



# Strategic Leadership Qualities to Enhance the Payment Culture for Municipal Services within an African Context

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategic leadership qualities required of municipal role-players to cultivate a payment culture for municipal services in the North West Province in South Africa. A systematic review and comparative study were conducted to compare the strategic competencies of executives in Canada, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. These are considered leading countries in service provision. The study proposes that municipalities should be visionary and result-driven, and engage people, while collaborating with relevant stakeholders to achieve desired results. The study further recommends that municipal role players adopt strategic leadership to achieve change through a planning and development process that involves assessing future goals and mapping specific actions. Furthermore, municipalities should achieve their goals through a strategic process of analysis, formulation, implementation, and evaluation, all of which entail a number of constituent tasks.

**Keywords:** Strategic Leadership, Leadership Competencies, Payment Compliance, Payment Culture, Municipalities, South Africa

**JEL Classification:** H70

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Municipalities in South Africa struggle to get revenue from residents for their service provision despite judicial precedents guiding municipal revenue collection (Financial & Fiscal Commission, 2020). This is due to an inability on the part of municipal role-players to collect debts accruing from non-payment for municipal services. In some cases, consumer debt reaches unacceptable levels and cripple municipalities' ability to perform their expected duties. In some scholarly papers, the rise of municipal consumer debt has been attributed to the poverty of residents, unemployment (Powell et al., 2010), political or entitlement issues (Lund, 2011), alleged corruption of role-players (Kelly, 2013), inadequate service provision (Kanyane, 2011), poor governance, the rise in the cost of municipal services, autocratic decision-making of role-players, and a lack of adequate communication (Enwereji and Potgieter, 2018; Enwereji and Uwizeyimana, 2019), as well the inability to impress upon

consumers the importance of paying their debts (Enwereji and Kadama, 2018). The obligation to collect consumer debts falls on municipal role-players such as municipal managers and accountants. The management of municipal debt does not seem to have been approached through strategic leadership principles and this has resulted in a persistent rise in municipal consumer debt all over South Africa.

The concept of strategic leadership is viewed as a system where strategists utilise all their knowledge and enthusiasm to provide direction for organisations to attain stated objectives (Joyce, 2017). Municipal role-players should apply the principles of strategic management to ensure that both internal and external variables affecting the collection of municipal debts, are addressed so that there can be a culture of timely payment. Within a South African context, there is a paucity of research examining the strategic management qualities that municipalities could apply to combat the intensifying debt crises as regards payment for municipal

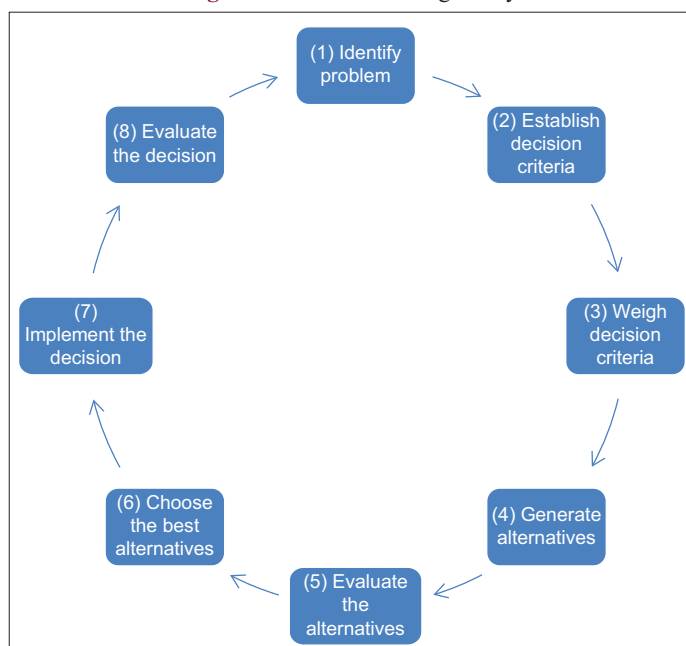
services. The adoption and application of strategic leadership, as specified by this study, will enable role-players to be visionary and make use of every opportunity to transform the activities of the municipality.

Local municipalities are performing below expectation, especially in the North West Province of South Africa, as consumer debt keeps rising and they fail to provide adequate services to residents (Enwereji, 2018). All this has resulted in an irresponsible payment culture that can also be ascribed to strategic leaders at South African municipalities not applying strategic leadership competencies. Municipal role-players not exhibiting excellent leadership qualities in arresting the intensifying consumer debt of municipalities is considered the research gap. This study, therefore, focuses on examining the strategic leadership qualities that municipal role-players should have to enhance a responsible payment culture for municipal services in the North West Province in South Africa.

## 2. DECISION-MAKING THEORY

This study adopts decision-making theory as its theoretical background. The decision-making theory, as portrayed in Figure 1, indicates that managers should firstly identify problems, then establish decision criteria, weigh decision criteria, generate alternatives, evaluate alternatives, select the best alternative, implement the decision, and lastly, evaluate performance and results. All of this will then form valuable input for the first step of the subsequent process. This theory depicts a situation where several courses of action are selected from two or more alternatives to resolve a specific problem (Akroni, 2011). Decision-making aims to achieve an objective or solve a specific problem. The decision-making theory, also referred to as the rational theory, involves an instinctive and interdisciplinary approach that determines how organisations decide on the path to follow,

**Figure 1:** Decision-making theory



Source: Bwisa et al. (2014)

given unknown limiting variables in an uncertain environmental framework for making the decisions (Jefford et al., 2011).

The decision-making theory emphasises the best decision-making strategy with perfect accuracy, which is rational and a basis of logical concepts aimed at enhancing the capacity of management (municipalities) to formulate productive policies. Intensifying the quality of the decision-making process in organisations improves work effectiveness, impacts lives, and changes the organisational direction. The decision-making theory expresses the need for management to think rationally when under risk and uncertainty, and to select the best alternative among various options (Bwisa et al., 2014). The relevance of this theory lies in that it provides management with structure and discipline for making decisions, while further encouraging them to consider factors that are incorporated in the decision-making process in a logical manner.

Municipal role-players, as in this case, need to understand the prescripts of this theory to be able to make a logical choice among available alternatives. Understanding this theory will enable role-players in a municipality to evaluate the pros and cons of options, forecast the outcome of each possible choice, and then determine the best choice for each situation – even before making the decisions. This theory could enable municipalities to fully understand the meaning of strategic leadership and determine the best strategy to implement for achieving payment compliance as regards municipal services in any given situation.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is informed by the constructivist paradigm, where knowledge is obtained from the construction of social realities, in propagating understanding. Creswell (2014) maintains that social constructivists believe that people try to understand the world in which they live by developing subjective meanings of their daily experiences. This subjective meaning may be complex as people differ in thinking and conceive multiple subjective ideas. The goal of any study built under this paradigm is to focus on the problem under investigation through the construction of knowledge. It also focuses on understanding the specific context within which people live, based on their historical and cultural settings (Creswell, 2014). This study adopted a qualitative approach by applying a systematic review. Several secondary documents were reviewed to help find solutions to the problem. The study commenced by prospecting different viewpoints on the concept of strategic leadership. A meta-analysis was done to peruse different authors' views on the qualities of strategic leaders. The tasks and roles of a strategic leader were also reviewed and the competencies of executives in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada were explored to establish a benchmark for municipal role-players in South Africa. These countries were included in this study as they represent the leading countries in the world for the provision of municipal services. The secondary sources included in this study specify the concepts, tasks, competencies, and roles of strategic leaders. Finally, strategic leadership competencies were proposed to the municipal role-players within the South African context as a way of handling the increasing debt. An improved payment culture for municipal services would go a long way in achieving the desired outcomes.

## 4. EXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

According to Louw and Venter (2012) and Hill et al. (2017), strategic leadership focuses on middle management exercising their responsibilities and providing tactical and operational management. The authors affirm that a strategic leader should understand the nature of the internal and external environments and create desired change within the organisational system to stabilise the functionality of the organisation. Furthermore, Bro et al. (2014) and Hitt et al. (2017) describe a strategic leader as a person who assesses the environment, maintains flexibility, and empowers subordinates to effect strategic change in an organisation. As far as the continuous change in the internal and external environments is concerned, Keevy and Perumal (2014) and Hill et al. (2017) uphold that a strategist strives to manage change through others (employees) and achieve organisational goals.

### 4.1. Tasks and Roles of Strategic Leaders

Strategic leaders are required to perform certain functions and achieve organisational objectives. Consistent with this, Nickols (2016) ascertained that the tasks and roles of strategic leaders are the specified responsibilities required to achieve success. One of the basic tasks of a strategic leader is to define the strategic direction, which includes articulating the characteristics of the organisational vision and mission based on which strategic direction is then expressed (Jones and Hill, 2010). A strategic leader specifies the organisational direction by formulating the vision and mission of an organisation in specific terms and devising strategies to achieve it. In specifying the organisational strategic direction, Joyce (2017) and Olson (2017) affirm that strategic leaders should study the threats and weaknesses of the organisation so that they can focus on strategies to be implemented and ensure that organisational goals are objectified. Nickols (2016) stresses that strategic leaders can set organisational goals in a clear, understandable, and acceptable way for all employees. The strategic direction should also be viewed as something that will benefit all the stakeholders in the organisation.

As far as the task of a strategic leader in realising the organisational vision is concerned, the strategic leader will guide the process of achieving the long-term organisational business opportunities, which will include a wider concept of where the organisation is heading and its imagined future position (Brinkschroder, 2014). Organisational vision assists in creating synergy between management and employees. They can have a common direction for achieving strategic goals. Furthermore, it aids in motivating employees so that their dreams are identified. They become committed to helping realize the dreams of the organisation. Hitt et al. (2017) state that the characteristics of an organisational vision include that visions should be ultimately understood and accepted by all stakeholders and be precise so that it means no more than it says. It should also motivate stakeholders to achieve it. Taiwo et al. (2016) further uphold that strategic leaders should formulate missions to guide organisational conduct and articulate objectives.

Managing organisational resources is a vital task for strategic leaders. It helps ensure that all the resources of an organisation

(including financial, human, and information resources) are adequately managed. In managing an organisation's financial resources, the strategic leader should ensure that adequate financial resources are available for daily, short and long-term operations (Brauns, 2013). The strategic leader must keep track of all financial transactions, predict organisational incurable costs, and determine how the financial resources will be utilised (Hill et al., 2017). Eustace and Martins (2014) affirm that the strategic leader should source financial resources for an organisation through various means, including loans, services and sales revenue, user fees such as payments for municipal services, and the government. Obtain funding from a wide range of sources is preferable to having only one source. In keeping track of the financial resources of an organisation, the strategic leader should ensure accountability and make sure that all employees know their limits when it comes to spending the financial resources allocated to them for executing their tasks (Rajasekar, 2014). Accurately matching resources with actualising organisational objectives requires substantial managerial skills. Strategic leaders maintain a delicate balance between remunerating employees and covering operating expenses.

For Hill et al. (2017) is critically important that strategic leaders uphold ethical practices. The rules and regulations of an organisation should clearly state what kind of actions or behaviour is not acceptable. It is a well-known fact that strategy implementation and execution is most effective when an organisation upholds ethical standards. To maintain law and order and achieve organisational goals, ethical practices must be employed throughout the organisation (Mirkamandar and Beheshtifar, 2015). Ethical behaviour in an organisation is the result of a strategic leader emphasizing justice, integrity, confidentiality, and self-control. They maintain a high level of ethical practice in an organisation. The strategic leader must nurture and support proper ethical behaviour among all employees. To discourage such practices, unethical behaviour must be dealt with swiftly through disciplinary action, inquiries, and suspensions. Couros (2014), Girma (2016), Haxton (2016), Yusof and Othman (2016) and Hill et al. (2017) proposes the following guideline for the development and support of an ethical organisational culture:

*Develop and communicate a code of conduct for all employees describing the mission and ethical standards; revise and amend ethical standards if necessary; communicate the ethical standards to all stakeholders in the organisation to ensure that business engagements are well specified; develop and implement effective measures that are suitable to actualise the organisation's ethical standards; and create a favourable environment where all employees are treated with dignity and rewarded according to performance.*

The last task and role of a strategic leader investigated in this study involves balanced organisational control, or the measures that a strategic leader uses to influence employees to behave in a way that promotes the attainment of organisational goals (Bredmar, 2011). Rules, guidelines, procedures, and limits are developed to direct work processing within the scope of the organisation. These rules involve setting limits on financial transactions and

expenditure, employee engagements, and behaviours, as well as other practices in the organisation. A balanced scorecard can be used to help achieve reliable organisational control. A balanced scorecard is a management instrument used to ensure a suitable balance between operations and performance. According to Bredmar (2011), strategic leaders are required to regulate financial procedures and maintain financial stability in an organisation. They do so by improving the means of communication and allowing for proficiency, as well as checking for errors and fraud. In this regard, the strategic leader allows for the submission of budgets and other financial documents to line management, while setting limits on the authority to allocate and approve funds (Hitt et al., 2017). A strategic leader should conduct regular budget variance exercises and implement adequate financial controls to detect errors and find suitable solutions. Financial reports such as cashflow reports and the profit and loss account should be submitted to the strategic leader and indicate the financial position of the organisation (Stoner, 2014). Other functions of strategic leaders in the implementation of balanced organisational control, as indicated by Brinkschroder (2014), Rajasekar (2014), and Hitt et al. (2017), include brand management, productivity efficiency, and legal compliance.

This section focused on the tasks and roles of a strategic leader. Major tasks include defining organisational direction, managing organisational resources, and upholding organisational ethical practices for balanced organisational control. Based on the ideal qualities discussed above, the qualities of a strategic leader in an endeavour to achieve organisational objectives will now be explored.

#### 4.2. Qualities of a Strategic Leader

According to Bruton and White (2011), Louw and Venter (2012), Bro et al. (2014), Keevy and Perumal (2014), Little et al. (2016), Hill et al. (2017) and Hitt et al. (2017) the qualities of a strategic leader include the characteristics required to achieve organisational goals.

Table 1 shows that a strategic leader must be visionary and employ strategic thinking. They should possess emotional intelligence, and transactional and transformational qualities, and have subordination and managerial skills. Table 1 provides a meta-analysis of the study. The next section discusses the qualities of a strategic leader according to various authors in the field of management as per Table 1.

Louw and Venter (2012) and Hrebiniak (2013) posit that leaders should be visionary by considering the future of an organisation

when formulating and shaping ideas, while using people to actualise the goals stipulated by management. A visionary leader should be knowledgeable about the internal and external environments and position the organisation on the path to achieve organisational goals (Hill et al., 2017). Organisational leaders, in the context of municipalities in this case, must be visionary and forecast and devise means to be adaptable in fostering the kinds of circumstances that will help achieve organisational goals. Leaders should be able to communicate a vision to their subordinates in such a way that stakeholders will clearly understand the concepts, principles, and strategic objectives of the organisation. Hitt et al. (2017) however posits that visionary leaders should guide subordinates while consistently articulating the vision, until it is ingrained into the organisational culture.

As regards strategic thinking, Joyce (2017) upholds that leaders should propose a diverse course of action in resolving issues in the organisation. In problem identification, Joyce (2017) and Hitt et al. (2017) maintained that leaders should scan the internal and external environment, understand the challenges facing the organisation, recognise the need for change, and decide on the course of action or models needed for successfully resolving issues. To diagnose organisational issues, a leader should understand the nature and causes of problems before coming up with measures to resolve them. Another quality of a strategic leader is emotional intelligence. A leader should be able to establish, manage, and maintain relationships with internal and external stakeholders. A strategic leader should possess a certain set of characteristics, including self-awareness (Bruton and White, 2011), self-regulation (Keevy and Perumal, 2014), motivation, empathy and social skills (Little et al., 2016), to achieve a cordial relationship with others.

A strategic leader should also be a well-informed person. Apart from the formal way of sourcing information, Little et al. (2016) would aver that a strategic leader should be able to source information through informal and sometimes unconventional ways, including the proverbial grapevine. Simply relying on formal channels of communication and information gathering can at times lead to the leader being misinformed. Furthermore, Hill et al. (2017) affirm that leaders who build an information network through formal and informal means tend to be better leaders than those who do not interact with people in the environment.

A leader should possess transactional and transformational leadership qualities. Transactional qualities involve a leader specifying the actual performance of subordinates and the

**Table 1: Qualities of a strategic leader**

Source	Visionary, eloquent, consistent, and strategic thinking	Emotional intelligence and behavioural complexity	Transactional and transformational leadership	Subordination and tactility	Managerial leadership
Bruton and White (2011)		√	√		√
Louw and Venter (2012)	√	√		√	√
Bro et al. (2014)			√		
Keevy and Perumal (2014)		√		√	
Little et al. (2016)		√		√	
Hill et al. (2017)	√	√			
Hitt et al. (2017)	√			√	√

consequences of not meeting targets (Bro et al., 2014). Transactional qualities include contingent reward and management by exception (MBE). A contingent reward refers to a situation where a leader is active and rewards subordinates for meeting targets. MBEs emphasise the ability of leaders to monitor employees and react to deviations, while seeking solutions and taking corrective action. A transformational leader strives to improve the quality of employees in an organisation by utilising different types of management styles (Keevy and Perumal, 2014). In this regard, leaders are expected to master the skills of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, individualised concentration, and intellectual stimulation. Correspondingly, Bass and Riggio (2006), Abasilim et al. (2019) and Dumdum et al. (2013) affirm that transformational leaders motivate and encourage their employees to achieve extraordinary results, while developing their own leadership skills in the process.

Louw and Venter (2012) state that strategic leaders should be ready to empower subordinates and others to acquire the relevant skills to assist in the implementation and execution of strategies. In the absence of delegating authority and empowering subordinates, strategic leaders are at risk of being overburdened, which may cause them to be less effective in delivering organisational mandates (Little et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2017). Organisations are more functional when employees are empowered, knowledgeable, and motivated in performing their duties. Keevy and Perumal (2014) propose that strategic leaders should be tactical in the use of power in the organisation and build consensus for progressive ideas rather than imposing them on employees. Strategic leaders need a substantive range of skills to be able to introduce ideas in a more democratic manner so that they can also be widely accepted by all employees. The next characteristic of a strategic leader, managerial leadership, is dealt with below.

Managerial leadership is another quality of strategic leaders and involves the ability to manage the daily activities of an organisation while focusing on the maintenance of order in the organisation for achieving the goals stipulated by management (Bruton and White, 2011).

Louw and Venter (2012) and Hitt et al. (2017) highlighted that a strategic leader should believe in the combination of ideologies and people being used to get work done in the organisation, monitor the work progress according to the duties given to subordinates, and influence the actions and behaviour of subordinates. Joyce (2017) feels that strategic leaders should be able to support subordinates in accomplishing tasks, use linear thinking, and make decisions based on the internal and external environments.

The discussion above examined the concept of strategic leadership. Clearly, strategic leaders must be visionary, eloquent and communicative. But they should also possess emotional intelligence and transactional and transformational qualities, as well as subordination and managerial skills to enhance a responsible payment culture. Leadership competencies of executives in other countries is elucidated below.

## 5. LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES OF EXECUTIVES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

According to Joyce (2017), leadership competencies epitomise the attributes, skills, and behaviours of strategic leaders, resulting in exceptional performance. Mascagni et al. (2017) pinpoint that many municipalities on the African continent fail to provide adequate services to residents due to issues related to strategic leadership. This section presents the leadership competencies of strategic leaders in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Canada for comparative purposes. These countries were selected in this study as they are leading countries when it comes to municipal debt management and service provision. Also, these countries were selected to serve as a benchmark to South African municipalities regarding service provision and public accountability. These are the leadership qualities that municipal role players in South Africa should embrace to become world class leaders who can provide adequate services to residents. A vast amount of literature was studied in this section to discover the leadership competencies of strategic leaders in the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Canada. The findings were presented in an Atlas-ti network diagram.

### 5.1. Leadership Competencies of Senior Executives in the United States

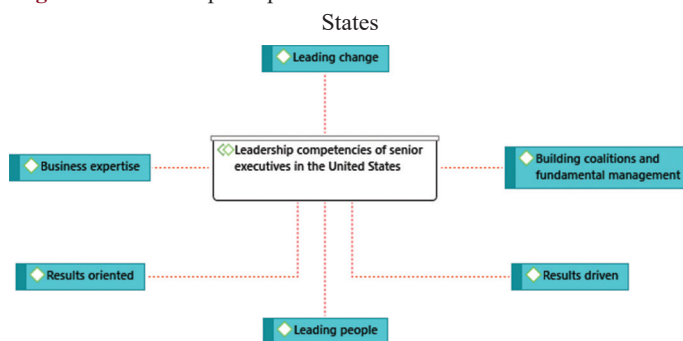
Joyce (2017) upholds that it is law in the United States of America (USA) that senior executives be qualified to hold senior executive positions. Their qualifications are reviewed by the qualification authority of the United States, to ensure that these executives are capable of discharging their duties rightfully. The leadership competencies of executives in the United States are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2 depicts that the leadership competencies of executives in the United States include leading change, building coalitions and fundamental management, leading people, being results driven, and having business expertise. The leadership competencies of executives in the United Kingdom are presented next.

### 5.2. Leadership Competencies of Senior Executives in the United Kingdom

Strategic leaders in the United Kingdom set organisational direction by sharing the vision and communicating high-

Figure 2: Leadership competencies of senior executives in the United States



Source: Adapted from Joyce (2017)

performance expectations with subordinates (Couros, 2014). Figure 3 presents the summary of leadership competencies of executives in the United Kingdom, as affirmed by Murray (2013), Couros (2014), Marrin (2015) and Joyce (2017).

The competency framework for senior civil servants in the United Kingdom (UK) provides that a senior executive should be a strategic leader who is capable of setting direction, engaging people to achieve determined objectives, and delivering results. The leadership competencies of executives in Canada are presented below.

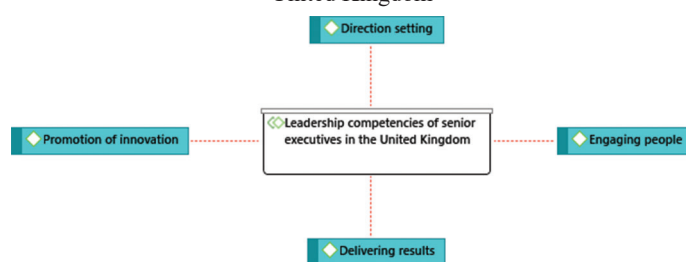
### 5.3. Leadership Competencies of Senior Executives in Canada

The Canadian Accountability Framework specifies the qualities that should define and identify leaders in the Canadian Public Service. These leadership qualities are reviewed for the benefit of municipal role-players in the North West Province in South Africa, who need to provide adequate municipal services to residents.

The six leadership competencies described in Figure 4 include creating visions, mobilising people, upholding integrity and respect, collaborating with people, innovation, and lastly, achieving results (Forgues-Savage and Wong, 2010; Joyce, 2017).

This section stipulates that success in the public sector is dependent on strategic leaders being proactive, visionary, passionate, results-driven, innovative, and collaborative. The subsequent section expounds on South African local municipalities' leadership perspectives.

**Figure 3:** Leadership competencies of senior executives in the United Kingdom



Source: Adapted from Joyce (2017)

**Figure 4:** Leadership competencies of senior executives in Canada



Source: Adapted from Joyce (2017)

## 6. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP: A SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL MUNICIPALITY PERSPECTIVE

According to Fourie et al. (2011), Manyaka (2014) and Mello (2018), municipal role-players in South Africa do not exhibit adequate leadership competencies. Evidence exists of inadequate collection of revenue from residents due to poor evaluation, assessment, billing, collection, enforcement, communication, and the inability to enforce the law on defaulters. Concurring with this view, Luttmer and Singhal (2014) uphold that inadequate mobilisation of revenue by municipal role-players could be a result of the inability to apply proper leadership skills to promote change. A Enwereji and Kadama (2018) study revealed that municipalities in South Africa are performing below expectations. Consumer debt keeps increasing and they have failed to provide adequate services to residents. Enwereji and Kadama (2018) further indicate that some local municipalities in the North West Province of South Africa fail to embrace emerging communication and innovation options, such as the adoption of mobile applications to facilitate the payment of municipal services, or sending reminders through emails or mobile phones.

The Enwereji and Potgieter (2018) study affirms that South African municipal role-players (executives) do not effectively collaborate with other stakeholders in the municipality to achieve their set targets and promote development. Not accepting change, an inability to promote the concepts of innovation, and a failure to collaborate with other stakeholders in the municipality, have resulted in South African municipalities continuing to experience a persistent consumer debt collection crisis. Consequently, it could be deduced that municipal role players do not utilise the precepts of strategic leadership. As a result, they have been unable to develop a responsible payment culture.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the strategic leadership competencies needed to halt the intensifying debt accrual in the payment for municipal services and instil a noble payment culture. Strategic leaders are responsible for assessing internal and external environments and implementing tactical strategies to create desired change amid challenging threats. Strategic leadership competencies in other countries were explored. These may provide a benchmark for strategic leaders in South African municipalities, as well as in developing countries, for collecting debt and providing adequate services to residents. The competences of municipal role players include visionary and strategic thinking; emotional intelligence and behavioural complexity; transactional and transformational leadership; subordination; and tactility and managerial leadership. The tasks and roles of a strategic leader include the ability to define organisational direction, manage organisational resources, uphold ethical practices, and balance organisational control.

A further comparative inquiry revealed that the leadership competencies of executives in the United States involve leading

change and leading people, being results driven, having business expertise, and building coalitions and fundamental management. In the United Kingdom, the competencies of executives include direction setting, engaging people, and delivering results. Lastly, the competencies of executives in Canada include creation of vision, mobilising people, integrity and respect, collaboration, promotion of innovation, and achieving results. This article concludes that municipal role players can deliver quality services to residents. They can properly manage the debt accruing from the payment for municipal services by applying the objects of strategic leadership as examined in this study in municipal management within the South African context.

This study recommends that municipal role players in South African municipalities adopt the strategic leadership qualities, tasks, and roles examined in this study. To achieve payment compliance and reduce the escalating consumer debts of local municipalities, municipal role-players should be visionary, eloquent, and consistent, and adopt strategic thinking. Other qualities include emotional intelligence and behavioural complexity, transactional and transformational leadership, subordination and tactility, and managerial leadership. Municipal role players should ensure that they define organisational strategic direction, manage organisational resources, uphold ethical practices, and maintain balanced organisational control. Furthermore, the leadership competencies of other executives as reviewed in this study should be developed to ensure that the objectives of municipalities are achieved. Qualities such as being results-driven, cultivating business expertise, building coalitions and fundamental management, setting direction, engaging people, delivering results, creating vision, mobilising people, having integrity and respect, collaborating, and promoting innovation should be adopted in all the local municipalities to enhance the payment culture for municipal services and achieve equitable service provision.

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