A LEARNING ORGANISATION PERCEPTION SURVEY OF THE

SALDANHA BAY MUNICIPALITY

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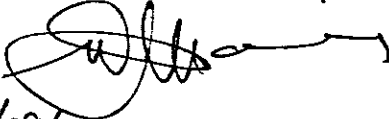## SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR H. H. BALLARD

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SEPTEMBER 2008

DECLARATION

I, Hendrik Snyders, hereby declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signature:

Date: 19/09/08

ABSTRACT

The merger of South African municipalities in the year 2000, and the dawn of the era of developmental local government, has confronted local authorities with a range of new challenges. In addition to the need to develop a new organisational culture and mutual trust, or the introduction of soft management actions, municipalities have to actualise the concepts and processes of co-operative governance, integrated development planning, public participation and developmental local government. In addition, the White Paper on Local Government (WPLG, 1998) implores municipalities to lead and learn while they search for local solutions.

An inability to learn and manage in a changed context and circumstances will inevitably lead to public displays of dissatisfaction, such as public demonstrations, that undermine municipalities' legitimacy. To overcome legitimacy dilemmas, municipalities need to strengthen their learning capabilities to enable them to operate effectively within changed circumstances and to become learning organisations. Such organisations, according to Senge (1990), have succeeded in formulating a shared vision, displayed a high level of personal mastery and team learning, as well as practising systems thinking. Together with these elements municipalities must identify and improve potentially constraining mental models. However, transforming any organisation into a learning organisation according to Dilworth (1996) requires a particular set of leadership qualities, such as commitment to the improvement of the quality of work life, democratic leadership and the promotion of human dignity.

In this thesis, a learning organisation survey of the Saldanha Bay municipality's leadership cadre, consisting of Municipal Councillors, Executive Directors and Departmental Managers and Division Heads is undertaken with a view to determine whether these key functionaries practise the key learning disciplines of team learning, shared vision, systems thinking, mental models and personal mastery.

The results of this study indicated that the municipality in question has not yet succeeded in becoming a learning municipality. It has at best succeeded in laying a foundation for both councillors and officials to build on in order to achieve the desired result.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. Without their tireless

encouragement and endless patience, I would have given up long ago.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction

The merger of South African municipalities in the year 2000 and the dawn of the new era of developmental local government have confronted the new local authorities with a range of new challenges. In addition to the need to develop a new organisational culture and mutual trust (Bijlsma-Frankema, 2001:192), or the soft management actions (Mittner, 1999:48), municipalities have to actualise the concepts and processes of co-operative governance, integrated development planning, public participation and developmental local government. In the White Paper on Local Government (henceforth the WPLG) stage, the drafters implored municipalities to lead and learn while they search for local solutions (WPLG, 1998:21). The Minister of Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi (Service Delivery, 2004:19), described local government practitioners in all of the 284 municipalities as pioneers who are in a learning curve in which they are learning by trial and error and by doing. Collectively, these events have created what Senge (1990:71) described as a dynamic complex situation.

In dynamic complex situations cause and effect are present in subtle forms, but the results of particular interventions are not immediately obvious. At the same time, Senge (1990) argues that that the most effective way for organisations to manage dynamic and complex change, and to realize key strategic objectives, is to transform them into learning organisations. Such organisations in Senge's (1990) view are entities, where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. These organisations are also "communities of commitment" under inclusive leadership that provides for the intimate involvement of both local line and executive leaders, supported by internal networkers (Senge, 1996:36). It is also one in which the five learning disciplines or competencies: personal mastery, shared vision, systems thinking, constructive handling and improvement of mental models and team learning are practised. In addition, the learning organisation has also succeeded in avoiding seven learning disabilities or "deadly sins" that often lay at the heart of organisational failure.

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Senge (1990) describes these disabilities as blaming others for own failures (*"The enemy is out there"*); re-active instead of proactive action (*"The parable of the boiled frog"*); pretending to be in control of the situation through taking aggressive action (*"The illusion of taking charge"*); a concern with the detail of problematic events instead of taking cognizance of the gradual and evolutionary change faced by all organisations (*"The fixation on events"*); personalising operational issues (*"I am my position"*); the delusion of learning from experience and management team myths. Any organisation, according to Senge (1994), can avoid these deadly pitfalls and become successful by mastering the five learning disciplines necessary for entering the *"deep learning cycle"* (Senge, 1994:18) where new capacities are developed and the *"...fundamental shifts of the individual and collective minds are achieved..."*

1.2. Problem Statement

Recent reports from the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) indicate that a large number of South African municipalities are struggling to execute their mandate. 136 of 284 municipalities have already been placed under the national government Project Consolidate, which is a rescue plan for local authorities that are suffering serious resource and other constraints. In addition, newspapers such as the *Mail & Guardian*, (2005:3) and *Die Burger*, (2005:1) report nation-wide protests by local residents concerning a lack of service delivery and claims of exclusion of local communities from key municipal decision-making processes. Cooke (1997:18) is of the opinion that an undeniable link exists between individual learning and quality service delivery to clients or customers. Service delivery protests, therefore, can be regarded as an indication that the learning process has largely failed, resulting in the breakdown of the relationship between government and citizens, causing a legitimacy dilemma.

Although the Saldanha Bay Municipality is not part of the Project Consolidate, it is exposed to the same practical implications of the new system of developmental local government, as well as dealing with community protests regarding poor delivery of services.

Finger & Bürgin Brand (1999:133-134) argue that the only way for public sector organisations to overcome legitimacy problems is by *"...developing the capacity to analyse this new context, to adapt to it and to transform themselves accordingly. They*

therefore need to develop their collective learning capacity and become learning organisations..." Effective performance public organisations with a high legitimacy profile can therefore be regarded as learning organisations that have made a deliberate effort to learn how to engage with citizens (Nemeroff, 2006:17).

The purpose of this study is to conduct a learning organisation perception survey amongst the political and administrative leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality, in order to determine whether key municipal officials and councillors perceive the organisation as a learning organisation, in order to recommend improvements that would enhance the legitimacy and effective performance of the municipality.

1.3 Research objectives

In pursuance of the abovementioned purpose, the following research objectives are formulated:

Objective 1:

To develop a theoretical framework, based on the learning organisation literature, for the evaluation of Saldanha Bay Municipality as a learning organisation.

Objective 2:

To determine whether the administrative and political leadership of Saldanha Bay Municipality practices the various learning disciplines and avoids the various learning disabilities in accordance with the theoretical framework.

Objective 3:

To formulate recommendations to improve organisational learning within the Saldanha Bay Municipality.

1.4. Theoretical Overview

The learning organisation concept originated in the private sector, but has since entrenched itself firmly in the public sector. Various diverse organisations such as child protection agencies (Reich, 2002), hospitals (Timpson, 1998; Lipshitz & Popper, 2000 Lipshitz & Popper, 2000; Garcarz & Chambers, 2003), social work institutions (Gould,

2000), water service organisations (Al-jayyousi, 2004), social housing organisations (Reid & Hickman, 2002), schools (Moloi, 1999) as well as some national postal (Finger & Bürgin Brand, 1999) and revenue services (Godfrey, 1994) have all embraced the concept. The above organisations have also tried, with varying levels of success, to transform themselves into learning organisations or to follow some of its basic practices. It has also on occasion been applied to public sector initiatives such as the Investors in People programme (Smith & Taylor, 2000; Duckett, 2002) by the government of the United Kingdom (UK). Not wanting to be left behind, some non-governmental organisations (Keleher & the Gender at Work Collaborative, 2002; Power, Maury & Maury, 2002; Roper & Pettit, 2002) have also started to experiment with some of the key learning organisation elements in order to promote better goal achievement.

Senge (1990) has been credited with proposing the learning organisation concept, which was built on the foundation laid by a number of equally important thinkers, such as Argyris (1993), DeGeus (1988) and others. His seminal work titled *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organisation,* (Senge, 1990) though dated, remains an important source of reference and point of departure for any serious study into efforts to put the concept into practice. It has however evolved significantly (Senge, 1994; Senge, 1996; Senge, 1999; Senge, Schamer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005) since its publication at the beginning of the 1990s due to the work of scholars such as Garvin (1993), Dilworth (1996) and Owenby (2002), who have paid particular attention to some of the inherent weaknesses of the original theory and have attempted to improve it significantly. Senge (1994:28) readily acknowledged that the learning disciplines are merely *"...bodies of 'actionable knowledge' comprised of underlying theories, and practical tools and methods derived from these theories..."* requiring real effort to be transformed into a formal architecture appropriate for a learning organisation. A learning organisation can therefore be regarded as an ideal organisational form or ideal-type (Finger & Bürgen Brand, 1999:136; Roper & Pettit, 2003:3) worth striving towards.

Criticism of the concept has centred on a number of its most important building blocks. Firstly, Garvin (1993:79) has criticized most of the original definitions as nothing more than *"...high philosophy, grand themes and sweeping metaphors"* and according to Elkjaer (2003: 481) are also lacking in pragmatism. The pragmatic learning organisation from Elkjaer's perspective makes ample provision for the three processes of knowledge

acquisition, inquiry and participation within the organisation. This provides for experimentation with new behaviour in a safe space.

Gender activists such as Keleher (2002) and Alexiou (2005) have been critical of the fact that most learning organisation theorists have failed to seriously address the issues of sexism, racism, bureaucracy and the Western-style management practices that are still prevalent in the majority of organisations in the public and private sector. According to Owenby (2002:54), this represents in many instances the dark side of the learning organisation. Authors such as Roper & Pettit (2002:263) argue that the learning organisation inevitably becomes a partner in suppressing critical discourse by leaving the existing power relations, worldviews and professional paradigms in the hierarchal and bureaucratic organisation with its variety of departments, sections and divisions intact. Under these circumstance Keleher & Gender (2002:313) argue that nothing more than a 'permissible conversation' is allowed, resulting in further entrenchment of the status quo in organisations with negative results for minorities such as women, the disabled and Black people.

Based on the different perspectives outlined above, it becomes clear that the ideal type of learning organisation can be regarded as one skilled in practicing the different learning disciplines, as well as being unafraid of openly and deliberately addressing issues of hierarchy, sexism and racism. The foregoing is particularly appropriate in the South African context where it is expected of local authorities, like their counterparts in other spheres of government, to promote the core constitutional values of democracy, equality, non-racialism and non-sexism.

Legitimacy, like the learning organisation, is a topic that continues to attract comment and criticism from a variety of scholars (Beaulieu, Roy & Paquero, 2002; Keyes, Hysom & Lupo, 2000; Vetter & Kersting, 2002; Svensson, 2003; Deephouse & Carter, 2005) in both the fields of politics and organisation science. Beaulieu, Roy & Paquero (2002:1) in particular define organisational legitimacy as a *"...status conferred upon the organisation by its various stakeholders..."* through a construction process called legitimisation. Legitimacy in itself consists of six dimensions (Beaulieu et al. 2002:2) namely identity, technical, moral, legal, perceptual and institutional legitimacy.

The process of legitimisation, on the other hand, consists of five modes (Beaulieu et al. 2002:3), namely initial construction, preservation, reinforcement, restoration and renewal. The researchers further argue that given the fact that legitimacy is "intangible and fluid" as well as an essential, vital and scarce strategic resource that is neither freely given, static nor automatically acquired, it must therefore be purposefully managed. In addition, the researchers (Beaulieu et al. 2002:3) argue that organisational management requires of organisational leaders to constantly learn through a process that involves *"...identifying, codifying and applying knowledge about the legitimisation process itself."* Establishing both a learning organisation and legitimate governance, according to Dilworth (1996:411), therefore requires learning leaders *with* democratic leadership styles and a commitment to the promotion of human dignity and quality of work-life instead of hierarchy, fragmentation and blocked communication, among others.

1.5. Research Design and Approach

To achieve the purpose of the study, namely to conduct a learning organisation perception survey amongst the leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality, an exploratory approach will be adopted. The research is a preliminary study in a relatively under-researched field, namely the learning organisation on municipal level in South Africa. Similar studies into municipal fire services (Cooke, 1997) and social housing associations (Reid & Hickman, 2002) in the United Kingdom clearly demonstrated the value of such studies for improving current practice. In addition, the study is also aimed at gaining new insights into the organisational learning processes of municipalities, their role in legitimisation and the transferability of the learning organisation concept to this sphere. However, the study is limited to the exploration of the perceptions of councillors and municipal line-managers and of the learning practices within one selected organisation, namely the Saldanha Bay Municipality. Mouton & Marais (1990:43) advise that when the aim of a study is to gain new insights, covering a relatively new field as well as being of a preliminary nature, it is better for the researcher to adopt the exploratory research approach.

The Saldanha Bay Municipality has a racially diverse staff component of 765 members (Saldanha Bay: Division of Human Resource Services, April 2007) distributed over three directorates, seven departments and 20 divisions. The research population for this study comprises the total management component (consisting of all Executive Directors,

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Departmental Managers and Heads of Division or their equivalent), and all Municipal Councillors, whose composition is listed below.

- 3 Executive Directors
- 2 Area Managers
- 5 Departmental Managers
- 17 Heads of Divisions or equivalent
- 23 Councillors

1.6. Data Collection Techniques

To execute this research, based on the chosen research approach, a variety of data collection methods and an open and flexible research strategy will be used. Selltiz, cited in Mouton & Marais (1990:43), outlined three basic methods for the execution of exploratory studies, namely: a review of pertinent literature; a survey of knowledgeable people; and an analysis of relevant case studies that offer new insights.

For the purposes of this study, a review of the available learning organisation literature, with particular regard to its application to the public and municipal sector, will be undertaken. In addition, content analysis of all available official documents relevant to this study will be undertaken with a view to supplement information obtained from literary sources.

To access the knowledge and perspectives of the identified municipal stakeholders (councillors and officials) a structured questionnaire based on the learning organisation disciplines will be developed and distributed for completion. Given the fact that the participants occupy important political positions in Council or senior managerial positions in the organisation (the Executive Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Portfolio Committee Chairpersons, Speaker of Council, Executive Directors, Municipal Manager, Heads of Department and Division Heads), it is important for the researcher to be knowledgeable and non-threatening. In order to build trust, Rubin & Rubin (1995:114) advise that the researcher/interviewer defines the survey with an interviewing dimension, "...as a chance for the conversational partner to step back and reflect on matters with someone who is knowledgeable but has no immediate stake..."

1.7. Data Analysis

The primary data for this study were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire. The results thereof were subjected to manual (pen and paper) content analysis and presented in graphic form (for example diagrams or tables) where appropriate. Throughout this process, collected data were analyzed and interpreted in accordance with the insights gained from the literature on the learning organisation, including Senge's (1990) model of the five learning disciplines.

1.8. Research Assumptions

It is assumed that the Saldanha Bay Municipality has the desire to become a learning organisation as envisaged in the literature and to "lead and learn" as described in the WPLG of 1998. A further assumption is that the study will obtain the necessary support (and access to the organisation) from all the relevant officials and councillors and that the decision-makers in the organisation will use the findings to reflect on current practices. Following Smith & Taylor (2000), it is further assumed that the potential participants would have little or no knowledge about the concept of the learning organisation. All participants will therefore be given a short written description to explain the concept as well as to promote understanding with regard to the overall purpose and usefulness of the study.

1.9. Ethical statement:

Permission to access official documentation and to conduct the study on organisational premises was obtained from the Executive Mayor. This has been secured with the understanding that all questionnaires be made available to the management and the Mayoral Committee of the organisation before distribution on organisational premises. A copy of the completed research project will also have to be provided to the municipality. A letter guaranteeing the anonymity and the confidentiality of participants must also be provided.

1.10. Chronology of Chapters

Chapter 1 will serve as the introduction and background to the study and will cover sub themes such as the research problem, research aim and objectives, rationale for the study, research design and approach as well as data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 2 will review the actual available literature on the learning organisation in general, the public sector in general and on municipal level in particular.

Chapter 3 will provide a detailed discussion on the Saldanha Bay Municipality as a case study to demonstrate the actual link between the learning organisation disciplines and the municipal sector based on particular legislative and policy mandates.

Chapter 4 will provide an outline of the research design and approach of this study, dealing with methodology, sampling, data collection and research instruments.

In Chapter 5, the actual empirical research findings and their accompanying interpretation with regard to the absence of the learning disabilities and/or the practice of the learning discipline in the organisation under scrutiny will be presented.

In Chapter 6, a conclusion will be formulated based on the findings as to whether the Saldanha Bay Municipality may be regarded as a learning organisation in terms of the learning organisation literature, including Senge's (1990) theoretical model. Further possible research topics that may be of interest to other scholars will also be identified and presented.

In the next chapter a comprehensive literature review about the learning organisation is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE MUNICIPALITY AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION

In this chapter a comprehensive literature review will be undertaken in order to develop a theoretical framework for the evaluation of a local municipality as a learning organisation. Topics that will receive particular attention in this review include the concepts of learning and legitimacy, change and learning in municipal organisations, features of learning organisations in general and the public or municipal learning organisations in particular, the transferability of the learning organisation concept to the public sector, the five learning disciplines as well as attempts at measuring the learning organisation.

2.1. Introduction

The White Paper on Local Government (1998), drafted to complete the final transformation of South African local government, urges local authorities to strive to "lead and learn" or, in the words of Senge (1990), to become learning organisations. Such an organisation, according to Giesecke & McNeil (2004:54), lies way beyond being a knowing, understanding or thinking organisation.

As a policy document, the White Paper provides no specific and custom-made set of guidelines or roadmap as to how this feat is to be accomplished. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, however, indicates in its founding provisions that state institutions like municipalities must give effect to values such as equality, non-racialism, non-sexism and democracy. The space that is therefore provided for innovation on the part of the different municipalities is thus, by implication, a qualified space. Qualified space or not, innovation and efficiency, the challenges that face all organisations (Timpson, 1998:261), including municipalities, require continuous learning.

The concept of the 'learning organisation' originated and was refined in the private sector where management innovation is critical for companies who strive to maintain, expand or capture market share and competitive advantage. The seminal work of Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) in particular stands out as one of the leading business texts in this regard. It continues to serve as an essential point of departure for any study of learning organisations (LOs). His LO model proposes the development of five organisational disciplines or strategic competencies, namely shared vision, personal

mastery, systems thinking, team learning and the ability to unmask and improve negative or constraining mental models as useful tools, even for public sector organisations, to handle turbulent change. These disciplines are of particular relevance for local government in South Africa, given the fact that various key national and provincial policy documents and legislation emphasise the need to design and align programmes and projects with the national, provincial, regional and local vision. In addition, all local institutions are challenged to confront the psychological and physical legacies of apartheid, such as racial inequality, discrimination and sexism whilst seeking to deepen democracy. Senge (1996) cited by Timpson (1998:270), is further of the opinion that true learning organisations will remain illusive until such time as the right combination of leadership skills becomes available and committed champions (Fulmer & Keys, 1998: 40) step to the fore. However, Senge (1998) is not pessimistic and believes that the "idea" and "vision" (Fulmer & Keys, 1998:35) are well worth striving for and that an appropriate architecture consisting of *"...guiding ideas, innovations in infrastructure, theory, methods, and tools"* is possible (Senge, 1994:22).

2.2. Learning, Leading and Legitimacy

Legitimacy, like the learning organisation, is a topic that continues to attract comment and criticism from scholars in the fields of politics and organisation science. This engagement has naturally led to various definitions. Upon close study of the diverse literature on the subject, it appears that legitimacy has variously been defined as social acceptance (Deephouse & Carter, 2005:332) or status conferred upon an organisation by its internal and external stakeholders (Beaulieu, Roy & Paquero, 2002:1) as a result of displaying the appropriate compliance behaviour (Keyes, Hysom & Lupo, 2000:148) and adherence to societally approved norms (regulative, normative or cognitive) (Svensson, 2003:2) and beliefs. Beaulieu, Roy & Paquero (2002:1) in particular emphasise that the process of legitimisation is never a once-off event, but rather the result of a purposeful and gradual process of construction.

Democratic legitimacy (as in the case of the South African political and local government system), according to Svensson (2003) and supported by Vetter & Kersting (2002:1), rests on two pillars or prerequisites, namely input legitimacy and output legitimacy. Output legitimacy per definition refers to questions of effectiveness and efficiency. Within the context of governance in particular, it refers to *"...the acceptance that some decision*

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or some structure of governance "works, performs, and is able to deliver the goods" (Svensson, 2003:2). At the same time the author defines input legitimacy as referring to means or steps taken to achieve a particular objective and is particularly concerned with *"...whether the outputs are reached in an appropriate and acceptable manner; a manner which contains appropriate checks and balances..."* A close study of current local government legislation and policy frameworks, which aim to establish a system of developmental local government and participatory democracy, emphasise exactly these points. It also increasingly displays the features of what Svensson (2003:4) has defined as a form of "hybrid governance". This approach to governance is defined as a *"...form of governance in which different more ideal typical approaches to governance are combined"*. As stated previously, the learning organisation is by and large an ideal-type system and a useful tool to build and strengthen the legitimacy of organisations.

Beaulieu et al. (2002:2) identified six dimensions of legitimacy, namely identity, technical, moral, legal, perceptual and institutional legitimacy. In this respect identity legitimacy, according to Beaulieu et al. (2002:2 - 3), refers to meaning, its nature, aims and its intended role in society at large. Technical legitimacy, in turn, refers to the organisation's defining competencies, collective knowledge and wisdom, whereas moral legitimacy refers to its stated and shared values that underlie all its activities and that account for its distinctiveness. Given the fact that municipalities are legal entities, legal legitimacy is another important aspect referring to its organisational form and the legislative or policy framework it operates within, which constrains or enables its functioning and outlines its operational responsibilities. Furthermore, perceptual legitimacy relates to the public image of the organisation, in particular it's standing in the eyes of its key stakeholders. Finally, the same authors refer to institutional legitimacy as the *"...dimension that develops over time as the organisation progresses, and that strengthens the foundations on which the overall legitimacy is based."*

The literature on legitimacy indicates that the subject is intangible and a moving target that is neither freely given, static nor automatically acquired. It is also an essential, vital and scarce strategic resource that must be purposefully managed. What then becomes crucial is the need to employ deliberate strategies and managerial effort to embark on an active programme of internal and external stakeholder mobilisation and ensuring a dedicated team of organisational leaders constantly learning through a process that

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involves *"...identifying, codifying and applying knowledge about the legitimisation process itself"* (Beaulieu et al. 2002:3) to drive key processes.

Against this background, Keyes, Hysom & Lupo (2000:149) identified three operating sources of legitimacy for leadership, namely authorization, endorsement and propriety, which complement the five modes of legitimatisation (Beaulieu et al. 2002:3) consisting of initial construction, preservation, reinforcement, restoration and renewal. By authorization is meant the support from key decision-makers or superiors within the organisation. Endorsement, on the other hand, refers to the support provided by co-workers, both rank equals or those on the lower ranks. Propriety at the same time is defined as *"...individual-level support. It refers to the idea that a given individual in an organisation may or may not support another individual."*

The presence of learning leaders and leaders-in-learning within the organisation, as well as the ability to learn is, however, not enough to ensure organisational legitimacy. Keyes et al. (2000:150) argue that crucial to the legitimatisation process is the presence and active involvement of legitimate leaders in their own right. Such persons may have better results with building a more positive organisation with socially committed employees with high levels of subjective well-being. These factors are critical for creating the appropriate conditions and relationships needed for the establishment of a workplace or service delivery entity that is more able to develop conducive relations with clients and stakeholders.

Legitimate and learning leaders are also leaders who do not restrict their learning to one type of learning or the use of a single learning system. Beaulieu et al. (2002:4) recommends the use of both bureaucratic and participative learning systems to achieve organisational objectives. In the bureaucratic learning process, organisations use the formal management systems (including municipal performance management and integrated development planning systems) to produce reliable, relevant and trustworthy information necessary for appropriate decision-making. The participative learning system, on the other hand, is more focussed on obtaining and exchanging relevant information through relatively informal and less-structured interaction with social groups and ad hoc committees, including of municipal community-based social movements and pressure groups.

2.3. From Private to Public Sector : Transferring the Learning Organisation Concept

Despite the potential value of the LO concept for the public sector, scholars like Harrow & Wilcocks (1990), Vince & Brousinne (2000:15) and Common (2004) are not convinced of the suitability and automatic as well as seamless transfer of these and others private sector concepts to the public sector. They explicitly caution against the uncritical and automatic transfer of a private sector style of management initiatives such as the current one to the public sector. Harrow & Wilcocks (1990:281) in particular argue that, given the nature and character as well as organisational contexts of the public services, a different set of managerial behaviours is required. In addition to this, Vince & Brousinne (2000:15) pointed out that local government approach to learning has become its greatest constraining factor. Local governments, in his opinion, have tended to focus too much on performance management and individualised management development to the extent that it has become its own worse victim (Vince & Brousinne, 2000:25) and has limited its own ability to learn. It has also, as a result, failed in its bid to promote learning and change on the organisational level. Common (2004), entering the debate from a different angle, argues that the political environment will always compromise the application of the learning organisation concept in government. He is further of the opinion that adaptation rather than true learning is the most common result of processes of interaction.

Presenting a counter argument, Stewart (1997), citing Bozeman (1987), argues that there is in reality no real difference between private and public institutions. The only substantive difference between the two sectors is the fact that public organisations are subjected to and constrained by much more political influence and authority than their private sector counterparts. They also enjoy a greater measure of "publicness" (Stewart, 1997:44). In addition, he points out that due to the fact that parliament/legislature provides the legal framework for good corporate governance, all organisations are basically public organisations. This is especially true in cases where organisations are recipients of public funding.

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Nevis et al. (1995:75) are equally positive and point out that all organisations, despite their defining features and irrespective of their classification or sector of the economy in which they operate, are learning systems and therefore possess the potential to learn. This potential is contained in the fact that they all possess formal and informal structures and processes to obtain, share and utilise knowledge and skills.

Based on the analysis thus far, it is therefore possible to argue that the unique features of public organisations, such as municipalities, do not necessarily have a greater constraining influence on their learning ability. However, it is wise to take note of the relevant concerns of scholars such as Harrow & Wilcocks (1990) against the uncritical transfer of private sector style management initiatives to the public sector.

In the next section a discussion on change and learning in municipal organisations will be undertaken.

2.4.   Change and Learning in Municipal Organisations

Modern life is characterised by change (Timpson, 1998:261) whilst change in itself is an integral part of the life cycle of all organisations. Sometimes it is necessitated by the need to defend competitive advantage, whereas at other times it results from the need to deliver a better or excellent service. Often it is forced upon the leadership of an organisation as a result of organisational death (Robinson & Ellis, 1999:26-27) and the need for a new organisational model. Whatever the cause, to survive in a changing environment, modern municipalities that want to enhance their legitimacy must remain receptive to new ideas and approaches, and need to develop appropriate attitudes. This receptiveness is not only a precondition for the anticipation of new developments in the environment, but is also a necessary competency (Bornman, 1992:19) for responding appropriately and timeously in changing strategic and operational plans to fit the new situation.

Organisations that fail to plan for change or that demonstrate a reluctance and resistance to organisational change must therefore be regarded as being resistant to learning. Such organisations can therefore also be regarded as anti-learning organisations (Vermeulen, 1999:26). Anti-learning municipalities or any other similar

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public sector entity may, as a result thereof, be catapulted into a vicious cycle of legitimacy challenges and dilemmas.

Since the late 1990's and early 21st century, the global local government landscape has witnessed far-reaching restructuring, particularly through mergers and amalgamations of municipalities. This change, according to Vetter & Kersting (2002:1), was the result of financial constraints on a national level as well as a strong demand for *"higher political efficiency and stronger citizen integration into politics"* and to strengthen democratic legitimacy.

Most national governments, including South Africa, have tried to achieve greater economies of scale and value-for-money through a process of reducing the number of municipalities. It was hoped that by amalgamating smaller municipalities into larger and presumably stronger entities (McKay, 2004; Fenn, 2002), a new and higher level of quality service could be achieved. As with most mergers, however, there is always the possibility of making mistakes, most notably with regard to achieving cultural integration and a proper organisational fit between the merging partners.

Commenting on the common mistakes normally made in the management and structuring of mergers and acquisitions, Bijlsma-Frankema (2001:199) pointed out that successful cultural integration and the management of cultural change processes depend on collective learning and mutual understanding of each other's cultural assumptions, as well as on bridging the gaps in between. It is also important for all the involved parties to avoid clashes that may lead to further disintegration in an already fragile situation. On the level of interpersonal interaction, it is important that *"...groups of* organisational *members must learn to adapt to one another while learning to master integrative mechanisms, such as forms of horizontal co-ordination between formerly almost independently operating departments"* (Bijlsma-Frankema, 2001:199). Care must also be taken to ensure that the discussion between the merging partners moves beyond the "mere exchanging of conclusions" (Bijlsma-Frankema, 2001:200) in order to reach the actual level of proper common learning. Proper learning, according to Bijlsma-Frankema (2001:201), is defined as a situation where it is possible to learn about each other's way of reasoning, to make comparisons and to achieve mutual understanding.

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Given the inherent complexities and peculiarities of government, especially the ever-present possibility of self-limiting practices, Vogelsang-Coombs (1997:490) recommends the use of a governance education programme consisting of uncovering, redefining, learning and relearning as a means to help local authorities to learn how to govern better and to enhance legitimacy.

In the following section the key features and characteristics of the learning organisations in general, and the municipal learning organisation in particular, will be discussed.

2.5. Definitions and Characteristics of the Learning Organisation

The learning organisation concept has led to a diversity of definitions and a significant volume of literature. Despite its age, the standard point of departure for identifying the key features of learning organisation remains the work of Senge (1990). In his view a LO on the 'elementary level' (Fulmer & Keys, 1998:35) is still an organisation where *"...people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together"* (Senge, 1990:3). In addition, such organisations have succeeded in avoiding seven learning deficiencies or learning disabilities that frequently lie at the heart of organisational failure. These include blame shifting, personalising work issues, fixation on events, aggressive action without results, and underestimating the influence of evolutionary change, the delusion of learning from experience as well as diluted management decision-making. In a later interview Senge (cited in Fulmer & Keys, 1998:37) also identified fragmentation of problem solving, competition rather than collaboration and forced experimentation and innovation as other barriers to learning. In comparison, the LO has a shared vision, practises team learning, displays high levels of personal mastery and systems thinking and possesses the ability to unmask and improve constraining mental models.

Over the last 15 years, Senge's (1990) theory has been the object of intense and lively debate, resulting in its significant modification. The learning organisation, in his view (Fulmer & Keys, 1998: 35), has always been an idea and vision in the process of evolution. Scholars such as Timpson (1998:262) have pointed out that much of the literature on the subject suffers from being overtly optimistic and prescriptive without really offering solid workable solutions to some of the most challenging management

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issues of our time. Keleher (2002), Owenby (2002) and Alexiou (2005) in particular, have criticised the main literature on the LO for its failure to address the deep-rooted and underlying issues of unequal power and gender relationships within most organisations and workplaces. These are especially important for South African institutions with their long history of sexism and racism. Under changed circumstances, these institutions genuinely wanted to be converted into more inclusive and equal entities with flatter structures.

Following their predecessors, scholars like Elkjaer (2003), have continued to raise arguments already articulated as far back as the 1990's by people like Garvin (1993) who question the practicality and implementability of the original theory. They have in particular expressed their misgivings with the main arguments of much of the original theory to bring about organisational learning and a new organisational format and have therefore proposed alternative definitions. These and others issues form the subject of discussion in the next section.

2.5.1. Pragmatism, Power, Gender Relations and the Learning Organisation

Elkjaer (2003) has been credited with coining the terminology of pragmatic learning organisations to describe an organisational theory stripped of high-sounding, idealistic and impractical definitions that have come to characterise the study field. As such she can be grouped with earlier writers such as Garvin (1993) and Van der Spuy (1996) who shared her interest and search for workable and practical theories. Collectively they have attempted to formulate and provide simple and understandable definitions against which progress towards becoming a LO could be measured.

Garvin (1993:80) defines a learning organisation as *"...an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights"*. This definition in his view is both measurable and implementable and stripped of any high aspirations. Elkjaer (2003: 482) in turn criticises the dominant theory of the LO as not pragmatic enough due to its strong focus on knowledge acquisition by individuals in the organisation. Instead, it is argued that an organisation consists of employees, their positions, as well as their work practices and that this "unity" forms the basis of organisational instead of individual learning. A true

learning organisation in this context is one that practices knowledge acquisition, allows for collective participation and deliberately creates space for inquiry into workplace issues and working life. Through this process of inquiry, collective and individual learning - which are the building blocks of organisational learning - will be achieved.

Scholars like Kelleher and the Gender at Work Collaborative (2002), Owenby (2002) and Alexiou (2005) working in the field of gender and power relations observed that the mainstream literature on the learning organisation has tended to overlook the most "distinctive and defining feature" (Alexiou, 2005:19) as well as contentious workplace issues such as gender bias and the unequal distribution of organisational power. These issues are not easily observable and are mainly avoided because they are embedded in hierarchies, work practices and beliefs of organisational life or the "deep structure" of the organisation. Alexiou (2005:18) further argues that these realities are not only avoided, but also supplemented by a total silence and even uncritical acceptance of the nature of work and work organisation.

In the same vein, Kelleher et al. (2002:313) argue that the existing discourse still appears to be a "permissible conversation" that is comfortable with the dominant and largely gender neutral paradigm and that it tends to treat the issues of gender inequality superficially. It also tends to isolate itself from any external ideas and fails to encourage critical internal and social analysis about changing the internal authority structures that fundamentally impact on the quality of learning within the organisation. Organisations eager to transform themselves into LO's have therefore no other option but to deliberately move away from these practices by challenging the existing unequal organisational power relations, the accompanying language as well as the other negative practices and outcomes. To become more equitable it is important to begin to deal with this sinister and darker side to the (corporate) learning organisation.

Like Kelleher et al. (2002), Owenby (2002:57) supports strategic efforts to change the organisational structures and power relations as well as prevent co-option by the deep structure of the power relations within the organisation. Instead of a strict hierarchy, he prefers a horizontal learning organisation that is an "...*interactive, interparticipatory complex of smaller learning communities or networks*" (Owenby, 2002:53).

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In addition to the gender dimension, Alexiou (2005) also extended the debate to the role of language in the maintenance of the existing power relations between different racial groups within organisations. The current corporate culture, management and language of modern organisations continue to be European and White dominated, and the language in particular has been identified as a significant exclusionary factor. It has also been dubbed as the language of managerialism with its own distinctive vocabulary. The language and terminology of managerialism, for example "improvement in productivity", "cost reduction" and "turnover" in her view, are both conservative and capitalistic and tend to lose neutrality in social settings with a history of racial capitalism, such as South Africa. Under such circumstances language becomes a tool to exclude and to further marginalize (Alexiou, 2005:23-24) those who were historically excluded from participation in organisational decision-making and from occupying positions of power and therefore also strengthened the prevailing exclusionary organisational culture. Quoting Prahalad & Bettis (1986), it is further argued that under such circumstances those individuals at the lower ranks of the power hierarchy tend to become submissive and self-regulating, instead of being assertive and confident, and readily comply with set standards. In the process, the established structures and "dominant logic" remain intact and unchallenged. These and other practices such as control/structure and discipline/punishment identified by Timpson (1998:269) stand in stark contrast to the attempts of the LO to be inclusive, empowering and forward-looking as well as intent on establishing an alternative organisational reality.

These matters are of particular concern to South African municipalities, given their constitutional obligations to promote and entrench equality, non-racialism, democracy and non-sexism. Taken together, these definitions clearly indicate the importance of both people and the organisation as facilitators of organisational learning. It would therefore be fatal if there were no proper balance between the needs of both parties and disadvantaging the one to the benefit of the other.

In the mid-1990s Vermeulen (1999) questioned whether South African companies had made the transition to become true learning organisations. In the wake of this, local scholars such as Lane (1996) and Moloi (1999) have attempted to answer this particular question by researching the LO in the manufacturing sector and schools respectively.

Lane (1996) in particular has identified the LO as an organisation characterised by the following features:

- Presence of a learning culture
- A people-first orientation
- High priority given to learning
- Presence and promotion of experimentation
- Promoting learning from the experience of others
- Team learning
- Promoting transfer of knowledge

Moloi (1999), on the other hand, focussed on the challenge of the transformation of schools from institutions of learning to becoming learning organisations. After analysing individual and organisational learning, and based on an in-depth study, the researcher identified two main themes that are central to building a learning organisation, namely a culture of cooperation and, secondly, a sense of belonging. In addition to this, she identified at least eight other themes, features or competencies that can help transform schools into a LO, namely: personal mastery, appropriate mental models, shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, reflection, dialogue and leadership/management.

In the next section particular attention will be given to the disciplines of the learning organisation.

2.5.2.   Learning Organisation Disciplines

As indicated previously, Senge (1990) identified five key competencies, critical success factors (Van der Spuy, 1996:30) or learning disciplines that each and every organisation needs to develop in order to create a learning organisation that is able to handle complex and rapid change within an ever-changing and globalised world. These disciplines, according to Senge (1990:114), provide those individuals who want to take action to create a new, desired and improved reality with a lever to do just that. They are also a valuable set of tools to assist in investigating as well as identifying appropriate actions for bringing about lasting change and improvement in structures. To get the full value from the use of these disciplines, however, it is necessary to make a concerted and coherent effort (Senge, 1990:12) to develop and strengthened each of them in order to improve their ability to complement each other. In addition, Senge (1994:18) also

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identified 3 natural groups of skills and capabilities that can serve as indicator that real learning is taking place, namely aspiration, reflection and conversation as well as conceptualisation.

Lipshitz & Popper (2000) have pointed out that despite the value of the learning disciplines for individual learning; it still falls short of facilitating organisation-wide learning. Such learning can only be achieved through the identification and active use of learning organisation mechanisms (LOMs), which they define as the *"...structural and procedural arrangements that allow organisations to systematically collect, analyze, store, disseminate and use information relevant to the performance of the organisation.."* (Lipshitz & Popper, 2000:136). The successful application of learning organisation mechanisms as a tool to facilitate organisational learning, however, depends on the existence of shared values and a genuine learning culture. In addition, its potency is further enhanced in conditions of great environmental uncertainty, where there is a high cost for error, high levels of professionalism and a committed leadership.

Furthermore, Armstrong & Foley (2003) have identified four facilitating mechanisms that can assist organisations to transform themselves into learning organisations. These include: creating the appropriate learning environment; identifying learning and development needs; taking concrete action to meet learning and development needs; and applying learning in the workplace.

The disciplines of shared vision, mental models, personal mastery, team learning and systems thinking will now be discussed.

2.5.2.1. Shared Vision

Shared vision, according to Schwella et al. (1996:287), is a powerful force that has the ability to overcome the constraining influence of time, space, material and energy to generate new systems, knowledge, technology and social institutions as well as new ways of doing business. It is also a potent and binding force that naturally emerges when there is a shared destiny and common goals that lend coherence to diverse organisational activities (Senge, 1990:206).

Vision and mission statements in the public sector generally originated in enabling legislation and/or budget documents published for public notice or internal training purposes (Von Wart, 1998:263). In a decentralised constitutional arrangement with provisions for different government spheres, it is also common to come across national, provincial, regional and local visions. This in essence represents the vision of politicians and is coloured by the ideology of the ruling party or coalition. Despite these constraining circumstances characterised by legislative and policy frameworks and lines of authority, Stewart (1997:48) argues that ample space still exists for the formulation of an own and unique vision by public officials (both managers and staff). This space, ironically, is created by the highly idealistic vision of politicians. It then largely depends on the bureaucracy of individual officials to concretise these grandiose visions into manageable projects and programmes. To broaden the space for officials to align their individual vision with the national one, Senge (1990) recommends that a deliberate attempt be made to develop and support the intrinsic vision of individuals.

Shared vision and the politically formulated visions of public institutions originate firstly in the personal and unique individual visions of individual politicians. Mastering the discipline of shared vision, however, requires that the formulation of an organisational vision through institutional planning processes be handled with great sensitivity. Given the uniqueness of each individual vision, the process of transforming personal visions into a shared vision requires consultation and continuous conversation and dialogue within a safe environment. Dialogue, according to Preskill & Torres (1999:103-4), is more than discussion and is about sharing personal and social understanding concerning, *inter alia*, the total organisation and requires neither the suspension of defensiveness nor any expectation of agreement and consensus. For this to happen, individuals need an environment where they are able to freely and honestly and in an understandable way express their dreams and desires and to learn and gain new insights from listening to each other.

Senge (1990:222) further argues that care must be taken to refrain from trying to convince participants and to equalise participation. He also advises that those in authority not be allowed to lead the process of vision formulation. The choice to support the value of a particular vision must be left to every individual. Furthermore, a process must be created that allows for the generation of diversity, common insight and the

elimination of negative visions that are energy-sapping and that create feelings of disempowerment and a strong focus on the detail of events. Senge (1996:36) therefore supports building communities of commitment, which comprise "...*people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organisations*", and come from all organisational levels and ranks, namely local line leaders, executive leaders and internal networkers or community builders.

Another crucial part of the process of building a shared vision of developmental local government out of the diverse ideologically coloured individual visions of both politicians and officials is the necessity to deliberately create space or Senge's "*...pockets of profound change*" (Fulmer & Keys, 1998:38) for the articulation of opposing views. By creating this accommodating space for "heretics" (people within the organisation that want to change the system from within) (Evers, 1998:60) it becomes possible to identify those elements of the current system that are still useful, valuable and vibrant as well as demonstrating vitality and longetivity. It also helps to clearly identify and to isolate those elements that are outdated and inflexible and therefore obsolete and destined for elimination. Lastly, such a process creates the necessary conditions for the emergence of a vision and imagination needed for the creation of what Miller (1973:154) has termed "*...new modes and new instrumentalities for accommodating emergent conditions..*" or a municipal vision that is shared and that is much more than the mere expression of a pure political-ideological position of the dominant party. Ranson & Stewart (1994:177) also observe in this regard that in the "*...arena of public discourse learning comes from listening to the voices that express issues, concerns and aspirations that lead into and from that arena*". These individual and organisational voices obtain momentum from the political process itself and when further reinforced, they become a powerful tool able to overcome any learning obstacle. Ranson & Stewart (1994:183) in particular argue that organisational learning in the public sector depends largely on the vitality, vibrancy and strength of the public debate and political process, given the fact that demands, desires and wishes are indicators of matters of public interests. Failure to strengthen these voices and the debate they are opening up may lead to public challenges and the creation of legitimacy dilemmas.

Knutson & Miranda (2000:206) argue that the creation of an appropriate organisational atmosphere conducive to the development of the learning organisation and a shared

vision, where it is possible to design, teach and become stewards, depends to a large degree on a particular kind of leadership. Such leaders must be cooperative and committed to making a contribution to the general well-being of others or, in simple terms, must show social interest. The ideal leader, according to Antonacopoulou (1999:223), is the "philomathic" manager or *"...individuals who are appreciative of the need to learn and engage in a conscious and active learning process to improve themselves, beyond the boundaries of the context in which they operate."* As designers, leaders in LO, design inter alia the *"...social architecture in which others operate"*, (Knutson & Miranda, 2000:209) including the development of purpose, mission, operating structure and the learning processes.

2.5.2.2. Personal Mastery

Personal mastery is regarded as a special competency and a vital building block of the learning organisation. Senge (1990:7) in particular refers to this discipline as the *"...discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focussing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively".*

Organisational growth and learning depends on the learning of competent individuals. Though individual learning is indispensable for organisational learning, it is not assumed that such learning guarantees or is the only requirement for such learning to happen. The competency of personal mastery also extends way beyond acquiring only new abilities, competencies or mental openness. It also requires individuals to see their personal life and insights as a piece of creative work that continuously needs to be shaped and reshaped to face new circumstances. It entails having a clear picture of the current reality (Senge, 1990:141) as well as highlighting those aspects that are important and striving towards achieving it.

New and current realities in a changing organisational field (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983:148) such as local government, populated by various actors such as suppliers, ward committees, political parties, community groups and regulatory agencies must both be clearly seen and accepted and built into the vision statements and strategic plans of the organisation. Staff must be assisted to become competent and develop high levels of personal mastery in the development of new protocols, building bridges towards the new political and legislative systems regulating local government (Kallinich & Clack, 1998:

67). Staff must also be assisted with the necessary skills and abilities to master the new dominant organisational logic ("...*mind set or world view or conceptualisation of the business and administrative tools to accomplish goals and make decisions in that business*") (Prahalad & Bettis,1986:485; 1995) of the restructured municipal system, in order to interface and maintain open and robust links with both the formal and informal side of the political process and to actively participate in the discussion about a desirable future on community/municipal level.

Furthermore, it is important for municipal staff to be constantly aware of both their own and the deeply ingrained prejudices, attitudes and stereotypes of others. These potentially constraining factors have a fundamental impact on the success of any effort to make the transition from being a bureaucracy to becoming a learning organisation. The individual official in the midst of the changing local government setup must attempt to maintain his/her personal vision, because it is the source of all creative energy, which *in itself is the essence of personal mastery. Without this, no transformation is possible.*

Any institution that wants to make the transition towards becoming a learning organisation must make an investment in the personal development of its staff. It is also imperative that those staff members in training also receive the necessary organisational support during and after the formal training/learning process. Organisations that want to promote the achievement of higher levels of competency must however be sensitive to the fact that that personal mastery largely depends on personal choice. Instead of compelling personnel to attend formal courses, Senge (1990:172) argues that is advisable for organisations to foster a conducive atmosphere "*... where it is safe for people to create visions, where inquiry and commitment to the truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected.*" Keyes, Hysom & Lupo (2000:143) support this argument and add that a positive organisation where personnel experience a sense of well-being also legitimises its leadership. Tran (1998:1) concurs with the view of Keys et al. and points out that the right emotional climate in a learning organisation *fundamentally affects organisational processes such as idea-generation, creativity,* learning processes, and adaptability to change.

Learning and other development opportunities must, however, not be confined to formal learning or restricted to a small number of talented high-flyers (Meyer, 1999:18). It has

long been recognised that learning is a continuous process that takes place on a daily basis through daily interaction with the social and the working world. Often it is also unstructured and outside the lecture room, or happens across external and internal boundaries (Gephart et al., Marsick, Van Buren and Spiro, 1996:41). Under these circumstances and with due consideration to the South African past, it becomes necessary to create sufficient learning opportunities to all categories of employees. Bellis and Van Zyl (1993:26) in this regard advise local employers to utilise the 'natural opportunities *"...to empower employees to become their own trainers and to take charge of their own learning throughout life"*. Meyer (1999:19), addressing the post-Apartheid legacy, concurs with Bellis & Van Zyl (1993) and states emphatically that in the South African workplace the time has come to move beyond and overcome the barriers of bureaucracy, hierarchies, rules and procedures, managerial control and lip service to empowerment and teamwork. Only when this happens will learning become a fact of organisational life for every member of the organisation, irrespective of race, gender, position or status.

2.5.2.3. Mental Models

Senge (1990:8) defines mental models as the *"...deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action."* These deeply embedded and largely invisible world views and attitudes of individuals' insistence that *"...what they have seen is true, and what is perceived is all that exists"* (Preskill &Torres, 1999:99), frequently lies at the heart of the failures of so many organisational plans, strategies and institutional processes.

Municipalities are political structures and are therefore subjected to the constant ebb and flow of changing ideologies, power relations and the like. Common (2004:35) therefore rightly argues that this *"...political environment will always compromise the application of the organisational concept in government."* Any attempt to transform municipalities into learning organisations must therefore consider the potential influence and impact of political views and ideologies. In addition, the presence of professional paradigms of municipal staff is equally important.

The various codes of conduct in the public service (including local government) expect personnel to execute their functions in an impartial and non-political manner. In contrast, public policy-makers are driven by a particular set of political ideas, programmes and frameworks (Stewart, 1997:46). Personnel have however mastered the art of reading each other's body language in addition to understanding the content of policy directives. They are therefore also able to read and interpret the tacit and unintended policy messages (O'Leary & Duffee, 1971: 609) relayed by their counterparts. Subordinates in particular are tuned into the tacit yet visible messages of their seniors that relay a particular policy interpretation and personal viewpoint, in order to guide their own actions. If there is a visible gap or incongruence between the actual policy directive and the tacit message of senior personnel, those on the lower ranks are placed in a decision dilemma where they have to make a choice as to the appropriate action and to consider its possible consequences.

In addition to ideological and political mental models, municipalities employ a large number of professionals such as engineers, planners, technicians etc. that subscribe to a particular professional code, paradigm or frame of reference, which also impacts on any attempts at organisational change. Ovens (1997) argues that each professional creates his/her own reality and enters or analyses any situation from his or her specific professional angle. To effectively manage the migration towards a learning organisation as well as to resolve any problem, it is important to determine whether it originates and is maintained by professional misunderstandings.

Dealing with all the mental models that the organisation is confronted with demands the acquisition of new competencies in assessing the underlying management philosophies and practises of the organisation, as well as the different professional and ideological groupings in its ranks. Stewart (1997:46) also regards this challenge as especially important if the organisation wants to strike a formal balance between the ideological or professional commitments of organisational members and the legitimate needs of the client community.

Confronting deeply ingrained personal or organisational mental models is a highly delicate task that must be steered and managed with great sensitivity and regard for people. It first and foremost necessitates the creation of an open, non-defensive and

non-threatening environment. Anything less would discourage the voluntary exposure of the various personal viewpoints that exist within the municipal organisation. The variety of views and visions of the future is regarded by Senge (1990) as a precondition to counter the emergence of a single and dominating vision. As a result he proposes the use of scenario-methodology to facilitate the development of rich multiple visions. In addition, Fulmer, Gibbs & Keys (1998:7) also identify other additional or second-generation tools, namely the Merlin exercise (a combination of free-form simulation and scenario planning), action learning practice fields, and knowledge management and mapping to assist practitioners who want to steer their organisation towards becoming a learning organisation.

As an additional precautionary measure to ensure that scenario creation steers clear of becoming a mere extension of the dominant perspective, Senge (1996:36) further proposes the involvement of all stakeholders or "seed carriers" (in this case municipal officials, councillors, ward committees, community etc.) in such processes. This will not only lead to improved policy learning (Common, 2004:40) of a different kind, but will also prevent the crafting of policies that exclude others, are selective, inaccurate or are selectively implemented.

2.5.2.4. Team Learning

It is generally assumed that organisational learning is determined by individual learning that takes place on all levels of the organisation. In many instances, individual learning is spontaneous and not integrated with the normal routines and processes of the organisation. It is also mainly maintenance instead of regenerative and anticipatory learning and is aimed at the successful execution of routine tasks, short-term planning and the achievement of greater organisational efficiency. The most desirable form of learning aimed at preparing the organisation for complex change and challenges in the present and future (Fulmer et al. 1998:10) is, however, double-loop or anticipatory learning. For the organisation to really benefit from the learning of individuals in its ranks, it is necessary to start a process of mapping, verifying and processing the individualistic knowledge and thereafter to institutionalise it for organisational use. However, organisational learning goes beyond individual self-analysis and reflection, but is effected through a conscious effort to develop common insights into organisational challenges, knowledge, objectives and mental models of learning groups or anticipatory

learning communities (Harkins, Grochowski & Stewart, 1995:14). Such groups have not only discovered meaning in group context (Senge, 1990:10) but also jointly identified those interactions that act as a brake on learning. Senge (1990:236) then defines team learning as the process of *"...aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire."*

Public institutions such as municipalities, police, and traffic and fire services are known for their culture of command and control, instead of deep and systematic listening, discussion and dialogue (Kallinich & Clack, 1998:69). The new system of developmental local government further requires that all personnel must obtain/develop new and unique skills and competencies. One option for municipal managers and trade unions to establish dialogue is by deliberately establishing transformation forums (Van Zyl Smith, 1997:51) to discuss the views of personnel concerning issues of organisational change, accountability and rationality. Marks (2000:559) is also of the opinion that the culture of public institutions can only be effected by change, based on the effective use of policy and training and the 'stories' of members of staff about their own experiences and practises that were marginalised by the previous system. However, it is important not to get caught up in mere negotiation. What is needed is open discussion and consideration of all pertinent issues to generate optimal synergy and interactive consultation (Black & Synan, 1997:70) between the participating actors, whilst repressing pride, personal criticism and domination of proceedings.

It has already been indicated that learning organisation processes can only take place in an appropriate emotional climate.

2.5.2.5.   Systems Thinking

Senge (1990:7) defines systems thinking as *"...a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed...to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively."* It is therefore a particular competency focussed on investigating and understanding the total operating environment of the organisation. In this regard it also tries to understand the components and the interaction as well as the total functioning of the organisation. Its point of departure is the interdependence of the whole system and the understanding that any attempt at change on one level directly impacts on all other components and systems. If such change initiatives are wholly unplanned or

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uncoordinated, there may be unintended consequences and even lead to severe resistance from other parts of the system.

Local government or municipalities in South Africa are the third sphere of government and a subsystem of the overall national governance structure, which includes provincial and national government and its departments. Municipalities therefore find themselves within a network of relationships, functions, goals, values, organisational principles and legislative restrictions. Organisational boundaries, according to Ranson & Stewart (1994:133–134), therefore cannot restrict the public interest.

The public sector, which includes municipalities, is known for its fragmentation, compartmentalisation and strict hierarchy, as well as for the conflict between different professional and occupational groups. This conflict stems from the fact that the different groups are primarily committed to their profession and then to the organisation in which they work. When professional bias combines with the embedded and ingrained mental models of the individual, it acts as a powerful brake on the achievement of organisational priorities.

The constitutional requirement with regard to cooperative governance, intergovernmental relations and integrated development planning increasingly limits the ability of municipalities to act unilaterally in the field of policy, strategy or philosophy. Instead, all spheres of government are expected to actively search for alignment with all stakeholders that have a responsibility with regard to municipal service delivery. Municipal personnel are therefore challenged with coming to grips, firstly, with the inner workings of their own organisational machinery and, secondly, with alignment and functioning within the broader system. One major advantage emanating from these requirements is the fact that it creates new opportunities for learning for all participating parties. In this regard, Kelner & Slavin (1998:72) and Inkpen (1998:223) observe that mutual learning as well as learning together in strategic alliances, enables and accelerates learning on all organisational levels and prevent duplicating costly mistakes.

Successful systemic cooperation also depends on the development and use of a common language that is understood and used by all participants. The absence of a common language undermines not only the levels of effectiveness and efficiency within

the system, but also building a climate of trust (Inkpen, 1998:225) between participating parties. A common language is also necessary for the sharing of accurate, comprehensive and timeous information, as well as for proper reflection with regard to divergent opinions and any eventual agreements based on a set of shared values, assumptions and goals.

2.6. Measuring the Learning Organisation

Measuring learning and progress of the LO is fairly difficult since learning of the type envisaged by the various proponents of the LO is a social process (Smith & Tosey, 1999:71), coloured by the different perceptions of the parties involved. The measuring process is also not merely a scientific or technical issue, but a political process driven by divergent opinions and definitions of the various stakeholders within a targeted context. It is therefore advisable that methods that encourage and aid self-discovery, find personal solutions ("heuristics") (Smith & Tosey, 1999:72), and are free from predetermined rules should be employed to measure whether learning has indeed taken place.

Despite the inherent difficulties experienced in measuring learning progress, the learning organisation has been the object of close and continuous investigation and adaptation by both academic scholars and private sector consultants. As a result of this engagement, new forms of human sciences technology (Prinsloo, 1993), especially diagnostic tests and assessment instruments to measure organisations and quality of work life, were developed and continue to be developed. Recent examples of these are the efforts of business consultants such as Crisp Publications of California (2003) and Calliope Learning (Falkenberg, 2005:4), aimed at transforming the basic ideas of the LO into a new diagnostic assessment instrument able to measure and audit the existing practices of organisations. Other assessment efforts include the work done by scholars such as Kline, Saunders and Kline, 1995), Pauls and Dimitrova (2003:6), bin Othman and bin Lehman (2004), as well as Sun (2006) who have tried to measure and assess the learning organisation with a view to develop its features, produce profiles of learning organisations and determine the role of four learning organisation mechanisms (for example the learning environment, identified learning and development needs and the application of workplace learning) in the creation of LOs. These and other instruments

and assessment exercises at best provide organisations with a snap shot (Falkenberg, 2005:4) of their current status instead of the full picture.

2.7. Conclusion

From the available literature it is obvious that, although municipal organisations have certain unique features and work in a highly politicised environment, they are in all other aspects similar to most other organisations in both the public and private sector. Like their private sector counterparts, they operate within defined boundaries, serving identifiable clients and also need to work continuously towards enhancing their legitimacy. Municipalities are also learning systems with the required ability and structures to capture, utilise and share new knowledge as well as to acquire new competencies. Furthermore, they are also subject to rapid and continuous change and must, like organisations in the private sector, work towards a full understanding of the new reality as well as acquiring the tools and abilities to respond timeously and to prevent legitimacy crises. For the municipality to become a learning organisation, a high regard for people is imperative and active steps need to be taken to ensure a positive and appropriate emotional work and learning climate.

In the next chapter the focus will be on the Saldanha Bay Municipality as a particular case study and an attempt will be made to link the learning organisation disciplines to municipal governance based on specific statutory provisions.

CHAPTER 3

LINKING THE LEARNING ORGANISATION DISCIPLINES AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE or THE LEARNING ORGANISATION IN ACTION

In the previous chapter an attempt was made to distil from the literature the key features of the learning organisation and its disciplines, as well as its transferability to the municipal sector. In this chapter the focus will be on the Saldanha Bay Municipality as a particular case study, and an attempt will be made to link the learning organisation disciplines with municipal governance, based on specific statutory and policy provisions.

3.1. Introduction

Government, as far back as 1995, realised that the old approaches to government and governance were no longer sufficient to adequately deal with the changes underway in South African society. In the search for new and innovative approaches, the *White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service* (15 November 1995) proposed that the learning organisation approach to organisational transformation be considered as more appropriate for the changing context. The policy-makers regarded this approach as *"...more than continually investing in knowledge, skills and competencies of all their staff, though this is important. It means essentially that organisations and their staff must fully exploit the opportunities for growth, development and change in the fullest sense of the word, particularly by constantly re-appraising existing work practices and behaviour, and the values and assumptions that underpin them; by building upon those that are useful and discarding those that not; by being prepared to experiment with new ideas and practises; and by learning from mistakes rather than attempting to conceal them."* By 1998, the required legislation and policy frameworks to complete the final transformation of local government were in place. These frameworks and statutory provisions provide for processes, procedures and mechanisms to actualise the learning organisation in the public sector, including local government. The exact fit between local government and the learning disciplines within the Saldanha Bay municipal context will now be discussed.

3.2. Linking Statutory and Policy Provisions with the Learning Organisation Disciplines

3.2.1. History of the Saldanha Bay Municipality

The Saldanha Bay Municipality (WC014), a Category B local authority in terms of the *Municipal Structures Act* (Act 117 of 1998), was established on 5 December 2000 following a merger between the former municipalities of Hopefield, Langebaan and the West Coast Peninsula Transitional Local Council. Like its 283 national counterparts, it is a member of the *South African Local Government Association* (SALGA), the body that represents organised local government in the country. The municipality consists of 12 wards that link together the 6 principal towns of Saldanha, Vredenburg, Paternoster, Hopefield, St. Helena Bay and Langebaan and deliver services to an estimated 91 000 residents comprising 34 637 households. National Treasury also designates it as a high capacity municipality based on the state of development of its financial and other systems. Other significant statistics for this municipality are contained in the table below. Based on these figures, it is obvious that managing the Saldanha Bay Municipality is indeed a challenge for all parties involved.

Table 1: Saldanha Bay Vital Statistics

Component	Statistic
Estimated Population	91 000
Number of Households	34 637
Number of Indigent Households	3 965
Income from Service Charges	R 162 808 330-00
Operating Budget (2006 / 07)	R297 651 476-00
Capital Budget (2006 / 07)	R107 634 178-00
Estimated Rates Income (2006/2007)	R616 000 405-00
Estimated Grant Income (R2006/2007)	R177 07 288-00
Approved Staff Establishment	882
Positions Filled	763
Staff Budget (2006/2007)	R 933 739 63-00

3.2.2. Linking Learning Organisation Disciplines and the Statutory and Policy Mandate

As a local authority, Saldanha Bay Municipality functions in accordance with and is subject to numerous national and provincial legislation and policies. These include the national *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Act 108 of 1996), the *Municipal Structures Act* (Act 117 of 1998), the *Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000), the *Municipal Finance Management Act* (Act 56 of 2003) and the *Intergovernmental Relations Act* (Act 13 of 2005). In addition to this, on the policy level it is duty-bound to implement a set of pre-defined national key performance areas for local government. The sector also has a duty to actively contribute to the implementation of particular national and provincial strategies such as the *Growth and Development Strategy* (GDS), *Poverty Reduction Strategy Framework* (PGWC, 2004), *Gender Policy Framework for Local Government* (SALGA, 2005) and *Integrated Sustainable Human Settlements Strategy* (ISHS). Furthermore, municipalities also have to play a role in contributing to the achievement of the country's international obligations, for example the *Millennium Development Goals*. These obligations, due to their very nature, make it possible to establish a direct link between municipal governance and the learning organisation disciplines. The exact fit between the two matters forms the basis of the next discussion.

3.2.2.1. Municipal Shared Vision

As far back as 1995, the drafters of the *White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service* (WPTPS) (15 November 1995) ascribed the "...*internal anxieties and external impatience*" experienced by the public sector to an absence of a clear and well-communicated national vision of change. By 1998, the *Government of National Unity* (GNU), the *Presidential Review Commission* (PRC) and scholars such as Pycroft (1998) once again observed that the South African state in general still lacked a clear national vision to guide its work in transformation, reconstruction and development, nation building, democratic consolidation and community empowerment. Instead, the public sector was characterised by the presence of "...*a plethora of visions*" among departments and provinces that are "*often quite different from each other in content, context and direction*" (PRC, 1998:25-26). Pycroft (1998:152) in fact argues that, up to that point, the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) that used to serve as an important guide to government delivery had become more than a mechanism for achieving delivery. It had, over time, in fact became a "*contested vision*" for the future of

South Africa. In order to give leadership the GNU, through the WPTPS, formulated a public sector vision committed to: "...*continually improve the lives of the people of South Africa through a transformed public service which is representative, coherent, transparent, efficient, effective, accountable and responsive to the needs of all.*" With this overarching vision as guideline, state institutions were mandated to formulate their own vision. At the same time the political platform of the governing *African National Congress* (ANC), namely *"A better life for all"*, in a sense became the *de facto* national vision.

In order to encourage the formulation of developmental visions aligned with national objectives, government promulgated the *Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000). Section 26(a) of this particular act compels municipalities to formulate and develop, within the framework of an *Integrated Development Plan* (IDP), a long-term development vision for their area of jurisdiction. It also prescribes the process of drafting this vision. Such a process must be inclusive and bring together the joint insights of the political functionaries (structures), municipal administration and the members of the community – which collectively represent the core constituents of a municipality. The legislation makes further provision for the establishment of additional mechanisms such as advisory committees (Section 17(4)), integrated development planning representative forums and ward committees.

A search of the organisation's records indicated that in the year 2005, two years before the new municipal vision, the management of the organisation attempted to formulate a collective vision of their own. The product thereof, dubbed the *Gandolini Document*, recorded that the management of the Saldanha Bay Municipality is committed to achieving the following objective:
"By the next local government elections, this management team will be benchmark setters for local government in the country."

In addition, the team formulated the following mission statement:
"In order to achieve this, the team will establish a more efficient, effective and transparent administration, staffed by happy and motivated people rendering IDP linked sustainable services, placing people first and which provides people and community access to developmental opportunities."

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On 29 May 2007, in line with its obligations under the *Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000), the Saldanha Bay Municipality, by resolution of Council, adopted both its budget for the 2007/2008 financial year and its new 5-year IDP covering the period 2006–2011. Contained within the IDP is a new vision statement namely *"Saldanha Bay – A caring Municipality/Saldanha Baai – 'n Munisipaliteit wat omgee").* According to the official record, this vision is the final result of 18 engagements involving politicians, ward committees, sectoral groups, local communities and municipal officials spread over a period of 8 months.

The process of crafting a local shared vision was however not done in isolation. As far back as February 2003, the Provincial Government Western Cape, through the Premier, introduced a provincial vision, namely *"The Western Cape: A Home for All"* within a development framework entitled *iKapa Elihlumayo / The Growing Cape.* This mission statement calls for *"...creativity, dedication and boldness in our drive to bring dignity, equity and prosperity..."* to all in the province (Department of the Premier, 2003). At the same time, in accordance with the stipulations of the *Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000), the West Coast District Municipality (WCDM), within which the Saldanha Bay Municipality is located, formulated its own regional vision statement, declaring to be committed to *"Building a better quality of life for all".*

Against this background, it is abundantly clear that any municipality that claims legitimacy and credibility in its operations, but excludes, disregards or omits stakeholder input from its actual programmes, cannot therefore claim to have formulated a shared vision of the desired future for the organisation. At the same time, it must also be stated emphatically that the mere existence of an IDP does not necessarily demonstrate the existence of a shared municipal vision.

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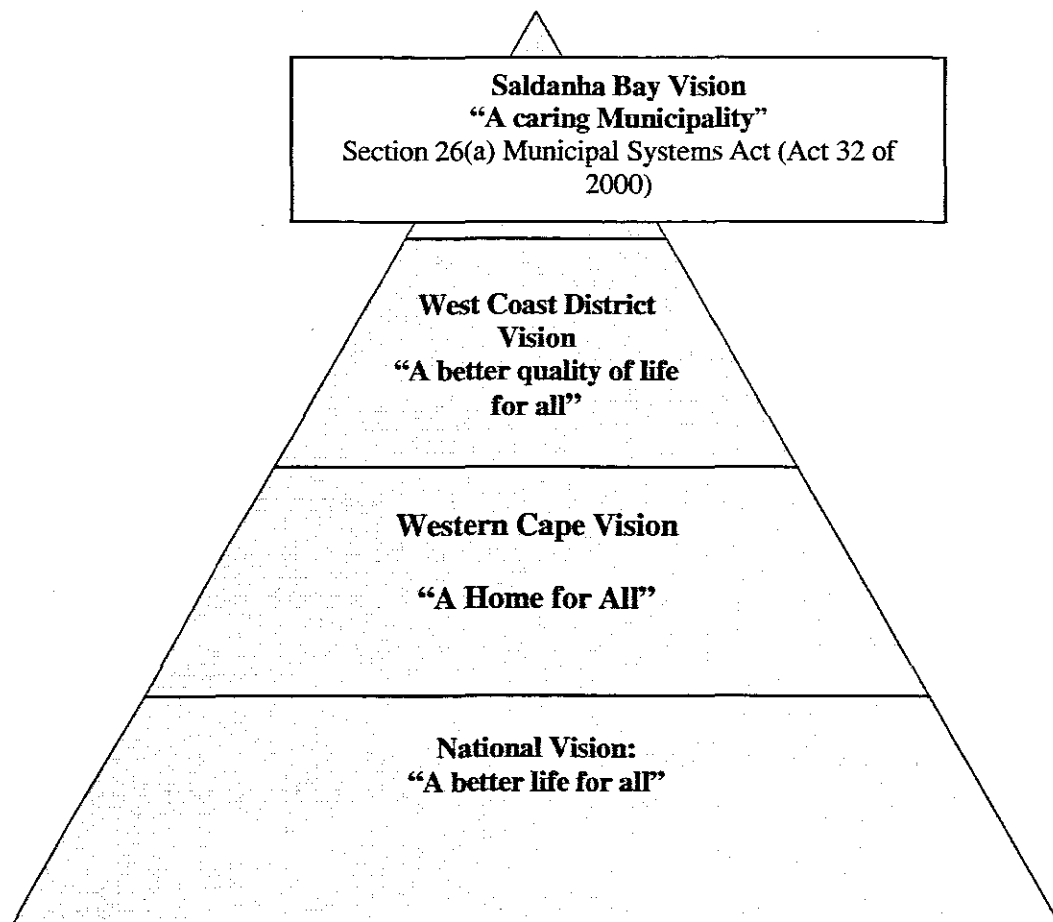
Figure 1: Municipal Vision in Action

3.2.2.2. Municipal Personal Mastery

Given the extent of change within municipalities between 1995 and 2007, local government has witnessed dramatic change in its organisational field. In addition to the established stakeholders such as political parties, suppliers and regulatory agencies, new actors such as ward committees, external audit committees, social movements and non-government organisations have entered the field. Given the increased activism and oversight from the various actors, municipal officials need to develop new competencies in relations management. Staff must also become skilled in developing new protocols and the building of new bridges towards the new political and legislative systems

regulating local government (Kallinich & Clack, 1998:67). In order to facilitate better relationship management, Saldanha Bay Municipality has recently adopted three key documents, namely a *Manual on Political Roles and Functions*, an *Administration-Councillor Interface Protocol*, as well as a *Draft Client Services Charter.*

Two of the most significant changes in local government have been the introduction of a new language, rich in technical terminology (for example sustainable development, portfolio committees, District Coordinating Forums, integrated development) as well as a new management approach defined as developmental local government as stipulated in Chapter 7 of the Constitution. Language, according to Alexiou (2005), is frequently used as a most useful tool to exclude people and to strengthen existing inequalities. For the organisation to function at its best and to manage its multiple relationships better, this new language, nuances and understanding thereof must be promoted throughout the organisation. Only when there is a universal understanding of this shared language amongst the constituent components of the municipality and a full mastery of its nuances, can there be a realistic chance of achieving key strategic objectives. At the time of writing, a dictionary of municipal language for easy reference by the constituent members of the organisation was being developed as a means to promote understanding and personal mastery of key processes.

The municipal workplace is increasingly becoming a diverse workplace, having to accommodate a variety of cultures and differences relating to gender, language, race and abilities. This reality demands that the organisation learns and develops new ways of managing these new challenges. In line with its statutory responsibilities outlined in Section 4(2)(g) of the *Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000) the municipality formulated and implemented an *Employment Equity Policy* and is following SALGA's *Gender Policy*. These policies are further complemented by the adoption of an *Employee Assistance Policy* and a *Work Place Skills Plan* to help personnel to cope better with the new situation and to achieve the optimal functioning of all.
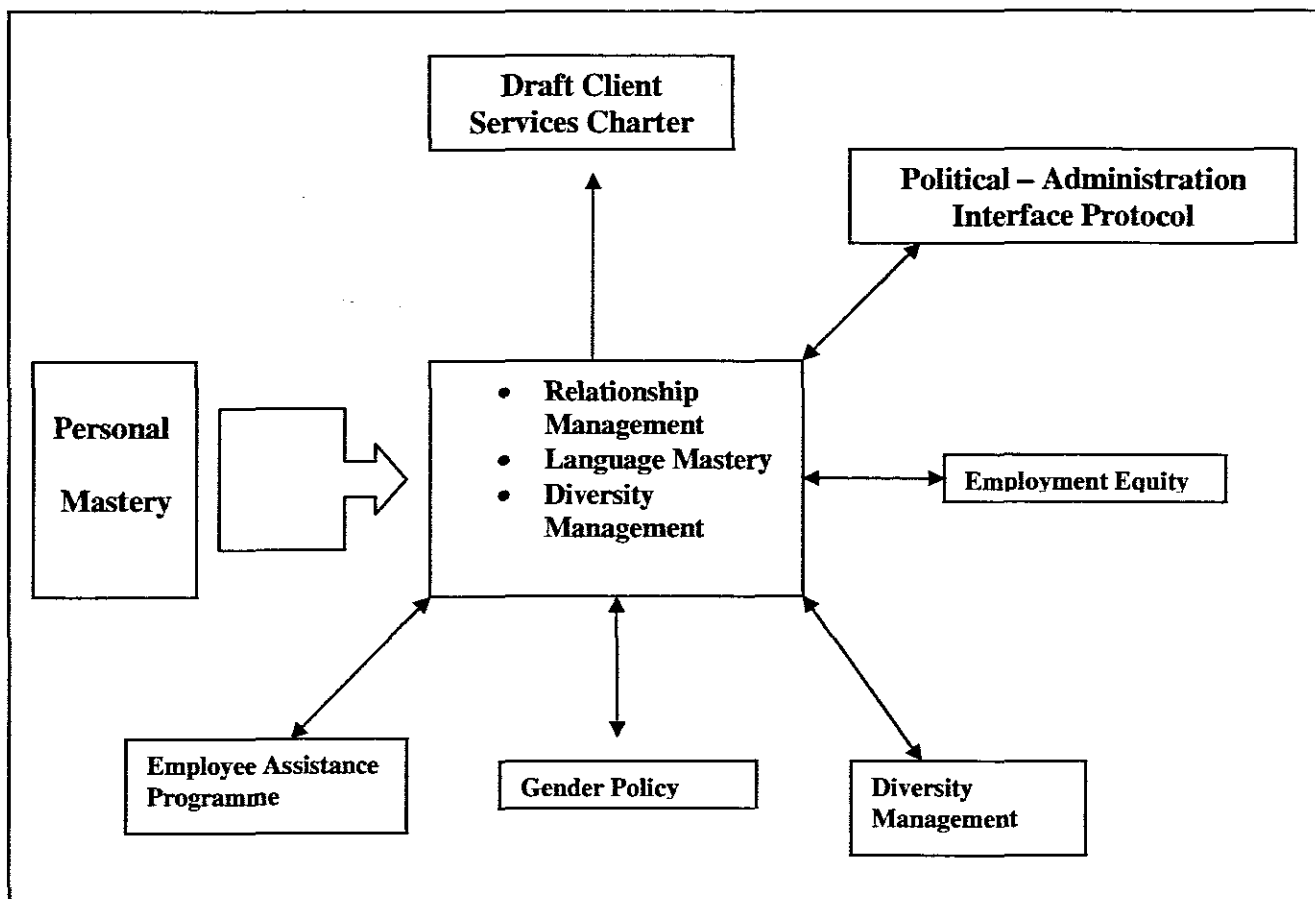
Figure 2: Personal Mastery in Action

3.2.2.3.   Municipal Mental Models

At the advent of the transformation of the public sector (including local government) the WPTPS emphasised the need for a new management philosophy and practices, organisational structure and culture as well as a new professional service ethos. Following the national constitution (Act 108 of 1996), the *Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000) makes reference of the need to *"...act in the best interests of local communities"*, *providing services equitably "without favour, prejudice and in an accountable and democratic fashion"*. In addition Section 16(1) of the same Act states emphatically that *"...a municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory*

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governance" opening the way for a dramatically expanded input from stakeholders from outside the organisation.

As indicated earlier, municipalities are political structures and are therefore subject to the constant ebb and flow of changing ideologies and power relations as a result of new governance coalitions, elections and new party formations, and increased social activism by community-based organisations. All of these contending influences are carried into the work of the administration, the 12 ward committees, specialised project committees and Council portfolio committees. This also demands higher levels of professionalism and accountability from municipal officials. These interactions also tend to slow processes down. As a result, many officials feel that politicians and "outsiders" interfere in the administration or that community consultation, which is a statutory obligation, leads to unnecessary work delays. Based on their professional paradigms, some officials may feel threatened by the expertise of specialists based in the community or may even display attitudes such as: "as professionals they know better". These and other similar sentiments undermine the obligation of municipalities in terms of (Section 6(2)(b) of the *Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000) to develop and *"...facilitate a culture of public service and accountability amongst staff"* as well as promoting a culture of "value for money" or "treating residents as a valued customer". As a result of the obligation to promote a client or public service orientation (Stewart & Clarke, 1987:161), the Saldanha Bay Municipality has recently undertaken a municipal-wide client satisfaction survey and has published for public comment a *Draft Client Services Charter.* In addition, the organisation subscribes to the *Batho Pele* principles and is actively promoting the same.

As previously mentioned, the municipal workplace is increasingly becoming a diverse workplace. In line with its statutory responsibility with regard to employment equity and the promotion of gender equity, the municipality has begun a process of targeted recruitment of women, disabled persons and Africans to address racial and other imbalances through its workplace equity policy and plan. The very nature of this process may cause great unease amongst those who are to be excluded. However, Council cannot shirk its statutory obligation with regard to the need for affirmative action. In most cases, popular and media perceptions tend to perceive the recruitment of candidates from the designated groups as nothing more than reverse discrimination and even as a process of political manipulation. The result is that these recruits are oftentimes

regarded as nothing more than well-connected political deployments with little or none of the required skills or experience. The debate about balancing merit and corrective action is therefore also prominent within the organisation under review.

The Saldanha Bay Municipality, like other organisations, also has to contend with, challenge and improve these deeply-ingrained personal or organisational mental models of municipal staff, which demand the acquisition of new competencies in assessing and improving the same.

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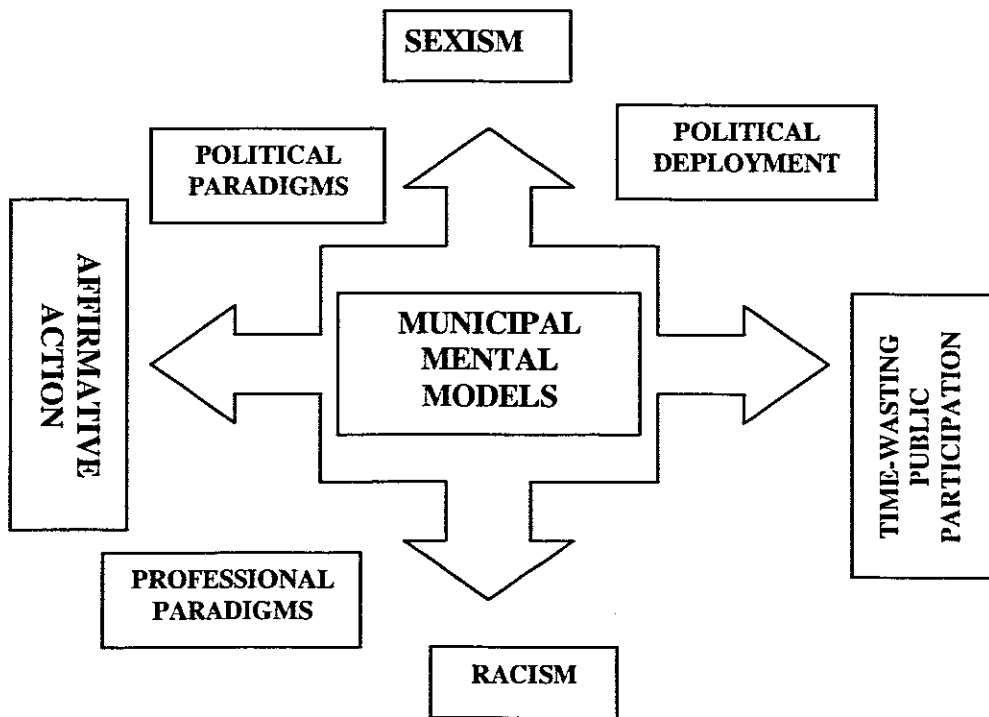
Figure 3: Municipal Mental Models in Action

3.2.2.4.   Municipal Team Learning

Honey & Mumford, cited by Teare & Dealtry (1998:48), define four roles for managers in promoting and structuring a true learning organisation. These roles include becoming a role-model through behaviour and actions, as a provider of learning opportunities, or a system builder who integrates and embeds learning opportunities into the daily work and architecture of the organisation, as well as becoming a champion for learning in the

organisation as a whole. In addition to this Harkins, Grochowski & Stewart, (1995:14) call for a conscious effort to develop common insights into organisational challenges, knowledge, objectives and mental models of learning groups or the discovery of meaning in context (Senge, 1990:10) in order to achieve desired results.

In terms of the various acts governing local and national government, learning and the discovery of meaning in context is guided by various statutory provisions. These range from the stipulations of the *Structures Act* (Act 117 of 1998) with regard to the establishment of various *Section 79 and 80* committees (Mayoral and other Committees of Council), to the provisions in the *Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000), dealing with the process of integrated development planning and the activities of ward committees and the obligation to draw up a (municipal) work place skills plan in accordance with the *Skills Development Act* (Act 97 of 1998). In addition, the *Municipal Finance Management Act* (MFMA) (Act 56 of 2003) provides for budgets and policy workshops with affected communities.

In terms of Section 80 of the Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998), the Saldanha Bay Municipality has implemented a six person Executive Mayoral Committee system supported by 5 portfolio committees which deal with issues such as social and economic development, finance, service delivery and standards as well as technical services.
These committees are primarily mechanisms to assist politicians to achieve greater oversight and accountability within the context of council. In addition, it provides the leadership of the organisation with an opportunity to develop a common understanding about the extent and magnitude of the strategic development and governance challenges faced by the municipality through workshops, policy discussions and ward committee engagements. It also provides all parties with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and to receive feedback through the sharing of ideas and experiences.

To further extend its work, Council has also made provision for a number of statutory committees that deal with a number of very specific operational areas. These committees provide all participants, both inside and outside the organisation, with an opportunity to engage in policy and other workshops on a continuous basis concerning service delivery standards, community input and labour issues as well as to learn from each other. These committees include for example the employment equity; training;

appointments; information communication technology; and occupational health & safety committees and public forums such as the *Saldanha Bay Water Quality Forum* and the *Saldanha Bay Tourism Organisation.*

In line with its responsibilities under the *Skills Development Act* (Act 97 of 1998) and *Skills Levies Act* (Act 9 of 1999), the municipality makes provision for the training and development of both officials and councillors through its *Work Place Skills Plan.* As such, its budget provides for formal bursary support for tertiary study and functional training in various fields. This is done without losing sight of the fact that mastery and organisation-wide learning can only be achieved through the skilful combination of both formal and informal learning. In addition, councillors are currently voluntarily participating in an executive leadership development programme sponsored by the *South African Local Government Association* (SALGA) in an attempt to further capacitate themselves.
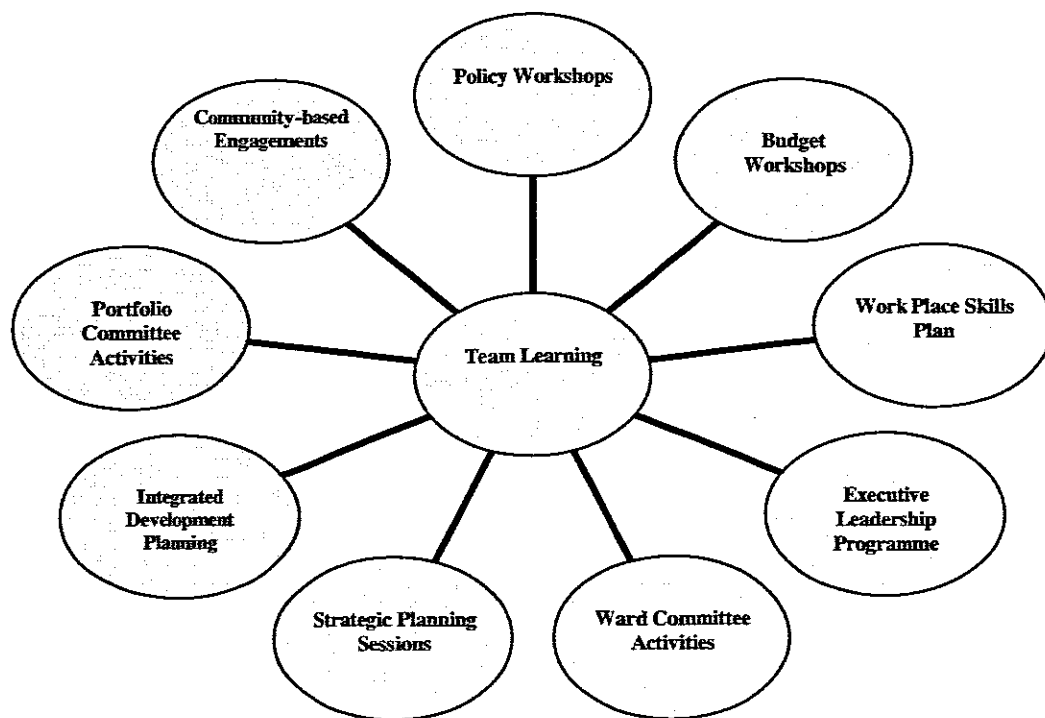
Figure 4: Municipal Team Learning in Action

3.2.2.5.   Municipal Systems Thinking

Although local government is a distinct sphere of government with the authority to act independently, this space has increasingly been infringed upon by the need to follow and implement national and provincial guidelines, policy, priorities and processes and having to participate in or to report to various transversal institutional structures. Statutory provision for the interdependence of the different government spheres has been made through the national constitution (Act 108 of 1996), the *Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000) and particularly the *Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act* (Act 13 of 2005). The latter act in particular makes provision for such structures such as the *Presidential Coordinating Council, Premier's Coordinating Council (PCC), Provincial Advisory Forums (PAF), and District Intergovernmental Forums (DIF)* in addition to such technical structures such as the PAF and DIF Technical Committees. Although these structures act as consulting and coordinating forums, they have gradually developed into accountability structures and structures of censure. The leadership of the municipality, as an active participant in the constellation of intergovernmental structures displayed in *Figure 5*, is therefore compelled to act in a manner that promotes coordination instead of simply exercising its autonomy as a distinct sphere of government. It is further essential that they master both the language and behaviour appropriate to successful participation in intergovernmental and inter-regional relations and by implication participate in the process of establishing learning regions (Florida, 1995:527). Failure to do so can only result in adversarial intergovernmental relations, which can act as a brake in the seamless achievement of common objectives.
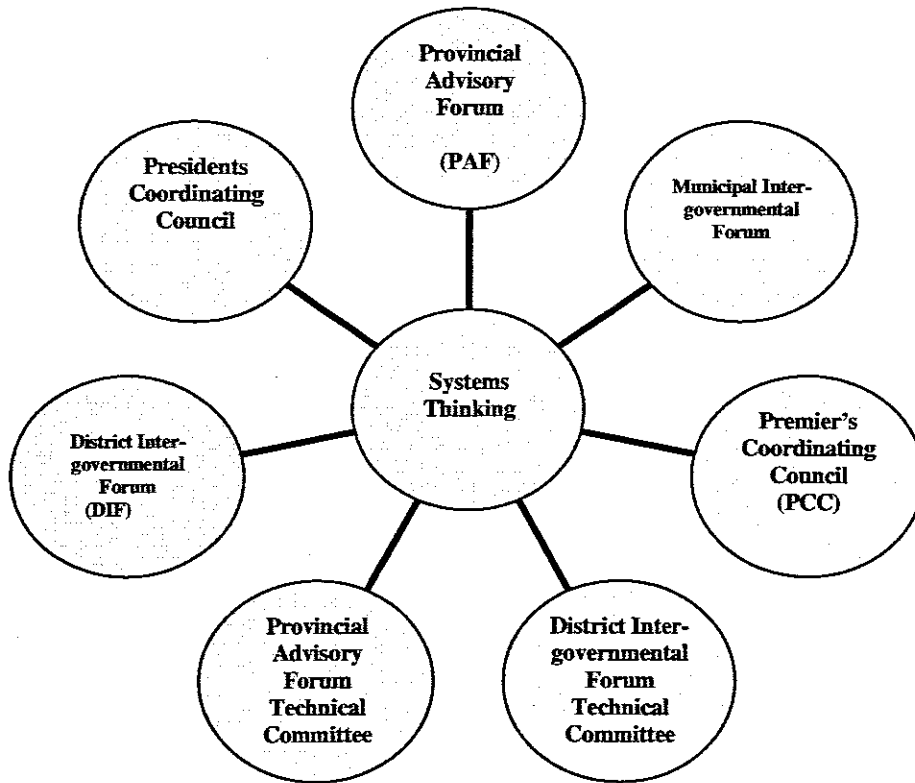
Figure 5: Municipal Systems Thinking in Action

3.3. Conclusion

The statutory framework that guides the functioning of municipalities in South Africa provides practitioners with a direct link to the principles and disciplines of the learning organisation. National, provincial and regional visions make it possible to determine whether there is real alignment between local visions and those formulated elsewhere. It is also possible to determine whether a municipal vision is indeed a true reflection of the collective desire and vision of its entire people, as expressed during the IDP process.

In the next chapter a discussion of the research methodology used in executing the study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

In this chapter the research methodology and approach used to execute the current study are discussed.

4.1. Research Design

An exploratory and qualitative approach based on an extensive literature review and further complemented by an empirical investigation was adopted for the present study. In addition, the social survey technique of a structured questionaire was used because it best suited the aims of this research. The purpose of this survey was to determine whether the administrative and political leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality understand and practice the learning organisation disciplines of shared vision, team learning, systemic thinking, mental models and personal mastery needed to enhance the legitimacy of their organisation.

4.2. Study Population

The study used a stratified research population consisting of 4 groups, namely Municipal Councillors, Heads of Directorates (executive directors), Department Managers and Heads of Divisions of both sexes, totalling 50 persons. The respondents represent the total population of the administrative and political leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality. Given the fact that this study lacks a representative sample, the perceptions of the participants clearly cannot be generalised or regarded as being representative of the views of all other municipalities and their leadership.

4.3. Survey Instrument

Neser (1989:21) advises researchers that plan to use survey questionnaires to keep in mind that the development of such instruments requires close attention to matters such as the general structure of the question, the composition of sentences, as well as the type of question that is formulated. It is proposed that general questions be followed by specific or specialised questions, that questions be kept as short and simple and as unambiguous as possible and that the researcher formulates questions that are easy to understand, with terminology that is within the grasp of respondents.

With due consideration of the aforementioned advice, a structured survey questionnaire was designed to determine whether the respondents practise the five disciplines as identified and refined by Senge (1990) and further expanded upon by various other scholars. The questionnaire was also designed after a thorough and comprehensive literature review during which various relevant questions were identified for inclusion. In order to ensure a nexus between theory and practice, an analysis was made in *Chapter 3* of the legislation and policy frameworks that guide local government in South Africa in order to establish a direct link between the various learning disciplines and current municipal governance and to serve as a basis for the construction of the survey instrument.

The final survey instrument was divided into two parts. The first part contains space for biographical detail, such as rank and experience, and was to be filled in by all respondents. It made provision for anonymity and confidentiality in order to promote full participation by the intended participants. The second part contains both general and specific questions as well as open-ended questions relating to the five learning disciplines and their application within the municipal context. Based on the original assumption that the concept of the learning organisation is not universally known in municipal circles, the introduction to the questionnaire included a short written description to explain the concept.

To ensure measurement reliability and validity, the preliminary questionnaire was evaluated and subjected to pre-survey statistical evaluation. After its reliability was established, the questionnaire was then pre-tested by the researcher among 10 members (5 from each group) of the study population before the collection of data commenced. Based on the feedback from those who have participated in the pre-test, relevant changes with regard to language and clarity of concepts were made.

4.4. Data Collection and Organisation

The researcher in the work place collected data over a period of 2 months during the course of the normal workday. Each participant was provided with a thorough overview of the questionnaire to ensure full understanding and to minimize error. The data obtained from the questionnaires were then organised by coding the questions to prepare them for data capturing.

4.5. Data Analysis

Collected data were organised into tables for ease of interpretation. The quantitative data were then subjected to a qualitative analysis and the interpretation was conducted according to the paper and pencil method. As a result of the insignificant number of female and non-Afrikaans participants/respondents, gender and language were discounted in the final analysis. The only variable that offered useful data, which was used in the final analysis, was administrative and councillor experience. In this regard 66,2% of councillor respondents have actual municipal council experience of between 3–22 months. In comparison, more than 80% of officials have at least a minimum of 5 years of administrative experience. This difference in particular largely accounts for most of the divergent opinions between the two groups with regard to particular items in the questionnaire.

In the next chapter the research findings obtained will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this chapter, the findings of the survey that was undertaken using a structured questionnaire amongst councillors, managers and division heads are presented. To make sense of, analyse and draw conclusions from the responses of the various participants based on the disciplines of the learning organisation, the data were subjected to the pencil and paper method of analysis and interpretation.

5.1. Demographic Overview

This study included 4 variables, namely gender, experience, language and status. The total study population consisted of 23 councillors and 27 managers who represent the full political and administrative leadership of the organisation as reflected in **Table 2** below. A similar number of questionnaires were distributed by hand and via the municipality's electronic communication system. Only forty two percent (42%) of the total number of questionnaires distributed to councillors and officials were eventually returned. The majority of respondents (57,1%) are officials, while 42,8% are councillors.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Total Population	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Councillors	23	9	39,1%
Managers	27	12	44,4%

Six members of Council (or 26%), are full time and serve on the Executive Mayoral Committee while the remainder (74%) are part time. In addition, 83,3% of the members of the Executive Mayoral Committee, or 5 out of 6 full-time Councillors, participated in this survey as reflected in **Table 3** below.

TABLE 3: STATUS OF COUNCILLOR RESPONDENTS

Status	No. of Councillors	Respondents	Percentage
Full Time	6	5	83,3%
Part Time	17	4	23,5%

The majority of respondents (80,9%) are Afrikaans mother tongue speakers. Only three of the participants (14,2%), have Xhosa as their mother tongue as reflected in **Table 4** below.

TABLE 4: LANGUAGE PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Language	Total	Percentage
Afrikaans	17	80,9%
English	1	4,7%
Xhosa	3	14,2%
Other	0	0

Out of the 21 respondents, only four participants (or 19,0%) are women, the majority or 80,9%, are male as reflected in **Table 5** below. The four female respondents represent 40% of the total population (10) of female councillors and managers.

TABLE 5: GENDER PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	Total Population	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	40	17	42,5%
Female	10	4	40%

The survey questionnaire also covered the work and council experience of both councillors and managers. At least two out of the 21 respondents (9,5%) have both councillor and administrative experience. At least half of the total number of participating managers has more than 10 years of municipal work experience. The other half has between 3- 0 years of municipal work experience as reflected in **Table 6** below.

TABLE 6:   MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE PROFILE

Years of Municipal Work Experience	No. of Respondents
0 – 5 Years	3
5 – 10 Years	3
More than 10 Years	6

In comparison with the distribution of experience amongst officials, only 2 Councillors (22,2%) have more than 5 years of actual experience of municipal work. The majority of the Councillors (66,2%) who responded have limited experience of council processes, with their actual experience ranging between 3–22 months as reflected in **Table 7** below.

TABLE 7:   COUNCIL EXPERIENCE PROFILE

Years of Council Experience	No. of Respondents
0 – 5 Years	6
5 – 10 Years	2
More than 10 Years	0
Not stated	1

In the next section the actual responses of councillors and officials with regard to the different learning disciplines are discussed.

5.2.   THE IMPACT OF THE DIFFERENT VARIABLES ON PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF THE LEARNING DISCIPLINES

5.2.1.   Shared Vision

In order to operationalise this learning discipline, 4 questions (*Questions 1–4*) were formulated covering the actual participation of respondents in the drafting of the official municipal vision, their identification with the final product, the degree to which it is supported by the rest of the organisation, as well as its alignment with regional, provincial and national strategic objectives and vision statements. From the results reflected in **Table 8** below, it is encouraging to note that the majority (85,7%) of the respondents of both groups were directly involved in the formulation of the municipality's vision of becoming a caring organisation. Only a small percentage was either uncertain (4,7%) or did not participate (9,5%) in the drafting process. Equally positive is the fact that the majority (76,1%) of all respondents (managers and councillors) indicated that they identify with the final product, namely Council's official vision statement. There is however a slight increase in the ranks of those who have ambivalent feelings and are therefore uncertain (14,2%) with regard to the final outcome. The picture with regard to the existence of a shared vision throughout the organisation is, however, quite different. Despite the fact that so many of the respondents actually participated in the vision exercise, more than three quarters (76,2%) of the respondents of either sexes were

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either uncertain or disagreed with the statement, suggesting that more work needs to be done to achieve a truly shared vision. This doubt is particularly evident among the ranks of the more experienced managers. The full complement (100%) of managers with more than 10 years of municipal experience (6 individuals) indicated their uncertainty with regard to the existence of a shared vision within the whole organisation. Two thirds (66,5%) of all managers as reflected in **Table 8** below, however, held the view that there is indeed local alignment with the regional, provincial and national vision.

TABLE 8: LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR THE MUNICIPAL VISION AMONGST MANAGERS

Statement	Response	Experience 0-5 Yrs	Experience 6 – 10 Yrs	Experience + 10 Yrs
The vision of the municipality enjoys the full support of officials and Councillors	Agree	0%	8,3%	0%
	Uncertain	25%	0%	25%
	Disagree	0%	16,6%	16,6%
The municipality's vision is in line with the visions of the West Coast District Municipality, provincial and national government	Agree	16,6%	16,6%	33,3%
	Uncertain	8,3%	8,3%	16,6%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%

Councillors are equally divided, with the majority (54,4%) being either uncertain or in disagreement and the rest (46,4%) being more positive regarding a shared organisational vision as reflected in **Table 9** below. Those councillors with more than 5 years of actual experience (2 individuals) are equally divided on this matter with one individual that agreed with the question and the other one indicated uncertainty.

TABLE 9: LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR THE MUNICIPAL VISION AMONGST COUNCILLORS

Statement	Response	Experience 0-5 Yrs	Experience 6 – 10 Yrs	Experience + 10 Yrs
The vision of the municipality enjoys the full support of officials and Councillors	Agree	22,2%	11,1%	0%
	Uncertain	33,3%	11,1%	0%
	Disagree	11,1%	0%	0%
The municipality's vision is in line with the visions of the West Coast District Municipality, provincial and national government	Agree	22,2%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	44,4%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%

A crucial part of the debate of the new system of developmental local government, has been the need to pursue a shared vision across all government spheres. Although the majority of respondents (57,1%) indicated that they believe that the municipality has succeeded in aligning itself with the regional, provincial and national visions, a significant minority (42,8%) differ from them as reflected in *Table 9* above. Senior managers with more than 10 years of work experience are also equally divided (50:50) on this matter. The majority of managers (53,3%) and councillors (54,4%), however, agreed with the statement. The majority of the respondents within the ranks of the Executive Mayoral Committee (3 out of 5 individuals or 60%) and who are full-time councillors, however, remained uncertain about the actual alignment between the local and other visions.

5.2.2. Personal Mastery

In order to operationalise this learning discipline, 5 questions *(Questions 5–9)* were formulated, covering aspects such as ability to manage stakeholder relations, understanding the language of local government, municipal support and capacity building, diversity management and transformation of the municipal workplace and Council. In accordance with its constitutional obligations, the municipality is duty-bound to continually engage with a range of stakeholders, such as taxpayers, government departments and community-based organisations and to promote a client service orientation. The majority (76,1%) of respondents, irrespective of work experience, language or gender indicated that they are comfortable with stakeholder management. Only a small minority (14,2%) was uncertain in this regard. In addition, an increased and overwhelming majority (90,4%) of respondents indicated their full understanding of the language and concepts of local government. Significantly, only one (1) official (or 4,7%) with 21 years of work experience within municipalities disagreed with the statement, meaning that more remains to be mastered. This stands in stark contrast to the reply from respondents in the ranks of Council, most of whom have very limited experience, ranging from as little as 3 months to 8 years at the most. This in effect means that the response of Councillors with less than 5 years of actual experience within the sector needs to be treated with circumspection. This caution is especially relevant when one considers the response of the majority of respondents with regard to the question on the support provided by the municipality to promote greater understanding of the new language of local government. A majority (57%) of respondents as reflected in **Table 10** below, indicated either disagreement (38,0%) or uncertainty (19,0%) with regard to the

question of adequate support provided by Council to promote increased competency in the language of developmental local government. This disagreement is especially widespread amongst the majority of managers (7 out of 12), irrespective of their years of experience. In contrast to this, 42,8% of all respondents indicated that they were satisfied with current initiatives to enhance the mastery of the language of local government amongst the current administrative and political leadership. These responses also confirmed that the overwhelming response (90%) to Question 6 should not be taken at face value.

TABLE 10: THE MUNICIPALITY DOES ENOUGH TO PROMOTE A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEW LANGUAGE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CATEGORY	Response	Experience 0-5 Yrs	Experience 6 – 10 Yrs	Experience + 10 Yrs
MANAGERS	Agree	0%	16,6%	8,3%
	Uncertain	16,6%	0%	0%
	Disagree	8,3%	16,6%	33,3%
COUNCILLORS	Agree	33,3%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	22,2%	0%	0%
	Disagree	11,1%	0%	0%

Diversity management has become one of the key current tasks of South African organisations. In order to deal effectively with this question, organisations need to create the appropriate atmosphere and systems for the management of the new workplace. A significant majority (61,8%) of all respondents either felt that the municipality was not doing enough (33,3%) or was uncertain whether enough has been done (28,5%) with regard to supporting the leadership in their management task. High levels of uncertainty have been observed in both the ranks of councillors (66,3%) and officials (66,3%) as reflected in *Table 11* below, meaning that more concrete initiatives in this regard are needed. Those officials with between 2–12 years of work experience (41,6%) were much more positive with regard to current levels of support given to all in leadership.

TABLE 11: MUNICIPAL STAFF AND COUNCILLORS RECEIVE ENOUGH SUPPORT TO ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH DIVERSITY IN THE ORGANISATION

CATEGORY	Response	Experience 0-5 Yrs	Experience 6 - 10 Yrs	Experience + 10 Yrs
MANAGERS	Agree	16,6%	8,3%	16,6%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	8,3%	16,6%	33,3%
COUNCILLORS	Agree	0%	11,1%	0%
	Uncertain	55,5%	11,1%	0%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%

The ability to effectively lead a transforming organisation with its great variety of service delivery demands and limited resources poses significant challenges to councillors and administrators. The majority of respondents (57,1%) indicated that they felt overwhelmed by the demands and challenges of the municipal workplace and Council. In this regard, the majority of Councillors (6 out of 9 or 66,6%), irrespective of the length of their term of office, experienced this inability to cope with the demands of the workplace. Officials are equally divided with at least 50% experiencing inability to cope and the other half or 50% indicating no problem in dealing with the challenges confronting local government as reflected in *Table 12* below. Significantly, this feeling of inability to cope with the challenges facing local government at this juncture was also prevalent among some of the most senior and experienced officials, despite them having 73 years of collective experience between them (3 individuals). The fact that half of the organisational leadership felt overwhelmed immediately raises a red flag. It would also be fairly difficult for any organisation in the midst of its own evolution to be expected to carry half of its leadership through a period of fundamental change. If this matter is not adequately addressed, it may cause internal strife between those who are ready to move matters to a higher level on the one side, and those who are too cautious to initiate new projects and programmes on the other. In addition, it may also unnecessarily prolong the period of local government transition.

TABLE 12: I AM OVERWHELMED BY THE TRANSFORMATION DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES OF THE MUNICIPAL WORKPLACE AND COUNCIL

CATEGORY	Response	Experience 0-5 Yrs	Experience 6 – 10 Yrs	Experience + 10 Yrs
MANAGERS	Agree	16,6%	0%	33,3%
	Uncertain	0%	8,3%	0%
	Disagree	8,3%	16,6%	16,6%
COUNCILLORS	Agree	33,3%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	22,2%	0%	0%

5.2.3. Mental Models

According to the literature, mental models or the deeply ingrained worldviews of individuals can effectively prevent an organisation from achieving its strategic objectives. In order to move forward, organisations must not only analyse these mental pictures in a non-threatening manner, but also strive to improve the existing ones. For the purposes of this study, mental models were operationalised using five questions (*Questions 10 – 14*) covering the perceptions of respondents towards community consultations, stakeholders, issues of accountability and employment equity.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (76,1%) displayed a positive attitude towards community consultations whilst only a small minority (28,5%), all of them managers, regarded regular consultation with local communities on matters affecting them as a waste of time. What is most disturbing about this statistic is the fact that this particular group have at least 106 years of local government experience between them and therefore represent the administrative core of the organisation's management team. The minimum amount of actual service within this group is at least 7 years with a maximum of 34 years of service. At the same time, 80,9% of all respondents indicated their agreement with the statement regarding the level of understanding of stakeholders concerning municipal affairs. In addition, 14,2% of respondents were uncertain whether this is indeed the case. Only a small percentage (4,7%) disagreed with the statement as reflected in *Table 13* below. The organisation therefore needs to increase its efforts with regard to promoting a fuller understanding of the inner workings of both Council and the administration. As far as report-backs to the community as a necessary tool to promote

greater accountability is concerned, the overwhelming majority of all respondents (90,4%) agreed with the statement.

TABLE 13: PERCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS, COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND REPORT BACK

Statement	Response	Management			Councillors		
		0 - 5 Yrs	6 – 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs	0-5 Yrs	6 – 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs
Community consultation is an unnecessary waste of time	Agree	0%	16,6%	33,3%	0%	0%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	25%	16,6%	16,6%	66,6%	22,2%	0%
Community stakeholders does not fully understand the workings of a municipality	Agree	16,6%	25%	50%	33,3%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	33,3%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reporting to communities is a necessary tool to promote greater accountability	Agree	25%	25%	50%	44,4%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	11,1%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

As previously indicated, all South African municipalities, like their counterparts in the private sector, have a legal responsibility with regard to the promotion of employment equity. The majority of respondents (61,9%) did not view affirmative action as reverse discrimination. However, the overwhelming majority (71,4%) supported the implementation of the employment equity programme on the basis of merit and qualification. In addition, within the ranks of the most experienced core of management, at least 3 individuals (25% of the specific group) with experience ranging between 7–23 years, perceived affirmative action as being equal to reverse discrimination. A small group of councillors (22,2%) shared this sentiment, while a further 3 (or 33,3%) in this group disagreed with the sentiment that employment equity can be achieved via the qualification and merit route as reflected in *Table 14* below.

TABLE 14: PERCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION & EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Statement	Response	Management			Councillors		
		0-5 Yrs	6 – 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs	0-5 Yrs	6 – 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs
Affirmative action is unfair reverse discrimination	Agree	0%	0%	25%	22,2%	0%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	22,2%	0%	0%
	Disagree	25%	25%	16,6%	22,2%	22,2%	0%
Employment equity must be based on merit and qualification	Agree	16,6%	16,6%	50%	22,2%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	8,3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	8,3%	0%	0%	33,3%	0%	0%

5.2.4.   Team Learning

In order to operationalise the learning discipline of *Team Learning*, 3 questions (*Questions 15–17*) were formulated covering aspects such as learning climate or atmosphere, existence of mutual learning opportunities and the availability of learning support for both councillors and managers.

The majority of respondents (52,3%) as reflected in **Table 15** below, either disagreed (28,5%) or were uncertain (23,8%) about the existence of a climate conducive (safe and open) to the emergence of mutual learning in the organisation in focus. This is particularly indicated from the ranks of officialdom, where only a small percentage (25%) from this group observed an atmosphere conducive to open discussion and reflection needed for the emergence of team learning. Significantly, younger members of the management team with between 3-12 years of actual municipal experience who can therefore also be regarded as part of the first beneficiaries of the post-apartheid system were uncertain. A further divide was observed in the ranks of the most experienced members of the management team who are split between the two opposing positions, those with between 21-23 years experience being more negative in comparison with the more positive response of the veterans with between 29–34 years of experience. On the whole, councillors are more positive with regard to the existence of an open and non-threatening atmosphere within the organisation.

The greater majority of respondents felt positive (76,1%) about the mutual learning opportunities of the last year. Councillors in particular, with the exception of one (1) individual, agreed completely with the statement and have found the past year particularly fruitful with regard to learning from officials and their political counterparts. This came as no surprise, given the fact that the majority of this particular group is first-generation public representatives voted into Council during the local government elections of March 2007. The majority of managers, irrespective of work experience, felt positive about mutual learning over the past twelve months. At least one-third (33,3%) of managers with experience ranging between 3–21 years, however, indicated that they learned very little or nothing from either their colleagues or Councillors during the past year.

The value and existence of support systems in instituting and promoting team learning has been emphasised throughout the literature. Respondents were therefore requested to indicate their level of agreement with the statement that sufficient support and opportunities for learning exist within the organisation. At least two-thirds (66,6%) of all respondents felt positive about having access to sufficient learning opportunities or finding support for their learning from the municipality. Managers, however, are equally divided (50:50) on the matter with one group indicating their disagreement with the statement and the other half supporting the opposite view. Disagreement is especially high in the ranks of those managers with more than 10 years of actual work experience in the municipality. The overwhelming majority of councillors (88,8%), as reflected in **Table 15** below, with the exception of a single individual, supported the statement and felt that the municipality provides enough learning opportunities and support to enhance their effectiveness).

Statement	Response	Management			Councillors		
		0-5 Yrs	6 - 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs	0-5 Yrs	6 - 10 Yrs	+ 10 Yrs
The municipality has established a safe and open atmosphere to express and analyse opposing views	Agree	8,3%	0%	16.6%	44,4%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	16,6%	8,3%	8,3%	11,1%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	16,6%	25%	11,1%	0%	0%
Over the last year I had the opportunity to learn from political and administrative colleagues	Agree	16,6%	16,6%	33,3%	55,5%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	8,3%	8,3%	16,6%	11,1%	0%	0%
There are enough opportunities and support to enhance the collective learning of both Councillors and management	Agree	25%	8,3%	16,6%	55,5%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	16,6%	33,3%	11,1%	0%	0%

5.2.5.   Systems Thinking

In order to operationalise the learning discipline of *Systems Thinking*, 3 questions
(*Questions 18–20*) were formulated covering aspects such as municipal attempts to
align activities with regional, provincial and national objectives, internal interdependence
and external relationships, as well as the approach of the organisation when considering
its own functioning.

With the exception of 5 respondents (23,7%), as reflected in **Table 16** below, the
majority (76,1%) agreed with the statement that the municipality's activities are geared
towards the achievement of local, regional, provincial and national objectives. This
strong and positive sentiment is, however, not carried through when it comes to
investigating the understanding of the interaction and interdependence of the internal
service delivery units of the municipality and their relationship with its external
environment. Instead, of the majority of respondents (52,3%), 33,3% disagreed and the
rest (19,0%) were uncertain about the level of understanding within the organisation.
Only about 47,6% of respondents agreed with the statement. Half (50%) of the

managers disagreed with the statement, while one third (33,3%) agreed and the rest (16,6%) were uncertain. Councillors, on the other hand, are much more positive (66,6%) with only a minority (22,2%) being uncertain and one individual in total disagreement as reflected in *Table 16* below.

At the heart of systems thinking, according to Senge (1990), lies the ability and the need to consider the interconnectedness of various internal and external systems as well as the awareness that change in one part of the organisation may have unintended consequences for the rest. Respondents were therefore requested to indicate their level of agreement with the statement regarding the organisation's approach when it evaluates its own functioning. Based on **Table 16** below, it is obvious that the majority of respondents (57%) either disagreed (28,5%) or expressed uncertainty (28,5%) about whether the interconnectedness of the whole system is considered before any change is initiated. Only about 42,7% of respondents expressed the opposite sentiment. The high level of uncertainty (28,5%) is also important. A high level of disagreement has also been observed among the ranks of senior managers, with those with less than 10 years experience being more positive than their more seasoned counterparts. Equally disturbing is the high incidence of uncertainty (33,3%) amongst managers who are supposed to give administrative leadership to the organisation when it comes to executing the twin tasks of organisational development and redesign for greater efficiency.

TABLE 16: PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE EXISTENCE OF SYSTEMS THINKING

Statement	Response	Management			Councillors		
		0-5 Yrs	*6 – 10 Yrs*	*+ 10 Yrs*	*0-5 Yrs*	*6 – 10 Yrs*	*+ 10 Yrs*
All activities of the municipality are geared towards achieving regional, provincial and national objectives	Agree	8,3%	25%	41,6%	44,4%	22,2%	0%
	Uncertain	16,6%	0%	0%	11,1%	0%	0%
	Disagree	0%	0%	8,3%	11,1%	0%	0%
Management and Councillors understand the interaction and interdependence of all municipal departments and our relationship with external stakeholders	Agree	16,6%	16,6%	0%	44,4%	11,1%	0%
	Uncertain	8,3%	0%	8,3%	11,1%	11,1%	0%
	Disagree	0%	8,3%	41,6%	11,1%	0%	0%
When the municipal management and Councillors investigate problems, the functioning of the whole organisation is also considered	Agree	16,6%	8,3%	0%	44,4%	11,1%	0%
	Uncertain	8,3%	8,3%	16,6%	11,1%	11,1%	0%
	Disagree	0%	8,3%	33,3%	11,1%	0%	0%

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5.3. Conclusion

With due consideration to the abovementioned results, it is obvious that actual municipal work experience in the case of managers, and length of council experience in the case of councillors, are fundamental factors that influence the outlook and the perceptions of both groups that have participated in the current survey. Due to the overwhelming dominance of Afrikaans-speaking male participants and the small number of participants from other language groups and females, it was not deemed necessary to investigate the influence of either of the other variables, namely language and gender, on the perceptions of the respondents. On the whole, officials are consistently more negative than councillors with regard to most of the issues investigated. Those with more than 10 years of actual work experience, who in most cases form the backbone of the municipality's administration, consistently displayed higher levels of negativity or uncertainty in comparison with their younger counterparts. It is therefore highly likely that they will become a source of negative influence, instead of becoming mentors, agents and guides for positive change. The only way to counter this would be with strong political leadership and significant political oversight from councillors. Currently, their lack of real council experience is a crucial weakness, but with more time and experience their ability to give the required strategic leadership can only improve.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to conduct a survey to determine whether the administrative and political leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality understands and practices the learning organisation disciplines of shared vision, team learning, systemic thinking, mental models and personal mastery that are needed to enhance the legitimacy of their organisation. To achieve this objective, a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items covering the various learning disciplines and based on the literature was used. Collected data were analysed using the pencil and paper method.

The literature on the learning organisation indicated that municipalities, despite their designation as public sector entities, have a lot in common with their private sector counterparts. Like a business, they have a well-defined clientele who are equally entitled to quality services and value for money. As organisations, they are also learning systems that are able to collect, analyse and apply new knowledge and in doing so, are able to change continuously. Municipalities, as part of the state structure, are also obliged to continuously strengthen their legitimacy in order to remain relevant. According to the available literature, one way of achieving greater legitimacy is by becoming a learning organisation. Such organisations are defined as being skilled in building and achieving a shared vision, promoting team learning, personal mastery and systems thinking, as well as constructively and critically engaging with the ingrained personal worldviews and mental models of its members.

Based on the available data, it is evident that the Saldanha Bay Municipality has not yet succeeded in becoming a learning municipality. Given that the municipality is fairly young, following a merger between three former municipalities, it has at best succeeded in laying a foundation to build on. It is also admirable that its leadership on both the political and administrative level, has actively participated in the process of creating a municipal vision and feels comfortable with the final product. Based on its own feedback, however, it is obvious that both parties have failed to promote and to align the final product of its processes with the dreams and aspirations of the rest of the organisation. It therefore creates the impression that the municipality, at this point, has merely achieved compliance with certain statutory prescripts regarding formulation an

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organisational vision. In order to achieve a shared vision that is fully aligned with the national vision, a great deal more work is needed. More work is also needed to reconcile the politically coloured vision of councillors and the more administratively-orientated vision of officials. Furthermore, the final product also needs to embody that of the broader community who by law cannot be ignored in such a process. In addition, more work needs to be done to achieve full alignment between the desired futures of local, regional, provincial and national governments.

Given the potential of word and text to exclude and confuse, the organisation needs to give much more attention and support to promoting full mastery of the language of the sector amongst all groups. Failure to do so may lead to a situation where both political and administrative functionaries may continue to experience feelings of disempowerment and an inability to deal effectively with the challenges and demands of the municipal workplace. It is also in the interests of community service delivery for councillors as the policy-makers, and officials as the implementers, to have a common understanding and enhanced feelings of personal mastery in particular to achieve a common understanding of the language of developmental local government, inter-governmental cooperation and a proper understanding of how the governance system works. High and equal levels of personal mastery are also the necessary ingredient for improving team learning and the ability to create the approriate atmosphere for confronting and improving some of the negative and potentially constraining worldviews that were observed during the study.

This study, however, had limitations and weaknesses that need to be highlighted. The first and most important factor was the fact that only a small percentage of councillors (9 out of 23) actually participated in this study. It was therefore not possible to make a proper comparison between the views of full-time and part-time councillors. The participation of managers, on the other hand, was much more encouraging, despite the fact that only 44% volunteered. The study was also negatively affected by the fact that the administrative and political leadership of the study organisation are still not representative in terms of language and gender.

In the absence of a similar local study on learning municipalities, at least three topics for further study and research have been identified. Given the need for inclusive governance, the role of the local community, represented by ward committees and organised labour as represented by the trade unions in municipal vision, is an area that warrants further research. These parties are both crucial in the process of achieving and maintaining maximum legitimacy. In addition, a study of the role of municipal training and development or governance education for transforming municipalities into learning organisations would also be appropriate and timeous. In addition, a study on stakeholder relations management on municipal level is another necessity.

Despite its inherent limitations and weaknesses, this study still contributes to investigating the potential of using the learning organisation disciplines in the transformation of public sector institutions, such as municipalities, for better service delivery and greater legitimacy. In summary, the following recommendations for municipal practice and further research are made:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE:

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommendended that the Saldanha Bay Municipality implement at least five specific initiatives to overcome the identified learning disabilities. These may include:

- Undertaking a series of targeted vision exercises that include all municipal stakeholders with the aim to establish a truely shared vision
- Formulating a comprehensive communication and marketing strategy programme to ensure full understanding and ownership of the formulated municipal vision and mission
- Developing a dictionary of municipal terms and phrases for the use of councillors, officials and the public to promote the common use and understanding of a shared language and increased personal mastery
- Dealing comprehensively with the mental models prevalent in the organisation
- Launching a formal programme of Governance Education and Training to enhance the improved understanding of the workings of local government and effectiveness of councillors

RECOMMENDATION FOR RESEARCH

Given the absence of a similar local study on learning municipalities, the following three topics for further study and research have been identified.

- The role of Ward Committees and organised labour in the formulation and execution of municipal vision and strategy implementation
- The role of municipal training and development or governance training in transforming municipalities into learning organisations
- The role of municipal leaders in stakeholder relations management

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APPENDIX A

Dear Colleague

Re. Learning Organisations Perception Survey in Saldanha Bay Municipality

The Office of the Municipal Manager is currently undertaking a Learning Organisation Perception Survey amongst the administrative and political leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality. This research centers on matters such as the existence of a shared vision, fostering team learning, promoting high levels of personal mastery, understanding the working of our whole system and dealing with personal and organisational views. The objective of this study is to determine whether our organisation has made any progress on the road towards becoming an organisation that truly learns. The findings of this study may form a basis for a collective effort to improve our own practice.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and all information will be treated confidentially. You are, however, encouraged to participate fully and in doing so, are contributing to a better understanding and improvement of our collective work life.

Thanking you in anticipation

Regards

....

Councillor O. De Beer

Executive Mayor

2007-11-07

APPENDIX B

ORIENTATION TO THE LEARNING ORGANISATION QUESTIONAIRE

Research Topic:

A Learning Organisation Survey of the Administrative and Political Leadership of the Saldanha Bay Municipality

Orientation to Learning Organisations

The American writer, Peter Senge (1990), introduced the concept of a learning organisation. Such an organisation, in his view, is one that never stops learning and is intent on the continuous renewal of its systems and procedures. He further observed that successful organisations that are also learning organisations are normally those who have succeeded in developing 5 key skills, competencies or disciplines, namely:

- a shared vision,
- fostering team learning,
- promoting high levels of personal mastery,
- a good understanding of systems thinking, and
- are not afraid of tackling people's personal and organisational views.

Senge believes that by mastering these competencies, organisations would be better equipped to handle regular and sudden change. He further believes that any individual or group can learn these skills and become skilled in handling any situation. Each of the disciplines is further described below.

1. Shared Vision

Developing a shared vision as an organisation starts with the existence of a clear individual or personal vision in the ranks of its members. Such a vision is in essence a view of a desired future or the ideal state of affairs. The organisation that succeeds in transforming the personal visions of its members into a single and shared vision may have a better chance of achieving its strategic goals and objectives. In local government, the personal vision of the individual councillor or official must be aligned with the visions of the region or district, province or country. If personal visions dominate the discussion, no shared or organisational vision can be achieved.

2.   Team Learning

Team learning refers to the process through which team members deliberately search for a common understanding, solutions or meaning while looking for answers when faced with difficult and complex issues. It relies on a favourable atmosphere where there is openness for different viewpoints and arguments and a commitment to learn from each other.

3.   Personal Mastery

The ability of individual team members to make a meaningful contribution to the achievement of the goals of an organisation depends on whether they feel empowered or capable enough to make a substantial input. People need to understand the language of an organisation, as well as the inner workings of the sector or the system in which they work. They also need to be able to manipulate the mechanisms and systems available to them in order to execute their tasks and to make a meaningful contribution.

4.   Mental Models

Every person looks at the world differently and has particular views about the world, society, groups or individuals and the work place. Some of these include views on employment equity, community participation and political interference etc. These personal viewpoints, which are deeply ingrained and mostly invisible to others, in many instances can become a stumbling block when it comes to joint action. Only organisations that are able to create a safe and open atmosphere in which these personal viewpoints can be discussed, scrutinized, criticized and improved to the benefit of all, have a realistic chance of becoming successful.

5.   Systems Thinking

Local government is part of a broader system that includes provincial and national government. Officials and councillors must not only understand the link between these system components, but must also strive towards promoting cooperation and alignment of work and resources between the different parts. The municipality consists of different departments and divisions that are intimately linked together and are interdependent. When change is considered, change agents must be mindful of the fact that change in one part of the system affects all the other parts of the system. Dealing with problems in the system therefore demands that all systems, instead of only one part of the whole, must be considered.

LEARNING ORGANISATION PERCEPTION SURVEY OF SALDANHA BAY MUNICIPALITY

Answer the questions below by circling the appropriate letter in every box. Dotted lines mean that a written answer must be answered.

SECTION A: PERSONAL AND GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Gender?

Male	1
Female	2

2.   Current Posisition ?

Councillor	1
Official	2

3.   Years of Municipal or Council Experience?

.... (Completed Years)

4.   Home Language ? (One only)

Afrikaans	1
English	2
Xhosa	3
Other	4

5.   Councillor Status

Full Time	1
Part Time	2

SECTION B: LEARNING ORGANISATION DISCIPLINES

Please indicate with an X your spontaneous level of agreement or disagreement for each of the following statements.

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I actively participated in the drafting of the municipality's vision of becoming a caring municipality	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can fully associate myself with the municipal vision of *"Saldanha Bay; A caring municipality"*	1	2	3	4	5
3. The vision of the municipality enjoys the full support of officials and councillors	1	2	3	4	5
4. The municipality's vision is in line with the visions of the West Coast District Municipality, provincial and national government	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am comfortable in my dealings with all municipal stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
6. I fully understand the terms and concepts or language of local government	1	2	3	4	5
7. The municipality does enough to promote full understanding of the new language of local government	1	2	3	4	5
8. Municipal staff and Councillors receive enough support to adequately deal with diversity in the organisation	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am overwhelmed by the transformation demands and challenges of the municipal workplace and Council	1	2	3	4	5
10. Community consultations are an unneccessary waste of time	1	2	3	4	5
11. Community stakeholders do not fully understand the workings of a municipality	1	2	3	4	5
12. Reporting to communities is a necessary tool to promote greater accountability	1	2	3	4	5
13. Affirmative action is unfair reverse discrimination	1	2	3	4	5
14. Employment equity must be based on merit and qualification	1	2	3	4	5
15. The municipality has established a safe and open atmosphere to express and analyse opposing views	1	2	3	4	5
16. Over the last year, I had the opportunity to learn from my political and administrative colleagues and the community	1	2	3	4	5
17. There are enough opportunities and support to ehance the collective learning of both Councillors and Management	1	2	3	4	5
18. All activities of the municipality are geared towards achieving regional; provincial; and national objectives	1	2	3	4	5
19. Management and Councillors understand the interaction and interdependence of all municipal departments and our relationship with external stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
20. When the municipal management and Councillors investigate operational problems, the functioning of the whole organisation is also considered	1	2	3	4	5