SENIOR MANAGER COMPETENCY PROFILING: THE CASE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR IN THE EMERGING COUNTRY

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Abstract

Local, district, and metropolitan municipalities as spheres of government should deploy a highly competent and professional management corps to address complex integrated development planning demands, local service delivery issues, and various governance-related dynamics (Polo & Kantola, 2019). However, official oversight, performance reports, and media scrutiny regularly reveal that the current South African situation fails to meet these requirements. Corruption, maladministration, political factionalism, and managerial incompetence have led to violent public protests (SACN, 2016). This paper assesses the current competency profile of senior managers in the South African local government sector, focusing on their integrated development planning responsibilities. The methodology followed a qualitative design involving an intensive literature review on international management competency models, document analyses to assess official statutory and regulatory prescriptions for senior managers, and semi-structured interviews with senior managers in sampled municipalities. The study established that most challenges faced by municipalities stem from a lack of senior management competency. Recommendations are made to address the current competency deficit.

Keywords: Competency, Competency Profile, Senior Managers, Local Government Sector, South African Municipalities

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1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision 2030, Chapter 13, calls for a "capable state" that can play a sustainable transformative and developmental role to realize the state's vision (NPC, 2013, p. 363). The essence of a capable state at the local level of government is service delivery excellence and overall organizational performance. How successfully local government fulfils this requirement depends largely on the capability, knowledge, and expertise — in other words, the competency — of senior managers in the local government sector. Similar studies conducted in Israel (Carmeli, 2006), Spain and Italy

(Padovani, Yetano, & Orelli, 2010), Nigeria (Agunyai, 2015), and Lithuania (Valickas, Raisiene, & Arimavičiūtė, 2017), confirm that there is a strong correlation between managerial competencies, institutional capacity, and effective municipal service delivery. Capacity-building through formal training, on-the-job training, and workshops are often used to ensure that managers in local government possess or acquire the right knowledge and skills to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities. The local government sector, comprised of local, district, and metropolitan municipalities, should thus build the required institutional and systemic capacity to produce competent human capital.

Integrated development planning is a highly dynamic municipal function that requires multidimensional and multidisciplinary competencies. The outcome of this function is an annually revised Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for each municipality that serves as a comprehensive strategic plan which informs and guides management and development decisions in that municipality. The IDP follows a phased participatory approach to coordinate and integrate spatial, social-economic, environmental, sectoral, institutional, and fiscal strategies. Its purpose is to support the distribution of scarce resources across geographical areas, sectors, and population groups. The primary objective of the IDP is to facilitate sustainable growth, socio-economic equity, and the empowerment of marginalized communities. The complete range of municipal functions should be aligned with the socio-economic development initiatives of the relevant provincial government and local businesses. Municipalities can only develop this functional capacity if their senior managers have the required competencies to make a contribution towards the successful operationalization of the IDP.

This paper aims to assess the current competency profile of senior managers in the South African local government sector, including accounting officers, chief financial officers, and chief accounting officers. This is done against the background of a conceptual and theoretical framework for managerial competency, an exposition of existing senior management competency profile models, and a synthesis of international competency frameworks. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature inclusive of the theoretical framework and models. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on the current competencies of senior managers. Section 4 outlines the results obtained and Section 5 discusses the main findings including recommendations that are made to address the identified senior management competency deficit. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of the competency movement is generally ascribed to McClelland's article titled *"Testing for competence rather than for 'intelligence'"* (1973). McClelland (1973) argues that testing for competence requires clustering performance outcomes according to specific criteria. He reasons

that there is a difference between "knowing" and "being able to do". Similarly, Woodruffe (1993), Brownell (2006), and Wärnich, Carrell, Elbert, and Hatfield (2018) maintain that competence refers to a particularly demonstrated ability and the skill to perform certain responsibilities. In the same vein, Robinson, Sparrow, Clegg, and Birdi (2007), Polo and Kantola (2019) emphasize the behavioural patterns individuals need to carry out their occupations. Writing from an occupational perspective, Epstein and Hundert (2002, p. 227) regard professional competencies as the skills, knowledge, and attributes that are explicitly prized by the associations and bodies connected to a particular profession. They involve ongoing use of knowledge, communication, technical ability, cognitive ability, feelings, beliefs, and thoughts to benefit and serve a specific group. McCall and Hollenbeck (2002), Lakshminarayanan Pai, and Ramaprasad (2016) also see competencies as a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and attributes relevant to a particular work context.

The views cited above imply that specific competencies should be applicable for management as a profession and that managers' possession and application of these specific competencies must be assessed to determine their competency. Slocum Jackson, and Hellriegel (2008) define managerial competence as the set of "knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes needed by an individual to be effective in a managerial position" (p. 12). Similarly, Vazirani (2010, p. 123) claims that there is an identifiable set of competencies that all managers should possess. These competencies relate to specific skills, knowledge, traits, values, and motives (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990, p. 82). There does not seem to be agreement among scholars on what exactly constitutes these management competencies, but there are some commonalities between the various competency models that have been developed.

Competency-based management (CBM) serves as an overarching theoretical framework for the purposes of this paper. Emerging in the 1970s, CBM can be regarded as an umbrella concept that embraces attributes, skills, traits, knowledge, and attitudes that are required for successful performance in a job (Benayoune, 2017; Rathawat, 2018; Roy & Ray, 2019). CBM encapsulates various theories associated with human resource management such as motivation, recruitment, human talent, performance, training and learning, skills development, career planning, and compensation management (Prabawati, Meirinawati, & AOktariyanda, 2018; Uppathampracha, 2019).

CBM has led to the design of various competency-based frameworks (CBF) that hold significant benefits for organizations. These benefits, according to Benayoune (2017) and Rathawat (2018), mainly centre around the framing of individual competencies required for a particular organizational function (i.e., job requirements). CBFs also serve to design competency models to align individual competence with organizational strategies. However, scholars such as Uppathampracha (2019) and Bordbar, Konjkav Monfared, Sabokro, Dehghani, and Hosseini (2021) assert that it is equally important to consider the external and organizational environment in the utilisation of such models. This includes

economic sector-specific concerns, social dimensions, political dynamics, and strategic factors that may influence employee competencies.

Woodruffe (1993) and Wärnich et al. (2018) differentiate between three types or levels of competencies, namely core competencies, specific competencies, and general competencies. Core competencies are foundational for organizational growth and development; they include the expertise and skills that drive high performance. Specific competencies may relate to a particular position, for example, senior managers require certain leadership competencies to be able to direct teams towards goal achievement. General competencies refer to basic capacities, including interpersonal skills, such as working well with others, being able to communicate well, and the ability to listen to team members. Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, and Younger (2008) and Wärnich et al. (2018) argue that there is a distinction between individual technical competencies, individual social competencies, organizational technical competencies, and organizational social competencies. The common denominator is that competence reflects personal ability. The development of that ability is what keeps organizations on the cutting edge, and makes them competitive in a global arena. The reason competence is so closely related to development is that as Makauki (2017) asserts, "it is clear that the concept of competency cannot be separated from the organization's intention to have high-performance human resources" (p. 12). Aspects that cannot be required as integral to competency include the natural talents that a person demonstrates prior to training, physical traits, or motives or intentions, such as ambition or personality (Boyatzis, 2008).

Mitra, Bangia, and Mitra (2008) contend that competency comprises four essential elements: it is "a combination of skills, knowledge, and attitude that influence one's job performance"; it "correlates with job performance"; it "can be measured using acceptable standards"; and it "can be improved through training and development" (p. 71).

The assessment of competency may be conducted in various ways. Typical approaches include a panel, consultant, and one-on-one approach. A panel usually consists of managers and human resources professionals (Storey, 1989, p. 8), and the panel assesses competency by means of a survey conducted through dialogue, and the dialogue often includes personal feedback. An alternative is that independent consultants conduct interviews with individual employees and their supervisors. Input obtained from this interview is then gauged against performance-related documentation to confirm the individual's competence level. This approach is similar to bi-annual performance appraisals, except that employees are rated against job-related skills matrices instead of against their job profile (Townley, 1993; Woodruffe, 1993). There are generally three types of evidence that may be presented in various formats: direct, indirect, and historical evidence. Such support documentation may include training certificates, project reports, testimonials, and performance reviews (Jacobs, 1989, p. 34). Evidence should be evaluated against criteria such as validity, authenticity, consistency, currency, and sufficiency (Brewis, 1996, p. 69).

2.1. International competence frameworks and managerial competency modelling

Various competence frameworks and models pertaining to the generic profile of senior management are available. Core dimensions, elements, and best practices can be extracted from these frameworks and models, and can then be extrapolated to the competencies expected of senior managers in the South African local government sector. In the case of the United Nations (UN), a competency framework was designed that emphasizes the identification of core managerial skills, attributes, and behaviours that would build and strengthen human resource systems. The UN's competency framework (UN, 2019) outlines specific core and managerial competencies, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. United Nations core and managerial competencies

Core competencies	*Managerial competencies*
Communication	Leadership
Teamwork	Vision
Planning and organizing	Empowering others
Accountability	Building trust
Creativity	Managing performance
Client orientation	Judgement and decision-making
Commitment to life-long learning	
Technological awareness	

Source: UN (2019, p. 13).

For each competency "behavioural indicators" are designed that act as "actions or behaviours that exemplify the competency in practice". These behavioural indicators are intended to promote shared performance standards, behaviour, and values throughout the organization (UN, 2019).

As specialized agencies of the UN, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Women, and the United National Development Programme (UNDP)

have all developed their own management competency frameworks. UNESCO's Competency Framework (UNESCO, 2019) puts special emphasis on learning, developing, and excelling through commitment, integrity, diversity, and professionalism. Prominence is given to the associated behavioural standards and the creation of a common competency lexicon. This framework is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. UNESCO's managerial competency framework

Core competencies	Managerial competencies
Accountability	Driving and managing change
Communication	Strategic thinking
Teamwork	Making quality decisions
Innovation	Building partnerships
Result-focused	Leading and empowering others
Planning and organizing	Managing performance
Knowledge sharing and continuous improvement	

Source: UNESCO (2019, p. 14–30).

Country-specific senior management competency frameworks include:
• the Canadian Public Service Commission (PSC) Competency Profile (Government of Canada, 2006);
• Tanzania's Public Service Leadership Competency Framework (Government of Tanzania, 2008); and

• the Republic of Kenya's Public Service Competency Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2011).

The South African government had a Senior Management Service (SMS) competency framework, The SMS handbook, designed in 2003. This SMS framework (DPSA, 2003, p. 98) makes provision for the core and process competencies set out in Table 3.

Table 3. SMS competency framework

Core competencies	Process competencies
Strategic capability and leadership	Knowledge management
People management and empowerment	Service delivery innovation
Programme and project management	Problem solving and analysis
Financial management	Client orientation and customer focus
Change management	Communication

Source: DPSA (2003, p. 98).

Apart from this generic competency set, the South African National Treasury prescribes minimum competency requirements for senior municipal managers in the local government sector. These competency requirements are outlined in the Municipal Regulations on Minimum Competency Levels; Chapter 2 of the Regulations specifies general and minimum competency levels for accounting officers, Chapter 3 for chief financial officers, and Chapter 4 for senior managers of municipalities (National Treasury, 2007). Table 4 outlines the general and minimum competencies of these three categories of managers.

Table 4. General and minimum competencies for senior municipal managers

Management category	General competencies	Minimum competencies
Accounting officers	"Skills, experience, and capacity to assume and fulfil the responsibilities and exercise the functions and powers assigned in terms of the Municipal Finance Management Act. Specific financial management responsibilities, functions and powers are entrusted by the Act to accounting officers. Any failure to comply with these may constitute financial misconduct".	• "Strategic leadership and management; • Strategic financial management; • Operational financial management; • Governance, ethics and values in financial management; • Financial and performance reporting; • Risk and change management; • Legislation, policy and implementation; • Stakeholder relations; • Supply chain management".
Chief financial officers	"The skills, experience and capacity to assume and fulfil the responsibilities and exercise the functions and powers assigned in terms of the Act. Any failure to comply with any financial management responsibilities, functions and powers entrusted to that officer may constitute financial misconduct".	• "Strategic leadership and management; • Strategic financial management; • Operational financial management; • Governance, ethics and values in financial management; • Financial and performance reporting; • Risk and change management; • Project management; • Legislation, policy and implementation; • Stakeholder relations; • Supply chain management; • Audit and assurance".
Senior managers	"The skills, experience and capacity to assume and fulfil the responsibilities and exercise the functions and powers assigned in terms of the Act. Any failure to comply with any financial management responsibilities, functions and powers entrusted to that senior manager may constitute financial misconduct".	• "Strategic leadership and management; • Operational financial management; • Governance, ethics and values in financial management; • Financial and performance reporting; • Risk and change management; • Project management; • Legislation, policy and implementation; • Supply chain management; • Audit and assurance".

Source: National Treasury (2007, p. 13).

Moreover, the former Department of Provincial and Local Government, now the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA, 2007) published the Local Government: Municipal Performance Regulations for Municipal Managers and Managers Directly Accountable to Municipal Managers, in which the management competencies for senior managers are outlined. The key performance areas for all senior managers within the ambit of the IDP include "basic service delivery, municipal institutional development and transformation, local economic development, municipal financial viability and management, and good governance and public participation" (DPSA, 2007, p. 8). These documents categorize managerial competencies as core managerial and core occupational competencies, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5. Municipal management core and occupational competencies

Core competencies	*Occupational competencies*
Strategic capability and leadership	Competence in self-management
Programme and project management	Interpretation of and implementation within the legislative and national policy frameworks
Financial management	Knowledge of developmental local government
Change management	Knowledge of performance management and reporting
Knowledge management	Knowledge of global and South African specific political, social and economic contexts
Service delivery innovation	Competence in policy conceptualization, analysis and implementation
Problem solving and analysis	Knowledge of more than one functional municipal field/discipline
People management and empowerment	Skills in mediation
Client orientation and customer focus	Skills in governance
Communication	Competencies determined by sector departments
Honesty and integrity	Exceptional and dynamic creativity to improve the functioning of the municipality

Source: Department of Provincial and Local Government (2006, p. 8).

Ultimately, the skills and competencies identified as essential for senior managers relate to their achieving the mandate assigned to local government, namely to foster, facilitate, implement and monitor its developmental activities in order to realize appropriate economic and social development and growth. Development by means of training is compulsory in terms of the Directive on Compulsory Capacity Development, Mandatory Training Days, and Minimum Entry Requirements for Senior Management Services (SMS) (DPSA, 2015).

Apart from the frameworks highlighted above, a synthesis was made of competencies derived from the following competency models:
• Boyatzis's (2008) management competency model;
• Slocum et al.'s (2008) managerial competency model;
• Mitra et al.'s (2008) managerial competency model; and
• Louw's (2012) managerial competency model.

This synthesis revealed that management competencies can broadly be categorized into the following core domains:
• intellectual-conceptual (strategic thinking);
• communication and teamwork (multicultural, leadership);
• adaptive (change management, creativity);
• achievement (performance and results);
• job-specific (specialized); and
• self-management.

While all the above models differentiate between core managerial competencies, all models affirm that competence can be regarded as the set of core characteristics required for superior organizational performance. Conceptually, all the models focus on managerial competency as interdependent personal and professional characteristics and abilities that would distinguish an ordinary employee from a professional manager. Another key feature of the competency models is their link to the strategic business of organizations.

The emphasis on planning, administration, strategy, and vision makes competency development a useful vehicle through which organizational strategy and strengths can be driven. Linking the assessment of competencies with proficiency levels is especially useful since it allows differentiation and more focused training and development for senior managers. Understanding that senior management competencies are rooted in lower management competency levels also assists with career management and development and allows for the identification of potential senior managers as part of an integrated approach to competence management in organizations. However, generic competency models should not be promoted without considering the context of the environment within which a particular organization operates. In the context of public sector institutions, this environment is significantly influenced by the applicable legislative and policy frameworks.

2.2. International and national legislative and policy frameworks governing managerial competency development

Managerial competencies are often practiced in a highly regulated environment, influenced by both international and national statutory and regulatory frameworks. Internationally, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on creating strong institutions — an ideal that only can be realized by competent managers driving responsive and responsible planning towards the realization of all the SDGs. In 2019, the OECD adopted its framework on public service leadership and capability. This framework is founded on three pillars, including "skilled and effective public servants" (OECD, 2019, p. 4). Building a corps of skilled and effective public servants implies determining an appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills, and specialized expertise, as well

as reviewing changing technologies and their influence on the competencies required, and aligning people management processes with the identified skills and competencies.

On the African continent, the African Union's African Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2019) emphasizes human capital development as the key to continued sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Goal 12 concentrates on creating capable institutions led by transformational leaders in order to promote responsive and accountable institutions. The African Union (2019) grounds its Agenda on critical success factors, which include promoting strong developmental states focusing on empowerment and revitalizing strategic planning as a key competency. Regionally, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) subscribes to specific values that include professionalism and managerial competency development. Nationally, the South African government has established a standardized approach toward competence development. This standardized approach is governed by the Public Service Act 103 of 1994 (Republic of South Africa, 1994), the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 1997), the Public Service Regulations (Republic of South Africa, 2001), and the SMS handbook (DPSA, 2003). According to the SMS handbook, SMSs are:

• "a highly educated group of individuals;
• operating within the strictly regulated and disciplined public service;
• governed by law and an austere code of conduct;
• (required to) maintain exceptional ethical standards;
• with a specialized knowledge base and skills that have been comprehensively researched by practitioners and academics; and
• are acknowledged by the citizens as the key to providing a better life for all" (DPSA, 2003, p. 2).

Continued professional development is crucial to sustainable leadership and high-quality service. In this regard, the "Leadership Development Management Strategic Framework" (LDMSF) for the SMS specifies the management responsibilities for all performer levels and the SMS (DPSA, 2014). It is required that any prospective SMS member is in possession of a prescribed senior management leadership qualification (DPSA, 2014).

For local government, the National Treasury (2007) defines senior managers as managers who are appointed in terms of Section 56 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (Republic of South Africa, 2000), and who are directly accountable to the accounting officer (municipal manager) whose responsibilities are described in Section 55 of the same Act. Senior managers in local government have prescribed competencies, specifically prescribed by the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (Republic of South Africa, 2004) and categorized as core and occupational competencies.

Against this backdrop, it is argued that competence development is a critical condition for the success of the public sector. The argument confirms that management competency development is significant to facilitate effective service delivery, and specifically by means of integrated development planning.

As far as the IDP competencies are concerned, Chapter 5 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 specifies the nature and scope of development planning. According to Hlongwane (2011) and Musitha (2012), the IDP should act as an instrument to meet the developmental obligations of local government. The formulation and implementation of the IDP occur within the ambit of the system of cooperative government; there must be strong interfaces with the plans and strategies of the national and provincial government, as well as with those of neighbouring municipalities. The annual budget of a municipality must indicate how the IDP will be implemented over a three-year budget period, and how the plan can be revised in terms of its budgetary resources and spending commitments (Ntlabezo, 2013). In this respect, the Integrated Planning Framework Bill of 2018 (Republic of South Africa, 2018) has been published for comment. It aims to address and remedy the discrepancies and fragmentation in government planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The Bill also intends to guarantee a more effective support system to align municipal planning with the National Development Plan. Sebei (2013) describes the different phases of the IDP process in terms of the purpose, processes, and outputs of each phase, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. IDP phases, purpose, processes, and outputs (Part 1)

Phase	Purpose	Processes	Outputs
Planning	"To ensure that sections 27 and 28 of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 are executed".	"District municipalities to consult with local municipalities regarding the time frame and process to be undertaken in the planning process".	"Adoption of a process plan describing the challenges to be addressed and the time frames in which to address these matters".
Analysis	"To guarantee that decisions are based on the needs of the community; the availability of resources and information; understanding of all the factors that influences development in the municipal area".	"Analysis of service standards and conducting in-depth analysis in order to categorize key issues that need to be addressed".	"Establishing a current level of development, prioritizing challenges, understanding causes of challenges, and identifying availability resources".
Strategies	"To identify means of addressing significant issues, taking into consideration available resources, competing requirements, and policy guidelines. Choices must be made between different options".	"Discussion regarding ways of dealing with addressing the challenges identified as a priority. Discussion should take place between district municipalities, local municipalities, and representatives from provincial and national departments".	"Vision for the municipality, clear objectives, strategic plans, clearly defined financial framework, and identified projects".

Table 6. IDP phases, purpose, processes, and outputs (Part 2)

Phase	Purpose	Processes	Outputs
Projects	"Ensuring an appropriate link between planning and delivery by providing a detailed, complete, and concrete project planning process".	"Development of a project proposal in consultation with municipal specialists, provincial departments, national departments as well as the community affected by the projects".	"Indicators for objectives, project targets, project location, project activities, time frames, responsible persons, cost, budget estimates — all taking sectoral planning requirements into consideration".
Integration	"To ensure alignment of projects with the municipality's vision, objectives, strategies, and resources".	"Project proposals to be presented to the IDP Forum and subsequent review by project tasks teams".	"Final plans including financial plans, capital investment program, action plans, special development framework, local economic development programmes and institutional plan for implementation management".
Approval	"To guarantee the adoption of the IDP by the municipal council taking consultation and comments received from the public".	"Consultation with the public, stakeholders, and the municipal council. Making amendments if required followed by adoption by the municipal council".	"Adopted IDP document which is supported by all the relevant role players".

Source: Sebei (2013, p. 106–108).

In this study, the generic competencies required of senior managers in municipalities, as well as particular competencies vital during each phase of the IDP, were compared to existing competency frameworks, models, and policies. These competencies were then compared and contrasted with the current competency profiles of senior managers in selected municipalities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was followed, employing both primary and secondary data collection methods in a phased approach. The first phase entailed conceptual, contextual, and situational analysis. Four activities were undertaken as a desktop survey:
- reviewing the literature regarding the current competency profile of senior managers;
- ascertaining international best practices regarding the managerial competencies required for integrated development planning;
- identifying international and national legislative and policy frameworks governing managerial competency development; and
- establishing a database with contact details of senior managers who have either completed the government's minimum competency training program or are still in training in the sampled municipalities (this database is omitted from the paper in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants).

The second phase concerned the design of an interview schedule to obtain competency assessment information from senior managers, as well as information pertaining to the demands and challenges of compiling an IDP. The input was obtained from senior managers in eleven randomly sampled local, district, and metropolitan municipalities, including low-capacity rural municipalities and high-capacity urban municipalities. Municipalities located in different provinces were selected to gain a broader geographical and demographic perspective, particularly regarding issues related to culture and ethnicity. The sampled municipalities were the following:
- Alfred Duma Local Municipality;
- Amajuba District Municipality;
- Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality;
- Emalahleni Local Municipality;
- Fezile Dabi District Municipality;
- Frances Baard District Municipality;
- Greater Letaba Local Municipality;
- Newcastle Local Municipality;
- Sol Plaatje Local Municipality;
- Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

The third phase entailed face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the target population and managers reporting to them. Four to five local managers and district and metro senior managers per municipality were sampled [$n = 52$]. The profiles of participants included municipal managers, chief accounting officers, chief financial officers, executive directors, and functional heads of departments. Data collected from the interviews were compared with a document analysis pertaining to performance-related documentation to establish each individual's level of competence. Three types of evidence were collected:
- direct evidence such as the competency profile, CV, and performance agreement of the employee;
- indirect evidence presented about the employee by the municipality; and
- evidence about the employee's past performance.

Sampled participants signed a declaration of consent, indicating their voluntary participation, and the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses were secured. The interview schedule was pre-tested (piloted) with senior managers in one of the sampled municipalities. Apart from the demographic details of participants, the interview schedule obtained information regarding the following:
- the status of the completion of the official minimum competency training program;
- a rating of the overall impression of the quality and contribution of current training to equip senior managers with the required competencies to perform their managerial responsibilities successfully;
- the core competencies regarded to be most important to managers' ability to fulfil their obligations;
- the competencies required that are currently not included in the competency framework; and
- particular competencies required for integrated development planning.

The fourth and final phase involved data analysis, including the final verification and cross-referencing of findings.

Alternative methods suitable for conducting this research may include the use of a mix-method research design with the use of a questionnaire (instead of face-to-face interviews) with Likert-type questions to ascertain the competency levels of senior managers.

4. RESULTS

The majority of participants (62%) had more than 10 years of experience in local governance and 88% had tertiary education. Of the 52 senior managers sampled, 60% had already completed the minimum competency training program and 19% were currently in the program. As far as competency development support is concerned, regular access to training opportunities (37%) and financial support (27%) were the two types of support most cited by participants. Most participants rated the current level, nature, and scope of support they received from their respective municipalities relatively highly — they selected "good" (46%), "excellent" (21%), and "adequate" (21%). Only two participants indicated that they did not receive any competency development support from their respective municipalities. The main limitations and challenges as far as the nature and level of support currently received are financial constraints (13%), the lack of monitoring and supervision after training (6%), time constraints (6%), and the fact that senior managers are often confronted with work-related issues during training sessions (4%). Participants propose that courses should be conducted away from offices to facilitate the undivided attention of candidates.

The five management competencies identified as most important for their obligations are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Top five most significant competencies

Competency	Frequency (n = 52)	Percentage
Financial management	40	77
Strategic leadership	33	63
Project management	21	40
Legislation awareness and policy implementation	16*	31
Good governance, ethics and values	16*	31
Supply chain management	16*	31
Risk and change management	15	29

*Note: * Competencies were grouped where similar frequencies were reported.*

In response to the question of whether there are senior management competencies required within their municipal context that are currently not included in the official competency framework, the five responses with the highest frequency were:

• emotional intelligence (18%);
• information technology and the application of systems and software (16%);
• coaching and mentoring (15%);
• political dynamics (10%); and
• corporate management (8%).

As far as best practice modelling for integrated development planning is concerned, the survey revealed that the core planning-specific competencies listed in Table 8 are critical per the IDP phase.

Table 8. Managerial competencies per IDP phase

IDP phase	Managerial competencies
Planning	Strategic capability and leadership
	Self-management
	Analyses of national legislation and sectoral policies
	Understanding of the developmental mandate of local government
	Competence in policy conceptualization
Analysis	Problem solving and analysis
	Comprehension of global, regional, and national socio-political and economic realities
	Policy analysis
	Service delivery innovation
	Systems thinking to appreciate the importance of a coordinated departmental and multidisciplinary response
Strategy formulation	Management of change
	Program and project management
	Knowledge management
	A client and customer orientation
	Competence to successfully execute national and municipal policies
Projects	Program and project management
	Financial management
	Human resources management and staff development
	Communication
	Performance management and reporting
	Negotiation and mediation skills
	Ability to coordinate activities with national and provincial sector departments
Integration	Communication
	Knowledge management
	Innovative service delivery practices
	Problem analysis and solving skills
	Good corporate governance practices and procedures
Approval	Honesty and integrity
	Communication
	Skills in governance
	Analysis and execution of national and municipal policies
	Comprehension of the developmental mandate and constitutional obligations of municipalities

5. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed a significant incongruence between the personal competency ratings of individual senior managers and the direct evidence produced by the participants (for example, their competency profile, CV, and performance agreement), indirect evidence produced by the employer, and historical documentation about the participant's past performance. It should be noted, however, that these findings differ vastly between individuals and per competency domain. An individual senior manager may, for instance, rate him/herself highly competent in financial management, and this result may be supported by direct and indirect evidence. However, the same manager may rate him/herself very competent in project management, but this rating may not be corroborated by direct and indirect evidence. In general, compliance with technical, job-specific competencies was found to be high, but there were significant competency deficits regarding more generic core competencies. In this respect, the general absence of strategic orientation and the ability to comprehend the broader systemic context of local governance was the most significant gap identified. This influences the strategic leadership abilities of senior managers and their cognitive abilities to steer municipalities into the future. This finding highlights the need to design tailor-made competency development opportunities per individual. The more general competency development approach currently followed, which requires all senior managers to participate in a generic competency development program, does not seem to yield the desired results.

A further important finding is that the particular management competencies required to successfully design and execute the IDP appear to differ from the core and occupational competencies. Participants pointed out that the kind of planning involved in compiling and IDP is a future-oriented function — this implies that senior managers need to have the competencies required to do appropriate forecasting and create a vision for their municipality. Competency frameworks are useful tools to ensure targeted development, but senior managers must be able to let the prioritized competencies speak to the future of the municipality. In respect of the competency frameworks and the must-have skills to draw up an IDP, it can be argued that local government has correctly emphasized selected occupation-specific technical competencies, but more should be done to develop more intangible competencies, such as strategic thinking, cognitive-conceptual judgement, and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence in particular is required in senior managers, who have to cope with a rapidly changing municipal governance context.

The worrying thing we found is that a large percentage (51%) of senior managers seem unable to think strategically about IDP processes. The particular context within which IDP planning occurs has a significant bearing on strategic priority setting, spatial development, and urban resilience. The data showed that senior managers should also be able to align municipal planning efforts with broader national and provincial plans and the IDPs of surrounding municipalities. Planning should thus be congruent with provincial growth and development plans and the National Planning Framework. Moreover, senior managers generally experience difficulty in aligning planning with other strategic plans of their municipality (for example, spatial development plans, local economic development plans, and infrastructure development plans). The current emphasis on occupational competencies may not be enough to ensure that the local government sphere is appropriately equipped to deal with the complexities of future political, economic, and social contexts, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the use of Big Data, and climate change.

Based on the triangulation of the respective information sets and the findings of the survey, four key recommendations are made to address the senior management competency deficit.

Recommendation 1: Provision of competency training support. The survey clearly revealed that the overwhelming majority (79%) of senior managers are satisfied with the nature and level of support they currently receive. The overall impression is thus that the levels of support currently provided are adequate for and generally conducive to capacity-building initiatives. The survey did, however, expose a number of challenges that should receive attention, namely:

• financial constraints, such as adequate funding for training (mentioned by 13% of participants);

• the lack of performance monitoring of the effectiveness of training received (6%);

• inadequate post-training support, especially from supervisors (6%); and

• time constraints, for example, managers do not have adequate time to attend training program sessions (6%).

Recommendation 2: Improvement of competency compliance. As far as the current levels of compliance of chief financial officers and accounting officers are concerned, the survey revealed that 60% of the participants completed the minimum competency training program; 19% are still in training, but 17% have never received training. It is recommended that competency profiles be compiled more frequently, based on regular skills audits of senior managers. It is imperative that all senior managers comply with the minimum competencies associated with their responsibilities and that training schedules make provision for new appointees, career advancement (promotions), and managers' changing their careers to move to different areas of responsibility (for example, by moving from one department to another).

Recommendation 3: Improvement of competency training programs. It is recommended that the content of training programs be continuously updated and revised to make provision for changing local governance conditions and trends. In this regard, it is imperative that the competencies of senior managers be divided into generic or general management competencies, and function- or job-specific competencies. The content of training programs should make provision for strategic competencies and include real-life cases and practical challenges to prepare senior managers for the realities of the world in which they work. Creative tuition and assessment methods such as

role-play and simulations should be explored in this regard. As far as the delivery of training programs is concerned, it is recommended that the following aspects receive attention, in order of priority:

• regular review and updating of training material;

• more practice-oriented training and adequate participation during lectures;

• more regular access to formal (recognized) managerial courses;

• timeous feedback on assignments;

• continuous monitoring and assessment after training to measure competency improvement; and

• submission of portfolios of evidence to assess competencies.

Recommendation 4: Improvement of integrated development planning competency. It is imperative that experienced and competent senior managers be involved in planning endeavours associated with the IDP and that they are capable of successfully implementing IDP resolutions. The competencies of senior managers should thus match the demands and challenges of IDP planning and implementation. It is further recommended that the following core planning-specific competencies per IDP phase be included in training programs:

• strategic capability and leadership;

• competence in self-management;

• interpretation and execution of national and municipal policies;

• comprehension of the developmental mandate and constitutional obligations of local government; and

• competence in policy conceptualization.

6. CONCLUSION

The local government sector in South Africa faces significant challenges. In general, this government sector struggles to fulfil its constitutional and developmental mandate and statutory obligations. Negative audit outcomes, regular service delivery protests, poor corporate governance, and ineffective integrated development planning show that municipalities experience wide-ranging management

competence deficits. Such deficits place senior management competency profiles at the epicentre of good local governance. This paper calls for senior managers' compliance with minimum core and occupational competencies to ensure that municipalities meet the expectations regarding a capable state, as outlined in the National Development Plan. To address the management competency deficit, a number of recommendations were made to ensure that municipalities recruit managers with the right skills, competencies, experience, and qualifications, and that continued competency development opportunities be provided through training programs.

The results of this paper expand the application of theories within the CBM framework by placing senior management competencies at the epicentre of local government performance. The results are also significant for future research in that it serves as baseline (for example, benchmark) to gauge competency improvement or deterioration over time. The paper is particularly useful to outline the variables necessary for measuring the effectiveness of competency improvement interventions. It is recommended that comparative analyses be conducted between the competency profiles of senior local government managers in established and emerging economies as well as in different global regions. This may facilitate the design of a more comprehensive and inclusive competency profile model of senior managers in local government. The fact that there is relatively high staff turnover in senior manager echelons may make the results obtained rather obsolete in a relatively short space of time. This limitation can be addressed by continuous follow-up research to monitor competency levels over time.

It is evident that municipalities should conduct various competency profile surveys and skills audits to determine areas where there are capacity gaps. Institutional learning capacities should be strengthened for good local governance through sound integrated development planning competencies.

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