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Misaligned Implementation: A case of the Municipal Water Services of a District Municipality in South Africa

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Abstract

The use of a decentralised organisational architecture to deliver water services in a district municipality is appealing to managers, but also complex. This study explores how a District Municipality implemented the provision of decentralised water services through eight Local Municipalities in South Africa. Seven area managers based in Local Municipalities were selected as participants using purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded. Meaningful patterns reflecting the implementation of each component of the McKinsey 7-S model were delineated using thematic analysis. The study found that internal alignment of a sound structure, style, and strategy supported the implementation of the provision of decentralised water services. However, poor alignment between a sound structure and skills, systems not supportive of devolved structure, staff, and a culture of poor performance management, largely marred this implementation. In addition, the same vehicle used to attract staff inadvertently created divisions - and sustained poor alignment of skills with strategy. Given the above, successful implementation of decentralised water services' provision requires managers who are equipped to reinforce systemic alignment at the nexus of internal-external-temporal alignment. This has implications for managing internal alignment and inter-organisational effects to reinforce one another in a district municipality.

Key phrases

Decentralised water services; internal alignment and systemic implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

Many of the well-crafted water services' development plans (WSDP) in District Municipalities in South Africa (SA) will remain fruitless artefacts because of poor implementation. To avoid this contemporary faux pas, skilful managers are required to provide direction, alignment and also to nurture the commitment of different people such as engineers and financial managers - in order to transform these great plans into the meaningful reality desired by business and ordinary citizens.

The twin challenges of lack of own capacity and the need to improve services, compelled a District Municipality which is legislated as a Water Services Authority (WSA) in the Eastern Cape Province of SA, to shift from centralised to decentralised water services' provision. This period, which commenced in 2009, typified a new modus operandi, as eight Local Municipalities within the jurisdiction of this WSA performed the delegated function of water services' provision until 2017.

This radical change set the stage for the execution of a different strategy. However, Brinkschröder (2014:2) reminds us "a gap … exists between knowing what to do and actually doing it". The most relevant study done on the District Municipality in question took place in 2011, and this focused on water regulation rather than evaluating the implementation of decentralised water services (South African Local Government Association 2011). The contemporary problem is to fathom "how" various actors embedded the complex phenomenon of decentralised service delivery in their everyday activities of providing water services in the District Municipality. Jenkins, Breen, Lindsay and Brew (2003:12) are fully aware that the implementation of a strategy in an organisation is generally not easy, and that it is fraught with complexity, and is "akin to fighting a long and bloody battle with a high possibility of failure".

Extant studies on public-sector implementation in SA have focused on isolating a catalogue of obstacles to the implementation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and municipal water service delivery in particular. Others have explored the influence of leadership on service delivery, service evaluations, and how strategic-planning processes promote public value through managing internal and external stakeholders (Mokalane, Drotskie & Jasson 2014; Weaver, Keeffe & Palmer 2017).

Andrews, Boyne, Law and Walker (2011:2) explicitly state that while scholars in the domain of water services and public administration are "increasingly using strategic management models and language more traditionally associated with private corporations … they are failing to learn and often recycle techniques which have been shown to be badly flawed". As if in mitigation, Hansen and Ferlie (2016:2) remind us that only recently has strategic management received attention in the public administration literature. Furthermore, "research on [the] dynamics of strategy implementation in the public sector is still in its infancy" (Andrews, Beynon & Genc 2017:1-2).

The aim of this study was to explore the implementation of decentralised water services' provision of a District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of SA. In pursuit of this, the study used the McKinsey 7-S model and focused on views of area managers to answer the key research question: how did the District Municipality implement decentralised water services' provision through eight Local Municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province of SA? This article is significant, as it highlights dynamics and interdependencies that reveal inadequacies of internal alignment - while pronouncing systemic alignment as a profound way to achieve the effective implementation of decentralised water services. This has implications for the competencies of public-sector managers if they are to implement effectively water services' provision policy or strategy in SA. Speculand (2014:29) has already lamented that managers are predominantly "taught how to craft strategy, but not how to implement it". Regardless of the sector, poor implementation is a serious management problem, rather than simply being a technical challenge. Even the best WSDP cannot implement itself: well-equipped management is irreplaceable in turning WSDP into desired results in SA.

This article begins with a focus on two key concepts of decentralisation and public-sector strategy implementation, with a focus on water. Thereafter, the article reviews the research methods and presents the findings. Lastly, there is a discussion of results, managerial implications, and the conclusions of the study are noted.

2. DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF DECENTRALISATION

Decentralisation is key to scholars and practitioners of contemporary management and organisation theory as one of the possible forms of organisational design and structure to

deliver public services in a municipal setting. However, the difficulties in defining decentralisation are not only due to the long intellectual lineage, which is traceable to the panacea first proposed as a solution to problems of stagnant economies and inefficient bureaucracies in developing countries in the 1980s. This concept is in fact multi-faceted - with aspects drawn from a variety of disciplines, such as public administration, management and economics. The common thread is that decentralisation is introduced to offset problems caused by dissatisfaction with a centralised system. With a continuum in mind, White (2011:3) focuses on the dynamic nature and relationships which are not uniform and static, and states that decentralisation is actually:

> *"a process, involving movement along a continuum; from a situation where relatively more power and responsibility over relatively more spheres of activity rests with senior managers to a situation where some power and responsibility over some spheres of activity has been devolved".*

The above definition raises four cardinal issues in terms of understanding decentralisation as a part of organisational structure. First, it reveals that decentralisation has a side which gains or receives power and responsibility - while another gives or loses these. It is a scholarly snag to focus only on those receiving, and then ignoring those from whom power or resources have been taken away. This aspect makes the definition more relevant to the current study. Second, the transfer of power and responsibility from those with accountability for a large sphere (e.g. WSA at a District Municipality level) to those with accountability for smaller subunits (e.g. Water Services Providers (WSP) at a Local Municipal level), is also enlightening and relevant to the current study. Third, the definition considers the boundary (geographical and functional) over which to exercise authority and within which to perform decentralised functions. Last, what is implicit in the continuum is the notion that there are differences in kinds or degrees of decentralisation. These differences or shades of decentralisation are sometimes a source of conceptual confusion or conflation which is evident in some definitions (Schneider 2003:34-35). The question of what dimensions constitute decentralisation is valuable to deepen our conceptual understanding of organisation design in relation to the local municipality.

2.1 Dimensions of decentralisation

There are four dimensions of decentralisation which inform organisation structure as a key part of the organisation architecture in the local municipality in SA:

2.1.1 Political decentralisation

Political decentralisation is about the degree to which central government allows non-central government entities to undertake the political functions of governance, such as representation (e.g. ward councillors and civil society (Schneider 2003:38). Citizens have the power to select public officials at the local level who they think will be more responsive and accountable. Although water has the potential to be a political issue, this study is not interested in political power - but rather in the administrative functions in a municipality.

2.1.2 Fiscal decentralisation

Fiscal centralisation relates to how much central government cedes, in terms of fiscal responsibilities, to finance public services and to collect public revenues (Schneider 2003:38-39). The extent of power transferred from the District to the Local municipalities to make autonomous decisions about water-related revenue collection and expenditures may shed light on the fiscal aspects of implementation.

2.1.3 Market decentralisation

Market decentralisation is the reassignment of service-delivery authority from central government to other institutions using market-based approaches to deliver goods and services (e.g. partnerships with private sector, non-governmental organisations, or community-based organisations) (see Schneider 2003). Critics however assert that market decentralisation devalues the public service ethos (e.g. impartiality, welfare and social justice) by pronouncing customer-orientation rather than citizenship. As WSA and WSP are both government structures, market decentralisation is not relevant to this study.

2.1.4 Administrative decentralisation

Last, administrative decentralisation is about how much autonomy non-central government entities have relative to the central control of the administrative function (Schneider 2003:33-40).This dimension of decentralisation is very relevant with WSA as the centre, and which has a network of WSP within the District Municipality in SA. Distribution of hierarchical and

functional powers on water service delivery across these two levels and the determination of where responsibility is situated during actual implementation may be key in the current study (Hansen & Ferlie 2016:4).

The next section discusses the three forms in which the identified dimensions of decentralisation may be present in a municipal organisation.

2.2 Forms of decentralisation

Contemporary scholars and practitioners of strategy implementation need to understand that decision-making rights, power, and degree of autonomy are key in how a local municipality design its organisational structure to deliver public service. First, "deconcentration" occurs technically when central government gives some autonomy to its territorial branches or field offices (Schneider 2003:38). This is however criticised as not being true decentralisation, but rather the unburdening of the central office or the mere extension of central control (White 2011:3-11). Second, delegation as another form of decentralisation relates to decision-making rights and administrative authority for clearly defined tasks given to local government or semi-autonomous institutions by central government (Schneider 2003). The principal-agent relationship prevails in the delegation. Decentralisation becomes vertical when the delegation of power is down the chain of authority. In other instances, it is horizontal if power is delegated out from the chain of authority to non-managers (e.g. operative core support staff) (Lunenburg 2012:3).

Devolution is the purest or most extensive form of decentralisation associated with complete autonomy and power for an exclusive sphere such as a district or local municipality (Schneider 2003:40). Interestingly, this invokes three relevant questions. First, clarity is needed on what exactly is devolved. Is it power, decision-making, or responsibility and accountability for a discrete segment of an organisation`s activities - or all of these?. If decision-making is devolved, clarity on the nature, range and level of devolved decision, is key.

The full complexity of decentralised water services' provision also requires the devolution of other management functions (e.g. motivating, controlling, organising and planning). For a contemporary manager, the predominant focus on the devolution of decision-making alone is parochial and potentially misleading. There is also the question of who is being devolved to

and a need to grapple with the question of how far down or wide the power and/or decision making are devolved in an organogram or sector. Critics of devolution argue that the widening of opportunities for most people to contribute to decision-making (participation), is incomplete without decision-taking (delegating) (Schneider 2003:44). Overall - loss of control, inconsistency and loss of direction in an organisation or sector as a whole, and the inappropriate use or abuse of new-found freedoms, are often highlighted as demerits of decentralisation (Schneider 2003:33-41).

3. FIVE BASIC ISSUES IN PUBLIC SECTOR IMPLEMENTATION

Elbanna, Andrews and Pollanen (2016:1018) concede that literature on strategy implementation is generally fragmented and dispersed throughout the general and specialised management literature. As such, it is prudent to delineate a handful of basic relevant issues such as the thesis of correspondence, emergent but also action-orientation of implementation - among other things.

Strategy implementation is associated with taking the ontology of putting what is on paper or talked about as a strategy or policy, and translating it into results. The old but still valid view of Mintzberg (1978) is that strategy may mean a plan, perspective, ploy, position, or pattern. The degree of “match” or correspondence between the results of what is realised on one hand, and what was pre-determined as strategy on the other - reflects implementation (Al Darmaki 2015:17-30). The correspondence thesis assumes that one can anticipate events, evaluate alternative courses of action objectively, and that there are simple, clear, and direct solutions. However, this is inconsistent with the dynamic nature of implementation - where the end-state is sometimes unknown. Complex, ill-structured and unanticipated problems also emerge in the course of implementation (Andrews *et al*. 2017:2-19). Emergent strategies are not a sign that water managers are out of control - but rather it demonstrates management’s flexibility and responsiveness to forces in the environment when implementing strategy. Implementation is not an event, but an ongoing *process* which is tolerant to *emergent* aspects (Al Darmaki 2015:2-5).

Second, strategy implementation is also about micro-levels of responsibility, and who is involved in specific activities to achieve outcomes (Hansen & Ferlie 2016:5-19). Successful top managers are not only concerned with the details of the strategic plan and budget, but

also with the need for context-sensitive implementation (Elbanna *et al*. 2016:1022). Buy-in by middle managers is critical, as they have the ability to not only unpack complex plans into digestible content, which is 'do-able' by many - but also link these with the concrete daily activities of the operative core (Cândido & Santos 2015:237-240). Implementation is *action-orientated*, as plans are divided into detailed and actionable components.

Third, implementation requires resources for the action to happen. Planning, allocation of resources and resolution of operational issues in programmes, budgets, and procedures in water services' provision - are key to making things happen (Brinkschröder 2014:2-19). While finer-level allocation of tangible and intangible resources is critical to support the bias towards action and outcomes, it should not lead to "paralysis by analysis" (Brinkschröder 2014:3-18).

Fourth, many factors are part of the internal functioning of an organisation and these hinder or facilitate implementation. For example, Mescht and Jaarsveld (2012) identified a sub-culture of deferred maintenance among technical employees in small Local Municipalities in South Africa (e.g. postponement of repairs on defective units; infrastructure "run" to destruction; premature failure of new assets; water losses due to failure to respond in time). Corruption, skill levels and political interference in Local Municipalities affect individual, team, and institutional levels of municipal capacity (Weaver *et al*. 2017:398-406).

Last, municipal water services are provided in a unique and complex context which is characterised by the multiplicity of stakeholders to be satisfied (e.g. business, citizens, politicians), and the complexity of demands and overly bureaucratic systems and processes - but also policy ambiguity in terms of goals and means (Andrews *et al*. 2017:3-12). A culture of non-payment by domestic consumers of water services - sometimes encouraged by councillors, non-functional meters, and the failure to send bills to users - affects the financial viability of municipalities in South Africa. According to the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS 2015:49), problems in water services' provision fall into six categories related to: governance or policy (e.g. poor enforcement and inadequacy of regulation, unsustainable policy); financial issues (e.g. unaffordable tariffs, cost of supply greater than income); and institutional issues (e.g. lack of capacity to manage, corruption). Additionally, other problems arise from the community (e.g. inadequate education, vandalism, plumbing leaks, inadequate community buy-in); technical issues (e.g. age of infrastructure, high levels

of leakage, technical capacity and skills); and water resources (e.g. poor management, drought, pollution). Interestingly, most of these water issues fall within management's control and require solution by municipal management (DWS 2015:59).

In the light of the above implementation is largely about getting the right things done in the right way, making the correct decisions and taking actions quickly, and also delivering on commitments (Weaver *et al*. 2017:398-401).

4. TECHNICAL AND CONTEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION OF CHOOSING THE MCKINSEY 7-S MODEL

The basic requirement of any effective implementation is the internal alignment among intertwined elements - whereby each reinforces the others in a web of interrelationships in a contemporary organisation. According to the McKinsey 7-S model (Peters and Waterman, 1982), managers do more if they achieve integrated harmony or internal alignment of seven interdependent factors, which are categorised as either "hard" (e.g. strategy, structure and systems) or "soft" (e.g. shared values, skills, staff and styles), as defined in Table 1 (below).

Table 1: Hard and Soft elements of the McKinsey 7-S framework

Hard elements	
Strategy	Purpose of an organisation and pattern in a stream of actions to achieve identified goals over time.
Structure	The way in which tasks and people are specialised and divided, and in which authority is distributed, and also the basic grouping of activities and reporting relationships into organisational sub-units.
System	Formal and informal processes and procedures are used to manage the organisation (e.g. management control systems, information systems, performance measurement and reward systems, quality control systems, and budgeting and resource allocation).
Soft elements	
Superordinate goals(shared value)	Long-term vision, and core or fundamental set of values that are widely shared in the organisation and which serve as guiding principles on what is important.
Skills	The organisation's core competencies and distinctive capabilities, which are required by staff or possessed within the organisation as a whole - for implementing strategy effectively.

Staff	The number and type of employees, and their background, competencies and approaches to recruiting and developing people.
Style	The leadership style of top management and the overall operating style of the organisation. This element encompasses the cultural style of the organisation (e.g. dominant values and beliefs, norms, symbolic acts).

Source: Waterman, Peters and Phillips (1980:10)

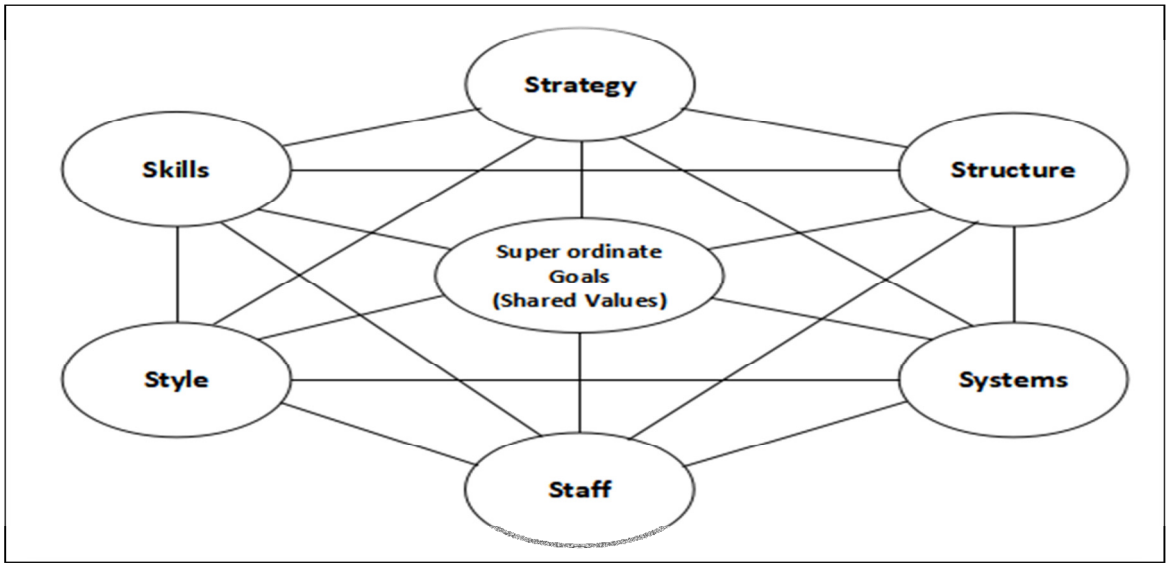
As there are many strategy implementation models and organisation architectures in strategic management (see Louw & Venter 2009), the question of why the McKinsey 7-S model is used -which is not only old but also from the private sector in America - is unavoidable? Even though the organisational forms are evolving, many of the internal elements have not changed significantly - such that internal elements highlighted by the McKinsey 7-S model are still evident in many contemporary private and public sector organisations in South Africa. For example, District Municipalities in South Africa have WSDP, systems, structures, and staff, styles of leadership and management, organisational culture and skills that influence internal functioning.

In this way, the seven elements identified by the McKinsey 7-S model as shaping the internal functioning of organisations in America in 1982 - are in fact similar to those shaping the internal functioning of contemporary organisations in South Africa in 2017. However, the local municipal context in SA is uniquely different from the American corporate world, which is the cultural, socio and economic context of origin for McKinsey 7-S model. Unique challenges for local municipalities in SA include not just the culture of non-payment for municipal services such as water or electricity, lack of institutional capacity and financial mismanagement, but also local clientelistic and patronage interests not supporting the delivery of public service. With all the above in mind, the McKinsey 7-S model is relevant, applicable, and systemic for exploring the dynamics and interdependencies, which enhance or impede the internal functioning of contemporary organisations such as local municipalities (Mbaka & Mugambi 2014:65).

The McKinsey 7-S model is explicit that paying attention to “hard” elements of an organisation while ignoring the “soft” aspects and variety of interrelationships is a major pitfall in strategy execution. It is naïve to dismiss the contemporary relevance of this pitfall to organisations in South Africa. The web of interrelationships between various internal

elements that are critical for internal alignment in the McKinsey 7-S model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interdepedencies in the McKinsey 7-S Model



Source: Louw and Venter (2010:515)

Van Donselaar (2012) used the McKinsey 7-S model to analyse strategy implementation in Netherland's Red Cross, and it is less than a decade ago when Mahomed (2004) analysed strategy implementation at the Johannesburg regional office of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) using the McKinsey 7-S model. Aptly, this showed that although the McKinsey 7-S model is old and originates from the private sector in America - it is also valid and applicable to the contemporary public sector and voluntary organisations, not only in South Africa but also in other countries.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study captures a variety of lived experiences and subjective reality from the viewpoint of area managers involved in executing decentralised water services provision at Local Municipal level.

5.1 Sampling

Area managers in seven of the eight Local Municipalities in a category C District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of SA (RSA 1998) participated in this study. However, one

area manager resigned immediately before this study. Three selection criteria for research participants guided the purposive sampling. A participant had to: (1) be an area manager in a Local Municipality; (2) be intimately involved in the day-to-day activities and knowledgeable of decentralised water services' provision in their respective Local Municipalities; and (3) have a minimum of three years of experience as an area manager seconded by the WSA to a WSP. All seven participants were male, aged 35-50 years, and had an average of four years of work experience.

5.2 Data collection

Nine semi-structured, individual, face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with seven area managers in 2017. Prior to each interview, the researcher obtained informed consent which served to assure each participant of confidentiality, anonymity, and that the collected data would only be used for academic purposes. An interview guide based on McKinsey 7-S, focused on: (1) positive and negative critical incidents on each element, arising from implementation actions and activities; (2) specific interactions and activities taken on each element in the identified critical incidents; (3) and clarity on how each of the seven elements actually supported or impeded others. The guide also focused on: (4) changes in cross-functional coordination; and (5) consequences of what was done over the years. The interview guide was tested before being used in this study. Each interview took an average of one hour and forty minutes. Triangulation of data through constant comparison of views from different participants helped to achieve data saturation, but also improve data quality.

5.3 Data analysis

Meaningful patterns reflecting the implementation of each component of the McKinsey 7-S model were delineated using thematic analysis of the transcribed interview data. Themes developed from patterns of actions, interactions, and consequences of implementation.

5.4 Research quality

A member check allowed participants to enhance the accuracy of transcriptions, while an audit trail of the research process and findings provided in this study contributed to dependability and transferability of findings (Schwandt 2015).

6. FINDINGS

Although internal alignment of a sound structure, style, and strategy were supportive elements in the implementation of decentralised water services, poor alignment between structure, skills, staff and systems, mainly made this implementation ineffective. Detailed findings are discussed below.

6.1 Strategy: Operational efficiency and close proximity to people

All the seven managers agreed that a reduction in travel time and costs when responding to faults - but also the close proximity of technical teams to communities - constitute the strategy to decentralise water services.

> *Previously [name of WSA] used to pay exorbitant amounts of money for technical people to travel from [name of town] to get to sites in deep rural areas to deal with faults … at [names of three distant Local municipalities]. We are closer now … the community can also directly report queries to us* (Manager 4).

As technical staff was close to the community, they gained better understanding of local challenges, location of water infrastructure and politics to get many things done quickly

> *Technical people are close to the communities … who get water services … We also now have a better understanding of the challenges of people in specific local areas … we now understand better the location of our own equipment … local political dynamics to get many things done quicker* (Manager 6).

6.2 Systems not supportive

While six area managers agreed that a variety of key systems were used in the delivery of decentralised water services (e.g. business planning, performance management, budgeting and quarterly disbursement, and financial controls) - most of these were not supportive. For example, WSA staff was not able to monitor water billing and revenues due to inefficiency and lack of a user-friendly financial system at Local Municipalities. Because of this misalignment, the system was not supportive of the financial viability of WSA and organisational-level performance, as elaborated below:

> *The problem is … the District wants to know water and sanitation information, but local Municipality combines all revenues … information on their system. It is difficult to isolate and monitor how much revenue is from water. It is not easy; you have to do it manually* (Manager 7).

Other area managers further said how the selective use of performance management failed to garner support from every employee in relation to decentralised water provision:

> *Annual performance assessment of Area managers is in our contracts. It has never happened … I do not know why it never happens … to us but others. As a result, one does not know if he is performing or not … you also do not get a reward. Our future is always not clear* (Manager 3).

Furthermore, inter-organisational processes such as centralised and periodic disbursement of funds by the WSA to various WSP, created tensions and negative perceptions of WSA - as having power over the Local Municipalities:

> *The main barrier is keeping funds at District level. As such, local municipalities feel that they are not in control of the water provision function ... someone else somewhere is in charge of the funds* (Manager 7).

6.3 Dual structures and unhealthy divisions

All seven managers agreed that the geographically based, multi-functional teams under an area manager created a sound structure, which was compatible with strategy. These multi-functional teams were helpful in facilitating close interaction among technical staff. However, the dual structure distorted the unity of command and confused area managers hosted in WSP - in terms of what to report and to whom:

> *The Area manager should not be reporting to both a Local Municipality and the District Municipality, because sometimes you find that these two institutions are working at cross-purposes and now you are in a dilemma; you do not know what to report to whom. We have not been able to integrate the two organisational structures* (Manager 6).

Although Area managers were in WSP to support decentralised water services' provision, they felt impotent and overlooked, especially in respect of the use of water-related funds - as illustrated below:

> *Area managers have authority in local municipalities only on paper … With due respect, they do not have it in reality. Authority resides with the municipal managers and technical managers of local municipalities, who use water funds for other things … maybe the opening of a separate water account will change this misuse* (Manager 1).

It is however notable those technical managers in WSP did not report to the WSA as required. This created structural dysfunctionality, as Area managers took on this bigger responsibility on behalf of technical managers. In summarising this conflict between structure and staff, one area manager had this to say:

> *Technical managers in local municipalities were supposed to report to [name of WSA]. This is not happening. Instead, this bigger responsibility is left to Area managers* (Manager 4).

Monthly and quarterly meetings for a network of managers from WSP and WSA reflect mechanisms meant for inter-organisational communication and coordination across a hierarchy of levels involved in decentralised water services' provision. However, poor attendance by key decision-makers from WSP undermined the effectiveness of such mechanisms:

> *There are monthly WSA/WSP meetings to discuss operational issues ... advise one another on issues affecting water service delivery. There is also a quarterly technical forum. Unfortunately, key people from local municipalities … Technical managers and others choose not to come. Only area managers under the District Municipality always come …* (Manager 2).

6.4 Divided staff

Five of the interviewees agreed that prerequisites in terms of implementing decentralised water services included the appropriate mix of staff in multi-functional teams - comprising technicians, an administrator, a financial controller, and customer care practitioners, all

under an Area manager in each WSP. One Area manager had this to say on staffing and the requisite help for a WSP:

> *[Name of local municipality withheld] agreed to be a water service provider only if given assistance with the appointment of qualified staff and the payment of salaries by [name of WSA]. So [name of WSA] appointed and seconded these people* (Manager 5).

However, the very same attractive packages and conditions used to attract qualified staff to WSP, inadvertently led to internal divisions and difficulties in managing staff - as elaborated on by an Area manager below:

> *Appointments made by [name of WSA] to a certain extent created some challenges. You deal with a number of different policies for different people … differences in leave administration, staff appointed by the District municipality and seconded to a Local municipality have a higher salary … these also bring tensions* (Manager 2).

6.5 Skills' attraction and development

Six area managers agreed that some WSP succeeded in attracting already trained technical staff to help with the implementation of decentralised water services' provision:

> *We attracted special technical skills, like troubleshooting on civil and mechanical problems. As water services' staff work with many different people like the communities and government departments, we ensured that these staff also had interpersonal and team skills* (Manager 7).

Alternatively, some Local Municipalities that insisted on undertaking their own recruitment ended up with unqualified staff. This sustained skills deficits - despite having a completely filled up structure. This type of misalignment of structure with staff and skills forced the WSP to incur unanticipated staff development costs, among other things, as recalled by one of the interviewees below:

> *They did not appoint staff with the necessary qualifications as prescribed by [Name of WSA]. Some of the people could not troubleshoot at all … they sent these staff for training from scratch. It takes long to train someone. So, they rely on external service providers* (Manager 1).

6.6 Collaborative style

Six of the Area managers reflected on how management and leadership collaborated with a variety of stakeholders in the WSA and key players in WSP, but also with different political leaders, to build internal and external social capital for water service delivery. One of the Area managers reflected on the interactive style of WSA management with employees:

> *[Name of WSA] technical services management inducts new staff ... Presentations are made … sharing the history of the water services' function of [name of District Municipality] … reasons behind the decentralisation of water services' provision function to Local Municipalities. Clarity on roles that each of the new staff would play within Local Municipalities - and so forth* (Manager 6).

Another interviewee focused on how the collaborative leadership style built inter-organisational support in respect of engaging the community:

> *Managers of [name of WSA] always avail themselves and try as much as possible to be visible in our municipality water services' events - to show support. We always invite them to our water services' community awareness campaigns. A slot is always given to the District to make a presentation* (Manager 5).

In some instances, the collaboration of management of WSA with WSP and political leadership helped create triadic resilience comprising WSA, WSP and the community - to ensure safety of the water infrastructure:

> *[Name of Local Municipality] engaged the District Municipality in a one-on-one meeting in trying to resolve repeated theft of water engines. The meeting resulted in a joint awareness campaign by councillors of both the Local and District Municipalities ... to engage citizens … community to safeguard their own water scheme* (Manager 2).

6.7 Limited shared understanding of core values

In this study, there was limited consensus among Area managers on the shared values in the WSA. The best-known core value cited by only three of the seven Area managers was integrity. Commonly, Area managers confused service delivery, customer satisfaction, and

Batho Pele as shared values of the WSA - when they were not. One of the Area managers captured this confusion, as follows:

> *Services delivery … is a priority … it is our shared value to ensure improvement in living conditions, economic development, and the Batho Pele principles of putting people first. These are our shared values* (Manager 3).

Given that only one Area manager could correctly identify a maximum of three of the nine fundamental values of the WSA, reflected the magnitude of the lack of shared understanding and unity of purpose in the implementation of decentralised water services:

> *I believe some of the values are honesty, integrity, and transparency; they were developed in a consultative process where officials and politicians of [name of District Municipality] went to a strategic retreat to formulate these values. The values are there to guide us on how best to serve the community* (Manager 4).

7. DISCUSSION

Overall, the implementation of decentralised water services by a WSA through a network of local municipalities as WSP in SA was predominantly misaligned - as alignment was evident only between a few elements. In terms of alignment, it is noteworthy that the strategy of operational efficiency and also close proximity to people was supported and reinforced by a geographically-based structure of multi-skilled teams located in Local Municipalities - which reduced the cost of travel and also the time to respond to water-related problems. Mbaka and Mugambi (2014:63) explicitly stated that, "unless [strategy] is suitably formed to represent a direction or goal, there is nothing to implement; and organisational members will be unable to work towards its realization". The style of leadership and management by the WSA reinforced this strategic direction by building various forms of support. More importantly, the collaborative style of leadership by WSA influenced internally (e.g. staff), upwards (e.g. political leadership), downwards (junior staff, Area managers) and externally (e.g. citizens in the community) - to build various forms of support for efficient operations in decentralised water services' provision. This reveals that decentralised water services in SA are complex as they entail garnering a variety of support and triadic resilience from three distinct but interactional levels - WSA, WSP and the community. Boreck, Rofcanin and Gurbuz (2015) similarly state that managers use social capital to help organisations to

"bounce back" or "bounce forward" from undesirable events (e.g. theft and vandalism of water infrastructure). While managers of WSA in this study used internal (e.g. employees) and external (e.g. WSP, community) social capital in various ways, it is unclear whether they also used radical change as a way to "bounce forward" from disruptive events. Nonetheless, it is important for managers tasked with implementing decentralised water services by a WSA in SA, to demonstrate collaboration-orientated leadership - for aligning strategy with style, building social capital for operational efficiency and triadic resilience, and innovating their way out of adversity.

Interestingly, the misalignments which predominantly marred the implementation of decentralised water services by a WSA in SA include a gamut of soft elements - in addition to system and structure. For instance, unskilled staff recruited to fill positions for technical experts in WSP, reflected misalignment of skills and a sound structure. More importantly, however, this misalignment was costly as it sustained a lack of technical skills, while necessitating a variety of costs to pay external service providers and trainers. Recruitment practices geared to attract technical skills also created inadvertent division among staff (e.g. disparities in pay and other conditions). This exposes how human resource-related elements of decentralised water services were prevalent in misalignments - which consequently impeded strategy execution. In their study on the implementation of IDP in a Mafikeng Local Municipality in SA, Mokalane *et al*. (2014) concluded that departments did not perform as components of a system - but rather as independent systems.

As highlighted in the findings of this study, misalignment of organisational structure, skills and staff affected implementation negatively through role confusion and a lack of clarity on the scope of authority, and this was compounded by a lack of integration of two organisation structures at the WSP level. In light of this, it is prudent that any manager challenged to lead decentralised water services' provision must address dysfunctionality of structure at WSP level and avoid role confusion and the misunderstanding of mechanisms for inter-organisational coordination and lines of accountability.

When strategy changes, it is appropriate to consider if extant systems are still compatible. In this study, systems impeded the efficient execution of key tasks such as the monitoring of municipal billing and revenue collection at WSP level, so threatening the financial viability of decentralised water services' provision by a WSA. More accurately stated, misaligned

municipal financial systems were technically inefficient and unable to help WSA to easily monitor and understand water-related financial performance in a Local Municipality.

Notably, improper and selective use of performance-management systems was unhelpful, as some employees were not incentivised to contribute to organisational success (Hansen & Ferlie 2016:5). This study underscores that implementing decentralised water services in SA requires not only effective financial, technical, and human resource-related systems - but also municipal leadership and managerial competency that can effectively reinforce the use of extant systems, promote system innovation, and harness the creative and productive energies of all employees in the network of WSP and WSA.

A favourable environment for optimal institutional collaboration and harmony is critical when implementation involves a network of organisations and a hierarchical relationship. Inter-organisational tensions between systems of WSA that reinforced centralised control and procedures (e.g. budgetary allocation, control, and a monthly disbursement system) and those that pronounced the operational autonomy of decentralised WSP facilitated institutional disharmony and negativity by WSP. This underscores the need for external alignment to deal effectively with the dynamics of tasks, processes, controls and any overlapping effects which span distinct organisational boundaries. Mindful of this institutional complexity and tension, for the successful implementation of decentralised water services in SA to occur, managers in WSA must create a series of “tight fits” - not only inside their organisation, but also across WSP or collaborators in a District Municipality. It is less surprising that Weaver *et al*. (2017:398) also encouraged water managers to adopt a systems approach to address the complex challenges of municipal water services in SA. The inherent insight is that inward-focused alignment and externally-focused alignment are key for WSA and WSP to reinforce each other, if decentralised water services provision is to be effective. Nonetheless, the question of change and the nature of the time-horizon for effectively managing the dynamics of internal and external alignment, emphasises that the temporal element of alignment also influences implementation. This insight reveals that managers in WSA face the challenges of managing intra- and inter-organisational processes and activities at the levels of WSA, the network of WSP and also the community on a continuous basis - while implementation unfolds. As such, the mastery of the trinity of internal, external, and temporal alignment is key - if these managers are to be systemic in

their implementation endeavours. Mbaka and Mugambi (2014) echo that the lack of a systemic approach to the implementation in the water sector in Kenya, manifested through improper information systems and poor technical infrastructure and structure, that was incompatible with various key actors.

Higgins (2005) warned managers that failure to align shared values is very grave, as it is enough to spin strategy implementation out of control. In this study, values other than those specified and explicitly desired by the WSA, shaped the work behaviours of Area managers and possibly other employees in the District Municipality being studied. Without the common influence of shared values, it is unlikely that managers and employees in the WSA and network of WSP were all pulling in the same way and towards the same goal of decentralised water services.

This study stresses that throwing money at a new structure in WSP without paying sufficient attention to other aspects of intra- and inter-organisational functioning is easy but superficial to meaningfully steer collective and effective effort toward decentralised water services through a network of interdependent organisations. Instead, what is critical is the systemic effort of re-aligning internal functioning and external interactions in response to strategy change. The implementation of decentralised water services in SA is intuitively simple, but is also complex, multi-level and replete with potential misalignments that are serious pitfalls in practice and also very capable of sabotaging any ill-equipped water services' manager.

8. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

There are three key implications relating to the findings of this study.

8.1 Continuous alignment for adaptive capacity

Misalignments in the internal functioning of WSP and WSA impede the overall effort of implementing decentralised water services. Fundamentally, they reflect failure to re-align critical elements such as systems, staff, and skills - which creates inadvertent rigidities and incompatible elements that undermine the effective implementation of decentralised water services. To avoid this, it is imperative that managers in WSA and WSP continuously re-align each internal element in order to reinforce adaptive capacity through interdependencies within WSA - but also across WSP. This is challenging, as it requires a robust understanding of change within a WSA, network of WSP, and also the environment - as core to shaping

alignment for adaptive capacity and foreseeing and addressing misalignments in the decentralised water services of a WSA in SA.

8.2 Living the shared values

Without unity of purpose fuelled by wide and deep sharing of core values among middle managers, effective implementation of decentralised water services is difficult to achieve. This is primarily because employees pulling in different directions cannot adequately reinforce and promote the implementation of decentralised water services provision by a WSA. Translation of an organisation`s core values into behaviours and decisions by employees, is a key component of alignment not achievable through non-interactive vehicles alone (e.g. framed posters of shared values in a reception area and meeting rooms and inclusion of these values in key organisational documents). Employees need a more engaging style (e.g. face-to-face small meeting) and healthy debate so that values act as an ethical "constitution", which everyone can use to evaluate decisions and behaviours. If managers in WSA are to succeed, they need to cascade shared values through each layer of employees in a WSA in order to unleash organisational capacity to perform - while simultaneously giving motivation, meaning and empowerment of employees.

8.3 Systemic alignment

Challenges of managing inter-organisational tension between WSA and WSP undermine collaborative efforts in decentralised water services' provision that require a different and more comprehensive approach. Alternative ways to align intra- and inter-organisational processes and dynamic interactions and to deal with overlapping effects that span organisational boundaries and levels of a WSA and WSP are essential if the implementation of decentralised water services is to be effective in SA. This article posits that any simultaneous pursuit of internal and external alignment of WSA and WSP should not overlook the temporal and dynamic aspects of implementing decentralised water services in SA. It is therefore critical that managers of decentralised water services in SA adopt a multi-faceted approach - converging on the nexus of inward, external and temporal alignment in pursuit of systemic alignment.

Researchers are implored to grapple with the key elements and web of dynamic interdependencies that are salient for operationalising the notion of systemic alignment in the

multi-level implementation of decentralised water services. This is important for making systemic alignment concrete and easy to practise. Given the multitude of problems with water in SA, urgency in exploring management competencies that are critical for water managers to shift from misaligned to systemic implementation, cannot be emphasised enough. Admittedly, developing these competencies in water services' managers will not be easy - but remains key for preventing the poor delivery of municipal water services from becoming a new norm for many citizens in SA.

9. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the implementation of decentralised water services by a WSA in SA was predominantly misaligned - despite notable alignment of the strategy of operational efficiency and the close proximity to people with a decentralised structure. Collaborative leadership style also aligned with strategy by building social capital. The plethora of misalignments included inefficient systems being unsupportive of strategy, staff being incompatible with structure, unhealthy staff divisions, and unskilled staff creating the unnecessary need for the costly use of external service providers - just to mention a few. More critically, decentralised water services' provision in SA was typified by a lack of unity of purpose, which made attaining success very difficult.

Furthermore, inter-organisational tension between WSA and WSP created an environment which was not conducive for optimal institutional collaboration. The implementation of decentralised water services is characterised as multi-level - involving WSA and WSP as distinct but interdependent organisations at different hierarchical levels. This prevents inward-orientated alignment from fully dealing with the challenges of managing relational dynamics and complexity resulting from overlapping processes and effects that span the organisational boundary of WSA and WSP in the course of implementation. Against this backdrop, external alignment is also needed for smooth co-operation across the levels of WSA, WSP and the community in a District Municipality. It is also important to note that the implementation of decentralised water services in SA requires a focus on the trinity of alignment - internal, external and temporal - to support and reinforce each other.

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