

AN EXPLORATORY BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH TO RADICAL TRANSFORMATIVE GOVERNANCE

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Introduction

Competency based management improves public performance. In a city like eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, competency based management improves service delivery that is to say that it is a strategic paradigm that promotes effective local governance. It does this by bundling human resource management practices together and configuring them. This recalibrates the operation, realigns it in a language that everyone understands, that is to say the language of competency.

Background

Since the dawn of South Africa's democracy in 1994, competency based management has been a policy directive for the public service. The Human Sciences Research Council (2008:324) confirmed that since 1994 increased emphasis has been placed on transforming and improving public service delivery. A dire need to develop competence in the South African public service resulted in the The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service. The Ministry for Public Service and Administration (South Africa 1995:6) identified as its primary goal the creation of a genuinely representative public service reflecting the major characteristics of South African demography, without eroding efficiency and competence. The Constitution (South Africa 1996:1243) shortly followed and confirmed that for the New South Africa to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person by developing their knowledge, skills and abilities (threshold competencies). The Skills Development Act (South Africa 1998) mandated all employers, public and private, with the task of developing a competent employ.

Problem Statement

Today in South Africa, we see that weak leadership, incompetent governance and an inactive citizenry are imperative drivers of an ever increasing cycle of societal decline that is resulting in social fragmentation. Societal decay is evidenced in declining living standards, poverty increase, economic contraction, increasing unemployment and incapability.

Internationally skills scarcity has become a dire problem for governments seeking to become effective agents of service delivery. The war for global talent (Chambers et al. 1998) grew out of this challenge and many developed countries like Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom (Brown et al. 2005) have instituted complex skills formation policies to develop talented citizens who in theory will stimulate their economies. Furthermore, little is understood about the nature of training and its mechanisms in local government (Jacobson, W., Rubin, E., and Selden, S. 2002:486) which complicates efficient policy formulation and

implementation. Maor (2010:380) emphasises this further adding that the challenges faced by local governments worldwide are profound which makes an analysis of local government human resource development timely at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Currently eThekweni Municipality (South Africa. 2015:42), has reported that inadequate skill levels are hampering human capital development and talent recruitment, retention and development which are necessary for effective service delivery, and enhanced productivity. Talented individuals with scarce and critical skill-sets are leaving for better jobs, are in short supply (ibid) and competition and turbulence are making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain talented employees and scarce skills positions (ibid. 2010: 4). The municipality in its Education Training and Development Policy (South Africa. 2010:6) identified as a core problem the lack of a strategic, competency-based approach to learning and development as it directly related to the developmental needs of Municipal employees.

The Competency Theory

Competency is a reliable predictor of public managerial performance. In 1973 David McClelland, an illustrious Harvard Professor of Psychology, postulated the competency theory in his paper titled: *Testing for Competence Rather Than for Intelligence*. Naqvi (2009:1) asserts that the history of competency can be traced to the early 1970s when industrial psychologists and human resource managers were seeking ways to predict job performance. Emmerling and Boyatzis (2012:7) claim that the desire to find a flexible framework which could account for additional variance in work performance can be seen as the driving force in the modern competency movement. McClelland was critical of the education system and believed that intelligence was not a predictor of career success and that the education system should realign its strategy by becoming competency-based rather than intelligence-based. Boyatzis & Ratti (2009: 821) affirm McClelland proposed that competency is a critical differentiator of performance and Jamil (2015:44) asserts that individuals are successful because of their competencies that explain their superior performance. The Competency Theory has since been expanded by prominent researchers from many disciplines especially in human resource management where it is used as a strategic management paradigm. Hence this study claims that competency provides a reliable answer to the problem of predicting and promoting effective and talented managerial performance.

Competency Frameworks

Competency frameworks improve public managerial performance. Competency frameworks strategically align human resource practices with a common language. Internationally, over the past 6 years, there has been an increase in the use of competency frameworks by the private and public sector. Furthermore, there is a clear distinction between frameworks for effective and superior performance, between frameworks for the employees who get the job done, and the high-flying talented few who give organizations the competitive advantage. Competency frameworks have an average of twelve to fifteen competencies and are used for job designations like middle managers, sales people, administrators etc. Thus, competency frameworks are being used to improve managerial performance.