

Planning in the face of silence: A phronetic¹ study of the restructuring of the planning function in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of the transformation of the planning function of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) read against the study by Flyvbjerg (1998) of the Aalborg Project. It focuses specifically on the human experience of the transformation process and the influence that power relations had on the outcome thereof. The study is historically situated within the broader context of the restructuring of local government in South Africa following the advent of a democratic dispensation in 1994. Theoretically it is dealt with both from the perspective of organisational theory and that of contemporary planning theory. The analysis shows that the CTMM is still a strongly managerialist environment where power is vested in the organisational hierarchy. It furthermore shows that democratic ideals are yet to precipitate in the day-to-day operational activities of the municipality. The lack of regard for people is highlighted as a serious flaw in the transformation process. The role of communication as a powerful tool in exercising power is confirmed. More significantly, however, it is found that failure to communicate can be used effectively by those in power to silence the objections of the weaker party in an unequal power relationship.

BEPLANNING IN DIE BLIK VAN STILTE: 'N FRONETIESE STUDIE VAN DIE HERSTRUKTURERING VAN DIE BEPLANNINGSFUNKSIE IN DIE TSHWANE METROPOLITIAANSE MUNISIPALITEIT

Die artikel gee 'n oorsig van die transformasie van die beplanningsfunksie van die Stad Tshwane Metropolitaanse Munisipaliteit (STMM) gelees teen die agtergrond van Flyvbjerg (1998) se studie van die Aalborgprojek. Dit fokus spesifiek op die menslike ervaring van die transformasieproses en die invloed wat magsverhoudings op die uitkoms daarvan gehad het. Die studie is histories binne die breër konteks van die herstrukturering van plaaslike bestuur in Suid-Afrika na die aanbreek van 'n demokratiese bestel in 1994 geleë. Teoreties word dit vanuit die perspektief van sowel die organisasieteorie as kontemporêre beplanningsteorie beskou. Die analise toon dat die STMM steeds 'n sterk bestuursmatige omgewing is, waar mag in die hiërargiese struktuur van die organisasie gesetel is. Dit toon verder dat demokratiese ideale nog nie in die daaglikse aktiwiteite van die munisipaliteit neerslag gevind het nie. Die gebrek aan konsiderasie vir mense word as 'n ernstige tekortkoming in die transformasieproses uitgewys. Die rol van kommunikasie as 'n kragtige instrument in die uitoefening van mag word bevestig. Van meer belang, egter, word gevind dat die versuim om te kommunikeer effektief deur diegene in 'n magsposisie gebruik kan word om die besware van die swakker party in 'n oneweredige magsverhouding die swye op te lê.

¹ Practice-oriented social (case) study that does not aim at finding absolute empirical answers as is the case in the natural sciences. Flyvbjerg (2001) enriched the original concept of 'phronesis', as defined by Aristotle, by adding the dimension of power. The Tshwane study follows this school.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of a new unicity municipality represented a significant departure from the previous dispensation for local government in the Tshwane area. The implementation of the new structure started with a round of municipal elections on 5 December 2000 and was preceded by the gargantuan task of compiling a comprehensive body of legislation that would set out the framework for and provide guidance with regard to the multiple processes involved. Most significant in this regard, is the Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000), which regulates the relationship between the municipality and the community that it serves and forms part of. Yet, at the point when implementation actually started, it was, more than anything, a human drama that unfolded. It is this drama of people with widely divergent backgrounds, personalities and ambitions aspiring to, wielding and oppressed by power in a highly managerialist environment that forms the focus of this study.

2. LENSES AND ANGLES

The theoretical framework within which the Tshwane story is read, illuminates the case from two angles, namely that of organisational theory on the one hand and a specific focus within contemporary planning theory on the other.

2.1 Organisational theory

Organisational theory particularly theories related to organisational change, provide useful perspectives to a study of planners working within a large organisational structure such

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as that of the municipality. Authors such as Mir *et al.* (2002), Beech *et al.* (2002: online), Gellerman (1995), Puth (1994), Skopec (1990) and Myers, M.T. & Myers, G.E. (1982), among others, argue that communication is the primary tool for managing organisational change. In their case for communicating managers, these authors advocate a people-oriented approach to organisational management.

The Tshwane municipality represents a distinct form of organisation, namely bureaucracy. Bennis (1993: 3) describes bureaucracy as "a social invention which relies exclusively on the power to influence through reason and law". The fact that, in a bureaucracy, rationality is expected to prevail over other forms of power, makes for an environment suited to studying the relationship and dynamic interaction between power and rationality. Bureaucracies have been widely criticised for enforcing conformity, stifling creativity and limiting access to power and information through their hierarchical structure (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Landry & Bianchini, 1995; Bennis, 1993; Merton (in Ott, 1989)).

The Tshwane municipality is what Boje (1991) refers to as a managerialist organisation. In such an organisation, the underlying supposition is that better management is the solution to most economic and social problems. In managerialist organisations, stories are used to transfer knowledge, communicate vision and accomplish change. Boje (1991) argues for an approach to storytelling organisations that is neither managerialist nor functionalist, but rather acknowledges a pluralism of plots and exposes the interplay between marginalised (silent) and dominant (hegemonic) stories in an organisation.

2.2 Planning theory

The central position accorded to people and the emphasis on communication that characterise contemporary theories of organisation and change also dominate contemporary debates on planning theory. In addressing this "communicative turn" in planning, Healey (1995: 218) describes this new

wave of planning theory as argumentative, communicative and interpretative. In recent years, a growing number of planning theorists, including Jean Hillier, Charles Hoch, Judith Innes, Helen Liggett, Tom Stein, Tom Harper, Seymour Mandelbaum, Tore Sager and Jeff Throgmorton (Yiftachel & Huxley, 2001) have contributed to this focus, inspired mainly, as is Healey, by the work of Habermas.

The communicative turn in planning opened poststructuralist and multicultural debates on the nature of knowledge, ethics and justice. This led a number of planning theorists to focus on communicative-pragmatic logic, accumulating evidence about speech, narratives, professional profiles, consensus building and negotiation (Hoch, 1996; Yiftachel & Huxley, 2001).

The process of communicative action as defined by Habermas and applied by planning theorists provided a new perspective on the complex web of social and power relations within which planning practice takes place. Communicative planning theory therefore places much emphasis on practice and the analysis of practice examples — a trend described in the literature as "the practice movement".

Authors such as Hillier (2002), Flyvbjerg (2001, 1998), Watson (2001), Mandelbaum *et al.* (1996) and Forester (1982) argue for the use of practice stories to strengthen theory, which in turn has as its aim the improvement of practice. Most often, the study of practice is done by way of richly detailed case studies rendered in the narrative form.

Mandelbaum *et al.* (1996) recognises a strong interest in the actions and experience of the professional planner in practice. Theorists increasingly acknowledge the need to listen to and register the daily interactive work of planning professionals (see also Hillier (2002), Watson (2001) and Flyvbjerg (1998)).

Hillier (2002) calls the practical wisdom that emerges from this kind of practice-centered theorising 'prudence'. Flyvbjerg (2001: 56) gives much the same definition to

'phronesis', which he describes as "practical knowledge and practical ethics". Flyvbjerg adds the dimension of power to the classical concept of 'phronesis', specifically the Foucauldian concept of power relations.

The viewpoints on power developed by Foucault in the 1990s were used by a number of planners to gain a better understanding of the forces at work in the relational/social web within which planning is practiced. These include Hillier (2002), Lapintie (2001), Allmendinger (2001), Watson (2001) and Kögler (1999). Hillier (2002) argues that Foucault's work aids understanding of power in the multiplicity of micropractices that comprise everyday life as well as understanding power as a relational process rather than as a commodity operating from the top down. Hoch (1996) argues that Foucault's concept of power relations provides an important critique on the professions (such as the planning profession) that claim to serve the communal good.

The work of Bent Flyvbjerg (2001, 1998), which draws heavily on the Foucauldian theory of power and rationality, as well as the work of philosophers Kant, Nietzsche and Machiavelli, has contributed greatly to the new focus on power relations in planning theory. In his seminal work, *Planning in the Face of Power* (1982), Forester explores the control of information as a key source of planners' power.

The question of the relationship of planning and politics is densely interwoven with the question of planning, planners and power. In his classical text on planners and politics, Catanese (1974)² sees the fact that the planner is never in a role to implement his/her own plans as a fundamental difficulty of the municipal planning profession. He discredits the concept that the wisdom of a planner can prevail in the face of politics.

It is clear that the relationship between planning and politics is a complex one. Planners are always at risk of being exploited by those in power to secure their position and they are often not equipped to play

² Although this is indeed a very old source and the relevance thereof for this study might be questioned on those grounds, we view it as a seminal text that influences the discourse on planning and politics even today.

the political game of influence and manipulation. Very often, the only tool available to planners to leverage power is what Habermas (in Flyvbjerg, 1998: 30, 86) refers to as "the better argument". Habermas believed "the better argument" to be a rational argument arrived at through open discussion. The catch, of course, is that in reality "the better argument" is not necessarily the rational argument, but merely the argument preferred by the party that holds the most power...

3. HOW NOTHING MUCH CHANGED IN TSHWANE

3.1 A new era dawns

With the establishment of the new municipality for the area now known as Tshwane³, the four former municipal structures that it replaced were given the status of Administrative Units, each with an Administrative Unit Manager (CTMM, 2000). In addition, eleven Divisions were established, each headed by a Divisional Manager. The Divisional Managers were responsible for managing specific functions, or 'Divisions', on a matrix basis across all the Administrative Units. 'City Planning' did not feature on the list of the new Divisions. Rather, it resorted under the Economic Development Division alongside Transport Planning and Management, Fresh Produce Market, and Local Economic Development.⁴

While the Divisional Manager responsible for planning was finding her feet, the Chief Planner at the former Metropolitan Council initiated a process to restructure the planning function (CTMM, 2001b). The working group driving the process consisted almost exclusively of existing managers. This process was, however, terminated by the Divisional Manager after conflict developed between her and the former Chief Planner. At the same time, a strong bond of friendship had formed between the Divisional Manager and a Senior Town Planner in the Chief Planner in question's team.

The Divisional Manager instituted a new restructuring process for the

planning function and named her friend, the Senior Town Planner, as convener of the process (CTMM, 2001c). The new process was rationalised on the basis of criticism against the process managed by the former Chief Planner, namely:

- inadequate participation;
- inadequate communication;
- lack of sufficient coordination with other functions and disciplines; and
- a lack of a clearly defined mandate and terms of reference to guide the restructuring initiatives (CTMM, 2001a).

The convener for the new restructuring process completed a *Work plan for the Restructuring of the City Planning Component* (Van der Merwe, 2001), which set out the terms of reference, purpose and objectives, process and approach, risk management and time frames for the restructuring of the planning function. The convener's effort in compiling the plan, which was nothing other than a change strategy, was particularly laudable in the light of the fact that, on a corporate level, no such strategy existed to guide the transformation of the municipality as a whole.

3.2 A core team and task teams

In terms of the work plan, a core team and task teams had to be established to manage the restructuring process. Just as the convener was appointed on the basis of her friendship with the Divisional Manager, the other core team members and task team leaders were also selected on the basis of a network of friendships and past acquaintances with the convener and other members of her team. It almost became a mantra in the core team discussions that theirs was a 'transparent and participative' process.⁵ Yet, in spite of this, the additional core team members and the task team leaders were chosen by the core team in an autocratic fashion that reeked of cronyism.

As part of the core team's commitment to communication (the lack of which was one of the criticisms against the Chief Planner's process),

newsletters and memoranda were frequently compiled and distributed to staff members (CTMM, 2001d; CTMM, 2001f; CTMM, 2001g; CTMM, 2001h; CTMM, 2001k). This was supplemented with small group meetings and workshops involving all the planning staff. While serving as a valuable source of information for the planning officials, who had until that point largely been kept in the dark regarding the restructuring process, it also served as a mechanism to entrench the core team's relative position of power. Although the core team members stated amongst each other that they aspired to managerial positions in the municipality and hoped that their positions in the core team would promote their chances in this regard, the communication issued by the team always emphasised that they had not been 'promoted' in any way. All communication with the Divisional Manager was routed through the core team, thus also strengthening their position within the organisational hierarchy.

The time of the establishment of the core team was turbulent in many respects. There was no relationship between the new top management and the officials, mostly because of the complete lack of communication from the side of the Top Management. Furthermore, there was no guidance with regard to so-called Management Regions within the larger Tshwane area (CTMM, 2001e), which would particularly affect land use management.

To meet the political demand for racial equity in their structure, the core team nominated three black staff members as additional members of the core team and introduced so-called 'co-task team leaders' who would work with the task team leaders and 'be empowered' in the process. In effect, every single black official in the planning function was made part of the wider core team structure. While this certainly looked very impressive and seemingly achieved the core team's stated objective of racial equity, there was little authenticity to it. Most of the core team discussions took place without the black members. They

³ An area including, but not limited to, what was formerly known as the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Area.

⁴ The Wonderboom Airport was later added to the list.

⁵ Just as often, this was placed in juxtaposition to the Chief Planner's process, which was said to have been 'exclusive and top-down'.

were isolated due to the fact that they did not share the core team's offices and were often 'forgotten' when informal or impromptu meetings were called. It would seem that the initial members of the Core Team had an alliance that was not shared by the extended group and that the efforts to promote racial equity did not amount to much more than window-dressing.

Nonetheless, the co-task team leaders responded with amazing alacrity to the challenge put to them by the core team and by the end of June 2001 most of them had progressed to the point where a work plan and proposed organogram for each of the component functions of the planning function were available.

3.3 The core team gets a curve ball

An unexpected development came towards the end of June 2001, when a new organisational structure for the municipality that had been approved by the Mayoral Committee was distributed to the Administrative Unit Managers, from whence the core team obtained it. The new structure was compiled by an external consultant and no consultation on it whatsoever had taken place with the municipality's internal stakeholders. It consisted of 8 Strategic Units (later called Divisions and finally Departments), headed by Strategic Executives (later called Strategic Executive Officers or SEO's). With this arrangement, the Administrative Units ceased to exist and the structure of the new unified City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality came into being.

The new Economic Development Department consisted of two components, namely Public Transport and Local Economic Development. It was clear that planning was no longer part of this function. On the face of it, it was also not part of any other function. The core team was no longer certain whether their champion, the Divisional Manager, would be permanently appointed. The new structure perpetuated the

disregard for the planning function. In fact, where City Planning was at least mentioned as one of the components of former Economic Development Division, there was now no mention whatsoever of it in the new structure.

Any hopes the core team cherished that their former Divisional Manager would remain their manager were dashed by a letter, Circular 1 of 2001, distributed by the Municipal Manager on 2 July 2001 (CTMM, 2001j). The letter ordered all acting Divisional Managers to return to their previous posts immediately without thanks for their contribution. Apart from this general circular, no personal communication had taken place to inform the Divisional Managers of the new developments. The Chief Operating Officer (COO) later referred to Circular 1 of 2001 as "the most inhumane document I had ever seen" because of the unfeeling manner in which it dismissed the acting Divisional Managers and the lack of acknowledgement for their contribution it displayed.

The only indication of where the planning function lay on the new structure was the recruitment advertisements for the Strategic Executive Officers and the General Managers. It was clear from the advertisement for the Strategic Executive Officer (SEO) for Housing (CTMM, 2001i) that the planning function was seen as part of the Housing Directorate.⁶ It was, however, not clear whether it would resort under the General Manager: Housing or the General Manager: Land and Environmental Planning, which were the two legs of the new Directorate.

3.4 Finding a foothold in the new structure

In the light of this uncertainty, the acting General Manager for Land and Environmental planning, who was also the Executive Director of City Planning and Development in the former City Council of Pretoria, offered to manage the planning function for the interim in the light of his long standing

relationship with the function. To the core team's surprise he indicated that he was satisfied with the work they had done to date and that he intended to retain the team. The core team had expected that he would disband the core team and revert back to the existing managers.

Yet, the core team's relief would prove to be short lived. The acting general manager to whom they reported received a faxed organogram of the planning function from the acting Strategic Executive officer indicating that another person, a long-time colleague of the acting Strategic Executive Officer, would act as the coordinator of the planning function, leaving the core team convener out in the cold. Once again an official who had worked in an acting capacity was dismissed in a mechanistic and unfeeling manner. However, the acting General Manager placed two former core team members in the co-ordinators' positions for the land use planning and strategic spatial planning functions. In a letter to all staff in the planning function, (CTMM, 2001m), the new coordinator for planning brought the coordinators into the mainstream of management of the function, albeit merely in an acting capacity. The letter stated that "the Coordinators will have the full operational responsibility of the functions Tshwane-wide". The existing line managers were to act as 'Regional Coordinators' who would report to the functional coordinators. This meant that the coordinators were no longer merely responsible for restructuring as was the case in the core team (although that responsibility remained), but that they now also had to manage the day-to-day operations of their functions.

The operational environment was in a state of disarray when the new coordinator appeared on the scene. Aspects such as the availability of leave forms bearing the name of the new municipality, signing powers, letterheads, a filing system and the budget had to be attended to (CTMM, 2002d).⁷ At that stage the City Planning

⁶ It furthermore caused confusion that the Division: Housing, had the same name as that of the Strategic Unit/Department: Housing, of which it was a part. The confusion that emerged regarding names of functions and structures (e.g. Directorate, Department, Division, Strategic Unit) were all at some stage used to refer to the larger 'Housing' structure, became a comedy of errors in itself that spoke volumes about the lack of stability that characterised the restructuring process. As far as the names were concerned, at least, such stability could have been established with ease through proper communication by the top management.

⁷ Week after week, these issues remained on the agenda of the Coordinators' meeting. By October 2001, there was still uncertainty regarding support services for the function (CTMM, 2001r). Most of the co-ordinators did not have secretaries and none of the officials were sure where to apply for stationery to be ordered, or how the filing system had operated since December 2000.

Division functioned 'unofficially' under the Housing Department (CTMM, 2001i). It was a thorn in the side of the planning Co-ordinators that there was no reference to 'Planning' in the name of the Department.

3.5 Something old, something new

While the Regional Spatial Planning (land use planning) function had a strong operational focus, the Strategic Metropolitan Spatial Planning (SMSP) function had to be established *de novo*. The relevant coordinator invited planners to form part of the new function. Those who responded were all former colleagues and friends of the coordinator.

During the second half of 2001, the initiating members of the SMSP function spent many hours in lengthy and intense discussions on the shape and content of the future function. Once again, as was the case with the core team more than a year earlier, a stimulating synergy developed in the small group that initiated the SMSP function.

The team used a generic strategic planning process as the point of departure for the structure of the function. Careful consideration was given to the characteristics that would be required of the people who would work in each component of the function. Sadly, it was not possible to create new posts or fill existing vacancies with external candidates who met the SMSP initiators' ambitious requirements. Ultimately, planners who were working in related functions (e.g. the research function) slotted in under the SMSP function 'by default'. Despite efforts to establish a completely new function, much of the existing structure had to be retained. The persistence of the 'old' structure was emerging as one of many themes that seemed to run like a golden thread through the story of Tshwane's restructuring process.

In an attempt to convey the importance of the planning function to Councilors, the SMSP team compiled a document under the title of "City Planning — a rough guide" setting out in very basic terms what the function was all about (CTMM, 2001o). The guide consisted of 10

pages with ample illustration and text in a large font size with headings such as "What is a city?", "Why do cities have to be planned?", "What is the city planning function?" etc. It was hoped that the document would effectively convey the importance of planning to the Councilors, who had no background in town and regional planning. What was not articulated, though, was the condescension that could be inferred from the manner in which the document was presented. The tone and format was that which one would have employed to convey a message to children. It bespoke the officials' deep-seated distrust of the competence of the new leadership. Nonetheless, the document was copied and distributed at the next meeting of the Mayoral Committee and was apparently well received. Unfortunately, it did not result in any change with regard to the status of the planning function.

The SMSP management team members were exasperated when they heard of a symposium on *The Restructuring and Rebirth of the City of Tshwane* (CTMM, 2001s; CTMM, 2001t), which was a joint effort between the CTMM, the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the University of Pretoria. The symposium had as its purpose to "discuss issues of urban restructuring, urban growth and the apartheid City's impact on human development", which clearly indicated a focus on 'spatial' restructuring. Some enquiries followed, and eventually the SMSP management team was invited to attend the first day of the workshop. Only one of the team members was invited to the second day, which would focus on a more exclusive programme. This increased the uncertainty the SMSP team felt regarding their place in the bigger picture of the municipality. They had been ignored and their expertise disregarded. This was one of many indications of the fragmentation of the new structure and the lack of communication and co-ordination that prevailed.

In the light of the lack of guidance regarding possible management regions for the Tshwane area, the Regional Spatial Planning team

decided to take matters into their own hands and proposed a model of eight management regions. The proposal was accepted, not only by the planners, but also, to the surprise of the planners, by the transportation engineers. This was another example of planning officials taking the initiative on important issues in the absence of leadership from the new top management.⁸ A team of planners was put in place for each region and each planning team was headed by an acting Deputy Manager. The new teams set to work immediately to deal with the backlog that had built up as a result of the delay in restoring the delegated authority of the town planners, which had initially been revoked with the establishment of the new municipal structure and was again in question after the introduction of the new organisational structure (Bezuidenhout, 2002: interview).

3.6 The battle for recognition continues

The planning coordinator and her team used every available opportunity to try to obtain recognition for the planning function on the level of General Manager. In the draft consolidated organisational strategy of the Housing Directorate (CTMM, 2001n), it was stated, for example, that City Planning was one of the key responsibilities of the Directorate, which "implies that there should be a separate division within the Department Housing Services, to execute the city planning and zoning function". Yet despite these rational arguments, there was no response from the top management. It would be almost two years before the planning function was recognized as a function on the level of General Manager in the organisational structure.

The situation had not improved by September of 2001 when the official who up to that stage was the Divisional Manager: Operations in the office of the Municipal Manager was appointed as the Strategic Executive Officer: Housing, without the post having been advertised. At the first meeting of the Management Structure of the Department of Housing, Land Use and Environmental

⁸ Another example of this was the initiative taken by the Core Team to "get the ball rolling" with regard to the process for the compilation of an Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

Planning (HOLEP), which was the new name given to the Housing Directorate, the position of the planning coordinator as acting General Manager for the planning function "while the status of the function was being formalised" was confirmed (CTMM, 2001p). At the meeting, the Strategic Executive Officer made it clear that the focus of the Department would be "housing provision", as this would be what the success of the municipality would be judged on at the end of its five-year term.

On 10 and 11 April 2002 a workshop called "disastrous" (CTMM, 2002b) by the Strategic Executive Officer was held to discuss the organisational structure. The Councillors who attended the workshop were not satisfied with the format in which information on the proposed organisational structure was presented and refused to participate. The Councillors furthermore wanted to know what informed the proposed organisational structure, what the core business of the Council was, and whether a strategy existed for Tshwane. This incident clearly indicated a muddling of roles and a lack of political leadership. The Councillors, who could reasonably be expected to provide leadership and strategic guidance, were, almost a year and a half after the new local government came into being, asking of the officials what the core business and strategy of the municipality was.

3.7 Frustration and suspicion

In the midst of the confusion about the corporate structure and the uncertainty experienced by officials regarding their future at the municipality, widespread negativity and absenteeism was the order of the day. In a memorandum addressed to all staff members on 28 November 2001 (CTMM, 2001r), the Strategic Executive: Corporate Services wrote the following: "It has been brought to our attention that since the disestablishment of the various Municipalities within the City of Tshwane, office hours are being **totally** disregarded by **most** officials..." (our emphasis). In order to

encourage adherence to the official working hours, the acting General Manager requested all coordinators in the planning function to keep an attendance register, as well as a register for signing in and out when attending meetings out of the office.

The delay in finalising the new structure and the staffing thereof was cited by most of the interviewees as the single largest frustration of the restructuring process. (Coetzee, 2004: interview). The Acting Managers found it difficult to perform optimally or initiate new projects while they were only gate-keeping. A quote from the draft minutes of the planning coordinators/managers meeting of 16 November 2001 (CTMM, 2001q) captures the mood of the planners and their suspicions towards the top management (unedited): "Problems regarding the unhappiness of people citywide as a result of uncertainty... Frustrating strategy by the top brass to let you pack up and leave the workforce...". In the same document, the following is also noted from the discussion (unedited): "Communication internally is very important. Corporate decisions should be communicated to the staff via the managers. Communication from corporate level is very bad, virtually non-existent. We are fortunate that we have [X] as SEO [(Strategic Executive Officer)] who at least communicates information to his managerial staff" (my parenthesis added).

Most of the planners interviewed expressed a lack of confidence in the top management as well as the political leadership. They complained that the Municipal Manager as well as the Mayor and Councillors were inaccessible and that they had had very limited contact with them. There were also complaints that the top management did not function as a team. Although it was more than a year after the new structure officially came into existence, operational problems such as lack of available office space, concerns regarding asset control and staff shortages? (CTMM, 2002b) persisted.

The long battle for recognition of the City Planning function continued

unabated. A rumour was doing the rounds that the disregard for planning from the top management was part of a political strategy to undermine the position of power held by the planners in the previous dispensation. However, when put to the Strategic Executive Officer, he strongly denied this.

3.8 The more things change ...

It would be June 2003 before the issue of the status of the planning function was finalised. This followed months of enquiries, both written and verbal, to the SEO, who continued to indicate that he was attending to the matter and gave assurances on more than one occasion that he would take the matter up with the Municipal Manager.

The Strategic Executive Officer (SEO) initially made some effort towards establishing a communication forum within the Department when he instituted the monthly HOLEP (Housing, Land and Environmental Planning) meeting with all the General Managers and Managers in the Department. At these meetings issues such as the budget, staff placement and shortages, the process for submitting reports to the Mayoral Committee, as well as the name of the Department, were discussed. The HOLEP meetings were the only chance for many of the managers to see the SEO in person and to feel some sense of belonging to the larger Department, which was scattered over a number of different buildings. Sadly, however, since the beginning of 2002, the HOLEP meetings were frequently postponed or cancelled and eventually stopped taking place altogether.

In the absence of other forums on which to voice their frustrations to the SEO, the planning coordinators invited him to their meeting held on 2 May 2002, "so that he can get an idea of the frustrations experienced" (CTMM, 2002c). The Co-ordinators made full use of the opportunity and bombarded the SEO with a number of issues. This included the top-down management style employed by the top management. It was said that decisions were "forced on

⁹ During a meeting of the Strategic Unit of the Department of Housing, Land and Environmental Planning (HOLEP) held on 23 April 2002 (CTMM 2002b), it was reported that the Mayoral Committee had confirmed that only 40% of 'critical' vacancies throughout the municipality would be filled in the 2002/2003 financial year and that the rest would be frozen until further notice.

municipality should be part of its Integrated Development Plan (IDP), should have played an enabling role in this regard. Yet the Act does not provide much guidance with regard to 'the manner in which' the municipality should be restructured. Although resistance to change, culture clashes, maintaining staff morale, power play and manipulation are risks inherent to a process where different structures (Transitional Local Councils) are forced, by law, to amalgamate, no process is proposed in the relevant legislation to ensure that the internal transformation process takes place in a regulated manner.

One could argue that it would have been helpful if broad guidelines for the transformation processes had been made available by Government. Such guidelines could have provided mechanisms to ensure transparency and consultation with or participation of all internal stakeholder groups in the transformation process, and could furthermore have provided a timeframe that would have prevented a situation such as that which developed at the CTMM, where officials worked in an acting capacity for almost two years (without additional remuneration). On the other hand, however, one could argue, as do Oranje and Harrison (2001) regarding the IDP, that the absence of specific practical guidelines or prescriptions leaves welcome room for flexibility and local innovation. In the Tshwane case, however, such innovation is sadly lacking.

4.3 *Batho Pele?* We think not

The restructuring of the Tshwane planning function was not about plans at all — it was about people. The failure of the new Tshwane top management to communicate should not merely be viewed in terms of a failure to communicate operational communication, which had an impact on the productivity and efficiency of the administrative processes necessary for effective service delivery. Rather, it was a failure to establish a relationship between the officials and their new leadership and in particular, a failure to create a caring environment within which the psychological contract between employee and employer,

which Mir *et al.* (2002) refers to, could be established.

Rather than putting people first, as dictated by Government's *Batho Pele* (people first) principle, it would seem that in the Tshwane story, the majority of people, namely the officials transferred to the new municipality from the former structures, were often the very last consideration. In the story, these people were very often ignored, sidelined, disregarded and threatened — and thereby made to feel worthless. There is very little evidence in the study of the *ubuntu*, or humaneness that is a characteristic trait of African culture. Although there seemed to have been pockets of staff within which a sense of cohesion and caring existed, on the whole the municipality lacked a sense of "community" as described by Peck (1994). At the same time, as far as the new top management was concerned, people were indeed put first. For these people speedy confirmation of their new posts and exorbitant salaries, select parking spaces and luxury offices, among other things, denoted their status as 'first officials' of the CTMM.

As the balance of power rested in the hands of the new Tshwane top management, it could furthermore be argued that it was their responsibility and, in terms of the role of the Municipal Manager as the head of the municipality's administration, his, to have ensured that the Tshwane officials were made to feel part of the new municipality.

The manifestation of the change within the micro-environment of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality can, however, be viewed as an example of unplanned change. Not only was it unplanned, it could furthermore be described in terms of Bennis's (1993: 97) category of 'coercive change', which is characterised by "non-mutual goal setting, an imbalanced power ratio and only one-sided deliberateness". Despite the prescriptions of the Municipal Systems Act regarding participation, the Tshwane planning officials were neither given the opportunity to fully and meaningfully participate in the transformation of the municipality in general or of their function in particular, nor where they communicated with or consulted on

it. Rather than partners in the process of transformation, the new political and administrative management and the officials seemed to be opposing forces.

4.4 The importance of communication confirmed

The importance placed on communication both in the organisational theory studied and in the survey of recent planning theory is strongly supported by the story of Tshwane's planning function. Both in terms of the absence thereof in some instances and the use thereof in others, communication played a central role in shaping the experience of the restructuring process.

The consistent absence of clear and frequent communication by the new top management, particularly the Mayor and the Municipal Manager (later referred to as the Chief Executive Officer) had a significant impact on the restructuring process. Rather than encouraging the officials to become part of the new structure and winning their loyalty, the silence experienced from the top resulted in the officials experiencing the change of management as a hostile takeover, which caused emotions of fear, distrust and resentment. The reality that the new top management was almost in its entirety constituted of black individuals and the vast majority of the officials were white, necessarily imbued the situation with racial overtones — a circumstance that made the possibility of achieving a new, unified structure even less likely.

The significant uncertainty as to the location and status of City Planning within the new organisational structure could certainly have been addressed through timeous and open communication. Yet despite numerous enquiries from the officials, there was no attempt by top management to engage the officials to address this burning issue.

The open confrontation that develops between the Technical Department and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in the Aalborg case study, is possible only because of the friction between two parties with equal, or comparable, power. Because of the unequal distribution of power between the officials and the top

management in the Tshwane structure open confrontation does not take place. The situation therefore never evolves to one where metaphors of war are appropriate as is the case in Flyvbjerg's (1998) Aalborg study. The Tshwane situation simply progresses from an uneasy, unarticulated animosity to a sense of resignation on the side of the planners. In the face of the silence from the top management, and given their position of relative powerlessness in the organisational hierarchy, the planners have no means to resist decisions that affect them. In Tshwane, it is perhaps not communication that turns out to be the most powerful tool of those in power after all, but rather the decision 'not' to communicate. "Non-activity" it seems, can sometimes also be indicative of a party's relative power (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 67). It would furthermore seem, both from the Aalborg case and from the Tshwane study, that rationality as power is only effective when the two parties involved have relatively equal powers. In Aalborg, the Technical Department succeeds in their rational response to the Social Democrats' "Dream Plan" (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 165) because of the comparable power of the two parties. In the Tshwane case, however, the rationality presented by the planners failed because of their position of relative powerlessness within the municipal hierarchy.

At the level of the planning function, communication was exploited as a tool to the maximum effect. The core team used communication both as a mechanism to entrench their position of power and as a "stroking device" to avoid confrontation and to win the support of the planning officials. The support that was garnered for the Divisional Manager and the restructuring process can to a large extent be ascribed to the frequent communication she had with the officials. The response from the officials indicated that it was not so much the written communication in the form of newsletters and circulars that was appreciated, but especially the face-to-face communication in the form of road shows, information sessions, workshops and small group meetings.

It could be argued that, had such direct communication been sustained, and had it been extended

to include the Strategic Executive Officer, and even the Mayor or CEO, the team spirit and motivation levels of the planners would have been greatly improved. It would also have contributed to the establishment of a strong "psychological contract" (see Mir *et al.*, 2002: 187) with the municipality, which would in turn have led to increased productivity and loyalty.

5. CONCLUSION

Yiftachel & Huxley (2001: 97) define planning after Lefebvre as "the public production of space; that is, all policies and practices which shape the urban and regional environment under the auspices of the modern state". We would argue, however, that planning is more than this, that it is not only all the dimensions of a profession producing, acting on or engaging with space, but that it is also the internal organisation, positioning and functioning of the planning team. Although the latter issues relate to procedural rather than substantive matters, to use the distinction drawn by Forester (1982), they can play a pivotal role in determining how effective an agent of 'space-making' such a team can be. In the South African context, where the need for spatial development and integration is so great, these aspects are all the more important.

The conditions within the CTMM during the study period were far from ideal. Yet one could hardly have asked for a better environment in which to gain experience on working within dynamic and complex power relations — power relations that always, however subtly, carried the added dimension of race in a city and country still struggling to redress the aftermath of its apartheid past. In that sense, the CTMM was indeed the ideal environment for planners, "to learn how to make their arguments under systematically skewed conditions of access, voice, power and authority" (Forester, 1982: 80). As such the municipality was merely a microcosm of the society it served and of which it was also an institutional member. We believe this to be true of any public institution in which planning teams/departments are constituted, which builds our argument for considering the internal organisation of planning teams as an

important focus for studies of planning practice.

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