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## ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY FOR METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA VIA PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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**Abstract.** This study sought to explore the role of Project Management in enhancing service delivery for metropolitan municipalities. This study was conducted in each of the six metropolitan municipalities of South Africa, viz. eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, the City of Cape Town, the City of Ekurhuleni, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, the City of Johannesburg, and the City of Tshwane. A qualitative and exploratory study was adopted using semi-structured interviews amongst a purposive sample of 60 respondents. The findings of this study showed that project managers lack Project Management credentials, which makes the implementation of projects at the Metropolitan Municipality level complex and demanding. The findings further revealed that some projects are encountering difficulties in project planning, quality management, monitoring and evaluation due to a lack of understanding and poor communication channels. These results were a highly intriguing breakthrough in understanding why Metropolitan municipalities fail to provide anticipated services. Thus, the proper execution and administration of the projects could result in a substantial improvement in the services that Metropolitan municipalities provide if municipal managers are equipped with the requisite Project Management theory and skills through training.

**Keywords:** Metropolitan municipality; local government; project managers; service delivery

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### 1. Introduction

The deterioration of municipal infrastructure is one of the myriad challenges that local governments have to overcome. Cities' infrastructure is in dire need of immediate repair, restoration or replacement. Thus, the essential infrastructure is degrading faster than anybody anticipated, and the cities are now unable to keep up with the rising demand for their services (Ntjatsane, 2017). The existing functional strategies in local governments are counterproductive to project efforts and are politically dominant (Parker, 2021). There is a lack of accountability and oversight, which cannot be achieved without separating the legal tasks, responsibilities and powers of

councils, mayors, executive committees and project managers. Today, many politicians and government officials are accused of acting out of greed and self-interest rather than in the spirit of self-sacrifice (Maloba, 2015). As a result, communities have been disgruntled with the local authorities' inadequate service delivery, which has led to regular demonstrations and service delivery protests over the level and quality of service delivery, leadership and lack of effective governance (Shai, 2017).

Local Government Agencies (LGAs) provide various services and goods to their constituents through executing a wide range of public works, health and safety, information technology, and other legally required projects and activities. These initiatives and activities are driven mainly by municipal ordinances, state legislation, federal restrictions and the organizations' commercial strategies. The public, elected officials, regulatory agencies and other government entities are the most critical stakeholders in LGA projects and initiatives (Khan and Morshed, 2012). The capability and capacity for productivity and service delivery are increased via projects. Therefore, the project method is important because it applies all management tenets more effectively than general management. Moreover, leadership is crucial in all sectors because it facilitates efficient policy-making, planning, organizing, leading, coordinating, directing and controlling, improving public service delivery and boosting private-sector output (Smith and Cronje, 2003; Fox and Meyer, 1995; Biljohn and Lues, 2019, Paes et al., 2021; Cetkovic et al., 2022).

Typical LGA project planning procedures and choices are often driven by stakeholder expectations rather than the opportunity to generate a profit. Project success is typically defined as meeting stakeholder requirements. To satisfy a portion of the Project's stakeholders, sponsors often drive the execution of the Project in haste and without extensive preparation. Some LGAs see systematic project planning as an expensive or superfluous phase, often reducing or removing the frequent application of all-encompassing Project Management techniques (Khan and Morshed, 2012). Local governments do not invest in Project Management systems, but instead, depend on consultants to provide project information that is easily understood. It is rare for municipal governments to purchase or employ project scheduling and cost software. National government Project Management is no better, and the provincial and national governments are responsible for the R70-billion infrastructure budget that was not spent by 2020 (Parker, 2021). Against this background, the current study sought to assess the role of Project Management in enhancing service delivery for Metropolitan municipalities.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

### **2.1 Local Government in South Africa**

The concept of "local government" refers to the practice of working with residents and organizations in the community to identify sustainable solutions to address the social, economic and material needs of the people in the community to improve the overall quality of their lives (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The preamble to the Constitution of South Africa has repercussions on South Africa's efforts to restructure its local government. As a result, the purpose of the Constitution is to advance democratic principles such as social justice and basic rights, as well as to improve the quality of life for all members of society as a whole. To accomplish these objectives, the structure of the government is essential. Therefore, local governments in their current form need to be converted into development-oriented governments capable of meeting and satisfying the needs and wishes of the people (Moosa, 2018; Rogerson, 2014).

Municipal Administration is likewise a broad topic of study with several sub-fields. Water, healthcare and housing are just a few municipal services that must be provided to a town (Craythorn 2006). Administrative management encompasses both local government and public administration. Therefore, principles of Public Administration also apply to local government administration, service delivery and management. As a result, it

may be concluded that the national, provincial and local realms of government must co-operate to accomplish public aims effectively. Local governments have several powers, with economic concerns being the most significant. Due to limited resources, the economic activities of local governments do not include direct engagement in the operations of specific businesses. They entail the management of economic processes within a certain region (Sebola, 2015; De Visser, 2009). The formation of a particular local economic policy is a plan for the community's economic growth and the definition of local economic policy. Important facets of the local economy include structural, investment, business and financial policy. In addition, it is vital to recognize that the municipal economy is interdependent on the public and private sectors of the economy. Egorov (2012) maintains that municipal economics is most evident in creating and executing the municipality's development strategy, providing services to the people, and social protection.

## **2.2 Project Management in Public Administration**

Over many decades, contractors hailing from the private sector, whose primary motivation was the pursuit of financial gain, handled the management of projects in the public sector. Consequently, contractors would make compromises and choices that went along with them only to support their desire to earn a profit. However, this is no longer the case because rather than relying on external contractors, many organizations nowadays are gaining expertise in Project Management and managing their projects with internal staff members (Kerzner, 2013).

The management of projects has emerged as an essential component of the programme management of many businesses. As a result, the Project has become an integral component of contemporary organization (Van der Waldt, 2009). However, Project Portfolio Management competence at the Project Management office relies on the relationship between strategic governance at the highest level and operational Project Management capabilities. Senior management must give valuable direction and strategies and make intelligent, important choices whilst ensuring that the business has sufficient Project Management capabilities. Thus, municipalities must have Project Management methodologies for planning, communication, knowledge management and resource management, as well as expertise to support Project Portfolio Management activities. Information created at the project level is the foundation for Project Portfolio Management choices, which is why Project Portfolio Management will only be as effective as the organizational capacity for Project Management (Hill, 2013).

Van der Waldt (2014) adds that related planning tools and frameworks, such as the Provincial Growth and Development Plan; the Integrated Waste Management Plan; the Environmental Management Framework; the Spatial Development Framework; and the Capital Investment Programme, should be used to inform municipal infrastructure development projects. This material should avail opportunities for the community and other interested parties to give feedback on the prioritization of infrastructure projects in the form of the five-year Infrastructure Capital Plan. Therefore, Project Management is essential to implementing IDP and SDBIP, and supports a municipality's responsibility to provide services and encourage community involvement.

## **2.3 The necessity for Project Management in municipalities**

Today, projects are seen as happening every day in all municipal areas. There is enough evidence to show that Project Management effectively improves and delivers services in municipalities. Thus, good Project Management could turn political promises into projects that provide services to help improve society. Municipal projects can be roughly divided into institutional, developmental and infrastructural projects. *Institutional* projects focus on the internal organization of the municipality to strengthen its capacity. *Developmental* projects focus on community development, with strong and firm development plans. *Infrastructural* projects entail things like building roads and getting water to people. Even though the primary goal of municipalities is to help the community, most decisions in municipalities are made through the political process. Most decisions are not just based on logic. Politics, stakeholder dynamics, and ideology are also affected (Van der Waldt, 2010).

In some cases, public projects are left unfinished, or a sub-standard level of service is provided to the general populace. For example, tarred roads are not always finished; even when they are, they are not of a high enough grade to be considered satisfactory. If such projects are not completed, it would negatively impact the citizens' welfare and result in a loss of billions of rands. It has come to light that the severity of these failures varies not only within the country but also from one region to another, contributing to national and global inequality (Bobby Banerjee, 2014).

The purpose of Project Management is to predict or forecast as many potential risks and difficulties as is practical, as well as to plan, organize and control activities so that the Project may be completed as successfully as possible despite the risks and obstacles. Project Management begins before the commitment of any resources and continues until the task is completed. A project aims to provide outcomes that meet the performance and quality requirements of the project customer within the agreed-upon time frame and without exceeding the allocated amount of money and other resources (Knipe and Nell, 2002). The need for Project Management is necessitated by the fact that ordinary tasks cannot create advantages, and the anticipated rewards of completing the Project greatly exceed the risk. Project Management is the method for managing projects and effecting change. Furthermore, Project Management is necessary to transition from a particular or present condition to the intended one. Lock (1996) maintains that it gives the capabilities for successfully and efficiently leading, defining, planning, organizing, concluding and managing a project.

## **2.4 Project Life-cycle**

The project cycle is a mechanism for guiding all initiatives that may be eligible for funding. Like all human endeavours, the project process is prone to change, growth and decline, regardless of how well-defined the ultimate results are (Kotze, 1997). In this study, attention is given to some key aspects of the project life-cycle, viz., project initiation, planning, execution and project closure.

### **2.4.1 Project Initiation**

As the name suggests, the initial phase of the Project Management life-cycle is known as the project initiation phase, and its purpose is to begin a brand new project. During the phase known as "initiation," a business issue or opportunity is recognized, a solution is outlined, a project is established, and a project team is selected to construct and deliver the answer to the end-user. The issue or opportunity is defined in-depth, and a preferable solution to the problem is determined to prepare a business case for its execution (Barron & Barron, 2022). Similarly, another school of thought suggests that the Project's success is primarily influenced by the origination and initiation phase, during which essential choices are made on the Project's goals and execution strategy. The authors concluded that not only does the production of official design and planning documentation significantly contribute to the success of the Project in meeting its timeline and financial objectives, but it also significantly boosts the benefits that customers derive from the end product (Dvir et al., 1999).

In managing increasingly complicated projects and the pressure, public organizations are under to produce practical projects, establishing a Project Management Office within public sector organizations may be pretty beneficial. The next issue is organizing a Project Management office inside an organizational structure. Regardless of where the office is deployed, it may impact Knowledge Management and Project Management processes. Its location would also impact managerial, information and resource sharing gaps across various organizational elements. There is also a concern that the installation of Project Management offices and their work will be hampered by a lack of Project Management maturity (Monteiro, Santos, V. and Varajão, 2016).

### **2.4.2 Project Planning**

Modern Project Management emphasizes the importance of planning. Professional standards, such as the PMI Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, emphasize the need to implement Project Management processes and procedures. Planning is thought to lessen project uncertainty and raise the chance of its success.

Project managers are encouraged to assume that even while preparation does not ensure project success, a lack of planning will likely lead to failure. Even if a project fails, there is still some degree of practice in the rise of computerized planning tools and the emergence of Project Management training (Dvir, Raz and Shenhar, 2003). According to Van der Waldt (2014), projects often come from a municipality's top-level Service Delivery Budget and Implementation Plan (henceforth SDBIP) and its Integrated Development Plan (henceforth, IDP). The creation and implementation of projects that re-align these plans are therefore mandated and the responsibility of each municipal agency. The Municipal Infrastructure Grant (hereinafter, MIG) should be implemented to provide certain infrastructure-related services. Hence, the infrastructure directorate should ensure that this is so.

### **2.4.3 Project Execution**

The project phase, known as execution, is when the bulk of the work gets done. During this phase, tasks such as the implementation of the planning document, as outlined in the work breakdown structure (WBS), as well as the budget and the Gantt chart, are carried out (work schedule). Notably, the team is responsible for monitoring and supervising the Project and providing periodic reports on its progress and status to the governing bodies of the Project. These entities include the steering committee, the project sponsor and the management office. Political oversight of municipal projects is necessary within the context of local government to ensure that the administration is held accountable for the expenditure of the Project's budget and any additional resources that have been allocated (Van der Waldt, 2019). Executing the Project seeks to create favourable conditions for social and economic development; promote investment activity; and draw in new investors, all of which contribute to the municipality's expansion. Good leadership is vital in both the social and economic spheres. Project Management should be focused on resolving any challenges that arise when a project execution approach has to be changed. Thus, Project Management is more adaptable than traditional management, prioritizing stability and sticking to the plan regardless of outside factors (Safonova & Anchihrov, 2015).

### **2.4.4 Project Closure**

Four distinct methods may be used to conclude an ongoing project: extinction, addition, integration and starvation. Extinction as a method of project termination indicates that all of the Project's objectives were successfully met. A project may also be completed in one of two ways: either by adding it to the organization (which is called an addition), or by allocating its resources (equipment, staff and functions) across the company (integration). Cutting off resources or finances is one way to end undertakings that have been unsuccessful or have become outdated (starvation) (Dvir, 2005). However, in practice, the project closing method comprises two procedures: "commissioning project deliverables and documenting all project experiences" (Gardiner, 2005). After all of the Project's tasks have been finished and the customer has accepted the final product, it is required to conduct an assessment to highlight the Project's successes and/or learn from the Project's previous experiences. Yet, these are the more conventional aspects of a project. Projects and the methods for managing projects differ from industry to industry. However, they are still components of a project. The ultimate objective is often to assist the business by providing a product, altering a process or finding a solution to a problem (Jarrin, 2016). According to Havila et al. (2013), there is a requirement for Project ending competence, which can be defined as the capacity and skills of the organization and its employees to bring an end to the Project in a way that causes the least amount of damage possible to both the company's internal and external project stakeholders and the company's relations with other organizations.

## **3. Methodology**

This study was conducted in all six of South Africa's Metropolitan municipalities, viz. the City of Tshwane, Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni Metro, eThekweni Metro, Nelson Mandela Metro, and the City of Cape Town. Ten project managers were selected in each metro. Thus, a purposive sample of 60 project managers from the six Metropolitan municipalities was selected. These project managers were chosen from a pool of managers working on various projects like housing projects; urban renewal projects; projects involving water and sanitation; projects

involving the construction of roads; projects involving the development of recreational facilities; economic development projects; tourism enhancement projects; heritage projects; and youth and women development projects. A qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews was adopted to acquire the necessary information. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The study used inductive coding and theme development to portray specific Project Management methodological issues within the Metropolitan municipalities.

**4. Results**

The analysis from the interviews is presented in the sections that follow and are in two parts. The first part of the analysis presents demographic data of the participants in this study from the six Metropolitan municipalities. The second part focuses on the responses from the participants on the various issues that were canvassed based on the research questions and objectives of the study.

**4.1 Demographic profile of respondents**

The findings of this study show that 63% of the project managers were male, and 37% were female, as shown in Table 1. In terms of the race of the participants, the findings show that most of the project managers were Africans, accounting for 65%, followed by whites (30%) and Asians (5%). The findings further show that most of the participants have been working as project managers for a period of between 5 years to 10 years (45%), followed by 10 years to 15 years (30%); below 5 years (20%) and between 15 years to 20 years (5%), as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of the participants

Description	Frequency
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	63%
Female	37%
<b>Total</b>	100%
<b>Race</b>	
Africans	65%
Whites	30%
Asians	5%
<b>Total</b>	100
<b>Years of experience</b>	
0 – 5 years	20%
5 – 10 years	45%
10 – 15 years	30%
15 – 20 years	5%
<b>Total</b>	100%

Source: Authors’ construct

**4.2 Role of Project Management in municipalities**

The crux of this study was the role of project management methodology in enhancing service delivery. The participants in this study felt that Project Management is instrumental in delivering services in the municipalities. As stated by one of the participants, “Metro municipalities often deliver services through a project approach. This emanates from the directive of the national government. Project Management is the most recent tool at metro municipalities’ disposal to deliver services, especially infrastructure such as houses, roads, recreational facilities, water supply, and electricity supply and may include more services. Project management approach to service

*delivery enables metro municipalities to combine all management principles, skills, and techniques simultaneously to maximize output"* (Participant 3).

#### **4.3 Nature of projects in municipalities**

The participants in the six municipalities were asked to identify the projects they have been involved in as managers. The study findings showed that all the managers in the six municipalities were engaged in relatively similar projects, viz. *"township renewal projects; heritage sites development; tourism and recreational facilities; urban renewal projects; housing development projects; economic development projects; and infrastructural projects development projects and building one-stop-shop projects"* (Participants 1 to 60).

#### **4.4 Challenges in Project Management in municipalities**

Municipalities in South Africa are confronted with several challenges that affect the smooth operation of various projects. The analysis from the interviews presents a bleak picture regarding the current state of project management in the six metropolitan municipalities. Thus, the participants that were interviewed from the six municipalities encounter relatively similar challenges which affect the success of the projects, such as *"lack of understanding; poor communication channels; joining the project in the middle; poor planning; lack of support from the executive"* (participants 1 to 60).

#### **4.5 Project Phases**

Project management sometimes requires that projects are completed or operationalized in phases for various reasons. The participants in this study argued that the municipalities divide their tasks into phases for multiple reasons. One participant remarked, *"A project can take more than one financial year, so it helps work in project phases. For instance, the first project phase can be done in financial year one, phase two can be conducted in the next financial year two, and the last phase may be conducted in financial year three. This can be determined by the project scope or resources required for the project"* (Participant 40).

#### **4.6 Project Scope Management**

As part of the planning process, project scope management assists in identifying and recording a list of all of the Project's objectives, tasks, deliverables, deadlines, and budgets. The analysis from the interviews conducted with participants shows that the project scope is not cast in stone and is Project specific. Thus, it is subject to change in the course of the Project, as intimated by one of the participants: *"Each Project differs in scope. The nature of the Project determines the project scope. Resources required in a project are determined by what will be achieved as the outcome/output. The interesting aspect in this area is that the scope can change as the project implementation occurs. This could be due to new priorities of the Council, challenges in implementation, redirecting funds to unexpected disaster or any contingency"* (Participant 18).

#### **4.7 Project Quality Management**

In any project, there is an obligation placed on team members to continuously monitor the quality of all operations and take corrective action to reach the expected target level of quality. In the context of this study, views were solicited from the participants regarding the quality management of projects in the municipalities and the consensus is that most municipalities have a quality assurance unit, which assumes the responsibility of monitoring the quality aspects of each Project against the set parameters, which are part of the project terms of reference. This is echoed by one of the participants who said that *"All project specifications are fully described in project terms of reference. When the Project is completed, the handover will be done, and the beneficiaries will review the Project. If there is any dissatisfaction, they will inform the municipality. After that, it is the municipality's responsibility to start the process afresh. A quality assurance unit ensures project quality"* (Participant 9).

#### **4.8 Monitoring and Evaluation of projects**

Many municipal projects fail to be finished for a variety of reasons. One of them is a misunderstanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluation. Sadly, many project managers do not appreciate the importance and use of these two. However, the participants in this study enjoyed the need for monitoring and evaluation as something that must be done during the entire project life span to check progress against the set performance indicators. As stated by one of the participants, *"Each Project is monitored according to articulated project specifics based on project outcomes, outputs and impact. The Project is monitored each step of the way. The monitoring process is checking the implementation of project steps against performance indicators. This process ensures the alignment of project proceedings to set standards. The monitoring process improves project quality and helps identify risks timorously and devise a strategy to manage them. As a result, resources are managed effectively and efficiently"* (Participant 46).

#### **4.9 Project Management methodology's contribution to effective service delivery**

The need to have strategies and processes that project members can use cannot be overemphasized. Not only do these methodologies have varied ways in which they are structurally arranged, but they also call for the creation of diverse kinds of deliverables and processes to ensure effective service delivery at the end of the day. The findings show that the participants believe a project management methodology is critical for effective service delivery. One of the participants remarked, *"Project management balances all management approaches and principles at the same time. Project management is more specific. For the task to be delivered, it requires specific resources at a specified time frame. As a result, this makes it different from the routine operations of the municipality. In a project approach of service delivery, the project team knows the objectives and due date to accomplish the project"* (Participant 17).

#### **4.10 Project Stakeholders**

Every Project has people and organizations directly engaged in the Project's activities or whose interests may be favourably or adversely impacted due to the Project's effective execution or its conclusion. The findings show that projects in municipalities have various stakeholders. As stated by one of the participants, *"the project scope determines the role players and stakeholders for the Project. Some projects cut across different units within the municipalities, local government departments and national and private sectors such as commercial banks, Donors Agencies and Non- Governmental organizations, Community Based Organizations, Councillors and Inkosi (Traditional Leaders)"* (Participant 31). In addition, every Project has what is known as internal and external stakeholders. Concerning internal stakeholders, one of the participants commented on their role and effectiveness as follows: *"Internal stakeholders play a critical role in the success of the project. This is the team that makes the project succeed or fail. The success of the project is more dependent on the project team"*.

On the other hand, external stakeholders are equally critical for the success of projects, as noted from the comments of one participant who remarked, *"The role of external stakeholders is to be overseer for what is about to be executed and what has been executed. They help to keep the internal stakeholders on their toes in all project phases. The most complicated external stakeholders are auditors and the media. These two are difficult in various ways. The media is interested in reporting on matters that attract the public and civil society. Auditors demand compliance with financial policies and procedures. Failure to comply results in the involvement of other role players in financial control. This can result in punitive measures against the responsible persons"* (Participant 57).



## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to ascertain the role of Project Management in enhancing service delivery for Metropolitan municipalities. This study's findings showed that Project Management's part in cities is indispensable as it is key to service delivery and infrastructural developments such as roads and housing. Barker and Cole (2013:11) assert that the need for Project Management can be deduced from the many advantages the discipline offers and the potential part it may play in expanding the local economy. The study further found that projects are completed in phases due to financial support and funding. Deene (2007) posit that projects are one-of-a-kind endeavours. Therefore, there is always some element of unpredictability around them. To increase management control and allow for ties to the organization's continuing operations, organizations that conduct projects will often break each Project down into various phases.

The findings also show that project managers in municipalities have monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure project success. Activities such as monitoring and evaluation may be beneficial, provided they are carried out appropriately and the findings are correctly understood. Monitoring and evaluation in local government make policy formation and sound financial management more accessible and enables municipal officials to align their actions better with the goals set by the national government (Govender, 2013). Similarly, Kariuki and Reddy (2017) believe that there must be a commitment made toward the acceptance of city-wide monitoring and evaluation as a helpful Project Management instrument. Thus, municipalities' monitoring and evaluation must go beyond compliance and toward institutionalization in an incremental approach. If progress is not made towards institutionalization, municipalities' monitoring and evaluation procedures will devolve into nothing more than an exercise in ticking off boxes. In the long run, towns' capacity to be responsible may be undermined.

The findings of this study further showed that most respondents believe that a Project Management methodology is critical and contributes to effective service delivery. Mokgethi (2021) emphasizes the importance of a Project Management methodology. It is frequently required to use just specific components of a generic approach due to the significant differences between projects in their application, context, role-players, deliverables and resource restrictions. It may be necessary, for example, for towns to devise a one-of-a-kind methodology for developing their municipal infrastructure, which would be based on a combination of the best practices taken from several other approaches.

## 6. Conclusions

This study sought to explore the role of Project Management in enhancing service delivery for Metropolitan municipalities. Based on this study's findings, municipal project managers must conform to the project scope and the Project Management body of knowledge. The training and capacity building that takes place in metro municipalities needs to be ramped up, specifically in the following areas: project scope; project knowledge management; project quality management; project monitoring; project handover and project evaluation; and finally, project closure. The level of project monitoring must also be ramped up to improve the Project's success.

Metropolitan municipalities need to develop a synergy and harmony between the principles of Batho Pele, the management of projects and the delivery of services. This must be done by section ten (10) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which outlines democratic norms and principles. Since project managers are working for the public, it is essential that they comprehend the relevance of the regulations to the delivery of services and that they adhere to these values. Future research should focus on the challenges in managing projects in Metropolitan municipalities using a qualitative approach to understand the underlying problems affecting service delivery.

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