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Contextualising the factors influencing human resource development in municipalities

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Author:
Harlan C.A. Cloete[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Public Administration and Management, University of Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Harlan Cloete,
cloetehca@ufs.ac.za

Background: Human resource development implementation faces several challenges that prevent organisational optimisation as defined in the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority Skills Development Handbook and related regulatory framework. The assumption is that skills development facilitators (SDFs) do not have the functional competencies to effectively implement human resource development projects and programmes.

Aim: The aim of the research was to present and reflect on the results of a survey conducted in selected South African municipalities to ascertain the factors influencing human resource development implementation and to assess the competence levels of SDFs to determine whether there are lessons to be learned. It also aimed to recommend how the identified challenges faced by municipalities can be resolved.

Methods: The mixed-methods research approach involved the analysis of primary data obtained from a qualitative perspective, including semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Questionnaires were completed by 239 line managers, 66 human resource development staff , 357 other municipal employees and 34 SDFs.

Results: The study concluded that SDFs are experienced and qualified but that human resource development is poorly managed in municipalities on six levels (ethical values, policy, practice, organisation, internal democracy and stakeholders), which affects the overall human resource development performance of municipalities.

Conclusion: Municipalities must follow an integrated management approach to manage HRD that includes a collaborative approach involving line managers, HRD professionals and employees.

Contribution: Specific implementation recommendations are made to ensure that municipalities are equipped to manage HRD and thus ensure effective service delivery in municipalities.

Keywords: skills development; human resource development (HRD); municipalities; implementation; facilitation.

Introduction

Governance in South Africa is divided into three spheres, namely local, provincial and national government. While the narrow view of South African municipalities' mandate is that their obligation is to provide basic services, the human resource development (HRD) view contends that municipalities have an obligation to create an enabling environment so as to ensure that employees are individually and collectively capacitated and provided with optimal opportunities to respond to the ever-changing challenges experienced in the workplace. This article evaluates the effectiveness of HRD facilitation in the municipal governance sphere with reference to the roles and responsibilities of line management, HRD practitioners and employees (municipal actors). The assumption is that these municipal stakeholders all experience skills development opportunities and challenges differently.

The local governance legislative context for HRD is addressed, as is the implementation framework for HRD in municipalities as per the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) Skills Development Handbook. The purpose of this article is to reflect on the findings of an empirical survey that was undertaken by the author for the LGSETA in a sample of inland and coastal municipalities in South Africa. The aim of that survey was to identify the factors influencing HRD praxis using the integrated management framework for HRD as

reference. A literature survey is presented below of the applicable legislation, followed by an overview of the methodology and a discussion of the results. Specific deficiencies are identified, and recommendations are made in order to address the identified weaknesses and limitations. The study concludes by considering the policy implications for municipalities and the integrated management framework for HRD (skills development) as a pragmatic implementation framework for HRD in South African municipalities. For the purpose of this study, the concepts 'skills development' and 'HRD' are used interchangeably.

Legislative and theoretical framework underpinning human resource development

Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996, identifies the key objective of local government as developmental, noticing the specific developmental obligations thereof. Accordingly, the objective of local government is to:

[P]rovide democratic and accountable government for local communities, ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, promote social and economic development, promote a safe and healthy environment; and encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. (RSA 1996)

The objective is defined through a 5-year strategic plan called the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) that is reviewed annually. The logical framework for effective municipal governance requires cost-effective competence development of staff and political leadership to ensure that the IDP objectives are indeed achieved (Fourie & Van der Waldt 2021; Van Der Waldt et al. 201). Section 29(1)(a) and (b) of the South African Constitution provides for the state to take reasonable measures to make adult and further education accessible to citizens as a human right. In other words, the workplace should be considered an active site of learning and development, where the limitless potential of all employees is encouraged and supported.

The above-mentioned requirement implies that 'every municipality must strive to achieve the constitutional objectives, considering (a) its financial, human resource and administrative capacity' (RSA 1996:s. 152, ss2). This requires enhanced state capacity (Ndou & Sebola 2016; Shava & Mazenda 2021; Thornhil 2012). Consequently, various HRD legislative frameworks have been adopted by government to respond to this increase in demand for ethical, accountable leadership and service delivery. Such responsiveness must be achieved through the provision of services to meet the increased demand from citizens and thus improve their overall well-being (Scheepers 2015). The constitutional objectives described here have found expression in a number of policies and regulations with the single aim of achieving consensus to enable a standardised approach for the broad public service (including local government).

Of key relevance to this study is the *Skills Development Act* 97 of 1998 (RSA 1998). Skills development in the workplace is governed by this Act. The *Skills development Act* compels certain employers to pay 1% of their payroll towards the Skills Development Levy Fund. This contribution is partly reimbursed to the employer upon submission of a workplace skills plan and an annual training report, as evidence that employees have undergone training. The workplace skills plan is informed by the skills audit of the employees, which leads to a personal development plan for each employee. It is compulsory for every municipality to submit a work skills plan to the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) annually. By submitting the work skills plan report, organisations have an opportunity to claim back funds through a levy grant system. The *Skills Development Act* aims to encourage employers to: (1) use the workplace as an active HRD environment, (2) provide employees with opportunities to acquire new competences, (3) provide opportunities for new entrants to the labour market to gain work experience and (4) to employ persons who find it difficult to be employed. Finally, the *Skills Development Act* aims to develop the competence available within the South African economy (Cloete 2005; Jack 2007; RSA 1998).

The *Skills Development Act* (97 of 1998) imposes an obligation on all employees to designate a skills development facilitator (SDF) who is responsible for overseeing the management of skills or HRD within the respective organisations. The SDF assumes the role of authorised organisational official entrusted with coordinating the skills development (HRD) activities within municipalities in accordance with the statutory provisions outlined in the legislative guidelines contained in the *Skills Development Act* (97 of 1998). The tasks that the SDF performs are, inter alia, to:

- Assist the employer and the employee to develop the work skills plan.
- Advise the employer and the employee on the implementation of the work skills plan.
- Assist the employer to draft the annual report on the implementation of the work skills plan.
- Advise the employer on any quality standards set by the SETA.
- Act as a contact person between the SETA and the employer.
- Serve as a resource person regarding all aspects of skills development (RSA 1998; see also Cloete 2005; SALGA 2012).

The specific overarching role performed by the SDF includes advisory services to both line managers and labour in order to identify the specific HRD needs within the organisation. Through this collaboration, the SDF plays a critical role in facilitating the implementation of HRD programmes: a role that is aimed at enhancing the overall organisational capability.

However, according to the National Treasury (2022), a capability gap exists in municipalities – between actual

capability (the ability to get things done in the form of sustainable services to communities) and the functional obligations of municipalities (what the municipality must do in terms of local leadership). This capability gap is widening as communities expect more, in the form of performance and service delivery demands, in a resource-scarce and technologically changing environment.

Municipal staff regulations and human resource development

The Municipal Staff Regulations introduce a new human resource management or development governance regime to address the capability gap in municipalities through an integrated approach that is linked to IDP. The objectives of the Municipal Staff Regulations are to create a local government development-oriented human resource management and career development practices, to ensure high standards of professional ethics are nurtured within local government, to strengthen the capacity and capability of municipalities to perform their functions by recruiting and appointing suitably qualified competent persons, and to establish a cohesive human resource management system that ensures adequate controls (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs [CoGTA] 2022). The Municipal Staff Regulations demand that managers play a more 'hands on' role in creating an enabling human resource management environment. In the Municipal Staff Regulations' human resource regime, managers perform human resource functions and cannot delegate this to human resources departments the way they did in the past, as highlighted by Cloete (2016). The Municipal Staff Regulations further advocate for employees to manage their own development actively (whether for current or future career opportunities) based on their personal development plans, by providing feedback on the outcomes, effectiveness and relevance of HRD initiatives (Cloete 2023a, b).

Contextualising human resource development in municipalities

The South African government's commitment is to building a developmental state, improving public service and strengthening democratic institutions (RSA 2009). For municipalities to succeed in delivering services to the people, it is a prerequisite for the latter to be staffed by competent and committed employees in tandem with effective political oversight. This perspective is highlighted by Manuel (2013), who argues that South Africa's challenge lies not in the absence of policies but rather in the ability to effectively implement policies (Gumede 2009; 2020). However, the South African municipal sphere is defined by a rigid hierarchical culture that relies on command and control (Kalinich & Clack 1998; Murhula, Singh & Nunlall 2019).

The primary objective of HRD interventions in municipalities is to enhance individual competence (knowledge, skills and attitudes) while also making the organisation more capable and effective (National Treasury 2022). This is achieved through the implementation of HRD programmes that are considered management tools with the aim of encouraging employees to develop the qualities necessary for organisational change (Cloete 2019; Elegbe 2010; Gilley & Gilley 2002; Hamad 2019). Various approaches to HRD exist (Cloete 2019; Luoma 1999). The open (need-driven) approach focuses on closing internal performance gaps through skills development and training interventions. Conversely, in the closed (opportunity-driven) approach, HRD supports the organisational strategy by emphasising workshops and teamwork to alter the culture and direction of the organisation. The capability approach prioritises the internal organisation of structures and processes aimed to develop superior organisational competencies that enhance responsiveness. In this context, HRD plays a strategic role in enhancing organisational performance.

Furthermore, an exploration of HRD approaches reveals the existence of two additional perspectives: activity-based and results-based HRD (Cloete 2019; Gilley & Gilley 2002). The activity-based approach can be characterised as 'training for training's sake' where there is minimal or no evidence linking such training to improved organisational performance. This approach is often taken in organisations, including municipalities, that prioritise compliance and adhere to a rigid mindset and culture. It has been observed that the HRD system in local government primarily focuses on addressing superficial activities rather than delving into the underlying causes of poor organisational performance (National Treasury 2022). The results-based approach, meanwhile, is built on the premise that results need to be improved at the operational level. In this approach, HRD professionals work collaboratively with management at all levels of the organisation. Human resource development department programmes help line managers to implement and manage change so as to improve organisational performance and ensure it is integrated into the organisation and culture. The results-based approach to HRD is the responsibility of every line manager with the support of the human resources department. This approach entails that HRD cannot be confined to a human resources department but should rather be integrated into the organisation to become the cornerstone of development.

Based on the insights from Gilley and Gilley (2002), it can be concluded that the activity-based phase of 'training for training's sake' is no longer valued. Instead, the focus has shifted towards embracing results-based HRD. In this approach to HRD, initiatives and interventions are employed to achieve organisational outcomes, including performance improvement and the cultivation of an enhanced organisational culture (Cloete 2019; Gilley & Gilley 2002).

The integrated management framework for human resource development

Houston and Kanyane (2022) maintain that the implementation of skills development plans and workplace transformation is a major problem for municipalities. Municipal departments suffer from a lack of skill implementation guidelines, and

skill development is practiced in silos, which has a negative impact on the ability of the municipality to function optimally. In order to reverse this downward pattern, the integrated management framework for HRD, an HRD implementation framework, has been advanced by Cloete (2016).

The integrated management framework for HRD refers to the collaborative efforts by an array of identified stakeholders to give effect to a change in organisational culture. The integrated management framework for HRD is about the cocreation of policies, the organisation of the HRD function that is delegated to line departments (managers), innovative HRD practices that involve the application of formal and informal options to learning, a consultative approach involving employees to determine their own development aligned with the municipal needs (internal democracy) and support from stakeholders that is premised on the sharing of resources. The value of the integrated management framework for HRD model lies in the ability to bridge HRD policies and practice. The benefit of the approach provides the employer (municipal council) with a deliberate long-term vision in support of the strategic direction of the municipality (the IDP), aligned to current and future competency needs. The functional organisation of HRD is structured within directorates, facilitating improved communication among the various actors within the organisation. The HRD practice is approached multidimensionally. The approach allows for the participation of employees in their own development (internal democracy), which results in a more motivated workforce and improved morale. Stakeholder support in HRD is perceived to be valuable at both internal and external levels. Stakeholders demonstrate their commitment to continuous improvement by providing support to the HRD initiatives of the core organisational actors.

External stakeholders acknowledge the inherent value that each stakeholder brings through their unique knowledge and experience. The shared service model is premised on the concept of consolidating HRD services, which is advantageous to all organisational actors (Cloete 2016). The integrated management framework for HRD offers a collaborative approach, based on a behavioural, structural and process change strategy for the management of HRD. These learned competencies and outcomes should be defined and, if effectively implemented, will lead to renewed organisational competence to deliver cost-effective HRD programmes that are linked to performance management. However, both management and employees will have to realise that they have an active role to play in skill development. Municipal employees have skills development rights and aspirations that will only be fully realised when municipalities learn to manage HRD collaboratively as opposed to the outdated compliance-driven, centralised approach that is simply not working. This will result in a change in the overall management culture of HRD in South African municipalities.

Consequently, line managers (who are responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organisation) must take the lead in skills development at the departmental level. This necessitates a shift in line managers' behaviour (attitude) towards embracing facilitative roles that prioritise employee engagement and development. In essence, line managers are required to assume the dual role of HRD managers, in addition to their functional responsibilities (Böhmer & Schinnenburg 2023; Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie 2006; Haseeb et al. 2019; Mintzberg 2013; Obeng et al. 2021; Ulrich 1997; Ulrich et al. 2007), as advocated by the Municipal Staff Regulations discussed earlier. However, the extent to which line managers can effectively fulfil this developmental role depends greatly on their competence level, for which they require support from the human resources department. The successful implementation of HRD initiatives, therefore, relies heavily on the capabilities and reliability of line managers. Notably, when line managers receive substantial developmental support such as coaching and mentoring, it leads to increased employee commitment to the organisation and improved performance (Beattie 2004; Kinnie & Swart 2020; Purcell et al. 2009; Wallo et al. 2021).

Methodology

Research design and method

The objective of research involves an attempt by the researcher to solve empirical problems in a systematic manner, with the primary objective of gaining a better understanding and insight in order to produce new knowledge. The research technique encompasses several factors, including the location (setting) of data, method of data collection, research procedure and method of data analysis (Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard 2014).

Research setting

The primary data sources were semi-structured interviews with municipal focus groups, individual officials and councillors, as well as structured questionnaires completed by targeted officials. Secondary sources included a comprehensive literature review that scrutinised the municipal HRD policies, municipal workplace skills plans and the municipal performance reports. The primary and secondary data were collected during site visits to a purposive sample of 24 South African municipalities, including metropolitan, district and local municipalities. The primary documents reviewed were the Learning Framework for Local Government (2012) and the LGSETA Skills Development Handbook (2015). These documents provided a comprehensive overview of the overall purpose of municipal HRD or skills development, the governance framework (specific roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms of stakeholders) and the role they play in implementation that leads to good HRD facilitation in municipalities.

Data collection and method

A mixed-methods approach was preferred for the study because it allowed for the collection of quantitative data (questionnaire) and qualitative data (participants had an opportunity to elaborate on their responses) (Brynard et al.

2014). The research instruments (design) were informed by the integrated management framework for HRD (LGSETA 2017). The survey data were first completed manually, then the information was transferred to Excel spreadsheets and was then transferred to and analysed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

In total, 696 municipal officials completed the questionnaire. Of the population sample, 239 were line managers, 66 were HRD professionals and 357 were employees. The evaluation component discussed here assessed the professional profiles and functional competencies of SDFs. A competence profile of the 34 municipal SDFs included in the national survey was followed by a diagnostic evaluation. The assessment was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the SDFs in relation to their respective legislative roles and responsibilities. It was informed by a self-assessment exercise (evaluation of functional proficiency) and a peer assessment (evaluation by other municipal stakeholders).

Data analysis and procedure

The statements were developed to test various dimensions; respondents had to indicate their response to each statement on a three-point Likert scale where 1 = agree, 2 = don't know/ not sure and 3 = disagree. The study considered only 'agree' as a positive experience and reported on this. In interpreting the data, a score below 65% was considered indicative of not functioning optimally, 65% – 80% was interpreted as satisfactory and a score of 81% and above was considered optimal functionality. The researcher used 65% as an arbitrary benchmark used before in previous research. The quantitative research findings measured six HRD dimensions that affect the HRD environment within a municipality, as advocated in the integrated management framework for human resource development discussed earlier in the text. These dimensions are HRD ethical values, policy, practice, organisation, internal democracy and stakeholder support.

The collected data were analysed and subsequently presented for three distinct respondent groups, namely: (1) line managers or supervisors (those who oversee staff members), (2) HRD or SDF specialists (employed within the human resources department) and (3) employees (employees who do not directly have officials under their supervision). The underlying assumption is that municipal actors (HRD professionals, line managers and employees) may experience the presence or absence of HRD in varied ways, thus yielding distinct perspectives from each group (municipal actors). The analysis and findings of the SDFs are presented in the next section.

Human resource development ethical values

In this section, the questionnaire focussed on two aspects, namely: (1) the acknowledgement of HRD values that support skills development in the municipality and (2) the application of HRD values that support skills development. Research participants were presented with four statements to indicate their perception of the acknowledgement of

HRD values – whether the municipality has identified HRD values, whether it actively supports HRD, whether HRD is a priority in the municipality and whether it is committed to service excellence. The HRD specialists (62%) and employees (55%) could not confirm the presence of such HRD values. The municipal actors were in agreement that the municipality does not actively support HRD and that HRD is not a priority in the municipality. For the statement on service excellence, only line managers confirmed the municipality's commitment to service excellence (76%).

In terms of the application of the HRD values, four statements were presented to the research participants: the municipality practices HRD values; the municipality acts with integrity in HRD; managers, employees and the HRD department collaborate to achieve HRD goals; and the municipal actors feel positive and part of the HRD processes (see Figure 1). The municipal actors agreed that the municipalities do not practice HRD values and do not act with integrity on HRD. Managers, employees and HRD professionals do not collaborate effectively to achieve HRD goals and do not feel positive and a part of the HRD processes. A strong perception existed among participants that the development of employees is not a priority for the municipality, as HRD happens in a haphazard way, leaving the municipal actors ill-informed. Municipalities may voice commitment to HRD but sometimes in practice they are not seen to be practicing the well-articulated values. From the research findings about HRD ethical values, it is concluded that municipalities are not actively supporting HRD efforts as envisaged in the Municipal Staff Regulations (CoGTA 2022) and the integrated management framework for HRD (Cloete 2016).

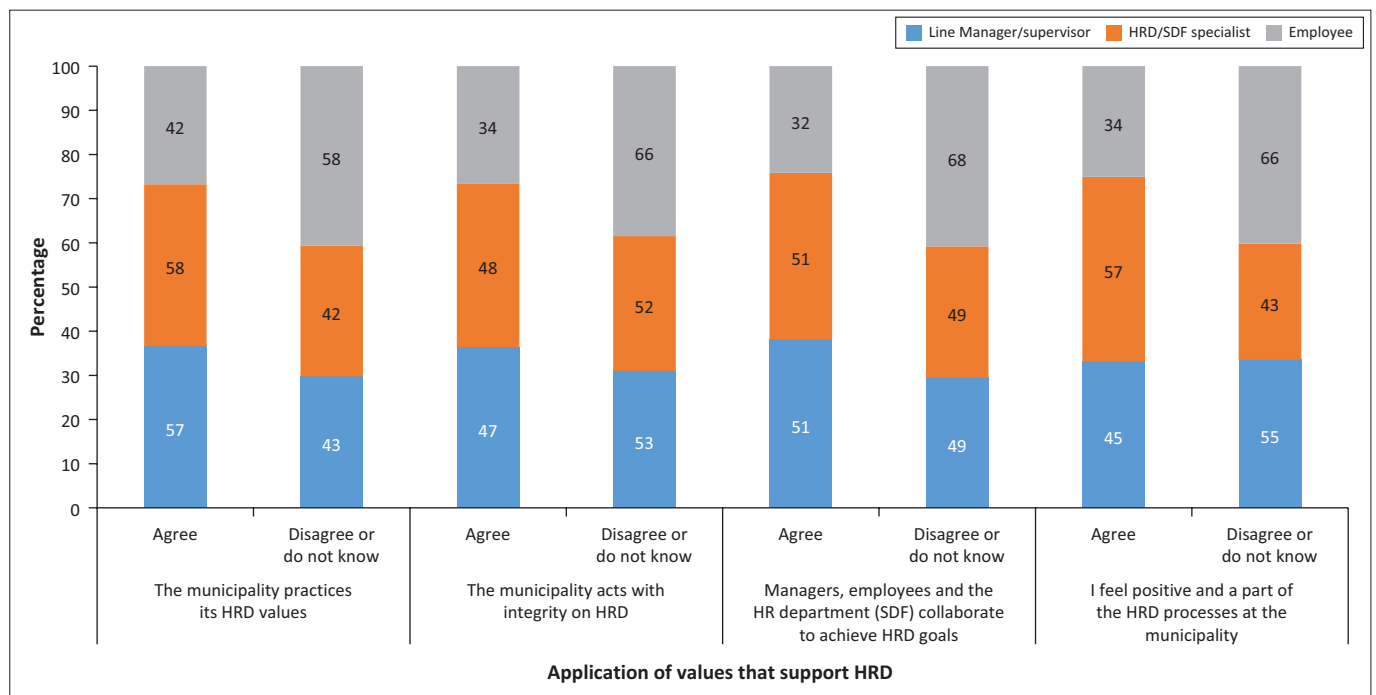## Human resource development policy

Regarding the HRD policy, the questionnaire focussed on two key performance aspects, namely knowledge of the skills development policy and specific competency and accountability aspects of the policy. For this section, the HRD practitioners (80%) and line department managers (74%) confirmed the presence of a policy and plan, but the employees indicated the lowest awareness of such a policy (60%). This points to an institutional problem in how such skills development policies are developed, communicated and implemented. Research participants were presented with four statements to indicate their perception of the aspects included in the HRD policy, namely that the policy establishes roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and that it links the strategic objectives of the IDP and HRD, skills development and employment equity, and skills development and performance management.

The municipal actors indicated that the policy establishes the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders for performance management. Line managers and HRD specialists were in agreement that the HRD policy links the strategic objectives of the IDP; however, the HRD specialists and employees

highlighted that the link between skills development and employment equity is a problem. The municipal actors were in agreement that the policy does not link skills development and performance management (see Figure 2).

It is concluded that poor awareness and a lack of understanding of the municipal skills development policies by the employees are prevalent. There is a failure to link the municipal strategy (IDP) and work skills planning (HRD). It was only the HRD staff who could see the link between strategy and HRD. In general, municipal actors failed to see the causal link between skills development, the IDP,

employment equity and performance management. The policies fail to address the assessment process of employees, and the formal and informal skills development options are not presented to employees. In instances where municipalities had policies in place, the prevalent perception was that the policies do not benefit all employees of the municipality but only certain categories of employees, leading to the perception of a growing 'learning elite' in municipalities. These research findings confirm those of Houston and Kanyane (2022), who showed that poor implementation and an uncoordinated approach to HRD are crippling effective implementation.

HRD, Human resource development; SDF, skills development facilitator.

FIGURE 1: Application of values that support human resource development (skills development).
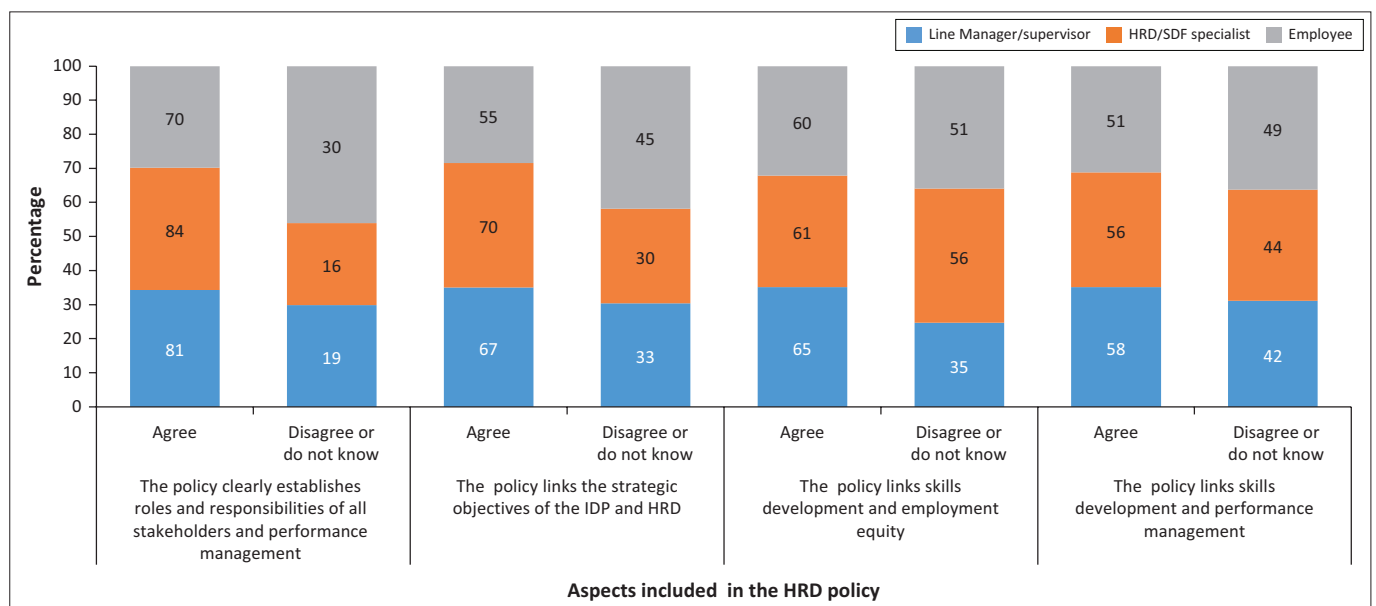
IDP, Integrated Development Plan; HRD, Human resource development; SDF, skills development facilitator.

FIGURE 2: Aspects included in human resource development (skills development) policy.

Municipal human resource development practices

This section of the questionnaire considered the participants' perceptions of how skills development is practised in local government and presented them with six statements. All respondents fell short of achieving a positive response at the designated benchmark of 65%. The skills audits of employees, which should form the basis of skills development interventions, and the needs analyses are poorly conducted, with a disjuncture between policy and practice. In many instances, municipalities have failed to align skills development interventions with the outcomes of skills audits they conducted. In many cases, after HRD interventions, employees are not provided with opportunities to practise their new competencies or learned behaviour. In this way, training without a clear outcome or purpose (often referred to as 'training for the sake of training') can become ineffective and wasteful, as pointed out by the National Treasury (2022) that shows that human resource interventions address superficial activities instead of addressing the root causes of organisational performance.

As pointed out earlier, the strategic document of the municipality, the IDP, does not feed into the workplace skills plan and vice versa. Municipalities continue to treat these two processes as separate. It is concluded that many municipalities lack a cohesive and coherent pre-determined procedure for skills development practices, leading to a significant gap in establishing standardised approaches. From these responses (see Figure 3), it is evident that skill development is not practised effectively in the selected municipalities.
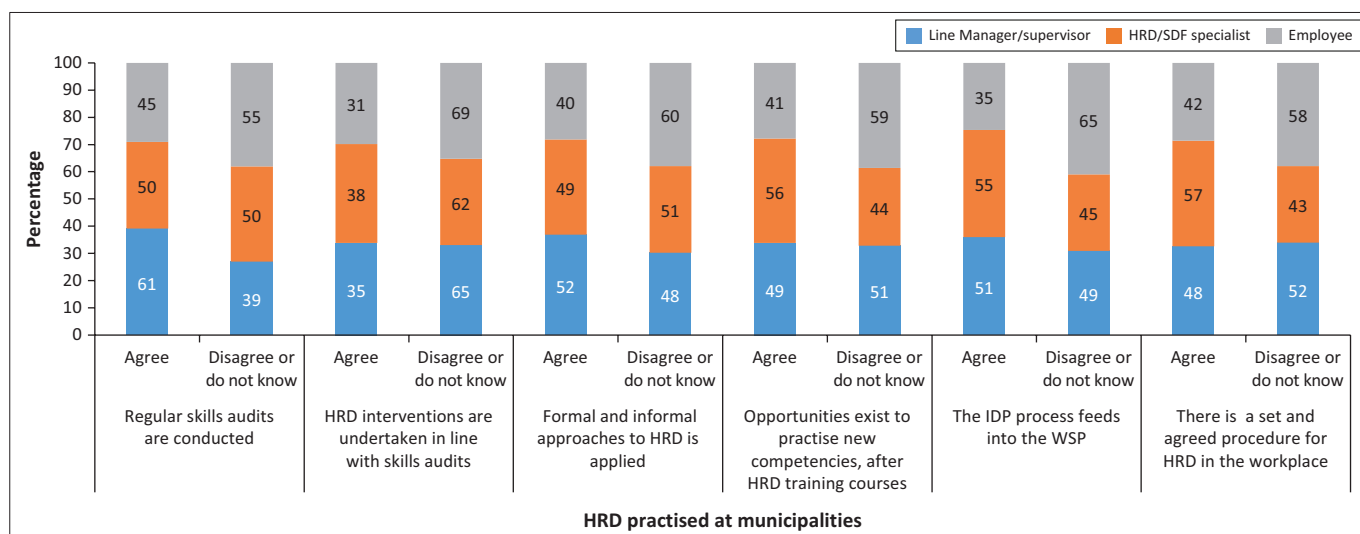
Human resource development organisation

This section describes the extent to which the municipal organisational structure supports effective skills development. Respondents were asked to respond to five statements. The majority of respondents from all three groups agreed that skills development is the shared responsibility of the HRD, line managers and employees (see Figure 4). However, the skills development plans for departments are absent, which leads to the skills development interventions not being effectively monitored in the respective departments by the respective accountable line manager. Notwithstanding the findings of this study, line managers are reluctant to assume their HRD responsibilities, preferring the HRD to implement and coordinate HRD. The HRD accountability for line managers is also very weak, and line managers are in general not sufficiently held accountable for the skills development functions of their jobs. This stands in contrast to the objectives of the Municipal Staff Regulations, which place the manager at the centre of HRD from a strategic and operational point of view. The finding further contradicts the results-based approach in the literature, according to which HRD should be the functional responsibility of every line manager with the support of the HRD.

Internal democracy

In order to assess the relationship between internal democracy and HRD, respondents were presented with nine statements. These statements were designed to gauge three key aspects pertaining to internal democracy and their impact on skills development. These aspects are: (1) the functioning of the consultative committee (the consultative committee provides input on all matters of HRD, the committee is actively involved in the promotion and awareness of skills development, the input of the committee is considered and employees receive regular feedback), (2) the involvement of different stakeholders in the work skills plan development process (managers, employees and trade unions are actively involved in the drafting of the work skills plan) and (3) whether officials in general have personal development plans or their attitude towards these plans (municipal actors have a personal development plan and are champions of their own development).

HRD, Human resource development; SDF, skills development facilitator; IDP, Integrated Development Plan; WSP, work skills plan.

FIGURE 3: How human resource development (skills development) is practised at municipalities.

The findings from the responses revealed a low positive response rate, with the majority of respondents indicating that the consultative committees did not perform their assigned tasks. The research findings further highlighted that managers, employees and trade unions were not actively engaged in the development of the work skills plan.

The research participants indicated that they do not have personal development plans, but agreed that they are the champions of their own development. It is concluded that the consultative committees (that are legislatively required to be constituted) are underperforming and hence not providing the strategic HRD input as envisaged in legislation. The committee members are not actively advocating skills development in the workplace either, as there is a lack of conceptual understanding of the skills development processes or simply a lack of confidence. The negative finding stands in contrast to the literature, specifically the Constitution (RSA 1996) and the objectives of the *Skills Development Act* (RSA 1997), which envisage the workplace as an active site of learning and development (see Figure 5).

Stakeholder support

This section of the questionnaire considered the effectiveness of key stakeholders' support for skills development. These stakeholders were senior management, organised labour, the Local Government SETA and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). The responses indicate that senior management does not sufficiently support and implement skills development in municipalities. Positive responses to all presented statements were significantly below the benchmark of 65%, which further suggests a lack of proactive involvement and commitment from senior management in fostering and encouraging successful human resource initiatives.

There was consensus among stakeholders that municipal trade unions are not sufficiently involved in HRD processes and that the LGSETA and SALGA are not sufficiently supporting HRD processes. The latter two bodies are often accused of working in silos with duplicate structures in support of HRD. The research findings contradict the literature in that internal municipal stakeholders are not working effectively with the appointed SDF to realise maximum HRD objectives as envisaged in legislation (see Figure 6).

The competence levels of SDFs are considered next as they play a critical role in the effective implementation of HRD in municipalities.

Competence of skills development facilitators

As illustrated earlier in the text, SDFs must have the functional competence to perform this role. The study evaluated the competence profiles and work experience of the SDFs. As part of the assessment of the SDF job competence, participants were requested to disclose their highest educational qualifications and whether they had completed an accredited SDF course. The responses to these questions revealed that slightly over half (56%) of SDF officials had completed a relevant diploma or degree.

To evaluate the relevant work experience of SDFs, participants were requested to indicate the duration of their employment in municipal skills development facilitation and the number of work skills plans they had contributed to compiling. A considerable percentage (76%) of respondents are experienced practitioners in the municipal skills development field with more than 5 years of practical experience. A small percentage of SDFs (3%) have been involved in this field for less than 1 year.
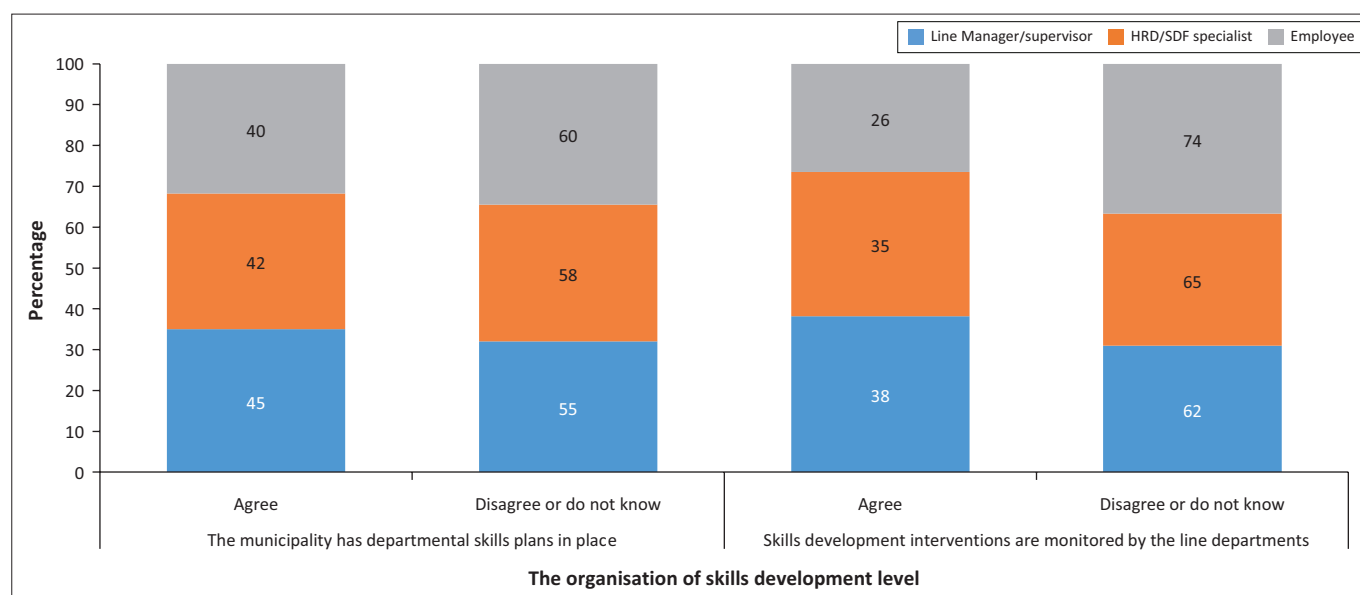
HRD, Human resource development; SDF, skills development facilitator.
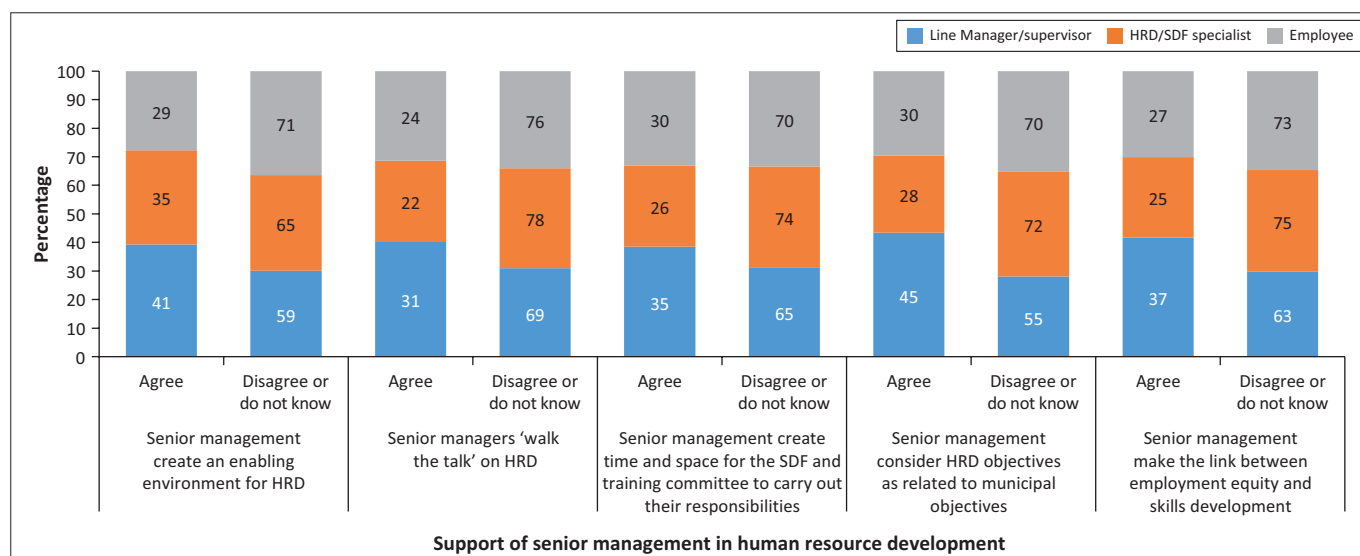
FIGURE 4: The organisation of skills development (human resource development) at organisational level.
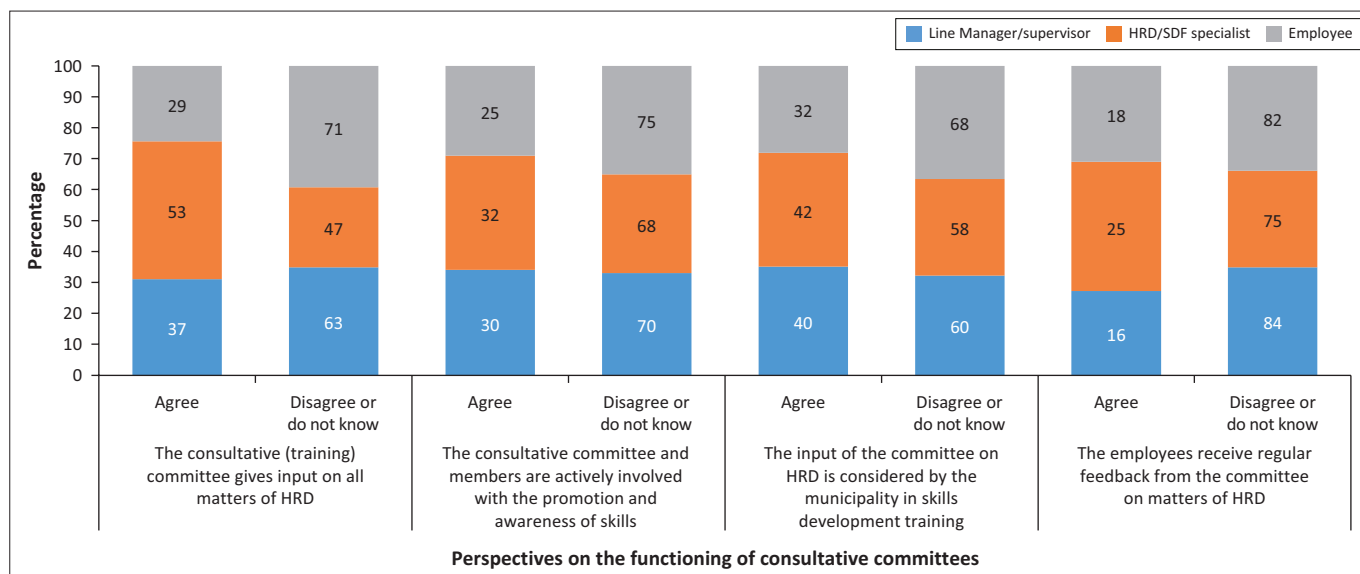
HRD, Human resource development; SDF, skills development facilitator.

FIGURE 5: Perspectives on the functioning of consultative committees.

SDF, skills development facilitator; HRD, Human resource development.

FIGURE 6: Support of senior management in human resource development (skills development).

The research findings revealed that 68% of SDFs have been involved in the development of five or more work skills plans. In addition, 29% of the surveyed SDFs have contributed to the compilation of fewer than five work skill plans. This indicates that a significant portion of SDFs have gained sufficient experience through participating in multiple work skills plan development processes.

In terms of specific skills, SDFs were rated highly in communication and computer skills, with facilitative skill levels rated as outstanding or effective by 71% of line department managers including supervisors, and 68% of employees. However, in other skills such as change management, stakeholder relationship management and project management, fewer than 65% of respondents (managers and employees) rated the skill levels of their SDF as outstanding or effective. The aforementioned skills

are considered critical for the effective execution of SDF duties.

In the assessment of the knowledge of the SDF on matters such as strategic policy and key municipal legislation, the SDFs were first requested to self-evaluate, and were then evaluated by managers, employees and HRD specialists in their respective municipalities. The aspects considered for evaluation included the LGSETA Skills Development Handbook, LGSETA Sector Skills Plan, the IDP of the municipality, applicable legislation and employment equity policy requirements. The findings indicated that apart from the knowledge of the LGSETA Skills Development Handbook, which received a rating of 'not effective' by 50% of employees, the other aspects received positive ratings from both employees and line managers, albeit mostly below the benchmark. More specifically, when rating the knowledge

of the SDFs on the LGSETA skills development handbook, only 56% of line managers regarded the SDF as functionally knowledgeable. The same was true for the LGSETA Sector Skills Plan, where only 58% of line managers and 53% of municipal employees indicated that their SDFs displayed functional knowledge. In contrast, line managers provided a positive rating for the SDFs on the remaining aspects – including the IDP, Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan, applicable skills development and employment equity legislation – rating the knowledge of the SDFs as effective at a level surpassing the 65% benchmark.

In evaluating the functional competencies of SDFs on institutional processes related to municipal skills development needs, specific knowledge areas were considered, including budget principles and procedures, needs analysis procedures, organisational operations, accreditation processes and organisational behaviour. As mentioned earlier, SDFs provided highly positive self-assessment ratings. However, the HRD practitioners and line managers rated SDF competence below the 65% benchmark in terms of their ability to act innovatively. Employees in general also rated SDF competencies below the benchmark in various areas, including acting in an ethical credible manner (64%), quality orientation (63%), results orientation (58%) and ability to act innovatively (64%). The majority of SDFs, who play a pivotal role in HRD, are qualified and experienced and rated themselves exceptionally highly in terms of their functional competence and facilitative skills. These self-ratings stand in stark contrast to how SDFs are experienced and perceived by their peers, however. In summary, the research findings on SDFs indicate a significant disconnect between the self-rated competence of SDFs and the perceptions of their peers, particularly line managers and employees outside the HRD practitioner circle.

Conclusion and recommendations

The current legislated HRD framework is more than 20 years old and although it can be considered relatively young, there are growing concerns that effective management of HRD may derail the quest to achieve a capable state. The absence of effective HRD processes creates a complacent workforce instead of a competent workforce, which paralyses the entire local governance system and ultimately gives rise to distrust from not only employees but also citizens (Houston & Kanyane 2022; Ngulube & Ngoepe 2013).

The research findings indicate that HRD is not managed well in South African municipalities. The findings point to a crisis in how HRD is managed, one which cannot be solely blamed on the SDFs because they were found to be functionally competent. Other factors influence the HRD performance of municipalities, as pointed out in the poor scores in the areas of HRD ethics, organisation, practice, internal democracy and stakeholders.

Based on the findings of the survey, eight specific implementation recommendations are advanced with the goal to improve HRD praxis and capability in municipalities:

- A set of ethical values must underpin the HRD plan of the municipality. The ethical values should include behavioural concepts such as transparency and accountability frameworks (code of conduct) that in turn lead to trust. This would lay the foundation for the ethical practice of HRD in municipalities (as highlighted in the integrated management framework for HRD), which would lead to enhanced state capacity (as pointed out earlier in the text).
- The HRD policy must unambiguously identify the coalition of municipal stakeholders who are responsible for the development, implementation and oversight of HRD policy in the municipality. At the centre of the coalition of municipal stakeholders should be the core organisational actors (human resources department, line managers, employees and labour) who are the focus of skills development and considered the core implementers of HRD. This will lead to more capable institutions and ultimately to a capable state, as envisaged in the 2030 National Development Plan, which has as a goal institutional coherence and standardisation through all departments (Barbier & Tengeh 2022).
- Municipalities must emphasise and implement formal (accredited and non-accredited training) and informal (coaching, mentoring, seminars) HRD programmes to enable employees to gain competencies that the organisation has identified as being important for its success and sustainability, as highlighted in the Municipal Staff Regulations and the integrated management framework for HRD described earlier in the text.
- Line managers must be supported by their senior managers and the HRD department to perform their specific HRD roles, as envisaged in the Municipal Staff Regulations explained earlier in the text. This includes line managers' analytical role (making evidence-based decisions), their supportive role (leading and managing in HRD roles) and their development role (coaching and mentoring).
- The curriculum of SDFs needs to be redesigned to include the strategic role performed by SDFs as change management facilitators, as envisaged in the legislation. This should be performed in order for them to perform their HRD tasks more effectively, as advocated by Van Der Waldt et al. (2018) and Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021).
- This consultative committee gives expression to workplace democracy. Its members must therefore be democratically elected and serve a minimum term of 3 years and a maximum of 5 years in order to ensure continuity. The consultative committee should ensure that the organisational actors are kept up to date through regular HRD communication on a variety of multimedia platforms. This will ensure openness and transparency, which will lead to good institutional HRD governance, as expounded on in the integrated management framework for HRD.
- Municipalities must be assisted to implement HRD through the use of an evidence-based platform (dashboard) with which they can more effectively analyse the

implementation and impact of HRD interventions. This will prevent the silo approach to HRD pointed out by Houston and Kanyane (2022).

- Future research should be focussed specifically on the oversight role that elected officials (municipal councillors) play in HRD in South African municipalities.

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