COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH PROPOSED FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SKILLS AUDIT AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Author and Presenter:
Sandra Greÿling, Senior Manager, Department of Cooperative Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

To address 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) who composes 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 at 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 converted to proposed OFO titles is underway).

The skills audit process involves:

- Selling to, i.e. meetings and planning with municipality (283).
- Training of Skills Development Facilitator / Training Committee members.
- 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 their 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).

1 The requisite knowledge, skills and attitude required for the job held
2 Job Evaluation System used in LG
• Reports are handed back to stakeholders (this includes province) and development of municipal implementation plans are facilitated (22 sessions facilitated to date).

The purpose of the skills audit is to ensure that all; 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 address 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. HR if strategically applied could assist line function managers to meet their service delivery challenges.

2. COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH

To be in keep 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, however, where TASK job descriptions were not available benchmarking was done nationally and internationally to determine the requirements for such a post.

A Competence Profile is a summary of the qualifications, experience and 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. Director Corporate Services - Plan, organise, direct, control and coordinate the operation of the organization.

(b) **Qualifications**, e.g. Appropriate Tertiary Qualification (NQF level 6).

(c) **Experience**, e.g. 3 to 4 years with considerable experience at a senior level.

(d) **Functional (or Technical or Professional) Competence**, e.g. Strategy Development.

(e) **Leadership / Managerial Competence**, e.g. Leading / Managing within the Municipal Context.

(f) **Generic Competence**, e.g. Communication.

(g) **Statutory Requirements**, e.g. Municipal Performance Regulations for Municipal Managers (MMs) and Managers directly accountable to MMs, 2006.

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.

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3 A competence that focuses on the execution of a leadership / managerial role / task
4 NQF is the National Qualifications Framework
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 that annual improvements can be made to.

The following generic proficiency scale was used to determine the proficiency level per competence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>PROFICIENCY LEVELS</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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| 5     | Expert             | i. Able to perform effectively and efficiently.  
|       |                    | ii. Able to understand the impact of one’s responsibilities on service delivery and innovation, adjust and adapt accordingly.  
|       |                    | iii. Able to advise others and set a benchmark for performance for colleagues and Council |
| 4     | Advanced           | i. Able to effectively and efficiently perform one’s responsibilities independently.  
|       |                    | ii. Able to understand the impact of one’s responsibilities on overall service delivery and administration.  
|       |                    | iii. Perform one’s functions confidently with significant and noticeable efficiency. |
| 3     | Intermediate       | i. Able to effectively perform one’s responsibilities with measurable impact to the organisation.  
|       |                    | ii. However, still requires support and guidance from managers/and or relevant stakeholders |
| 2     | Basic              | i. Able to perform one’s responsibilities at a basic level.  
|       |                    | ii. Require constant monitoring and significant support from senior / direct report and other stakeholders. |
| 1     | Below Basic        | i. Performs below basic requirements and requires hand-holding to be able to perform at a basic level.  
|       |                    | ii. May require considerable effort and time to develop such an employee at this level.  
|       |                    | iii. May be advisable to be placed at a level lower. |
For Section 57 managers\(^5\), 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. They refer to Harvey and Brown who suggest that today’s manager’s require a new mindset – one that values flexibility, speed, innovation and the challenge that evolves from constantly changing conditions.

3. LIST OF 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.
- **Address management and leadership competence** based on a leadership / management learning pathway, ensuring that learning programmes address the competence requirements, through PALAMA\(^6\), Provincial Academies in the Office of the Premiers and the Public School for LG (to be established). E.g. DWA want to embark on a holistic (addressing all competences) programme for their senior managers.
- National sector departments, Professional Bodies and municipal training institutions addressing **functional (technical or professional) competence**, e.g. also develop learning pathways indicating competences required for e.g. Administrators, etc. 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 / learnerships**, depending on a municipality’s size and focused on scarce and critical skills.
- **Providing Guidelines** to facilitate comprehensive **Human Resource Planning** so that incumbents, e.g. for the 6 critical posts are available.
- **Addressing relevant organograms** by providing Guidelines.
- **Drafting**, consulting on and implementing **Education, Training and Development (ETD) Regulations for municipalities.**

3.2 National are to ensure that **province and municipalities** also apply a **focused and targeted approach** to individual capacity building / ETD.

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\(^5\) These are the Municipal Manager (MM) and those directly accountable to the MM in terms of the Municipal Systems Act

\(^6\) PALAMA is the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy that is mandated to present training at all three (3) spheres of government.
4. CONCLUSION

In view of very tight quarterly reporting time frames to a Cabinet Committee linked to targets that compelled many parallel processes to be instituted to ensure that the skills audit deadlines were achieved the process has 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 that organisations and workforces are constantly exposed to.

Currently, the verification 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 where the Department currently is in the process as they cluster job families, a process that the Department can only engage on, 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 can be requested from LeonieN@cogta.gov.za for comments to be submitted by the latest the end of January 2011.

For your further information other products flowing from the skills audit are:

(a) A draft Learning Framework and Qualifications Database to support the competences.
(b) A draft Staffing Norms and Standards Framework.

Other matters that need to be addressed are to:

(a) 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.
(b) Implement the solutions listed.
(c) Continue monitoring the use of the GAPSKILL and use-ability of information it provides including skills audit methodology.
(d) 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.
(e) Involve other sector departments than those already involved in developing the skills needed to implement the policies they make.
(f) Understand qualifications available to LG offered through Further Education and Tertiary institutions and influence the compilation of correct qualifications if they are not on offer.

The process engaged in is thus far from finalised but is continuous.
5. REFERENCES
