



Leadership And Management Skills: A Neglected Issue in South African Municipalities

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the prevalence of ignorance of the significance of effective leadership and Management within the municipal administration setup. Such practice compromises service delivery at the coal face of the community. Service delivery has been and is still a problem in South African municipalities. Numerous concerns about it were raised, both scholarly and political. Leadership and Management are critical variables that have not been thoroughly investigated regarding their impact on impediments to municipal service delivery. The paper adopts a qualitative approach and employs a desktop study method to collect data that supports the notion that the South African political leadership is unaware of the importance of leadership and management skills in delivering services to the people. The results of the paper demonstrated that ignoring consideration of people's leadership and management skills within the municipal environment leads to inefficient service delivery, a lack of public trust, corruption, public protests, and instability. The paper concludes that the consideration of leadership and management skills in the leadership and Management of South African municipalities can ensure the country's success in delivering services in its municipalities.

Keywords: Impact; Leadership; Management; Skills; Service Delivery; Municipal Administration

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership and Management are critical competencies required for achieving organizational goals. The traits are arguably and mostly considered in the private sector rather than in the modern state administration of some African countries. Even though such competencies are often listed as requirements in advertisements for vacant positions in state administration and local government, they are rarely followed in the appointment of public sector employees. The issue of token appointments and spoilt is common in public sector employment. Effective organizational Management requires solid management and leadership skills (Skripak, 2016). While due consideration of these two critical elements is rarely taken into account in South African municipal administration, it is noted that there has been an ongoing debate on the principles and practices of leadership and Management (Dike, Odiwe, & Ehojor, 2015). Not only are managerial issues a problem in local municipalities, but the elections also produce results favoring mostly inappropriate candidates. The most suitable candidates are typically those who participate in grassroots competitions, where their names do not advance to the final stage. This paper engages with what we believe to be the overlooking of the critical competencies and the importance of leadership and management skills in the South African local government space (Municipalities). The primary research question raised in this paper is: Do the South African municipalities consider leadership and Management as significant in their administrative space? The following are secondary objectives to answer the primary research question raised: 1) To provide a theoretical underpinning of the study, 2) To conceptualize leadership and Management, 3) To contextualize Leadership and Management within the South African municipal space, 4) To contextualize the

politics of appointment in South African municipalities and 5) To analyze the effect of poor leadership and Management in South African municipalities.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted qualitative research. The scientific arguments in the paper are derived from secondary data sources, including scientific journal articles, published scholarly books, and government policies. The materials sampled for data analysis deal with leadership and management, local government management and administration, and local government and service delivery. The data analysis method employed in this study is the inductive approach. The technique is helpful for researchers to engage with the defined data, providing a link between initial or open coding and eventual emergent themes and theories (Bingham, 2023). This analytical tool has the potential to enable researchers to analyze raw data, thereby achieving the study's reliable research objectives (Alase, 2017). The qualitative data from these secondary sources are analyzed inductively to provide new insights and knowledge that will assist the academic society and the South African public administration in improving service delivery through the acknowledgment of skills rather than political Patronage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of this paper align with the research question raised about whether the South African local government environment indeed considers the leadership and management skills potential in both their employment and political space. The paper assumed that political Patronage and spoils systems are prevalent in South African local government, compromising service delivery. In answering the research question, the results are presented and discussed under the following themes: 1) The Spoils system Theory, 2)

Conceptualizing leadership and Management, 3) Contextualizing Leadership and Management within the South African municipal space, 4) Contextualizing the politics of appointment in South African municipalities and 5) The effect of poor leadership and Management in South African municipalities.

The Spoils System Theory

The spoils system is the opposite of the merit system in its approach to employing individuals in organizations. The merit system is "epistemologically defined as good things that deserve to be appreciated" (Darsim, 2022). This means that individuals with the appropriate skills are placed in suitable organizational positions to meet the necessary performance requirements. On the contrary, the Spoils system refers to a practice in which the ruling political party, after winning an election, awards jobs to its supporters, friends, and relatives as a reward for their efforts in the campaign and as an incentive to continue working for the party. The spoils system is, therefore, characterized by Patronage, cronyism, and nepotism and has little consideration for people with leadership and management skills within the organization. More often, a proponent of the system promotes self-interest rather than organizational interests. According to Stancetic (2019), the spoils system provides space for a mutually exploitative relationship between politicians and public officials. Generally, organizations such as municipalities are highly politicized in appointing personnel from all senior occupational categories using the spoils system. In such a working arrangement, individuals appointed in this capacity are not pursuing government business, but rather the interests of the ruling political party and those in higher ranks. Arguments supporting the spoilt systems maintain that the ruling party needs to have such appointments at strategic positions to counteract program

sabotage by the opposition employed in government. At worst, in the African context, such a strategic spoiled system is often employed even at lower organizational levels due to a lack of job opportunities. Although these realities contradict the expectations of modern government, the merit system is often overlooked in favor of political loyalties. This is against the fact that "every organization requires resources such as money, materials, machines, and man to actualize its objectives (Bassey & Edemidiong, 2021). Service delivery often collapses due to such practices. The neglect of leadership and management skills in the administration of South African municipalities has created an ongoing service delivery crisis. The Spoilt system, which is often called *Party Recruitment*, is used in other countries to recruit party loyalists to public administration, public service, and public enterprises based on loyalty to the party (Stancetic, 2019) to the detriment of society so that the ruling party could have an eye everywhere in the public administration space. Although preferred by many developing countries, the spoils system is a democratic nightmare in African governance systems. It has pros and cons that are not manageable, making it difficult to achieve a good public administration (Santino, 2011), but fueling further disparities between the public and the electorate.

Leadership And Management

Leadership and Management are crucial for service delivery in the public sector, including the municipalities (Wajdi, 2017). The debate about the similarities and dissimilarities between leadership and Management has been ongoing for centuries, and no conclusive evidence suggests whether there are differences. A simple dictionary definition is that leaders have followers while managers have subordinates (Bohoris & Vorria, n.d). The paradoxical question is whether leaders

need managerial skills to lead effectively or managers need leadership skills to lead. Waiji (2017) noted that, although leadership and Management are similar in some respects, they require different types of outlooks, skills, and behaviors. Ruducan & Ruducan (2014) believe that Leaders derive their activities from self-vision and providing direction, while managers derive their activities from management functions. Unlike leadership, Management is considered both a science and an art; therefore, managers do not necessarily require leadership abilities to manage effectively. Leadership is, consequently, one of the vital skills required of a manager. Still, it is not necessarily a compulsory one. It is thus clear that for service delivery to be possible in municipalities, we require good managers who have received appropriate management training as a science. Within the municipal administration, a need exists for political structures, such as councilors, to provide political leadership, and for competent managers to be given the space to execute their managerial functions. The 21st-century organization is faced with the reality of doing things right, regardless of how complex the organizational environment may be (Dike, Odiwe, & Ehujor, 2015). Leadership and Management can be overlapping concepts, but they are not necessarily the same. In a municipal environment, municipal officials possess both the skills to achieve government service delivery objectives.

Leadership And Management Within the South African Municipal Space

Ineffective leadership poses a significant challenge in the African region, resulting in weak institutions, a weak rule of law, corruption, nepotism, a lack of accountability, transparency, and poor service delivery (Atiku, Kurana, & Ganiyu, 2023). While these abnormalities characterize our political and administrative space, there is little accountability and consequence

management for councilors and senior officials responsible. The greatest challenge facing South African municipalities is the lack of practical leadership ethics (Mbandlwa, Dorosamy, & Fagbadebo, 2020), which is not enforced by law when contravened. The leadership and Management of South African municipalities are marred by instability and unethical leadership challenges that emanate from prevailing mediocrity promoted by high political structures. Mediocrity and poor service delivery characterize numerous municipal administrations and their operations, while politicians promise the public effective administration, often compromising on this promise by talking right while walking left. Such abnormalities were primarily associated with the spoils system, which occurred during the appointment of officials in the municipal administration. Moreover, the worst part is also the rigged elections where only losers become winners, and winners become losers. The complex electoral administrations and systems for investigating electoral fraud make such cases difficult to resolve. Ngqwala and Ballard (2020) noted that effective leadership in South African municipalities is lacking, as leadership itself is a complex concept.

On the other hand, Madumo (2012) attested that the service delivery protests experienced in South African municipalities could exhibit a lack of good leadership in the municipalities concerned, both politically and administratively. Good leadership is based on trust, honesty, integrity, courage, sincerity, confidence, determination, compassion, vision, and selflessness (Schmidt, n.d), a characteristic most political and administrative officials of South African municipalities lack. Thus far, municipal leaders, both administratively and politically, have been accused of major corruption scandals and lack many of the characteristics of effective leaders in organizations. Sadly, these

scandals occur when municipalities take pride in the Codes of Conduct and Ethics for Councillors and Officials, which they have approved and claim to be operating under (Ngubane, 2021). There is a considerable distance between the approved ethical policies and the work of councilors and senior officials. The leadership and Management provided by the municipalities have created little trust with the public. Mabitsela and Raseala (2022) have alluded that the broken trust between the public and the South African government is beyond repair. The discrepancy is not only perpetuated by local politicians and officials, but there is also a profound disjuncture between constitutional and political arrangements (Local Government Outlook, 2021: 259). Leadership is a moral responsibility and cannot be achieved through the political patronage strategies employed by modern politicians, primarily because, in South Africa, the autonomous nature of local politics is subordinate to both provincial and national politics.

The Politics of Appointment In South African Municipalities

The nature of appointments in senior local government posts and other public sector agencies in South Africa is believed to be based on the spoils system. This is done through the Cadre Deployment Policy. The opposition parties' challenge to this policy has not been successful thus far. This is despite equity having been overachieved in other occupational categories under affirmative action, another equity policy. According to Ndedi & Kok (2017), the purpose of the Cadre deployment policy is to "appoint ruling party loyalists in an organization as a means to circumvent public reporting lines and bring the institution under the control of the party, as opposed to the state." Adopting the system reveals that management and leadership potential are compromised as essential for job performance, ultimately undermining

the service delivery purpose purported by the ruling parties. In this type of setup, government resources are primarily used to benefit the ruling party and its loyalists rather than for service delivery (Mlambo & Thusi, 2022). Mafunisa (2008) also attested that the African National Congress's decision to adopt the Cadre Deployment Policy is not a peculiar practice, as the National Party government of South Africa used to appoint ruling party loyalists to key strategic positions. Mafunisa's assertion may have been ignorant of the fact that the National Party was careful to assess the skills and competencies in leadership and Management of those appointed to key strategic positions. The National Party had an intellectual hub to source from called "*The Broeder Bond*."

The consideration of both leadership and management competencies in municipal officials is key to effective service delivery. Twala (2014) maintained that the Cadre Deployment Policy is likely to be effective in situations where only competent cadres are placed in their rightful positions, which is not a fact that can be confirmed, as many cadres have indeed compromised the legitimacy of the Cadre Deployment Policy in South Africa. President Ramaphosa has also acknowledged the scale of corruption associated with the Cadre Deployment Policy, which threatens the state's capacity (Swanepoel, 2021) to carry out its activities. The deteriorating service delivery in the country is primarily attributed to the adoption of the Cadre Deployment Policy. Zulu, Yalezo, and Mutambara (2022) noted that opposition political parties, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), have criticized the Cadre Deployment Policy as a contributing factor to poor service delivery. In this instance, the ANC is primarily concerned with maintaining its entrenched power and control over the state machinery, rather than delivering services. The 2016 Auditor-

General's findings demonstrated that the poor performance by various government departments and local government is attributable to skills problems (Makwetu, 2016). From this, it can be argued that the Cadre Deployment Policy is not a problem in itself, but rather that the system's implementation is not aligned with its purpose. It is understood that the African National Congress (ANC) inherited a racially skewed country with numerous democratic problems. However, those corrections cannot be corrected through means that are not beneficial to the beneficiaries meant to be served. Cadre Deployment Policy has thus far compromised service delivery through corruption, poor procurement systems, wasteful expenditure, and deteriorating local government service (Shava, 2018). Mlambo and Thusi (2022) state that "this political favoritism, which was carried out through state positions, resulted in poor performance in government institutions and the country as a whole." Officials with poor leadership and management skills often struggle to deliver services effectively. Cadre Deployment Policy has thus far promoted poor service delivery because it only appoints incompetent staff to lead service delivery projects (Thusi, Matyana & Jilli, 2023).

The Effects of Poor Leadership And Management In South African Municipalities

The ignorance of poor leadership and Management in appointing and electing potential candidates adversely affects service delivery. These adverse effects have long-term effects on future generations. The continued ignorance of these two aspects in the leadership and Management of municipalities shows that visionless loyalists of the ruling party lead the political and public sectors. More often, academics and political analysts have focused on the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause. Indeed, all address the service

delivery problems from the centre of corruption discourse rather than its cause. Hence, the debate is endless. For this article, I will focus on the effects of poor leadership and Management on South African municipalities: 1) poor service delivery, 2) poor public trust, 3) corruption, and 4) protests and instability.

Poor Service Delivery. Throughout the country, the public has complained about the lower quality of service delivery. However, we complain about corruption as a huge causal factor. Ngqwala & Ballard (2020) believe that current service delivery concerns are complex and diverse, and therefore require leadership to understand the complexities and dynamics of modern, changing society. Although leadership is significantly emphasized in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) as a key factor in achieving developmental local government, it is not widely considered a problem of local government today. Instead, the government has identified technical failings as a significant cause of the issues rather than leadership (Schmidt, n.d). Many challenges facing South African municipalities, such as service delivery issues or the lack thereof, are predominantly highlighted in most local government literature (Madumo, 2012), where corruption is identified as a more significant factor than any other cause. Poor service delivery has been reported in various development areas, such as housing, health, and social services. In 2013, the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, presented a report on Low-Cost housing to the Parliament of South Africa, which highlighted instances where houses were built without foundations. The materials crumbled at the touch (South Africa, 2017). While in South Africa, there was less concern about leadership and service delivery, in Namibia, poor leadership and a lack of community involvement were identified as key factors that hinder proper service delivery (Atiku, Kurana, & Ganiyu, 2023).

Public trust. Unlike the subordination of people through management functions, following a leader politically is a voluntary act. Moreover, the public follows political programs that convince them that those carrying them out are honest, truthful, have integrity, are selfless, and have compassion for serving the people. Therefore, politicians and public managers should be people who are trusted by the public. The decline of trust in politicians of the modern political era is on the rise (Ruscio, 1996) and has led to public dissatisfaction. Members of the public act differently when they have lost trust in the public institutions and the government in power. Some prefer to leave their country and seek fortunes abroad, while those who stay often take the option of protests, which can be either violent or peaceful. South Africans typically choose the latter. Notably, South Africa is predominantly known for its dissatisfaction, which, to a certain extent, negatively impacts the stay of foreign nationals. Political trust is a significant aspect in public administration discourse (Susanti, Halwatiah, Rukmana, Yani, Hidayat, & Ahmad, 2017) due to the importance of trust between politicians and the public. Trust from the public is an integral part of the smooth functioning of any society (Perry, 2021).

When the public loses trust in the government and its public institutions, both the government and its institutions lose legitimacy. Any normal government understands its function as being aligned with societal needs rather than the private interests of politicians and public managers. Mabitsela and Raseala (2022) view trust between the government and its people as "the most important foundation upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems are built." Poee & Munyanyi (2022) also noted that "delivering public goods requires that processes facilitating relationship building and mutual respect among stakeholders be well designed to establish better

communication and conflict management. Thus far, trust between the South African government and its public appears to be lower. The fact that the African National Congress (ANC) lost most of its municipalities in the last local government elections bears enough evidence to suggest a broken trust with the public. Without good leadership and Management, public trust is not achievable. Not to mention the current general election loss, which led to the creation of a government of national unity (GNU) (Malapane, 2025; Mabotha, 2025; Mgomzulu, 2025), public trust can ensure the ruling party's success in implementing policies and service provision (DahyarDaraba, 2021). In South Africa, the political analysts' predictions have anticipated coalitions in local and other spheres of government. The country is said to have compromised its leadership credibility by consistently appointing individuals of questionable leadership credibility to positions of power, thereby implementing service delivery projects. The public trusts political leadership characterized by credible commitment, ability, competence, cooperation, responsiveness, openness, fulfilled promises, limited opportunism, ethical behaviour, accountability, and reliability (Tanny, 2019).

Corruption. One of the significant effects of poor leadership and Management in the public sector is corruption. Corruption has been widely acknowledged as a significant contributor to underdevelopment in developing countries (Abah & Nwoba, 2016). In South Africa, it is viewed as the first problem of poor service delivery in the public sector. This variable has been selected separately from leadership and Management as a cause. Indeed, corruption is a symptom of poor leadership and Management, rather than a cause of poor service delivery, as has been claimed. Mbandlwa, Dorosamy, and Fagbadebo (2020) noted that "the biggest challenge of South Africa's service delivery

is effective ethical leadership." Corruption appears to have been practiced at the highest levels, with heads of state mainly involved in each publicized scandal. Despite the existence of Codes of Conduct at Municipalities and other sectors of the public service, unethical conduct remains high. It is known that it cannot be eradicated without effective leadership and Management to oversee the public administration machinery. Political leaders and public managers cannot influence their subordinates and followers to adhere to ethical codes that they regularly contravene. Naidoo (2012). reiterated that "the eradication of corruption depends on promoting good governance achievable through effective leadership." Conversely, effective leadership depends on an ethical government in power, which is rare in Sub-Saharan Africa. Leaders and public managers elected and appointed through the spoils system model are unlikely to be role models of good governance. The purpose of leadership is to provide direction to advance collective interests (Fagbadebo & Dorasamy, 2021), primarily those of the public rather than private interests. Thus far, private political interests in public offices have been served at the public's expense, leading to poor service delivery.

Protests and Instability. Post-Apartheid South Africa is confronted with the proliferation of public demonstrations in different contexts (Mongale, 2022), with some categorized as minor and others as major (Bonga, 2021). South Africa's protest actions are highly linked to "patronage and clientelism politics, in which there is a reciprocal trading of public goods, services and employment with political support between politicians and voters" (Chiwara, 2022: 3). Patronage and clientelism could only be promoted by leaders with dishonest and untrustworthy characters who lack integrity. The world is still asking how a country like South Africa, which was hailed

as the best model of democracy, could be experiencing such a negative image of service delivery provision (Botes, 2018). From a literary perspective, many scholars continue to argue that South Africa is a crucial player in the region, both economically and politically, and is even competing with the best in the economic sphere (Sebola, 2023). Its membership in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) family is evidence enough. Surprisingly, when it is doing well regionally, continentally, and globally, its domestic affairs are on the rise. South Africa's service delivery problems cannot be attributed to economic factors. It has all the elements of bad leadership and Management. Poor leadership and Management in the public sector have resulted in adverse effects such as protests and instability. The municipality, being at the forefront of service delivery, has witnessed the disastrous impact of such leadership problems; as a result, it responds through mostly violent protests. The protest actions in South Africa are motivated by various areas of discontent, including a lack of access to water, sanitation, electricity, housing, and employment, as well as a lack of political accountability (Mottiar & Bond, 2012).

On the other hand, other grievances were linked to the incompetence of local councilors and their administration, which is unresponsive to the needs of the people (Nleya, 2011), often displaying the results of corruption and nepotism. It is clear that when services are not delivered, such discontent produces anger against the state and its institutions by the society (De Juan & Wegner, 2017). Thus far, instability due to service delivery issues has been experienced in various parts of the country, resulting in a loss of faith in the ruling party among the public. The failure of those in power to reorganize their strategy for appointing and nominating individuals to lead and manage their projects will

ultimately lead to a future government collapse.

CONCLUSION

This paper argued that leadership and Management had been compromised in the appointment and nomination of leadership in public sector organizations, such as municipalities. The paper demonstrates that the neglect of leadership and management skills within the South African municipal administration environment has led to inefficient service delivery, a lack of public trust, corruption, public protests, and instability. This paper contributes to the literature on Local Government by bringing new knowledge to understand the causes of service delivery problems in South Africa, rather than focusing on symptoms. The paper will be helpful to policymakers in that it advises them not only to look at South Africa's municipal problems from a cause perspective but also to understand the effect that leadership and Management, as skills of the office, have on the general agenda of government service delivery programs.

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