

## Capacity building in local government: an analysis for application of competency-based training in South Africa

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### Keywords

Competency-  
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*The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual account on the applicability of Competency-Based Training as a model for capacity building in the South African local government. The South African Local government has since the transition into democracy in 1994, invested on workforce development, aimed at improving municipalities' capacity to deliver their mandates as described by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. These efforts are shadowed by the ever increasing levels of service delivery protests, supplemented by unpleasing audit outcomes over the past two decades of democracy. The paper argues therefore that among other challenges of local government in South Africa, is the lack of conceptuality of capacity building as critical aspect of local government strategy. This challenge of the context of local government capacity therefore result in local government being unable to measure the account of capacity interventions in the municipalities. The paper in its purpose will use literature to back-up a hypotheses that using Competency-Based Training as a model in capacity building can be fruitful in the South African local government. On the basis of such a conceptual account the paper concludes that Competency-Based Training can be a driving force behind a professional, competent and self-driven local government workforce, where capacity intervention can be clearly measured.*

### 1. Introduction

At the turn of democracy in 1994, the South African government was tasked with transformation of the government system, to rewrite the apartheid system with a democratic, inclusive and non-racial governing system. The government was thus envisaged to deliver services to all citizens equitably and proactively. This was to be done simultaneously with dealing effectively with the imbalances of the apartheid system (Abedian & Biggs, 1998 in Pycroft, 2000; Nyalunga, 2006). This transformation has found expression in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter to be referred to as the Constitution of 1996). The Constitution of 1996 paradoxically mandates the local government to provide the most comprehensive response to the complex developmental challenges of the local communities covering the whole territory of the Republic. This was to be done with the clear consideration of the past imbalances, where municipalities are expected to cater for a black society which was previously deprived of local government services (Zegeye & Maxted, 2002; Makobe, 2002). This history marks therefore a complex footing of the concept of a democratic and developmental

local government, where the municipalities have to champion clearly the democratisation and development of a historically fragmented society.

In South Africa, while institutional arrangements are often deeply flawed, local government has to be transformed from passive service providers to proactive facilitator's of democratic and developmental local government as purported by its founding mandates in the Constitution of South Africa (1996). Local government in South Africa, however has proved to be lacking the strength to live up to such prescripts by the Constitution of 1996. This has manifested in the continuing service delivery protests that swept across the country, and the unpleasing audit opinions by auditor general indicating unhealthy financial immune in the municipalities (Ndletyana, 2007; South African Auditor General Reports, 2013/14). A vital component of strengthening local government is through development of a capable workforce that imparts authority, responsibility and competency over the demanding local government practices. A concept of capacity building contextualises the context in which government in South Africa, design interventions to support and improve their organ's ability to perform a strategic aspect of governance.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual account of the capacity building in the South African local government, providing analysis for application of Competency-Based Training (CBT, hereafter) as a model for workforce skills development (capacity building). The paper argues that among other challenges of local government in South Africa, is the nature of capacity building offering by skills service provides, lack of conceptuality (conceptual tools) of capacity building as an aspect critical to local government strategy and management. The paper begins by providing the context of local government in South African, local government capacity building, and CBT as a model for capacity building in local government.

## **2. Local Government in South Africa**

The basis for local government and its role is backed by its crucial aspect of democratisation that manifests in the mass participation of communities on the decision making process about their local affairs. Local government is thus a localised political system that offers services and governing decisions for local people (Faguet, 2005; Watt, 2008; Benhabid, 2006). This means that local government embraces a character of policy priorities that are derived from direct participation by local people. As a political system local government is a product of decentralisation which intends to devolve public responsibilities from centralised government systems to a localised governing body or institutions, giving local people direct influence on the functions and control of such a delivery body or institution (Pauw, 2012; Peters & van Nieuwehuyzen, 2013). Therefore in essence local government is constituted of people, institutions, markets, social groups, and legislatures within a locally defined boundary. These bodies are jointly engaged in the establishment of a local democracy that is beneficial to all members of a given locality.

This system of government is normally referred to as municipalities which collectively forms a single local government sphere covering a given nation (Constitutions of 1996, section 151 (1)). Despite being independent statutory bodies, local government are normally accountable and interdependent to provincial and national governments. Furthermore the extent to which a

local government is local, depends on the context of decentralisation in a given territory, for instance in South Africa, the national and provincial government are charged with supervisory roles on local government with limitation for intrusion on their functioning and exercise of power ( Adami, 2002; Holland, 2006; Pretula, 2011). Local government is also required to align its strategies with nationally prescribed policy directions, therefore the policy prioritisation does not depend on local people but to national objectives (Gomme, 1987:1-2; as sighted in ul Haque, 2012). The unavoidable financial dependence of municipalities on national and provincial government limits further the policy preferences and autonomy of local government.

The composition of local government in South Africa, has a long history marked by discrepancies of the apartheid system from which local government is recovering today. Hence recognising the unpleasing past of government in South Africa, the focus of this paper is on the composition of local government in the post 1994 (democratic) period. This is done in order to establish the functions and powers of local government so as to analyse the applicability of CBT in training for competency on current local government trends in South Africa. The Constitution of 1996, creates a multi-sphere system of government, described as a national, provincial and local spheres of government. Each sphere is allocated a status of being distinct, with legislative and executive autonomy. However based on the formation of a unitary government, the spheres are despite being distinct, interdependent and interrelated with each other (Pratchett, 2004; Ledwith, 2005). They thus do not exist in isolation but coevolve with each other as sub-systems of a large government system covering the whole of the Republic. These interdependencies and interrelations manifest in the supervisory and supportiveness of the national and provincial government to the local sphere (Shuman, 2000; Boone, 2003; Craig, 2007). The local government sphere in South Africa serves as a policy implementation platform for a wider framework of the government, where the national and provincial government are for a strong support and supervisory service.

The local government in South Africa is practiced through an array of legislation that structures the operations, functions and powers, taking from the Constitution of 1996. Local government as stated by its objects in the Constitution of 1996, should provide sound local service that promotes economic and social welfare of the local communities. This objects are supplemented by the mandate that local government should be developmental in the administration of its fiscal resources. A developmental local government, can manifest where communities are able to strive economically and socially with minor state intervention (Wibbels, 2003; Watt, 2008). The role played by local government in this developmental capacity of local areas is the establishment of an enabling environment where society learn developmental appetite and explore their potential to develop with minor state intervention.

There are two positions in which the functions of local government can be based in South Africa. Firstly, the scope of local government, is for municipalities and local sphere organs to strive to deliver competently the objects described by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Section 151 (1) a-e). This first position of local government can be described by the following as per the objects:

- Local government should provide a democratic and accountable government for local communities. This object indicates constitutional strength of democracy by promoting

that municipalities should be democratic and accountable to the society they serve. It promotes that local government as a political institution should follow the democratic principle as provided for in section 195 (1) of the Constitution of 1996.

- The local government should ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner. This provision imply that local government should strive to provide services sustainably to the communities, this should be done within the limitations of resources and every increasing challenges communities are faced with.
- Local Government should to promote social and economic development. This is found in the reason that people's quality of life can be enhanced when their economic can social state is improved. Local government is thus charged with the development of economic and social prosperity of its localities, this includes institutionalisation and planning for this development.
- Local government should is to promote a safe and healthy environment for their localities. Local government is therefore increasingly required to deal directly with management of health and environmental related hazards to in the respective communities.
- Local government in South Africa is required to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisation in matters of local government. Thus local government should promote public participation in the matters of the development and services to the community. This practically manifest in the processes of public consultation during IDPs, budgeting and elections.

The constitution clearly stipulates that municipalities must strive, within their financial and administrative capacity, to achieve the objects as set out by the section. The second position in which local government can be grounded in South Africa is that which is provided in the developmental role of local government as purported in the section 153 of the Constitution of 1996. Section 153(a) stipulates that municipalities must structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community. Paragraph (b) of the same section, requires municipalities to participate in national and provincial development programmes. These development related provision are continued in Schedule 4B and 5B of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996.

### **3. Capacity Building in the South African Local Government**

Capacity building are frameworks adopted by government as organisational development and human resource tools for responding to the dynamic changes in the emerging trends of service delivery and governance. The delivery of services in the South African local government has shifted from a racially based to a more complex and demanding inclusive democratic dispensation since the 1994 transition. Local government therefore in the democratic dispensation exist in a political sphere, where it has to deliver a constitutional mandate, under guidelines of policy frameworks and direct demands or influence by society (Abedian & Biggs, 1998 in Pycroft, 2000; Nyalunga, 2006). The varieties of competencies require municipal practitioners to deliver services under such complex environment, which ranges from industry

knowledge to catch-ups with new technology and need for innovative, and reflexive thinking. This practitioners are required to integrate politics and administration practices under a complex web of legislation, intergovernmental relations and international standards and competitiveness. In this light challenges of capacity in the South African local government are highlighted by the spring of public service protests, demonstrating the inability of municipalities to meet the emerging trends of society and their needs (Sebola, 2014; Bowman & Kearney, 2011). Lack of specific industry expertise is confirmed by the bad audit results and a high pool of service outsourcing. Noting that financial management skills in the South African municipalities are highly required to rescue local government from such financial dismay, there is a need for professionalization of local government services in the whole of the territory to ensure sustainability of municipalities for service delivery and development.

#### **a. Defining Capacity**

The term capacity in Morgan (2006) is viewed as part of development in an institutional practice, owing its existence from individual, organisational, and environmental development. The use of the term capacity in local government is to describe initiatives to improve efficiency arising from institutional economics. Capacity building therefore describes the practice, rules and inputs that shapes effectiveness of any development intervention (Peters, & van Nieuwenhuyzen, 2013). This description is however wide to could possibly cause confusion or misconception, because local government capacity is a multi-dimensional subject consisting of human capacity (individual), institutional capacity, and environmental capacity which can be integrated to produce optimal local government capacity to deliver its purposes and mandates. Such dimensions are comprehensively described as follows;

##### *Individual Capacity*

It refers to the potential and competency or lack thereof of a member of an institutions reflected through specific technical and generic skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, acquired through forms of education, training, experience, network and values. In confusion with this Peters and van Nieuwenhuyzen (2013), argues that in the context of local government in South Africa capacity means the appointment of an individual to the post in which their specific capacity can be used to the maximum benefit of the community served. Though this may be another definition of capacity, in the paper the focus is on the former, as the latter is more of gab or post filling than improving the ability to do required work in municipal organisations (see also, CoGTA, 2009). Capacity therefore in this instance refers to the extent to which an individual is able to use skills to produce required work where intervention needs emanates from individuals skills gaps to maximise delivery of their specific performance area.

##### *Institutional Capacity*

It refers to potential competency or lack of capacity found within an institution. This include human resource, leadership, partnership, institutional orientation, institutional memory, internal confidence, intergovernmental relations, powers and functions, resources and support system. This refers to the ability of an organisation to apply its existing assets (or acquire new), powers and functions to deliver valued service to the public. This means that municipalities as institutions are able to provide effectively and sustainably services and challenges of the communities they serve.

### *Environmental Capacity*

Environmental capacity is found outside an organisation and as such it is beyond the control of such an organisation. This includes socio-economic and demographic composition, politics, legislation and social capital within communities. Challenges of environmental capacity in local government are mostly found in rural municipalities where municipalities are unable to exercise their duties due to uncollectable revenues. Such Challenges emanated from poverty and unemployment of communities in municipal areas. In this instance the municipality depends greatly on national and provincial government grants which are mainly for capital projects than operational. These environmental challenges are a detriment to developmental local government. Hence self-organisation of municipalities, to find opportunity in this challenges may be a turn to prosperity.

Capacity therefore refers to a performance based concept that inquires and act on the basis of organisations ability to use its resources to deliver its objectives. In the context of local government capacity building is an action based concept that encompasses the interventions by internal and invitation of external factors aimed at improving the abilities of a municipality to deliver its expected mandate (Voorhees, 2001). In essence capacity building is an applied concept in that changes in the effectiveness and efficiency of a municipality should be experienced where capacity is applied effectively (see also: UNDP, 1998: X; CAFRAD, 2004; Sebola, 2014: 636). Capacity building however remain to be defined, in the context of its application by individual organisations in local government to suit their productivity deficiencies and possible improvements.

#### **b. Capacity Building**

In the context of the UNDP (1998: X) the concept of capacity building is broader than organisational development, given the three dimensions of understanding capacity. Conceptualisation of capacity building should thus inform a holistic approach. This should be where capacity building is viewed as the intervention structured to facilitate a production of particular outcomes or outputs and where capacity of each dimension supports the ability of local government to be productive. This in essence is an emphasises on the use of complexity theory made. This is to advocate a local government system's ability to coevolve with its environment and constantly change. Therefore interaction and interdependences are critical for such changes (Kuyeza, nd: 5; South Africa, 2012; South Africa, 2008). This underpinning theory argues that capacity building should not only happen in local government, but should include other stakeholders such as provincial and national government in which capacity building may also mean the improving national and provincial governments to constantly improve local government (UN, 2014). In South Africa the national and provincial governments are mandated by an array of legislative frameworks including the Constitution of 1996 that they should ensure capacity building in local government where needed. Thus far local government is facing greater challenges which requires capacity building to be a holistic intervention. National and provincial governments therefore should be capacitated to be able to constantly fit in the capacity needs of local government as the most sensitive sector to change and thus spontaneous.

#### **4. Policy Framework for Capacity Building in the South African Local Government**

The transition of South Africa into democratic state came with many challenges to be addressed accounting for the apartheid government. Developing a defined South African workforce required legislation to be put in place to guide both public and private sector (Pycroft, 2000). Capacity building in South Africa is developed taking guided by an array of legislation promoting the values prescribed by the Constitution of 1996. Capacity building in the South African local government is intended to develop the abilities of local government to deliver expectations of the public guided by nationwide policy and legislation. Section 195 (1)(a) of the Constitution of 1996, states that a high standard of professional ethics should be maintained throughout the government's system. Professionalisation of local government requires formulation of a combination of training methods that would equip local government skills market, capable and competitive personal pool (Lewis, 1994; Klijin, 2008). This professionalisation should develop local government to be an employer of choice, to graduates and experienced professionals. In this principle the Constitution is promoting that local government should be capable of providing effective and efficient government to its local communities.

The Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (32 of 2000) requires that the employment of municipal managers as administrative heads or accounting officers, or managers reporting directly to the municipal manager must have the skills, expertise, competencies and qualifications as prescribed by the job description. In many cases local government skills demand change due to the emergent nature of trends in the sector, therefore local government skills market will change as influenced by the trends of the sector. In 1999 the Skills Development Act, 1998 (97 of 1998) was introduced to provide and instituted a framework to advice and implement a national sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve skills in the South African workforce. This act was established to operate within the provisions of the South African Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995. Such national frameworks are supplemented by the Skills Development Levies Act, 1999 (9 of 1999), which prescribes a framework for contribution of employers to the skills development of their workforce as well as how the proceeds from the levies would be distributed to the organs of its purpose. Further affirmative action also promotes training of designated groups in order to eliminate unfair discrimination and promote inclusion. The notion of capacity building in local government was introduced by the Green Paper on Local Government (1997:20), following government's interest on municipal employees' performance. This groundings of capacity building in the green paper outline the contexts in which other spheres of government should intervene in local government capacity matters.

#### **5. Competency-Based Training**

Human resource development for every organisation is critical. Conducting workplace education introduces workforce to various level changes in the industry they serve. Local government has over the past twenty years in South Africa become complex, emergent and situational in such that administering local government now needs a equipped professional body of workers (Naidoo, 2003; Sebola; 2013). Though local government employees may possess

prior-learning in the respective sector qualifications (Finance, Human Resource, Business, Accounting. just to mention a few), the ever changing needs of communities invite a requirement for continuous improvement of local government systems and learning is ultimately a requirement not to be avoided.

Understanding that problem solving in local government is emergent and situational there is a need for workplace training to focus on individuals and organisational competencies that could allow reflexive practices in the emergent trends of local government. Initiating capacity building programmes in this case can be credited, however, there is a need for modelling such programmes to ensure probability and effectiveness (Lankard, 1996; Morgan, 2014). The focus of this paper is to defend a proposition that Competency-Based Training (CBT) can serve as an effective tool for capacity building in the South African local government. Local government workplace education can benefit from CBT as it allows employees to move with training efficiently while maintaining an emphasis of the quality of the work in which trainees are charged with. Therefore progress occurs as the worker-trainees attain competence rather than by serving time on theory that can't be tested on their inherent performance requirements.

In order to understand the concept of Competency-Based Training there is a need to provide a definitional analysis for a South African perspective. CBT has come to dominate industry training and performance practices (Sueivises, 2009). A trend of employing Competency-based approaches in education and training, assessment and development of workforce and retirement have been seen as unavoidable. CBT has been used for succession planning, in which most of South African municipalities remain without quality personnel to replace people who leave the sector, and therefore their organograms remain with some major positions being vacant (Bergin, 2013). Employers and training administrators have turned to competency models for determining the need for business and employers as well as required skilled workers (Bengcheng, 2009; Quick & Nelson, 2009). This models, however, fall within the private sector borrowed models to inform transformation in the public sector. Private sector models are employed for improving efficiency in the public sector. Therefore application of CBT in local government capacity building would assist evaluation and conceptualising the purpose, functions and powers of local government and thereby effectively develop training needs based on the required productivity of local government in the Republic.

CBT finds its expression in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) literature, known as the "Competency Movement", whereby learning is driven by development of a specific competencies for dealing with needs and challenges for a specific industry (Recciardi, 2005; Chang, Wang, Yang, Kinshuk & Peng, 2011). CBT is widely used by organisations to drive workplace learning activities which enable employees to respond urgently and adaptively to work needs. CBT focuses then on enhancing what is expected of an employee in the workplace and embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations (Brownie, Thomas & Bahnisch, 2011). This element of application of knowledge on new situations is critical for local government as an emergent setting by society. The concept of CBT depends on a fundamental principle of demonstrating capacity to perform specified tasks in a given career. It usually requires employees to demonstrate production of a particular task in line with their jobs and therefore identifying gaps to be developed (Naquin & Holton, 2003; Le Deist &



Winterton, 2005; Holton, Coco, Lowe & Dutsch, 2006). CBT can thus be defined as a system for organising, evaluating and instructing aimed at improving knowledge, skills and behaviours for an individual to compete in completion of a specified task. CBT is thus an educative system that emphasises on specification, learning and demonstration of competences that are central for production of a task in a given environment. This concept can be broadly applied in organisation as the exercise that focus on an organisations ability to produce a given objective, and therefore where there are capacity deficiencies, these must be interventions to improve competency for competitiveness and productivity.

**a. CBT Practice in Local Government: Lessons from other Countries**

CBT has been practiced in local government, mainly in the developed countries. Though there is no evidence that suggest CBT as the only or most effective model to deal with skills development in both public and private sector, it parades a convincing system of training that can be used to improve various levels of technical knowledge required in the local government sphere. For instance in a strategy that is based on emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, CBT may not be sustainably effective when used for training. However it may remain employable for measuring the effects of other method used in the skillsdevelopment of such emotional and transformational leadership skills (Billet, 2001; Blanchard, 2014:1). In the progressive local government of the world, CBTbased framework for professional development is a preferred method for development and assessment. This is due to the complexity of social drivers impacting on local government trends, which requires continual fluctuation of improvement on local government leadership, management and delivery.

While the core of local government practitioner's competencies are managing the job, interpersonal relations, developing people, self-management in the United Kingdom (UK), a national management competence tool is implemented with emphasis on specific industry and sector competencies (UK Employee Organisation for Local Government, 2003). This approach could not really vary from what is branded Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) in South Africa, and Local Government Sector Education and Training for the municipalities and local government related workforce. However in the UK, the UK Employees Organisation for Local Government (2003) introduced a concept of "meta-competencies" such as decision-making, communication, impact and influence, personal management, drive and strategic focus. Local government practitioners are tested under a specific template that indicate competencies required for a specific career in the local government system which enables practitioners to take self-assessment boosted by peer reviews to identity professional development need and use CBT for development of such needs.

The New Zealand (NZ) government introduced a public services leadership profile system, following the increase in demand for skilled leaders and senior managers in their public sector including their local government. The profile focused on building a pool of talented managers of the required quality, quantity and diversity to meet the future needs of their dynamic public service (NZ State Services Commission, 2003). A central element of this strategy was making clearly the qualities expected of future leaders of their public sector based on competence assessment, and therefore introduced a CBT approach to develop their skills. A

decade ago Canada was faced with seventy percent (70%) of its public sector workforce exiting after a decade. CBT was thus introduced to recruit and develop a new generation of public service workforce including local government practitioners. In their view CBT and Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) was important to develop a workplace of choice that nurture strong managerial and professional rigor, values all individuals, diversity of ideas and styles, supports risk and foster open communication. CBT was then basically viewed as an instrument that promoted innovation, empowering individuals, challenge creativity, value contribution, manage the local government workload issues and resources while staying focused on a principal mission of delivering to their public's expectations at a global elegance (Aucoin, 2013).

A similar experience was experience in Australia, where a competency framework for local government chief executives and senior manager were established. The strategy focused on developing specific competencies required for the local government officials to compete specific tasks related to the ever changing trends in local government service delivery (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004). These experiences cannot solely make a direct contribution to the application of CBT in the South African local government skills development gaps. There is a need for continuous analysis of the characters of CBT that are relevant to development assessment of skills in the sphere.

## 6. Conclusion

CBT as a model for skills development in the workplace specifically emphasis on the requirement for employees to demonstrate ability to perform required work. Worth noting is that CBT should be applied, with the intention of improving the technical know-how of the required work of local government. Other methods should be establish to tackle issues of creativity and innovation in local government. Local government trends have shown characters of complexity, and thus requires researchers and practitioners to design methods that fits the emergent nature of local government trends. The concluding position of this paper is that Competency-Based Training can be a driving force behind a professional, competent and self-driven local government workforce, where capacity intervention can be clearly measured.

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