



An Investigation of the Impact of Leadership Development Programmes on Councillor Leadership Effectiveness

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Abstract

The global demands on politicians across all levels (local, sub-national and national levels) have increased exponentially and placed a strain on them to develop themselves to be agile to the evergrowing demands of the constituencies they serve. The South African political context is no exception to these global demands, infact there are more challenges which are exarcebated by the low maturity levels of democracy. In South Africa politics is now regarded as a career and is a job to many political leaders who otherwise would be jobless given the high unemployment rate in the country. This has resulted into the political arena being a highly contested space sometimes even characterized by political killings because of the competition for the positions of councillors. The political positions also enable some unscrupulous councillors to have access to resources and begin to amass them for themselves and their friends and families. This therefore necessitates the need for politicians (councillors) to be developed to be able to rise above these challenges and lead with integrity. It is for this reason that this study investigated the impact of leadership development programmes on councillor leadership effectiveness of eThekweni Municipality ward councillors. The article used quantitative research methodology to collect and analyse data. The study found that leadership development programmes have a positive impact on councillor leadership effectiveness. It therefore recommended that councillors' leadership development programmes should be intensified and councillors should be allowed to pursue academic studies (diplomas and degrees) to enable them to face challenges of local government.

Keywords: *Professionalization; Professional Development; Local Government; Ward Councillors; Leadership Development Programmes; Higher Education Institutions; Public Management; Financial Management*

Introduction

One of the main principles and pillars of professionalization is professional development which is meant to build capacity for professionals or any person who may not be a professional to do his or her work professionally and uphold ethical and professional values. Examples of professional values are honesty, integrity, trust, respect, loyalty, accountability, compassion, humility, reliability, fairness, confidence, etc. There has always been a contention that politicians (councillors) cannot be professionalized, however gleaned from the above-mentioned professional values it becomes apparent that they need professional development even though it may not be as direct as that of the officials. Integrity is one example of a professional value that is expected of any elected public official who is expected to do his or her work truthfully, not taking bribes, not indulging in excessive private life and not abusing his or her power or authority.

Allen, et. al (2020) maintains: “Across various political arenas from national and subnational parliaments to local politics, the time demands placed on political offices have increased.” This then is testament that politicians need to be developed to be able to face these current challenges. The South African context of politics is no different in terms of these global challenges. Jabarndhan (2022) asserts that currently both politically appointed, and career public servants are viewed very sceptically by the public. There is a general view that some councillors are corrupt, and they are in politics to enrich themselves and their families.

Mbandlwa and Mishi (2020) maintain that councillors are supposed to be the exemplary individuals in a society, and it is important to have councillors who have necessary leadership characteristics. Leadership development of councillors therefore becomes paramount in shaping a councillor who is astute and acceptable to the society. It is for this reason that this study focused on the investigation of the impact of leadership development programmes on councillor leadership effectiveness with special reference to eThekweni municipal ward councillors.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to investigate the impact of leadership development programmes on councillor leadership effectiveness of eThekweni municipality ward councillors.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To establish the areas in which councillors have been developed (trained).
- To establish councillor level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the programmes they have been developed in.
- To ascertain the benefits that councillors derived from the development programmes.
- To determine the areas that councillors recommend for future development.
- To find out what councillors recommend as fields of study that councillors should pursue.
- To determine what councillors recommend as the acceptable level of education for a councillor.

Research Questions

The primary or main research question for this study is: What is the impact of leadership development programmes on ward councillor leadership effectiveness at eThekweni Municipality?

The specific or sub-questions are:

- Which areas have councillors been trained or developed in?

- What is the level of satisfaction of councillors about the programmes they have been trained or developed in?
- What should be the areas of development for councillors?
- What would councillors recommend as fields of study that councillors should pursue?
- What would councillors recommend as an acceptable level of education for a councillor?

The hypotheses of the research were as follows:

H0: Leadership development programmes have a negative impact on councillor leadership effectiveness (null hypothesis).

H1: Leadership development programmes have a positive impact on councillor leadership effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Whilst there are many theories that inform leadership development only two theories will be discussed here, and these are Great Man Theory and the Behavioural Theory. The main reason why these two theories are discussed is because whilst they are perceived to be complimentary to each other, they also contradict each other.

Great Man Theory

The pioneer of the Great Man Theory is the historian Thomas Carlyle who developed it in 1841 (Allio, 2013). His theory was based on the people who were considered to be great men at the time such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Jesus Christ, Winston Churchill, etc. According to this theory there were unique features that distinguished these men from ordinary men (Carlyle, 1907). This distinction is based on the assumption that these leaders were born leaders (natural leaders) with an innate ability to lead and were different from ordinary people. Spector (2016) maintains: "Therefore, not everyone can be a leader and cannot want to be a leader because leadership is seen as a gift from God to human beings." This theory is also called a genetic theory because of the assumption that leadership is genetic and passes through genes especially in the family, therefore this theory refutes that leadership can be learned which is a direct contradiction with the Behavioural Theory.

One greatest criticism against this theory is its gender-based stereotype which assumes that only men (not women) can be born leaders. The other criticism against the Great Man Theory is the fact that it is oblivious of the natural environment that can shape leadership. It was also criticised that the theory had an understanding of leadership independent of environmental factors and claimed that leadership characteristics were only passed through genes (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991).

Behavioural Theory

This theory is founded on that leader behaviours are not innate but can be seen and be learned and effective leaders can be trained (Uslu, 2019). This therefore means that the behaviour of the leader is shaped by the kind of training or learning he or she has received, and this is in direct contrast to what is propagated by the Great Man Theory. The other stark contrast is in terms of the followers where the Behavioural Theory emphasizes that the behaviours of different individuals (followers) or groups bring along the success to the leader as opposed to the Great Man Theory which puts a lot of emphasis on the leader distinct from the followers. In many cases the success of the leader largely depends on the relationship he or she has with the followers and a leader will always ensure that he or she brings them on board if he or she wants to be successful. One criticism against this theory is that it does not consider the environment or context within which the leader is leading and how it shapes the leadership behaviour.

Literature Review

Leadership Development

Van Velsor and MacCauley (2004) define leadership development as the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes. This is accentuated by Ngubane (2022) who defines leadership as the expanding of the collective capacity of organisational members to engage effectively in leaders' responsibilities. Leadership development focuses on the development of intra-personal and interpersonal skills of leaders. Intra-personal skills are the skills that a leader develops on his or her own and is largely based on self-development. This emphasizes the fact that a leader or councillor needs to undergo his or her own development by accumulating knowledge through practical experiences that will shape his or her behaviour and acumen as a councillor. One advantage of developing intra-personal skills or traits before the interpersonal skills is the fact that intra-personal skills become a foundation for the development of the interpersonal skills or behaviours. For example, if an intra-personal skill of self-regulation is adequately and properly developed, a councillor can easily develop integrity where he or she is able to control himself or herself against fraud and corruption.

Leadership Challenges at the Municipal Level

Section 151 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) places the oversight obligation of the municipal functions over councillors (the oversight responsibility of councillors is a constitutional mandate). The first poignant challenge that has been identified in municipalities is lack of oversight. Masiya, et. al (2021) confirm that if oversight is flawed or weak, accountability and responsiveness are significantly weakened. This is supported by Shava and Mazenda (2021) that South African councillors continue to find their roles and responsibilities of oversight challenging. This inadvertently leads to the collapse of service delivery which is the mandate of councillors.

The Local Government Municipal Structures Act (1998) establishes oversight roles of section 79 and section 80 committees which is an additional layer of oversight which is meant to analyse and discuss issues in more details compared to the Executive Committee and Council. Mamokhere, et. al (2021) emphasize that at a systematic level, it is evident that lack of effective oversight and accountability in the local sphere of government undermines the legitimacy of municipalities and leaves room for political interference and administrative malpractice.

Whilst challenges relating to local government cannot be exhausted in this study, it is important to indicate that the second most important challenge that has brought many municipalities to their knees is political interference in administration. Where political interference is rife, there is a lot of fraud and corruption, absence of consequence management, employment of unqualified personnel, and all of these inadvertently lead to municipal bankruptcy and collapse of service delivery. There are developmental programmes targeting the separation of political oversight from administration but the practicality of the management of the political-administrative interface is largely dependent on the political will and a very strong will power of the Municipal Manager to draw the line.

The increasing gap between elected officials (politicians) and their constituencies (communities) is also proven to be one of the top challenges of local government. There are councillors who are unable to stay (reside) in their wards because their communities do not welcome them, and they are accused of betrayal and that also explains why there are many councillors who have bodyguards (close protection). Some councillors cannot even hold public meetings and report back to their communities because they are scared of rejection. This is an indication of the collapse of public participation. By their extension ward committees who are expected to be the interface between councillors and communities also suffer the same fate and their inactiveness has contributed to the collapse of public participation.

Gumede (2021) points out that violent public protests are indicative of the fact that ward committees are not adequate channels to express community concerns and frustrations. It is a pity that

many communities have resorted to public protests to raise their concerns, however the downside of these confrontational approaches is that public protests turn to be violent and are characterised by destruction of infrastructure which then results into a vicious cycle of deprivation and further backwardness.

The fact that there is no qualification criteria when councillors are elected poses a huge challenge when they are to be developed because they will not start at the same level of literacy. In some cases, especially when councillors do not have any formal education, development programmes need to be either translated into the vernacular language or simplified and in the process the content of the programme is watered down. Farisani (2022) notes that councillors are not elected based on their educational capacity or qualifications and that has a negative impact on their ability to perform other tasks. Khomo, et. al (2023) therefore concur that capacitated councillors are therefore a necessity to ensure resources are managed properly to the benefit of the citizens.

The other barrier to leadership development is the fact that councillors as community leaders are extremely busy to be in class the whole day. This has been evident especially in the poor attendance by councillors of the developmental programmes. In some cases, even when they attend, they are distracted by emergencies in their constituencies.

Leadership Development Programmes

Edoun, et. al (2023) maintain that the lack of top-performing leaders in municipalities has led to a backlog in providing electricity, housing, water and sanitation and other essential basic services. This basically means that lack or poor service delivery is a direct result of the lower levels of development of personal capacity of political leaders. The study by Masiya, et. al (2021) reveals that factors that lead to substandard performance by leaders in these positions include lack of support within the organization, squabbling for authority, excessive regulation, political interference, bureaucracy, inadequate administration system, poor organisational culture, improper use of human resources, poor oversight, and working in silos. Whilst many of these challenges are both structural and systemic in municipalities, they fundamentally become a base within which leadership development programmes can be developed. Capacity building is proven to be strengthening management and governance so that organisations achieve their targets (Mufidah, et. al, 2022). It be noted that governance is largely driven at a political level by councillors through oversight. This is one area of dire need for the development of councillors.

Leadership development programmes in the South African context are developed and rolled-out by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) and internal institutional mechanisms within municipalities. This therefore suggests that there are adequate developmental interventions at local government level, but the question of their effectiveness still remains. Leadership Development Programmes organised by the above-mentioned institutions include but not limited to Municipal Service Delivery, Municipal Legislation, Public Participation, Local Economic Development, Consequence Management, Financial Management, Oversight and Accountability, Integrated Development Planning, Performance Management, etc. It should be noted that some municipalities such as eThekweni Municipality further offer councillors financial support to study at higher education institutions.

Benefits of Leadership Development

There are many benefits of developing leadership skills of councillors, and it does lead to the better understanding of local government in general and how it functions. There is also a good relationship between leadership development and political stability where councillors understand their roles and responsibilities better and do not spend a lot of time bickering and playing politics (in some cases opposition politics) at the expense of the citizens who need services. The same impact is also felt in terms of decision-making where councillors once properly developed are able to analyse reports submitted by officials and take decisions quicker and this impacts positively on service delivery. The analytical skills also improve, and they can better navigate through complex municipal processes such as budgeting. It is

also proven that when properly developed in Public Participation their relationship with their communities and constituencies improves and there is less confrontation which then minimises risks of public protests.

Research Methodology

The study was quantitative in nature and analysed quantitative data sourced from ward councillors of eThekweni Municipality through a survey. The focus of the study was to survey ward councillors to profile their demographics as well as their views on leadership development they have received as councillors. The total population of ward councillors is 111 (N). According to Bacchetti, et. al (2005) sample size calculation is important for striking a balance between risk and benefit. The Trairo Yamene Formula (TYF) has become popular among researchers (Adam, 2020) and it was used in this research as $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ where the sample size of 61 ($n=61$) ward councillors were randomly selected and the confidence level set at 90% with the margin of error at 5% ($e=0.5$). Closed questions were used in the survey and 50 selected councillors responded making the response rate 82%.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 30). The data analysis process unfolded in four stages: descriptive statistics, Chi-square analysis, correlational analysis, and regression analysis. These stages provided a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' demographic characteristics, training experiences, satisfaction levels, and the relationships among key study variables. Multiple responses were aggregated to form an index for leadership effectiveness.

Results

Demographic profile

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) were between 51 and 60 years of age. Male respondents constituted 66% of the sample, compared to 34% female. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held either a diploma (28%) or a matric qualification (34%), with 22% holding a degree and only 6% reporting below-matric qualifications. Regarding experience, the majority (42%) had worked as councillors for four to five years, followed by 30% with six to ten years of experience and 16% with more than eleven years.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age		
25-30	0	0.0
31-39	7	14.0
40-50	17	34.0
51-60	24	48.0
Over 60	2	4.0
Gender		
Male	33	66.0
Female	17	34.0
Qualification		

Below Matric	3	6.0
Matric	17	34.0
Certificate	5	10.0
Diploma	14	28.0
Degree	11	22.0
Experience		
Less than 3 years	6	12.0
4-5 years	21	42.0
6-10 years	15	30.0
More than 11 years	8	16.0

Training and satisfaction

Table 2 presents the responses on the areas the respondents were commonly trained in leadership. Training was most frequently reported in the areas of public participation (54%) and municipal finance (48%), while ethics and consequence management (24%) appeared least common.

Table 2: Areas of training with leadership development initiatives

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Areas of Training		
Municipal Finance	24	48.0
Municipal Legislation	22	44.0
Local Economic Development	14	28.0
Public Participation	27	54.0
Municipal Oversight	21	42.0
Ethics and Consequence Management	12	24.0

Satisfaction with leadership development initiatives is given in Table 3. The results suggest that satisfaction levels were notably high among the respondents, with 74% reported being satisfied with leadership development programmes, 16% were very satisfied, and only 10% expressed dissatisfaction. This trend suggests a generally positive perception of the leadership development initiatives offered within the municipal context.

Table 3: Satisfaction with leadership development initiatives

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Satisfaction Level		
Dissatisfied	5	10.0
Satisfied	37	74.0
Very Satisfied	8	16.0

Perceived benefits of leadership development initiative

The perceived benefits of leadership development training across several key dimensions of professional growth and municipal performance are given in Table 4. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported improved service delivery as a key benefit of the training, suggesting that the knowledge and skills acquired were effectively applied to enhance performance and responsiveness, while 36% indicated better communication skills. About 32% noted gains in analytical thinking, pointing to strengthened problem-solving and decision-making abilities. Meanwhile, 34% of respondents observed

improved relationships with their wards, highlighting the training's role in fostering participatory governance and stronger community linkages.

Table 4: Benefits from training

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Benefits from Training		
Service Delivery	24	48.0
Analytical Thinking	16	32.0
Improved Communication	18	36.0
Better Understanding of the Municipality	37	74.0
Improved Relationship with the Ward	17	34.0

Relationship Analysis

Association between demographics and satisfaction

Table 5 shows whether the demographic factors were associated with satisfaction levels. The results revealed no statistically significant associations between age and satisfaction, $\chi^2(6, N = 50) = 7.73$, $p = .258$; gender and satisfaction, $\chi^2(2, N = 50) = 0.50$, $p = .778$; or qualification level and satisfaction, $\chi^2(8, N = 50) = 12.06$, $p = .149$. Although not significant, respondents aged between 51 and 60 years tended to report higher satisfaction levels, suggesting possible experiential influences on their perception of leadership training effectiveness.

Table 5: Demographics vs Satisfaction

Variables	Satisfaction			Chi Square (df)	p-value
Demographics	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied		
Age				7.734 (6)	.258
25-30	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		
31-39	2.0%	10.0%	2.0%		
40-50	6.0%	22.0%	6.0%		
51-60	0.0%	40.0%	8.0%		
Over 60	2.0%	2.0%	0.0%		
Gender				.502 (2)	.778
Male	8.0%	48.0%	10.0%		
Female	2.0%	26.0%	6.0%		
Qualification				12.060 (8)	.149
Below Matric	0.0%	6.0%	0.0%		
Matric	8.0%	24.0%	2.0%		
Certificate	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%		
Diploma	0.0%	18.0%	10.0%		
Degree	2.0%	16.0%	4.0%		

Association between experience and benefits

A second Chi-square test examined the relationship between work experience and perceived training benefits (Table 6). The results again showed no statistically significant association, $\chi^2(3, N = 50) = 5.40$, $p = .145$. Nevertheless, respondents with six to ten years of experience were more likely to report gains in analytical thinking, communication, and understanding of municipal operations, implying that mid-career councillors may derive greater value from structured leadership training.

Table 6: Experience vs Benefits

Variables	Experience				Chi Square(df)	p-value
Benefits	Less than 3 years	4 -5 years	6 – 10 years	More than 11 years		
Service Delivery	4.0%	18.0%	18.0%	8.0%	5.404 (3)	.145
Analytical Thinking	4.0%	8.0%	14.0%	6.0%		
Improved Communication	2.0%	14.0%	14.0%	6.0%		
Better Understanding of the Municipality	8.0%	26.0%	28.0%	12.0%		
Improved Relationship with the Ward	4.0%	14.0%	10.0%	6.0%		

Impact of leadership development programmes on councillor leadership effectiveness.

Pearson correlation

Table 7 shows the association between training areas, satisfaction with training, and benefits from training. A stronger positive correlation was observed between training and perceived benefits, $r = .477$, $p = .001$ as well as satisfaction, $r = .471$, $p = .001$, indicating that participation in relevant and well-structured training programmes was associated with higher perceived effectiveness and practical workplace gains.

Table 7: Association between training and leadership benefits

	Benefits from training	
Areas of training	Pearson Correlation	.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	50
Satisfaction from training	Pearson Correlation	.471**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	50

Multiple regression analysis on the predictors of councillor leadership effectiveness

Table 8 shows the extent to which areas of training and satisfaction with training jointly predicted the benefits derived from training. The model revealed a statistically significant relationship, $R = 0.573$, $R^2 = 0.328$, $F(1, 49) = 11.465$, $p < .001$, indicating that approximately 32.8% of the variance in perceived training benefits could be explained by the combined effect of the two predictors. Both variables contributed positively to the model, with areas of training ($\beta = 0.351$, $t = 2.727$, $p = .009$) and satisfaction with training ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 2.654$, $p = .011$) emerging as significant predictors. This suggests that respondents who received training in relevant or diverse areas and who reported higher satisfaction levels were more likely to perceive greater benefits from leadership development programmes.

Table 8: Multiple regression on the predictors of councillor leadership effectiveness

DV	IV	R	r^2	F	df1; df2	p-value	β (regression coefficient)	t	p-value
Benefits from training	Areas of training	0.573	328	11,465	1; 49	<.001	0.351	2,727	.009
	Satisfaction from training						0.341	2.654	.011

Recommended areas of training

Figure 1 shows the training and qualification priorities for capacity building within the municipal sector. In terms of the recommended areas of training, the data highlight a strong emphasis on municipal budgeting (20%) and disaster management (18%), with slightly lower but comparable interest in municipal by-laws (16%) and technology (16%). This pattern suggests a growing recognition of the need for both fiscal competence and resilience planning in municipal operations.

Regarding the recommended qualification fields, public management and economic development emerged as the most preferred, each accounting for 26% of responses. Public administration (24%) and financial management (20%) followed closely, while disaster management (18%) was also considered an essential field. These preferences reflect an integrated view of governance, where administrative efficiency, economic growth, and financial accountability are viewed as interdependent pillars of municipal performance.

For the recommended levels of qualification, the data show a progressive preference for higher education. A degree qualification was most recommended (60%), followed by a diploma (50%). Lower-level qualifications such as matric and certificate were less emphasised, each at 24%. This trend underscores a perception that advanced academic training is critical for enhancing professional competence and strategic decision-making capacity within local government structures.



Figure 1: Recommendations for priority areas within the municipality

Research Findings

There is a general satisfaction with the current leadership development programmes. Half of the respondents reported improved service delivery as a benefit from the leadership development programmes. This supports the assertion by Edoun, et. al (2023) that lack of top-performing leaders in municipalities has led to a backlog in providing electricity, housing, water and sanitation and other essential basic services. Poor performance is also attributable to lack of developmental programmes. Mafidah, et. al (2022) further reiterate that capacity building is proven to be strengthening management and governance so that organisations can achieve their targets. In terms of relationships more experienced councillors seemed more satisfied with effectiveness of leadership development programmes. There was a

stronger correlation between training and personal benefits where respondents who reported higher satisfaction levels were more likely to perceive greater benefits from leadership development programmes. This then proves the hypothesis that leadership development programmes have a positive impact on councillor leadership effectiveness. This also supports the Behavioural Theory where Uslu (2019) emphasizes that leader behaviours are not innate but can be seen and learned and effective leaders can be trained.

Public management and municipal budgeting turned to be the highly recommended areas for qualification. This supports the assertion by Khomo, et. al (2023) that capacitated councillors are therefore a necessity to ensure resources are managed properly to benefit the citizens. In terms of qualification fields, public management and economic development were rated higher by respondents. A degree qualification was also identified as the preferred qualification.

Recommendations

Leadership development programmes should be intensified because they are beneficial to councillors. All councillors should be trained in financial management and development since these areas have been identified as the most important areas for councillors to lead and play oversight effectively. Councillors should be enrolled for degrees with higher education institutions so as to enhance their oversight capabilities.

Conclusion

The study focused on the investigation of the impact of leadership development programmes on councillor leadership effectiveness of eThekweni municipal ward councillors. It was proven in the study that leadership development programmes have a positive impact on councillor leadership effectiveness. The study further recommended that councillors' leadership development programmes should be intensified, and areas of financial management and development were highly emphasized. Councillors also expressed a need to study degrees at higher education institutions.

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