



LEADERSHIP AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

By David Schmidt

Effective leadership is a critical ingredient in achieving organisational success. This is a common wisdom buttressed by strong research evidence.



Picture by: Brett Eloff

LEADERSHIP is also typically seen as different to management although they are related. Management relies more on planning, organisational and communication skills. Leadership relies on management skills too, but more so on qualities such as integrity, honesty, humility, courage, commitment, sincerity, passion, confidence, a positive attitude, wisdom, determination, compassion and sensitivity. Some people are born more naturally to leadership than others. But everyone can develop leadership ability. And everyone is called to take on leadership responsibilities of some sort. Leadership is about individual skills but it is also an institutional capacity

that goes beyond individuals.

The search for good leaders is a contemporary holy grail and a global industry around leadership development has been in vogue for some time. The big established names of this ever-proliferating industry like Covey and Maxwell compete with this year's fads and fashions and universities and consulting companies alike seek to position themselves as leaders in a field that is seen as the precondition for success. Nor is this just a private sector phenomenon. It is a major focus within the public sector internationally. How do we build the leadership required to address the major leadership challenges of the 21st century? A simple google-

search will turn up a plethora of public leadership academies and leadership development programmes.

There is also a vibrant South African leadership industry dedicated to unpacking and repackaging the leadership lessons of our history and context. Local concepts such as ubuntu leadership and the leadership lessons of King Shaka or our Nobel Laureates jostle with other leadership manuals in the executive training and airport bookshop markets.

Within the South African municipal context, it is thus unsurprising that leadership is identified as an important area requiring attention. “Leading and learning” is identified in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government as one of the four characteristics of “developmental local government”. Much of the pivotal Local Government: Municipal Structures Act focuses on clarifying and strengthening the role of political and administrative leadership. Leadership initiatives at provincial or organised local government level have been piecemeal and *ad hoc* in their focus.

At the same time, leadership or the lack thereof has not been a strong feature of the analysis of the problems of governance or service delivery for municipalities. The explanations of municipal weakness have typically tended to point to technical failings in the municipalities. This tends to lead to the predomination of technical-legal support interventions. So we have seen an emphasis since 2000 on intensive regulation of the core planning, management, budgeting and financial management processes of the municipality. We have seen a similar approach to the issues of inter-governmental relations where we have sought to resolve issues through legal means by refining roles and responsibilities (as in the various efforts to clarify the powers and functions) or through legally prescribing mechanisms for promoting inter-governmental relations rather than looking at the

“softer” relationships and interface management skills. This legal-regulatory approach has been complemented by an emphasis on hands-on technical support to address perceived technical capacity deficits. Project Consolidate is a typical example of this.

In the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) paper on citizen’s organisations that have emerged in response to service failure and poor local government, Paradza and Mokwena endorse the research findings of Idasa and Atkinson which suggest that local government’s woes in fact arise from a complex array of factors that include ‘weak management, hesitant or absent leadership, poor communication, political favouritism and ineptitude...’ – state led analysis of the same symptoms typically focuses on only one of these factors and avoids a direct criticism of leadership.

Beyond a focus on structures and the small leadership academy programme, very little attention from a policy, support or research perspective has been done on the theme of leadership. And yet, there would be strong grounds to suggest that many of the major governance and delivery challenges stem not so much from technical deficiencies but from failures in the softer “leadership” realm - where values, vision, commitment, motivation, energy, innovation, learning, relationships and trust - come into play.

During a work-session with a team of experienced local government practitioners, the participants were asked to evaluate the local governance environment of the province where they were working in terms of four categories - Passion (which encompassed issues such as motivation, morale, vision and commitment), Trust (which

encompassed the key relationship issues internal and external to the municipality), Capacity (which related largely to the technical skills available to the municipality) and Infrastructure (which encompassed the municipal facilities, systems and resources). Passion and trust, which are associated with the quality of leadership function, were rated as very poor. Capacity and Infrastructure which are associated with the management function, scored better. Capacity was rated as poor and Infrastructure scored best and was assessed as satisfactory.

And yet, despite the growing acknowledgement that “leadership” is a very important area of attention, national and provincial support for local government is almost exclusively focused on building municipal capacity and infrastructure – the managerial-technical dimension. “Leadership” is arguably only tackled when the level of dysfunctionality of the municipality requires some kind of dramatic intervention whether in terms of section 139 of the Constitution or where a mayor, speaker or municipal manager becomes so unacceptable that they are removed by the relevant political party. Nor is this gap limited to government policy-makers. It is equally present within the academic and research arena. There are very few research papers and journal articles addressing leadership and management issues in local government in South Africa.

Why the reluctance to engage robustly on the issue of leadership? One reason may relate to its politically sensitive nature. To point to failures of leadership at municipal level is to put a spotlight on political leadership and the functioning of political parties, particularly the national ruling party. It could be argued that the intense factionalism and partisanship within parties and between parties over the past years has resulted in a political climate that is not conducive to a frank and open discussion

about the quality of municipal leadership and how this can be improved and developed.

Through its exploration of corruption in local government, the Afesis-corplan paper begins to reflect on this crisis of local governance and asks the question, is the crisis not at least partly the making of the growing gap between high order policy for clean governance and accountability and citizens daily experience of local governance which creates the impression of wide-scale malfeasance and disregard for the public interest. The problems of corruption and unethical leadership appear to be worsening at the same time as politicians and officials make escalating claims of improvement in governance systems and the integrity of the public service. When major campaigns such as the National Anti-Corruption Strategy appear to exist primarily for symbolic reasons, these misgivings are reinforced and public opinion inevitably becomes more sceptical.

Another part of the reason is that “leadership” is a slippery concept. When we say that there is a problem of leadership within the municipal realm, what exactly do we mean? Is this a problem of political leadership? Is this a problem of administrative leadership? Or is it a problem of how the political-administrative interface works? Is it a problem of the people who occupy the top positions in the municipality or organisation? Or is it a problem of the culture and competency throughout the organisation? Is it a problem of people in positions of political or administrative authority lacking the managerial skills and competence to effectively undertake their responsibilities? Or is it more a problem of ethics and values? Is it a problem of a lack of vision and commitment? Or is it a lack of knowledge about how to get things done?

Even if we have defined what we mean by particular leadership challenges, there are no simple solutions to growing better leadership. It is a softer more elusive concept that cannot be addressed through a training programme, or a new regulation or the deployment of a skilled technical expert. It requires a more holistic, longer-term process of development rooted more in culture than a skills set.

This brief conceptual note seeks to explore the different ways in which leadership is an issue in the South African municipal context from a policy and research perspective and to identify some of the associated questions that would benefit from a process of deeper enquiry. Some of that enquiry and research takes place in the following papers, produced by members of the Good Governance Learning Network. However, many of them will have to be taken up subsequently by the public policy sector. The paper briefly explores leadership through six themes:

- Models and mindsets
- Roles and relationships
- Decision-making and democracy
- Affirmation, change and transformation
- Challenge and capacity
- Renewal and reform

This is not meant to be a definitive list, nor do the categories flow from any rigorous analytical scheme, but provide a framework to categorise some of the issues that are relevant when considering the theme of leadership in local governance and development. Nor are these sealed, stand-alone themes, but are inter-related and interdependent. The emphasis tends to be on leadership as a function or role within the municipal context rather than a more generic focus on leadership skills and how these can be advanced at all levels within the sector.

MODELS AND MINDSETS

A starting point for exploring the policy and research landscape in relation to leadership is with the underlying models or paradigms of leadership that apply in the local governance sector. For municipal practitioners different concepts of leadership compete with each other and this can require careful navigation. Are our dominant concepts of leadership about the idea of service to the people? Or is a model of leadership as status, power and patronage more prevalent? Do we put people into positions because of their capacity to innovate and to be bold or do we rather value compliance and toeing of the line in selecting leaders?

The academic literature points to three primary models of governance each with an associated leadership concept – more traditional **bureaucracy**, more market-focused **new public management** that became fashionable from the 1980s and the more recent focus on **network** governance where authority becomes less important and the ability to influence across organisational boundaries is the focus. The literature also notes that these different paradigms tend to build on each other rather than replacing each other. A good leader should be able to understand the different modes and shift mode depending on the circumstance. Thus some issues require a leader to use the bureaucratic authority that he or she has to drive change while another issue may require a more networked approach based on using his or her influence and so on.

Many people in leadership positions however are unable to access such multiple modes and are only able to respond to issues using a single mode. It could be argued that the predominant mode of leadership within the municipal sector has emphasised leadership as “authority” and is rooted in hierarchy.

Such mindsets are typically largely unconscious but inform leader's responses to a range of issues from how they view community participation to how they understand intergovernmental relationships to how they engage across the political-administrative divide. We might also expect major differences in leadership models between more rural municipalities (where understanding of the role and style of leadership might be more informed by traditional understandings rooted in chieftancy) and the larger more modern urban municipalities (where a modern democratic culture of leadership informed both by trade union traditions and urban middle class perspectives may be stronger).

There are many other areas related to the largely unconscious mindsets that inform leadership culture with municipalities that could be explored. For example, there could be important "cultural differences" between politicians and managers. John Nalbandian, who has been both politician and manager in United States city government points to four areas of cultural difference:

- **Differences of values and philosophy.** There can be considerable misjudgment of one another when political and professional values suggest different resolutions to a problem. Strongly-held views are questioned and the feeling is of frustration or being blocked. Political and administrative leadership needs to acknowledge these differences and respect them in negotiations over decisions.
- **Differences in conversation and language.** Politicians and managers can quite often describe a situation, problem or challenge in different ways. Oversimplified it may be, but politicians quite often prefer the power of the individual story drawn from real life. By contrast, managers often see the elaborateness of their data as the best way to describe the situation. Both can be partial.
- **Differences of authority and career.** Authority

arises at least partially from the way in which people are selected or elected to their post and these differ between politician and manager. This has practical implications for an individual's reporting lines, what agenda they work to and how much they are prepared to negotiate.

- **Different views of performance.** The pressure for performance can differ radically between politician and manager. Delivering to local communities within shorter timescales (often heightened by electoral cycles) can be markedly different from national or professional assessments of performance over longer timescales.

Do these factors apply in our South African context? Are there other factors in South Africa that make this relationship more difficult?

There has been very little if any research that explores these questions and which would enable a better understanding of some of the deeper less conscious mindsets that underpin many of the conflict and misunderstandings we find across some of the divides within the municipal system. Critical questions, in this regard, are:

- What is the predominant approach to leadership across the municipal sector? Are there major differences between urban and rural municipalities? Are there differences where one party is very dominant in a municipality or where political control is tightly contested? Are there different views from political and administrative leadership? Can we detect different cultures of leadership in different provinces given their different histories and context?
- Does the current regulatory regime - with its emphasis on compliance – not reinforce a culture of dependency and disempowerment at municipal level? If so, this should be addressed.

- Is government doing enough to equip municipal leadership to have a deeper grasp of the range of leadership modes and styles so that they have a wider range of responses available to the complex array of challenges that they face? What is civil society's role therein?

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

A key theme of policy activity since 2000 has been the roles and relationships within the municipal governance system, particularly those between politicians and administrators and between provincial and local governments. There has been a policy recognition that these are important issues although the emphasis has tended to focus on seeking to both further refine roles to reduce duplication and uncertainty and to regulate the interface rather than building the capacity to collaborate across boundaries emphasising shared responsibilities and pragmatic practical approaches to solving problems. Examples include efforts to refine the financial management responsibilities of executive mayors and municipal managers (especially through the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA)), to clarify the roles of executive mayors and speakers, to refine the allocation of powers and functions within local government and between provincial and local government and the establishment of inter-governmental coordination mechanisms through the intergovernmental relations framework legislation.

The contribution of the Community Law Centre (CLC), for example, argues that municipalities (and the sector that supports local government, including national and provincial governments) have done too little to make use of “softer” leadership-based initiatives to clarify roles and responsibilities. They point specifically to the

lack of appreciation for the adoption of clear Terms of Reference for office-bearers, structures and the administration and over-emphasis of the “harder” institutional and legal solutions.

One major area of enquiry and research has been the relationship between politicians and officials. This is often marked by major conflict, mistrust and an inability to find an effective way of working together even where the senior management has been appointed by the politicians. There will only be effective leadership when the two groups make sense of their different views and approaches and find common ground for leading the municipality. It poses questions about who is responsible for leadership and who for management. The answer may seem straightforward - politicians lead on policy and officials implement and manage its delivery. However, experience suggests that reality is more complicated and it is this complexity that contributes to the hard work of the relationship. Politicians are necessarily involved in management and managers necessarily involved in leadership. Politicians, as well as defining policy direction, are the primary means for conveying community concerns over service delivery – they bear electoral responsibility for it – and are the deciders of resource allocations. They have values about what and how things are managed. They have ideas. For all these reasons they must be part of managing the authority without attempting to do the managers' job.

The Community Law Centre's contribution examines the political-administrative interface. It locates the discussion within the context of the conflation of legislative and executive authority in the municipal council. The contribution argues

that the problems in this relationship must be addressed through appropriate leadership and the emphasis on common values. However, it also submits that there are some legal changes that may be suggested in order to clarify the delineation between the political and the administrative.

Managers are the primary conduits for government policy and directives and for some community pressures. They also have professional and local expertise about what is possible and appropriate. They hold values about what and how things should be changed. They also have ideas. For all these reasons, they must be part of leading the authority without doing the politicians' job.

But perhaps there are instances where managers or bureaucrats *have* to do the politicians job. In the Isandla Institute paper on local government and HIV and AIDS, case study material on health professionals like Von Mollendorf suggests that in some circumstances managers are required to defy their political bosses and even official government policy in order to assert their own brand of leadership based on professional ethics. Dr Von Mollendorf sanctioned the distribution of ARVs in contravention of health policy and was dismissed for his defiance. Government has subsequently done an about turn on ARVs and today might regard Von Mollendorf as having exercised the only moral option open to a caring health professional. Isandla goes on to show that defiance of morally abhorrent public policy such as the Mbeki government's stance on ARVs was not limited to individuals. Municipalities like Msunduzi, the City of Cape Town and even the Western Cape Provincial Government have found

it necessary to defy or re-interpret government policy around HIV and AIDS in order to fulfil their public duty.

Effective municipalities ensure that the key parts of the council's leadership and management are a shared responsibility between the politicians running the administration and senior managers running the organisation.

Similar levels of complexity can be observed in the challenges of clarifying local-district municipality roles and responsibilities and those of provincial government in relation to local government.

Some other questions that must still be explored include:

- What have been the benefits and costs of establishing the executive mayoral system across most of the country?
- How has the role of non-executive councillors been defined in practice and how can their oversight, representative and community leadership roles be enhanced?
- How effective are the various inter-governmental coordination mechanisms and are they helping to build shared leadership regarding key developmental challenges?
- Do we have good examples of collaborative cross-boundary working across government and between government and other stakeholders? What contributed to success and how can these lessons best be shared?

DECISION-MAKING AND DEMOCRACY

We elect or appoint people into positions of leadership in municipalities to represent us within the governance process and make decisions in line with our wishes that ensure better, affordable and

sustainable service delivery and development. But how much do we know about the challenges facing municipal leadership in making good democratic decisions about delivery and development?

Probably the biggest idea contained in the notion of “developmental local government” was that of public participation in the municipal decision-making process. Legislation flowing from the 1998 Local Government White Paper requires municipalities to ensure participation in a wide range of planning and decision-making processes, to publish information on their performance and financial management and created a number of participation mechanisms such as ward committees.

In the Afesis-corplan exploration of corruption in local government, it is suggested that the assessment of quality local leadership rests in part on the degree to which that leadership is prepared to submit to transparency and accountability in the course of governing. Thus not only is the quality of decision-making linked to democratic practice and the capacity of such decisions to stand up to public scrutiny, but the institutions of leadership develop a reputation or public profile that is either shaped by authoritarianism or transparency and accountability. Thus leadership behaviour shapes not just the current relations between civil society and state but how civil society perceives and is prepared to engage with the state over time.

But how well has the new system for participatory democracy performed? The focus of policy and research thus far has been on formal participation mechanisms particularly ward committees and on

community-based planning and has generally suggested that our municipalities are not yet becoming the models of democratic participation that was intended. The focus on a limited range of formal mechanisms represents a narrow perspective on how the processes of participation and decision-making actually work in local government. A more nuanced picture must be developed of the informal as well as the formal processes through which stakeholders are involved in decision-making. For example, the role of party regional structures and party caucuses in participatory decision-making is often under-appreciated. At the same time, the professional opinions of officials in the decision-making process are also critical in shaping the outcome of participatory processes. More broadly, an important question is to what extent private interests involve themselves in decision-making, how does this happen and what kinds of decisions do they focus on? Do communities have real influence on resource allocation and service delivery priorities? Have the Municipal Structures Act and MFMA requirements in relation to procurement and other financial decisions had a major impact on improving the transparency and effectiveness of decision-making?

The Centre for Policy Studies case studies on organisations such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, and the Soweto Concerned Residents (SCR) suggests that these organisations are so disillusioned with the manner in which elected leadership perform their duties that they reject the integrity of local decision-making and the right of councillors and officials to determine how settlements are managed. Abahlali baseMjondolo, for example, alleges that councillors demand bribes and other payment in kind from residents in exchange for

ensuring registration on the social housing waiting list or alternative housing. Independent research, cited by CPS, suggests that the concern of these resident bodies is well founded – the veracity of local government decision-making is undermined by strong indications of nepotism, corruption, and a lack of transparency. Whether local leadership would be able to make better decisions if they were entirely honest remains a moot point – the quality of judgment exercised and the ability to assess key options often requires more than honesty.

There has also been little if any research on the inevitable trade-offs and choices integral to decision-making. Public decision-making typically involves difficult ethical dilemmas. These tend to crop up on a daily basis. It is often not clear what is right or wrong, or what one ought to do, or which perspective is right in moral terms. In this sense, an *ethical dilemma* is generally not a choice between right and wrong, but a choice between two rights. For example, stealing government property for your own personal gain would be a “moral temptation” not an ethical dilemma. Deciding whether scarce resources should go to skills training for staff or to subsidising an early childhood development scheme and how you make that decision might constitute a dilemma.

Dilemmas arise when values or priorities conflict. This kind of conflict is heightened because councillors and officials have obligations to many people who often have competing values or interests. How have municipalities and their leaders managed the trade-offs between the interests of the poor and the middle class, between economic growth and social inclusion and between environmental considerations and growth needs? Again there does not seem to be much policy or research in regard to

these issues, the trade-offs and how leadership resolves them.

The contribution of BESG reflects on the difficult choices and dilemmas faced by municipalities. Public officials facing contentious decisions frequently choose the strategy that casts them as the mediators of difficult and sometimes irreconcilable interests. Many councils for example choose to attribute the decline of community services (often grass-cutting and general environmental cleansing and maintenance) in middle class areas to their decision to re-direct resources to poor communities, whereas the latter have invariably endured a similar decline in service and it is the municipal institution itself that has been the main beneficiary of shifting spending priorities.

The emergence of a range of “service delivery” protests raises many interesting questions about leadership and democracy. What new forms of community leadership do we see emerging? How do these structures relate to established government structures? Are the driving forces largely to do with poor service delivery or are they products of broader conflict and political in-fighting in a community? How have municipalities and other political structures responded to the challenges posed by protests?

In the CPS case studies of citizen’s action it is suggested that protest and engagement outside of the provided spaces (ward committees, imbizos, petitions etc) becomes inevitable once citizens realise that “playing by the rules” is ineffective in shaping state responses. All of the respective movements and especially the Phumelela

stakeholders, were able to show some attempt to have their demands addressed within the official governance framework. In Phumelela this involved a series of petitions, memoranda and meetings with the municipality. The lesson for civil society in all the case studies however was the same: that only action outside of the provided spaces was effective in getting a significant state response.

A further complexity relates to the role of regional structures of political parties in municipal decision-making. There is certainly evidence to suggest that some regional structures particularly of the African National Congress (ANC), are closely involved in some of the decision-making of municipalities. How does this work? What drives it? What are the implications for good governance and the quality of decision-making?

The Community Law Centre’s examination of decision-making power within political parties and the centralisation of such power is instructive. The CLC looks at instances of regional party interference in the decision-making of its representatives on the district municipality. This arose when the ANC district caucus was instructed by regional leadership to make a decision on the most senior appointment within the Amathole District Municipality. In this instance the ANC leadership on the municipality bowed to the influence of their regional executive although they knew that their decision on the candidate selection would be antithetical to the public interest. In a subsequent ruling by Justice Pickering, the Court clearly reinforced the principle that the public interest may not be conflated with or subsumed by party interests and thus underlined the importance of maintaining the separation of party from state.

A critical issue is the need to improve the

accountability of political and administrative leadership to communities and individual service recipients. The development of formal and informal mechanisms to achieve better accountability is fundamental. In this regard, the role of opposition parties within the process of governance is important.

The extent and nature of patronage and corruption within the municipal system is an area of great concern and the question is whether enough is being done to address this.

One of the underlying themes in the Afesis-corplan paper concerns the signals sent out by the state, to both civil society and its own employees, through its response to irregularity and corruption. In policy terms government has accepted that it is a poor governance principle that senior officials are allowed to use their influence within government to rapidly move into related private sector work (the precedent set by certain cabinet ministers in this regard is lamentable). In the case of the contract granted to a former Department of Agriculture official by the Msunduzi Municipality, this appears to have been exacerbated by that fact that the official had not been cleared of serious allegations of financial mismanagement – under these circumstances it is not unreasonable to infer that the municipal appointment was at best “poorly advised” even though it may not have been demonstrably corrupt. But municipal leaders frequently argue that the quality of decision-making is a subjective assessment and that civil society has little legitimate input into such an assessment. According to this principle, citizen feedback has little place in local governance unless they are able to reveal blatant instances of wrongdoing.

AFFIRMATION, CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

A critical task of local leadership is to drive the transformation of our municipalities to ensure that they are representative of the population, committed to the ideals of the constitution and the vision of developmental local governance, capacitated to drive delivery and responsive to the needs of the people, particularly the poorest.

A wide range of processes to effect the implied institutional change has been undertaken since 1994 at both national and local levels. The scale of this change effort has not been matched by academic and policy research and there is no obvious long-term research programme focused on institutional transformation and capacity-building. There is consequently not a strong base of knowledge about the impact of such efforts and the role of leadership in them.

This is a theme that throws up a range of knotty leadership challenges including issues of race and gender equity, creating the required skills and talent base amongst councillors and staff, leading change management and restructuring and finding productive ways through the contested interpretations of transformation. The question is whether these profound processes of change have been led effectively by municipalities. In addition, where they indeed have been more successful, how important has municipal leadership been? The impact of municipal policies and practices on the race and gender dynamics of municipalities is underexplored. What, for example, has the impact of gender quotas on leadership representivity and accountability been?

The White Paper on Local Government makes it clear that municipal leadership has a responsibility to create a new common set of values and commitments, not only within the administration but

also more broadly within the community. How well have municipalities discharged this responsibility?

CHALLENGE AND CAPABILITY

A further theme has to do with how we ensure that leadership has a capability that matches the nature of the challenges experienced at different levels of authority. Njabulo Ndebele suggests that part of former president Nelson Mandela's legacy is what he calls counter-intuitive leadership, and the immense possibilities it offers for re-imagining whole societies. He says that the characteristic feature of this type of leadership 'is the ability of leaders to read a situation whose most observable logic points to a most likely (and expected) outcome, but then to detect in that very likely outcome not a solution but a compounding of the problem. This assessment then calls for the prescription of an unexpected outcome, which initially may look strikingly improbable. Somehow, it is in the apparent improbability of the unlikely outcome that its power lies. The improbable scenario is soon found to evolve its own complex solutions. A leader then has to sell the unexpected outcome because he has to overcome intuitive (and understandable) doubts and suspicions that will have been expected. In this act of salesmanship truth and the absolute integrity of the leader are decisive attributes.'

In a similar vein, Ronald Heifetz distinguishes between "technical" and "adaptive" problems. Leadership for him is primarily about addressing "adaptive" problems - problems or challenges for which there is no technical remedy, a problem for which it won't help to look to an authority for answers because the answers are not there. The task of the leader in such situations is not to provide the answer but rather to create a safe social context where people have to face the tough questions,

discuss them frankly and openly and in the process adjust their views and attitudes. The South African municipal context presents challenges that are “adaptive” in character and require collective change in attitudes and practice.

For example, in its consideration of the manner in which the Equitable Share transfers have been applied towards the national objective of free basic service (FBS) provision for poor households, the BESG finds that that a policy that, despite its flaws, has much potential to transform the realisation of socio-economic rights, has created a set of complex challenges for municipal leadership. At one level the policy has removed the discretion of council to stamp its service and development outputs with a particular political direction. All municipalities are obliged to deliver FBS to the poor as best they can – the credit that accrues to local leadership therefore lies not in the adoption of the policy per se but the effectiveness in which it is implemented. The rural municipalities of KwaZulu-Natal examined by BESG leadership were failing in terms of using the FBS policy for optimum transformation. One of the most startling revelations is that municipalities are receiving equitable share earmarked for service functions that they do not undertake. The BESG found that the equitable share income had been used for means to which is it not intended.

This dilemma arose partly from the policy itself which states that the equitable share transfer is non-discretionary and is therefore subject to little transparency or accountability through reporting to the National Treasury. Salaries and operational costs of municipalities, particularly resource poor rural municipalities, have accounted for a significant part

of the equitable share allocations meant for service delivery. While it is often argued that such operating costs are inevitable, and are not affordable based solely on local revenue sources and the institutional component of the transfer, what is not clearly demonstrated is that these high institutional costs are necessary for the current level of service provision or indeed even a significantly improved output of services.

At the same time, there are there good examples of “adaptive” or counter-intuitive leadership in the South African municipal context. A lot can be learned from such examples.

For example, the contribution by Isandla Institute examines the extraordinary leadership efforts of Ben Mokoena as mayor of Middleburg in Mpumalanga in the period 1995-1999. Mokoena managed to achieve major improvements in service delivery, payment rates and widespread community support for his initiatives. This case study is now a prescribed public leadership case at some of the major international public management schools. The tragedy of Ben Mokoena is that after the elections of 2000, the provincial structures of the ANC decided that he clearly did not have the right level of deference and compliance to party structures and he was not put forward as executive mayor for the new municipality.

A particular problem is the fact that, too often, people in positions of leadership in municipalities lack the maturity and insight to function as leaders of adaptive change. This requires improvement.

An interesting but largely unexplored aspect of the above is whether the structuring and enforcement of political discipline within council presents any opportunity for creative and counter-intuitive leadership to flourish in local government. The CLC paper notes that the office of the speaker and its relationship with executive authority, as wielded by the mayor, presents complex issues in this regard. The implied checks and balances that exist between the authority of the speaker and the exercise of executive authority are rarely used to promote a more creative political discourse in council. Instead the pattern is often one of descent into inner-party conflict and factionalism or the alleged abuse of the Speaker's investigative authority for political ends. Plurality in council debate or consideration of more creative solutions to development and governance problems is frequently constrained by the imperative to consolidate coalitions across different parties or to reconcile political factions within the ruling party.

RENEWAL AND REVITALISATION

The last theme has to do with how leadership can be developed within a local governance context. It is commonly recognised that leadership development is a key strategic issue for the public sector. At the same time, there are no easy solutions to either developing the leadership capacity of the existing pool of politicians and officials or to recruiting new political and administrative talent. It is increasingly acknowledged globally that the public sector experiences a challenge to attracting talent into the sector as the opportunities to make a contribution often seem more pronounced outside of government

within the non-profit and private sectors. Ours is the era of the social entrepreneur where public service innovation seems to have shifted outside government.

There are currently some interesting initiatives to improve managerial and leadership capacities. National Treasury's competency regulations and associated graduate internship scheme to improve financial management is one example. The implications and nature of the still current idea of a "single public service" and the future possible role of the public service development agency (PALAMA) will be important in this.

Coupled to this must be an effort to evaluate leadership capacity in local government. Criteria must be developed to evaluate leadership capacity and the consequences (intended and unintended) of the new frameworks on leadership capacity must be evaluated. For example what has been the effect of the introduction of fixed term contracts for senior management? Some argue that fixed term contracts have unduly politicised local government administration. Others argue that fixed term contracts have resulted in impunity as the lapse of the contract becomes the focal point of accountability, rather than the performance appraisal.

The current processes and programmes for developing the capabilities of political and administrative leadership need to be rated for their effectiveness and improved where necessary. A critical question is whether enough is being done to develop the ethics and value base of political and administrative leadership. It is incumbent on political parties, professional associations in local government and educational institutions and programmes to include this in their activities.

MOVING FORWARD

Leadership clearly is a key ingredient for effective local governance and development but has been neglected as an area for focused and systematic policy and support intervention. There are many dimensions to an exploration of leadership for local democracy and development as outlined above. It is a broad field with many and diverse areas of potential relevant enquiry. There has however been

very little sustained programmatic research in South Africa over the past decade on this theme. The contributions that follow make a modest start in rectifying this knowledge gap. However, a much more sustained effort to record, examine and analyse leadership issues in local government is necessary to achieve a much needed improvement in local governance leadership and the performance of the municipal system.