



Exploring Developmental Local Government As A Strategy For Municipalities In South Africa

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Abstract:

This research is based on a conceptual framework that represents the vision of developmental local government as the ideal form of local government envisaged for municipalities in South Africa. A qualitative approach was used to conduct a multisite case study at three Free State Province municipalities in South Africa. It was ascertained that integrated development planning (IDP) is used as a principal strategic planning approach, following a linear process. A more holistic approach to municipal strategy, namely, a growth and development strategy as proposed by the National Planning Commission, is thus not yet fully interrogated and employed. The findings also highlight the dominance of the traditional approach to strategic management and planning by municipalities, factors affecting the effective implementation of the vision of a developmental government, the impact of historical factors including the legacy of the liberation struggle and apartheid on local governance, and the role of ethical leadership and performance management. The findings have implications for both theory and practice since it contributes to an understanding of municipal strategy from its military etymology, as well as identify critical factors affecting the effective implementation of the vision of a developmental local government.

Keywords: developmental local government, socio-economic development, ethical leadership, developmental state.

INTRODUCTION

At the time of public policy pronouncements, the public sector often sounds promising and destined for great success, just like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (Imurana, Haruna & Kofi, 2014). However, once the policy implementation phase begins, the original vision, such as that of a developmental local government, slowly becomes blurred by the complexities and uncertainties of the real world (Imurana *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, an undesired chasm emerges between vision (ultimate goal) and strategy execution (Swilling, Roux & Guyot, 2010).

Throughout generations, organisational strategy, inspired by the best practices from the oldest military treatise, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, has always evolved around bridging the gap between a vision and its execution (McKeown, 2016). In this way, strategy seems to be crucial in determining the rationale for any proclaimed success or failure in pursuit of a vision. By nature, strategy does not exist in a vacuum, but as an insight or vision or purpose-driven phenomenon (Tovstiga, 2010).

In the post-apartheid South African municipal systems, strategy has been shaped and constrained by numerous factors (Swilling, Roux & Guyot, 2010), namely, political history, colonialism, apartheid and the struggle for liberation, political transition, democratisation, institutional capacity, and the so-called sins of incumbency (Netshitenzhe, 2012). These factors constitute the current realities that are unfortunately hostile to the desired future (vision) of establishing a developmental local government and seem pedestrian by any measure (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2010).

While the gap between what is envisioned and the actual implementation has become a global phenomenon (Nadgrodkiewicz, Nakagaki & Tominic, 2012), the difference lies in the quality of the implementation strategies employed to close the gap. Within the local government realm, efforts to close the gap in question are confined to the dictates of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Ramodula, 2014), which is regarded as the 'mother of all plans,' since all municipal activities must be aligned with national and provincial policies implemented (SALGA, 2001). The IDP is also embraced as the most effective management tool ideal to provide the strategic vision, leadership and direction for all municipal functions (CoGTA, 2009).

However, the IDP has a life span of only five years, which perhaps makes it difficult to pay special attention to the ultimate goal of establishing a developmental local government. Netshitenzhe (2012) considers the introduction of the National Development Plan (NDP) as a catalyst for the creation of a developmental state-oriented vision. However, Mashele and Qobo (2014) also exercise caution about the looming failure of the NDP, due to the lack of implementation plans. With new developments following the introduction of the NDP, municipalities are expected to design and adopt growth and development strategies (GDS) aligned with the provincial GDS (The Presidency, 2011).

The scope and mandate of the local sphere of government in post-apartheid South Africa have been amplified to include economic development and growth, in addition to the elementary service delivery issues. Whatever the local authorities decide to do in improving the lives of local communities is often expressed in strategic plans (IDPs) (MMM IDP, 2017/18). However, the actual strategy to drive those plans towards the ultimate goal still remains unclear.

The implementation of strategy, if considered from its historical and contemporary use, is centred on why (vision) and how (plan) organisations deploy leadership or human resources in general and the allocation of other resources such as finance, property and fleet (Bozkurt & Ergen, 2014). The nature of the relationship between the vision and the strategic plan has a significant bearing on whether or not the ultimate goals will be realised. The strategic plans of municipalities in South Africa are still replicating the original intent of strategy such as objectives, plans, and allocation of resources – both human and capital (MMM IDP, 2017/18; Mainardes *et al.*, 2014). In essence, strategy gives impetus to varied hypotheses made by organisations about their desired future state. The ideals and dreams regarding a desired future are often codified in legislative prescripts, thus providing policy directives (Swilling *et al.*, 2010).

In transforming to being (becoming) developmental, municipalities are expected to focus on local economic policy as a catalyst for the eradication of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Koma, 2012). This further inspires other critical features of this vision, such as 'maximising social development and economic growth, integrating and coordinating, democratising development, and leading and learning'. With these important development milestones clearly defined in the White Paper on Local Government, the obvious expectation is to see them incorporated in municipal strategic plans. This is because these milestones resemble the desired future state of local government in South Africa.

To change the status quo, the current practice of strategy needs to be investigated and reviewed. Lessons can still be drawn from the practice of strategy with its etymological roots and other practices on strategies suited to a developmental local government and understanding the terrain of local government is key in this regard (Bozkurt & Ergen, 2014).

Although the literature is replete with perspectives on what form strategy should take, especially in accordance with different disciplines, a descriptive definition has been the dominant feature of the theory of strategy (Van den Steen, 2013). However, a key piece has been missing in the body of knowledge; that is, 'what strategy does' as a functional definition (Van den Steen, 2013:2). After all, state institutions exist 'to do' and not necessarily 'to be'. What ought to be done (to achieve the end state) determines the nature of the tools (means) needed by the institution concerned (Andrews, 2014). This is the obvious reason why strategy means different things to different institutions.

It is against the above background that this study focuses on the interface between the present and future (vision) state of a municipal system as the core content of strategy (Ackermann & Eden, 2010).

The conceptual framework for the study stems from the key features of the envisaged developmental local government in South Africa as the broader local government vision. The study examines how a particular emphasis on key features could shape the understanding and best practice of strategy as a means to realise the ultimate local government goal.

Research Methodology

An exploratory research design was followed with a particular focus on multisite case studies by using interpretivism, which according to O'Donoghue (in Punch, 2014:17), helps to understand why municipalities practice strategy the way they currently do since it focuses on the 'meanings people bring to situations and behaviour, and which they use to make sense of their world'.

Sampling

The sample comprised three categories of municipalities; Rustenburg Local Municipality (Category B) and Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (Category A), both established in terms of Section 155 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (2006) and the third was a municipality referred to as Oranjia which has proclaimed 'self-determination' but is governed in terms of the provisions of common law and section 235 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Norman, 2016).

Notwithstanding the demarcation dilemmas involving its incorporation in, and/or independence from, the broader Thembelihle Local Municipality, Orania was selected for its firm stance on self-reliance. The latter constitutes a key feature of a developmental local government – a vision that the study seeks to establish in terms of its nexus with strategy (Norman, 2016).

The strategic location of Rustenburg, as the capital of the world's largest platinum mines, makes its municipal jurisdiction an interesting unit of analysis as to how such an economic environment affects municipal strategic making and the implementation processes (Ntema, 2017; Eunomix Research, 2016).

Shortly after the first local government elections (2000), Mangaung Municipality was renowned as the best model of community-based planning (CBP) in South Africa. Such a municipality provides grounds for rich inputs in terms of strategy formulation processes.

Purposeful sampling method which is commonly used in qualitative research was used for the 'identification and selection of information-rich cases', such as individuals and groups whose knowledge is deemed relevant for the present study. A purposive sample (Benoot, Hannes & Bilsen, 2016) was drawn from key individuals and stakeholders actively involved in the municipal strategic planning process; that is, the IDP and/or GDS. These ideal, information-rich individuals or politicians included councillors and officials, ward committees, and civic organisations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Having adopted a qualitative method of inquiry due to its provision for multiple sources of data (Arthur, Mitchell, Lewis & Nicholls, 2014), a multisite case study was used to amplify the richness of information with at least three case studies.

Due to geographical factors involving the distance between the selected case sites, the researcher had to decide on either face-to-face or telephone interviews. However, for the purposes of more in-depth data collection, the researcher engaged the participants using semi-structured interviews. Throughout the data collection process, the research participants were allowed to dominate the discussion by sharing their stories and all interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. Thematic data analysis was used to compare more than one set of data collected at different times, as is the case with the present stud.

The rationale for adopting a multisite case study is premised on the uniqueness of selected 'bounded system[s]', including making provision for multiple sources of data (Punch, 2014). Themes that matched key features of strategy were established during the collection and analysis phases.

Key findings

In all three cases, the participants indicated that the vision of their respective institutions provided a sense of direction to all elements of the local community, and these visions are related in one way or another to the political agenda of the government of the day. Despite the differences in terms of political orientation, another critical dimension involving the visions of the municipalities was that they are founded upon certain provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Although Chapter 7 of the Constitution provides a template of an ideal local government or municipality in South Africa, it is specifically Section 235 that gives effect to the right to self-determination or the legitimacy of the 'Whites only' case in propagating Afrikaner self-determination. Since it is a widely accepted norm within the public sector (in SA), that the notion of 'vision' is subject to a thicket of legislation, all three cases conformed to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1998) in crafting their respective visions, though not all were necessarily following all the legislation.

On the basis of the findings, it could therefore be stated that there is no scepticism about the vision of a developmental local government as the ultimate form of post-apartheid local government in South Africa, though in the case of Orania, Afrikaner self-determination is the defining feature of their vision. Regarding Orania's stance on the vision of a developmental local government, one participant (Orania2) believed they have the best model which should be followed by other municipalities in South Africa. Such a conclusion may be profound if, in simplest terms, a developmental local government is defined as a developmental state at the local sphere of government (Madumo, 2012).

To avoid a simplistic approach and narrow comparisons between the cases in relation to their developmental local government status, the six defining features of a developmental state were revisited; namely, determined developmental elite; relative autonomy; a powerful, competent and insulated economic bureaucracy; a weak and subordinated civil society; and effective management of non-state economic interests and repression, legitimacy and performance (Swilling *et al.*, 2015). This is because at the surface, it may seem quite simple to discern the incorporation of the key elements of the vision of developmental local government in municipal strategies, although with noticeable similarities and variations. The similarities and variations in terms of the state of the three cases in relation to the key features of a developmental state are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Features of the development state in selected cases

| Features of aspired developmental state | RLM | Orania | MMM |
|--|--|--|---|
| Determined developmental elite | Determination shown through initiatives such as Mayoral Stakeholder Engagement Committee (MSECO), promoting private sector involvement in community development. | Highly determined political leadership striving for total self-substance, owning almost everything including own currency (ora - Orania money). | Socio-economic development is characterised as everybody's business, hence the leadership pioneered community-based planning. |
| Relative autonomy | Concerns of political interference raised | Relative autonomy providing for a free-market system | Political interference compromises the autonomy of the administration |
| A powerful, competent and insulated economic bureaucracy | No form of economic bureaucracy initiated or municipal entity established to promote local economic development. This gap is filled by the LED unit | Albeit the <i>Spaar and Kredit Bank</i> (OSK) - largest cooperative bank in South Africa, is a form of economic bureaucracy, it is not established by the independent local government of Orania. It is rather community-based | No form of economic bureaucracy initiated, though there is a suggestion to re-establish LED unit this way |
| Weak and subordinated | A strong, highly politicised | The one political party | A strong, highly politicised |

| Features of aspired developmental state | RLM | Orania | MMM |
|--|--|---|---|
| civil society | civil society with inherent legacy of defiance (non-payment of municipal services, civil unrests) | system of Orania epitomises a form of a weakened and subordinated civil society | civil society with inherent legacy of defiance manifested in the form of episodic civil unrests and non-payment of municipal services |
| Effective management of non-state economic interests | The power (executive and legislative) and autonomy is enshrined in the constitution and related local government statutes – this particular attribute is there but what is not clear effective management of private economic interests. | Operates as an independent state for Afrikaners (Volkstaat) which always for free-market system – that is, the role of the municipality is minimal in managing private economic interests | The power (executive and legislative) and autonomy is enshrined in the constitution and related local government statutes – however, allegations of a distorted property market presupposes poor management of private economic interests. |
| Repression, legitimacy and performance | While repression becomes obsolete in a free and democratic society, legitimacy and performance are comprised by lack of confidence in the local authority and weak institutional capacity respectively. Despite approval of performance management system, poor implementation remain a problem. | Due to one party system, legitimacy is high with no form repression and poor performance reported. | While repression becomes obsolete in a free and democratic society, legitimacy and performance are comprised by lack of confidence in the local authority and weak institutional capacity respectively including failure to introduce performance management system |
| *This simplified assessment of the elements of the vision of developmental state at the selected cases, shows that the local government situation is very unique, and may require peculiar institutions and approaches in turning the latter vision into reality – perhaps a developmental model adapted to municipal state within the dictates of the relevant legislation. | | | |

Table 1 compares the attributes of the traditional developmental state with the elements of developmental local government in the three cases. These attributes might have been tried and tested by the pioneers of the developmental state, such as Japan, but they need to be fully explored to test their feasibility in the local sphere of government. It is for this reason that the East Asian model, or the ‘flying geese paradigm’ – that is, trying to catch up by literally replicating what the early industrialisers did when grafting their developmental path, cannot be applied generically.

Although the development model of the Asian Tigers seemed to have inspired even municipalities to follow a similar developmental path, the participants had reservations regarding the dilemmas and possible solutions pertaining to its implementation. The RLM and the MMM participants highlighted the factors impeding the effective implementation of the vision of a developmental local government as involving a plethora of negative issues: financial constraints, resistance to change, working in silos, political interference, corruption, maligned deployment, non-payment of municipal services, red-tape, understaffed critical departments (IDP and LED), skewed development, lack of a performance management system, lack of accountability, malicious compliance with legislative prescripts (especially public participation), poverty, unemployment, victimisation, the hegemony of the liberation movement or ruling-ruling party, more people claiming indigence, no sense of urgency, failure to access untapped grants, and misconceptions.

These factors emerged as common denominators in RLM and MMM, perhaps due to their similar governance systems and similar leadership styles as they are both led by one political party. According to the participants of Orania, the main reason why the attributes of the traditional developmental state are not evident in South African communities is due to their failure to manage their own economies.

Therefore, the study gives effect the findings of Booyesen (2014) on the negative perceptions of people about the current state of public service in South Africa. It further corroborates the apparent lack of confidence in the local sphere of government. The ability to diagnose factors

impeding the effective implementation of the vision of a developmental local government, as outlined by the participants, suggests that they know where the local government crisis lies. However, the challenge is moving beyond knowledge and interpretation of the impediments, and finding possible solutions.

The findings further reveal that little work is done with regard to the meritocracy and performance management system in some municipalities. For example, despite the RLM's adoption of a performance management system, the challenge is a failure to cascade it to the lower levels. Whilst the MMM does not have a performance management system in place, Orania did not disclose much about their way of measuring performance, except to briefly share the existing partnership between the municipality and the Bo-Karoo *Opleiding*, which is aimed at enhancing the performance of every sector within their society.

It became evident that the implementation of the vision of a developmental local and related performance seems to be implemented lackadaisically, with the participating municipalities showing no sense of urgency. This is contrary to the approach of the local authorities prior to 1994, as during state repression the implementation of the vision of the government of the day was mastered so well that even two and half decades after freedom and democracy, apartheid spatial planning remains intricate to redress (Berrisford, 2011).

It is worth noting that the incorporation of a municipal vision in the political vision of the government of the day is a normative issue, regardless of who is at the helm of the government (Fukuyama, 2013). This is quite evident in Orania as the political leadership of the Orania Movement dictates the developmental path that the municipality should take. The same applies with regard to the influence of the ruling party at both the RLM and the MMM.

Regarding RLM and MMM, it appears that these municipalities are still grappling with elementary maintenance issues. While RLM has already passed the stage of the adoption of the long-term vision aligned with the NDP (vision of the government of the day), MMM's 2040 long-term vision is still in its draft stages. Ideally, the long-term vision is expected to highlight how these municipalities envision their transformation into a developmental local government as a constitutional mandate. This is because at the heart of the vision of post-apartheid local government, is the promotion of socio-economic development; a defining characteristic of a developmental local government (Ndevu & Muller, 2017).

Serving the interest (political vision) of party politics may be seen as a political dimension characterising the municipalities. Based on the prevailing literature on the nature of political institutions, three features were noted to explain the findings further; namely, the existence of a municipality 'in a society', as 'humanly devised' and being subjected to the 'rules of the game'. For example, Orania professes its right to self-determination as bestowed to a municipality 'to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, [and] is subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the Constitution' – espoused in section 151(3) of the Constitution of Republic of South Africa. Notably, although the latter constitutional provision, read in conjunction with Chapter 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, is an overarching legislative framework for all municipalities, the participants argued that Section 235 constituted the basis for a common law municipality, i.e. Orania. Despite this, the final form of local government, even if it is initiated by the municipality concerned (as per section 151(3) of the Constitution), is envisaged to be a developmental local government.

The findings reveal that even though the vision of a developmental local government is one of the ideas mostly put forth in defining the constitutional mandate of local government in the post-apartheid era, the vision remains too abstract and perhaps too remote from the realities of the local authorities. It is treated as if it is a matter of choice whether to be developmental, and not an obligation, because all three cases (and perhaps all municipalities) are yet to produce more effective developmental outcomes along the ideals of a developmental local government; especially its defining feature of socio-economic development. This gives effect to some assertions that a development state is impossible in South Africa (Mathebula, 2016).

The status quo regarding the continued failure to fulfil the legislative mandate of local government puts the legitimacy of the vision of a developmental local government under threat. It questions the quality of political commitment on the side of politicians, the degree of public confidence in the local sphere of government, the clarity of the feasibility of the objectives of a developmental local government, and the institutional capacity of municipalities. These are critical issues that should ideally be discussed at the stage of the IDP process.

It appears that there are no strong legal grounds to question the political commitment of the leadership in all three cases regarding the vision of a developmental local government. The basis for political commitment in this regard is worrying on two fronts; whether the vision of a developmental local government is clearly defined and/or feasible in terms of public policy directives. There is an apparent legislative inadequacy in defining the objects broadly in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) in terms of how municipalities should implement the vision of a developmental local government. Ideally, a normal legislative process involving a serious governance matter, such as the ultimate goal (vision) of a sphere of government as detailed in the White Paper, would not necessarily end in the form of a proposed policy directive, i.e. a White Paper. The latter is merely the second stage in the legislative process, coming after a Green Paper (first draft of policy) process in South Africa.

Furthermore, deficiencies associated with a vision that seems inadequately legislated make it difficult to explain the success or failure of the three cases, in pursuit of a developmental local government. Without sound policy direction, the enforceability of good performance and/or accountability may not be practical. This exposes a gap of uncertainty in the ideal South African model of a developmental local government. In reality, in the case of the RLM and the MMM, the focal point is the short-medium term vision (five-year), while in Orania whatever is done is centred on the promotion of Afrikaner self-determination. The findings further relate the vision of a developmental local government with historical factors affecting post-apartheid local governance.

The study identified historical factors affecting both the strategy and vision of municipalities. Taking historical factors into account depends on the wisdom of policy-makers to separate the negative from the positive effects of history. For example, the deployment of highly skilled human capital (magistrates) at municipalities, as seen during the Dutch rule, can be embraced as the basis for building a meritocratic bureaucracy in local government today, while racial hatred and separate development are the iniquities to avoid. The same applies to the role of the liberation struggle movement as championing freedom and democracy as something to embrace, while its negative effects relate to the inherent culture of defiance of the government of the day as manifested in the non-payment of municipal services (the RLM and the MMM) and episodic civil unrest need to be cast off.

The findings further show how history is interpreted differently by different people. According to a particular sect of Afrikaners, as attested to by the Orania's participants, the demise of White minority rule was associated with the looming extinction of the Afrikaner folk; their history and culture and the fear of possible reverse discrimination. Subsequently, the Whites-only town of Orania was established as a Whites-only independent local government (Orania1). The approval of Orania's independence or self-determination, took many by surprise as some South Africans embraced the dawn of freedom and democracy as the restoration of hope for the people's government by the people – that is, irrespective of their race. Ignorance of the influence of history in crafting the strategy and/or vision-making process may impact negatively on local government, as seen with Pericles' strategies during the Peloponnesian War (Walling, 2013) and may collapse the entire government system.

Regarding the negative colonial-apartheid legacy, spatial planning remains a challenge, while racial segregation takes a new form; namely, a conscious choice by the people of Orania to be separated from the rest of South Africa. In the same vein, the hegemony of the liberation movement, in particular the ruling party (ANC), is characterised as one of the main obstacles to realising a developmental local government (MMM1). The recurrence, in the post-apartheid and post-liberation struggle era, of a new version of racial separatism (Orania) and the inherent

dominance of liberation in local governance politics reflect how the past events shaped the future of local government. How municipalities invoke critical historical factors affecting their respective local communities depends solely on the discretion of the municipal leadership at a given time.

The participants from the RLM and the MMM raised concerns about the effects of unethical conduct and political interference on the institutional capacity at the local authority. For example, RLM4 was agitated by the emergent tendency of some local business leaders who consciously bypass the municipal administration and deal directly with the politicians to bend the by-laws in their favour. This undermines the autonomy of the municipal administration and the rule of law and weakens staff morale. In the same vein, in the MMM, allegations of the distortion of the market in terms of property rentals were levelled against anonymous businessmen said to be working closely with some politicians (MMM1). These tendencies can be seen as the early precursors of state capture and political decay in the local sphere of government.

What seems to be missing in the findings is diversity in leadership, which is needed to build developmental municipalities as espoused in White Paper on Local Government (1998). The multiple interests represented by philanthropic, religious, business and political organisations including learning institutions, are not fully coordinated and linked to the vision and strategy of the local community concerned. For example, in Orania, political consciousness in the community regarding the development trajectory propagated by their independent local government is given a high priority. Every citizen has pledged allegiance to the promotion of Afrikaner culture and self-determination (Orania1 and Orania2). According to the participants, this particular commitment is ascertained during the interviews for residence and subsequent orientation sessions.

Section 79 of the Municipal Structures Act provides for the municipal council to establish two types of committees ideal to oversee the effective implementation of the vision of a developmental local government; oversight committees and ward committees. However, there are worrying concerns about the effectiveness of these committees. According to MMM1, ward committees are reduced to being branches of the governing party as their elections are rigged with a view to dispensing patronage and thus deepening internal political factions. To overcome this, MMM2 argues that ward committees 'must be constituted of people from different fields of interest, like business professionals, like engineers, you know religious communities, you know civic communities, small business and so on and so forth. Because those people understand that the needs of a local community...'. Alternatively, it is not only the committees (oversight and ward) that need to be strengthened, but the entire council of the municipality (RLM1).

Furthermore, the findings expose the non-existence of structures similar to the Public Service Commission in ensuring that the municipal administration is accountable in terms of its constitutional mandate (MMM2). This represents a unique challenge to municipalities since, in terms of the Public Service Act, local government does not necessarily fall within the scope of public administration and therefore is not a competence of the Public Service Commission.

Strategy

In all three case study municipalities, strategy (mainly the IDP processes) is employed as a means towards the realisation of a vision. Interestingly, unlike the RLM and the MMM that adopted the IDP as the principal strategic planning instrument in terms of the provisions of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, Orania, although governed in terms of the provisions of common law, has also adopted its own IDP. One participant of Orania expressly stated, 'We have an IDP' (Orania1). Furthermore, beyond the normal participatory democracy involving consultation with local communities and other relevant stakeholders, as required by law, the self-acclaimed 'independent local government' of Orania employs consultancy services in crafting its strategy. But, all these strategy-making processes are done in-house in the case of the RLM and the MMM, although with some complaints that the IDP units are poorly staffed.

The use of the IDP as a principal strategic planning mechanism might at first create an impression that the three cases are on the right track towards the establishment of a developmental local government. This is because the White Paper on Local Government (1998) envisions the IDP as

part of the critical tools and approaches required towards the successful establishment of a developmental local government. Their compliance in this regard further gives effect to the theory and practice of strategy, and its military etymology, which encompasses whatever means by which the vision is achieved (Grunig & Kuhn, 2018).

Performance management

Although the White Paper on Local Government (1998) highlights performance management as one of the critical approaches to assist municipalities to become more developmental, the performance management system at the MMM has not yet been introduced (MMM4), while at the RLM it has been developed and adopted. However, there are concerns regarding the implementation of performance management at RLM; it has not yet cascaded down to all levels and employees are still grappling with understanding its importance and adherence to the performance standards (RLM3).

The literature cautions that poor performance at the municipal level mainly involves the failure to institutionalise performance management systems or only deals with it on ad hoc basis. This study reveals that in all three cases performance management is treated temporally. Ideally, performance management has to be considered at the very early stages of policy processes. For example, the ruling party in South Africa identified critical issues to be considered to sustain excellent performance in the public sector; namely, ensuring well-staffed and trained bureaucracies, 'nationally coordinated training', and human resource development aligned with education and training – similar to what Orania does through the Bo-Karoo *Opleiding*.

What the ruling party envisaged through community-based financial institutions has reference in the Puerto Rico Community Foundation in Puerto Rico which generates grants and endowment funds for the community (Garcia, 2018). MMM2 argues that alternative ways or methods of community development are known by the affected communities and they should therefore be accorded space to share them. This demonstrates why increased involvement of the local community in designing the municipal strategy is important.

In the cases of RLM and MMM, a holistic approach to strategy may require the municipal strategy to cover to all three areas of vision, guided by the principles of a unitary state in policy making. Their strategies may have to involve the following interrelated processes and elements; (1) municipal growth and development strategy geared to developmental local government (aligned to the NDP and provincial growth and developmental strategy), and (2) IDP (vision of the incumbent mayor/council) and bottom-up community-based strategies if these municipalities adhere to legislative requirements and the will of the local community as some participants reasoned.

An approved performance management system that is not implemented, as seen with the RLM, makes no significant difference to those without it, such as the MMM. As happened with the fall of the mighty Athenians who were distressed by the narrow approach to strategy adopted by their General Pericles, municipalities need to be vigilant on what their strategies do for them (Van den Steen, 2013). Whatever distresses municipalities, or makes them dysfunctional, can be related to their strategy and performance management systems.

Conclusion

All three cases used the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in substantiating the legitimacy of their respective visions. However, in the case of Orania, a particular section of the constitution is applied to justify its autonomy and vision of Afrikaner self-determination. Regardless of the norms and values underpinning the vision of the three cases, their visions provide strategic direction towards the development of the communities they represent. The developments in this context involve seeking the best community development model along the ideals of a developmental local government and/or a developmental state. Although taking the latter route is obligatory due to its constitutionality, i.e. a constitutional mandate of local government, the three cases appear to be treating the vision of a developmental local government as if it is a matter of choice. Whilst such a lackadaisical attitude might be tolerable in the case of Orania due to its autonomy and self-reliance, the RLM and the MMM seem to have

no justification for not fully incorporating the vision of a developmental local government into their vision and strategy; that is, as per the findings of the study.

The study further revealed historical factors, such as the legacy of apartheid and the liberation struggle, as affecting the effective implementation of the vision of the local authorities; these include apartheid spatial planning, the dominance of the liberation movement, and a culture of non-payment of municipal services. These issues affect the institutional capacity of the municipalities and its related performance management system.

Critical to the findings of the study is how municipalities use strategy to bridge the gap between the limited means at their disposal and policy ends such as the developmental outcomes as espoused in the White Paper on Local Government. In this regard, the IDP is used in the three cases as the principal strategic planning. In doing so, these municipalities subscribe to the conventional approach to strategic management; i.e. following a linear, step-by-step process. The latter is the antithesis of systems thinking which propagates a holistic approach. Strategy is more than a plan as it includes pattern, position, perspective and ploy.

The findings further highlighted a lackadaisical approach to performance management as pushing municipalities to the cliff of a distress mode. Lastly, the following emerging issues were discussed as possible solutions towards establishing a developmental local government: introduction of community social investment tax; continuity in terms of the long-term vision in every political term; reconsidering the dominance of the liberation movement in community development; and identification of the untapped grants and use them in building institutional capacity in local government.

Implications for local government

With the IDP as the current principal form of strategy, municipalities should be concerned about their effectiveness in bridging the gap between the means and the ends. The current state of distress in many of South African municipalities, may, to some extent, be embraced as the basis for the justification of the so-called 'impossibility' thesis which assumes that a developmental state is not possible in Africa due to capacity-related deficiencies. This study identifies strategy (or strategic management) as one critical thematic area that deserves the highest degree of primacy towards the improved institutional capacity of local government. If the practice of strategy could be mastered in local government as military strategists do, the political and administrative leadership could also manage to achieve policy ends with great ease.

Although the need for reconsideration of the current strategic management approach in local government emerges strongly in this study, municipalities should avoid the reductionist catching up game or flying geese paradigm, and should rather be open to the principles of a learning organisation. There are a few lessons that can be drawn from the successful developmental states of East Asia that should be incorporated into municipal strategies. To achieve this, municipalities will have to revise the current conventional approach (command-and-control) and perhaps modify it with some practices of the science of complexity.

The difference between the local authorities and the ostensible development states as examined in this study is centred on the ability to craft and implement the best developmental model that resembles the six components suggested by Leftwich. However, there is a common denominator between municipalities and upper spheres of government - that is, possession of legislative and executive authority. This authority plays a pivotal role in dictating the developmental path by means of decisive policy directives. In this regard, a sound policy foundation has already been laid as the constitution bestows developmental duties on local government. This foundation has been solidified through the White Paper on Local Government, although never developed beyond the White Paper status. This presupposes that in terms of explicit and possibly enforceable policy directives towards the establishment of a development local government, a legislative vacuum exists. This study highlights the implications of this vacuum as twofold; a White Paper is a mere discussion document that cannot be enforced, and if unenforceable, then any related oversight function, including monitoring and evaluation, becomes irrelevant.

The bulk of the issues causing the distress of local government revolve around poor the institutional capacity of municipalities; these include adverse audit reports, ineffective performance management systems, the debt crisis, corruption, appointment of incompetent staff, and understaffed critical units (IDP and LED). A strong municipal administration or bureaucracy is required in forging the developmental agenda. There are two main features of an effective bureaucracy for developmental local government; namely, autonomy and meritocracy.

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