

Assessing the Extent of the Application of Strategic Thinking in a Local Sphere of Government

¹Thabo Ramodula, ¹Cecile N. Gerwel Proches and ²Elias Munapo

¹Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Westville Campus, Durban, South Africa

²School of Economics and Decision Sciences, North West University, Mafeking, South Africa

Abstract: This study assessed the extent of the application of strategic thinking in a Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. It was aimed at initiating an inquiry into the relevance of strategic thinking to local governance: its concept and theoretical orientation in the systems approach paradigm and/or science of complexity. The study adopted a qualitative methodology and gave primacy to the key role-players in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process which was treated as equivalent to a strategy-making process. The participants interviewed included senior staff members, ward councillors and ward committee members because of their strategic positions to influence the current and future strategic decision-making as well in determining how to improve it.

Key words: Strategic thinking, integrated development plan, systems perspective, vision-orientated strategy, staff members, determining

INTRODUCTION

The practice of strategy is associated with characteristics like winning, coherence and direction towards the realisation of organisational vision as its core purpose while its formulation is predominately a managerial function. From the origin of strategy in the realm of warfare, it is quite evident that armies depended solely on the wisdom of their military commanders to design strategies to conquer their adversaries (Neiberg, 2011; Carron, 2010; Ho, 1997). The practice of strategy in realms including military and business in particular (i.e., private and public sectors) is still largely assumed by senior management teams (Reed, 2006).

Recent strategy studies demonstrate a drastic shift from reliance on step-by-step articulation of programmes to more systemic approaches recognizing both complexities and uncertainties that cannot be contained by legislative prescripts unpredictable (Agar, 2007; Lissack, 1999). This implies that effective strategy-making within a domain is characterised by highly structured processes or procedures.

A classic example of the reductionist approach (step-by-step) is the National Development Plan in South Africa. The office of the Presidency in South Africa released the green paper on national strategic planning which provides normative guidelines

for strategic planning for the provincial and local spheres of government. Briefly, the green paper provides for long-term strategic planning as opposed to ad hoc and fragmented planning in government. This implies that provincial and local governments must consider their strategic plans in accordance with the national guidelines. The government's approach to strategic planning could therefore be categorised as classically top-down, hierarchical and linear (Chapman, 2004; Reed, 2006).

The history of South Africa's strategic planning (socio-economic policies), particularly since 1994, bears testimony to this effect. Embedded in the freedom charter and as a core policy framework of the ruling party the African National Congress (ANC) the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was adopted by the democratic government as an ideal plan to address the social and economic problems facing South Africa. Since, the RDP was not considered extensive enough for rebuilding and restructuring the economy, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy was later adopted as the government's macroeconomic strategy. Although, GEAR was considered to be an alternative strategy to meet the challenges outlined in the RDP, it did not succeed in enhancing growth, employment or redistribution as envisaged. Hence in 2006, some 12 years later, the accelerated and shared growth initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) and the Joint Initiative on Priority

Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) were launched with the particular intention to confront unemployment and the skills shortage. Again in 2012, a new plan called the National Development Plan (NDP) was adopted by the national government which aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. Today, planning at both provincial and municipal levels must respond to national targets as encapsulated in the NDP. While, the NDP constitutes a premise upon which the programmes of the provincial government must be drafted, municipal planning is guided by both the NDP and the provincial growth and development strategy. However, it is worth noting that growth and development strategy is a fairly new phenomenon in local governance.

This study gives primacy to this complex environment and its implications for strategic decision-making in local government. The study utilises complexity theory to examine the nature of the local government environment because this theory provides tools for strategy-makers to wholly understand (government) systems and their emergent priorities and transformational potential (Byrne, 2005). According to Lissack (1999), complexity theory challenges established ways of doing things and challenges the status quo of placing too much reliance on the set of rules.

Because municipalities wrestle with both complex and unpredictable challenges facing local communities in the context of complexity theory a municipality is considered to be a complex system defined by complex relationship(s) among its elements (Brown and Lerch, 2007; Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1998). With regard to strategic thinking, reference is made to strategy theory which portrays emergent characteristics as being triggered by complexities and uncertainties (Gharajedaghi, 2011; Tallman and Koza, 2016).

The research problem: According to the South African Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, local government is currently in a state of distress. Such 'distress' manifests in different forms insufficient funds, unemployment, poverty, poor service delivery, violent conflicts (civil unrests and labour disputes), billing crises as well as many other forms of political decay such as corruption. Thus, the institutional integrity of individual municipalities is also at stake.

Dealing with the 'distress' in question, municipal authorities assemble annually to review how they plan to meet the institutional strategic objectives as prescribed by the municipal systems act. In the context of this legislative requirement, the IDP is treated as equivalent to the normal strategic planning practices at both provincial and national government as encapsulated in the framework

for strategic plans and annual performance plans (National Treasury, 2010). Ideally, the provision for annual review of strategic objectives (or plans) should be a great opportunity for local government leadership to detect discrepancies between the IDP and the realities shaping local governance. However, municipalities do not always take advantage of such opportunities because of the reductionist prescripts of command-and-control, implying that they merely endeavour to comply with what has been prescribed. Furthermore, inherent to traditional strategic-planning practice, strategy-making is dominated by those at the helm of governance while real executors (non-executives) and the affected (communities) are often pushed to the periphery and endeavours to solicit public opinion are for conformity purposes only (Tovstiga, 2010).

Local authorities, however are faced with challenges and unless municipalities adapt to the uncertainty and complexity of today's turbulent environments, they will fail to execute their constitutional mandate. To overcome these uncertainties, one must invoke the tools offered by the science of complexity particularly strategic thinking (Amagoh, 2008). Rosenberg-Hansen and Ferlie (2016) explore strategic-management thinking in the public sector.

Purpose of the study/motivation: This study initiates an inquiry into the relevance of strategic thinking with respect to local governance with its concept and its theoretical orientation in the systems approach paradigm. The intention is not to propose an alternative approach to the current traditional strategic-planning practices as encapsulated in the IDP document but to provide a conceptual framework to engage strategic thinking. For this reason, the study is premised on the recognition of the IDP as the principal strategic-planning instrument or approach for municipalities as a legislative requirement.

Furthermore, since the legislation provides for community involvement in municipal affairs this study also investigates the involvement of other stakeholders in the IDP process: the ward committees in particular. This study is based on a number of premises. First, although strategic thinking and strategic planning complement each other as they constitute two sides of the same coin and strategic thinking usually precedes strategic planning. Second, the emergence of complexity science provides a new framework for thinking and responding accordingly to the current challenges facing municipalities. Therefore, strategic thinking is presented as a tool to assist municipalities better understand their turbulent environments and to overcome these challenges.

The study pays particular attention to the strategy-making process with respect to the IDP as practised in a Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. The identity of the municipality is not revealed due to confidentiality agreements especially because the study analyses strategic aspects. Following a decision of the municipal demarcation board of South Africa in 2010, this particular municipality was declared to be a metropolitan Category A municipality.

What is the Integrated Development Plan (IDP)?

Considered from a legislative perspective, the local government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000 defines the IDP as follows: Section 35(1) (a) “the principal strategic planning instrument which guides and informs all planning and development and all decisions with regard to planning, management and development in the municipality” which according to Section 35(1) (b), “binds the municipality in the exercise of its executive authority”.

Literature review: The theoretical framework of this study concentrates on systems thinking and complexity theories that can provide appropriate strategies leading to the improvement of service delivery. Studies on the history of strategy (management) embrace those which consider its evolution from the military realm to the private sector where it gained momentum after World War 2 until the late 1980’s and early 1990’s from which the practice of strategy remains intact in the general public sector (Carron, 2010). The evolution of strategy in the post-war era coincided with the emergence of systems thinking, yet another important and relevant theory in contemporary management thinking.

Overview of the historical development of strategy theory:

The concept of strategy has its origin in the realm of warfare. Sun Tzu, esteemed as the best (Chinese) strategist of all time, wrote a military treatise commonly known as the “Art of War” in about 500 BC which still remains relevant to most strategists and leaders today (Neigberg, 2011; Carron, 2010; Ho, 1997). Military thinkers in both ancient and modern discourses of war endorse Sun Tzu’s “five fundamental factors” that characterise a war. These include: “the moral, the weather, the terrain, command and doctrine” (Critzler, 2012; Holmes, 2001; Gray, 1998). An organisational strategy essentially outlines the strategic direction of the organisation (Vracheva *et al.*, 2016).

Conceptual orientation (strategic planning and strategic thinking): Mintzberg (1994) argued that in order to revert to the original meaning of strategy-making as “capturing

what the manager learns from all sources and then synthesising that learning into a vision of the direction that the business should pursue”, the difference between strategic planning and strategic thinking must be understood.

Strategic planning: Upon its arrival in the realm of planning or strategic management, strategic planning was embraced as a panacea to most governance-related issues (Mintzberg, 1994). It was considered as “the one best way to device and implement strategies” (Janczak, 2005). Its proponents were content that strategic planning is destined to offer “revitalisation of governments and the public service”.

Strategic thinking: The core content of strategic thinking is captured by the term ‘synthesis’ (Mintzberg, 1994). According to Yolles (1999), synthesis involves “selecting, inventing, creating, designing or developing possible options or scenarios for use as strategies for action”. Synthesis denotes the combination of separate elements of a system to form a coherent whole.

Systems thinking: The development of systems thinking as a scientific discipline under the tutelage of Ludwig von Bertalanffy and its major pioneers including Russell, Ackoff, Parsons, Boulding and Forrester is premised on the discrepancies associated with the three historic paradigms: the scholastic, renaissance and mechanistic schools (Skyttner, 2005; Ackoff, 1996).

Viable Systems Model (VSM): The most essential element distinguishing the VSM from the other systems approaches is the notion of ‘viability’. The latter is needed most for the organisation to survive and succeed in its “environment” (Ahmad and Yusoff, 2006).

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM): Subsequent to a 30 years action research programme undertaken by Peter Checkland and his colleagues, the SSM was initially introduced as part of action research and general systems theory but was later “developed as a multipurpose and flexible methodology” (Checkland and Poulter, 2010). Today, it has developed further as a tool for modelling, learning and development (Williams, 2005). According to Khisty (1995), the development of the SSM emanates from “dissatisfaction with the limitations of the traditional hard systems methodology”. Within the systems thinking paradigm, the SSM serves the purpose of “locat[ing] the use of systems concepts in the process of inquiry rather than objective observations of the real world”.

Complexity theory: Complexity theory has its roots in chaos theory (dealing with disorder, irregularity and randomness) and provides a means to adapt in complex and uncertain situations (Jackson, 2003). To understand this theory, however, precedence must be given to the definition of the concept 'complex system'. Agar (2007) defines a complex system as a "non-linear dynamic system". It is nonlinear, since it cannot be prescribed (non-reductionist), dynamic for "moving through time" and systemic due to the interconnectedness of its elements. Both the chaos and complexity theories "serve as appropriate metaphors for understanding the nature of the strategic environment" in terms of its key features and how it functions (Yarger, 2006).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is aimed at exploring ways of integrating a strategic thinking orientation into the municipality's strategy-making process. A qualitative research method as well as a case study were selected for this study.

The objectives of the study: The study seeks to:

- Evaluate strategic planning within the municipality against the idealised strategy-making process deemed relevant for the local government environment
- Examine the process followed by the municipality during the strategic-planning process
- Provide strategies to enable the improvement of service delivery
- Identify possible limitations of the current practice of strategy

Research questions: In the context of the foregoing analysis, the primary research question to be investigated by this study is:

- Can strategic thinking be applied at any of the stages of the IDP process?

Added to this, the study also seeks to respond to the following questions:

- How does the local authority manage multiple inputs from different stakeholders during the IDP process?
- What happens if the latest developments seem to contradict the approved IDP?
- What are the key elements of the municipal strategy-making process and who are the key participants?

- How does strategic thinking complement strategic planning?
- When it comes to strategic thinking and/or strategic planning which comes first?

Research design: The study applied the qualitative research method because its focus is premised on the observation and interpretation of a particular real-life context (Rubin and Babbie, 2009). A case-study design was chosen because it would be impossible for the study to uncover a true picture of the municipality's strategic planning (or strategic thinking) without the context, a case study and particularly the role of those individuals or groups involved in the strategy-making process (Baxter and Jack, 2008). As an empirical inquiry, a case study provides for the investigation of a present-day issue like strategic decision-making within a real-life situation (Yin, 2003).

Sampling method: The study was conducted in a Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. The research followed a process of purposive sampling. This implies that the sample was chosen based on the knowledge of the population and the purpose of the research under review (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). It was therefore deemed appropriate to select five individuals who had substantive experience and who were directly involved in strategic decision-making in the municipality. It was further decided to include the ward councillors as well as their ward committees due to their direct involvement in the development of the strategic plan of the municipality.

Method of data collection: Given the multiple sources of data used in qualitative studies identified by Creswell (1998, 2009), the study applied the following four basic types of data collection: interviews, observations, documents and audio-visual materials. However, it must be noted that although audio material was used, there were no pictures taken. The study scrutinised relevant speeches of the political office-bearers as a primary source for the strategic vision of the municipality. Furthermore, to be able to understand and interpret the inputs of the selected participants, the study analysed official documents of government, including reports, IDP and budget documents, council resolutions and policy directives as the primary sources of data. The accuracy and feasibility of this information were verified during interviews with the participants. Added to these, the participants provided more detailed information on request. A total of twelve interviews were conducted including four senior staff members, five ward councillors and four ward committees due to their direct involvement in the strategic-planning process at the municipality.

Method of data analysis: The study used thematic analysis, a conventional practice in qualitative research involving scrutinising data in order to examine recurrent issues (Creswell, 1994). Thematic analysis is considered better placed to enable researchers to interpret and analyse interview data which have been transcribed into a readable form. Thematic analysis provides for flexibility and the establishment of themes or clusters to link different expressions conveying similar meaning.

Validity and reliability: Validity in the context of qualitative research involves the steps taken by the researcher in ensuring that the findings of the study are accurate while reliability seeks to establish congruency with the existing studies or body of knowledge (Creswell, 2009). In this case study, a detailed protocol for data collection was developed and adhered to in conducting the study. This was aimed at ensuring maximum reliability and validity of the findings of the study (Yin, 2003).

Ethical issues: A formal request for permission to undertake the study was sent to the director corporate services of the municipality who granted the necessary approval. Ethical clearance to undertake this study was also obtained. All respondents were requested to complete an informed consent letter. The first part of the letter outlined the aims and objectives of the study as well as ethical matters relating to the rights of the respondents to refuse to participate or to be able to withdraw from the research project at any time with no negative consequences. This part of the informed consent letter was left with them (respondents) as a way of demonstrating objectivity and openness on the part of a researcher by giving them the opportunity to confirm the authenticity of the study. The second part of the informed consent letter was signed by all respondents and these were retained by the researcher for record purposes. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder with the consent of all the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key features of strategic thinking ideal for promoting good governance: Key features of strategic thinking that have a significant bearing on good municipal governance were identified throughout the study. Although, the study focused on strategic thinking as the main theme, rather than good governance, good governance would only be possible if a congruency exists between strategy outcomes (needs of the community or service-delivery issues) and the vision of the organisation. The study

uncovered strategic thinking as a “theoretically and conceptually rigorous” process which provides “for a wide range of possible outcomes” for overcoming local government distress (Tovstiga, 2010).

Holistic approach to strategic planning: The study exposed the municipality’s practice of strategy as being smothered by a thicket of legislative requirements. Hence, it embraces a more reductionist-orientated approach in the strategy-making process. The implication for non-conformity to the legislative prescripts was considered as being the main reason for being content with a linear municipal system. Holism applied to a municipal system denotes that performance is in terms of its ‘whole’ rather than its departments operating in silos.

The study found that a municipality is a complex system and must therefore have a holistic approach to strategy. Although, there is evidence of the municipality’s ability to integrate a wide range of activities (provincial and national policy directives, business and civil society) into a holistic municipal plan, the principles of holism (systems/strategic thinking) are still compromised by an attempt to predict behaviour. The study demonstrated that it is difficult to predict non-linear systems (Sutton, 1998).

Vision-orientated strategy: While on the one hand, the respondents attested that the IDP is vision-orientated and culminates from a series of public consultations, they also admitted that the very good intention of the municipal authorities to involve everyone in crafting institutional vision seems to be frustrated by the fact that public consultation is undertaken merely for compliance purposes. Putting much emphasis on compliance implies that the municipality gives primacy to reporting progress in things like meeting deadlines, than being concerned with coordinating and facilitating effective participatory development initiatives.

Thinking in time: The study established that a time factor features strongly in the conventional approach to strategic planning, although in a reductionist manner. All reporting mechanisms of the IDP including quarterly reports and annual reviews are the predetermined schedules fulfilling certain legislative requirements. Thinking in time as strategic thinking purports, instils vigilance on emergent properties. The municipality as a complex system, often facilitates dynamic interactions among multiple stakeholders out of which (new) patterns (emergent properties) arise, so, challenging the status quo.

Unlike conventional thinking which is reactive (thinking later) to emergent changes or problems, strategic thinking challenges the leadership to be up-to-date with issues characterising the present reality, since the present glues history and the future (vision) of the institution together (Yolles, 1999; Liedtka, 1998). It was therefore, established that thinking in time petitions leaders (e.g., councilors, ward committees, officials) to respond (for adaptation) timeously to change (emergent issues). It does not necessary denote timeous reporting as oversight institutions (e.g., legislative committees) would probably desire.

A system perspective: Commensurate with earlier research by Brown and Lerch (2007) on systems thinking as a tool for municipalities, it was established through this study that the ‘butterfly effect’ which is premised on the aphorism “a little tweak can have major effects and major inputs may have no effect” does in fact apply to a municipal system. The study identified that the very definition of a municipality as a complex system (Brown and Lerch, 2007) propels municipal leaders to acquaint themselves with complex systems especially as systems approaches or complexity science dictates. It was established that the ‘butterfly effect’ notion cautions that ‘minor’ local-governance issues can cause major effects. For example, a maintenance issue involving a pipe spewing toxic chemicals can pose serious health risks to all those living within that specific municipal jurisdiction. In the same vein, a single opinion by a concerned resident has the potential to spiral into civil unrest.

Agar (2007) argued that “only intervention in a complex system may or may not have intended results but will inevitably create emancipated and often undesirable results”. It was found that understanding a systems approach equips leaders with the ability to treat every local governance issue delicately. If the strategist at municipal level were introduced to the complexity theory and CAS principles, they could improve local governance as follows:

- Treating employees and community members as strategic thinkers (agents with schemata)
- Allowing self-organisation structures such as informal brainstorming sessions and thus applying free interactions in local governance (Dooley, 2002)
- The butterfly effect on local governance (sensitive dependence)
- The relevance of history that drove the institution (municipality) to where it finds itself today (Agar, 2007)

- Incorporating path dependence in local governance taking into account precedents set and their impact on local governance today (David, 2006)
- Embracing the emergence of new properties
- Sustainably using the municipal environment (natural) or maintaining co-evolution with it (Boons and Gerrits, 2008)
- Learning accordingly about the things that are improving local governance (Whitt, 2009)
- Remaining calm at the edge of chaos (when an institution is on the verge of chaos) and recognising that such times present a great opportunity for creativity, coherence and expertise (Remington and Pollack, 2008)
- Municipal services are far from being in equilibrium because they are complex and/or messy: equilibrium or total stability in local governance is impossible since, complex systems are characterised by messy problems and uncertainty (Lichtenstein, 2009). This does not propagate anarchy but recognises that change is a rapid and inevitable natural phenomenon
- Egalitarianism (equal treatment) of all municipal role-players is significant because they all have a butterfly effect

The municipality’s approach to strategy practice: The findings revealed that the IDP is a legislative requirement for the practice of strategy for all municipalities in South Africa. It is a municipal strategic plan designed for a 5 years municipal council (or mayoral) term which is reviewed annually with the budget cycle. In accordance with the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, the municipality adheres to this national trend in order to fulfil certain legislative requirements.

The study identified that the municipality’s approach to strategy is more inclined to conventional strategic planning that gained prominence after World War II (Pascale, 1999). However, it was also established that the strategic planning of the IDP includes financial planning, long-term planning and an environmental and multi-year focus features that were highlighted by Mintzberg (1994). The study established that the IDP is aligned with the annual budget (financial planning), long-term vision (GDS), the 5 years tenure (multi-year focus of both the IDP and MTREF budget) and the analysis of the internal and external environments.

It was also found that the practice of strategy in the municipality is somewhat different from the original intent of strategy especially in accordance with the ancient science of warfare (holistic approach). The strategic plan (IDP) is predominantly reductionist due

its reliance on the prescriptions of public policy. This is because the actual IDP process (including its review) is legislatively prescribed to follow a step-by-step procedure (process plan). In this regard, the IDP is reduced to a mere programmatic and analytical thought process (Heracleous, 1998).

Strategic planning process followed by the municipality:

With respect to the case study presented in this study, the following observations were highlighted constituting the process followed by the municipality during strategic planning:

- The process is formalised from the first to last stage. It begins with a municipal council approving a process plan and ends with a municipal council approving or adopting the final IDP
- The process unfolds programmatically in accordance with the approved process plan
- Despite, the legislative requirement (municipal systems act) that the executive mayor or mayoral committee manage IDP process, the actual process is delegated to the city manager
- The internal process is predominantly managerialist as it involves senior management
- The process involves multiple stakeholders

Limitations of the municipality's approach to strategy:

It became evident throughout the study that the municipality's practice of strategy (IDP) subscribes to a conventional approach to strategic planning. The latter approach has also been proven to be lacking in terms of keeping pace with the latest developments characterised by complexity and uncertainty. Specific deficiencies in this regard are: control-and-command approach encapsulated in numerous pieces of legislations applicable in local government (South Africa) extinguishes the community's zeal for active participation in local governance. Respondents attested to this and confirmed that public participation is merely for compliance (to legislation) purposes. A systematic unfolding of the IDP in accordance with a predetermined agenda (i.e., the IDP process plan) thwarts creativity and innovation for internal and external stakeholders.

Compliance-orientation and the managerialist approach characterising the municipality's IDP process, stands in the place of strategic thinking. Although, strategic thinking is essentially a leadership attribute, it provides for active involvement of everyone in a complex system such as a municipality. The practice of strategy at the municipality has become the domain of senior

managers and/or leaders. Other than submissions for the compilation of existing data needed during situational analysis, there is no record of active involvement of middle management and lower staff in the IDP process. Ironically, those excluded in strategising are the principal functionaries in the implementation process and therefore, they are better placed to discern discrepancies between what is envisaged (approved strategy or IDP) and reality (uncertainties).

Extent of the application of strategic thinking in the municipality:

The municipality's concerted effort to possess a situational wisdom by employing an extensive consultative approach is the most salient example of strategic thinking. By its very nature, the IDP is designed to link, integrate and co-ordinate plans in the spirit of cooperative government. In the light of the definition of a municipality as a complex system (Brown and Lerch, 2007), a systems perspective therefore presents the municipality as being an ideal institution to apply strategic thinking. A critical challenge facing the municipality here relates to its intuitional capacity to manage (intelligibly) the interconnectedness of internal departments or directorates as well as its environments (external and internal).

Recommendations for the municipality: Strategic thinking could certainly make a significant contribution to the municipality's practice of strategy towards improved local governance. In this regard, the following recommendations relate directly to strategic thinking and reflect on certain IDP matters or principles.

Vision-orientated strategy: Strategic thinking is premised on the notion of a 'vision-oriented strategy' in turbulent times (Horwath, 2006; Janczak, 2005; Liedtka, 1998; GPW., 2000). To overcome leadership and governance challenges facing local government, the municipality must inscribe its mark on good governance. To achieve this, Brown and Lerch (2007)'s study identified systems thinking a paradigm which promotes strategic thinking as a tool for municipalities.

Institutional situational analysis: The study uncovered possible underutilisation of knowledge and skills at the disposal of municipality, due its approach on strategy as being exclusively the domain of senior management (Minzberg, 1994). To ensure that all directorates do exactly what they are supposed to do and that they possess situational wisdom of almost every minute detail in their span of control (e.g., solid waste, parks, health,

Table 1: Situational analysis

Parameters	Description	Application in the IDP process
C	Customers all affected by the very operation of a municipal system	Members of the community Municipality employees Members of the municipality's council (e.g., councillors) Other spheres of government because of concurrent competences and/or cooperative government) Interest groups
A	Actors role-players in the operation of a system	E.g., business, community, employees, creditors
T	Transformation	Enhancing participatory democracy Improving institutional performance towards promotion of good performance Effective management and transformation of disputes community/labour
W	World view	Distressing state of local government in South Africa; capacity-related messy problems; steps towards establishing developmental local government; promotion of good governance
O	Owners	Those who can stop or review the process/activity, e.g., partnership
E	Environmental	Unpredictability and complexity of challenges facing the municipality

environment), interconnectedness of responsibilities and individuals concerned requires dynamic leadership. Dynamic leadership in this regard implies.

Introduction of intra-departmental round-table thinking:

Since, a systems approach values the role of everyone (or every element) constituting a system, everyone in the employ of the municipality is therefore indispensable. The functionality of the municipality as a system, depends on the contributions of everyone and their interconnectedness. In order to invoke such a contribution, the introduction of intra-departmental round-table thinking is proposed. The concept 'round table' is founded upon the principles of complexity theory and embraces the notion of progressive dialogue which is conducive to the emergence of new ideas for creativity and/or innovation. In this regard, the SSM's acronym, CATWOE could assist municipal strategists to improve their situational analysis as illustrated in Table 1 (Jackson, 2003).

Gradual application of strategic thinking: It is recommended that strategic thinking be introduced in gradual and manageable units (department or directorate) as a pilot study. This will build evidence on how to explore strategic thinking fully.

The fact that strategy-making depends on soft and hard data as discovered in this study (Mintzberg, 1994), the knowledge management unit as stewards of tacit and explicit knowledge, must work closely with the IDP unit for this endeavour.

CONCLUSION

The study found that a municipality is a complex system and must therefore have a holistic approach to strategy. The study recommends a paradigm shift towards the incorporation of strategic thinking into municipalities

in order to improve the current conventional planning practices and to encourage effective participatory democracy. In this context, strategic thinking should not be embraced as rendering the IDP obsolete but rather as complementing it. The study also recommends that strategic thinking should precede strategic planning or the IDP perse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies could explore possible means to reduce reliance on the mass of legislation in order to allow for greater creativity and innovative thinking within the public sector milieu. There is also a dire need for more extensive research on the possible viability of the municipality in accordance with the principles of the VSM. The study could explore the application of the substantive elements of VSM including self-sufficiency, self-existence and co-evolution of the municipalities with their environment (Ahmad and Yusoff, 2006). These elements must be tested against the relevant opportunities pertaining to local economic development in order to overcome the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

REFERENCES

Ackoff, R.L., 1996. From Mechanistic to Social Systemic Thinking: Innovations in Management Series. Pegasus Communications, Berwyn, Pennsylvania.
 Agar, M., 2007. Rolling complex rocks up social service hills: A personal commentary. *Emergence Complexity Organ.*, 9: 97-106.
 Ahmad, R and M.B. Yusoff, 2006. A viable system approach to tackle complex enterprise situation for SISF. *Malaysian J. Comput. Sci.*, 19: 87-103.

- Amagoh, F., 2008. Perspectives on organizational change: systems and complexity theories. *Innovation J. Public Sect.*, 13: 1-14.
- Baxter, P. and S. Jack, 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *Qual. Rep.*, 13: 544-559.
- Boons, F. and L. Gerrits, 2008. Between self-organization and government: A complexity perspective on the rise and fall of the hierarchical state. *Proceedings of the 2008 Conference on European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR'08)*, January 1, 2008, University of Essex, Colchester, England, pp: 1-15.
- Brown, S.E. and D. Lerch, 2007. *Systems thinking: A tool for municipalities*. Post Carbon Institute, Santa Rosa, California.
- Byrne, D.S., 2005. Complexity, configurations and cases. *Theory Culture Soc.*, 22: 95-111.
- Carron, G., 2010. *Strategic Planning: Concept and Rationale*. UNESCO Publications, Paris, France.
- Chapman, J., 2004. *System Failure: Why Governments Must Learn to Think Differently*. Demos Medical Publishing, New York, USA., ISBN:1-84180-044-09, Pages: 86.
- Checkland, P. and J. Poulter, 2010. *Soft Systems Methodology*. In: *Systems Approaches to Managing Change: A Practical Guide*, Reynolds, M. and S. Holwell (Eds.). Springer, London, UK., ISBN:978-1-84882-808-7, pp: 191-242.
- Creswell, J.W., 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA., USA., ISBN-13: 9780803952546, Pages: 228.
- Creswell, J.W., 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA., USA., ISBN-13: 9780761901433, Pages: 403.
- Creswell, J.W., 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications, London, England, ISBN:9781412965576, Pages: 260.
- Critzer, O.D., 2012. *21st Century Strategy Needs Sun Tzu*. United States Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
- David, P.A., 2006. Path dependence: A foundational concept for historical social science. *J. Historical Econ. Econometric Hist.*, 1: 1-23.
- Denzin, N.K. and N.K. Lincoln, 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications, London, England, ISBN:9780761915126, Pages: 1143.
- Dooley, K., 2002. *Organisation Complexity*. In: *International Encyclopaedia of Business and Management*, Warner, M. (Ed.). Thompson Learning, London, England, pp: 5013-5022.
- Funtowicz, S. and J. Ravetz, 1998. *Post-normal science-environmental policy under conditions of complexity*. Centre for the Study of the Sciences and the Humanities, Oxford, UK.
- GPW., 2000. *Local government: Municipal systems act of 2000 (Act 32 of 2000)*. Government Printing Works, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Gharajedaghi, J., 2011. *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture*. 3rd Edn., Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Burlington, Massachusetts, USA., ISBN:978-0-12-385915-0, Pages: 351.
- Gray, C.S., 1998. *Explorations in Strategy*. Praeger Publishers, London, England, ISBN:9780275962562, Pages: 265.
- Heracleous, L., 1998. Strategic thinking or strategic planning?. *Long Range Plann.*, 31: 481-487.
- Ho, S.K., 1997. Competitive strategies through Sun Tze's Art of warfare. *Strategic Change*, 6: 133-147.
- Holmes, C.K., 2001. *What the Chinese learned from Sun-Tzu*. United States Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA391266>.
- Horwath, R., 2006. *The origin of strategy*. Strategic Thinking Institute, Barrington Hills, Illinois. http://www.strategyskills.com/Articles_Samples/origin_strategy.pdf.
- Jackson, M.C., 2003. *Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers*. John Wiley & Sons, London, England, ISBN:9780470845226, Pages: 378.
- Janczak, S., 2005. The strategic decision-making process in organizations. *Prob. Perspect. Manage.*, 3: 58-70.
- Khisty, C.J., 1995. Soft-systems methodology as learning and management tool. *J. Urban Plann. Dev.*, 121: 91-107.
- Lichtenstein, B.B., 2009. *Moving far-from-equilibrium: Opportunity tension as the drive for the emergence*. Master Thesis, University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Liedtka, J.M., 1998. Strategic thinking: Can it be taught?. *Long Range Plann.*, 31: 120-129.
- Lissack, M.R., 1999. *Complexity: The science, its vocabulary and its relation to organizations*. Emergence, 1: 110-126.
- Mintzberg, H., 1994. The fall and rise of strategic planning. *Harvard Business Rev.*, 72: 107-114.

- National Treasury, 2010. Framework for strategic plans and annual performance plans. National Treasury, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Neiberg, M., 2011. The evolution of strategic thinking in world war I: A case study of the second battle of the marne. *J. Mil. Strategic Stud.*, 13: 1-19.
- Pascale, R.T., 1999. Surfing the edge of chaos. *Sloan Manage. Rev.*, 40: 83-94.
- Reed, G.E., 2006. Leadership and systems thinking. *Defense AT. L.*, 35: 10-13.
- Remington, K. and J. Pollack, 2008. Tools for Complex Projects. Routledge, Abingdon, UK., ISBN-13:978-0566087417, Pages: 211.
- Rosenberg-Hansen, J. and E. Ferlie, 2016. Applying strategic management theories in public sector organizations: Developing a Typology. *Publ. Manage. Rev.*, 18: 1-19.
- Rubin, A. and E.R. Babbie, 2009. Essential Research Methods for Social Work. 2nd Edn., Cengage Learning, Belmont, USA., ISBN-13: 9780495604372, Pages: 384.
- Skyttner, L., 2005. General Systems Theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice. 2nd Edn., World Scientific, Singapore, ISBN:981-256-467-5, Pages: 525.
- Sutton, C., 1998. Strategic Concepts. Macmillan Publishers, Great Britain, UK., ISBN:9780333725306, Pages: 176.
- Tallman, S. and M.P. Koza, 2016. Strategic Animation and Emergent Processes: Managing for Efficiency and Innovation in Globally Networked Organizations. In: Perspectives on Headquarters-subsiary Relationships in the Contemporary MNC, Ambos, T.C., B. Ambos and J. Birkinshaw (Eds.). Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, UK., pp: 59-85.
- Tovstiga, G., 2010. Strategy in Practice: A Practitioner's Guide to Strategic Thinking. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, New Jersey, ISBN:978-0-470-97239-7, Pages: 163.
- Vracheva, V., W.Q. Judge and T. Madden, 2016. Enterprise strategy concept, measurement and validation: Integrating stakeholder engagement into the firm's strategic architecture. *Eur. Manage. J.*, 34: 374-385.
- Whitt, R.S., 2009. Adaptive policy-making: Evolving and applying emergent solutions for US communications policy. *Fed. Commun. Law J.*, 6: 483-494.
- Williams, B., 2005. Soft Systems Methodology. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Michigan.
- Yarger, H.R., 2006. Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy. Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Pages: 83.
- Yin, R.K., 2003. Case Study Research: Designs and Methods. 3rd Edn., SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, ISBN:0-7619-2552-X, Pages: 185.
- Yolles, M., 1999. Management Systems: A Viable Approach. Financial Times Pitman Publisher, London, England, ISBN:9780273620181, Pages: 474.