

The Effects of Political Leadership on Public Administration Within South African Local Government

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Abstract: Politics-administration interface is perceived as the heart of practice of public administration and aims at fostering relationships between administrators on one hand and political leaders and the public on another hand. The interface is the direct opposite of the dichotomy and advocates for a complementary model to be adopted where both politicians and administrators work hand in hand. Woodrow Wilson, widely acknowledged as the founder of Public Administration as an academic discipline, famously asserted that proper administrative questions were not political questions, meaning political questions are different from administrative questions. In his view, politics was outside the purview of public administration. However, it can be argued that politics cannot be separated from public administration because one needs the other. The findings indicate that politics do play an important role in public administration of the country however; the problem starts when the discipline of public administration tries to separate the two. The academic writings try to separate politics from administration nevertheless; it may be possible in writing but difficult in practice. Hence the paper seeks to probe the effects that politics has on public administration specifically in South African public administration. The political leadership in the South African context contributes to the effectiveness of public administration in the country. The paper seeks to analyse the benefits or rather seeks to look at how the political leadership contributes or affect running of public administration. Furthermore, the relationship between politicians and administrators at the local level is the point of view. A comprehensive literature survey or review in the study was the most important research method to gather relevant data that supports the study. Thus, recommendations are that, since politics cannot be separated from administration in practice, the relationship between political leadership and public administration should be strengthened.

Keywords: Dichotomy, Politics, Political leadership, Public Administration

1. Introduction

The public sector is comprised of both politicians and administrators, who should work cooperatively and mutually towards the promotion of common good for all citizens. However public institutions are still grappling to have an in-depth understanding of how administration and politics should interface to realize its set objectives (Ndudula, 2013:1). According to Venter (2000:117), politics and public administration are connected, but distinct. Section 197(1) of the South African Constitution (1996) provides that within public administration there is a public service for the Republic, which must function and be structured in terms of national legislation, and which must loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day.

According to Bayat and Meyer (1994:4), public administration may be defined as that system of structures and processes operating within a particular society as the environment, with the objective of facilitating the formulation of appropriate

governmental policy and the effective and efficient execution of the formulated policy. Political administrative interface has been established in South African context in order to outline the relationship between politics and administration, however the interface on the other hand it is regarded as a challenge not only in South Africa but as well as in other developing states. It is important that the auxiliary and administrative functions be performed in order to meet or satisfy the needs of citizens. Not only the functions of administrators have to be performed in order to fulfil or meet the satisfactory of citizens needs. Thus, it is also important for the politicians to perform their functions in order to grab the attention of citizens by gaining more support through service providing and the satisfaction of citizen needs. That is why there is politics-administration interface.

According to Mandal (2007:380), politics is the process by which groups make decisions. However according to Spicer (2010:1), politics provides us with a means of settling, at least for a time, the

inevitable conflicts of interests and values or conceptions of the good that seem to arise among us without having constantly to take up arms against each other. Basu (1994:118) identifies politics as the means by which society faces up to the issues and decides how to resolve them. Since politics is a complex concept, it is viewed differently by different authors, thus Ndudula (2013:6) views politics as a process that determines who shall occupy roles of leadership in government and how the power of government shall be exercised. It is the authoritative allocation of scarce resources throughout a state or a society with an organized government or a group of persons who have some form of political relationship with one another.

According to Basu (2004:2) administration is a determined action taken in pursuit of conscious purpose. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making activities happen which one wants to happen. However, it can also be defined as the organisation and direction of human and material resource to achieve desired ends. Administration is defined as organising and maintaining human and fiscal resources to attain group's goals (Khan, 2008:1). Thornhill (2005:180) states that administration primarily concerns the establishment of an enabling framework for the performance of duties.

2. Public Administration and Politics-Administration Interface

According to Ndudula (2013:7), public administration has no generally accepted definition, because the scope of the subject is so great and so debatable that it is easier to explain than to define. Public administration is the management of government affairs (Khan, 2008:1). Furthermore, public administration is the implementation of government policy and also an academic discipline that studies this implementation of government policy and prepares civil servants for working in public services. Public administration is an aspect of the larger field of administration (Marume, 2016). It is the action part of government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realized (Naidu, 2005). Public administration can be defined as a field of study and as an activity which is practiced. According to Cameron (2003:53), politics-administration interface is viewed as the heart of the practice of public administration and aims at fostering relationships between administrators

on one hand and political leaders and the public on another hand. The interface is the direct opposite of the dichotomy and advocates for a complementary model to be adopted where both politicians and administrators work hand-in-glove (Ndudula, 2013).

3. Conceptualisation of Politics Administration Interface

According to Hanekom, Rowland and Bain (1996) in Mafunisa (2003:86) politics refers to the aspiration for and or retention of power over a jurisdictional area. The inhabitants of politics by individuals or groups of individuals; inherent is the authoritative allocation of values in order to regulate or accommodate conflict within the community concerned. Administration refers to the provision of goods and services to members of the public with the aid of the administrative and auxiliary functions. Thornhill (2005:182) states that the political/administrative interface is where the tyre hits the road. Memoire (2014:6) indicates that the nature of political/administrative relationship changes not only with respect to a particular policy sector, but it also changes over time and due to changes in the dominant political ideology of the time, or changes in political leadership. Therefore, the very nature of interactions between the political sector and public administration is influenced by many policy variables which range from political/administrative culture in a country, to various sector-specific properties.

Thornhill (2005:182) further adds that the politics/administration interface is probably one of the most complex relationships to manage in any public institution. As already alluded to, this interface is particularly complex on the municipal sphere of government. However, the different acts governing municipal matters are quite clear regarding the respective functions and duties of the political role player (e.g. the mayor) on the one hand and the head of administration (the municipal manager) on the other hand. Hanekom, Rowland and Bain (1996) in Mafunisa (2003:86) continue to state that the senior public service are paid attention as a result of senior public servants having the functions which put them at the centre of concern.

4. Historical Overview of Politics-Administration Interface

The politics-administration interface originated from "dichotomy doctrine" whose advocates were

former American statesman Woodrow Wilson, whose philosophy was subsequently followed by Frank J. Goodnow. The doctrine has presented different views and dialogue on how politics and administration can foster and advance government activities of service delivery to its inhabitants (Ndudula, 2013:1). Mafunisa (2003:93) specified that, in South Africa, the public services have historically been highly politicized. When the National Party (NP) came into power in 1948 it deployed its loyal members to different senior positions in the public service. It was then difficult to separate the National Party (as the government-of-the day) and the public service. The post-1994 political developments certainly saved the debate on the relationship between political office bearers and senior public servants. Naidu (2005:31) indicated that the founding father of Public administration Woodrow Wilson propounded politics-administration dichotomy theory which made a sharp distinction between politics and administration.

Ndudula (2013:2) further adds that the politics administration interface in South Africa on service delivery derives its roots from the apartheid era government. This is whereby public servants were highly politicized to serve the interest of the erstwhile government. However, different scholars have different perceptions on how the politics administration interface originated, that is why Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (ND) views politics administration interface as a notion that has always been highly contested subject in the evolution of the administrative state, where the question is, how the irregularity of interdependence can be institutionalised as the defining feature of the interaction. This question simply means how can power relations at the interface be structured to foster the best way to cooperate among actors in the space? Naidu (2013:31) emphasised that after the World War-II, there was an argument that public administration is policy-making and is thus a part of political process. It is no longer believed that administration can be kept separate from policy and politics and that is why they have an interface.

5. The Relationship Between Politics and Administration

Ndadula (2013:7) indicates that administrators ensure policies are executed and implemented as designed by politicians. Even though the political/administrative interface is a small component in the wheel of a

functioning system, it is nevertheless an important one (Memoire, 2014). Politics and administration co-exist in that they demonstrate a complementary role that is underpinned by fostering of cohesion and mutual respect. Memoire (2014:3) holds that political and administrative relations remain one of the most difficult issues to address in public administration reforms in Africa and elsewhere.

The relationship between politicians and bureaucratic leaders has, for many years, been a subject of great interest for scholars and researchers who have submitted theories to characterise public administration (Memoire, 2014). Even if their typologies differ because of the distinct focus, there are interfaces between them. Memoire (2014:8) further adds that bureaucratic leaders on the other hand give up their right to blame or express opposition to the ruling regime in public, but they gain a place in the administration with responsibilities and rewards - tangible and/ or intangible.

6. Models Seeking to Describe and Analyse the Relationship Between Politics and Administration

6.1 Dichotomy Model/Depoliticised Bureaucracy

According to the politics-administration dichotomy theory, the business of politics is policy-making and that of administration is policy implementation. Wilson (1887) argued that administration is separate from politics because administrative questions are not political questions. The field of administration is a field of business hence it is removed from the hurry and strife of politics (Naidu, 2005:31). Mafunisa (2003:87) indicates that the dichotomy model is traced from the politics administration dichotomy, which grew out of the early administrative reform movement and its reaction against spoils system in the period 1887 and later. The politics administration dichotomy holds that political interface in administration would erode the opportunity for administrative efficiency, that the policy-making activities of government ought to be wholly separated from the administrative functions, and that administrators had to have an explicit assignment of objectives before they could begin to develop an efficient administrative system.

According to Ndudula (2013:16), the dichotomy model can be used to try test and understand

whether a clear-cut demarcation line is possible in the South African public sector. This model is also known as the neutral model of administrative responsibility. It is based on acceptance of the politics-administration dichotomy which specifies that the public servant should be neutral in matters of policy, but professionally competent in selecting the appropriate means to carry out policies decided upon by their political superiors. The dichotomy model sees the public service as distinct from political process; it advocates a clear separation between politics and administration and by extension separation between the party and the state (Mafunisa, 2003:87). This model is similar to the separation school whereby, Demir (nd:3), holds that the separation school treats public administration as a world in its own with values, rules and methods divorced from those of politics. The proponents of the separation school express support for a clear structural division of authority between elected and administrative officials to eliminate or minimise undue political influences on public administration as well as potential conflicts.

6.2 Politicised Bureaucracy Model

The politicised bureaucracy model argues that elected office-bearers have a mandate to control the public service. In this context, there is no distinction between politics and administration and between party and state. The challenge is how to manage the relationship between political office-bearers and public servants in a manner that ensure that the public service is not abused for narrow party political agendas, but remains an instrument of service delivery for the people as a whole, but under the policy direction of the ruling party (Mafunisa, 2003). According to Ndudula (2013:17) the politicized bureaucratic model centres itself in the inseparability nature of politics and administration, and it gives politicians the will and power to determine how the bureaucratic public sector operates. The political school positions itself against the separation school and is characterised by outright rejection of the politics-administration distinction (Demir, nd: 4).

6.3 Complementarity Model

According to Mafunisa (2003:89), the complementarity model is a strong foundation for public administration at all spheres of government. Svava (2001) in Mafunisa (2003) highlights that the complementarity of politics and administration is

based on the premise that political office-bearers and administrators join together in the pursuit of sound governance. Complementarity stresses interdependence along with distinct roles; compliance along with independence; respect for political supremacy along with a commitment to shape and implement policy in ways that promote the public interests; deference to elected incumbents along with adherence to the law and support of fair electoral competition; and appreciation of politics along with support for professional standards. Ndudula (2013:17) holds that the complementary model implies that politics and administration exist as separate and distinctive parts, however recognizes the role each can contribute in the entire organizational framework. Henry (2013:47) states that elected officials and administrators have extensive interactions, and there is a growing complementarity between them.

The complementarity model is similar to the interaction model because they explain more or similar things. The interaction school acknowledges the differences between politics and administration in a number of ways such as logical and psychological differences between politics and administration. The school emphasise a high degree of collaboration between elected and administrative officials while maintaining each one's traditional roles and unique perspectives (Demir, Nd:6). In other words, the interaction school and complementarity model are in the middle of the politicised and dichotomy model. Mafunisa (2003:89) further states that complementarity reconciles what have seemed to be contradictory aspects in public administration. How can politicians maintain control and, at the same time, allow senior public servants to maintain their independence, adhere to professional values and standards and be responsible to the public? Political office bearers could, in theory, dominate administrative practice, but they are constrained by a respect for administrative competence and commitment.

7. Nature of Politics-Administration in Local Government

Henry (2013:36) states that every local government has two groups of executive institutions, namely; political executive institution and administrative executive institution. According to Thornhill (2012:32) and Henry (2013:36) in political executive institutions, usually every municipal council

elects from among its members a mayor or an executive committee, depending on the type provided for in the relevant legislation. Furthermore, (ibid), in administrative executive institutions, the administrative activities of municipalities are usually undertaken by departments and/or divisions, and the functions allocated to those departments and divisions are based on specification. Memoire (2014:9) holds that it is obvious that political/administrative relations take place at different levels including local government. It is therefore, important to understand that decentralization inevitably changes the location of power and jobs thereby creating tension between local autonomy and national standards.

7.1 The Role of Administrators in Local Government Administration

Municipal administrators execute local government functions. Each is headed by a municipal manager and staffed with relevant officials (Shah, 2006:63). Mafunisa (2003:96) indicates that, in South Africa, the roles of the senior public servant are clearly defined by the Public Service Act (Proclamation 103 of 1994) and related laws and policies. The municipal manager is the head of the administration therefore this implies that powers and duties are vested in the municipal manager. Olumuyiwa (2015:15) indicates that the task of civil/public servant or administrator is to assist in the formulation and execution of policy as directed by the minister or commissioner. It is therefore his duty to supply his political boss with all the information necessary to arrive at a right decision.

7.2 The Role of Politicians in Local Government

According to the Environment & Urbanization Brief (2009:1), mayors are meant to be guarantors of services, the public good and citizen's participation in local life. Fatima (2010:16) further agrees that the functions of the mayor include presiding at meetings of the executive committee and performing duties which include ceremonial functions and those delegated to him or her by the council or executive committee. Stellenbosch municipality (nd: 26) indicates that the mayor is the political leader. Political leadership is the key to better local government. A mayor in a council manager form of government serves to foster communication and facilitate interaction and to provide a greater sense

of purpose and thus serves as 'the guiding force' in government (Morse, Buss & Kinghorn, 2015:274). Amongst others the following will be discussed:

7.2.1 Finance

In terms of section 52 of the Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003, the mayor of a municipality must provide general political guidance over the fiscal and financial affairs of the municipality; in providing such general political guidance, may monitor and, to the extent provided in the MFMA, oversee the exercise of responsibilities assigned in terms of the MFMA to the accounting officer and the chief financial officer, but may not interfere in the exercise of those responsibilities; must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the municipality performs its constitutional and statutory functions within the limits of the municipality's approved budget; must, within 30 days of the end of each quarter, submit a report to the council on the implementation of the budget and financial state affairs of the municipality; and must exercise the other powers and perform the other duties assigned to the mayor in terms of the MFMA or delegated by the council to the mayor.

7.2.2 Providing Political Guidance

According to Venter, Van der Walt, Phutiagae, Khalo and Nieker (2007:63) the mayor provides political guidance on the financial affairs of council and must ensure compliance with the provisions of the Act. The mayor must provide leadership and guidance to council including amongst others, initiating and advising on the development and adoption of policy and strategy, giving strategic advice and ensuring that council is fully briefed and properly advised on new developments, advising the municipal council on the exercise, performance and discharge of its powers, functions and duties as contemplated by the Constitution and providing political guidance in the fiscal and financial affairs of the municipality (Stellenbosch Municipality, nd; 26).

7.2.3 Monitor and Oversee the Exercise of the Responsibilities of the Municipal Manager

It is the role of the mayor to monitor and oversee the exercise of the responsibilities of the municipal manager and chief financial officer and without interference (Venter, Van der Walt, Phutiagae, Khalo & Nieker (2007:63). This simply implies that the mayor has to ensure that what the municipal manager and chief financial officer are doing or performing in the municipality they are clearly monitored and

overseen. In other words, if the mayor does not do as required to him he/she will face what is coming to him or he/she will be accountable for them.

7.2.4 Guide the Budget Process

The mayor must guide the budget process and ensure that the municipality complies with the budget requirements such as service delivery programmes, the budget implementation plan and staff performance agreements (Venter, Van der Walt, Phutiagae, Khalo & Nieker, 2007:63). The mayor must also ensure to submit a budget implementation and finance report to the council quarterly.

7.2.5 Identification of Financial Problems

According to Craythorne (2006:270) if the municipality faces any serious financial problems, the mayor must promptly respond to and initiate any remedial or corrective steps proposed by the accounting officer to deal with such problems, which may include steps to reduce spending when revenue is anticipated to be less than projected in the municipality's approved budget. Chandler (2007:293) holds that if the government is willing to consult with local authorities on their financial need and hence respond more effectively to problems identified at local level, there will be a significant improvement in financial harmony. In other words, the government must ensure that they consult to the mayors with regard to financial needs since the mayor has the role of identifying financial problems in municipalities.

7.2.6 Interaction with Staff Members

The mayor interacts with staff members in consultation with the municipal manager (guideline document on the roles and responsibilities of councilors and official, South African Local Government Association). Thuynsma (2012:182) emphasise that local government has to transform the spatial and social legacy of a segregated city. Local government, the sphere closest to communities, is best placed to make cities inclusive and to allow its poorer citizens enjoy the benefits of urbanity and access their essential human rights.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is clear that separating politics from administration in the public sector is impossible, thus the public sector was, is and will forever remain a politicised system. Politics and public administration do co-exist on the same social continuum, but as separate and distinct

constellations of logic whose activities sometimes overlap. At far ends of that continuum, political acts (such as appointing to government jobs unqualified nephew) can be distinguished from administrative acts (such as appointing to government jobs the most qualified applicants drawn from a competitive pool) and easily so. A clear separation of powers between political office bearers and public servants is not clear or rather strict enough in outlining the distinction in the roles and responsibilities needed to be carried out by these two parties. However on the other hand, inappropriate political involvement in administrative activities also contributes to the contradiction of mandates between the political office bearers and senior public servants, since it is not clear on who does what in the public sector, as such it can be suggested that the interface to be reviewed as it is regarded as a way of giving out the relationship between politics and administration which has been traced even before 1994 in order to eliminate the challenges not excluding the criticism against the interface. There should also be right and strict procedures whereby the political officials and public administrators account for any misuse/miscellaneous of resources

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