Hendri Kroukamp

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300; e-mail: kroukhj@ufs.ac.za

Fanie Cloete

Department of Public Administration and Management, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300; e-mail: gsc@sun.ac.za

Improving professionalism in South African local government

It is assumed that public sector organisations will act in a professional way in the execution of their daily tasks. However, the contrary is experienced when assessing the performance of local government in South Africa. Municipal service delivery is often plagued by alleged financial irregularities, maladministration, corruption, mismanagement, service delivery protests and lack of trust by citizens. To improve this situation, it is proposed that particular competencies and capabilities be acquired by employees to promote more professional conduct; that an environment of more responsiveness, high performance and clear accountability be created; a culture of really putting people first be inculcated; financial sustainability and management be ensured; and that institutional capacity be improved through direct and indirect support interventions.

> Professionalism is a multi-layered concept and a singular focus
> on any one layer blunts the analysis.
>
> Branden et al. (2010: 3)

1. Introduction and problem statement[1]

An efficient public service is vital for a well-functioning and well-governed country that aims to maximise its developmental potential and the welfare of its citizens. In this regard, local government could and should play a particularly important role, working to extend services and reduce inequalities, and demonstrating to citizens that their society is capable of organising itself in an efficient and effective way. In South Africa, the public service – of which local government forms an important part (Republic of South Africa Public Administration Management Bill, 2013, which was passed in Parliament in March 2014 – the President is yet to proclaim a commencement date for the Act) seems to suffer from high levels of inefficiency, corruption and incompetence. Governmental institutions routinely receive qualified audits and regular local government service delivery protests take place, thereby undermining, rather than maximising, the developmental potential of the country. These actions also contradict Section 195(1)(b)-(e) of the Constitution that stipulates that resources must be efficiently, effectively and economically utilised, public administration should be developmental-orientated and services must be provided in an impartial, fair, equitable and without-bias manner that is responsive to the needs of the inhabitants. The latter will ensure that a high standard of *professional ethics* will be promoted and maintained in public administration (Section 195(1)(a) of the 1996 Constitution).

The preconditions for professionalism in local government include an increased emphasis on improved client focus; new technologies; value for money in service provision and explicit reporting of outcomes. One way to address this situation is through the design and implementation of more systematic monitoring and evaluation systems to assess individual as well as institutional performances in terms of policies, programmes and projects, such as the In-year Management, Monitoring and Reporting System for Local Government (IYM) to ensure sound financial practices.

In government, these control mechanisms should be understood within the context of the specific institutional characteristics and the dynamics of the environments in which they are functioning. A comprehensive local government

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1   This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented by the first author at the 8th SPMA (School of Public Management and Administration) International Conference held in Pretoria, Republic of South Africa, 29 – 30 October 2015

turnaround strategy (LGTAS) based on five strategic objectives, and the National Development Plan (NDP), 2030 (Republic of South Africa 2013) were also approved by the South African government to ensure that local government would play a meaningful role as envisaged in the 1996 Constitution. The main question to be answered here is how these and other strategies can promote more professionalism in local government, which it is hoped can also improve good local governance processes and outcomes in South Africa.

2. Research design and methodology

A literature study of primary sources comprising authoritative publications, books, journals, the internet and official documents such as departmental policies was conducted to gather initial information on professionalism and its manifestations in government in general and in South African local government in particular. The findings of these activities were triangulated by conducting interviews and focus group discussions with practitioners and academics in the field of public administration and management in South Africa. These groups comprised 50 public servants in managerial positions – level 12 and upwards – who were enrolled at the University of the Free State in postgraduate Public Administration and Management studies in 2015. The collected data sets and conclusions reached were then integrated and the findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarised below.

3. Professionalism in context

One of the most classic early conceptions of professionalism in public administration is Pugh's (1989). The author identifies these six elements of professionalism: a conscious self-awareness of distinctive, shared attributes among a group of people ('esprit de corps'), based on an explicit written knowledge base, commitment to apply this knowledge for the social good, according to a strictly adhered-to code of ethics and conduct, formalised within an organisational structure of sorts and formal recognition of outstanding performance (Pugh 1989: 1). Various authors elaborated on this model of professionalism in public administration in a special edition of the *International Journal of Public Management* (1993). They include De Hoog et al. (1993), Gargan (1993), Gazell and Pugh (1993), Svara (1993) and Ventriss (1993).

The United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA 2000: 5) further expanded this concept and defined public sector professionalism as "the overall value that encompasses all other values that guide the public service". Feedback from the focus group discussions identified these values as loyalty,

neutrality, transparency, diligence, punctuality, effectiveness, impartiality, and other values that may be specific to the public services of individual countries. Public service professionalism embraces the notion that those who join the public service need to be inculcated with shared values and trained in basic skills to carry out professionally their official duties. Complementary to this process is a need to set up management structures to ensure that a public service ethos and competence is achieved. This implies strict quality control to ensure adherence to the professional standards shared in such groups.

It is assumed that professionals will practise professionalism. However, professionals are often committed to developing and maintaining their own level of expertise, while professionalisation (of the organisation), according to Shafer, Park and Liao (2002: 53), meets only limited success. The literature on professionals in organisations have focused on the compatibility of professional values and organisational role demands as well as on the adaptation and commitment of professionals to their employing organisations (compare Schwella 2015: 3). The incongruity thesis maintains that professionals face a commitment dilemma or an inter-role conflict since organisational and professional role requirements are often incompatible. Moreover, it has been shown that role conflict leads to many negative consequences for professionals and their employing organisations (Tubre and Collins 2000: 161).

As society became more economically and socially complex through industrialisation, urbanisation, and bureaucratisation, the study of professions shifted from the rigid, static concept of essential components towards recognising *professionalisation* as a dynamic process in which an occupation could strive towards the ideal of a profession. Brandsen et al. (2010: 4) explain the evolving concept of 'professionalism' from a public management perspective over time as follows: "Earlier work on professionalism shows that the concept professionalism has always been interpreted in mutual and sometimes even contradictory ways… Different notions emphasize different elements of professionalism. Some focus on the idealistic aspects of professionals, others state that the nature of the work (work logic) demands professionalism. While others state that professionalism is just the outcome of conflict and reflects an attempt of a certain group to protect themselves. These three notions reflect different perspectives of professionalism; a normative, cultural cognitive and regulative perspective."

The generic characteristics of 'professionals' tend to include the following elements (Brandsen et al. 2010: 5):

- Professionals have specialised knowledge and skills based on theoretical principles reinforced by practical experience.

- Professionals are members of a small and closed group of specialists who share and regulate the same elite, technical standards, approaches, skills and experiences.

- They are accepted as such by society and allowed the discretion to regulate their own specialised standards, approaches and methods because they are regarded as useful to society in general.

Thus, professionals are valued by people and society in terms of a favourable reputation and personal commitment to quality. They are also seen as elites who are supposed to be honest, trustworthy and loyal, and have a sense for equity and social justice in applying their specialised skills and experiences to the benefit of society. However, with the growing number of cases involving *inter alia* a lack of responsibility, many professionals are losing such respect (Wheeland, Palus and Wood 2014: 19S).

Professionalism is also defined according to the scope of the profession studied. However, the ideals that receive attention regarding professionalism originate from the viewpoint that it can represent a variety of different concerns, ranging from demonstrable workplace competence to a set of conditions that enable market dominance (Reamer 2009: 87). As the above quote by Brandsen et al. indicates, there are different layers of professionalism. Shafer et al. (2002: 56) emphasise that some researchers define professionalism as the conceptualisation of obligations, interactions, attitudes and organisational role behaviour required of professionals in relationship to individual patients or clients and to society as a whole. Brandsen et al. (2010: 6) for example, refer to Mintzberg's conclusion that the organisational application of specialist skills tends to result in standardisation of organisational procedures that are detrimental to the maintenance of specialised professional skills that require different applications in different organisational settings. This potentially creates conflicts between professional requirements (e.g. quality assurance) and organisational requirements (e.g. completing bureaucratic paperwork and reports), resulting in organisational requirements obstructing professionalisation of such specialised skills in those organisations (Wilensky 1964, Lipsky 1980).

On the other hand, managers also strive to professionalise their management activities (Noordegraaf 2007). However, Mintzberg in Brandsen et al. (2010: 8) famously emphasises the importance of the management context that might differ from case to case, and therefore militates against uniform professional 'management' standards and practices that constitute a one-size-fits-all standard. This also includes the often fast-changing political environment (Cooper 1984). The director-general of the International Association of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) conceptualised professionalisation in 1998 as "..the sum of knowledge,

skills, attitudes and ethical orientation that a career official brings to his/her job to contribute to the effective and efficient discharge of organisational responsibilities (UNDESA 1998: 23). Various managerial competencies identified for this purpose as attributes of a genuinely professional civil servant, are also identified as:

- "Foresight and prevision (strategic, pro-active orientation);
- entrepreneurship (risk-taking, innovativeness);
- excellence/merit (constant search for perfection);
- impact or results-orientation (focus on performance and productivity);
- moral rectitude (responsibility, political neutrality, public spirit, accountability, equity, transparency, subordination of private/personal interest to public good)" (UNDESA 1998: 24).

A widely-used measuring instrument in the field of professionalism is Hall's professionalism scale (Snizek 1972: 109), which assesses five attitudinal attributes, namely, the use of a professional organisation as a departure point; belief in public service; belief in self-regulation; a sense of calling; and, perceived autonomy in work. Moore (1970: 55) also proposes a hierarchy ranking professional attributes in ascending order of importance from motivation, established professional organisation, specialised body of knowledge, and evaluative skills to autonomy of judgement. Bebeau, Born and Ozar (1993: 29), in turn, developed an instrument according to an ethical-philosophical description that guides professional relationships and decision-making within an organisational context. It is known as the Professional Role Orientation Inventory (PROI) and measures four dimensions of professionalism; namely authority, responsibility, autonomy and agency.

In Australia, the Professional Framework for Public Sector Employees (n.d.) was developed to deliver high-quality administrative and managerial performance outcomes based on the following five key categories of combined capabilities:

- Corporate commitment and ethics;
- communication and teamwork;
- initiative and adaptability;
- outcomes and results; and
- skills and knowledge.

The framework intersects with and supports a range of public service directives in areas such as:

- A code of conduct;

- performance, training, and development;

- managing and resolving grievances; and

- regulating and resolving workplace conflicts.

It is clear from the above that professional capabilities are based on particular competencies that can be enhanced by *inter alia* training and development – which in turn enhance professionalism. Rusaw (2009: 36) draws a distinction between competencies that are person-based (such as creativity, problem-solving, and cooperativeness) and those that are specific to a task, organisation, and skills set. Garavan (2001: 149) observes that competencies are products of mental sets, values and beliefs, organisational cultures, and environmental situations. Competencies contain much "tacit" knowledge, which is subconscious and based on years of learning via practical experience. Because of the complexity of the concept of competency, Garavan (2001: 152) asserts that competencies cannot be accurately sorted and classified by levels, because competencies are holistic and shaped by specific contexts. Other conditions playing a role in professionalism is how supervisors treat employees. These include: (a) interpersonal supervisory trust; (b) organisation climate and culture; (c) organisation politics; (d) job content and structure; (e) flexibility of implementation; and (f) sufficient resources (Rusaw 2009: 41).

For purposes of this article, however, the question is how the professional management of local government can be improved. Minimum local government competency levels exist in South Africa to "seek to professionalise the local government sector to make it a career choice for talented officials and to some extent mitigate some of the root causes of poor financial management and service delivery" (SA Local Government October Briefing 2015: 4). These minimum competency levels refer to the higher education qualification, work related experience, core managerial competencies and occupational competencies (Republic of South Africa, Municipal Regulations on Minimum Competency Levels, Government Gazette 29967 of 15 June 2007).

Professionalism at the local level is similar to its manifestations at other governance levels. The wide range of public services that local governments are responsible for and their closeness to their communities mean they must find a workable compromise between efficiency, effectiveness and user satisfaction. Nalbandian (2005: 311) explains: "Local government professionals find themselves in the middle of two dynamic forces: administrative modernisation and citizen engagement. Attention to one without recognition of the other renders governance ineffective. The key to effective professionalism in local governance

is bridging the gaps in governance that these two trends create." Scheepers (2004) applied the Pugh (1989) model of professionalism to South African local government and concluded that there are still gaps between ideal and reality, as Pugh has also pointed out in the American context. This necessitates a continuous process of further professionalisation of local governance in order to consistently improve on the different elements of professional local governance performance. The main obstacles to full professionalisation of local government in South Africa are summarised below.

4. Constraints on professionalism in local government in South Africa

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA 2012: 3-4) identified a range of factors that inhibit the professionalisation of human resources management and ethos in the country. The background to the SALGA project to improve the professionalism of local government in South Africa can be summarised as follows: The 1996 South African Constitution provided for an innovative approach to governance by introducing concepts such as cooperative governance and by making provision for autonomous spheres as opposed to levels/tiers of government. Examples of legislation and regulations that were specifically promulgated for the local government sphere were *inter alia* the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005, the Local Government Municipal Systems Amendment Bill, 2011, and the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) in 2003, and the comprehensive LGTAS in 2009. The New Economic Growth Path (NGP) was launched at national level in 2010, and then there was the NDP – 2030 (National Planning Commission (NPC) 2013: 30), the latter two having implications for local government as well as the Municipal Intervention Plan: 2014 to 2019 that brings together the goals of each piece of legislation to meet the basic demands of all citizens by a reduction in unnecessary government expenditure, the release of resources for productive investment and to strengthen local government's role in terms of improved service delivery (Kroukamp 2014: 1413).

Despite everything done by government and SALGA over time at different levels to attempt to achieve more professional local government, at least the following seven realities still exist that hamper local government in acting in a professional manner and that need to be taken into consideration in terms of professionalism as part of current local government practices:

Firstly, as many as 95 of 278 municipalities (divided into local, district and metro municipalities) were in financial distress (a term specifically used to indicate the number of municipalities approaching 'financial crisis') in July 2013.

Although more audits were completed according to the MFMA in 2012, the number of disclaimers, adverse or qualified audit opinions increased from 110 to 127 in 2013/14; altogether 43 municipalities were not audited due to their failure to submit annual financial statements on time, with the majority of these unlikely to receive a favourable audit outcome. However, 50% of municipalities did achieve at least a financially unqualified audit opinion (compared to 45% in the previous year), though there were merely 17 clean audits in the country, which means that fewer than 5% of municipalities were on par with the required benchmark (SA Local Government Briefing 2014: Operation Clean Audit Barometer).

In 2016, "inadequate financial management continues to plague the local government sector, the coalface of service delivery" (Gernetzky 2016: 3). At the release of the 2014-2015 report into municipal financial management, Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu said that while the quality of reporting had improved and the number of municipalities receiving clean audits had risen steadily in the past five years, institutional capacity and day-to-day financial management remained concerns. "The auditor-general has again flagged institutional capacity and management as major concerns for SA's 278 municipalities, a quarter of which remain uncertain as going concerns due to the problems of revenue- and debt-collection in a tough economic environment. A fifth of municipalities received unqualified audit opinions for 2014-15, representing R134bn (39%) of the R347bn total expenditure budget for the municipal sphere, Makwetu said" (Gernetzky 2016: 3).

Secondly, and related to the first aspect, excessive use of consultants – even in cases where there were people employed to do the work – has been recognised as a serious impediment in local government. In the North West Province, for example, as much as R29m was spent in 2014 to pay consultants to assist with accounting-related services and help municipalities to prepare year-end financial statements, although this did not lead to a visible improvement of audit outcomes. A total of 226 municipalities (71%) were assisted by consultants in 2011/2012 at a cost of more than R378m (Treasury 2013: 15).

In 2016, despite an increase in the number of municipalities receiving clean audits, local government still remained too reliant on the use of consultants, as cautioned by Auditor-General Makwetu at the release of the 2014-2015 report into municipal financial management (Gernetzky 2016: 3). More specifically, Makwetu pointed out that "ninety-two percent of municipalities are now utilising consultants for financial reporting, the cost of which has increased from R267m five years ago, to R892m in 2014-15" (Gernetzky 2016: 3). Makwetu explained that "this growth in consulting was often disproportionate to the growth in other services" (Gernetzky 2016: 3).

Thirdly, supply chain management was also investigated by the Auditor-General. According to the 2012/2013 AG Report as much as R3.5bn worth of procurement could not be audited due to non-submission of the relevant documents. Almost half (46%) of municipal contracts were awarded to employees, councillors or other state officials. Moreover, there were no consequences for the afore-mentioned transgressions (May 2013: 38).

A fourth concern expressed by the focus groups is that a lack of synergy caused weak coordination between various spheres, levels and departments of government, which had an adverse impact on service delivery and development in terms of, for example, the provision of housing and related activities such as water, electricity, sanitation and the identification of land.

Furthermore, despite the high unemployment rate in South Africa, there are 30 000 vacancies at all levels of government, including the local level. In addition, leadership instability, ineffective performance management, and insufficient internal controls have had a detrimental impact.

Political deployment has furthermore exacerbated corruption in the form of fraud, tenderpreneurship, nepotism (e.g. R3.274bn of contracts were awarded to family members in 2012/2013), cronyism, patronage, money-laundering and price collusion. At local government level, corrupt practices also entail abuse of mayoral funds, unauthorised transfers of municipal money to outsiders, favouritism in procurement processes, the payment of bribes to secure services, the abuse of travel allowances, fictitious tenders, non-payment of municipal services by councillors, using municipal facilities for party-political or personal purposes, employing individuals as general workers without advertising the posts, and irregular performance bonuses (Ebersohn 2014: 16). There are examples of recent corruption cases such as that against the former municipal manager of Moqhaka Municipality (Kroonstad) arrested for fraud involving R11m and offences in terms of the MFMA; similarly, the chief traffic officer of the Maquassi Hills municipality in the North West Province (Wolmaransstad) was arrested on corruption charges of defrauding the municipality of R540 000 in unpaid licence discs and traffic fines (SA Local Government Briefing 2015: 40).

A consequence of the penultimate points on corruption is that fewer people trust government, a prerequisite according to Rusaw (2009: 44) for professionalism in local government. The SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey, a nationally-representative public opinion poll conducted annually by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (SA Local Government Briefing 2014: 5), indicates that trust in local government dropped by 7,91% over the year from April 2013 (see Table 1) – and in addition, that approval of government's performance dropped by more than 20% on issues such as transparency and accountability,

correct appointments, crime, inflation, narrowing the income gap and fighting corruption over the same period.

Table 1: Trust in local government

Trust in institutions, 2006–2013 (%) Year	Presidency	National government	Provincial government	Local government	Parliament
2006	77.0	73.1	65.5	50.3	69.4
2007	68.2	62.7	56.6	43.2	61.6
2008	57.4	57.9	49.8	40.0	56.0
2009	54.5	57.1	49.0	38.5	54.9
2010	66.9	65.8	57.9	43.1	64.5
2011	64.5	65.0	56.4	42.7	61.1
2012	63.7	65.4	61.2	49.8	62.9
2013	55.1	54.5	51.8	48.6	54.5

Source: S A Local Government Briefing 2014

Various reasons were cited for this state of affairs by the respondents in the focus groups. They include:

- No proper fit between the capacity and responsibilities of provinces and municipalities;
- coordination and capacity-building problems between different spheres of government;
- political instability and diverted focus;
- top-heavy political parallel structures that undermine the administration of municipalities;
- the focus on finding quick solutions and achieving compliance with minimum requirements, rather than developing a long-term, sustainable solution with an appropriate execution plan and scientific change management (Deloitte 2012: 21; Treasury 2013: 14; Public Service Management Bill 2013; NDP 2013);
- capacity problems, not only to deliver and sustain quality services, but in the ability to spend its revenue as well as inadequate or irrelevant training of managers;
- unacceptably high levels of underspending in poverty-stricken areas;

- the quality, nature, availability and accessibility of information provided in service -delivery improvement plans and annual reports. This information is generally vague, making it difficult to measure performance accurately. This means that baseline empirical data to monitor performance quantitatively and qualitatively is lacking;

- misconceptions and a lack of knowledge regarding the regulatory framework of government, leading to cumbersome procedures, delays in turnaround time and lengthy decision-making processes caused by municipalities themselves and compromises in the quality of services; and

- the limited extent to which policy intentions that are linked to performance are accomplished, thus, a lack of the implementation of policies. According to Rayner, Lawton and Williams (2012: 122) the latter goes hand-in-hand with a lack of public sector ethos (an ethos that, in some sense, promotes the public interest over and above organisational and individual interests). The lack of this, therefore, illustrates a lack of professionalism.

On the basis of these findings, it is clear that professionalism is not charac-teristic of good governance in South Africa in general and that deliberate measures should be put in place to ensure that professionalism is indeed practiced and cultivated at local government level in order to improve local government operations and outcomes.

5. Ensuring professionalism in South African local government

Ensuring professionalism in local government will *inter alia* depend on the nature of the role of local government in service delivery, the capacity of the people in local government and the resources available (Lewin 2014: 12). Emphasis should be placed on what can be done to deliver more and better services. This means investigating what the real causes of non-professionalism might be and to choose strategies that could enable municipalities to make a difference. These strategies will depend on changing factors external to the organisation – such as economic conditions; internal factors such as work environment needs, resources or work systems; and people, in terms of their competencies, capabilities and motivation (Lewin 2014: 12).

Although Tsenoli (2014: 1) concedes that there have been some positive results in terms of the mandate of local government to rationalise functions, structures, legislation and resources, emphasis should also be placed on the use of non-financial measures such as product quality and customer satisfaction to ensure better long-term performance by local government as it will assist managers in refocusing on the long-term aspects of their actions and enhance professionalism.

Deloitte (2012: 20) proposes the following six key priorities that need to be addressed to professionalise local government:

Leadership and strategic HR: recruit, retain and develop the best available talent and skills, especially the best possible leadership.

In South Africa, governance structures in general are clogged with acting municipal managers and acting chief financial officers (CFOs); e.g. in 2013, a total of 17% of all municipalities had acting municipal managers, as many as 60 municipalities had acting CFOs, and 22 municipalities had both acting municipal managers and acting CFOs. This absence of sustainable senior leaders and managers leaves municipalities vulnerable to non-compliance and in a dysfunctional state (Lewin 2014: 12).

Performance management: creates an environment of responsiveness, high performance and clear accountability.

Rewards and remuneration must be linked to performance and competent people should be appointed. This involves some form of performance measurement and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can play an important role here, but with a need for active citizenry where two-way information gathering and sharing between citizens and government takes place. M&E practices could enable citizens to communicate their grievances and seek redress at the point of delivery, also providing insights into service delivery in the process. Although the benefits of using M&E include improvements in transparency, accountability, learning, feedback and productivity, the danger of ignoring professional judgement and not seeking a nuanced understanding of the underlying reasons for good or poor performance should be kept in mind. Unintended consequences include the manipulation of results, ignoring non-targeted areas, alienation of professional staff, increase in bureaucracy and blocking innovation and learning. Unfortunately, evaluation in government is still applied only sporadically and is not adequately informing planning, policy-making or budgeting. It is, therefore, important that M&E capacity development at an institutional level should involve providing technical support in the form of guidelines, advice, tools and frameworks related to improving M&E processes, structures, resources and infrastructure (Treasury 2013: 15).

Culture: establish a people-centred culture of service delivery and customer care along the *Batho Pele* principles – putting

people first. Being a municipal employee should be about serving citizens, not about entitlement and power. Encourage and reward innovation and initiative that improve service delivery.

Planning and governance: ensure planning, governance structures, people, processes, systems, infrastructure and oversight mechanisms are optimal and aligned to the mandate, as defined by a realistic IDP and applicable legislation.

Financial sustainability and management: ensure economic and financial viability and prosperity of the municipality, recognising its developmental mandate to help facilitate growth of the local economy and the creation of jobs; and

Ensure *sound financial management and budgeting.*

In terms of Section 18 of the MFMA, a municipal budget must be funded before a council can adopt that budget for implementation. A funded budget is essentially a budget that is funded by cash derived either from realistically anticipated revenues to be collected in that year; government transfers; and/or from cash-backed reserves of previous financial years. However, when preparing their annual budgets, municipalities often overstate or inflate revenue projections, either to reflect a surplus or to show that excess expenditure requirements are adequately covered by revenues to be collected. Revenue estimates are therefore seldom underpinned by realistic or realisable revenue assumptions, resulting in the municipality not being able to collect this revenue and therefore finding themselves in cash-flow difficulties (NDP 2013, Schwella 2015: 7).

Elio, Kubra and Elio (2013: 553) say that professionalism is enhanced by the application of particular values. Public sector professionals should be motivated to perform their responsibilities based on an intrinsic value system that includes altruistic behaviour as well as a belief in a public-service ethos. The traditional view of this ethos emphasises service, duty and obligation, rather than financial viability, profit or shareholder value. The authors define 'ethos' as

...a way of life that includes a set of values held by the individual, together with organisational processes and procedures that shape, and are shaped, by those values. Such values are enshrined in organisational goals that are directed towards public rather than private or sectional interests'' (Elio et al. 2013: 555).

This is then directly linked to professionalism, as referred to earlier.

The consensus that SALGA (2012) reached, after its brainstorming session with local government HR professionals, was that there are three core pillars of further professionalisation of local government in South Africa. These are the development and adoption of norms and standards for all the major occupational disciplines in the local government sector, an improved local government competency framework based on these norms and standards (see Scheepers 2004, Greyling 2014), and the promotion of more effective sectoral professional bodies to manage "the accreditation of members, regulating the conduct and professional behaviour of individual as well ensuring adherence to discipline and norms and standards by their members" (SALGA 2012: 14).

The SALGA report said that in order to achieve success eventually, an integrated approach to the above professionalisation of local government in South Africa is needed from a number of stakeholders in different sectors and at different levels. This requires the development of a coherent professionalisation system which should comprise the following five main elements: an effective performance management system; a communication strategy; building up professionalisation values, ethics and cultures; collective bargaining; and employee induction.

Successful achievement of SALGA's proposed interventions to improve institutional capacity and service delivery will strengthen the most critical competencies of local governments in these areas. This includes direct interventions like frontline office improvements, which will help to improve the service-delivery interface of all government institutions in all spheres of government. Indirect interventions would include systemic issues such as strengthening intergovernmental relations (IGR) structures and processes, communication strategies and the development of national service-delivery norms and standards (Sokupa 2010: 2). Mechanisms that can be used in these interventions include:

- the deployment of experts in the short term to conduct assessments in priority institutions and to make incisive proposals to improve poor service delivery;

- support teams to assist with the implementation of proposals in the medium and long term;

- secondment of competent staff from other institutions to municipalities in need;

- voluntary and independent peer reviews which are non-threatening and encourage ownership of proposed improvements; and

- mentorship (Kroukamp 2014: 1418).

Once these mechanisms are put in place and the preconditions are met, the strategic goal of fully professionalising local government can be achieved. This

would, however, necessitate dedicated political leadership and administrative and financial commitments to provide the resources needed for this purpose and to ensure successful implementation.

Scheepers (2004) has proposed a more detailed action plan to achieve the required results. These recommendations make eminent sense and apply the traditional mechanisms that are normally used for professionalisation to the development of a professional local government service in South Africa. His recommendations include:

- New national legislation to establish and regulate a formal profession of Local Public Administration Management;

- the creation and empowerment of regulating oversight bodies to develop and control the new profession, in the form of a council and institute of local public administration management; and

- a registration system for associate and professional local public administrator managers as well as professional fellows of local public administration management (Scheepers 2004: 97).

In his doctoral thesis, Scheepers (2015) expanded his prior conclusions from 2004 about how to improve the professional skills of local government officials by developing a systematic assessment model to determine the institutional capacity of municipalities to improve their quality of governance and levels of service delivery. This expansion links the envisaged increases in professional knowledge and skills of municipal officials to a local government implementation plan (the Municipal Institutional Capacity Model –MICM), prioritising the main strategic foci and activities to be addressed. The MICM consists of "..a primary capacity area (leadership),…a secondary capacity area (innovation) and a set of four key institutional capacity elements, namely (a) long-term visioning and planning; (b) fiscal management; (c) public participation; and (d) human resources" (Scheepers 2015: ii).

6. Conclusions

From the exposition above it is apparent that, in general, local government in South Africa does not currently show the professionalism required, due to the cases of corruption cited, the inefficiency of service delivery, the incumbents of posts in local government, and incompetence.

Despite an array of legislative and regulatory provisions to create an environment conducive to supporting the mandate to act in a professional manner, not all South African local governments are currently living up to expectations

due to problematic political/administrative interfaces, a lack of accountability, dysfunctional caucuses, unsatisfactory labour relations, weak public partici-pation structures and weak financial management, creating the belief that professionalism is not part and parcel of the nature of local government. Various turnaround and reinforcing strategies have been proposed to improve the professionalisation of South African local government. They include ensuring sound leadership; providing M&E mechanisms for performance management; creating a culture of service; ensuring sound financial local government; inculcating particular values in every employee; and applying different direct and indirect support interventions.

There does not seem to be a dearth of ideas, strategies and action plans to try to achieve better professionalisation in local government in South Africa. However, this will only bear fruit if stronger political, administrative and financial commitments to this cause are made.

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