LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

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Abstract

This study unveils the extent to which leadership styles impact on service delivery performance using Greater Giyani Municipality as a case study. It is argued that ethical leadership in South African municipalities is criticized for lacking, while effective leadership is crucial for enhancing basic service delivery. The problem statement highlights the criticism faced by municipalities for inadequate service provision due to non-democratic leadership styles. The aim is to explore different leadership styles and their impact on service delivery performance using a qualitative research methodology and Servant Leadership Theory. The study evaluates democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, transformational, transactional, bureaucratic, and servant leadership styles. Democratic leadership, characterized by shared decision-making, is shown to enhance employee morale and community engagement, positively influencing service delivery. Autocratic leadership, in contrast, is self-serving and suppresses creativity, potentially leading to service delivery protests. Laissez-faire leadership, while promoting autonomy, may result in confusion and inefficiencies. Transformational leadership fosters innovation but may lack support for individual learning curves. Transactional leadership focuses on rewards and performance, suitable for routine tasks but may limit innovation. Bureaucratic leadership provides stability but may hinder flexibility and responsiveness. Servant leadership prioritizes team needs, positively impacting service delivery but requires a balance between support and accountability. Challenges affecting leadership in South African municipalities include corruption, political interference, socio-economic inequalities, and a lack of leadership ethics. The study recommends a transformational leadership approach to enhance collaboration, trust, and meaningful participation for improved service delivery in municipalities.

Keywords: *Leadership Styles, Leadership, Service delivery, transformational leadership, Democratic Leadership and Servant leadership*

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership, according to Newstrom & Bittel (2009:123), is the special skill of getting other people to follow and do willingly the things that the leader would want them to do. This interpretation suggests that leaders must possess a variety of competencies, personality characteristics, and attitudes to compel others to perform specific tasks. For instance, leadership in the municipalities provide information, knowledge, and methods to realise the municipal objectives as stated by Drucker (2008). Furthermore, leadership, as defined by Northouse (2009), is the mechanism through which individuals control a collective working towards a common objective, underscoring its significance in organizational success. This extends to various spheres of governance, where those in positions of power, whether through elections, appointments, or other means, exert leadership influence (Gaines, 2012). In the context of municipal governance, political leaders, including ward councillors, play a crucial role, in seeking election through political affiliations (Nelson, 2004). The impact of leadership on service delivery is pivotal, as highlighted by Gaines (2012), where poor leadership contributes to governmental failures in providing essential services. Conversely, wise leadership is fundamental for stability and success (Gaines, 2012). Municipal leadership, therefore, aims to emphasise the importance of communities and safeguard

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

their economic, environmental, and social well-being (Brookers, 2007). Moreover, the success and weakness of municipal performance are often determined by the leadership style. Corporate Financial Institute (2023) indicated that leadership style refers to a leader's unique approach and behaviours to guide and influence a group or organization (municipalities) toward achieving goals. Different leadership styles can be characterized by how leaders make decisions, communicate, motivate, and manage their teams. Scholars have identified various leadership styles, each with its characteristics and implications for organizational dynamics. For instance, Northouse (2009) categorizes leadership styles into transformational, transactional, charismatic, and servant leadership. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers by appealing to their higher-order needs and fostering a shared vision (Northouse, 2009). Transactional leaders, on the other hand, focus on exchanges between leaders and followers, emphasizing rewards and punishments based on performance (Northouse, 2009). Charismatic leaders exhibit a magnetic personality that attracts and influences followers through their charm and vision (Northouse, 2009). Servant leaders prioritize the needs of others, aiming to serve and empower their followers to reach their full potential (Northouse, 2009).

Based on the above, it is further important to introduce the concept of service delivery, which is one of the variables of this study. The concept of service delivery globally pertains to the distribution of basic needs and services, including water, sanitation, housing, land, electricity, and infrastructure vital for the daily well-being of communities (Dassah, 2012; Mamokhere & Mabunda, 2023). In South Africa, however, rural societies face risks due to inadequacies in providing essential services (Booysen, 2012). The historical context, particularly the adoption of apartheid laws, further exacerbated inequities in service access (Chikulo, 2003; Mabunda & Chauke, 2023). Van der Berg (2003) concurs, illustrating how apartheid racialized access to services, favouring white' minorities and leaving black-dominated areas with limited access. The leadership during apartheid significantly favoured white communities in service delivery, perpetuating disparities (Chikulo, 2003 Mabunda & Chauke, 2023). Notably, actions related to service delivery were aligned with white interests and failed to uplift the overall standard of living for the entire population (Chikulo, 2003). Thus, the relationship between leadership and service delivery performance is evident, with effective leadership being instrumental in ensuring equitable access and improving the well-being of communities. Therefore, this study intends to assess the extent to which leadership style impacts service delivery performance using Greater Giyani Municipality as a case study.

Problem Statement

In South Africa, leadership is acknowledged as pivotal for expediting the delivery of basic services and elevating the quality of life for underprivileged groups (Madumo, 2012; Mabunda & Chauke, 2023). The deficiency in effective leadership significantly hampers the improvement of basic service delivery within municipalities. Municipal leadership, designed to enhance citizens' livelihoods, plays a critical role in achieving this objective. Basic service provision at the local municipality level encompasses public housing, infrastructure, water and sanitation systems, public transport, land, and electricity (Masuku & Jili, 2019). Regrettably, South African local municipalities, including the Greater Giyani Municipality in Limpopo Province, often face criticism for inadequate service provision. Municipal authorities and government officials are frequently accused of making poor financial decisions, resulting in wasteful and unsustainable spending practices (Glasser & Wright, 2020). The author(s) of this study observed that there is a discrepancy between promises made to residents of Greater Giyani Municipality regarding improved service provision in recent years and the persistent lack of tangible outcomes. The communities within Greater Giyani Municipality continue to experience insufficient access to essential services. This discrepancy points to a potential failure in leadership, exacerbated by challenges that negatively impact the distribution of basic services at the local government level. Community perceptions highlight concerns such as corruption, leadership style, lack of effective

training, managerial skills, and issues related to poor governance as contributing factors to the observed difficulties. The cumulative effect of these challenges raises questions about the effectiveness of leadership in fulfilling its role. It underscores the urgency of addressing these issues for the betterment of service delivery.

Moreover, Kgobe, Bayat & Karriem (2023) indicate that a leadership style that lacks promotion of democracy and public participation in decision-making and planning can detrimentally impact service delivery performance in South African municipalities. In such a scenario, decision-making becomes centralized, hindering the incorporation of diverse perspectives and local insights. This lack of inclusivity can lead to policies and plans that do not resonate with the community's actual needs. Additionally, a non-democratic leadership style may foster corruption and inefficiency, as there's limited transparency and accountability. Without public input, there's a risk of misallocation of resources and neglect of crucial services. Ultimately, the absence of democratic principles weakens the connection between leadership and the community, impeding the effective delivery of essential services (Kgobe, & Chauke, 2021; Kgobe, Bayat & Karriem, 2023). Based on the above problem statement, this study intends to explore different leadership styles, and their influence on service delivery performance using one of the South African municipalities, namely Greater Giyani Municipality.

Epistemological Framework

To understand the nature, scope and limits of this study, the author(s) adopted a Servant Leadership Theory, developed by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s, which emphasizes leaders' primary role as servants to their followers, prioritizing their needs, growth, and well-being. This leadership approach aims to foster a sense of community, empower individuals, and promote a collaborative and ethical work environment. In the context of service delivery, Servant Leadership contributes by cultivating a culture of empathy, listening, and support within organizations, ultimately enhancing the quality of service provided. Leaders practising this theory focus on serving others first, believing that by prioritizing the needs of their team, they can achieve higher levels of performance and overall organizational success (Eva et al., 2019). The servant leadership theory, as expanded by Setiawan et al. (2020) also emphasises personal integrity and service to others, particularly communities, wherein leaders prioritize the needs of their citizens over personal interests. This theory is most applicable to public institutions like municipalities (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014). The theory demands self-sacrifice, ethical considerations, and a commitment to the betterment of stakeholders (Northouse, 2009). Greenleaf (1998) characterizes it as a multidimensional theory that begins with a desire to serve and culminates in achieving a higher purpose for the benefit of individuals, organizations, and society. Effective servant leadership involves attentive listening and community engagement to understand and fulfil the needs of citizens (Spears & Lawrence, 2005).

Leaders must possess conceptual skills, foresight, and a vision for the future to enhance service delivery (Cheema & Popovski, 2010). The ability to bring people together and foster a sense of community is crucial, contributing to expectations management and relationship stability (Spears & Lawrence, 2005). For instance, in resource-strapped municipalities like Greater Giyani Municipality, collaborative leadership becomes essential for delivering public goods as stated by Gaines (2012). in line with servant leadership, this shared leadership and accountability culture promotes communal goals and collective effort (Gaines, 2012). The proximity of leaders to their constituents enhances relationships and the quality of leadership (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014). Servant leadership aligns closely with South Africa's public service model and the principles of Batho Pele (In translation referred to as People First), making it vital for ethical policymaking and administration (Hunter et al., 2013). It inspires trust, minimizes self-focus, and redefines public service as genuine service through attitude and action, addressing the challenging environment of public goods delivery (Hunter et al., 2013). Therefore, the servant leadership theory is relevant in this study as it intends to overcome the multicity of challenges faced by the public sector like

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

municipalities. Indeed, the municipalities require ethical leaders who prioritize community needs instead of being corrupt. The theory is further deemed relevant because it maintains a collaborative effort between political, administrative and the citizens to overcome service delivery challenges.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section purposively explores the relevant literature on leadership styles, service delivery performance as well and the challenges faced by leaders with different characteristics, skills and styles.

Exploring Common Leadership Styles and their impact on Service Delivery Performance

Corporate Financial Institute (2023) indicated that leadership style refers to the unique approach and behaviours a leader employs to guide and influence a group or organization (municipalities) toward achieving goals. Different leadership styles can be characterized by how leaders make decisions, communicate, motivate, and manage their teams. Scholars have identified various leadership styles, each with its own set of characteristics and implications for organizational dynamics. For instance, Northouse (2009) categorizes leadership styles into transformational, transactional, charismatic, and servant leadership, among others. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers by appealing to their higher-order needs and fostering a shared vision. Human interactions, such as the capacity to influence people, are important aspects of leadership. Leaders can use personal characteristics and styles to influence others. Figure 1 below presents some of the common leadership styles.

Figure 1: Common Leadership Styles

Source: Corporate Financial Institute (2022)

Democratic Leadership Style

Choi (2007) indicates that a democratic leader shares decision-making with other members and, in most cases, is correlated with higher morale. Increased follower efficiency, happiness, participation, and engagement are also linked to this type of leadership. Ward councillors who are more likely to use this leadership style have a better chance of re-election because community members feel in control of their growth. In contrast to an autocratic leader, a democratic leader consults with the people. Through this type of leadership, the political and administrative leadership in Greater Giyani Municipality can meet the needs of the communities. Leadership in local municipalities should consult with the community before implementing any service. Because of a lack of consultation, municipalities may supply services that the community does not require.

The municipality, for example, can offer road infrastructure to a village that desperately needs water and sanitation (Kgobe, Bayat & Karriem, 2023). Equally, Corporate Financial Institute (2022) implies that democratic leadership is a style where leaders involve team members in the decision-making process, encouraging open communication and collective input. Regarding service delivery performance, the positive impact lies in enhanced employee morale, creativity, and commitment due to a sense of ownership in decision-making. However, the potential negative impact may include delays in decision implementation due to the consultative nature. In public participation, democratic leadership fosters inclusivity and engages the community in decision-making and planning processes, promoting transparency and trust. Nevertheless, challenges may arise if consensus is difficult to reach or if the process becomes time-consuming. Overall, a democratic leadership style positively influences service delivery through employee engagement and public participation, but potential drawbacks include decision delays and challenges in achieving consensus (Kolzow, 2014; Mamokhere, 2022). The Greater Giyani Municipality would benefit from this style of leadership.

Autocratic Leadership Style

The autocratic leadership style is self-serving and liberal in nature due to a lack of participation from others (Schoel, Bluemke, Mueller & Stahlberg, 2011). Mabunda (2022) describes autocratic leadership as a style of leadership that suppresses other people's creativity, including their excellent and bright ideas, to assist leadership in improving services. Cuba and North Korea are two countries that function under autocratic leadership. Some scholars, such as Hoffman and Whitehead (2016:06), did not believe that the late Cuban President's autocratic leadership would be able to support the country's economy. It was, however, sustainable, and Cuba served as an example to many countries on the African continent and beyond. The autocratic leader demands and assumes obedience from his or her followers without involving them in consultative processes.

Based on the literature presented above, it is evident that this leadership style will never be successful in local government. Political and administrative leaders who use this leadership style do not always succeed in uniting and collaborating with their subordinates. Employees are demotivated to perform effective service delivery in municipalities when these types of leaders are in charge. This challenge does not exclude any leaders in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality. For instance, the Corporate Financial Institute (2022) indicates that autocratic leadership is the direct opposite of democratic leadership. In this case, the leader makes all decisions on behalf of the team without taking any input or suggestions from them. After the decision is made, everyone is expected to support the decision made by the leader. There is often some level of fear of the leader by the team. Mamokhere (2022) further expands that this is the case of leadership style where communities often resort to service delivery protests because they are provided services requested.

Laissez-faire Leadership Style

Kendra (2022) indicates that laissez-faire leadership is characterized by a hands-off approach, where leaders grant significant autonomy to subordinates, providing minimal guidance or direction. In terms of service delivery performance, the impact can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, this leadership style allows for creativity and innovation among team members, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. However, the lack of clear direction and oversight may lead to confusion, lack of coordination, and inefficiencies, negatively affecting service delivery. Public participation in decision-making and planning can also be influenced by laissez-faire leadership, with positive aspects including increased involvement and diverse perspectives.

However, the absence of structured guidance may result in a lack of engagement or unclear communication channels, hindering effective public participation. In summary, while laissez-faire

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

leadership can promote autonomy and creativity, its potential drawbacks include decreased performance due to insufficient guidance and potential challenges in fostering robust public participation (Robert & Vandenberghe, 2022). Similarly, Makhdoom & Daas (2022) opine that due to lack of or limited leadership involvement and the allowance of the employees to lead themselves in many crucial and critical decisions that must be made, this type of leadership style is generally viewed as a negative leadership style (Makhdoom & Daas, 2022). Leaders do little, which has a detrimental effect on the outcome or end effects of various critical activities. The consequence of doing nothing ultimately hurts leadership because when failures or bad things happen, people will blame the leaders who should be accountable, not the subordinates employees, for failing to provide successful leadership, regardless of the leadership style used or applied. (Makhdoom & Daas, 2022). Robert & Vandenberghe, (2022) conclude that because the laissez-faire style depends so heavily on the group's abilities, it is not very effective in situations where team members lack the knowledge or experience, they need to complete tasks and make decisions. This can lead to poor job performance (poor service delivery) and less job satisfaction. Based on the information presented above, this type of leadership cannot work in the municipalities. Political and administrative leaders or employees together with the communities should work together to deliver effective service. However, there should be a clear separation of power and duties among the role-players.

Transformational Leadership

Steinmann, Klug & Maier, (2018) indicate that transformational leadership is a leadership style characterized by leaders who inspire and motivate their followers to achieve exceptional performance and personal growth. Positively, transformational leadership can significantly enhance service delivery performance by fostering innovation, employee engagement, and a shared commitment to organizational goals. Leaders encourage creativity and empower their teams, resulting in improved service quality. However, the potential downside lies in the risk of overreliance on the leader's vision, creating a dependency that might be detrimental if the leader leaves.

Regarding public participation, transformational leaders often cultivate an inclusive decision-making environment, encouraging active involvement and input from the public. This positive influence on public participation can lead to more informed and widely accepted decisions, enhancing the democratic and collaborative aspects of governance. Nonetheless, the intense focus on the leader's charisma may inadvertently marginalize alternative voices or viewpoints, potentially hindering a fully inclusive decision-making process. In the context of municipalities, Chitiga (2018) indicates that transformational leadership is crucial in improving service delivery performance. Municipalities, as local government entities, have the primary objective of providing essential services to their communities efficiently. Transformational leaders within municipalities inspire and motivate their teams to surpass traditional expectations, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By encouraging employees to exceed perceived limitations, these leaders drive transformative changes in service delivery, addressing community needs more effectively. This leadership style aligns with the municipality's function of adapting to evolving community requirements and innovatively enhancing service quality.

However, there's a potential challenge in ensuring that individual learning curves are adequately supported, as the emphasis on pushing boundaries may inadvertently neglect the need for tailored coaching and guidance. Despite this, the overall impact of transformational leadership within municipalities lies in heightened productivity, increased employee engagement, and the establishment of a shared vision for delivering improved services to the community. The above arguments are also supported by the transformation leadership theory developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. The transformation leadership theory focuses on the basis that transformation is what is needed in municipalities to ensure better service delivery in communities, as advanced by the current researcher. The key point of the transformational leadership theory is

that when leaders succeed in pushing their organisation in a new direction and producing drastically improved outcomes and results, such leaders are considered transformative (Kahn & Naidoo, 2011). Furthermore, Chitiga (2018:61) states that "transformational leadership is increasingly becoming essential to the sustainability of healthy public and private organisations, where followers and leaders mutually value and trust each other, develop intellectually enhancing workspaces, practise collegiality, and collaboratively and meaningfully participate in the development and implementation of their organisations' visions, for the betterment of their organisations and their host communities. For nations to become more equitable and socially just, some traditional ways of doing business and pillars of the status quo may have to be interrogated and changed. Transformational leadership could be one of the assets that organisations employ to achieve needed change". This type of leadership style is needed in South African Municipalities such as Greater Giyani Municipality because it brings organisational reforms that can overcome service delivery backlogs and other governance challenges.

Transactional Leadership

Corporate Financial Institute (2022) indicates transactional leadership, characterized by a focus on transactions between leaders and followers based on rewards and performance for meeting specific goals, has implications for service delivery performance. Transactional leaders in service-oriented settings often concentrate on task completion and employee compliance, using organizational rewards and targets as motivational tools. While transactional leadership can provide a structured approach to achieving goals and maintaining order, its impact on service delivery performance may have limitations. The emphasis on tangible rewards and targets may not necessarily inspire innovation or a commitment to excellence in service provision. The approach may work well in situations where tasks are routine and clearly defined, but it might fall short in fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

On the one hand, Madumo (2012) opines that transactional leadership is defined as a leadership style, characterised by the lack of charisma and the possession of skill and ability required to handle more ordinary, operational transactions of daily life, i.e., evaluating subordinates' performance about the organisation. On the other hand, Naidoo (2010:117) alludes to "the notion that transformational leadership is characterised by a leader who uses his or her charisma, vision and inspiration to achieve a specific organisational goal. The combination of both transformational and transactional leadership styles could contribute significantly to improving the quality-of-service delivery in the local sphere of government, in a developmental state, such as South Africa.

This calls for a comprehensive management approach with charismatic leadership, where subordinates will be inspired to attain the organisational goals". Kahn et al. (2011) indicate that in the context of public service or municipal governance, transactional leadership might lead to compliance with established regulations and standards but may not necessarily drive initiatives for community engagement or service innovation. In contrast to transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to reach higher performance levels, transactional leadership may not be as effective in promoting a sense of shared vision and purpose (Kahn et al., 2011). In the illustrative example of sales, transactional leadership is commonly observed, where salespersons receive commissions for meeting sales targets. While this approach can drive short-term results, studies suggest that transformational leadership may be more impactful in the long run. Transformational leaders in sales can create a more engaged and committed sales force, leading to improved performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. Trust and role clarity, influenced by transformational leadership behaviour, mediate in enhancing sales performance and employee satisfaction. Therefore, while transactional leadership may be suitable in specific contexts, a transformational leadership style appears to offer greater potential for sustained and enhanced service delivery performance.

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

Bureaucratic Leadership

A bureaucratic leadership Style is characterized by strict adherence to rules, procedures, and hierarchical structures (Kuye & Akinwale, 2021). On the other hand, Corporate Financial Institute (2022) "bureaucratic leadership is a "go by the book" type of leadership. Processes and regulations are followed according to policy with no room for flexibility. Rules are set on how work should be done, and bureaucratic leaders ensure that team members follow these procedures meticulously". Positively, it can provide stability, clarity, and efficiency in service delivery by ensuring standardized processes and accountability. However, it may negatively impact innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness due to its rigid nature.

In terms of service delivery performance, the positive aspects lie in consistency and order, while the negatives may include slow adaptation to change and potential alienation of employees. In public participation, Bureaucratic Leadership can hinder open decision-making and planning, as the top-down structure may limit input from the broader community. Public engagement might be less participatory and more directive, potentially resulting in decisions that don't fully consider diverse perspectives or local needs (Kuye & Akinwale, 2021). A famous example of bureaucratic leadership is the Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill. For instance, the authors of this study believe that bureaucratic leadership can turn into micromanagement as leaders constantly oversee their employees' performance. This can lead to discomfort and a lack of motivation. However, this can lead to less corruption while at the same time may cause delays in the provision of basic services to constituencies.

Servant Leadership

A Servant Leadership Style, according to Van Dierendonck (2011) is characterized by leaders prioritizing the needs and development of their team members, emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and ethical decision-making. Positively, this approach enhances service delivery performance by fostering a supportive work environment, motivating employees, and promoting a shared commitment to organizational goals. It encourages innovation and problem-solving, ultimately improving the quality of services provided. However, it can have negative impacts if leaders prioritize team satisfaction at the expense of necessary directives or fail to strike a balance between support and accountability. In terms of public participation, Servant Leadership positively influences it by creating a culture that values input from all stakeholders, promoting open communication, and building trust. Citizens are more likely to engage in decision-making and planning processes when they perceive leaders as genuinely committed to serving their interests (Kiker, Callahan & Kiker, 2019; Kgobe et al., 2023). The next section focuses on challenges faced by leadership in South African municipalities.

Challenges Affecting Leadership in the South African Municipalities.

Leadership in South African municipalities faces several challenges that impact effective governance and service delivery. One significant challenge is the prevalence of corruption and mismanagement, which undermines the trust and confidence of citizens. Instances of corrupt practices, such as bribery and embezzlement, erode public resources and hinder the efficient allocation of funds for essential services. This challenge not only tarnishes the reputation of municipalities but also impedes sustainable development and exacerbates socio-economic disparities (Mamokhere, 2022a; Thusi & Selep, 2023; Mamokhere & Mabunda, 2023). Additionally, political interference in administrative functions poses a substantial barrier. The politicization of decision-making processes often results in appointments based on political affiliations rather than merit, leading to leadership positions being filled by individuals without the necessary qualifications, skills and expertise. This compromises the ability of leaders to make informed, impartial decisions and negatively impacts the overall efficiency and effectiveness of municipal governance (Masuku & Jili, 2019). Similar to the above discussion, Madumo (2012) indicated that "the leadership challenges that are identified are inter alia political interference, lack

of finance, lack of skilled human resources, lack of proper planning, and lack of commitment. For a municipality to deliver the required services effectively and efficiently, municipal leaders must know which skills officials should possess to enable them to realise the institution's vision. More often, political interference would exist where a councillor encroaches on the role and responsibility of a municipal manager".

Mbandlwa, Dorasamy & Fagbadebo (2020) indicated another challenge affecting leadership in South African municipalities is the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities and service delivery disparities. Many municipalities grapple with resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and high levels of poverty. Leaders must navigate these challenges to ensure equitable access to essential services like water, sanitation, and housing. The historical legacy of apartheid contributes to spatial planning challenges, where previously disadvantaged communities continue to face barriers to accessing quality services. Leaders must address these deep-rooted issues while managing the expectations of citizens who demand improved living conditions. The intricate interplay of social, economic, and historical factors makes effective leadership in South African municipalities a complex task, requiring innovative solutions and a commitment to addressing systemic challenges for sustainable development and inclusive service delivery (Mamokhere, 2022a).

Furthermore, Mbandlwa et al. (2020) indicate that a lack of leadership ethics in the South African government has been identified as the biggest challenge facing government leadership. For example, Gillano (2016) reported that "fraud, totalling R19 million in the KwaZulu-Natal Social Development department's Empangeni office shows that unethical leaders abuse public sector institutions. The head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development decided to place 35 employees on forced leave of 60 days pending the investigation outcome. At the time of the report, 1,376 grants were administered for foster care children who did not exist. The internal investigations discovered that there were also foster care grants for children whose parents were alive and well and there were grants for people who did not exist. However, all court instructions for the grants were attained from one court, the Ngwelezane Magistrate's Court. This report indicates that the South African government does not have ethical leaders". Mbandlwa et al. (2020) indicated that municipalities such as Abaqulusi Municipality in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province and Greater Giyani Municipality in Limpopo Province were once faced with charges for mismanagement of public funds and poor ethical leadership which had a bad impact on the provision of public services.

Overview of the Legislative Framework Governing the Provision of Service Delivery and Ethical Leadership in South African Municipalities

The legislative framework governing the provision of service delivery and ethical leadership in South African municipalities is primarily outlined in the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) and the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act (Act 56 of 2003). The Municipal Systems Act establishes the foundational principles for municipal administration, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and public participation. Relevant sections include Section 4, which outlines the democratic and accountable government principles, and Section 5, which focuses on the role of municipalities in providing services. Furthermore, the Municipal Finance Management Act plays a crucial role in ensuring responsible financial governance within municipalities, with Section 38 emphasizing financial management and accountability.

Additionally, the Municipal Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998) is pertinent, particularly Section 26, which addresses the establishment of municipal councils and the promotion of ethical conduct. These legislative frameworks collectively guide South African municipalities in their service delivery responsibilities and underscore the importance of ethical leadership, creating a legal foundation for transparent, accountable, and ethically sound governance. These laws establish the foundation for municipalities' organization, functioning, and service delivery responsibilities.

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

Additionally, ethical leadership is underscored by the Public Administration Management Act (Act 11 of 2014), which sets standards for the conduct of public officials. This provision is also supported by section 195 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which states that a high standard of professional ethics should be maintained and promoted in the public sector like municipalities. The framework aims to ensure accountable, transparent, and responsive governance, emphasizing citizen participation and the delivery of services that meet the needs of the diverse South African population. Compliance with these legislative provisions is essential for fostering ethical leadership, promoting good governance, and ultimately improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery within South African municipalities.

3. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

In this study, a qualitative research methodology was adopted to achieve the aim and objective of the phenomena under investigation. Denzin & Lincoln (2003) indicate that a qualitative method investigates things in their natural environments and tries to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of their meanings. Qualitative research is an approach concerned with human sciences that depends on deductive models of explanation consisting of evidence in the form of words rather than figures. This study required in-depth knowledge of leadership, which compelled the researcher to collect information from municipal officials and community members with distinct features (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The use of the qualitative method was critical to collect data as a form of taking views of the municipal officials concerning the application of leadership styles on service delivery in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality. Because the research involves analysing human behaviour in a unique situation, the qualitative research method was most appropriate.

Due to the chosen subject area being under-researched in South Africa, an exploratory design was adopted. Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole (2013), exploratory designs are predominantly qualitative and frequently employ small and non-probability samples. This design assisted the authors in investigating the impact of different leadership styles on service delivery performance using Greater Giyani Municipality as a case study. In other words, the study has been empirically conducted at the municipal offices of Greater Giyani Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Greater Giyani Municipality is one of the local municipalities falling within the Mopani District Municipality. Greater Giyani Local Municipality comprised 91 villages, however, the authors only focused on the participants working at the offices of the municipality. The target population in this study was municipal officials or employees, and ten (10) municipal officials were used as a total sample frame. These municipal officials were sampled using the purposive sampling technique, which is understood as a process "where the researcher relies on his expert judgment to select units that are representative of the population," according to Burger & Silima (2006:663).

Data collection in this study involved both secondary and primary data. In collecting secondary data, which is existing literature, the researcher has reviewed the literature using the study themes to search for and identify new themes. Different databases, such as Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, and university repositories were utilised. On the other hand, primary data was collected utilising a semi-structured interview guide. Ten (10) face-to-face interviews were scheduled and conducted with municipal officials to share their views and feelings on the impact of different leadership styles on service delivery performance. The thematic content analysis was used to analyse the collected data. According to O'Leary (2014:300), "thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It minimally organizes and describes the data set in detail. The benefit of utilizing thematic content analysis in this study is its ability and potential to further interpret and highlight emerging themes and aspects of service delivery protests". Lastly, to ensure the reliability and validity of the study, the authors were not biased toward the topic under investigation, and the interview questions were tested against the study objective to ensure that the language used in the questions was appropriate and specific to the topic under investigation. The next section presents the empirical findings and discussion.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To explore and realise the objective of this study, the themes were created from the data analysis process. The findings are presented based on the study objective and the questions asked. The major themes identified are (i) leadership styles impact on service delivery and (ii) types of leadership style. The findings are presented below in a thematic format.

Impact of leadership style on service delivery Performance in South African Municipality

The author(s) of this study asked the municipal officials (used interchangeably with municipal employees) of the Greater Giyani Municipality if certain leadership styles have an impact on service delivery performance. In response to the asked, the responses from the municipal officials were likely varying, reflecting different perspectives within the organization. However, the majority of the municipal employees of the Greater Giyani Municipality agreed that leadership style has a significant impact on service delivery performance. A leadership style that embraces principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, such as a servant leadership approach, is more likely to foster a positive organizational culture. This, in turn, can enhance teamwork, motivation, and innovation among employees, ultimately improving service delivery performance. Conversely, a leadership style that lacks these qualities, or is characterized by autocracy or corruption, may hinder effective governance, erode trust, and contribute to inefficiencies in service delivery.

In this regard, it can be affirmed that certain leadership styles have a positive impact and critical role in shaping the success of service delivery in the municipality. These findings are also supported by the study conducted by Mulenga, Nzala & Mutale (2018) who state that "leadership styles affect employees' commitment, motivation, satisfaction, extra effort and efficiency. This in turn has a bearing on performance and directly or indirectly influences patient care and its quality. Health system managers are significant in using leadership styles that promote good practice. It can be safely concluded that hospital performance and the quality of healthcare delivery services are a product of several factors. The analysis of leadership practices in this study shows two of the factors influencing hospital performance. The first factor is the effectiveness of leaders within the hospital and secondly the dedication, motivation, commitment, and performance of employees that will improve health care services".

Types of leadership style, which one yields more desired outcomes

The author(s) of this study further asked the municipal officials of the Greater Giyani Municipality which types of leadership styles often have positive and negative impacts on service delivery performance. In response to this question, the municipal officials stated that; Most of the respondents stated that a leadership style that tends to have a more positive impact is one rooted in servant leadership. When leaders prioritize the needs of employees, foster open communication, and promote a culture of collaboration and accountability, it positively influences the work environment. This, in turn, enhances team morale, encourages innovation, and improves the overall efficiency of service delivery. Servant leadership can also contribute to building trust between leaders and employees, as well as with the community, which is crucial for effective governance. On the other hand, other respondents went further and stated that leadership styles that turn towards autocracy, lack of transparency, or instances of corruption tend to have a more negative impact on service delivery. These styles can breed a culture of fear, and demotivation, and erode the trust of both employees and the community. Decision-making becomes centralized and may not consider the diverse needs of the municipality, leading to inefficiencies and potential misallocation of resources. Additionally, corruption can divert funds away from essential services, exacerbating existing challenges in areas like infrastructure development, healthcare, and education.

Based on the above findings, different leadership styles have varied outcomes. However, one was expecting that the majority of respondents would state transformational leadership style as

LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Mamokhere John, Mabunda Nhlamulo, Khensanni Richard Chauke

the most preferred but it is clear that employees are resistant to changes and fear losing their jobs due to reforms and restructuring. Chitiga (2018:61) states that "transformational leadership is increasingly becoming essential to the sustainability of healthy public and private organisations, where followers and leaders mutually value and trust each other, develop intellectually enhancing workspaces, practise collegiality, and collaboratively and meaningfully participate in the development and implementation of their organisations' visions, for the betterment of their organisations and their host communities. For nations to become more equitable and socially just, some of the traditional ways of doing business and pillars of the status quo may have to be interrogated and changed. Transformational leadership could be one of the assets that organisations employ to achieve needed change". This leadership style is needed in South African Municipalities such as Greater Giyani Municipality because it brings organisational reforms that can overcome service delivery backlogs and other governance challenges.

5. CONCLUSION

In South African municipalities, leadership styles significantly impact service delivery performance. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiration and innovation, can foster positive changes and adaptability. Democratic leadership involves collaborative decision-making, potentially enhancing community engagement in service planning. With its centralized decision-making, autocratic leadership may expedite processes but risks alienating stakeholders. Laissez-faire leadership, while promoting autonomy, might lead to a lack of direction. The effectiveness of each style in improving service delivery in South African municipalities depends on contextual factors such as community involvement, responsiveness, and the need for innovation in addressing unique challenges. Balancing participatory elements with decisive actions seems crucial for optimizing service delivery outcomes. In conclusion, the responses from municipal officials at the Greater Giyani Municipality affirm that leadership styles significantly impact service delivery performance.

The majority of officials acknowledged that leadership styles emphasizing transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, such as servant leadership, contribute positively to organizational culture and, consequently, service delivery. Conversely, autocratic or corrupt leadership styles were recognized as having detrimental effects, eroding trust and efficiency in service provision. These findings align with the broader literature, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Mulenga, Nzala & Mutale (2018), emphasizing the influential role of leadership in organizational outcomes. Notably, the preference for servant leadership over transformational leadership in the context of the Greater Giyani Municipality suggests resistance to extensive changes and restructuring, highlighting the importance of considering organizational culture and employee concerns in leadership transitions. To enhance service delivery in South African municipalities, including Greater Giyani, there is a clear need for a transformational leadership approach that promotes collaboration, trust, and meaningful participation in organizational vision and development. This shift can foster the necessary reforms to overcome service delivery challenges and improve overall governance.

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LEADERSHIP STYLES: UNVEILING THE NEXUS WITH SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

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