

CHALLENGES IN STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES: A SERVICE DELIVERY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the possible factors that frustrate strategy implementation processes in local municipalities of South Africa in their bid to achieve equitable service delivery to residents. The contingency theory of leadership underpinned this study, which emphasises the need for managers to use diverse measures to resolve issues that may hinder strategy implementation. This study adopted a qualitative study, with 150 participants being involved in a focus group interview. Data were analysed using Atlas.ti (version 8.0). The results indicate that municipalities struggle to implement their stipulated strategies due to factors such as resource barriers, issues with organisational leadership, technological barriers, culture-strategy conflicts, and councillor oversights. The study recommends that municipalities should allocate adequate funding to facilitate specific projects throughout the implementation process and position competent employees to enhance strategy implementation. It is further recommended that infrastructural facilities should be upgraded to facilitate service provision, culture-strategy conflict should be reconciled by understanding different cultural imperatives before strategy implementation, and collaborating with ward councillors to facilitate their representative duties effectively. This is in an endeavour to enhance strategy implementation to achieve equitable service delivery to all residents in South Africa.

KEY WORDS: *Strategic management; Strategy implementation; Local municipalities; Municipal role players; Service delivery*

INTRODUCTION

Organisations and municipalities need to monitor their internal and external business environments to effect change in order to move the organisations forward with regard to achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage in business and service processes. In order to initiate change in a business environment, there is a need to implement the objectives of strategic management to achieve desired objectives. Strategic management refers to the practice of how management transforms an organisation in order to cope with the challenges of the business environment. Parnell (2014) affirms that strategic management incorporates the totality of activities that are initiated by managers to ensure that the performance of an organisation approximates anticipated targets. In this regard, Hill, Schilling, and Jones (2017) indicate that the failure or success of organisations strictly depends on management's effort to implement the objectives of strategic management, which should be aimed at achieving strategic advantages and growth. This emphasises the need for strategic leaders in public

organisations to be skillful in managing the affairs of the organisations, especially in the decision-making process, to effectively convert input into output.

Despite clear constitutional and legislative provisions for the composition, functioning, and development of local municipalities and public services in South Africa, reports show that municipalities perform below expectations in providing adequate services to residents as constitutionally stipulated (Manyaka, 2014). National Treasury and other concerned departments in South Africa have conducted several studies on measures to enhance municipal revenue and to address issues surrounding the low performance of municipalities in terms of service delivery. The inability of municipalities to achieve their service provision motive has led to riotous service delivery protests and the destruction of public buildings. This can be ascribed to strategic leaders in South African public offices not possessing the required strategic leadership competencies to turn the situation around. With regard to the failure of public organisations, especially municipalities, to achieve their stated strategies, this study investigates the challenges in public sector strategy implementation processes that result in poor service delivery in South Africa.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

National Treasury (2017) and the Auditor-General (2018) indicate that municipalities are faced with serious challenges with regard to massive service delivery backlog challenges such as water delivery, housing, sewerage, and sanitation. Local municipalities, according to Presence (2017), are also faced with financial management issues and the 'inability to execute approved strategies, plans and programs' (Leibbrandt, 2013, p. 1). This has increased the frustration and anger of the residents due to the poor performance of local municipalities, which has resulted in service delivery protests. The recommendations from these reports indicate that local municipalities in South Africa should devise soluble measures to mitigate these issues. Despite the recommendations proposed, it has been a challenge for municipalities to 'identify the mismatch between intent and practice as well as the need to assess the reality of poor municipal performance within the local government sector' (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2009, p. 5; Leibbrandt, 2013, p. 4) in order to achieve equitable service delivery.

Despite the fact that progress has been made recently in a few provinces on the aspect of service delivery, there is also a need to deliver equitable services to all residents in South Africa as constitutionally stipulated. Service delivery challenges have been attributed to the inability of local municipalities to execute approved strategies, integrated development plans (IDPs), and programmes (National Treasury, 2017), which contributes to the main problems in local governance (RSA, 2009). This problem persists and does not receive the urgent attention it needs due to negligent strategy implementation practices. Joyce (2017) states that strategy implementation is the most difficult stage of strategic management and requires a series of carefully interrelated activities that could enable municipalities to achieve their goals. Municipalities in South Africa are not performing exceedingly well in strategy

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implementation. National Treasury (2017) affirms that there are approved strategies in local municipal governance, but the role players pay little attention to the execution process.

The state of poor service delivery by local municipalities in the North West province could point to failures in strategy implementation processes. This study is motivated to investigate these challenges thereof, as well as the key enablers of successful strategy implementation processes. This is in an endeavour to achieve equitable service delivery for all residents in South Africa.

CONTINGENCY THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

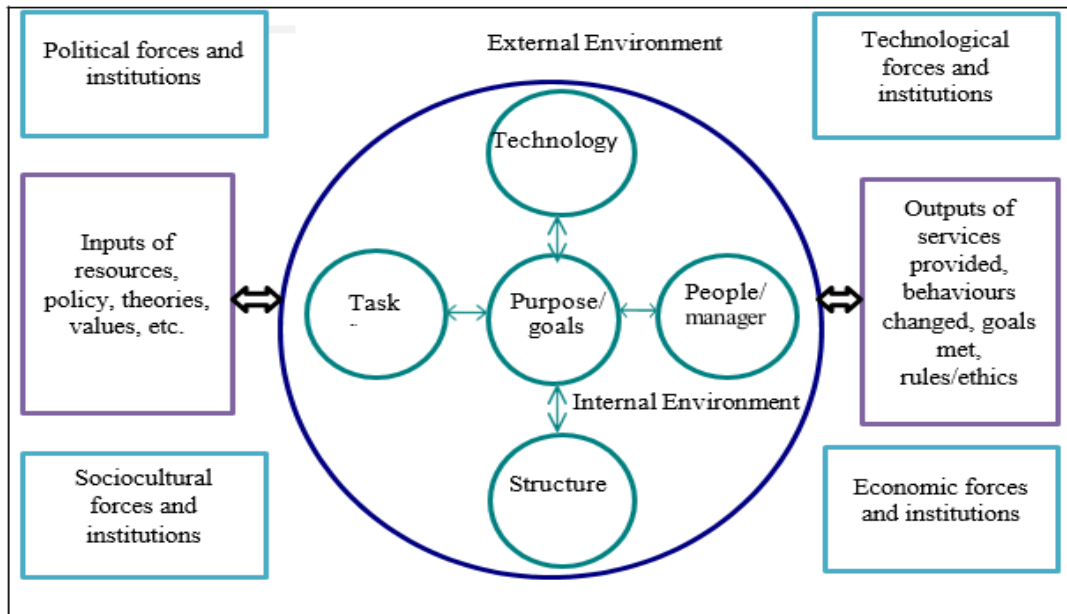
The contingency theory of leadership is a behavioural theory that contends that there is no single effective way to manage and design organisations as the best method of management depends on internal and external factors that affect each specific organisation (Gallardo, 2015). Organisations are faced with different kinds of contingencies with regard to their internal and external environments, which result in different levels of uncertainty. Gallardo (2015) affirms that there is no single optimal design to fit all organisations. This implies that leadership strategies that might be effective in some organisations may be ineffective when applied to another organisation. Hellriegel et al. (2008) posit that the basic concept of the contingency theory emphasises that organisations are open systems, which entails that managers should make decisions based on the contextual and environmental circumstances to ascertain the needs of the environment and its subsystems, as well as developing skills that are beneficial to moving the organisation forward.

The contingency theory of leadership posits that management should use diverse approaches to resolving issues that may arise in the work environment (Flynn, Hou, & Zhao, 2009; Sauser, Reilly, & Shenhar, 2009). It further posits that managers should make decisions based on the present need of the surrounding environment. In this regard, Miller and Greenwood (2010) postulate that it is important to note that different situations may require different problem-resolving mechanisms. Municipalities need to scan both the internal and external environments in order to identify suitable problem-resolving mechanisms. Local municipalities ought to adopt the contingency approach in the management of service delivery and payment. Management needs to communicate adequately with residents and facilitate mechanisms to articulate residents' needs, then identify opinions and matters arising from the service delivery logistics. The contingency theory of leadership anticipates that management would combine diverse leadership approaches and situational controls to achieve performance, which would not necessarily be the same for all municipalities.

The application of the contingency theory of leadership in a municipality context could enable managers to identify and even resolve issues from diverse perspectives. In this case, municipal role players should consider the contingencies of the internal and external environment and evaluate whether or not the organisation is adept at managing the uncertainties of the environment.

Figure 1 depicts the contingency theory of leadership model with the external environmental forces that influence organisational performance.

Figure 1: Contingency theory of leadership



Source: Schoech (2006)

According to Figure 1, the external environmental forces include political, technological, and economic factors, and socio-cultural external forces that interact with the internal organisational variables (technology, people, structure, and tasks) orchestrated by management to achieve desired goals. The contingency theory of leadership is based on the premise that managers should consider contingent external environmental factors (political, technological, economic, and socio-cultural) in order to make favourable decisions for the organisation, which are aimed at achieving a unitary goal.

The contingency theory of leadership is based on a hierarchy characterised by its complexity and interaction between three elements, namely leaders (municipal role players), followers (residents), and situation (environmental factors) to provide a general resolution direction to leadership. In the case of municipalities in South Africa, role players are required to examine the factors that constitute inadequate service delivery, as well as to formulate measures to enhance effective service delivery. Municipal role players ought to be flexible in adapting to situations and should use diverse methods to harness the forces and all environmental factors such that they resolve problems they may encounter in the process of enhancing service delivery. Furthermore, administrators should lead, support, and direct employees in all circumstances to achieve the desired objectives of the municipality.

THE MEANING OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Ackermann and Eden (2012) state that strategic management may be viewed as the entire set of obligations, decisions, and actions required to achieve a strategic benefit and to produce desired results. Strategic management entails the ability of managers to effectively manage the organisation's set of diverse resources to achieve its goals and objectives. Joyce (2017) maintains that strategic management encompasses analysing the total environmental factors facing the future of the organisation, formulating strategies to actualise the objectives of the organisation, implementing/executing formulated strategies, and, finally, evaluating such strategies to inform management of the effectiveness of the applied strategies. Strategic management involves all the organisational resources such as human, financial, and information being coordinated and directed towards achieving the organisational vision in alignment with the internal and external environmental challenges (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2017). In order to achieve the long-term objectives of an organisation, management (municipalities) must have access to information about the business environment, formulate a mission statement, collaborate with all stakeholders, and add value to its products and/or services (Hitt et al., 2017).

STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

A strategy, according to Jones and Hill (2010), is deemed meaningless until it is implemented. Organisations may fail repeatedly due to the inability to select and implement their strategies appropriately. Strategy implementation, as affirmed by Partidario (2012), is the conversion of strategies into action. This process includes designing the future of the organisation, refining the effectiveness of organisational operations, and improving organisational design, structure, control systems, and culture. Strategy implementation is required to reposition the organisation in line with its vision, which could translate into reformation or re-engineering if necessary (Leibbrandt, 2013, p. 40; Dhillon, 2014). As argued by Jones and Hill (2010, p. 345), '[c]orporate governance and performance are linked to strategy implementation through the association between stakeholder management and corporate performance'. Strategic leadership is necessary for attaining the vision of the organisation, thereby achieving its short- and long-term objectives (Hough, Thompson Jr, Strickland III, & Gamble, 2011).

Several organisations (municipalities in this case) fail to realise their objectives, as noted by Samad and Aziz (2016), because good organisational strategies are often poorly implemented. To achieve effective strategy implementation, organisations sometimes need to restructure in order to meet the performance standards required, as well as through monitoring and controlling strategic activities (Parnell, 2014). To further sustain proper strategic implementation, management must set clear objectives, 'support reward systems, policies and procedures' (Leibbrandt, 2013, p. 34), involve senior management, and ensure the proper allocation of resources to support procedures (Samad & Aziz, 2016). In addition, 'the development of an implementation plan is required to translate strategy into action' (Leibbrandt, 2013, p. 27) and it is obligatory that organisational strategic leadership should

bring all business tasks together, which encompasses ‘the mission, vision, goals, ethics, culture, employee enthusiasm and communication’ (Parnell, 2014).

Strategy implementation, in the view of Ehlers and Lazenby (2010), refers to a management process that requires a leadership style that is motivated by change and driven by commitment. The implementation of strategy commences with corporate governance, in that top management has the responsibility to oversee that managers implement the strategy and monitor its implementation (Gamble, Peteraf, & Thompson, 2017). The magnitude of change required by an organisation determines whether change revolves around the current organisational structure and culture (Ungerer, Ungerer, & Herhodt, 2015). Management is required to ‘accept changes within the existing organisational framework’ as it leads to the adoption of new measures to acclimatise to a changing environment, and, as Ehlers and Lazenby (2010, p. 266) further posit, ‘the implementation of the strategy covers all the necessary areas, which include strategic change, organisational structure, strategic control systems, strategic leadership and sound governance’.

Due to the inability of local municipalities in South Africa to implement their strategies equitably in order to achieve effective service delivery, this paper further investigates the compendium of factors identified by several authors that could frustrate strategy implementation processes. These are highlighted in the subsequent sections.

REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

There are numerous reasons for organisational failure in strategy implementation that top management needs to be acquainted with, should they want to improve organisational effectiveness. This deliberation provides an amalgam of some of the major reasons why organisations fail to implement a strategy. Table 1 presents a compendium of the factors identified by various scholars that cause frustration in strategy implementation.

Table 1: Factors that negatively affect strategy implementation

Source	Vision barrier	Management barrier	Resource barrier	People barrier	Leadership / lack of implementation of plans	Dealing with complexities / communication issues	Technology/ culture and environment
Kaplan and Norton (2008)	√	√	√	√			

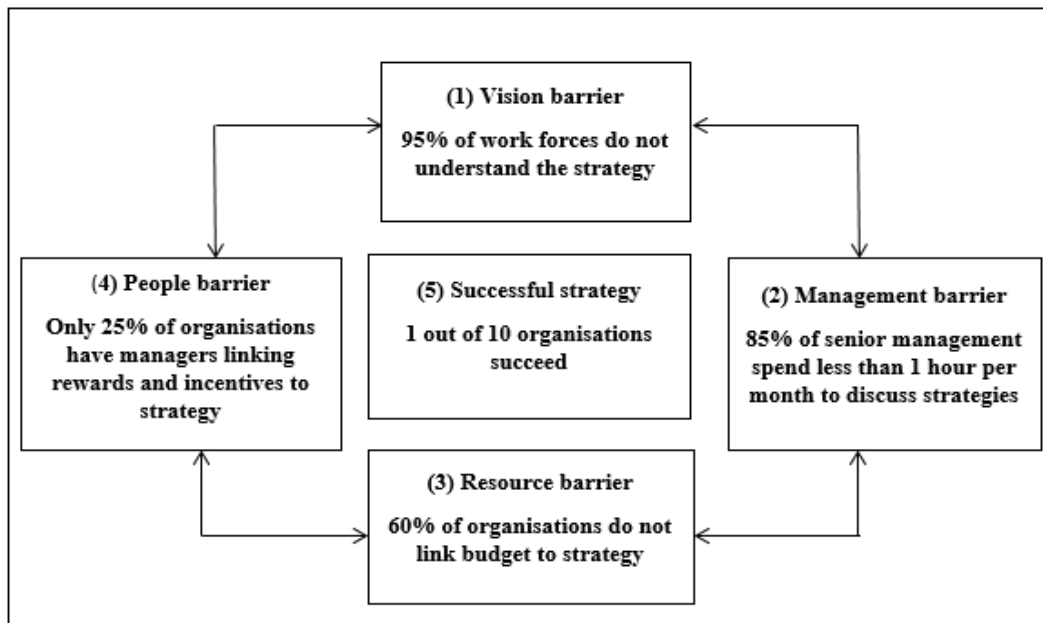
O'Donnel and Boyle (2008)	√					√	√
Ehlers and Lazenby (2010)	√			√			√
Jones and Hill (2010)				√			
DuBrin (2011)		√				√	
Koschmann (2012)		√				√	
Kotter (2012)	√					√	
Barton and Ambrosini (2013)		√		√		√	
Beer (2013)			√			√	
Miller, Williams, Allen, & Glasby (2013)			√				√
Thornton (2013)				√		√	
Brinkschoder (2014)		√			√		√
Eustace and Martins (2014)	√				√		
Rajasekar (2014)					√		√
Ungerer et al. (2015)					√	√	

Girma (2016)			√		√		
Siddique and Shadbolt (2016)		√			√		
Yuen and Lim (2016)			√				√
Olson (2017)			√		√		√

Source: Authors

Kaplan and Norton (2008, p. 219) note that ‘organisational failures might occur due to a lack of strategy definition by top management to efficiently administer their operations’, as there is a lack of integration between practices while an all-inclusive management system is deemed lacking. Four main barriers that contribute towards failure in strategy implementation are highlighted in Figure 2, namely vision, management, resource, and people barriers. This deliberation expounds deeply on the understanding of strategy implementation by management.

Figure 2: Strategy implementation failure



Source: Kaplan and Norton (2008)

Following is an explanation of the barriers illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 2 that can impede strategy implementation processes in the public service.

Vision barrier

The organisational vision refers to a statement that encapsulates the core beliefs and values of an organisation. A vision barrier is created when many of the employees do not comprehend the specified approach of the organisation, which leads to an inability to follow the strategic direction of the organisation (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2010). It is observable in Figure 2 that 95% of the workforce in most cases does not understand the strategic vision of the organisation. In this regard, Ehlers and Lazenby (2010) and Kaplan and Norton (2008) opine that a vision statement should be inspirational to guide employees in achieving organisational objectives. Vision statements are difficult to implement as there is a wide gap between paperwork and the daily actions of employees, and management should devise soluble measures to educate employees on the vision and strategic goals of the organisation so that all employees have it at heart.

Management barrier

Despite the fact that managers view strategy implementation as a top management activity, it is depicted in Figure 2 that many managers do not meet the strategic goals set by their organisations. It is observable that 85% of senior management do not spend quality time to discuss matters related to organisational strategies and strategy implementation (Kaplan & Norton, 2008). Management, according to DuBrin (2011), is regarded as the attainment of organisational goals in an efficient and effective manner by planning, organising, coordinating, directing, and leading. Managers are expected to devote time to discuss these elements of management and to implement the objectives of strategic management to ensure that the objectives of the organisation are achieved. In order to achieve the desired goals in a municipal context, municipal role players should endeavour to discuss organisational strategies and strategy implementation with all members of top management to ensure that detailed duties will be assigned to specific individuals who should be held accountable.

Resource barrier

Organisational resources, such as human and financial, should, according to Yuen and Lim (2016), be placed in the right position in an organisation for the attainment of organisational growth. This proposition, according to Kaplan and Norton (2008), entails that management should examine the competencies of employees before allocating them to specific duties in order not to waste talent and resources. It is observable in Figure 2 that 60% of organisations do not align their budgets with their strategy. This signifies that financial resources are not optimally utilised and this could imply that many resources are wasted or are incorrectly channelled towards unprofitable ventures that do not yield positive results or which are not indicated in the strategic goals of the organisation. In this regard, poor resource allocation and the management thereof are viewed as a significant barrier to strategy implementation (Yuen

Copyright © 2019 Ife Centre for Psychological Studies/Services, Ile-Ife, Nigeria & Lim, 2016). In the case of municipalities, role players should ensure that the right resources are employed and they should also ensure that the available resources are channelled into positive investments as this could result in proper implementation of strategy.

People barrier

The fact that management is disinclined to dedicate adequate time to discussing issues related to strategy implementation invariably leads to underprovision of incentives for strategy execution (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2010). Figure 2 depicts that 75% of incentives are not linked to strategy execution. This is also caused by management's inability to work as a team in strategy execution (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013). Strategy implementation is made difficult because of the inherent resistance to change and management issues in organisations. Management is expected to reach consensus on the actual path to follow in implementing strategy effectively and timeously. Management should thus constantly review its strategy and make necessary adjustments to guarantee success (Kotter, 1995). In a situation where management fails to implement necessary measures to strengthen the capacity of the organisation, Barton and Ambrosini (2013) postulate that this is known as the 'people barrier' to strategy implementation. According to Jones and Hill (2010), the involvement of lower-level management in the success of strategy implementation is important, particularly in today's technology drive where imminent success is often based on 'luck and chance discoveries rather than on rational strategy'. Apart from the barriers to effective strategy execution illustrated in Figure 2, six other factors are proposed by the literature that also pose barriers to strategy implementation. These are dealt with in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Issues with organisational leadership and commitment

Poor leadership, according to Rajasekar (2014), is among the factors that cause the failure of strategy implementation. There is a need for managers to guide and control the nature of activities in an organisation. Girma (2016) affirms that logical action and good decisions by top management in the process of strategy implementation enable an organisation to achieve its objectives. It requires that top management should adhere to the norms, policies, and rules of the organisation while they constantly communicate with employees, in order to keep them on the right track (Eustace & Martins, 2014). Organisational leaders should learn how to appreciate and nurture talent, build trust, develop close ties between employees, confront challenges, and communicate satisfactorily with employees (Mitchell, 2015). Leaders are expected to develop managerial competency in an organisation by developing employees' skills, time management skills, decision-making capabilities, and accuracy in goal attainment. The greatest tasks of leaders are to motivate employees during the work process, to manage stakeholders in the business environment, to set attainable goals, to clarify tasks, and to delegate authority to ensure that strategy implementation will be successful (Mitchell, 2015).

Lack of proper implementation of plans

Managers are expected to state clearly the vision, mission, and value statements of the organisation, which should be supported by reasonable action to achieve the stated objectives of the organisation (Olson, 2017). The implementation of strategic plans needs to be clear, while managers are required to communicate reviews and agreements on contingencies with employees (Kaplan & Norton, 2008). The inability to implement plans as agreed on by top management can, however, frustrate the efficient implementation of strategies. The following process, as recommended by Brinkschroder (2014) and Olson (2008), should be used to guide strategy implementation:

- Management should decide on a strategic plan after agreeing with all stakeholders involved in the strategy implementation process.
- Organisational budgets should be well aligned to annual goals, which ought to be based on specific financial estimates.
- Management should assign responsibilities to different groups of stakeholders.
- A scorecard should be available for tracking and monitoring all plans.
- Management should establish a performance management system to measure the performance of employees and all stakeholders involved.
- The totality of plans should be communicated to stakeholders.
- Weekly or monthly meetings should be held based on strategy implementation reporting and monitoring.
- Management should set up review dates at which time the line strategic plans should be reported, deliberated, and reviewed.

Dealing with complexities

Strategy implementation is a complex process with many variables, which requires experienced leadership (Strohhecker & Grobler, 2012). Dealing with complexities is a vital quality of top management members because they are required to make highly ethical decisions in times of complex situations. Highly ethical thinking, as described by Thornton (2013), is thought of as a higher degree level of thinking that enables management to understand the challenges of an organisation from different perspectives in the process of making organisational decisions. Thornton (2013) posits that organisational complexity is the intellectual capacity of managers to take notice of the issues surrounding the organisation and to develop measures to resolve them. In order to implement organisations' strategies effectively, managers should deal with complexities and think in multiple magnitudes or in associations that will encourage gaining more insight to finding solutions to problems. More so, managers should adopt systems thinking in such a way that the organisation is viewed as an adaptive structure, purposefully search and integrate emerging information to be versatile in seeking solutions, and connect or unite with employees to seek better solutions to resolve organisational issues. In dealing with complexities in organisations, Rajasekar (2014) affirms

that managers should be able to think widely and expand opportunities to ensure that the organisation's strategies will be duly implemented.

Inability to communicate effectively as a challenge to strategy implementation

Communication is the procedure of passing information from a sender to a receiver and from a receiver to a sender through a chosen medium (Wells, 2011). Koschmann (2012) postulates that organisational communication involves a process by which the employees and/or stakeholders of an organisation exchange information within and outside their business environments. In order to effectively implement organisational strategies, communication should be able to flow among the stakeholders of an organisation. Beer (2013) advocates that the effective communication of strategies in an organisation contributes towards efficient execution of strategies. Furthermore, the inability of managers to communicate organisational strategies to employees in such a way that all will comprehend it could inhibit the implementation of the strategy. Figure 2 illustrates that 95% of employees do not understand organisational strategy, which hinders strategies from being implemented well and as such causes the organisation to lack possible vision.

Technological barriers as a challenge to strategy implementation

The concept of technology refers to the scientific application of machinery and other devices to the work process in order to achieve the purpose of an organisation (Marx, 2010; Wahab, Rose, & Osman, 2012). Because technology is considered a measure to solve problems in an organisation, management should be creative in ensuring that it is applied competently to achieve the goals of the organisation. Some organisations (and municipalities) do not provide enabling technological advancement, which poses barriers to the implementation of their strategic goals. According to the Auditor-General's (2017) report, South Africa struggles to provide and maintain infrastructure to enable sectors such as industrial, commercial, and household sectors to function effectively, therefore organisations (municipalities in this case) need to invest in a strong network of technology that is designed to support the implementation of organisations' strategic objectives.

Culture, environment, and change management

Culture refers to a set of standard characteristics and a common form of knowledge, behaviour, and understanding adopted by people living in a given community and these are dispersed through socialisation (Zimmermann, 2015). In the same vein, O'Donnel and Boyle (2008) posit that organisational culture and culture are intertwined as they deal with the practices that organisations adopt for handling people and business processes. In order to implement a strategy in an organisation, Ehlers and Lazenby (2010) affirm that there is a need for change management in organisations, which includes the organisation's implementation of diverse strategies to move from a current state to a higher level. Ehlers and Lazenby (2010)

Copyright © 2019 Ife Centre for Psychological Studies/Services, Ile-Ife, Nigeria and Siddique and Shadbolt (2016) affirm that the implementation of strategic management in organisations requires active leadership that is liable to convert input into output. In this respect, O'Donnell and Boyle (2008) acknowledge that the implementation of the strategic management process requires leaders to create an appropriate environment for change, and leaders who position themselves as champions who adopt employee engagement and empowerment, employ team orientation, assessment of change, and train employees.

In the business environment, according to Kotter (1995, p. 48), organisations would not need to be too concerned regarding threats from the external environment if their change processes have been adequately planned for. Miller et al. (2013, p. 6) note that change is determined by cultural heritage and that people or employees could be influenced to adapt or change their behaviour, which leads to organisational culture. Managers are expected to establish a culture that will enable the implementation of strategic management in order to move the organisation forward. In the absence of creating a favourable environment for change, Ehlers and Lazenby (2010) affirm that the implementation of organisational strategies will not be possible. The above discussion dealt with additional reasons for failure in the implementation of organisational strategy. It is to be noted that management can make progress in the implementation of strategy if these factors are considered (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011, p. 959).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a constructivist paradigm, which maintains that learning is an active and constructive process (Creswell, 2014). Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) maintain that social constructivists believe that people attempt to understand the world in which they live by developing subjective meanings of their daily experiences. This subjective meaning may be complex as people differ in thinking and conceive multiple subjective ideas. The goal of any study built on this paradigm is to focus on the problem under investigation through the construction of knowledge. It also focuses on understanding the specific context in which people live, based on their historical and cultural settings (Maree, 2015).

This study adopted a qualitative approach by reviewing several documents aimed at finding solutions to the research problem of the study. The study adopted online focus group interviews with more than 150 municipal role players in South Africa. These municipal role players were selected purposively due to their vast experience in strategy implementation towards achieving service delivery in local municipalities. Interview guides were developed that focused on the challenges in the strategy implementation process to enhance service delivery. Open-ended questions and interview guides were formulated to obtain reasonable data from the participants. The questions were formulated in simple English in order to enhance easy understanding by the participants. The interview questions were posted on the WhatsApp forum of the Institute of Local Government of South Africa after explaining the necessary ethical concepts of research such as informed consent to participate in the study, voluntary participation and exit, anonymity of responses, and protection of participants'

Copyright © 2019 Ife Centre for Psychological Studies/Services, Ile-Ife, Nigeria interests. Furthermore, the researcher introduced himself and the topic and after the responses were gathered, thanked the respondents for their cooperation and reasonable responses.

Responses by several target respondents were documented and arranged with the help of Atlas.ti (version 8.0). Data analysis followed the following procedure:

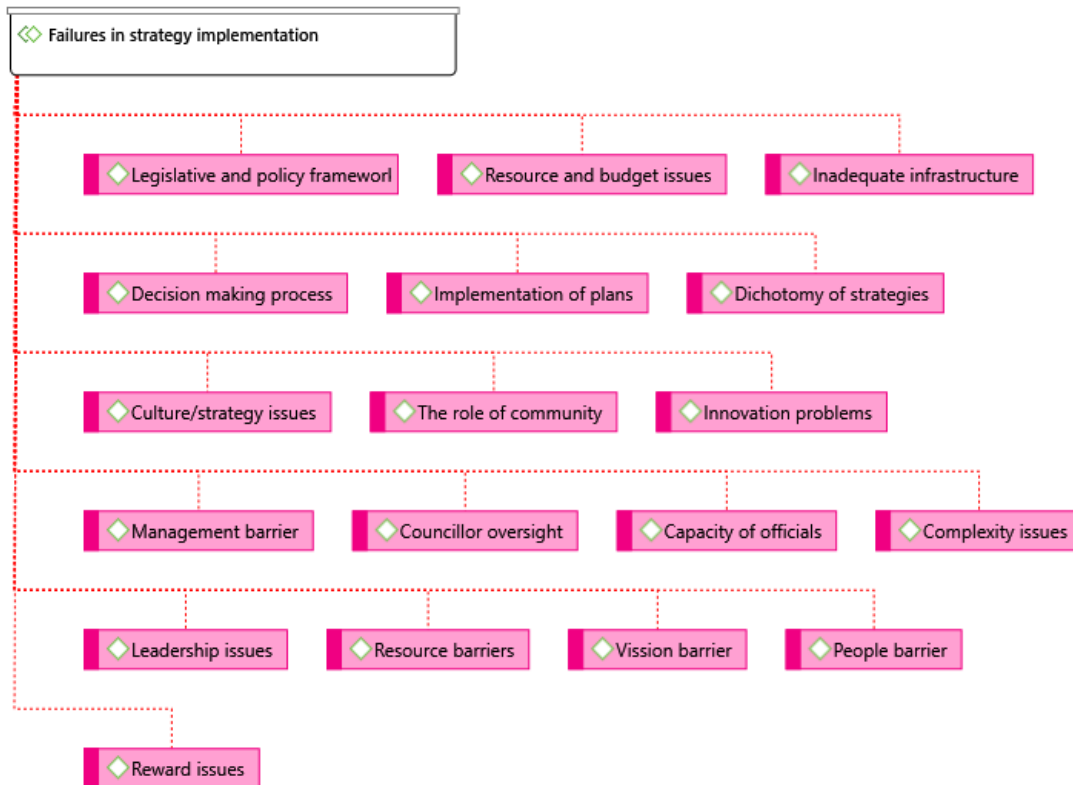
- Organisation of data: The data collected from the participants were transcribed from the WhatsApp platform and manipulated in Atlas.ti. The transcribed data were reviewed accordingly.
- Data coding: Coding was initiated based on the meanings derived from the data as they related to the research questions. After reading through the transcribed data, the researcher sorted the data in such a pattern that all related data from each research question were grouped together to derive a theme.
- Data representation: According to the objective of the study, the researcher presented the findings that emerged from the theme of the study. Afterwards, Atlas.ti was used to represent the data using graphs.
- Interpretation and summary of data: Interpretation was done by focusing on the research question after presenting the graphs for the themes that were generated. It was further corroborated with the literature to provide a comprehensive view of the study and to find solutions to the research problem of the study.

Construct validity was maintained in this study by ensuring that interview questions emerged from the prescripts of the reviewed literature and possible experiences noted from the nature of service delivery in South Africa. Validity was maintained by ensuring that only the municipal role players in South Africa were interviewed. The subsequent section presents the responses obtained from the respondents.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The responses from all the respondents were carefully documented and arranged using Atlas.ti. The analysis of the results presented in Figure 3 shows that the following factors contribute to challenges in the strategy implementation process: legislative and policy frameworks, resource and budget issues, infrastructural issues, decision-making issues, implementation of plans, dichotomy between long- and short-term strategies, culture/strategy issues, the role of the community, innovation issues, management barriers, councillor oversight, capacity of officials, complexity issues, leadership issues, resource barriers, vision barriers, people barriers, and reward issues. Figure 3 presents the responses from the respondents.

Figure 3: Responses from participants on challenges in strategy implementation



Source: Created by authors

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The interpretation of the results of this study was performed with a holistic approach. The participants of this study highlighted that some legislative and policy frameworks do not enable them to implement some strategies. In this regard, they mentioned that measures such as water restriction as a method of payment enforcement is sometimes frustrated due to enabling policies entitling gallons of water per day to residents. The participants affirmed that resource and budgeting issues constituted a challenges in executing their major projects due to the inability to allocate adequate funding to the strategy implementation process. This result conforms with the findings of Yuen and Lim (2016) and Ehlers and Lazenby (2010), who noted that the inability to place human and financial resources in the right position frustrates management in achieving its objectives. With regard to infrastructure and technology, the participants indicated that the state of infrastructure in the municipalities constituted challenges in the strategy implementation process. Further probing revealed that some municipal employees lacked the ability to handle administrative tasks, which frustrated the implementation of established strategies. This is, however, linked to the people barrier and leadership issues. Barton and Ambrosini (2013) affirm that management should work as a team to implement necessary measures to strengthen the capacity of the organisation. Girma (2016) pinpoints that the success of an organisation depends on the logical actions and good decision-making processes by top management. Due to the inability of municipal employees

to make good decisions timeously, the participants indicated that municipal management lacked the capacity to implement plans to achieve service delivery, which was linked to leadership issues, management barriers, and the dichotomy of strategies. Kaplan and Norton (2008) note that the implementation of plans should be clear and should be communicated to employees by management to enhance strategy implementation. DuBrin (2011) states that organisational success could be attained when managers devote their time to discuss organisational issues such as strategy and its implementation with employees. Dealing with complexities and issues related to innovation and organisational vision was also highlighted by the participants as factors that frustrate the strategy implementation process. The issue of complexity, innovation, and organisational vision is a function of top management, which Thornton (2013) maintains requires highly ethical thinking for management to understand the challenges of the organisation from different dimensions and to devise measures to move the organisation forward.

Other striking findings from the participants included councillor oversight. The participants highlighted that councillors do not execute their duties equitably, which is linked to the role of community members in disrupting strategy implementation through violent service delivery protests at the local municipal level. Mileham (2009) indicates that councillors serve as a link between the community and the municipality. In a situation where the councillors do not engage the residents effectively, it may result in protests that frustrate the strategy implementation process. The participants emphasised the need for municipal role players to reconcile strategy and culture. Ehlers and Lazenby (2010) note the need for organisations (municipalities in this case) to implement change management in order to facilitate diverse strategies to place the organisation at a higher level. According to Miller et al. (2013), organisations should endeavour to access the threats from both the internal and external environments as postulated by the contingency theory of leadership and devise soluble measures to implement strategies. Lastly, it was deduced from the responses that most municipal employees need additional rewards for effective strategy implementation. Theron, Barkhuizen, and Du Plessis (2014) affirm that effective rewards are one of the significant factors that satisfy employees, as well as to retain them in the workplace. The following delineation expounds on the recommendations for or the key enablers of strategy implementation processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS (KEY ENABLERS OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION)

The following recommendations are made by this study to facilitate effective strategy implementation in the public sector:

- Adequate resources should be allocated to specific projects, and suitable human resource should be positioned in sensitive strategy implementation segments.
- Infrastructures should be upgraded to enhance the strategy implementation process.
- Knowledgeable employees and competent strategic should be employed and should be able to assess environmental challenges to convert input into output.

- Favourable decisions should be made timeously by the municipal role players to facilitate the implementation process.
- Long- and short-term strategies should be clearly specified by the management to guide the employees in the strategy implementation process.
- Innovation such as communication procedures should be held in high esteem in the various municipalities.
- Municipal role players should collaborate with ward councillors in order to guide them in facilitating their duties in their communities as constitutionally mandated.
- In order to reconcile the strategy-culture conflict, municipalities should understand the various cultural imperatives before engaging in strategy implementation processes.
- Finally, adequate reward packages should be provided to municipal role players who implement strategies effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the challenges in strategy implementation towards achieving equitable service delivery by South African local municipalities. This study was motivated by the incessant riotous service delivery protests by residents and the destruction of public property. This study focused on the municipal role players in South Africa who have vast experience in the implementation of strategies to achieve service delivery. It was noted that challenges in strategy implementation processes are caused by many internal and external factors, which are fundamentally related to the capacity of municipal role players and political issues respectively. The contingency theory of leadership was proposed to the municipal managers, contending that managers should adopt the best tactics to handle different environmental circumstances. Furthermore, it was noted that achieving effective strategy implementation involves the collaboration of municipal employees, politicians (councillors), and the residents to discharge their moral obligations in the quest to create a civil society. Municipal role players could enhance the strategy implementation process by incorporating the recommendations of this study in their various managerial practices in an endeavour to achieve service delivery to all residents.

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