



10. Competence-based approach proposed for local government skills audit and skills development

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ABSTRACT

To address the previous president of South Africa's question whether the state has the ability to deliver on its service, Cabinet tasked the then Department of Provincial and Local Government (now the Department of Cooperative Governance - DCoG) to conduct a skills audit at local government (LG) level; in view of the fact that its mandate is local government. To be in keeping with best practice, education, training and development key stakeholders decided to measure individual capacity through the skills audit.

Individual capacity is defined as the combination of qualifications, experience, leadership/managerial, functional and generic competences required for the job. To be able to do the measurement, it was necessary to develop Competence Profiles. A skills audit web-based tool (GAPSKILL) was also developed to sustain the skills audit process.

This paper is structured such that it will:

- Provide a background.
- Discuss the competence-based approach.
- List solutions to address findings.
- Indicate a way forward.

1. BACKGROUND

To address former President Mbeki's question whether the state has the ability to deliver on its service, Cabinet tasked the then Department of Provincial and Local Government (now the Department of Cooperative Governance - DCoG) to conduct a skills audit at local government (LG) level. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) was tasked to do so at provincial and national levels. The Department decided to do the skills audit in collaboration with its key stakeholders, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA), South African Local Government Association (SALGA), South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU). These bodies comprise the national Steering Committee (Steercom). There are also provincial and metro structures that link to the Steercom structure. In June 2006, the Steering Committee decided that the skills audit would not be a 'quick and dirty' exercise but that the opportunity would be used to put the necessary systems in place in local government (i.e. the 283 municipalities).

These systems could ensure a sustainable skills audit process and the collection of comparable base-line information. It was decided that a web-based skills audit tool would be compiled. This tool was given the name GAPSKILL based on a name chosen by the Steercom from a competition posed to LG Skills Development Facilitators.

The GAPSKILL was compiled to measure individual capacity that was defined as the combination of qualifications, experience and competence required for the job.

To ensure skills transfer, the necessary officials in all three spheres of government were trained in the competence-based approach and use of the GAPSKILL. Alignment of the LG skills audit to that being conducted by the DPSA was also ensured through the use by both

departments of the Department of Labour's Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO).

The OFO ensures a standardisation of post titles to enable labour market analysis. The verification of a common list of TASK job designations (job evaluation system used in LG) converted to proposed OFO titles is underway.

The skills audit process involves:

- Selling it to the participants through meetings and planning sessions with the 283 municipalities.
- Training of Skills Development Facilitator / Training Committee.
- Data Collection for every individual (200 000) – interviews / translations to those not fluent in English. This should be completed by December 2010; currently it has been completed in 252 municipalities. Metros are the most difficult to complete due to size.
- Data Capturing (as not all have access to computers).
- Data Cleaning.
- Data Analysis.
- Municipal Report Writing and Editing by Steercom (30 municipal reports have been completed to date).
- The return of reports to stakeholders (including the province) and the facilitation of the development of municipal implementation plans (22 sessions facilitated to date).

The purpose of the skills audit is to ensure that all of the approximately 200 000 employees at all levels in LG would be issued with a Personal Development Plan (PDP).

The consolidation of PDPs would further assist with the development of improved Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs). Individual capacity building should thus be targeted at addressing these identified gaps, e.g. to improve qualifications, use qualifications or skills programmes linked to unit standards; to address experience, use development opportunities; and to address competences, use relevant training programmes. It should lastly be noted that, although in this paper it is indicated that the competence-based approach is for the skills audit and skills development in LG, the work done will impact on LG Human Resource (HR) practices as the Department promotes an integrated approach to HR. If strategically applied, HR could assist line function managers to meet their service delivery challenges.

2. COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH

To be in keeping with best practice Education, Training and Development it was decided to base the measurement of individual capacity through the skills audit on the combination of qualifications, experience and leadership / managerial, functional and generic competences required for the job. To be able to do the measurement, it was necessary to develop Competence Profiles.

Where possible, these profiles were based on TASK job descriptions but, where TASK job descriptions were not available, benchmarking was done nationally and internationally to determine the competence requirements for such a post.

A Competence Profile is a summary of the qualifications, experience, leadership/managerial, functional, (or technical or professional) and generic competences (knowledge, skills and attitude) that an individual requires to successfully perform that job. The Competence Profile is structured as follows:

- (a) Post definition, e.g. Engineering Manager (OFO) - Plan, organise, direct, control and coordinate the engineering and technical operations of organisations.



- (b) Qualifications, e.g. B. Sc Civil Engineering plus Pr Eng or Pr Tech Eng. (NQF level 6).
- (c) Experience, e.g. 3 to 4 years with considerable experience at a senior level in the Engineering field.
- (d) Functional (or Technical or Professional) Competence, e.g. Designing and Planning.
- (e) Leadership / Managerial Competence, e.g. Leading/Managing within the Municipal Context.
- (f) Generic Competence, e.g. Cognitive Application.
- (g) Statutory Requirements, e.g. Municipal Performance Regulations for Municipal Managers (MMs) and Managers directly accountable to MMs, 2006.

SCORE	PROFICIENCY LEVELS	EXPLANATION
2	Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Able to perform one's responsibilities at a basic level. •Requires constant monitoring and significant support from senior / direct report and other stakeholders.
1	Below Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Performs below basic requirements and requires hand-holding to be able to perform at a basic level. •May require considerable effort and time to develop such an employee at this level. •May be advisable to be placed at a level lower.

Although a very strict distinction is made between Leadership/Managerial, Generic and Functional Competences, it should be noted that it is possible to list a competence that is in essence a Generic Competence (such as Administration) as a Functional Competence in a Competence Profile if it represents a core, functional part of that particular job.

The competences refer to roles that employees play in a municipality and are thus not position specific. Also, they are "What a staff member should be able to do". For example:

- An HR Officer (job / position / tasks as given in a job profile) in a smaller municipality may be responsible for HR Administration (role as defined in a Competence Profile) as well as Skills Development (role as defined in a Competence Profile). The relevant competences as defined in the Competence Profiles may be included so that a relevant job profile is developed for such an individual.
- In a Metro Municipality there will probably be a Skills Development Facilitator (job / position / tasks) who will be responsible for only Skills Development (role).

It is accepted that the roles will be fairly consistent across municipalities although the environment within which a role is played might be more complex, depending on the size of the municipality, but the essence of the role will remain. In the long term, the Competence Profiles will allow for a standardised approach to addressing competences in the LG sector. In those municipalities where a competence-based approach is new, it also provides for a baseline methodology from which annual improvements can be developed. The following generic proficiency scale was used to determine the proficiency level per competence:

SCORE	PROFICIENCY LEVELS	EXPLANATION
5	Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Able to perform effectively and efficiently. •Able to understand the impact of one's responsibilities on service delivery and innovation, adjust and adapt accordingly. •Able to advise others and set a benchmark for performance for colleagues and Council
4	Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Able to effectively and efficiently perform one's responsibilities independently. •Able to understand the impact of one's responsibilities on overall service delivery and administration. •Able to perform one's functions confidently with significant and noticeable efficiency.
3	Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Able to effectively perform one's responsibilities with measurable impact on the organisation. •However, still requires support and guidance from managers/and or relevant stakeholders

For Section 57 managers (Municipal Manager and those directly accountable to the MM), clinical psychologists did a comprehensive 5 to 6 hour competence assessment using various tools to determine whether they had the relevant leadership/managerial and generic competences. Schwella and Rossouw note that it is important to know whether managers are able to take up the leadership role and change their organisations and to do so they would need the right competences. Schwella and Rossouw refer to Harvey and Brown (Journal of Public Administration) who suggest that today's managers require a new mindset – one that values flexibility, speed, innovation and the challenge that evolves from constantly changing conditions.

3. SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS FINDINGS

3.1 At a national level the focus flowing from the skills audit should be on:

- Developing a national competence assessment instrument for newly appointed S57s to be used by accredited providers and in collaboration with provincial counterparts.
- Addressing management and leadership competence based on a leadership/management learning pathway, ensuring that learning programmes address the competence requirements through PALAMA, (Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy, mandated to provide training at all 3 levels of government), Provincial Academies in the Offices of the Premiers and the Public School for LG (to be established). E.g. DWA want to embark on a holistic programme for their senior managers, addressing all competences.
- National sector departments, professional bodies and municipal training institutions addressing functional (technical or professional) competence, e.g. also developing pathways indicating competences required for Administrators and ensuring that learning programmes address these.
- Encouraging improvement of the qualifications profile of the sector through bursaries and also by simultaneously addressing scarce and critical skills.
- Encouraging the use of the Local Government Resource Centre of the Development Bank of Southern Africa to address low levels of experience coupled with the development of procedure manuals per occupation.
- Addressing the level of appointment of skills development facilitators.
- Ensuring that there are functional Training Committees.
- Addressing Employment Equity matters by improving reporting on this.
- Addressing youthful demographics through a proposed number of

internships or learnerships, depending on a municipality's size and focused on scarce and critical skills.

- Providing Guidelines to facilitate comprehensive human resource planning so that suitable appointments can be made to the critical and other posts.
- Addressing relevant organograms by providing guidelines.
- Drafting, consulting on and implementing Education, Training and Development (ETD) Regulations for municipalities.

3.2 National Departments need to ensure that provinces and municipalities also apply a focused and targeted approach to individual capacity building / ETD.

4. WAY FORWARD

The very tight time frames calling for target-linked quarterly reporting to a Cabinet Committee required that many parallel processes be instituted to ensure that the skills audit deadlines were achieved. The process only allowed for the collation of base-line information and placement of base-line systems but not for, amongst others, the verification of the Competence Profiles.

It is only now, near the end of the skills audit data collection process, that time is available to verify the contents of the Competence Profiles as part of an annual review to ensure that the GAPSKILL and skills audit methodology is improved.

In the words of Terry Meyer (1997) the mapping and building of organisational and individual competences on an ongoing basis rather than successive efforts at cost cutting is the change process that will create organisations able to compete with confidence in the international arena. As such, he argues that these processes should be a central feature of strategy and organisational design.

He also implies that it is an ongoing process of improvement to address the changes to which organisations and workforces are constantly exposed. Currently, the feedback received to verify the Competence Profiles is mostly from metros that are sharing Competence Frameworks they have compiled. These Competence Frameworks differ somewhat from what here the Department currently does in that they cluster job families, a process that the Department can only engage in, on completion of the Competence Profiles, i.e. post specific. However, the information contained in the Competence Frameworks is still relevant in terms of proposed content for the Competence Profiles. National sector departments and professional bodies have been encouraged to provide inputs into the competence requirements per post, relevant to their mandates. The internal audit, management, administration and some built environment professional bodies have already done so. A list of posts for which Draft Competence Profiles and the Draft Competence Dictionary is available and can be requested from LeonieN@cogta.gov.za. Comments on these are to be submitted by the end of January 2011, at the latest. Other products flowing from the skills audit are:

- A draft Learning Framework and Qualifications Database to support the competences.
- A draft Staffing Norms and Standards Framework.

Matters that still need to be addressed are to:

- Develop tables for all municipalities to compare Local Government Turn-Around Strategy information relevant to skills development, skills audit findings, LGSETA Workplace Skills Plan and any other relevant skills development information and use it to monitor

progress and review the situation in municipalities quarterly.

- Implement the solutions listed above.
- Continue monitoring the use of the GAPSKILL and usability of information it provides including the skills audit methodology.
- Understand the municipal training landscape: Who can offer what, which programmes are on offer and do they address the competence requirements? If not, to correct the situation.
- Involve other sector departments in addition to those already involved in developing the skills needed to implement the policies they make.
- Understand qualifications available to LG offered through Further Education and Tertiary institutions and influence the development of more relevant qualifications – revising existing ones and/or introducing new ones.

The process engaged in is thus far from finalised but is a continuous one.

5. REFERENCES

- Meyer Terry, June 1997, Management Today. Global Competitiveness: Creating competitive advantage through competencies.
- Schwella E and Rossouw A, December 2005, Journal of Public Administration. Competencies for the Senior Management Service in the South African Public Service: An Evaluative Assessment.