



Ubuntu Ethic and SCM in Public Organisations: Towards an African Perspective to Improve SCM Practices in South African Local Municipalities

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Abstract: The study is embedded in the discourse on Supply Chain Management (SCM) and municipal governance in South Africa. There is a growing consensus that SCM is increasingly becoming a crucial component within local government operations. However, notwithstanding some positive endeavours made by local government authorities to enhance the efficiency of the SCM unit, there are evident obstacles that persist. Some of the problems alluded to in extant literature include noncompliance with existing SCM legislation, poor ethics, moral bankruptcy and corruption that hamper SCM practices and the realisation of positive organisational performance at South African local municipalities. Against this backdrop, this qualitative desktop study utilises secondary data to explore an ethical framework that could serve as a basis for renewed ethical behaviours in SCM operations of local Municipalities in South Africa. The study suggests foraging within the realm of African ethics and proposes the Ubuntu ethos as a framework for improving SCM practices in South African public organisations. Conclusions further suggest that adopting and mainstreaming the Ubuntu ethical framework will go a long way to addressing some of the moral issues that hamper SCM practices and performance in South African municipalities.

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1. Introduction

The current study is embedded in the discourse on Supply Chain Management (SCM) and South African municipal governance. Mokotedi (2016) reports that there is increasing agreement that SCM is becoming an increasingly important part of local government operations. The SCM concept is not novel within the South African context. SCM practices and issues have been explored in different areas of the South African socio-economic context. Centrally, available studies have noted some of the challenges faced by different sectors of South African society and have indeed pointed out several of the peculiarities in SCM practices in the country (Naude & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2011). This study seeks to contribute to this increasing number of studies which focus on SCM practices in South Africa but will specifically look at SCM in local government administration.

Notably, the SCM unit's importance has been essential to local municipalities' attaining operational success. Still, there are clear challenges that remain in spite of the efforts made by local government officials to improve the effectiveness of the SCM unit. Extant literature (Ugaz, 2015; Pring, 2015; Mantzaris, 2014; Ambe, 2016) has alluded to some of the problems, including noncompliance with existing SCM legislation, poor ethics, moral bankruptcy and corruption that hamper SCM practices and the realisation of positive organisational performance at South African local municipalities. Existing solutions to these problems that hamper local government performance in South Africa have taken the route of punitive measures based on prescriptions of South African laws, which are largely influenced by colonial/western sources (Bachmann & Frost, 2012; Aiyedun & Odor, 2016). It is thus pertinent to explore an ethical framework that could serve as a basis for renewed ethical behaviours in SCM operations of local Municipalities in South Africa.

Consequently, the current study particularly seeks to explore an ethical framework that could assist in responding positively to the unethical issues that bedevil SCM processes and constitute hurdles to the successful implementation of SCM towards positive organisational performance. The study proposes an African ethical perspective towards grounding and improving SCM processes to realise true organisational performance. The African Ubuntu ethical concept is relevant towards achieving strong and ethical SCM practices which will result in positive

organisational performance. The suggested framework considers its status as an African ethical idea that holds significance in Southern Africa as a whole, with particular prominence in South Africa. It is envisaged that an ethical perspective rooted in the cultural beliefs and philosophy of the African people could assist in improving SCM processes towards a positive organisational performance at the Municipal Governance level in South Africa.

2. Literature Perspectives

2.1. Municipal Governance and Service Delivery

Rodrigues, Tavares and Araújo (2014) noted that considering their proximity to the people and their competence, local governments in Portugal have gained importance as service providers in the past two decades. Their useful tasks have been meaningfully extended to cover different aspects of societal life, including the supply of water, development, collection of waste, emergency management, health care, and education. In response to the growing demands placed upon them, local governments in Portugal have transformed from being broad multi-purpose institutions to evolving into complex networks that establish and maintain ties with various public and commercial sectors. This has meant that service delivery to the people by local governments can be carried out using internal administrative mechanisms, but also through coordinated partnerships with other public and private sectors, including non-profit organisations. Using the transaction cost framework in the analysis of service delivery by local governments in Portugal, according to Rodrigues, Tavares, and Araújo (2014), public service delivery is influenced significantly by service features and the local political context, which are crucial factors in local authorities' decision-making process when selecting among three governance models.

According to Jones, Cummings and Nixon (2014), enhancing service provision for individuals residing in urban areas who are economically disadvantaged is a crucial objective in developing countries and has become a matter of urgency. The study assessed service delivery among the growing urban poor who have migrated to cities in search of a better life. Conclusions emphasised the centrality of local governments and other government agencies in managing and realising service provision. Disjointed decentralisation frequently presents challenges for local governments as the fragmentation, overlap, or ambiguity of responsibilities among government levels can impede policy coherence and result in inadequate government regulation and monitoring of service delivery (Jones, Cummings & Nixon, 2014, p. 34). There

has been a suggestion that the urban poor might benefit from a certain degree of autonomy granted to local municipalities since it would contribute to improved governance and service provision.

According to Ndevu and Muller (2018, p. 181), an examination of the legislative and policy framework pertaining to local government in South Africa has facilitated a more comprehensive comprehension of the legal context in which local government functions. This study is pertinent to the present investigation as it examined a conceptual framework aimed at enhancing the delivery of services by South African local governments. The objective was to evaluate the tools that could assist in the evaluation of performance in local municipalities' service delivery in the country. Given the proximity of local governments to the populace and their consequent indispensability, it is imperative to consistently evaluate methods for enhancing their capacity to provide efficient services to the public. The findings propose the adoption of a value-based integrated conceptual framework to enhance service delivery, within which a performance assessment model might be incorporated.

Sibanda (2014) focused on the conceptual analysis of service quality and customer proxy measures to monitor service quality in the public sector. This research is connected to the work of Ndevu and Muller (2018). It is worth mentioning that South African local government has achieved autonomy, so it ceases to operate under the authority of both the provincial and the national governments, as outlined in the South African 1996 Constitution, section 152. This initiative aims to guarantee the sustainable provision of services to local communities. Nevertheless, the issue of inadequate or insufficient service delivery by local authorities has garnered considerable attention in recent years. Monitoring customer-oriented delivery of services at South African local governments had significant importance during that time. The findings indicate that for local government to enhance its effectiveness with regard to accountability, openness, and responsiveness, it is imperative to have the active participation and trust of all stakeholders involved in local government (Sibanda, 2014, p. 22). Additionally, it has been proposed that the monitoring of performance goals, principles, and outcomes has the potential to improve the delivery of excellent services to individuals.

For Mthembu (2012), the primary objective was to evaluate the impact of leadership on the implementation of service delivery initiatives within the Buffalo City Municipality. The local governments in South Africa have been recognised as the institutional framework tasked with ensuring the provision of services to the population. The local government is given this task considering that it is the closest

level of governance to the people in local communities. The task of local governments has been broadly sustained by both the National and provincial governments through numerous legislations, including the 1997 White Paper on the transformation of public service. This piece of legislation buttressed the role of political and administrative leadership in realising service delivery mandates. It is indicated that there is a need for leadership in the chosen context of the study to be proactive in leading service delivery initiatives. This can be realised by establishing avenues to enhance the public participation process at the local government level. Similarly, Nkomo (2017) explored people's perceptions of the extent to which local governments have carried out their constitutional mandate of service delivery to the people. The study finds, among other points, that more than half of South Africans are of the view that local governments performed relatively badly in providing basic amenities and in providing other aspects of services. It was also found that some South Africans are not happy with the way local governments are run. The study's central finding posits that it is imperative for all stakeholders involved in local governance in South Africa to consistently bear in mind the constitutional requirement for local municipalities to uphold accountability, sustainably deliver services, foster socioeconomic growth, create a safe and healthy environment and foster community involvement.

Furthermore, Mbecke (2014) emphasised that the role of local municipalities as the primary agents of service delivery is undeniable. The primary emphasis was placed on the corporate governance of municipalities in South Africa to enhance service delivery in a manner that is both efficient and effective. The presence of ongoing protests concerning service delivery failures across the nation serves as evidence supporting the assertion that the "Batho Pele" principles, which target effective governance and enhanced local government service delivery, had inherent weaknesses. A comprehensive evaluation was conducted on the corporate governance frameworks implemented in local governments in the United Kingdom and Australia. There has been a suggestion that the effective corporate governance systems observed in these nations require the establishment of a distinct corporate municipal governance system to effectively solve service delivery concerns within local governments in South Africa. To effectively address the distinct characteristics of South African local governments, it is imperative to consider implementing legislative modifications and corporate governance principles.

It has been established in the literature that globally and in South Africa, the local municipality is an important level of government, established to ensure that service

delivery reaches people in local communities. Local municipalities are constitutionally mandated to guarantee that government and governance get to the grassroots. An important aspect of realising this is seen in the ability of local municipalities to work towards the delivery of services. Nonetheless, there exist certain issues which have to do with the performance of local governments, thus hampering the effort of this government organisation in realising efficient service delivery to the people. The current study will seek to build on these existing studies and specifically assess issues which have to do with the performance of the selected municipalities. Notably, Nkomo's (2017) conclusions become necessary in any assessment of the performance of local municipalities as the current study seeks to do. As already established, SCM processes have a lot to offer in assisting local municipalities to perform better. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the obstacles encountered by local municipalities while implementing SCM processes to enhance service delivery.

2.2. SCM in Public Sector Organisations

The public sector differs from the private sector, as the latter is primarily driven by profit maximisation, while the former places greater emphasis on service delivery. The public sector primarily refers to the governmental domain encompassing various entities, enterprises, and agencies responsible for administering and providing public programs, products, and services within their designated jurisdiction. For Dube and Danescu (2001), there may exist governmental agencies or companies that prioritise profit, leading to the current definition of publicly supported institutions as encompassing such entities within their activities. The public sector can function at various levels, including worldwide, national, regional, and local. The public sector assumes the responsibility of ensuring the maintenance and accessibility of various forms of infrastructure, encompassing roadways, educational institutions such as schools and universities, commercial establishments like malls, and residential accommodations. Additionally, it assumes responsibility for healthcare provision, fosters entrepreneurial endeavours, generates employment prospects, and ensures a secure milieu. Numerous governmental functions are carried out by several public entities. It is important to highlight that the effectiveness of this approach is contingent upon the implementation of a well-established SCM system. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the present status of public sector SCM systems to comprehend the fundamental significance of SCM within public companies.

As previously said, it is imperative for all national, provincial and local government institutions to adhere to SC norms or ethics in their operational procedures, following the South African constitution (Fuzile, 2015). An illustration of this can be found in Section 127 of the 1996 South African Constitution, which pertains to the fundamental principles and regulations governing the acquisition of products and services. Section 35 of the Constitution pertains to the mandated constitutional ideals that must be adhered to when providing services to communities. The establishment of effective and transparent administrative procedures and rules, as stipulated in section 33, is crucial to ensure compliance with legal requirements (Fuzile, 2015, p. 10-13). It is worth noting that the field of SCM in municipalities has been subject to the detrimental influence of fraudulent activities and corrupt practices over time. In addition to the adoption of SCM laws and regulations, there exist municipalities that demonstrate improvement in their operations, while others experience challenges and setbacks in the execution of their supply chain strategies. From 2001 to 2013, a mere five to nine per cent of municipalities were found to have obtained a clean audit. Various forms of media, such as magazines, newspapers, and radios, as well as individuals in society, have served as platforms express discontent with the standard of the services supplied by the public sector (Amber, 2016, p. 20). The individuals tasked with implementing SCM inside government institutions in the public sector exhibit varying levels of familiarity with the system, hence impeding the efficient provision of public services. The implementation of government rules inside the supply chain presents a significant difficulty, as many authorities lack a comprehensive understanding of these laws and regulations (Fuzile, 2015).

Some public sector institutions may experience resource limitations that hinder the complete implementation of SCM in their operations. There exists a deficiency in the availability of qualified leaders in the industry who possess the necessary expertise to effectively inspire and encourage personnel in the public sector service with regard to SCM. According to Fuzile (2015, p. 4), resources are deficient for those who possess inadequate skills, and they need access to desktops, spreadsheets, databases, internet access, as well as information so as to effectively conduct research and execute SCM strategies in their operational contexts. The policies implemented by municipalities and other government entities pertaining to procurement mostly centre around the decision-making process associated with the purchase of goods or services. The procurement strategy within the SCM framework centres around the strategic procedure for making decisions involved in purchasing, starting from the pre-tendering phase and extending to the final acquisition.

Additionally, an assessment is conducted to see if any instances of inefficient or unproductive expenditure occurred (Fuzile, 2015, p. 5). The inadequate provision of services in the public sector can be attributed to the improper implementation of SCM. The lack of effective supplier connections within the public sector results in inflated prices and susceptibility to collusive practices by enterprises in the provision of products and services to government departments (Fuzile, 2015).

The discord between workers and political officeholders is a significant obstacle to the fulfilment of their respective duties and obligations, not adequately defined for government officers. The ambiguity surrounding roles and responsibilities within the public sector engenders corruption, hence significantly impeding the provision of services. One significant obstacle in the public sector is the limited availability of competent and qualified leaders. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that certain supply chain managers lack a comprehensive understanding of the rules and regulations that have been established (Fuzile, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, it is frequently observed that suppliers exhibit hesitancy in engaging with governmental entities, particularly when it comes to small enterprises. This reluctance can be attributed to the extensive documentation requirements associated with contracts, as well as the complex procedures and policies that must be adhered to. This subsequently presents a financial burden for small enterprises lacking the necessary resources and financial stability in specific aspects of their administrative operations.

In contrast, SCM includes the strategic coordination and control of obtaining, purchasing, transformation, and logistics operations. Collaboration and coordination are formed with suppliers, intermediaries, and customers. Effective operational coordination between several areas, such as logistics, marketing, procurement, manufacturing, and management of operations, is crucial (Amber, 2016).

2.3. Introduction to South Africa's SCM Practices

The field of SCM has been widely acknowledged for its crucial role in facilitating the effective execution of service delivery initiatives within governmental contexts (Sanders, 2012). There is a growing emphasis on the government's responsibility to provide value to both the people and clients (Sukati et al., 2012). The delivery of service programmes in South Africa is facilitated through State-Owned Entities (SOEs), which are responsible for the development of vital areas such as energy, transportation, communication, logistics, and production. The magnitude of financial investment associated with this obligation renders SOEs the most significant

purchaser within the economy. Based on some findings by 2020, the South African government is expected to invest an estimated R3.2 trillion in essential sectors such as water, transportation, electricity, housing, and different large-scale programs (Fourie, 2014). Since 1994, the democratic government in South Africa has significantly invested in the development of rules, regulations, and guidelines on SCM, which have undergone multiple changes. Mkhize (2004) notes that the government in 2004 implemented an integrated SCM model to resolve the issues and deficiencies that arose from the initial procurement rules and practices. The application of the unified SCM prototype extends to all departments and entities of government. Consequently, government departments are obligated to adhere to the integrated SCM system provided by government, along with the corresponding guidelines and protocols of government, when procuring projects that have to do with service delivery (National Treasury, 2015). These developments point to the reality that SCM practices in South Africa have come a long way since their introduction, and it becomes important to continuously assess SCM practices and performance of public organisations, especially at the municipal governance level, as this study intends to.

According to Makhitha (2015), SCM plays an essential role towards the achievement of corporate success, as the acquisition of products and services constitutes a significant portion of trade revenue. Also, a successfully managed SCM has the potential to create a competitive advantage and thus increase profit for corporate bodies. The study is embedded in the growing body of studies on SCM practices in South Africa, specifically exploring SCM practices of small businesses in the country. The study assessed SCM practices and challenges in Gauteng's Craft Industry. Findings in the study suggested that craft producers used different SCM methods towards attracting customers. The study also identified certain challenges to the SCM practices of craft producers, which include, most importantly, a lack of proper transportation logistics. The study conducted by Niehaus (2016) contributes to the adds to the burgeoning body of literature on SCM in the South African context. Nevertheless, the author conducts a focused analysis of this issue by employing the framework of environmental sustainability. This study aimed to examine the current supply chain practices implemented by organisations in South Africa, to determine their potential contribution to environmental sustainability. It has been noted that to achieve sustainable commercial operations, businesses must efficiently utilise the tools and resources available to them. The tools included in this category comprise corporate governance frameworks and the incorporation of sustainability and

corporate social responsibility initiatives (Niehaus, 2016). The attainment of these objectives may be enhanced by the utilisation of suitable SCM strategies that are explicitly tailored to foster environmental sustainability. The outcomes of the study suggest that South African firms should place greater attention on enhancing supply chain sustainability.

Masete and Mafini (2018) explored the internal obstacles to SCM implementation at South African Universities. Considering the increasing demand for university studies, there is a need to put measures in place to realise a proper university education. SCM was identified as one of the practices which could assist universities to improve their operations towards meeting the demand for tertiary education in the country. However, despite the emphasis placed on SCM by the government, research indicated that few public universities have embraced SCM. The conclusions of the study suggested that numerous internal barriers prevent the proper implementation of SCM practices at South African Universities. The failures bordered on the inability of university authorities to put sufficient resources, time, and initiatives into realising SCM in public universities. For Molefe et al. (2018), the focus was on SCM practices in the South African tourism industry, seeking to evaluate tourism SCM practices in the City of Tshwane. Notably, every corporate organisation aims to ensure that customers are satisfied while increasing profits (Molefe et al., 2018). This is true in the tourism industry, in which the management of supply and demand is important for the success of the business. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate SCM techniques within South Africa's local governments to enhance the sector. The analysis conducted in the study identified five key variables that are fundamental to SCM practices in the case study. These factors encompass connections and collaboration, communication, sustainability, customer interactions, and value-added processes.

2.4. SCM Challenges in South African Local Municipalities

One of the primary concerns impacting the SCM operations of various national, provincial, and local municipalities is identified within the procurement stage. According to Fuzile (2015, p. 1), it is common for vendors to impose exorbitant pricing and deliver subpar goods and services to government entities. There is a need to develop adequate measures to counteract such underhanded business processes at the municipal level. Furthermore, it has been noted that in some South African municipalities there is a need to establish stringent regulations aimed at preventing

wasteful spending, minimising conflicts of interest, and ensuring equitable treatment of service providers (EThekweni municipality, 2015).

It is established that timely distribution of products and services at some local municipalities is hindered by a time-consuming process, as the government, through the National Treasury, engages in double-checking procedures to identify any misappropriation before allocating funding. The aforementioned circumstance leads to a delay in the timely provision of specific goods and services to local communities. Also, it has been observed that supply chain managers have challenges in comprehending and navigating the complexities of Supply Chain Management Platforms (SCMPs). This lack of clarity and difficulty in utilising SCMPs subsequently hampers the effective execution of supply chain strategies, leading to subpar delivery of goods and services. In addition, it is noted that some South African municipalities commonly encounter comparable issues in the realm of SCM. One of the primary obstacles in comprehending SCM pertains to the imperative of fostering human capital development in alignment with socioeconomic and technological advancement in an ever-globalising world context.

Notably, the implementation of SCM has posed challenges for municipalities in light of the phenomenon of globalisation. The global economy has fostered interconnectivity in the acquisition and delivery of goods and services, resulting in a reduction in the perceived size of the planet. The advent of technology has emerged as a significant catalyst in the process of globalisation. According to Motuba (2014, p. 24), the integration of technology has emerged as a crucial factor in the development and implementation of SCM strategies. There is a contention that officials must possess a comprehensive understanding of technology implementation, since its improper application can potentially result in detrimental consequences. The utilisation of technology facilitates the seamless dissemination of information throughout the value chain, resulting in enhanced communication capabilities and a reduction in associated costs. On this issue of the effect of globalisation and the advent of new technologies, one of the primary obstacles encountered by South African municipalities is the dearth of human resources with a comprehensive comprehension of new technologies that can assist in facilitating SCM practices at the municipal governance level (Ambe, 2016). The lack of appropriate organisational structures, equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and capacity to effectively carry out SCM responsibilities, has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the inadequate provision of services and instances of corruption within South African municipalities (Motuba, 2014). There has also

been a notable need to train personnel in an understanding of policies and legislation that govern SCM practices at the municipal governance level in South Africa (Ndevu & Muller, 2018; Mapulanga, 2015; Anthony, 2019).

Furthermore, according to Rogerson (2004), the public procurement policies in South Africa are designed with the aim of fostering economic reconciliation and enhancing competitiveness. The government aims to utilise the preferential procurement policy framework as a means to accomplish its socioeconomic goals, which encompass the advancement of small, medium, and micro firms, specifically those that are owned and controlled by historically marginalised individuals (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012). The procurement system has been specifically designed to align with the five fundamental principles of public procurement, namely fairness, transparency, competitiveness, equitableness, and cost-effectiveness (Pauw & Wolraardt, 2009). The policy can additionally serve as a means to expedite the accessibility of work opportunities for individuals living in poverty, as well as facilitate the generation of income within marginalised sectors of the economy. Furthermore, it can contribute to the implementation of affirmative action measures aimed at addressing the intentional marginalisation of black individuals, women, and rural communities across economic, political, and social domains (Deloitte, 2013).

Municipalities are required to adhere to SCM policies while engaging in the purchase of products and services. SCM policies can be complex, leading officials with appropriate skills to have difficulties in comprehending certain regulations and procedures. Communities frequently engage in strikes due to a lack of information on policy changes, and their participation is occasionally undercut by authorities who are unaware of their inclusion in the decision-making process within the value chain (Ambe, 2016, p. 25). Consequently, municipalities have encountered challenges in establishing supplier relationships, a critical component within the realm of SCM. This phenomenon has resulted in suppliers engaging in price gouging and collaborating, specifically targeting authorities responsible for procurement in municipalities. Consequently, this behaviour has had detrimental effects on the provision of services. Notably, in instances where there is a departure from policy, it is common to see committees of individuals who are not in alignment with the prescribed policy requirements and exhibit inadequate motivation. This phenomenon poses issues within the value chain pertaining to the delivery of goods and services, as it impacts distribution methods, production processes, and the range of products available to local inhabitants.

Moreover, the achievement of sustained and high-quality service delivery over an extended period to communities is often hindered by prevalent issues such as corruption and inefficiency (Motuba, 2014). It is noted that SCM processes at some local governments in South Africa have met with some irregularities and flagrant disregard for legislation governing SCM processes and the *Batho Pele* policy, which proposes putting the people first in any effort of local governments geared towards improving lives in local communities (Motuba, 2014; Ambe, 2016). As such, the prevalence of strong ethical leadership has experienced a decline due to the actions of public officials. Compliance and accountability remain deficient among officials in municipalities. There is a noted dissatisfaction among individuals with regard to officials in the SCM sector within municipalities who have been implicated in corrupt practices yet continue to retain their positions within the government by simply transferring to different departments. It is argued that this phenomenon is consequent on the inability of existing punitive laws and protocols to arrest the issue of corrupt and irregular practices by officials (Bachmann & Frost, 2012; Aiyedun & Odor, 2016). There is then a need to establish an ethical framework that could appeal to the sense of humanity in SCM officials to do better. This approach is valid considering that this is at the centre of the *Batho Pele* principle.

Summarily, what this section has attempted to do is to present some of the SCM challenges that face South African municipalities. As further established in some studies (Mbecke, 2014; Nkomo, 2017; Motuba, 2014; Ambe, 2016), South African municipalities generally face issues with SCM practices which have consequently impacted negatively on the performance of the local municipalities, leading to poor service delivery. Consequently, the current study particularly seeks to explore an ethical framework that could assist in responding positively to the unethical issues that bedevil SCM processes and constitute hurdles to the successful implementation of SCM towards positive organisational performance. The study proposes an African ethical perspective towards grounding and improving SCM processes to realise true organisational performance. The need for this framework is more pertinent considering that from the above literature perspectives, contemporary global events (globalisation, COVID-19 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution technological development) have also impacted SCM practices in municipal governance, and there is a need to explore a framework that considers ways of overcoming the constraints and building on the positive effects of these global phenomena.

3. Ubuntu Ethical Framework: Towards an African Perspective on Improving SCM Practices and Performance in South African Municipalities

3.1. Understanding the Ubuntu Ethic in the African Worldview

According to Onwuegbuchulam (2014, p. 39), ‘Etymologically speaking, the concept of *Ubuntu* derives from the Nguni word for humanness. *Ubuntu* actually is a shortened form of the aphorism *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means “a person is a person through other people”.’ As such, the Ubuntu ethic is at the centre of the life of African people and is a value held in esteem by the African people as defining people’s relationship with others as part of the human community. Ubuntu is regarded as an African philosophical and ethical concept which expresses the whole life of African people. It is a concept which denotes humanness or personhood and also refers to the call to respect people’s dignity as members of the human community (Gathogo, 2008). For Shutte (2001), Ubuntu is an African morality concept intrinsically linked to human happiness and fulfilment, seen in the sense that in the Ubuntu ethic, there is a conscientious move towards establishing human happiness for the sake of mutual co-existence.

Moreover, according to Lefa (2015, p. 5), Ubuntu can be seen as a mode of human interaction that fosters critical cognition, the absence of dominance, and the utmost cultivation of interpersonal connections. The concept of Ubuntu is commonly interpreted as the notion that an individual’s humanity is best exemplified via their interactions with others. Ubuntu entails not just recognizing one’s own existence, but also acknowledging and fulfilling one’s responsibilities towards others in their community (Lefa, 2015, p. 5). Consequently, in the Ubuntu ethic it is understood that in every human relation and in every transaction that involves human beings, there must be an effort to recognise people’s interconnectedness and adoption of the highest form of morality in dealing with issues concerning people. Metz (2011, p. 537) agrees that ‘the declaration that “a person is a person” is a summons to develop one’s (moral) personhood, a prescription to acquire ubuntu or botho, to display humanness.

3.2. The Ubuntu Framework and Improving SCM Practices in Public Organisations

‘Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to show compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of constructing and maintaining community,’ says Nussbaum (2003, p. 21). The Ubuntu ethic’s three main ideals prioritise people over resources, making them tools for human use. People should live in communities where they understand each other and follow social rules even when they disagree. Social unity, collaboration, and conflict avoidance are ideal. These principles could govern an ethical economy (HSRC, 2021).

It is easy to see how the Ubuntu ethic can help us in conceptualising an ethical perspective in realising proper SCM processes towards a positive performance of public organisations. As already established in the literature, local municipalities are tasked to help change the lives of people at the grassroots level. The achievement of this objective is contingent upon government agencies responsible for public procurement prioritising the welfare and interests of individuals in the execution of their obligations and roles. In this, striving towards bettering the lives of the people becomes the guiding principle, and SCM practitioners are then encouraged to approach their task with the utmost form of care and honesty. This is what the Ubuntu ethic advocates, and this is important considering that putting people first and realising their happiness should be more important. As such, any form of irregularity and SCM malpractices are eschewed towards realising the good life of the people. In the South African local municipality context, this becomes more important in the idea of the *Batho Pele* policy, which should guide public organisations and which agrees with the Ubuntu ethic that people should come first. The Ubuntu ethic is here seen as being the foundational framework of the *Batho Pele* and indeed other legislation guiding public organisations in their task and relationship with the people they serve.

The MFMA’s SCM regulations set ethical criteria for SCM Practitioners to follow the ethical code of conduct. SCM officials and others should follow relevant laws, regulations, and standards to fulfil their tasks efficiently, effectively, and with integrity. Responsible public resource management is their responsibility. SCM officials and others should act impartially. They should never unfairly discriminate or give preferential treatment to any group. Power and authority should not be abused. Seen through the lens of the Ubuntu ethic, it is also important to see that corruption and any form of moral bankruptcy are detrimental to the realisation of any venture that is supposed to be for the benefit of people in society. Consequently,

the Ubuntu value of seeing people as the focus is important towards realising the injunction that resources should be used and directed to serving people and not vice versa. In following this stipulation, the Ubuntu ethic helps us to have a moral imagination in going about all processes in public organisations, including SCM processes.

Another aspect of the Ubuntu ethic that is relevant to the discussion on SCM practices and organisational performance is the notion that ‘There should be social cohesion, teamwork, and no disagreement or conflict (HSRC, 2021). This is fundamental to efficient and effective SCM processes, according to this study. This article argues that organisational efficiency depends on humane teamwork and social solidarity, which is also intrinsic to the *Batho Pele* principle. When people work together in solidarity and towards stated goals, then there is a better chance of progress and, in this case, a realisation of positive organisational performance. This, necessarily, means the utilisation of people’s skills and expertise in coordinating different human resources towards the realisation of positive organisational performance. Following due processes is also important towards realising the avoidance of conflict and different challenges to SCM processes in public organisations. Notably, this also relates to, and concerns leadership; SCM practitioners are encouraged by the Ubuntu ethics to take their task seriously, utilising Ubuntu and servanthood as values in going about this (Meylahn & Musiyambiri, 2017). Figure 1 presents a diagrammatic depiction of Municipal supply chain practice grounded on the Ubuntu Framework.

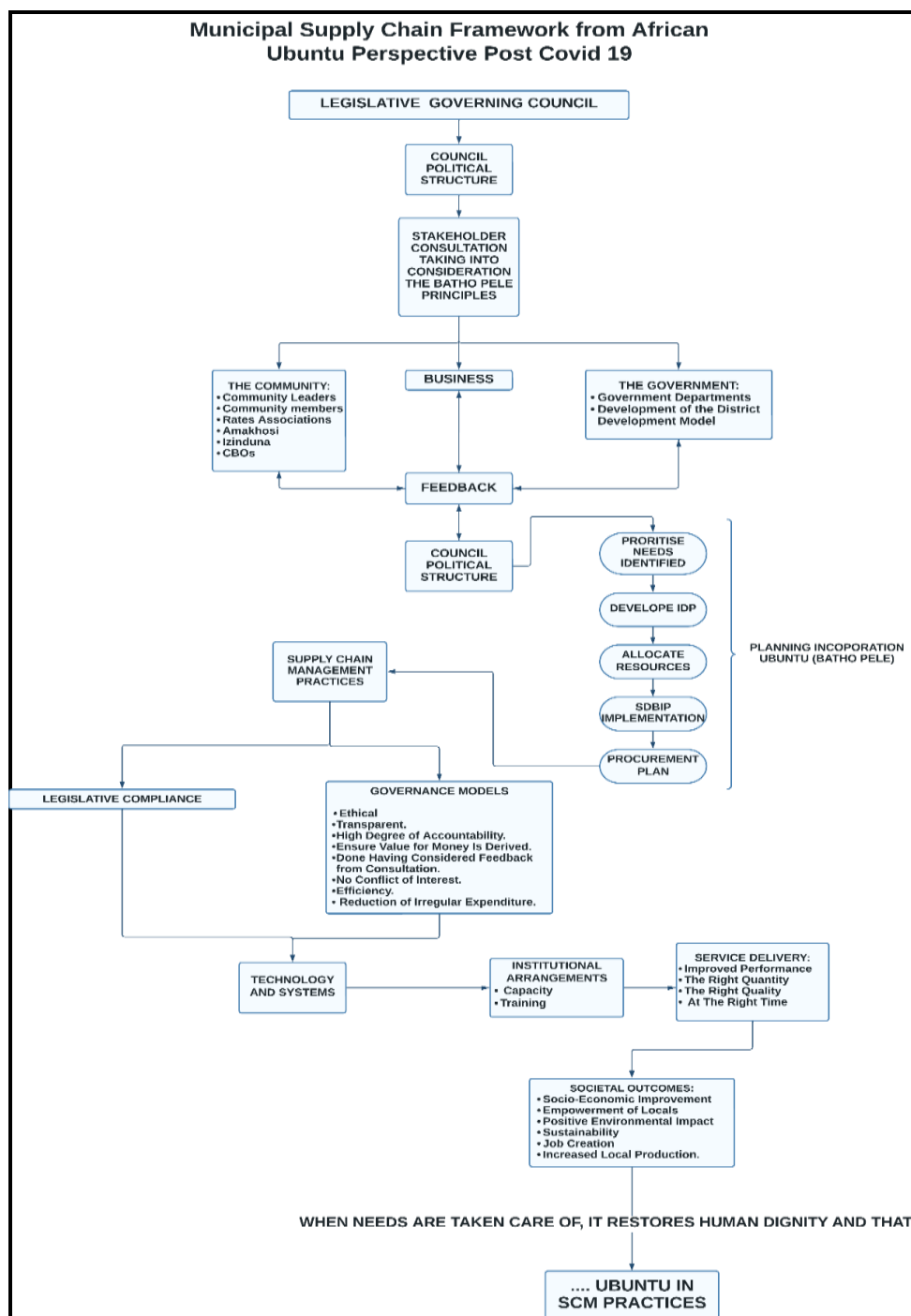


Figure 1. Municipal Supply Chain Framework from an African Ubuntu Perspective

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the proposed framework towards improved implementation of SCM in South African local municipalities. The proposed framework is firstly informed by recent global developments which demand a shift in theory to understanding SCM practices at the municipal governance level. Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution necessitate the collaborative efforts of both commercial and public entities to foster innovation and explore solutions that mitigate the adverse impacts and enhance the beneficial outcomes in the field of SCM. The proposed framework integrates the role of the different legislative governing councils and stakeholders involved in SCM at public organisations in South Africa who are guided by the values and principles of *Batho Pele*. Recognising the centrality and the need for these values to guide the different levels in the SCM, the framework links them to the ubuntu African ethos grounded in humanness and proposes that the values should guide the strategic operations of South Africa's local governments. As such, the framework prioritises efforts to restore human dignity through ubuntu in practice. It further incorporates emerging business and governance models that are necessary for the responsible and sustainable management of supply chains. This is achieved through the utilisation of three types of solutions: innovative technological solutions, political solutions in the form of collaborative partnerships and cooperation among multiple stakeholders within and across supply chains, and ethical solutions that involve the responsibility of different tiers within supply chains and the responsibility of organisations. Moreover, the proposal of the ubuntu framework is valid considering some of the noted malpractices in the literature that have characterised SCM practices at South African local municipalities.

4. Conclusion

Consequent on the literature perspectives and theoretical analysis, which have highlighted the need to improve SCM practices and organisational performance of South African local municipalities, this essay has focused on proposing an African ethical framework to improve SCM practices and organisational performance of local municipalities. It is argued in this article that the Ubuntu ethic provides a moral framework for excellent SCM practices to strengthen South African local municipalities. It is envisaged that adopting and mainstreaming this ethical framework will go a long way to addressing some of the issues as established in extant literature that hamper SCM practices and performance in South African municipalities. The study hence proposes more research and interaction with this

African philosophical concept to explore how it might help address economic concerns, including SCM processes and organisational performance of public organisations in South Africa and the African continent.

Conflict of Interest

The authors wish to declare that there is no conflict of interest in the undertaking and production of this paper.

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