

The COVID-19 Impact on Municipalities: The Case of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Municipalities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to understand the impact of COVID – 19 in KZN Municipalities from an organisational perspective. Contextual dimensions of the contingency theory (derived from organisational theories) informed this study. KZN Municipal Managers and Administrators were selected as respondents to the questionnaire developed to elicit information. The selection was based on the knowledge that this group has on COVID-19, including their role. The study concludes on key issues - that organisational behaviour contributes positively on the flattening of COVID -19 curve. However, it was clear that, within the majority of municipalities, both employees and councillors shared the same belief about the impact of this pandemic on organisational behaviour. Secondly, municipal goals and objectives are found to have been affected as service delivery and attainment of set goals were compromised. It is the view of the municipalities that investment in technology even beyond COVID - 19 is key as it has improved performance of municipalities during this period. Municipalities experienced levels of unemployment and absence of business continuity, where some businesses could not survive during this period. This has led to inability by some ratepayers to pay for municipal rates and services. This study further recommends that municipalities should develop standing protocols that will ensure there is ongoing culture of conformity during times of disasters. Municipalities need to proactively train their staff, councillors and communities so that the impact of disasters can be minimised when they occur. It has also been very clear that there is an expectation for better and effective leadership direction and it was clear that many municipalities were found wanting in this regard. Therefore, there is a need for training on leading during crises or natural disasters, a programme directed at political and administrative leadership. Municipalities need to budget for disasters and this budget should be reserved for cases of disaster. There is a need to seriously rethink the sizes of municipalities in terms of the numbers of employees employed. Without a doubt it has become clear that many municipalities are overstaffed. This reconfiguration should not be limited to staff but also include other resources like office space, vehicles and equipment. Lastly, it is inevitable that all municipalities must embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution to sustain the technological culture and opportunity presented by Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Local Government, Municipal Performance, Municipal Revenue, Use of Technology, Virtual Meetings, Service Delivery

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) was found to be caused by a coronavirus associated with transmission from camels in 2012. Following the identification of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China, Chinese authorities reported on 7 January 2020 that the causative pathogen was identified as a novel corona virus (2019- nCoV). These new coronaviruses have RNA sequences that are very similar to coronaviruses from animals, MERS-CoV = camel coronavirus SARS = bat coronavirus. The animal source of COVID-19 has not been identified but is thought to be bats.

The disease, COVID-19, is a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The first reported case of COVID-19 was in September 2019 in Wuhan, China. The problem with SARS-CoV-2 is the pressure it puts on the healthcare system because of its high infection rate. Globally, sudden spikes in the confirmed COVID-19 cases are severe because there are limited resources to effectively manage and treat patients in any of the current healthcare systems. As of February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared SARS-CoV-2 a pandemic as one of the first biological threats to modern society in the 21st century.

In order for the South African government to reduce the widespread of SARS-CoV-2, travelling restrictions were placed on high-risk regions and border-crossings were closed from one country to another. South Africa experienced the first COVID-19 case on the 28th of February 2020, and as of the 26th of August 2020, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases increased to 613 017 and recorded 13 308 deaths, despite efforts to contain the virus by putting a ban on international travel. The increase in confirmed cases caused widespread panic and anxiety, which is why the public relies on good, reliable information and data, now more than ever (WHO).

Legislative and Contextual Background

The Impact of Covid-19 in South Africa was looked at by Sekyere, Bohler-Muller, Hongoro, and Makoae (2020), where they highlight that several governance structures were quickly put in place to manage the spread of this disease, including an Inter-ministerial committee on COVID-19, an Emergency Operations Centre, and a National Command Council chaired by the president himself. The President, in collaboration with the National Command Council, declared a 21-day national lockdown commencing on March 26, 2020 to help curb the spread of the disease and minimize its impact on South African society. Several regulations were published, which guide how organisations including municipalities should tackle the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic.

Notwithstanding the above, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs promulgated general provisions that should be applied during the national state of disaster. In this regard a Notice was issued on 15 March 2020, in terms of section 23(1)(b) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) (the Act), classifying the COVID-19 pandemic as a national disaster.

Emanating from the classification of this occurrence as a national disaster and in terms of section 26, read with section 23 (8) of the Act, the primary responsibility to coordinate and manage the disaster, in terms of existing legislation and contingency arrangements, was designated to the National Executive. This meant that municipalities as organs of the state, are subject to national directives to implement such measures that are necessary to deal with the impact of COVID 19.

Taking into account the need to augment the existing measures undertaken by organs of state

to deal with the pandemic, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, as designated under Section 3 of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) (the Act), in terms of - 1) Section 27(1) of the Act, declared a national state of disaster having recognised that special circumstances exist to warrant the declaration of a national state of disaster.

The regulations issued in terms of section 27 (2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Gazette 43048) extended the National State of Disaster that was declared on 15 March 2020 by Government Notice 313, published in Government Gazette 43096, to 15 July 2020, taking into account the need to continue augmenting the existing mitigation measures undertaken by organs of state to address the impact of the disaster. This means that the country was still in a state of disaster until 15 July 2020(Gazette 43048, No 646).

Notwithstanding the above, the Minister promulgated Directives on 25 March 2020 and with respect to the response to COVID-19 in the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Sectors. Of importance, the Directives directed municipalities and provinces in respect of the following matters in response to COVID-19: (a) Provision of water and sanitation services; (b) Hygiene education, communication and awareness; (c) Waste management, cleansing and sanitization; (d) Municipal public spaces, facilities and offices; (e) Customary initiations and cultural practices (f) Isolation and quarantine; (g) Monitoring and enforcement; (h) Municipal operations and governance; (i) Institutional arrangements and development of COVID -19 response plans; and (j) Precautionary measures to mitigate employee health and safety risks. However, the main aim of government by introducing all these directives and regulations was to address, prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 in South Africa (Gazette 43147, No 399).

In addition, an Annexure to Municipal Finance Management Act Circular No. 99 provides further guidance to municipalities and municipal entities regarding Government Gazette No.43181 on Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 and exemption from the Act and Regulations that was published on 30 March 2020. This expands on socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and precisely indicates that municipalities will be impacted negatively due to loss of revenue streams as businesses, households and communities reel from the

economic fallout caused by COVID-19. They may also be required to expand their scope of basic services and free basic services to respond directly to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and prevent the transmission of communicable diseases (National Treasury circular 99, 2020).

While the effects of COVID-19 are far reaching, how they impact each industry is unique. Manufacturers are grappling with supply chain issues. Financial institutions are trying to make sense of relief provision funding in the wake of continually released guidance. Healthcare organizations are simultaneously grappling with a decrease in budgets and an increase in patients as they stand in the front lines of the pandemic. Undoubtedly, the world of work is being profoundly impacted by the Coronavirus. Leaders and corporate heads are forced to adapt to the 'new normal', but what does that entail? And what is required from municipalities to deliver and thrive? Local government is a sphere of government that is expected to deliver services to the community. Local government derives its powers and functions from the Constitution of South Africa, which is basically to provide services to the community which amongst others include water, sanitation, roads and storm-water, law enforcement, disaster and fire services. In this study, the impact of COVID-19 was looked at from an organisational perspective and in KZN municipalities.

Stavenger (2020) embarked on a study which focused on how the State and Local Governments can navigate the COVID-19 Pandemic. He further re-iterated, for state and local governments that the "black swans" have arrived. From an economic standpoint, black swans are immensely disruptive and spontaneous occurrences that have a dramatic impact on economies. This can be a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience, as the defences and responses state and local governments develop now could serve them when faced with future black swan events. In this regard, there is no doubt that COVID-19 will shape the responses for municipalities in the future, however a close look on the impact of this pandemic within municipalities is what this study focused on.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The aim and objective of this study was to understand the impact of COVID-19 in KZN municipalities, this from an organisational perspective

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study focused on municipalities as organisations. Organisations are defined by Daft (2007) as follows: organisations are (1) social organisations that (2) focus on goals, (3) are designed as coordinated and structured activity systems, and (4) are associated with the external environment. However, Morgan (1997) states that an organisation is not a set of policies or procedures, neither a building as organisations consist of human beings and their relationships with one another. Figure 1 below depicts the importance of an organisation to the society and to the people within the organisation itself. Seven reasons indicated by the author include the ability of an organisation to bring together resources to achieve desired goals; the ability to produce goods and/or services efficiently; organisations facilitate innovation; they use modern manufacturing and information technology; they adapt to and influence a rapidly changing environment; they have an ability to accommodate challenges of diversity, ethics and coordination; and they create value for owners, customers and employees.



Figure 1. The Importance of an Organisation

Source: Daft (2007)

According to Daft (2007), organisations impact on many aspects of people's lives and organisation theory is important in two key respects. Firstly, organisation theory helps to reflect upon and understand the nature of humans and their purpose. Secondly, organisation theory is about humans and how they interact with others during their encounters in a vast array of different, often deceptively ordinary and mundane, social contexts that are taken for granted because they cannot see or imagine any alternative to how things appear to be.

Certain organisational theories evolved over years, which shape the functionality within an organisation and consist of modern organisation theories which include systems theory, socio-technical theory and contingency theory. Contingency theory focuses on structural and contextual issues and this study focused on both contextual and structural issues of an organisation (municipalities). Contextual dimensions of the contingency theory characterise the whole organisation and represent both the organisation and the environment and include elements such as size (organisations are social systems, thus size is measured by the number of people in the organisation), organisational technology (tools, techniques and actions used to transform inputs to outputs), environment (all elements outside the boundary of the organisation), goals and strategy (define the purpose and competitive techniques), culture (the underlying set of values, beliefs, understandings and norms shared by employees or groups of people, whilst structural issues include those aspects pertaining to organisation structure i.e. formalisation, standardisation, centralisation, specialisation and hierarchy. Guided by the said view, the following **Conceptual Framework** is applicable:



Figure2. *Conceptual Framework*

Adapted from Daft (2007)

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTUAL ISSUES AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Definition of Corona Virus (COVID-2019)

The Marriam-Webster Dictionary (2020) defines COVID-19 as a respiratory illness that is caused by coronavirus material (such as respiratory droplets) or with objects or surfaces contaminated by causative viruses and characterised especially by fever, cough and shortness of breath and may progress to pneumonia and respiratory failure. Although the above-mentioned general definition

of Covid-19 provides a clear topical understanding and analysis of the virus, it is important to note that its scientific name, according to the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (2020) is “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2” or SARS-COV-2 because it is related to the virus that caused the SARS outbreak in 2003. To avoid confusion with SARS, the World Health Organisation (WHO) referred to it as COVID-19.

Background to the Outbreak of covid-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 is traceable from the City of Wuhan in the Hubei Province in China as early as November 2019. The World Health Organisation (WHO) was alerted to the outbreak in December 2019. The main infection from the virus was that of the respiratory tract many patients having to be supported by ventilators to breathe. The WHO declared the outbreak as a pandemic in March 2020 resulting to South Africa declaring a National State of Disaster on 15 March 2020.

The World reached 9 million infections by COVID-19 by June 2020 and the rate of death globally was estimated at more than half a million. Many countries adopted strict confinement and lockdown measures to minimize the spread of the virus. There is no doubt that the pandemic has a huge negative impact on economies globally. Apart from this global economic crisis, national and sub-national or provincial governments had to activate and provide emergency relief funds to curb the virus. This basically means the much needed funds to provide services are now diverted or redirected to fighting the spread of the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 in South African Local Governments

The regional and local impact of the crisis has been highly asymmetric within countries-some regions have been harder hit than others, at least in the early stages of the pandemic (OECD, 2020). Local governments have been in the forefront of managing the crisis, for example, they have to continue to provide essential and critical services, provide health-care and remodel health facilities, provide and care for homeless people, give food parcels to deprived communities, decontaminate all the facilities, etc. They also had to close down all the revenue generating sources such as tourism and leisure, sports, events, conferences, etc. Local governments had to endure a sudden drop in payments for rates, services and taxes.

South African municipalities have always been confronted with a myriad of challenges that deter them from effective and efficient delivery of services. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19 there were sporadic outbreaks of service delivery protests across the country. The outbreak of COVID-19 saw many municipalities getting added responsibilities and thus resulting into unfunded mandates which needed to be funded outside the originally approved budgets. This in many cases resulted into the redirection of funds from the much needed service delivery budget to emergency relief funds. There is also a big test on municipal leadership to ensure organisational readiness during the time of the pandemic.

When the state of national disaster was declared by National Government, municipalities became the hardest hit because they are expected to implement the National Disaster Measures and Regulations. What also made matters worse is the fact that the declaration of national disaster was coupled with the national lockdown. This resulted into huge loss of revenue by municipalities since residents were unable to pay for rates and services, some people lost employment and were unable to pay for rates and services, all streams of economy were closed and all other revenue streams were completely shut down especially during level 5 of the lockdown which took almost a month. In April 2020 the President of South Africa announced a R500 billion COVID-19 relief fund, R20 billion of which was allocated directly to municipalities. This proved to be a drop in the ocean given the work that needs to be done.

Metropolitan municipalities have, on average, suffered a loss of about R5 billion a month on revenue and most of them only had 1-month cash in hand just after 1 month into lockdown. One of the budget items which proved to be costly for municipalities were the food-parcels to be distributed to vulnerable and poor communities. On average metropolitan municipalities spent between R7m – R10m on food parcels in the first month of the lockdown.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

This review focused on the relationship between organisational contextual dimensions and COVID-19. The theoretical and conceptual framework exposed five concepts underlying organisational contextual issues and these are organisational culture, size, environment, technology and goals.

Organisational Culture

The role of organisational culture in relation to municipalities can be explained as the ability of these municipalities as organisations to share the same beliefs and values about COVID-19, the commitment by members to implement COVID-19 directives and to co-operate with all COVID-19 activities. Robbins, Odendaal and Robbins (2003) view organisational culture as resembling a sense of shared meaning by members, that distinguish one institution from the other. This implies that in each municipality there exists a set of beliefs and understanding about COVID -19, which beliefs influence their understanding on the impact of COVID-19. In relation to this definition, Arnold (2005) argued that organisational culture relates to distinctive norms, values, principles, beliefs and the manner of behaving that affect the distinct character of an organisation.

Schein (1985) further views organisational culture as “a pattern of basic assumptions that are invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration within its area of work”. This description highlights that organisational culture has created assumptions, which are accepted as a way of doing things and these have a potential of being passed on to new members of an organisation or group. There is no doubt that, as municipalities learn to cope with COVID -19 pandemic, a certain culture develops, which affects the way in which municipalities operate or even achieve its goals and objectives. Meaning, one might imply therefore, that organisational culture does affect the achievement of the goals. Within the context of municipalities, this will refer to the implementation and achievement of Integrated Development Plan (IDP) objectives and Budget.

Dimmock and Walker (2002) examine culture and leadership closely and observe that they are two sides of the same coin; neither can really be understood by itself. On the one hand, cultural norms define how a given nation or organisation will define leadership, who will get promoted, or who will get the attention of followers. On the other hand, it can be argued that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture; that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture; and that it is an ultimate act of leadership to destroy culture when it is viewed as dysfunctional. Figure 3 below demonstrates levels of organisational culture.

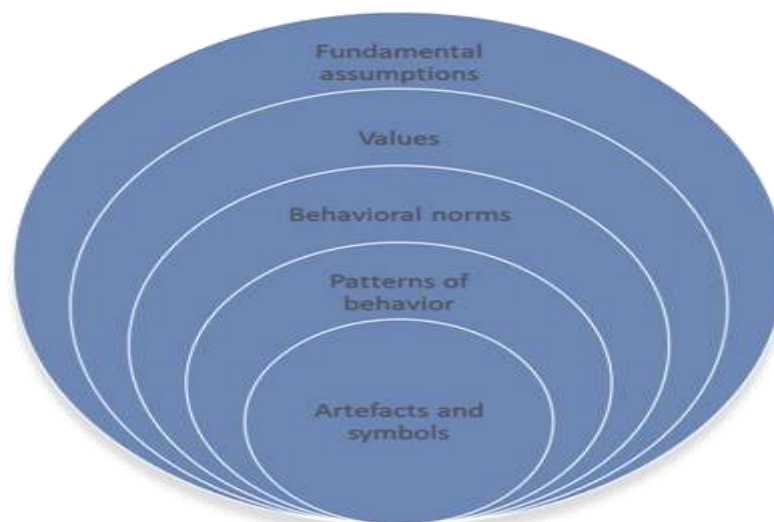


Figure3. Levels of Organisational Culture

Source: Schein (1985)

Schein (1985), as an expert in culture issues, identifies the following levels, as shown in Figure 3 above. In Schein's view, fundamental assumptions constitute the core and most important aspect of organisational culture. Accordingly, this author offers the formal definition of organisational culture as being "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1999).

During this period of COVID-19, organisational culture is important as it shapes what the organisation considers to be "right decisions", what employees consider to be appropriate behaviours and how they interact with each other within the organisation, how individuals, work groups and the organisation as a whole deal with work assigned to them, the speed and efficiency with which things get done, the organisation's capacity for and receptiveness to change and the attitudes of outside stakeholders to the organisation.

Organisational Environment

An understanding of organisational environment and its various complexities is essential to manage the organisation's activities effectively. In relation to COVID-19 pandemic, such understanding may assist in flattening the curve or impact of the pandemic. Municipal environment is constantly dynamic in nature and creates problems for management. Different researchers like Harrington and Kendall (2007) suggest that environmental dynamism comprises of changes that could not be predicted and which take place in the organisational

environments, as a result organisational dynamism and uncertainty remain the major concern for organisational theorists for over some decades (Gerloff, Muir & Bodensteiner, 1991).

In this regard, most of the researchers suggest a detailed environmental analysis before preparing an organisational plan (Barton, 2000; Miller, 1978).

Duncan (1972) further expands on the previous work done by defining internal and external environments in detail. He holds the view that internal environment comprises of all the forces operating within the organisation, while external environment comprises all the forces operating outside the organisation. Duncan (1972) identifies three elements of internal environment and five elements of external environment. The internal environment consists of personnel, functional and staff units and organisational-level components. The five components of external environment are customers, technology, competitors, socio-political forces and suppliers.

All organisations operate within an external environment as a single organisation does not exist alone. It is part of a larger system that contains thousands of other elements which all mutually influence each other in a complex system that becomes the standard of living for the people. Individual organisations, such as government departments or any public entities, cannot avoid being influenced by their external environment.

It influences the attitudes of people, the working conditions and provides competition for resources and power (Daft, 2007). The components of general environment according to Carroll (1983) include socio-cultural, technological, political or legal as well as economic environments.



Figure4. *The Components of General Environment*

Source: *Carroll (1988)*

Figure 4 above indicates components of the general environment in which organisations operate, which includes socio-cultural, technological, political or legal as well as economic environments. According to Carroll (1983), changes in technology, which is used to transform inputs into outputs, can be a benefit or a threat to a business. Socio-cultural trends, such as changing demographic characteristics, affect how companies run their businesses. Similarly, socio-cultural changes in behaviour, attitudes and beliefs affect the demand for a business's products and services.

Economy

According to Carroll (1983), the current state of a country's economy affects most organisations operating in it. A growing economy means that, in general, more people are working and therefore have relatively more money to spend. More products are being bought and sold than in a stagnant or shrinking economy. However, Burt (1983) indicates that while a growing economy does not mean that sales of an individual firm are necessarily growing, it does provide an environment favourable to business growth.

Technological Component

Technology is the knowledge, tools and techniques used to transform inputs (raw materials, information, etc.) into outputs (products and services). According to Burt (1983), changes in technology can assist organisations by providing better products or services. For example, improvements in surgical techniques and imaging equipment have made open-heart surgery much faster and safer in recent years. While changes

in technology can benefit a business, they can also threaten it.

Socio-cultural component

Carroll (1983) refers to the socio-cultural component as the demographic characteristics and general behaviour, attitudes and beliefs of people in a society. Socio-cultural changes and trends influence organisations in two important ways. According to Burt (1983), changing demographic characteristics, such as the number of people with skills, or the growth or decline population segments (single or married; old or young; men or women; or visible minorities and the disabled) affect how companies run their businesses.

Political and legal component

Carroll (1983) refers to the political or legal component of the general environment as including the legislation, regulations and court decisions that govern and regulate business behaviour. Throughout the last decade, new legislation and regulations have placed additional responsibilities on companies which managers should follow.

Organisational Goals

Robbins and Decenci (2001) indicate that a strategy is the plan of action that describes resources allocation and key activities for dealing with the environment and for achieving the organisational goals. This further includes purpose, mandate, scope and relationship. Within a municipal environment, this refers to an Integrated Development Plan and Budget. An Integrated Development Plan is a super plan for an area that gives an overall framework for development. It aims to co-ordinate the work of local and other spheres of government in a coherent plan to improve the quality of life for all the people living in an area. Municipalities in South Africa have to use "integrated development planning" as a method to plan future development in their areas. The IDP helps municipalities focus on the most important needs of local communities taking into account the resources available as per budget provisions.

In this regard, Levy (2006) argues that central to the issue of organisational studies is the notion of organisational goals. The author refers to goal achievement as an integral part of all systems, because for all systems to survive they must achieve whatever goals they set out for themselves. However, an organisation as the system is singled out as being that in which the problem of goal achievement has dominance over all other problems.

Daft (2007) refers to a goal as a declaration of a desired end result that an organisation wishes to attain. It describes what the organisation is trying to accomplish. Goals may be strategic (refer to where the organisation wants to be in future) or tactical (defining short-term results of an organisation). Goals serve as an internal source of commitment and motivation and guide actioning and measuring of performance (Barton, 2000). According to Levy (2006), defining organisational goals assists in conceptualising and articulating the future focus of the organisation, thus allowing those in leadership for setting that direction and ensure that a common understanding is in place of where the organisation is heading. Notwithstanding the above, at a municipal level the notion of organisational goals includes service delivery commitments made by the municipality in the form of Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIPs).

As goals are defined by Munk (2011) as a specific desired accomplishment over a specific period, of importance to note is that, an organisational decision may be admirable, but it is not a goal. To make any desirable idea into a goal, it is recommended that an organisation must subject it to five criteria: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound (SMART).

However, Levy (2006) highlights that for an organisation to be effective, goals and objectives must be written. If they are not in writing they are merely ideas with no real power or conviction behind them. Written goals and objectives provide motivation to achieve them and can then be used as a reminder to all those involved. When clearly and specifically written, they also eliminate confusion and misunderstanding. According to Locke (1977), among all the attributes of a well-written objective the most important are measurable results and a timeframe for completion. Being able to quantify results and evaluate the timeliness of accomplishing goals allows owners or managers to assess the performance and progress of the overall business as well as individuals and teams within the business. There is no doubt that all municipal goals and objectives are written down in their IDPs, however goal accomplishment and results could be a challenge, in the light of COVID-19 pandemic.

Organisational size

Size is the organisation's magnitude as reflected by the number of people in the organisation. Because organisations are social systems, size is typically measured by the number of employees. Other measures such as total sales or total assets also reflect magnitude, but they do not indicate the size of the human part of the social system (Daft,

2007). The number of people and resources and their span in the organisation is a determining factor. However, in a municipal environment the size of the municipality is further measured to include the total population, number of households within the area, the extent of density and the area.

Scott (1981), in the study of organisational size, indicates that a crucial problem in organisation theory which has not yet received adequate attention is the nature of the processes which cause an organisation to assume a certain shape and reach a certain size. The author further indicates that there is no best way to study organisational size as it has numerous approaches wherein one approach is the descriptive of structure found in various sizes and types of human associations; another approach to organisational size is the study of differential patterns of behaviour of members and leaders in various sizes and types of organisations; and the third way to study size is to analyse organisational behaviour as it adjusts its size and shape in response to changes in the environment during the process of pursuing goals.

Technology

These are the often-unique activities needed to reach organisational goals, including nature of activities, specialization, type of equipment or facilities needed. Organisational technology refers to the tools, techniques and action used to transform inputs into outputs. It encompasses the way in which the organisation provides the services for customers or communities and includes such things as computer-aided equipment, advanced information systems and the internet (Daft, 2007). The technological context includes the internal and external technologies that are relevant to the organization. Technologies may include equipment as well as processes, tools and techniques (Tornatzky & Fleisher, 1990).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers selected KZN municipalities as the population and used a qualitative approach. A reasonable sample was systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity and provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation. From the selected municipalities, the researcher went further by selecting municipal managers and administrators to participate in this study. The selection was based on the knowledge that this group has on COVID-19, including their

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role. In this regard, purposive sampling was used to include both selection of municipalities and participants. Data collection has been done through documents review and questionnaires. The documents provided background information on COVID-19 and included all directives, regulations

and circulars presented during this period and provided for in the legislative background. Semi-structured questions were used and responses analysed using content analysis. Figure 5 below, demonstrates steps that were followed in qualitative content analysis as defined by Henning (2004):

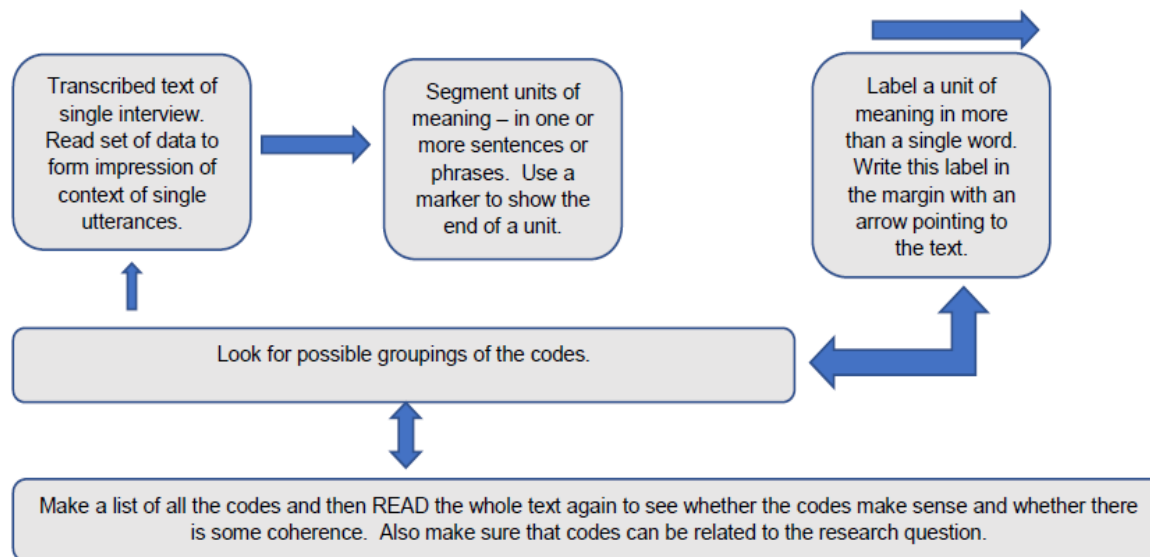


Figure5. *Qualitative Content Analysis*

Source: Henning (2004)

Figure 2 above indicates steps that were utilized in analyzing data. It ranged from reading data, segmenting units, labelling units, looking for possible groupings and making a list of all codes and ensuring that it related to the research objectives.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Organisational Culture

The findings of the study on the municipality's behaviour and attitude on COVID-19 revealed that all (100%) municipalities were taking the pandemic very seriously and followed all protocols as outlined by the Regulations developed by the Department of Health. On the impact of behaviour on flattening the curve of COVID-19, the study revealed that 17% of municipalities had a negative impact, 17% had no impact at all, 17% had a mixed impact, 17% had not yet measured the impact and 33% recorded a positive impact. On whether municipal employees and councillors share the same belief and understanding of COVID-19, 83% of the municipalities agreed and 17% disagreed. The appreciation of the positive impact brought about by the Regulations is the fact that they provided uniform standards and protocols to be followed in dealing with the pandemic.

On the role of leadership in creating and managing organisational culture, 33% of municipalities recorded that the role is to ensure compliance and to play oversight, 17% indicated that it is to follow protocols, 18% indicated that it is to build organisational resilience, 18% indicated that it is to create awareness and 16% indicated that there was no role displayed. On cultural and behavioural changes 50% of the municipalities stated that municipalities must embrace the new technological culture brought about by Covid-19, whereas 34% suggested that municipalities must have a culture of treating everybody as if they were positive and 16% propagated for the culture of empathy for the infected employees. The virtual culture brought about by COVID-19 seems to be the best learning experience for all municipalities hopefully they will embrace that culture more sustainably.

Organisational Goals

The study also intended to find out whether or not the outbreak of COVID-19 impacted on the goals of municipalities. All (100%) municipalities indicated that their goals were impacted negatively. Although this was expected and inevitable, this means that municipalities will not be able to deliver some of the targets they stated in their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). On how the municipal operations were affected, all municipalities (100%)

stated that operations were not normal since most of the staff were working from home which meant that service provision would also be reduced. All municipalities (100%) indicated that COVID-19 had visible effect on municipal budget and planning processes. This is largely because all municipalities had to set aside COVID-19 budget which was not originally planned for. On the loss of revenue 50% of municipalities stated that they have lost between R6 million and R24 million whereas 50% of municipalities had not yet quantified their losses. When requested to make recommendations on how municipalities can achieve their goals again, 67% recommended that municipalities should embrace and invest more on technology which is likely to help them catch up with the planned goals in future, 33% of the municipalities recommended that current legislative provisions including IDPs should be revised and goals be scaled down to the minimum achievable.

Organisational Environment

Municipalities were requested to state the general behaviours, attitudes and beliefs they have observed in their communities during COVID-19. Many municipalities (33%) indicated that their communities did not take the virus seriously and the same number (33%) indicated that communities were taking the virus seriously. 17% indicated that the general behaviour, attitudes and beliefs were mixed and another 17% indicated that the community was gripped by anxiety. It is very clear that there is almost a 50/50 split of awareness amongst communities about the virus which is a concern because it is true that knowledge about the virus is one weapon that can help the flattening of the curve of the virus.

It is also important to note that the indifference of communities towards the virus is not necessarily attributable to the rurality (rural nature) of the municipality. There are rural municipalities that indicated high alertness and compliance and there were some urban municipalities that recorded low levels of seriousness and awareness. When asked how the current state of the country's economy has affected them, all municipalities (100%) stated that they were severely impacted citing reduction in revenue and increased levels of employment.

It is given that when ratepayers lose their jobs they will be unable to pay for services. When asked about the impact introduced by COVID-19 legislation and regulations, 50% of municipalities indicated that the new legislation and regulations had a positive impact and another 50% of municipalities stated that the legislation and regulations had a negative impact off course citing

service delivery being hard hit. When asked if the political environment had been shaped by COVID-19, 50% of municipalities stated that there was no change in the political environment, 17% indicated that political parties were pulling together and 33% were indifferent. It is apparent that COVID-19 was a test to effective political leadership which was indeed caught off-guard.

When asked to make recommendations to improve the working environment, 50% of the municipalities recommended that the District Development Model (DDM) should be fast-tracked so that it can forge collaboration amongst government spheres. 33% recommended futuristic outlook and pro-active planning and 17% did not respond to the question.

Size of the Organisation

When asked about the effects of the pandemic on the number of people and provisions of resources, all municipalities (100%) indicated that they were operating with the reduced number of employees. Off course this would have severe impact on service delivery. 100% of municipalities appreciated the fact that COVID-19 has brought new changes such as virtual meetings. The concern though is the fact that these changes had not necessarily improved service delivery.

Technology

When asked if technological changes brought about by COVID-19 assisted municipalities by providing better services or improved performance, all municipalities (100%) indicated that there was improved performance with regard to holding of meetings because all of the meetings were held virtually. It does become difficult to ascertain if better services were provided more especially because the outbreak of the virus did impact negatively on service delivery.

When asked about changes brought about by COVID-19 on municipal processes, all (100%) municipalities indicated that the most significant technological change was virtual meetings and working remotely. When asked to recommend ways to sustain the current use of technology brought about by COVID-19, 34% of municipality recommended that municipalities should sustain virtual operations, 33% recommended up-skilling of employees and councillors on technology and 33% recommended that municipalities should invest in technology. It is inevitable that COVID-19 has fast-tracked the pace within which municipalities should embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study the following is recommended:

Municipalities should have their culture changed and be adapted to the culture propagated for the whole country when there is a national disaster and outbreak of the nature of COVID-19. It would be worthwhile for municipalities to develop standing protocols that will ensure there is ongoing culture of conformity during the times of disasters.

Municipalities need to proactively train their staff, councillors and communities so that the impact of disasters can be minimised when they occur. These training programmes should also target culture change and change in mind-set. It has also been very clear that there is an expectation for better and effective leadership direction and many municipalities were found wanting in this regard. Therefore, there is a need for training on leading during crises or natural disasters, a programme directed at political and administrative leadership.

There is a need for municipalities to review their organisational goals after a disaster like COVID-19. This has to be done aligned with available resources. The budget will always be hardest hit when it comes to disasters because more money will be needed. Municipalities need to budget for disasters and this budget should be rolled over in case there was no disaster in that particular financial year.

Training programmes for staff, councillors and communities should be developed and implemented with an aim of ensuring that all of these stakeholders are aware of the environment the municipality is situated in. The political environment has been one area with a huge weakness during COVID-19 exacerbated and characterised by a lot of corruption. There is a need for a serious political engagement around COVID-19.

There is a need to seriously rethink the sizes of municipalities in terms of the numbers of employees employed. Without a doubt it has become clear that many municipalities are overstaffed. This reconfiguration should not be limited to staff but also include other resources such as office space, vehicles, etc.

It is now inevitable that all municipalities must embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution to sustain the virtual culture and opportunity presented by COVID-19. There needs to be a lot of investment into technology but also a lot of training needs to be

implemented so that employees are re-skilled for purposes of portability to the 4th Industrial Revolution.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to understand the impact of COVID-19 on KZN municipalities from an organisational perspective. Municipal Managers and Administrators were targeted as respondents to research questions because they are the administrative decision-makers and are responsible for implementation of all programmes and protocols necessitated by the outbreak of the pandemic. The literature that was explored included that which deals with organisations and also the background to the outbreak of COVID-19. Data that was collected through questionnaires was collected from a selected sample of Municipal Managers and Administrators. The collected data was analysed through data interpretative analysis and aligned with the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that it elicited information around organisational readiness of municipalities. This research has therefore revealed that municipalities were not ready for the pandemic and some of them were not resilient enough to deal with this unprecedented challenge or disaster. There is therefore a need to improve municipal readiness even through training programmes so that they are able to deal with disasters better in future.

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