

Prospects and Challenges of Transforming Local Government into a Learning Organisation

N Tshishonga

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Abstract: This paper explores the prospects and challenges of transforming local government as a learning organisation. The Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) and local government scholars (Amtaika, 2013; Reddy & Maharaj, 2008; Tapscott, 2008; Thornhill, 2008, Tshishonga, 2015, etc.) have diagnosed the challenges facing the local sphere. The diagnosed challenges include amongst others, administrative incapacity, inefficient delivery, under spending and corruption, inadequate consultation, poor responsiveness and lack of accountability. National interventions such as Project Consolidate (2004-2006), Siyenza Manje Programme (2006-2009), Local Government Turnaround Strategy (2009), Operation Clean Audit Programme (2009-2014) and currently Back to Basics were institutionalised in order to mitigate these predicaments and their effects. Despite these interventions, local government is still in crisis and unable to fulfil its mandate. The paper argues that COGTA, SALGA and other local government stakeholders entrusted to play a meaningful and pivotal role in creating an independent and competent structure, should strive to transform local sphere into a learning organisation. Proponents of learning organisation theory such as Hudson (1995), Marquadr (2011) and Senge (1990 & 2006), view learning organisation as an organisation capable of facilitating the learning of its workforce and harnessing knowledge capability and experience for the benefit of all its stakeholders. Such learning is encouraged at individual level within teams and organisation-wide level. By employing learning organisation within the local government context, capacity and capability of all stakeholders would be optimally utilised for the development of the local sphere of government. Thus, building and transforming local government into a vibrant and competent learning organisation would require collective envisioning organisational culture, strategy and enabling structure.

Keywords: COGTA, Learning organisation, Local government, South African Local Government Association

1. Introduction

Since 1994, the South African local government has been overhauling itself from apartheid's highly unequal, racially classified local administrative apparatus to a potentially integrated, developmental, equitable and sustainable form of government (Mogale, 2003:216). The transformation of local government in post-apartheid era saw the restructuring of the local sphere, preceded by the establishment of local transitional authorities, which became the precursor for the final phase culminated in 2000. Historically, legislative frameworks such as the Constitution (1996), the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Municipal Structures Act (1998), the Municipal Demarcation Board Act (1998), the Municipal Systems Act (2000), and the Municipal Financial Management Act (2003) underpinned the restructuring of local government. These frameworks form the basis of the transformation, democratisation and decentralisation agenda for South African local government. In particular, the Constitution mandated local government to

1) democratise local government, 2) promote social and economic development; 3) create safe and healthy environment and 4) enhance local participation. These constitutional functions are to be actualised through the employment of the developmental model to local government as mandated by the White Paper of Local Government (1998). These frameworks form the foundation upon which local government could deliver on its mandate. Thus, local government or subnational government as the only sphere of government closest to the people is challenged and mandated to deliver essential services and further promote local governance through public participation (Amtaika, 2013; De Vries, 2016). The adoption of development state as a model to address socio-economic challenges requires local government to play a pivotal role in activating projects and programmes to benefit the people, especially the poor and indigent. Local government as presented in this paper has both the prospects and challenges to transform itself post-apartheid era. Against this background, the paper aims to determine the potential, prospects and challenges

of local government in transforming itself through the employment of a learning organisation as a transformational model.

2. Theoretical Exposition of Learning Organisation

This paper is underpinned by the concept of learning organisation as its theoretical exposition. The proponents of learning organisation theory such as Hudson (1995), Marquardt (2011) and Senge (1990, 2006), view learning organisation as an organisation capable of facilitating the learning of its workforce and harnessing the knowledge capability and experiences for the benefit of all its stakeholders. Since the emergence of a learning organisation, organisational learning or learning society has been dubbed, 'a never-ending journey' (Watkins & Golembiewski, 1995:99), 'a vision' (Senge *et al.*, 1994:5); 'a continuous aspiration' (Garratt, 2001:x) while scholars such as Marsick and Watkins (1999:219) perceive it as not the real destination. These various ways of looking at learning organisation are the foundation upon which organisations and companies have adopted and modified learning organisation as a management and organisational model for their competitive advantage. In order for organisations to attain and sustain comparative advantage, Marquardt (2011:67) advises organisations to learn better and faster from their successes and failures alike. The adoption of learning organisation has been justified on the benefits derived from gaining organisational effectiveness and excelling in the future (Pitinger, 2002; Senge, 1990). From this perspective, learning organisation is a key component in organisations intending to unlock the potential of the people either as individuals or as teams. The idea of learning was developed particularly in the 1960s and 1970s with contributions from Argyis and Schon (1978). It was in the 1980s that the authors developed a link between learning training and company or organisation performance. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Jones and Hendry (1992) also saw a clear link between training, development and human resource management on the one hand, and company performance and competitiveness on the other hand. In their study on learning organisation, Jones and Hendry (1992) found that Shell, a company that pioneered the "learning company" concept accelerated its learning and gained advantage over its competitors. The authors identified team work and effective communication as key components of an effective learning company.

Senge (1990) identified five dimensions of organisation that is capable to learn, and continually enhance their capacity to realise their highest aspirations. In one of the dimensions the author opines that people excel and learn voluntarily if there is a genuine shared vision. Having a shared vision is fundamental in growing a learning organisation, yet Senge (1990, 2006) argues without clear goals, values and missions, organisations are unlikely to succeed. Successful organisations thus bind people around a shared picture of the future they wish to create. Senge asserts that team learning for example involves thinking together to allow the group to discover insights not attainable individually. Senge (1990:42) argues that the learning organisation focuses on generative learning, as well as on adaptive learning. Adaptive learning reacts to events and brings about adaptations retrospectively; generative learning is creative and moves into the future by keeping in touch with the systemic structure of the organisation. These features are the foundation for an organisation which is inspired to expand its horizon by not only responding to the expeditions of its constituencies, but also capable of leverage itself as a comparative entity. Nevis *et al.* (1995) identified three key qualities of learning organisations that ground learning organisations such as 1) pursuing an enhanced knowledge base whereby learning orientated organisations are aware of their strengths for competition, 2) have the capacity of continuous improvement and 3) are able to continuously challenge existing ways of doing things. Within a learning organisation, individual and team learning are equally valued and encouraged hence Senge (2006) argues that organisations learn only through individuals, although individual learning by itself does not guarantee organisational learning. However, the author went further to assert that without individual learning there is no organisational learning take place (Senge, 2006:129). In essence, learning organisation is about organisational acquisition of knowledge and the capacity to process such acquired knowledge into productive use. In this regard, Nonaka (1991) argues that knowledge is not created until the deep-rooted insights of one individual are successfully internalised and applied by others. As such Nonaka is of the belief that knowledge creation transcends just processing objective information. According to Senge, both individual and organisational learning is enhanced by personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systematic thinking. Despite these outlined building blocks towards building

a learning organisation, proponents of a learning organisation phenomenon such as De Geus (1997), Garvin (1994), Jackson & Slocum (1999), Marquardt (1999), Watkin & Maarsick (1993).

Despite the prospects and opportunities learning organisation possess in transforming organisation across sectoral divide, the model is without faultiness. At first glance of evaluating, Shaw (2004:117) is sceptical about how the notion of learning organisation fits comfortably in the management and organisational equation. On one hand evaluation is about outcomes, effectiveness, bottom lines and evidence based practice-accountability. On the other hand, learning organisations are about systems, interaction, process, feedback and improvement (Shaw, 2004:117). The author adds that although there are tensions, proponents of learning organisations argue that lessons learned must be evidentially based, albeit in a variety of ways and not unfalsifiable insights. In practice if not in rhetoric, most evaluation is about incremental change and improvement.

3. Conceptions of Local Government

Globally, local government is considered as the lowest sphere of government with executive and legislative powers to make bye-laws and regulations binding on the local populace (Pillay, Reddy & Sayeed, 2015:35). Both in developed and developing nations, local government is created either as the second or the third sphere charged with the responsibility to render services to the local populace and enhance local democracy by affording people power to govern and facilitate development at local level (Amtaika, 2013; Reddy, 1999). Local government is in other regions known as the second or third level of government is deliberately created to bring government to the local populace (Reddy, 1999). Some scholars in political and public administration, more particularly those in local government, describe local government as the 'sphere of government' (Constitution, 1996:87; Siddle & Koelble, 2012:1), subnational government (De Vries, 2015:67), local state (Picard & Mogale, 2015:127). Others scholars associate it more with the political-sub-division of national or regional government (Internal Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, 2008, cited in Pillay, Reddy & Sayeed, 2015:35), decentralised representative institution (Totemeyer, 1988:2) and 'developmental local government' (WPLG, 1998:37). Local government is

viewed by Meyer (1978:10) as '...local democratic units within the democratic system...which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled government powers and sources of income to render specific local services and to control and regulate the geographic, social and economic development of a defined local area'. However, within the context of Intergovernmental Relations (IGR), local government is conceptualised as an integrated, interdependent as well as distinct in relation to provincial and national spheres of government (Constitution, 1996; Watts, 2001). Reddy (1999:9) views this local sphere of government as... the level of government created to bring government to the local populace and to give citizens a sense of participation in the political processes that influence their lives. In the same vein, van der Waldt (2007:4) defines it as ...the decentralised and representative institution with general and specific powers as stipulated by the Constitution (1996) and the White Paper on Local Government (1998). Since local government is the 'sphere closest to the people' (Thornhill, 2008:59) and van der Waldt (2007:2) argue that ...is an invaluable socio-political laboratory hence various new government proposals are often experimented at this small scale level.

Despite local government being regarded as a fully-fledged sphere on its own right, Van der Waldt (2007:4) sees local government as a decentralised, representative institution with both general and specific powers, devolved upon it and delegated to it by the central or provincial government. Thus, scholars of local government such as van der Waldt (2007) view it as an invaluable socio-political laboratory for testing various new government proposals on a small scale. In a country like South Africa which is plagued by high levels of uneven development, Dawson (2010:104) argues that local government has the potential to play a key development role. For local sphere to execute its developmental mandate, Lemon (2002:18) advocates for sufficient financial resources and the deployment of adequate trained personnel.

4. Challenges Faced by Post-Apartheid Local Government

The failure to uphold the roles stipulated in the Constitution and other local government legislations cascaded into lack or poor service delivery. Thus, poor service delivery should be understood within the broader challenges faced by local government

in general as highlighted by scholars and government reports. These challenges range from poor implementation of policies and the legacy of autocratic and bureaucratic apartheid local government (Ismail *et al.*, 1997), the lack of administrative capacity and co-ordination (Tapscott, 2008). In addition, Tshishonga (2015:169) adds that the challenge faced by the local government is to bring democracy and development in the local sphere through citizen participation. Weak administrative capacity coupled with poorly trained staff is inter alia some of the reasons municipalities fail to deliver services. Nepotism and cadre deployment of unskilled personnel is an area that contributes towards the failure of delivery of services (Booyesen, 2011). Corruption and mismanagement is rife in the local government; hence the incapacity to deliver services as funds is diverted for personal use and not for development. Some municipals are financially poor and cannot raise their own revenues which could help to meet the rising urban needs. Extensive research conducted by many researchers show that the South African local government is faced by a multiple of challenges particularly lack of finance, land and human capacity, assets that are at the heart of service delivery. Weak deployment of incompetent human resources and the lack of strategic thinking and operations contribute in depriving the public of quality and sustainable services. Reddy and Maharaj (2008:197) allude to the fact that the failure by most municipalities to align their budgets and human resource deployment contribute to the failure to develop a linkage between capacity development and integrated development planning.

Despite the local democratic processes inherent in the new local government system, residents of a municipality might still be alienated from it due to local government's incapacity to deliver basic services (South African Cities Network, 2004:136; Cloete, 2002:286; Mogale, 2003: 226). The challenge of service delivery according to Reddy (2008:70) is daunting considering that demand for service exceeds the resources available. The local government's failure to fulfil its mandate and perform effectively has led to the widespread disillusionment which results in communities losing trust in the institution (Tapscott 2008:226). Thus, people's distrust of local government has led to 'democratic deficit' and 'participation fatigue' in which Tapscott (2008:226) describes as 'growing tired with the rhetoric of participation and empowerment without any material gain'. These predicaments are further

aggravated by the non-compliance by politicians and officials with municipal by-laws and breakdown of communication between the local polity and its constituency (ibid, 229).

According to Sikhakhane & Reddy (2011:85), one of the major challenges faced by municipalities in South Africa is quality serviced delivery and lack of accountability. Service delivery on one hand entails basic necessities required by the citizens of municipalities to survive socially and economically or live a decent living. Central to the delivery of sustainable services (such as water, electricity and houses) depend on the enactment of the developmental mode of local government. Van der Waldt (2007:34) argues that such a framework also depends on responsible and accountable municipal functionaries as well as good relations between them and the local citizenry. On the other hand, Smit & Cronje (2002:192) argue that the concept of accountability whether politically, legally or professionally...demands responsible employees to account for the outcomes, including whether those outcomes are positive or negative in their line of duty. However, most scholars argue that 'service delivery' protests are often symbolic of a non-functioning local government (Atkinson, 2007; Tshishonga, 2015). Protests in South Africa are a legacy of the resistance struggle against the apartheid separate development and imposed local authorities. Service delivery protests have become a debated phenomenon. The service delivery protests are multifaceted. Atkinson (2007:53) reports that in 2005 numerous towns saw mass protests, marches demonstrations, petitions and violent confrontations. The most frightening aspect about protests in South Africa is the violence. In 2008, 61 people mostly foreigners were killed over service delivery. The communities particularly in the poor black municipalities attacked foreigners for taking services that were meant for them. They accused the foreigners for stealing government built houses and paying bribes to municipal workers in order to get in front of the queue for services. The horror and extent of the violent protests is etched in many people's minds. Some analysts argue that lack of service delivery forced these communities to vent their frustrations on foreigners.

5. National Interventions to Local Government Challenges

In an attempt to address the above mentioned challenges, various strategies and interventions were

designed mainly to deal with the predicaments undermining local government (Amtaika, 2013; Picard & Mogale, 2015; Tshishonga, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, five programme interventions were selected, namely Project Consolidate (2004-2006), Siyenza Manje Programme (2006-2009) and the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) introduced in 2009 as well as the Operation Clean Audit Programme (2009-2014) and Back to Basics Programme (2014-current). Importantly, these programmes are critically reviewed in terms of their specific mandate in particular and as instruments geared towards activating local government to be effective, efficient, proactive and productive.

5.1 Project Consolidate (2004-2006)

Project Consolidate was established in 2004 with the intention to capacitate under-performing municipalities through support from experts and partnerships. All in total, 136 municipalities were identified as having blockages resulting into negative feedbacks and complaints received during the national and provincial elections. Thus, Sikhakhane & Reddy (2009:224) noted that Project Consolidate was one of the national government's key initiatives to support capacity building within local government. According to DPLG (2006) project consolidate was a concerted programme to address shortcomings at the local level which Tapscott (2008:228) further highlighted that its mandate in terms of building capacity and providing programme support to municipalities known to be struggling administratively. This entails that any meaningful interventions would have to take into account the different capacities of local government in order to adjust their policy or programmes.

Previous research identified similar challenges suggesting that the provision of basic services and infrastructure remains a thorny problem in many municipalities (see Hemson *et al.*, 2004; Amtaika, 2013). Although the government was tackling poverty and providing basic services, many households still lacked access to electricity, sanitation and clean running water. Realising that many municipalities had numerous backlogs and incapacity to fulfil their constitutional mandates, the then Ministry of Provincial and Local Government launched Project Consolidate to tackle the escalating problems of poor service delivery, the project enabled provincial governments and key private sector partners to find innovative ways of supporting local government to

boost service delivery. According to Pieterse and van Donk (2008:53) the local government institutional failure to redress the apartheid legacy in terms of poverty alleviation, service delivery and employment creation led to an institutional crisis which manifested in the form of shortage of appropriate skilled municipal staff, particularly in managerial and technical positions including the weak and fragmented financial management systems.

Project Consolidate's main aim was to promote a culture of performance and accountability within municipalities by creating collective responsibility, governance and performance in municipalities (CMTP, 2003-2008). The two year project was earmarked to connect national and provincial governments with the private sector to collaborate in reconstruction and local development by capacitating the 'failing' municipalities. The project involved the deployment of experts to assist municipalities in addressing practical service delivery and local governance issues (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2006:1). Specific areas were identified as needing assistance in the development and implementation of indigent policies, and free basic services and billing systems. Municipal debt and poor local development were also identified as areas in which Project Consolidate could assist. Project Consolidate introduced performance management and public participation, key features that put an emphasis on anti-corruption which was also identified as a serious challenge in the 'failing municipalities'.

Project Consolidate was tasked to assist and encourage municipalities to ensure that they complied with the Municipal Financial Management Act's internal audit control measures to safeguard them from the incompetent and corrupt management by supporting the municipalities with financial auditing skills. Former Local Government Minister, (Mufamadi), in 2006 envisaged that Project Consolidate would ensure efficient utilisation of resources drawn from national revenue to benefit the poor and accelerate service delivery. Many programmes that followed Project Consolidate were initiated to sustain and consolidate the implementation of its policies. According to Pieterse and van Donk (2008:54), Project Consolidate targeted failing municipalities which subsequently managed to elevate themselves through tremendous achievements and progress, but with some remaining trapped in the vicious cycle of under-performance mainly due to inherent

institutional weaknesses coupled with skills and financial management challenges. This intervention was according to Powell (2012:18) directed at those municipalities under stress due to a systematic crisis in local government.

5.2 Siyenza Manje Programme (2006 - 2009)

Siyenza Manje is a Zulu words translating to 'we are doing it now'. This programme talks to the urgency of providing sustainable services at municipal level (Tshishonga, 2015). Thus, the programme was initiated to offer support mainly to overstretched municipalities identified during the Project Consolidate tenure in 2006 hence it was managed by the Development Bank of Southern Africa in partnership with National Treasury. Treasury was instrumental in funding 70% towards the implementation phase while the DBSA constituted 30% (Kaufman, 2008). Overall, Siyenza Manje was hands-on support and skills transfer geared towards empowering low-capacity municipalities. Through this programme, experts were recruited and deployed to low performing especially the poor and rural municipalities. Funds were also provided to assist in developing plans, feasibility studies and more particularly in implementing plans and strategies aimed at delivering services effectively and efficiently (Kaufman, 2008).

Project consolidate had 136 low capacity and poor rural municipalities and Siyenza Manje increased to 160 and 485 professionals were deployed with various apprenticed skills and expertise, 51 in total, drawn from Further Education Training (FET), colleges and universities (Kaufman, 2008). Importantly, this programme utilised these professionals to assist distress municipalities not only to access and spend Municipal Infrastructure Grants (MIG), but also to unlock service delivery bottlenecks as well as sustaining their entities (Letsholo, 2007).

5.3 Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) - (2009)

Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) intervention similarly to Project Consolidate was introduced in 2009 in response to local government distress which according to Powell (2012:21) manifests itself through 'huge service delivery backlogs', hence local government is in a state of crisis. The intervention was justified by Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA)

(2009:13) through inter alia, a breakdown in council communication with and accountability to citizens, political interference in administration, corruption, fraud, bad management, increasing violent service delivery, factionalism in parties and depleted municipal capacity. More than nineteen years into the new Local Government System there have been worrying trends and signs that undermine the progress and achievements made thus far which are a threat in service delivery and socio-economic development (Tshishonga, 2015). Predicaments such as systemic factors (linked to model of local government); policy and legislative factors; political factors; weaknesses in the accountability systems; capacity and skills constraints; weak intergovernmental support and oversight; and issues associated with the inter-governmental relations were highlighted to be the root causes of dysfunctional municipalities (COGTA, 2009).

The main objective of the national "local government turnaround strategy" is to renew the vision of developmental local government. Broadly, the strategy was aimed at achieving the following: better planning and overseeing of local service delivery – remove constraints on service delivery; address constitutional and legislative weaknesses in municipal governance; professionalisation and administrative stabilisation of local government – undertake steps to strengthen professionalism of local government; establish a single window of co-ordination for local government – establish a single point of entry for the support, monitoring and intervention in local government (Local Government Turnaround Strategy 2009:29-39). Accordingly, this entails the national sphere informing the sub-national spheres when they will visit municipalities; deepen people-centred government through a refined model of ward committee; priorities of all three spheres of government. Thus, finding expression in the work of ward; committees and these committees should be coordinated at a municipal, district, provincial and national level; and reform the inert-governmental fiscal system – improve coordination of various grants to local government and address equity and compliance challenges (ibid).

In fulfilling this mandate, the strategy sought to improve the organisational and political performance of municipalities and therefore that would translate to improved delivery of services. Its primary goal was to improve the lives of citizens, and progressively meet their social, economic and

material needs, thereby restoring community confidence and trust in government.

5.4 Operation Clean Audit Programme (2009 - 2014)

Operation Clean Audit is the brainchild of the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs as one of the Flagship Projects, 2014 (www.dplg.gov.za). The programme emanates from the Auditor-General's reports highlighting constant queries relating to ineffective institutions, ineffective structures (internal audit units and audit committees), poor performance or absence of systems, especially financial management and systems (COGTA, 2009-2014:1). Its target was mainly to assist all the municipalities and provincial departments to achieve sustainable improvement in financial management and governance aimed at yielding clean audit by 2014. The following challenges were highlighted to have a negative picture affecting government service delivery plans in general and corporate governance in particular. Such challenges include; inadequate skills on planning, budgeting; public financial management, including expenditure management; poor interface between financial and non-financial information; inability to manage cash-flow significantly; inadequate skills on credit and debt management, including basic financial accounting and filling or record keeping; duplication of payments in some instances and amounts not accounted for (lack of financial accountability); and lastly lack of systems to manage audit queries and recommendations, both internal and external auditing, etc. (COGTA, 2009-2014:1).

5.5 Back-to-Basics Programme (2014 - Current)

Back to Basics programme is a constant reminder of the core function of municipalities which is providing services (Amtaika, 2013; Picard & Mogale, 2015; Siddle & Koelble, 2012). These services are fundamental to the improvement of the quality of life especially for those residing in the townships and rural areas (Cebekhulu, 2014). The core services that local government provides, for example, are clean running water, sanitation, electricity, shelter, waste removal and roads are not only basic human rights, but also essential components of the right to dignity enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. The central goal of this programme is to improve the functioning of municipalities to better serve communities

by getting the basics right (COGTA, 2014). Thus, the Department of Cooperative Governance is therefore charged with the responsibility of building and strengthening the capability and accountability of municipalities by ensuring that basic services are delivered. During the Presidential Local Government Summit in Midrand in Johannesburg, Gordhan, the Minister of Finance (Stone and Magubane, 2014) highlighted that the new plan was expected to focus municipalities on getting small things right such as fixing street lights, leaking taps and collecting refuse. Thus, the programme was considered to be an attempt to breathe new life into municipalities. He rebuked municipalities to move away from outsourcing core functions, including financial management. According to Gordhan (2014) the Back to Basics Strategy was in line with the president's vision for local government to be at "the forefront of improving people's lives and creating conditions for inclusive economic growth and job creation". Overall, Back to Basics is designed to ensure that in every municipality, traffic lights work, potholes are filled, water is delivered, refuse is collected, electricity is supplied, and refuse and waste management takes place.

The programme is anchored on creating decent living conditions, good governance, public participation, sound financial management and institutional capacity as its building blocks (COGTA, 2014). Accordingly, the delivery of services such as water and sanitation; human settlements; electricity; waste management; roads and public transportation should be based on fundable consolidated infrastructure plans. Good governance based on public participation through various structures should be institutionalised in order to ensure the effective functioning of municipalities (COGTA, 2014:10-12). This can be achieved by installing sound financial management as an integral part of running the competent local government. Finally, institutional capacity building is imperative for municipalities to function to their full capacity and capabilities. This entails shifting the focus towards building strong municipal administrative systems and processes. It includes ensuring that administrative positions are filled with competent and committed people whose performance is closely monitored. Targeted and measurable training and capacity building will be provided for councillors and municipal officials so that they are able to deal with the challenges of local governance as well as ensuring that scarce skills are addressed through bursary and training programmes (COGTA, 2014:10-12).

6. Opportunities Available for Learning Organisation-Based Local Government

6.1 Opportunities Through Policy Frameworks

The policies developed since the dawn of democracy provide local government with opportunities for this sphere of government to grow. The White Paper on Local Government (1998:11) declares that local government stands at the threshold of an exciting and creative era in which it can and will make a powerful impact on reconstruction and development in South African democracy. This declaration is based on evidence-based research which culminated into policy frameworks such as the White Paper on Local Government itself, the Municipal Structures Act, the Municipal Systems Act, and the Municipal Demarcation board Act and ultimately the Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003. With these policies in place, the central question this paper has to grapple with is the extent to which these frameworks implicate the local government within its various categories, namely category A (metros), category B (local municipalities) and category C which are the district municipalities (La Roy, 2012:1). Does local government have the capacity and competency to implement all these policies? And if not, what are the policy implications of its failure to local state stakeholders, mainly the poor and previously excluded and marginalised. The reality is that local government is the level of government that is at the close proximity to the citizens; hence it is strategically positioned to expedite services by responding to people's needs and expectations within its jurisdiction (Tshishonga, 2015:141). According to De Visser (2009), local spheres are equally placed to identify and unlock local potential, and mobilise resources present in the locality. He further argues that these characteristics do not automatically lead to a higher quality and legitimacy of decisions but certainly have the potential to do so. Local government through its municipalities could draw from its institutional memory backed up by legislative law of the country. Thus for learning to filter through organisational system, Mayors and Municipal Managers are to work within the laws and at the same time allow flexibility for creative and innovative feedback and input from both the employees and the public alike. However, policy compliance should not stifle creativity and innovativeness among local government stakeholders especially the citizens as the primary recipients of municipal services (Nzimakwe, 2015). This depends however on whether local governments are indeed configured

to behave responsively, and to the extent that local governments are able to pursue their communities' wishes for their locality through broader government structures and partnerships. Fundamentally, the South African Constitution is clear in elevating local government not only as a sphere of government created to serve the needs of the people, but also a decentralised and democratic government with both executive and legislative powers to execute its core functions of service delivery and local democracy promotion. This constitutional foundation arms the local state with a mandate to act distinctively, integrated and interdependent with other sphere of government as stipulated in the Intergovernmental Relations Policy framework of 2005.

6.2 Opportunities Through Election of Local Leadership

Apart from the pieces of legislation, local government stakeholders are afforded to elect their own leaders, unlike the provincial and national governments where on proportional representative (PR) system is used, local sphere has the opportunity to use a mix-system (proportional and constituency system). According to Amtaika (2013) the existence and adoption of various electoral systems are often influenced by political reasons and common to all is the process of selecting suitable candidates to hold office. The electoral systems which are famous in political science are proportional representation (PR) and constituency-based (De Jager, 2015:146). On one hand a representative system of governance uses an indirect method to elect public representatives and decision-making personnel (Heywood, 2000). On the other hand a constituency-base system affords voters a direct nomination and election of their candidate. There are various electoral systems that exist and each nation is guided by its national vision to choose which one is application. Despite these electoral systems, Heywood (2000:199) argues that voters may be advised to choose between candidates or between parties; they may either select a single candidate or vote preferentially, ranking the candidates they wish to support in order; the electorate may or may not be grounded into electoral units or constituencies; constituencies may return a single members or a number of members. However, Heywood (2000: 199) argues that the most common way of distinguishing between electoral systems is on the basis of how they convert voters into seats. Laver (1988:181) alludes to the fact the process of

selection has two main stages. The first stage has to do with the selection of candidates while the second stage a choice is made from among candidates, of representatives. Elections may nevertheless be either democratic or non-democratic. On one hand, democratic elections adhere to the principles such as universal adult suffrage; one person one person, the secret ballot and electoral choice offered by completion between both candidates and political parties. On the other hand, non-democratic elections are said to exhibit features such as the right to vote is restricted on grounds like property ownership, education, gender or racial origin; voters are subject to pressure or intimidation or only a single candidate or single party can contest the election (Heywood, 2000:199). Hanka and Downs (2010:761) argue that local government elections are necessary to realise the benefits of decentralisation.

According to Mangcu (2013:1160) the proportional representation system does not only provide parties with equal opportunity to compete but it also fosters a culture of obeisance to the party leadership. At the local government, ward councillors are elected through both proportional representation and constituency-based systems (Amtaika, 2013; Picard & Mogale, 2015). In this regard, elections are used not only to decide who governs, but also, in some instances, deciding what government should do. It can be argued that elections are a vehicle upon which people vote among alternative parties or leaders capable of governing them. Since 2000, a mixed-member proportional municipal representation was adopted to incorporate local constituencies or wards. Currently, local elections consist of a mix of propositional representation and candidate-based voting (February, 2009:54). Elections at this level work on a 40-60 ratio. 40 percent of the seats are distributed from PR lists while 60 percent are directly elected from wards (Picard & Mogale, 2015:169). Unlike the PR system, the constituency-based system affords local electorates to choose their representatives directly. Accordingly, constituency-based electoral system guarantees greater accountability and it is possible to hold elected representatives accountable for their promises.

6.3 Opportunities for Learning Through National Interventions

Since 2004 the national government initiated some interventions aimed at assisting targeted municipalities throughout the country such as Project

Consolidate (2004-2006), Siyenza Manje Programme (2006-2009), Local Government Turnaround Strategy (2009), Operation Clean Audit Programme (2009-2014) and currently Back to Basics. These interventions are based on evidence-based research with recommendations warranting strategic and pragmatic interventions to those municipalities in stress.

These interventions mark the government's commitment to assist struggling municipalities in order for them to execute their mandate. These initiatives and support programmes were meant to strength and enhance the capacity and performance of local government. Considering the underperformance of this sphere of government, interventions were also introduced to transform local government to be responsive, accountable, efficient and effective (Reddy, 2015:327). See Table 1 on the following page.

Despite the 'abundance of technical tools to support municipalities' the Auditor-General Report (2011) revealed that Project Consolidate had only fractionally performed better than the previous year. Gasela (2007:1, in Reddy, 2015:328) noted some qualitative and quantitative progress made despite the programme failing to achieve its mandate completely. Project Consolidate was followed by Siyenza Manje which aimed at capacitating human resources in low-capacity, poor rural municipalities. Despite the good intention of Siyenza Manje programme, it failed to transfer skills to the local municipal officials as envisioned in its objectives. Powell (2012:18) argues that it was difficult to measure the impact of these capacity building measures on one hand while on the other hand these interventions were labelled as having little to improve the financial performance of municipalities which according to Powell is perhaps the most important indicator of the health of local government. Ndletyana and Muzondidya (2009:35) acknowledged that:

Overall, the presence of Service Delivery Facilitators (SDFs) has reportedly made a huge difference where they have been stationed. However, by July 2007, 85 of the 139 designated municipalities had been assisted through this programme. There were fewer SDFs than required, even though by September 2006 a total of 181 individuals, including technical experts, graduates and students are said to have been involved in the Project Consolidate programme. This was meant to assist those underperforming and

Table 1: Brief Evaluation of the 5 Interventions Based on the Challenges, Interventions and the Progress Made

Project	Challenges	Intervention	Progress
Project Consolidate (2004-2006)	Under-performance Backlogs in service delivery Lack of human capacity Weak administration	Promote a culture of performance & accountability Connect national & provincial gvt with pvt sector Introduce performance management Introduce public participation Support with financial auditing skills	Achievements in some municipalities Other municipalities still under-perform due to institutional weaknesses
Siyenza Manje Programme (2006-2009)	Overstretched municipalities	Skills transfer Technical support	Increased capacity to some extent Unlocked service delivery bottlenecks Failed to transfer skills
LGTAS (2009)	Service delivery backlogs Lack of accountability Lack of capacity & skills Weak intergovernmental support	Improve coordination Address corruption	Improved organisational & political performance Improved people's lives Restored confidence in government
Operation Clean Audit Programme (2009-2014)	Ineffective institutions Ineffective structures Poor performance Absence of systems Inadequate skills	Assist with human and financial capacity and management	Limited progress due to the number of disclaimer, adverse and unqualified audit Limited capacity and skills
Back-to-Basics Programme 2014-	Inefficient basic service delivery	Breathe new life into municipalities Improve lives	Got small things right Training & capacitating councillors

Source: Author's analysis

ailing municipalities in terms of municipal services (Reddy, 2015:328). In addition, the programme was hit by another challenge of resistance staged by municipalities as they suspected that SDFs were sent to expose inefficiency and corruption. According to Ndletyana and Muzondidya (2009), the programme was undermined by the high SDFs turnover which further compromised the progress already made. The study conducted by Mafema *et al.* (2009:114) at Umzumbe local municipal revealed that 'inadequate institutional capacity' undermines the municipality to be effective, innovative and responsive to the needs and aspirations of its residents. The authors advocate that: the building of human resources and institutional capacity is the prerequisite of organisational development and transformation and hence the empowerment of public officials and citizens generally (Mafema *et al.*, 2009:114).

The introduction of a Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) was a reactionary trajectory

brought by the change of administration from Mbeki to Zuma in 2009 hence the disbandment of the Ministry of Provincial and Local Government to the Ministry of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). COGTA including the LGTAS was over-ambitious, its findings revealed nothing than that the local government was showing signs of distress which contributed to 'huge service delivery backlogs' (COGTA, 2009:2). Operation Clean Audit programme has a logframe with clear performance indicators, means of verification and assumption. Without adequate human capital to perform basic financial management (COGTA, 2009-2014:8). Similarly, to LGTAS, the Operation Clean Audit Programme was over-ambitious and was further accused of having unrealistic time frames hence unattainable objectives. Both programme failed to yield desirable results because government had applied 'a one size fits all approach' (COGTA, 2010:1). For example, Siddle and Koelble (2012:215) alluded to the fact that between 2010 and

Table 2: Category of Employees and Performance Percentages

Category	Performance	Percentage
Category A	Higher performers	20%
Category B	Status quo maintainers	40%
Category C	Poor performers	40%

Source: Author's analysis

2011, no municipalities ... achieved adverse and disclaimer audit opinions. The Auditor-General (2011:4) reported for 2009/10 that only 53 municipalities received disclaimers, seven received adverse opinions; 50 received qualified opinions; 120 received financially unqualified opinions; and seven financially unqualified opinions. To make matters worse, the Auditor-General (2011) also found that most of the municipalities engaged external consultants to prepare their financial statements, despite having full complements of staff in their finance departments.

7. Towards Unblocking Local Government's Potential and Capacity

Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) presents the conceptual underpinning of the work of building learning organisations (Senge *et al.*, 1995:5). The author introduces five disciplines as the core of the learning organisation, as follows:

7.1 Personal Mastery

According to Senge (1990:7), personal mastery is described as continually clarifying and deepening one's personal vision, focusing on one's energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively. This is viewed as the essential cornerstone of the learning organisation. The author views people with a high level of personal mastery as having a special sense of purpose that lies behind their visions and goals, and who functions in a continual mode of learning. Senge (1990:7) states that there are few organisations that encourage the growth of their people, resulting in vast untapped resources. In essence, "organisations learn through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning, but without it no organisational learning occurs". Individual employees within the local public sector are motivated by various reasons, while others financial remuneration is top on their motivators, others value enabling environment and personal growth as the primary drivers for excellent productivity and higher performance. Table 2 depicts the situation of the employees within various municipalities in South Africa.

Table 1 on the previous page reflects a dire need for municipal employees who are self-motivated in order for transformation to take place. With 20% as higher performers, such category of staff is likely to migrate to other lucrative jobs with market competitive environment within government departments or private sectors. Both category B and C share 40% of employees each, though different they have the common denominator for mediocre performance. 40% of staff who are known for maintaining the status quo are equally responsible for most of the challenges betting municipalities. These are mainly those staff members employed through the policy of cadre employment, often without requisite skills and knowledge to do the required job. Considering that municipalities are at the coalface of service delivery, thus representing the interests of citizens, mandated to provide service at their doorsteps (Palmer *et al.*, 2017:273), skilled and competent, dedicated and motivated employees both as individuals and teams are imperative.

Personal mastery is viewed as where people live in a continual learning mode (Senge, 1990:142). Individual learning should be motivated by people wanting to bring change and influence democratic principles and values especially the Batho Pele. Throughout the South African municipalities, employees have taken the initiative to enrol themselves both for formal certificates, diplomas and degrees offered by various public and private institutions of higher learning to upgrade their skills and academic qualifications. Formal education and training, together with informal knowledge exchange engagement through either through workshops and academic excursions are key in a knowledge driven society (Castel, 2000). Staff development either through formal or informal training should be aligned to the strategic and action orientated planning of the municipalities. Strategic and action orientated planning of the municipalities are covered by IDPs as the leading instrument of local planning (Harrison, 2008:321), which are compulsory for all municipalities. The central tenet of this belief is that no one can increase someone

else's personal mastery; however, there can be conditions which can encourage and support people to increase their personal mastery (Senge *et al.*, 1995:197).

7.2 Mental Models

Mental Models are described as deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisation, or even pictures or images that influence the way we understand the world and how one takes action. People are not aware of the impact of mental models on behaviour (Senge, 1990:8). For example, in a public sector organisation, employees can make assumptions that an African candidate for a senior post was not appointed on merit, which would result in people in the organization acting and behaving inappropriately. Senge (1990:9) states that the discipline of working with mental models involves turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. Therefore, it requires the ability of one's own thinking. In order for managers and employees to acquire this type of thinking, both formal and informal education and training is required. Formal training and capacity building could help in requisite skills and knowledge, more particularly with hard skills in municipal specialising areas such as development planning, urban and regional planning, spatial planning, infrastructure planning and maintenance, transport planning, environment and sustainable development and municipal finance. For municipalities to model themselves on a learning organisation, addictiveness and openness should be part of individual and organisational structures and ethos (Higgs & Smith, 2015). This entails the ability of both employees and organisational structures to recreate themselves.

Mental models are fundamental in generalising the direction the organisation is heading to if it has to stay relevant to its foundational vision. Mental models as like any assumptions and human behaviours can be learnt or unlearned. Mental models can be either positive or negative. Positive mental models such as attitudes and relational behaviours are crucial among individual employees and are often cultivated through a conducive environment, mentoring for personal and organisational growth, with grounded processes and systems. For examples graduates who also happened to be staff members within municipalities, upon completing their degree qualification are eager to put their knowledge into

public use. At the municipal level, this entails individual employees being aware of their capabilities in their areas of expertise, which require strengthening and consolidation. Mental models have a negative side due to the absence of transformative leadership, hostile environment and lack of motivation, the workforce is prone to be unproductive. In most of the municipalities, learning and transformation is hampered by the mentality that subscribes to non-compliance especially by senior managers. Thus, people entrusted with positions of power to transform the municipalities are often caught in political-administrative dichotomy; hence, they are unable to fulfil their task professionally. Ideally, administrators and politicians should mutually respectful each other's roles, as each cohort of staff is designated to serve the municipal as stipulated by the Municipal Structures Act (1998).

7.3 Building Shared Vision

The practice of shared vision begins with a viewpoint about an idea that has inspired leadership for thousands of years, that is, the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future the organisation wants to create (Senge, 1990:9). Senge further elaborates that many leaders have a personal vision of the organisation that is not translated into a shared vision. To translate individual vision into a shared vision involves genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance (Senge, 1990:9). IDPs are designed with shared visions that are supposed to inspired municipal political principles and administrators to outperform in their mandate. More often, municipal visions are undermined by the lack of organisational capacity of municipalities and exclusive focus of political-executive interface. Thus, the effective implementation of these visions demands the synergy and alignment of internal policies, organisational structures, strategic leadership, organisational purpose, operational systems, technical capacity and financial abilities (Palmer *et al.*, 2017:109). The repertoire of these skills laid a solid background instrumental in restoring the municipal organisational memory, increasing internal confidence for employees to be productive. Importantly, a shared vision implies 1) that conclusions are communicated to all those within the organisation who take decision, 2) involving in the planning process, both through consultation and through a proper mixture of top-down and bottom-up, 3) a strategy which is truly corporate, with meaning for everyone in the organisation (Smith, 1994:19).

Figure 1: The Link Between Mission, Vision, Values, Strategy, Behaviour and Outcomes



Source: Carre and Peran (1992 in Pearn et al., 1995: 21)

Local governments like any organisations are grounded and are based on municipal visions, which are stipulated in their Integrated Development Planning documents. Strategic management becomes efficient when the management team work towards a common shared vision and strategic goal. In addition to that, the team has to have a collective vision where all the strategic management team has consensus on a collective vision. A common and collective vision thus is key to strategic management as it brings solutions and change. Tesoriero (2010:117) argues that a vision does not necessarily lead to goals being achieved. He states that a vision serves as a source of inspiration for change and as a framework for interpreting and seeking change from the perspective of medium- and long-term goals instead of purely being reactive. A vision allows one to seek an alternative paradigm, whereas purely reactive 'problem solving' and an insistence on being realistic mean being permanently imprisoned within the existing dominant paradigm (Tesoriero, 2010:117). For municipalities to realise their visions, the McKinsey 7-S framework that include skills, strategy, systems, style, staff, structure and shared values (Smith, 1994:86). According to Smith, this framework could helpful in looking at the organisation's present position, help identify problems and weaknesses which require organisational attention.

In many instances, visions of municipalities are contained in their integrated development plans which are developed through individual and collective inputs. In the case where visions are developed by

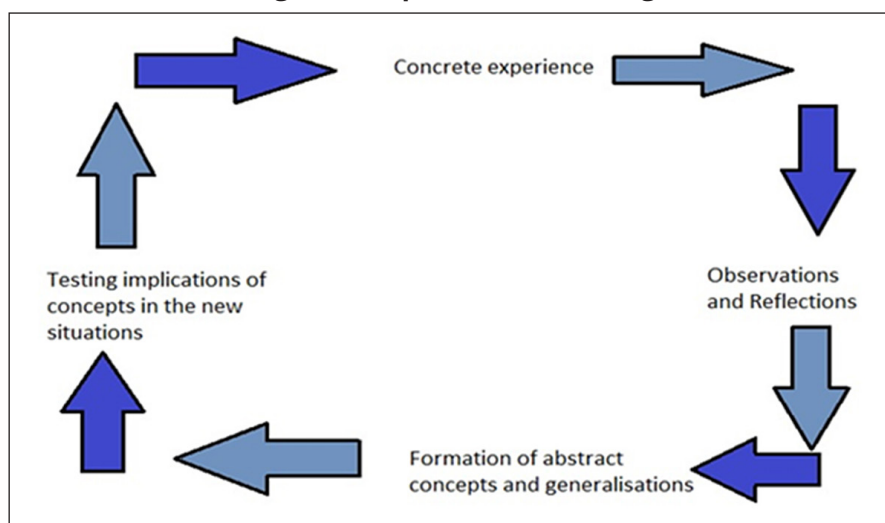
consultants; citizens and communities are denied ownership. Figure 1 reflects that a learning organisation is comprised of interwoven relationships, which links the organisation or municipal's vision, mission, values and behaviour to the desired outcomes (Govender, 2009: 375). For Pearn *et al.* (1995:20), vision and mission of a learning organisation manifest themselves through appropriate values and behaviours.

Without ownership and collective participation of all stakeholders, visions are difficult to translate into actions and end up redundant. It is obvious that when citizens are excluded and marginalised from participating in contributing towards a vision of the municipality, they become what McKnight and Block (2010:99) call 'rusty' because they fail to do what only themselves can do. A vision is strategically designed to 'give people hope, inspire and excite them' (van Rensburg, 2007:17). A common vision thus unites people and becomes the driving force behind actions that awaken the latent potential in people to create a better issue (van Rensburg 2007:17). Leaders are aware of the effectiveness and success of a vision which is dependent on the people who are implicated and need to buy into it (van Rensburg, 2007:16).

7.4 Team Learning

To practice the discipline of team learning requires members of the team to begin with dialogue, where the members argue through and discover insights

Figure 2: Experiential Learning



Source: Kolb's experiential learning cycle (in Govender, 2009: 370)

that cannot be obtained as individuals. The fundamental characteristic of team learning allows for the team to become more aligned as a commonality of direction emerges, and a resonance or *synergy* develop. Within organisations, team learning has three critical dimensions. First, there is a need to think insightfully and together with all the powerful forces in the organisation, which arises from the intelligence of the teams. Second, there is a need for innovative and coordinate action. Third, team learning becomes a collective active, as learning teams continually learn from other teams by inculcating the practices and skills of team learning (Senge, 1990:10,234-237). In public sector organisations there are on-going projects and development planning requires collective action by team members and synergy among teams to achieve the desired goals and results. For municipal bureaucrats, politicians, councillors and officials to maximise their potential, they have to create strong and work orientated teams.

Within public organisations, municipalities included, all the relevant stakeholders are to contribute in order to build and forge local sphere as a learning organisation for its success, effectiveness and sustainability (Govender, 2009). Figure 2 depicts the four stages of learning as represented by the experiential learning cycle, the cycle encompasses concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalisations and finally testing implications of concepts in new situation (see Swart *et al.*, 2004:145). Viewed from concrete experience stage, managers may observe

staff stationed in different departments and positions learning and working collaboratively within assigned teams. At eThekweni municipality, special units such as Area-based Management (ABM), Safer City Project and Community Participation and Action Unit are some of the examples where staff members deployed in their different capacities are able to experiment with experiential learning. With the observations and reflections, managers and the project members themselves do some observations through reflecting on how successful have they work together as a team to achieve set objectives.

This requires municipalities through their councils to strategically adopt and embrace the culture of learning as exposed by Kolb's experiential learning. The fourth stage envisage the formation of abstract concepts and generalisations where both managers and team members reflect on strategies and skilled gained by figure out how effectiveness such skills and knowledge could be used improve their performance. The final stage dictates that all learning organisations with their respective teams and units have to put to test the concepts developed in the previous stage. This stage allows managers and employees from various departments to gauge if their can work in diverse groups and teams. For example, the experience gained through area-based management was documented in a form of a book, which has become the basis for the municipal councils to recommend the approach to be expanded to other areas needed such as intervention. Inter-organisational or departmental projects are a typical example where politicians and administrators come

together to exercise their professional powers, skills and knowledge to bring projects into fruition. It can be argued that the service delivery demands exceed the capability and capacity of local government including the financial resources. The Cornubia Project in eThekweni municipality is a model where the private sector, the municipality and national Department of Human Settlements pull their resources and expertise to provide low-cost housing for the poor households and indigent (eThekweni Municipality IDP, 2012/2013-2016/2017). This situation is worsened by the widespread of corruption, poor developmental planning, absence of inter and intra departmental teamwork and lack of work ethos among the municipal employees.

Without strong work ethics, municipalities are prone to become the targets of bogus, untalented, incompetent people whose interest is to enrich themselves. At this level, the lack of team work and cooperation results into unmet promises which in turn give rise to poverty, unemployment and inequality. Thus the social contracts only exist on paper through various policies but dismally lack the implementation plan, monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress made. The absence of teamwork and strategic direction, according to Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) has led to the dismal failure of the government to redistribute land, to create sustainable job opportunities, building lousy houses with the track record of dismal failure of protecting the interest of big capital (Letsoale & Molele, 2013:3). In order to reverse this situation, social contracts should be established and consolidated based on partnership approach as a win-win arrangement in which all actors have responsibility for the development of the total municipality. In this regard, social contract based on team work according to Enz *et al.* (2000:188) should be broadened to encompass citizens themselves, local public agencies, CBOs and NGOs as well as various departments and units. For a social contract approach to activate work ethics and team work should rest on fulfilling the responsibilities of being a part of the context based on moral criteria which are premised on the elimination of poverty, direct care for the poor, creation of employment opportunities and widespread education of the citizenry (Enz *et al.*, 2000:189).

7.5 Systems Thinking

System thinking theory forms part of the fundamental framework upon which local government could

be grounded as a learning organisation. According to Stacey (1999:276) this theory challenges the scientific management approach and its origin could be attached to the work of the German biologist Von Bertalanfy within his idea of organism and human organisations as open systems. Systems are differentiated by having various component sub-systems that are not only interrelated, but are interdependent on each other (Nkuna & Sebola, 2015:43). Similar to local government which comprises of political and administrative structures created with processes, systems and procedures put in place to ensure the basic mandate of delivering services and enhance local governance is fulfilled. This requires the strategic alignment of political by-laws with administrative policies based on sound balanced politico-administrative interface. Within both political and administrative structure of municipalities are internal stakeholders who form the core of municipal machinery. The upper category comprise of politicians, Mayors and Councillors, either Ward or PR councillors, who assume power by being elected during elections. Through this category of political office bearers, especially the mayors and their deputies, speakers (La Foy, 2012), together with their portfolio committees are institutionalised and tasked to develop municipal policies, debate and pass the budget. Systems thinking in this context is used to describe the rationality that focuses on local government together with its stakeholders such as people, communities and organisations. Senge (1990) argues that emphasis should be on organisations in this case municipalities have to be flexible, adaptive and open if they have to survive and thrive.

Another complementary category crucial to function of the municipality is the administrative structure headed by the Municipal Manager (MM). Unlike the political arm of the municipality where office bearers are elected, administrative part of the municipal is staffed by employees appointed based on merit, qualifications and experiences. Systems thinking is a conceptual framework where systems theory is integrated into the learning organisation, and where it integrates the disciplines of building a shared vision, mental models, team learning and personal mastery into a coherent body of theory and practice (Senge, 1990:12). Systems thinking is viewed as the cornerstone of how learning organisations think about their world as there is a shift in thinking from seeing the whole, seeing people from being helpless reactors to.... Active participants (Senge, 1990:69).

The five disciplines of the learning organisation are key in assisting public sector managers and head of departments within municipalities to identify and develop best practices and competencies geared towards building a learning organisation.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Failure to transform socio-economic relations inherited from the apartheid state has made freedom an empty dream for the majority of South Africans who remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder (Ramphela, 2012:117). Despite the policy frameworks and pragmatic interventions introduced to alleviate local government to take its place as a distinct, independent and integrated sphere of government which decentralised and democratic, evidence show that local state remains in distress. The paper reveals that lack of political, administrative and fiscal accountability, horizontally and vertical, unfilled vacant posts aggravated by the deployment of unskilled and incompetent personnel especially the municipal senior managers contribute to the challenges facing local governments. These together with other challenges documented in academic articles and official documents such as the Auditor General Reports attest to the failure of municipalities to transform themselves into learning organisations. It is impossible to deliver services without effective application of the laws especially in chain supply, lack of capacity to fulfil the constitutional mandate, particularly in the delivery of essential services and upholding the developmental local governance principles and values.

The employment of a learning organisation in transforming local government as a model to revive and activate local sphere of government is imperative. The effective, efficient and proactive functioning of local government is dependent mainly on its ability to repair itself as part of addressing challenges faced. The notion of learning organisation is underpinned by the quality of the workforce and its ability to translate policies into tangible and implementable projects and programmes. Through local government oriented policies, the local state has been given a face lift which is contrary to the apartheid era where the local authorities were designed to serve the interests of the few and also used as agents of central government. Operating within the context of local government transformation, democratisation and decentralisation, the new local dispensation requires the local sphere to be

organised and transformed and developmental. This model warrants local government to be the engine of advancing development, expedite service delivery and promote local citizen participation. Thus development, service delivery and citizen participation have become a measure to gauge if the developmental local government is effective and efficient or not. Similarly, Seers (1969) underlines issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality as the criteria in which a country could measure of development is taking place or not. He argues that if poverty, unemployment and inequality have decreased then the country could be said to have development progress. With the exception of few municipalities, socio-economic challenges and participation deficit have put local government on the spotlight. Poor leadership, corruption, poor service delivery, incompetent personnel, skill shortages at managerial and technical level were cited as the main source of discontent and mistrust which led to nation-wide strikes and demonstrations by the poor.

References

- Booyesen, S. 2011. *The African National Congress and the Reconstruction of People Power*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Booyesen, S. 2012. Introduction. In Booyesen, S. (ed.). *Local Elections in South Africa: Parties, People, Politics*. Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA Metro.
- Castel, M. 2000. *End of Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- COGTA. 2014. *Back to Basic: Serving Our Communities Better*, document presented at the Presidential Local government Summit, 18 September 2014.
- eThekweni Municipality. (2012/2013-2016/2017). *Integrated Development Plan: 5 Year Plan, Annual Review 2015-2016*. Durban: eThekweni Municipality.
- Hanka, C.R. & Downs, W. 2010. Decentralisation, governance and the structure of local political institutions: lessons for reform? *Local Government Studies*, 36(6):759-783.
- Harrison, P. 2008. The Origins and Outcomes of South Africa's Integrated Development Plans. In Van Donk, Swilling, M., Pieterse, E. & Parnell, S. (eds.). *Consolidating Developmental Local Government: Lessons from the South African Experience*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Higgs, P. & Smith, J. 2015. *Philosophy of Education Today: An Introduction*. Lansdowne: Juta & Co.
- Joyce, P. 2000. *Strategy in the Public Sector: A Guide to Effective Change Management*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- La Roy, G. 2012. *Local Government Handbook Series: Roles and Responsibilities within Local Government*. Durban: LexisNexis.
- McKnight, J. & Block, P. 2010. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighbourhoods*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

- Mogale, T.M. 2003. Developmental Local government and Decentralised Service Delivery in the Democratic South Africa, in Mhone, G. and Edigheji, O. (eds.). *Governance in new South Africa: The challenges of Globalisation*. Lansdowne: University of Cape Town Press.
- Nkuna, N.W. & Sebola, M.P. 2015. Developmental Local government and the State of Public Administration: Theoretical Discourse in South Africa. In Sebola, M.P. (Ed.). *Local Government Administration Post-Apartheid South Africa: Some Critical Perspectives*. Polokwane: Batalea Publishers.
- Nzimakwe, T.I. 2015. Local government typical organisational structure. In Reddy, P.S. & De Vries, M.S. (eds.). *Quo Vadies? Local Governance and Development in South Africa post 1994*. Rue Haute: Bruylant
- Palmer, I., Moodley, N. & Parnell, S. 2017. *Building a Capable State: Service Delivery in Post- Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Ramphele, M. 2012. *Conservations with my Sons and Daughters*. Parktown: Penguin Books.
- Reddy, P.S. & Maharaj, B. 2008. Democratic decentralisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In Saito, F. (ed.). *Foundations for Local Governance: Decentralisation in Comparative Perspective*. Japan: Physica-Verlag.
- Reddy, P.S. 1999. *Local Government Democratisation and Decentralisation: theoretical Considerations, and Trends and Developments*. In Reddy, P.S. (Ed.). *Local government Democratisation and Decentralisation: A Review of the Southern African Regions*. Kenwyn: Juta & Co Ltd.
- Republic of South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No 108 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. 1998. *White Paper on Local Government (notice 423 of 1998)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa. 2010. *Local government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAs), Municipal Turnaround Strategy Implementation*. Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional affairs. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Schermerhorn, J.R. 2002. *Management*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Senge, P.M. 2006. *Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of Learning Organisation*. Croydon: CPI Group.
- Smith, R.J. 1994. *Strategic management and planning in the public sector*. England: Longman.
- Smith, M.K. 2001. *Peter Senge and the learning organisation*. Available at: <http://infed.org/mobi/peter-senge-and-the-learning-organisation/>. Accessed June 2018.
- Tesoriero, F. 2010. *Community Development: community development-based alternatives in an age of globalisation*. Australia: Pearson.
- Van Rensburg, G. 2007. *The Leadership Challenge in Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.