

Leadership Learning: A Mechanism to Enhance Performance Among Municipal Leaders in the Bushbuckridge Municipality

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Abstract

This research examined leadership learning and how it influences performance of municipal managers in the Bushbuckridge municipality. Drawing from the relevant literature and guided by Mattone's (2012), Morse and Buss's (2008) conceptual framework for leadership learning, we adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design. Data was collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews from seven municipal managers coded R 1 to R 7. The interviews were analysed qualitatively, and data were organised and arranged into themes that described participants' views regarding leadership learning and performance enhancement. The participants confirmed that through leadership learning they experienced enhanced communication and better decision-making skills. They also indicated that they emerged out of the leadership learning sessions motivated and more emotionally aware of the need to adapt to external and internal changes that influence today's workplace. The authors recommend that municipalities must invest sufficient resources in leadership learning development programmes. These programmes must be tailored to their specific needs and incorporate a combination of formal leadership training, change management skills, continuous and experiential learning, mentoring, and coaching. The authors emphasize the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programmes and prioritising leadership learning as a continuous individual and organisational development process. The findings of this study have important implications for municipal organisations seeking to enhance performance of their leaders and improve their overall effectiveness and efficiency.

Key words: Leadership learning, performance enhancement, municipal leaders, Bushbuckridge Municipality, change management, organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

Introduction and Background

Leadership learning as a mechanism to enhance the performance of municipal senior managers in the Bushbuckridge local municipality, Mpumalanga province of South Africa is studied as a case in this research. Leadership learning remains a strategic mechanism to facilitate growth and development for government officials whose responsibilities are to lead government institutions towards achieving their community mandates which include adequate service delivery. Since the

establishment of municipalities in South Africa, concerns continue to grow over the incapacity of the municipal senior managers to successfully facilitate the delivery of basic services to the immediate communities they serve. Some communities have since resorted to protests to express their dissatisfaction with the levels of services they receive from their municipalities. Some of the protests have turned violent where houses belonging to councillors and mayors were targeted. To date, these protests continue to define the context of local government in South Africa. Reports of 'cadre deployment' by the governing African National Congress (ANC) into senior management positions in municipalities have worsened the situation, where some opposition political parties have since hauled the governing party (ANC) to courts to force it to be transparent about its deployment policy. During the proceedings of the Commission on State Capture chaired by the then Deputy Chief Justice, and now the Chief Justice Zondo, it was reported that most of the problems that led to the collapse of government administration at all levels of the state were caused by the employment of unqualified individuals into senior government positions and strategic positions (cadre deployment) by the governing ANC.

Leadership learning can be conceptualised as a process where an individual or a group of leaders participate in leadership learning experiences aimed at developing and enhancing their performance in their formal roles (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000; Komives et al., 2005, 2006; McCauley et al., 2010; Mkhabela, 2015). Probert and Turnbull (2011) argue that the process of leadership learning should also be viewed as encouraging those who participate in leadership responsibilities to critically review the taken for granted assumptions about what leadership means and its influence on their organisations. Probert and Turnbull (2011) further suggest that in a case where leadership learning initiative is aimed at reviewing the leadership concept, it also influences how organisational employees perceive, act and value both their organisation and leaders. Thus, over, and above improving the performance of individual leaders and their organisation, leadership learning needs to influence how leadership is conceptualised by those who participate in the leadership learning interventions (Day & Harrison, 2007; Komives & Dugan, 2014; Komives et al., 2005, 2006; Probert & Turnbull James, 2011).

Municipalities, the world over, are at the coalface of communities where efforts are made to implement creative ways of delivering adequate social services in a sustainable and affordable

manner. In South Africa, the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2022) states that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa created local government as the focus for service delivery. Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) guarantees all citizens basic services which include potable water, sewage collection and disposal, refuse removal among, electricity and gas supply, municipal health services, municipal roads and storm water drainage, street lighting, municipal parks and recreation, municipal public transport among others. These are the services that communities in South Africa continue to yearn for 29 years into the democratic dispensation. The Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2022) adds that government at local level must be more responsive to citizen needs and more effective in providing acceptable services. Local Government Handbook: South Africa (2021) states that local municipalities are the closest to communities and carry the constitutional obligation to provide adequate social services for local communities they serve. The mandate of local government as stated above, may suggest that the challenges of service delivery in South Africa are widespread across the country with 8 metropolitan municipalities, 44 district municipalities and 205 local municipalities (Local Government Handbook: South Africa, 2021). Given the mandate of municipalities as stated above, the capacity of the municipal senior managers to facilitate the realisation of these municipal mandates, as leaders of municipal administration, features prominently because they are delegated by law to take decisions that are always to the best interest of the communities they serve. Masiya, Davids and Mangayi (2021) assert that since the dawn of the democratic dispensation of 1994, South Africa has experienced increased numbers of community protests about inadequate provision of basic municipal services. Protests in South Africa are because of inadequate provision of basic services at municipal level (Morudu & Halsall, 2017). Masiya, Davids and Mangayi (2021) add that most recent studies point to the inability of municipal senior officials to facilitate the provision of the municipal basic services as expected. Studies have also shown that for municipalities in South Africa to achieve on their constitutional obligations, more investment must go to building the capacity of municipal senior managers to facilitate the delivery of services expected by communities (Mkhabela, 2015). The ability to create supportive institutional environment, manage conflicts, manage the resources of their municipalities effectively and efficiently, and utilise the available institutional skills capacity

optimally are among the critical competencies required for municipal senior managers to achieve their constitutional mandate (Masiya, Davids & Mangayi, 2021).

Research indicates that leadership learning at *personal level* focuses on developing an individual leader within the role and conceptualises the intervention within the broader organisation context (Brungardt, 1997; Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000). Furthermore, leadership learning should therefore build on and retain leadership capabilities that increase the productivity and the performance of the organisation (Mabey, 2013), because leadership learning also embraces collectivism in the development processes (Day, 2000; Day & Harrison, 2007; Drath, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Accordingly, leadership learning considers the other key players sharing leadership responsibilities within same organisational context (Day & Dragoni, 2015; De Brun et al., 2019; Raelin, 2018; Yammarino et al., 2012). Consequently, leadership learning happens through a process that embraces lived experiences within a practical context which in the case of this study is a Bushbuckridge local municipality and its senior managers. In this context, leaders can learn through formal programmes which may increase their knowledge about important competencies and skills required to lead organisations such as municipalities. However, we acknowledge the warning by Mostert (2012) who suggests that there is no clear evidence to confirm that indeed structured interventions do lead to enhanced performance.

The Bushbuckridge municipality like all municipalities in South Africa is entrusted with the responsibility to provide basic social services to local communities in a sustainable manner. The services include among others; potable water, electricity, access routes, refuse removal, safe environment, parks and library service, cemeteries services, recreational services, public transport services. Consequently, municipal senior managers are at a decision-making level where they are responsible for facilitating the provision of the services above to their communities.

However, most research findings have pointed to lack of effective performance by municipal officials as responsible for inadequate basic service delivery to communities (Asha & Makalela, 2020; Mutyambiri et al., 2020; Sibanda et al., 2020; The Auditor General of South Africa, 2018; Mkhabela, 2015). Moodley (2019) revealed that an unsupportive institutional environment is among the reasons why some municipal officials are left without requisite competencies and skills for their job, leading to inadequate capacity to deliver municipal services to their communities.

Although Moodley's assertion points to several factors that explain the reasons for lack of performance by municipal senior managers which include lack of organisational support, we argue in this investigation encouraging continuous learning for municipal senior officials could also constitute an important institutional support initiative without which the performance of municipal senior managers may not be fully enhanced. Masiya, Davids and Mangai (2021) found that the gap between the skills that municipal senior managers have and the skills they need, is responsible for their unsatisfactory ability to facilitate the delivery of basic services to communities. The purpose of the current study is to explore what leadership learning is and how it could be applied to enhance performance among municipal leaders in the Bushbuckridge municipality. Indeed, the study will answer the question: What is leadership learning and how can the Bushbuckridge municipality enhance its performance to deliver satisfactory services to its communities? It was guided by the following objectives: a). to establish how leadership learning could enhance performance among municipal leaders in the Bushbuckridge municipality b) to critically examine relevant research literature on leadership learning to establish the current study's contribution to knowledge and evolving scholarship.

Literature Review

Learning, coaching, individual and organisational development, are integrally connected with all public and private organisations. Through leadership learning, individuals are empowered to develop their full potential and continue with workplace learning in instances where education and training are supported and encouraged. Leadership learning is intended to increase the *efficiency and effectiveness* of municipal senior officials with the view to influence the capacity to facilitate the delivery of basic services to communities globally and in South Africa, within the Bushbuckridge municipality (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Carroll, 2019; Mabey, 2013; Mkhabela, 2015). Leadership can play a key role in improving *organisational effectiveness and efficiency* by setting strategic direction and goals, influencing employees' behaviors and motivations, mobilizing resources and support for institutional development, and keeping employees focused on work performance through monitoring, evaluation, support, guidance, and continuous feedback cycles (International Bureau of Education, 2023:1).

Leadership learning in this perspective consists of focus on *individual leaders whose developmental needs* are addressed through an intervention aimed at equipping them with the necessary knowledge of the job, skills, competences, and attitudes, that may contribute to improving *individual and organisational performance* (Carroll, 2019; Mabey, 2013). Based on the assertion by Carroll and Mabey above, the researchers argue that if municipalities must improve in their ability to deliver adequate basic services to communities, senior managers need to be encouraged to participate in continuous learning to equip themselves with requisite competences and skills (Mkhabela, 2015). In this investigation, leadership learning is defined as the commitment by municipal senior managers to participate in the opportunities for continuous learning that are provided for in the working environment. These continuous learning opportunities, if provided, may enhance the capacity of municipal senior managers to facilitate the delivery of adequate basic services to communities (Van Velsor et al., 2010). There is need to note that when deciding on programmes for development of senior managers, intervention activities must be accurately linked to their developmental needs (Arnulf et al., 2016; Collins, 2013; Larson et al., 2020; Yukl, 2013). The question that now arises is: How does leadership learning enhance senior managers' performance? This question is explored in the sections that ensue. Effective learning is thus, the outcome of effective leadership that appropriates relevant policies and programmes to develop workplace leaders who embrace learning at the core of their leadership role - what is referred to as learning leadership (International Bureau of Education, 2023:1).

Research by the International Bureau of Education (2023:1) suggests that literature on leadership has traditionally focused on management roles such as planning, budgeting, scheduling, maintenance of facilities, evaluation, and promotions. However, current research has shown that a particular type of leadership that makes a difference in the workplace is instructional leadership or learning leadership, where leaders are intensely involved in work activities and instructional issues that have direct bearing on organisational efficiency and effectiveness, change, transformation, and agility required for survival in a highly fierce, uncertain, competitive global environment. The researchers argue that personnel deployed in management positions in the municipality seem to lack requisite skills and competencies for effective performance; and yet there is ample research suggesting a link between skills and competencies acquisition, good local governance and

satisfactory service delivery (Cutu, 2021; Shannon & O’Leary, 2021; Shannon, O’Riorddan & Boyle, 2019; Zwane, 2020, Hadunka, 2020; Khota, 2020; Moatshe, 2018; Abraham, 2017). Considering that service delivery is a continuous, cyclic process for developing and delivering user-focused services (World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2014:7), the need for continuous learning among municipal employees and in this context, managers cannot be questioned. Thus, the primary goal of most government organisations such as municipalities is to fulfil their mission so that they can deliver quality services to the communities they serve. This cannot be realized unless management is equipped with the relevant skills and competencies to carry out their managerial roles and responsibilities effectively and efficiently. It is against this backdrop that Woods (2012) argues that successful managers make a proactive effort to continuously develop and learn four essential skills, namely leadership, managerial, performance and communication skills to improve the long-term aspects of their careers, and the quality of their performance. Thus, learning leaders are those who prioritize workplace achievements learning at the top of their priority, promote the culture of continuous learning, use evidence or data on employee achievement to make decisions and set priorities. These leaders are consistently focused on the core technology of education, which is learning, employee support, assessment, feedback, and continuous improvement (International Bureau of Education, 2023:1).

Leadership Learning and Senior Managers’ Performance

To establish how leadership learning influences managers’ performance, we draw from Mattone (2012:26), Morse and Buss (2008:4–5) conceptual framework for leadership learning. Mattone (2012:26) contends that ‘organisations that excel operationally excel initially with their human capital practices’. In the context of this study, the work of senior managers is seen as being as critical as it can facilitate the delivery of acceptable services to members of the public. The above-mentioned views expressed by Mattone (2012:26) are consistent with those of Morse and Buss (2008:4–5) mentioned above. These authors emphasise the importance of a clear vision that should set a direction for the organisation. They also point to the significance of creating alignment between the competencies and skills that senior managers possess, and the capacity needs of the organisation. Furthermore, they argue that the continued existence of any organisation is dependent on whether the organisation can achieve on common commitments made with

stakeholders and communities. Thus, Figure 1 below provides a conceptual view on how leadership learning and development can be used as mechanism to position the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality towards enhanced performance in providing social services.

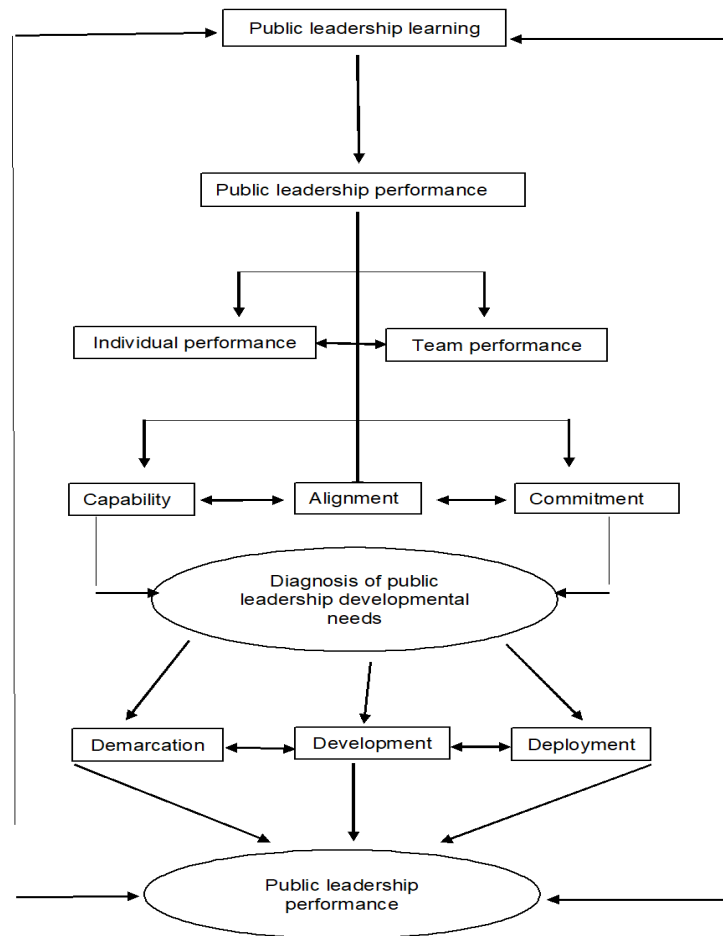


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for leadership learning (Adapted from Mattone, (2012:26) and Morse and Buss (2008:4–5))

The conceptual framework as given in Figure 1 suggests that for public organisations, such as municipalities, to meet communities' service delivery demands they need to encourage and support public leadership learning. Organisations that encourage and support public leadership learning, place emphasis on creating an environment for *continuous development* which may influence desirable performance by those in positions of leadership within the municipality. Such leaders who continue to learn may contribute as individuals and teams towards the overall effective and efficient performance of their organisation. Furthermore, the conceptual framework shows that continuous learning by public leaders can equip them with relevant competencies and skills that are coherently aligned to the core business of their organisation. This alignment is an important indicator of whether public leaders have the necessary capabilities to carry out their *roles and responsibilities* towards meeting the commitments made with the communities they need to serve. In instances where the capabilities of public leaders are not aligned to commitments with customer needs, their own developmental needs must be diagnosed for the purposes of further development. During the diagnosis process, their required competencies and skills are clearly identified and demarcated to ensure that developmental interventions that are initiated address the relevant competencies and skills required to execute their tasks. In the demarcation process, it should be determined whether public leaders' leadership developmental needs are demarcated according to individual needs and departmental responsibilities of individual leaders or whether their developmental needs should be viewed as an endeavour towards 'developing connections between individuals, collectives, and between the organisation, key constituents and stakeholders within the immediate environment' (Morse & Buss, 2008:5). When the demarcation process is complete, the development of public leaders ensures where an intervention is implemented to address the identified developmental needs. Finally, after the development process, deployment of the presumed new competencies and skills ensues where leaders try out new ways of leadership and of interacting with the environment within their organisation. The anticipated newly developed competencies and skills may – when implemented – enhance the performance of public leaders and that of their public organisation.

Enhancing Performance Among Municipal Leaders Through Leadership Learning

Leadership competencies are traits and abilities that signal that a professional is good at guiding groups. These skills require development and practice. Some folks have more of a natural knack for leadership than others, but experience and mindfulness help leaders perfect the art. Managers do not automatically obtain leadership skills upon receiving a promotion, and many workers show leadership potential without having a title. These skills are like leadership qualities, and they must be learned. Many of these traits overlap with executive skills, HR skills and team management skills. Professionals can improve these skills by reading books on leadership and performing leadership activities which include: (i) leadership communication skills; (ii) leadership soft skills; (iii) qualities of good leaders; (iv) traits of good leaders (Teambuilding.com: 2023:1).

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study situated within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm (Yin, 2003) was adopted. Since the focus of the research entails leadership learning and enhanced performance, constructivist interpretivist approach was found appropriate. The choice of the case study design was influenced by the social world of the selected participants regarding their knowledge and experiences about leadership learning and enhanced performance within the context of the Bushbuckridge municipality. For Willis (2007), qualitative methods provide substantial reports that assist the interpretivist to comprehend contexts fully. Willis (2007) further asserts that interpretivist tend to favour qualitative methods such as case studies and ethnography. As explained by Willis, qualitative approaches often give rich reports that are necessary for interpretivists to fully understand specific contexts.

Data was collected from seven purposively selected senior managers (out of a population of 20) through individual, in-depth, individual semi-structured interviews to establish what they thought about leadership learning regarding enhancing their performance and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2007:245). The participants had served a minimum period of three years in their current positions. in the researchers' schema these informants had the required knowledge and experience to serve the purpose of the current study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:62-63). Participants were selected from the study population because they met the same criteria for data adequacy, which

pertains to the appropriateness of the sample composition and size (Lincoln & Guba 1985:236-236). The researchers believed that the selected sample would be able to provide rich information to meet the objectives of the current study. Furthermore, the selection of the sample was based on the researchers' own knowledge of the population and its elements (Babbie & Mouton, 2004:166).

Using the interview protocol, the researchers asked questions and prompts to get as much rich information from the participants as was possible (Lincoln & Guba 1985:236-236). The researchers started with a general guiding question (a "grand tour" question): "In your view what is your understanding of leadership learning? They were allowed to talk freely about any of the questions posed to them (Polit & Hungler 1991:253-254). The collected data was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Following the dictates of qualitative research, data was thematically analysed to reveal insights, patterns and themes that enriched the understanding of leadership learning and enhanced performance (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; The Scientific World, 2021:1). The themes that emerged constituted the findings of the study.

Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of leadership learning in enhancing the performance of municipal managers in the Bushbuckridge municipality. The study aimed to gain insight into how managers perceive the value of leadership learning in their professional development and how it influences their performance. The study was based on the premise that effective leadership is critical to the success of any organisation and that leadership learning is essential for managers to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to lead effectively. Seven municipal managers, coded as R1 to R7, participated in the study. During the interviews, participants were required to indicate how they experienced the training and how the training impacted on their performance. The respondents' views about leadership learning and how it impacted their performance manifested in five themes, namely: enhanced communication skills, decision making skills, motivation, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. These themes and subthemes together with operational definitions developed during the study are captured in Table 2 as the findings of this study. These findings will be analysed and interpreted in relation to existing

literature on leadership learning and its impact on managerial performance. The implications of the findings for practice and future research will also be discussed.

Table 2: Themes, sub themes and operational definitions

Theme	Sub themes	Operational definitions
Improved communication	• Regular talking to teams • Active listening to staff • Empathizing with staff members • Feedback giving to staff • Understand my staff's non-verbal communication • Ability to articulate issues • Active engagement with team members • Make follow-ups on issues • Build good relationships with workers	Amicable two-way exchange of words and ideas between management and staff.
Better decision making	• Give reasons for all decisions made • Make decisions based on facts • Take decisions based on available data • Ability to weigh the pros and cons of different options • Generation of innovative solutions to problems. • Ability to make tough decisions	Choosing the right and practical course of action from alternatives to achieve the specified result.
Increased Motivation	• increased job satisfaction • see challenges as opportunities • Positive attitude towards work • Accountability for own actions • Development of a clear vision • Working as a team	Initiating, guiding, and maintaining goal-oriented behaviours among staff members
Enhanced Emotional Intelligence	• Ability to stay calm and composed even in stressful situations. • Ability to make decisions without emotions • Understanding team members emotions and perspectives • Better relationships with team members	Ability to recognize and manage own emotions and those of staff members, enhance interpersonal relationships
Better adaptability	• Ability to adjust management style. • Resilient and able to handle setbacks and failures • Ability to come up with new ideas and solutions even in challenging situations • Ability to skillfully solve problems as they rise. • Seeking to improve their skills through continuous learning	Ability to respond effectively to changes within the municipality

The themes (findings), as captured in Table 2, are now explained, discussed, analysed and interpreted in relation to existing literature on leadership learning and its impact on managerial performance.

Improved Communication

For it plays a big role in the achievement of organisational goals, effective communication is essential for managers and teams (Teambuilding.com: 2023:1). All managers interviewed in this study confirmed that exposure to staff development programmes that were designed to sharpen their communication skills had a worthwhile impact on them. The participants indicated that they were not only able to articulate their ideas clearly to their teams but were also able to do it persuasively.

Asked, for example, what his main take away from the communication workshops was, R1 indicated thus, *“We learn a lot of things but for me these workshops opened regular meets with my team members. I met them regularly. I put my ideas to them in a persuasive language and they now understand me.”* In response to the same question, R 7 went further to indicate the training assisted him to become not only an active listener to members of his team, but also to listen to their various challenges, empathize and always give them feedback whenever it was necessary. *This finding confirms Saputra’s (2021), Nani’s and Safitri’s (2021), Syakur’s, Susilo’s, Wike’s, and Ahmadi’s (2020) that if managers have to enhance production in their organisations, they require to learn and apply communication skills as they are essential for organizational vision articulation, motivation and commitment of workers.*

For R 6, exposure to leadership learning programmes did not only endow him with negotiation skills, but also the ability to build good relationships with team members and to actively engage them wherever the opportunity arose. Nani and Safitri (2021) indicate in this regard that it is only when good relationships are nurtured in an organization that trust between the manager and the workers is established. This eventually fosters a positive working environment, an environment that enhances productivity (Mattone, 2012; Morse& Buss, 2008). Indeed, in a follow up question

that solicited to establish how the learning programmes had impacted on the team members, and how this had impacted their performance, the following participants responded thus:

R 2: Members of my team felt that they were being heard whenever I listened to them and actioned some of their ideas”.

R 3: The workers I was responsible for indicated I was a new manager; they said I understood and valued them.

R 4: Colleagues in my group felt I was not harsh to them anymore; and that I often consulted them before acting.

Overall, it can be argued that learning empowered the municipal managers with the ability to clarify expectations to their teams, provide feedback, foster collaboration, build trust, and reduce conflicts. According to Mattone (2012), Morse and Buss (2008), this empowerment trickles down to both individuals and teams and is characterized by enhanced performance.

Better Decision making

Available literature (Abrams, Shaker, Oppenheimer, Davis, Bukstein & Greenhawt, 2020; Abubakar, Elrehail, Alatailat, & Elçi, 2019; Calabrese, Costa, Levialdi, & Menichini, 2019) indicates that a strong relationship exists between a leaders’ decision-making skills and their team members’ productivity. Indeed, interviewed managers in this study, confirmed that their exposure to leadership learning programmes placed them in a position to make well-informed decisions, which decisions provided clear direction, instructions, and expectations to the team members, enabling them to focus on their work and be more productive. The managers further confirmed that decisions they made after the leadership learning programmes were based on facts, available data, and after weighing the pros and cons of the different options.

Indicating how the leadership learning programmes assisted him as a manager, R 5 reflected on the way some of his friends and himself managed their units before the learning programmes, “*it was confusion at first. There was a lot of inefficiencies, indecision and it was all chaos.*” Answering a probing question that required him to substantiate his response, he explained how there was a lot of favouritism and nepotism, “*say in allocating water trucks to supply the*

community with water in times of water scarcity. This business was given to those who were close to management”.

The respondent went further to indicate that in several cases the work done was not perfect and the municipality lost a lot of resources. What this implies is that prior to leadership development programmes, decision making was devoid of direct stakeholder involvement and not based on *principles of good decision making*. Abrams, *et al* (2020); Abubakar *et al* (2019) and Calabrese *et al* (2019), indicate in this regard those decisions not anchored on good decision-making practices.

R5 further revealed that the programmes did not only equip him with the ability to make tough decisions, but he was also now, together with the team, capable of considering the pros and cons of any decision he took, “in the process am able to come up with innovative solutions to any of the problems.” For an innovative person is also a critical person, it can be argued in this context that leadership learning programmes enabled the development of the managers’ critical thinking skills; enabling them further to make decision that were in the best interests of the municipality. Such decisions are bound to stimulate employees’ job satisfaction, productivity, and overall organisational performance (Mattone, 2012; Morse & Buss, 2008).

Increased Motivation

As far as the theme of increased motivation is concerned, participants indicated there was a way leadership learning programmes changed the way they perceived their roles. Many of the managers revealed that they developed a positive attitude towards their work, were more satisfied with their jobs, and looked at challenges as opportunities to prove their worth. R6 for instance indicated that, “*these sessions (learning sessions) to a big extent led to my positive attitude towards my team and my fellow managers*”. The respondent then indicated further that he was often enthusiastic and often willing to put in extra effort to achieve his goals. This, R 6 continued, “was contagious to the team members as most of them copied my example” and were willing too, to take on additional responsibilities. This finding confirms Mahmoud’s, Fuxman’s, Mohr’s, Reisel’s & Grigoriou’s (2021) contention that motivation enables employees to function at a high level of efficiency.

Explaining further how leadership learning impacted on them, most of the participants agreed, they became accountable for own actions, developed a clear vision of what the municipality wanted to be and implemented teamwork as a norm. Regarding accountability for instance, R5, in a response that epitomised the views of the other participants, indicated that, “I now personally take ownership of what happens because of my choices and actions. I don't blame my employees anymore. I do not make excuses for what has gone wrong.”

The issue of accountability by managers after the learning programmes is further captured in the following excerpts by different respondents.

R1: “I’m now clear about my roles and responsibilities. I do not blame any of subordinates if anything goes wrong.”

R2: “When I make a work-related mistake, I say sorry to the team.”

R3: “I do not blame anybody if the mistake is mine; and I will now always do what I can to make amends when things go wrong.”

This finding confirms the views that accountability on the part of leadership motives the leaders to improve their own performance and that of their team (Abdullah, Yusuf & Bayan, 2020). Thus, when managers are held accountable for achieving specific goals and targets, chances are that they will strive to achieve those goals. Furthermore, in their research on accountability among restaurant workers Abdullah et al (2020) confirmed that managers’ accountability is always reciprocated by the teams. It is this reciprocity that eventually promotes a culture of accountability throughout the organization encouraging all employees to work effectively for enhanced performance (Mattone, 2012; Morse & Buss, 2008).

Talking about working as a team because of leadership learning, the respondents indicated that teamwork lessened their workload and enhanced their performance. It was now possible for them to delegate some of their responsibilities to capable team members. This left them with time to focus on strategic planning, decision making and other managerial duties, resulting in a more efficient and effective use of their time and resources. Epitomising the views of other respondents regarding the issue of teamwork, R4 indicated that, “*teamwork enabled me to distribute even managerial duties among team members who had the capability to do such duties. This was a big relief for me as I had some time for my personal life and interests and other duties.*” Echoing R

4's sentiments, R6 went further to indicate that the use of the team approach to management enabled better problem solving, presented growth opportunities to team members and eased the risks of employee burn out. All these resulted in efficiency and increased productivity.

Enhanced Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is vital in as far as building a well-planned and well-organized work environment and administration (Patra, 2004; El Khatib, Almtteiri, and Al Qasemi, 2021). Patra (2004) indicates that leaders' emotional intelligence is also responsible for the crafting of a useful vision and achievement of organisational development in any organization. Not surprisingly, in their research, El Khatib, Almtteiri, and Al Qasemi (2021) found that emotionally intelligent managers were more bound to succeed than less intelligent ones. Respondents in this study confirmed that through leadership training, they acquired the ability to recognize and manage their own emotions as well as those of the team members. Respondents indicated that during programmes when they were taught emotional intelligence (EI) skills, they acquired the ability to stay calm and composed even in stressful situations and to make decisions without emotions.

All the interviewed participants validated the fact that the leadership learning programmes assisted them as individuals to become aware of their own thoughts and behaviours and how such behaviours would impact other people like their team members. The managers were also assisted to understand the emotions, needs and perspectives of other people due to differences in the way different people think. Through these leadership learning programmes, it was also possible for the participants to understand and take cognizance of team members' emotions and perspectives, learn to communicate effectively, resolve conflict amicably and build positive relationships within the municipality. Programmes concerning stress management, coaching, and mentoring were also conducted for the managers; with the sum result of a work environment where employees were passionate about their work, leading to enhanced productivity.

The following excerpts embodies the views of all the interviewed managers in this study.

R 1: The programme helped me to discover myself, I mean am an emotional person and sometimes these emotions spill over when am angry. My teams don't want it.

R 2: I Liked the idea of not judging other colleagues immediately. So, for me I learnt to be patient with the people I manage.

R 3: My major take away was the different ways to conflict management. I liked the win-win approach. I think it works for me.

R 4: The training made a lot of sense to me; especially the need for calmness even in stressful conditions.

R 5: I liked the slot on how to communicate with team leaders effectively and how to resolve conflicts in cases where they occurred.

R 6: The lesson on self-reflection and self-awareness talked to me directly and I have since then adjusted.

R 7 Understanding emotions of people we work with and not making decisions when emotional was an indelible lesson for me.

From the contents of the preceding paragraphs, we hold the view that a manager's emotional intelligence can have a big impact on their team's productivity. This find confirms that managers endowed with high emotional intelligence communicate effectively with their teams, resolve conflicts amicably and build positive relationships; and in the process they enhance productivity. This observation is also in line with the tenets of Mattone's (2012:26), Morse & Buss' (2008:4–5) Conceptual framework for leadership learning that public leadership learning does not only enhance leaders' performance but also filters downwards to individual and team performance to do the same.

Better Adaptability

Defined as an array of competencies, behaviours, and attitudes that enable individuals to be better suited to specific jobs (Tolentino et al., 2013), adaptability has also been conceptualised as a psychological resource that enables individuals to handle challenges, successfully adapt to situations, effectively handle transitions, tasks, and any other challenges encountered in the work environment. For adaptability can be developed during career-related events or changes (Ocampo et al., 2020) and training, respondents indicated that the leadership learning sessions, equipped them with behaviours, competencies and attitudes that empowered them with the ability to respond

effectively to the constant changes and challenges that the municipality experienced. Asked how the leadership learning sessions impacted them and whether, in their view, the learning translated into enhanced productivity, most of the managers validated the view that the sessions transformed them into adaptable individuals. This is captured in the excerpts below.

R 1: “Another thing I learnt was that, as a manager I must always be flexible when dealing with members of the teams.”

R 2: “We learnt that we don’t have to be rigid as managers. At times we must change or adjust our management styles.”

R 6: “I learnt that there are times when I have to be tough as a manager. I must be able to handle all challenges and failures.”

R 4: “I must be able to come up with new ideas and solutions even in challenging circumstances.”

R 7: “I got the ability to aptly solve problems as they rise.”

Overall, the managers validated the fact that the learning sessions equipped them with skills, behaviours and attitudes that better equipped them to handle change and uncertainty within the municipality. The implication the respondents were empowered to respond quickly to change, identify and address problems faster, better manage their teams, foster motivation, and help their teams learn and grow. All these factors can contribute to increased productivity in the workplace.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that leadership development programmes have a positive impact on the performance of municipal leaders. The study suggests that leadership learning programmes can enhance the knowledge, skills, and abilities of municipal leaders, resulting in improved decision-making, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. It is therefore recommended that municipalities invest in leadership learning programmes to enhance the performance of their leaders. We suggest that leadership programmes should be tailored to specific needs of specific municipalities and should incorporate a combination of classroom training, experiential learning, and coaching. The research also emphasizes the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of leadership development programmes to ensure that they meet the needs of the municipalities and their leaders. We further recommend that

municipalities should prioritize leadership learning as a continuous process rather than a one-time event. Leadership learning should be viewed as an ongoing process that involves both formal and informal learning opportunities. It is our view that this approach will help leaders stay current with the latest trends and developments in management and leadership, enabling them to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges.

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