic leadership, where subordinates will be inspired to attain of the organisational goals.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENT

This section provides a brief juxtaposition of the environment within which municipalities find themselves in Swaziland and South Africa. The rationale for using these two countries as case studies rests upon the ideological differences followed in the two countries. In Swaziland, the system of governance follows the traditional authority with the Western system as a basic system, whereas, South Africa, a constitutional democratic state that uses a Western system with the augmentation of a traditional authority system. These two countries are used as a standard measure for developmental states in Africa.

Swaziland

The Kingdom of Swaziland is a landlocked country wedged between South Africa and Mozambique. It is interesting to note that the Kingdom of Swaziland is a constitutional monarchy that comprises two spheres of government, *i.e.* national and local government.

Table 1 Municipal Authorities in Swaziland

District	Authorities				
	Urban			Rural	
	City council	Town council	Town boards	Regional administrator	Tinkhundla
Hhohho	1	2		1	14
Manzini	1	2		1	16
Shiselweni		3		1	14
Lubombo		3		1	11

In terms of the local sphere, Swaziland confers its authority upon the local authorities for decision making. These local authorities include structures existing in both the urban and rural areas. The country is divided into four administrative regions as presented in table 1 (Mkhonta 2007:85).

In respect of the rural authorities, Swaziland utilises the *Tinkhundla* system (equivalent of a council). Mkhonta (2007:121) argues that the *Tinkhundla* system is an alternative to a Westminster type of constitution with the traditional values espoused in them. The authority of the King was intensified to become an executive monarch. Each of the *Tinkhundla* consists of between three to six chiefdoms, tasked with achieving the objective of, *inter alia*:

- serving as a meeting place to discuss local issues;
- promoting social and economic development of rural people;
- establishing a strong local government and decentralise administration; and
- serving as a point of contact between the government and the people, thereby promoting participatory democracy.

It is imperative for municipalities in a country such as Swaziland to fast-track development through the promotion of high quality delivery of services. The following case offers a South African overview, which is arguably relatively progressive as compared to some countries that were considered in the Southern African Development Communities (SADC).

South Africa

The Republic of South Africa occupies the southernmost tip of the African continent, with the land surface area of 1 219 090 km² and a population of over 50 million inhabitants. As in most states in Africa, South Africa has a history of colonialism and oppression. Democracy in South Africa came into effect in 1994, after the countless struggles of the people and the effort of the Convention for Democratic South Africa negotiations which were initiated in the late 1980s. The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*, which is the supreme law of the country, recognises the national, provincial and local governments as the spheres of government. These spheres are distinctive, interrelated and interdependent, thereby creating an environment where each sphere is identified as unique and as a sphere existing within its own right. Chapter 7 of the Constitution, 1996, gives a framework for the establishment of democratic local government. Local government comprises 278 municipalities which have been established for the entire territory of the Republic [Section 151(1)].

In terms of the Constitution, municipalities can be categorised into three *i.e.* metropolitan municipalities, local municipalities and district municipalities. The three categories differ in terms of their composition and functioning. Eight metropolitan municipalities have been established *i.e.* City of Tshwane, City of Cape Town, City of eThekweni, City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, Buffalo City and Mangaung Metropolitan municipality. A metropolitan municipality is a densely populated urban area with central business districts, and creates an environment conducive to economic growth and employment opportunities. The composition of local government in South Africa is illustrated in the table 2.

Table 2 Composition of local government per provinces

Province	Number of metropolitan municipalities	Number of district municipalities	Number of local municipalities
Eastern Cape	2	6	37
Free State	1	4	19
Gauteng	3	2	7
Kwa-Zulu Natal	1	10	50
Limpopo	–	5	25
Mpumalanga	–	3	18
North West	–	4	19
Northern Cape	–	5	27
Western Cape	1	5	24
Total	8	44	226

Source: Adapted: Municipal Demarcation Board (2012)

Apart from a metropolitan municipality, there are 226 local municipalities, which are primarily responsible for towns and smaller cities. Local municipalities grouped together in a contiguous area forms a district municipality. The 44 district municipalities provide structural and administrative support to local municipalities assigned to them. In all municipalities, the legislative and executive authority is vested in a municipal council. Municipal councils are strategic components of the municipalities as they play a crucial role of monitoring their respective municipalities, and can make binding decisions. This political oversight is also applied on the administration of the municipalities, as the municipal manager as administrative executive head in a municipality is appointed by and accountable to a municipal council. In municipalities, the ability to inspire the behaviour of people is primarily driven by the executive mayor (where this type has been implemented) and the municipal manager.

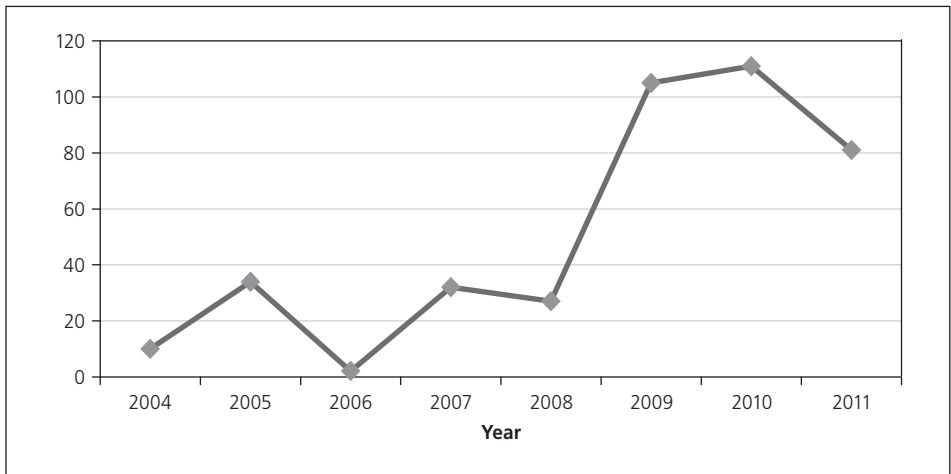
The *White Paper on Local Government, 1998*, envisages developmental local government. This would make municipalities responsive by co-operating with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet the needs of the community, and subsequently improve the quality of their lifestyle. Political representatives and administrative officials have a responsibility to ensure the existence of an environment conducive to the effective facilitation of developmental local government.

CHALLENGES FACING MUNICIPALITIES

Over the years, since democratisation, municipalities, despite their challenges associated to overcome the Apartheid regime's spatial planning in the case of South Africa, have managed to make strides in servicing their communities. However much is still to be done. This means, municipalities still have a crucial role to play in the transformation of the living conditions of



Figure 1 Major service delivery protests, by year (2004-2011)



Source: Adapted: Municipal IQ- Municipal Hotspots Monitor (2012)

the people. The *Local Government Turnaround Strategy* (LGTAS) and the *State of the Cities Report*, 2011, have identified a plethora of challenges facing municipalities in South Africa. These challenges could be associated with service delivery, or the lack thereof. Corruption and maladministration as well as the lack of administrative capacity are the prominent features in municipalities' inability to function effectively and ultimately deliver the required quality and quantity of services.

As explained by Moldoveanu and Sabie (2009:111), the concept of leadership has a broad proximity and it is applied at an individual, group or organisational level. Thus the protests experienced in municipalities could possibly exhibit the improper or lack of good leadership in the municipalities concerned. In a municipality, the political office bearers, as leaders should be able to influence the behaviour of those subject to the leader's sphere of influence and consequently improve the quality and standard of living for the citizens. Mafora (2009:1) in Naidoo (2010:113) contends that the number of protests relating to service delivery in South Africa in the past decade had been over 500. During the period 2004–2011, most municipalities have experienced a rapid increase in the number of protests, often violent and associated with service delivery. Protests of this nature occur mainly in the local government sphere, where the aggrieved inhabitants accuse the municipality of incompetence, misconduct and corruption (State of the cities report 2011:134). Such protests have the capacity to reinforce the notion that municipalities as the local sphere of government are in crisis. The figure below depicts the number of community protests which are linked to service delivery, which occurred in the period 2004–2012. These major protests were experienced in municipalities across South Africa, and as shown in the figure, there was a rapid increase of number of protests from 2008–2010, suggesting political turmoil in municipalities.

It could be argued that these protests are not solely linked to service delivery, but other socio-economic maladies, such as unemployment, poverty and inequality. One has to take cognisance of the possibility of the *happiness factor* of the individuals who participate in such activities. Most of these protests occur in disadvantaged communities, where high rates of unemployment, poverty and inequality are prevalent. The concept *service delivery protest*

is ambiguous as it makes the assumption that, if civil disobedience ensues in a community, it is in every case related to the delivery of services.

In the post-independent Kingdom of Swaziland, what poses as the main challenge to the government, both national and local, is to establish an effective mechanism that will ensure that the traditional values are espoused into the current governmental system. Accordingly, municipalities have to promote and maintain the development of the citizens of the country. Local government in particular, experience the challenges of, *firstly*, lack of experience and illiteracy of the members that comprises *Tinkhundla*. This means that an individual will be appointed to the chieftaincy, irrespective of the age of that individual, as long as he is the heir of a particular clan. *Secondly*, the prominent challenge for rural authorities is the lack of financial resources and skills to propel the *Tinkhundla* to be an effective system that could promote participatory democracy (Mlipha 2010:245). It is often assumed that municipalities fail as a result of the lack of effective and progressive political leadership and political stability. This argument is inaccurate, as it overlooks and does not appreciate the administrative capacity as a prerequisite for a good government, *i.e.* the government that uses all its resources effectively to respond to the needs of the people.

Clearly, in order for a municipality to ignite excellence in its area of jurisdiction, it would be important for both the political and administrative leaders to dissociate themselves from corrupt activities. Striving for excellence, will inspire community members and ultimately eradicate the perception of leaders' incompetence in municipalities. The Department of Co-operative Governance (COG) has developed the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) (2009:18), in an attempt to introduce a new initiative to promote excellence in local government. This LGTAS is a principal strategy towards overcoming the challenges facing municipalities in South Africa. It has identified improper leadership and poor governance as the prominent features in municipalities' poor performance. The governance of the local government sphere is critically dependent upon the nature and character of leaders in those municipalities.

Vyas-Doorgapersad (2010:48) notes that the service delivery standards are below expectation as a result of the challenges confronting local government, including:

- skewed settlement patterns;
- extreme concentrations of taxable economic resources;
- large backlogs in service infrastructure;
- great spatial separations and disparities among towns and townships;
- entrenched modes of decision making, administration and delivery;
- substantial variations in capacity; and
- lack of sound relations among municipalities and the communities they serve.

The above phenomena represent some of the challenges that greatly impact on the leadership of municipalities. Municipalities in South Africa are faced with critical challenges of which, if they are not urgently addressed, will compromise the quality of the lives of the inhabitants. Taking the history of South Africa into account, it would be safe to argue that some challenges prominent in the ANC government today were inherited after the democratic transition. In overcoming such challenges, a need for developing an implementation strategy ensues. Introducing a mechanism in order to address the stated challenges is in effect an attempt to solve the imbalances created by the policy of separate



development initiated and implemented by the apartheid government of the former South Africa (prior to 1994).

The rural authority system of *Tinkhundla* in Swaziland is dominantly male oriented, *i.e.* males are at the centre of local government decision making in Swaziland. This creates a gender gap and exclusivity in local government affairs and participatory democracy. Representation is thus compromised by the very system (*Tinkhundla*) it was intended to address. It is not only in rural authorities where gender misrepresentation takes place, also at the structures of the urban authorities. For instance, by 2009, only 17 of the 76 seats in municipalities in Swaziland were occupied by female councillors who were serving in municipal and town councils or town boards in representing their constituencies across the urban local government authority in Swaziland (Mlipha 2010:247).

Challenges affecting leadership in municipalities

Municipalities are responsible for ensuring the promotion of collective effort to pursue the endeavours which the community members would deem fit and proper. In so doing, it becomes important to highlight the role played by individuals who hold positions of authority within the municipal structures in terms of the legislation. The leadership challenges that are identified are *inter alia* political interference, lack of finance, lack of skilled human resources, lack of proper planning, and lack of commitment. For a municipality to effectively and efficiently deliver the required services, it is imperative for municipal leaders to know which skills officials should possess to enable them realise the vision of the institution. More often, political interference would exist where a councillor encroaches on the role and responsibility of a municipal manager. This normally happens where the council strives to influence the decisions of the municipal manager. Administratively, an organisation will not be able to effectively function without properly skilled human capital, finances, proper planning and the commitment of the leaders.

Naidoo (2010:115) acknowledges the importance of developing leadership in municipalities through building the capacity of its employees, in order to ensure that municipal functions are performed in the most effective and accountable manner. Capacity building is a prerequisite for development. Capacity building will ensure that employees with the necessary skills and abilities are required for providing policy directives in the municipality and its administrative units. *The White Paper on Local Government* (1998:17) emphasises the importance of creating a developmental system of local government. Developmental local government suggests that a local sphere becomes an active government structure, which is responsive to the socio-economic needs of the citizens. Municipal managers should possess the ability to co-ordinate and lead the formulation of a strategic vision through transformational policies. This will ensure an innovative municipal leadership, with municipal departments aligning with the municipal vision.

INTERVENTIONS TO ACCELERATE SERVICE DELIVERY

Naidoo (2010:115) argues that municipalities do not only need sound management, but they also require effective leadership across all the levels of the service delivery chain. The Local

Government Turnaround Strategy in South Africa was initiated in 2009 as an interventionist mechanism which replaces the earlier, Project Consolidate. Project Consolidate was a hands-on intergovernmental programme which aimed at supporting the local government sphere to identify the critical challenges that inhibits the efficient provision of services. Project Consolidate made little progress in the attempt to reform the identified 136 failing municipalities, as a result of lack of proper leadership in municipalities (SA local government research centre 2012:35). The purpose of the recently amended *Municipal Systems Amendment Act*, 2011, intends to professionalise the position of managers by restricting political office bearers from interfering with the appointment of any of the managers in municipalities. This legislation will render municipal councils legally responsible when appointing unqualified people to vital posts in municipalities.

For Swaziland to flourish, it would be beneficial for the rural authority to embark on a project that aims at empowering and encouraging women to participate in local government matters. Furthermore, the leaders of *Tinkhundla*, should promote the transformation of the system, taking into account the modern management techniques applied in providing services to a 21st century citizenry. Among other initiatives for intervention, the local government in Swaziland has notably implemented the Urban Development Programme (UDP). This is an intervention that aims at facilitating infrastructural upgrades in the rural local authorities, thereby attempting to modify them into urban areas (Sihlongonyane 2003:254).

IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN MUNICIPALITIES

In the discipline of Public Administration, the concept of leadership is sometimes confused with that of management. The distinction between the two lies in the function and activities within which a person in a position is expected to perform. Cohen (2008:334) asserts that, management is the task of setting up control structures and standard operating procedures, whereas leadership involves stimulating organisational change by articulating a vision and inspiring a sense of mission. Management ensures the setting-up of an organisational vision, and leaders play an inspirational role to make subordinates to take ownership of the vision, and subsequently implement it. According to Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Vrba (2011:315) management and leadership are distinctive, and yet complementary. Management is an act of coping with the complexity of practices and procedures to ensure the effective functioning of an organisation whereas leadership highlights the act of implementing in an organisation. Both concepts are viewed as a means to an end.

Strategic leadership is defined as the leader's ability to anticipate, envision, and maintain flexibility by empowering others in order to bring change as and when necessary in an organisation (Jooste and Fourie 2009:52). As a multifunctional process, strategic leadership has a potential to promote effectiveness and stability in an organisation. Naidoo (2010:117) views the concept *strategic leadership* as a combination of both transactional and transformational leadership styles. As such, it is argued that using strategic leadership will ensure the promotion of organisational effectiveness and the attainment of the long term goals, while maintaining short-term stability.



Through strategic leadership, the municipal manager in a municipality would be able to ensure the development of particular skills necessary for the creation of an organisational culture that promotes effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of the required services. This is imperative because it will ensure consistent and sustainable goal attainment by encouraging the participation of the community. Naidoo (2010:120) affirms that the adoption of a strategic leadership approach will ensure that those in positions of authority in municipalities have a thorough understanding of each and every component in a municipality.

CONCLUSION

The role of government in every state is to maintain the general welfare of the people. The local government, being the sphere closest to the people, plays a pivotal role in ensuring this task on a daily basis. With all the necessary tools required, it is inevitable that the municipal councils will be able to achieve their goals. Municipal managers should have the ability to inspire their subordinates in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in municipalities. The article, thus recommends the introduction of a strategic leadership approach in local government. The discussion captured critical challenges affecting the performance of municipalities, in their drive to implement policies that advocates the effective and efficient delivery of services. More importantly, municipal councils should always ensure that the leaders in a municipality have the necessary skills that enable them to perform their required tasks in an organisation.

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