

The Impact of a Systems Approach on Strategic Thinking in Complex Organizations: A Comparative Case Study of Two Zimbabwean Local Government Authorities

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This article focuses on two local government authorities, which, as social organizations, are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical. The theoretical foundation of this article finds its roots in organizational complexity; strategic management characterized by strategy implementation; and sense-making, especially in the context of complex adaptive systems. Managers frequently neglect elements of complexity when they develop models and implement management practices. The purpose of this article is to analyse the implementation of strategies in complex public organizations by focusing on two of the largest Zimbabwean local government authorities, namely Chinhoyi and Gweru, in a comparative, qualitative case study. Data were gathered in three main ways: interviews, non-participant observation, and vast quantities of government local authorities' documents. Two important aspects of the strategic approach are discussed: first, the implementation of strategies, and second, the influence of complexity, ambiguity, unpredictability, and uncertainty in the way strategies are implemented by local government authorities. The analysis indicates that the implementation of strategies in local authorities has to do with the practices and processes that are adopted (how) and the practitioners (strategists) involved (who). The findings reinforce the importance of the strategizing process in the implementation of strategies. The findings also highlight that strategic practices are adopted in parallel with the formal strategic planning processes and are characterized by lack of strategic thinking formality.

Keywords: local government authorities, municipal corporate governance, strategic management, implementation of

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strategies, complex systems, strategic human resource practices, systems thinking and strategic thinking, change management and economic environmental analyses

Introduction

Background

Public sector organizations such as local government authorities are ever more under pressure to improve their performance and to give evidence through management performance measurements that their strategic enactments and enhancements are effective.

Public sector organizations are difficult to understand—they are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus in 1987 proposed the VUCA model—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—to describe the general business conditions. Public sector organizations are starting to embrace this model as they have come to recognize their own complexity. They too are required to address the demands of their internal and external business environment for greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness to gain a competitive advantage over other public organisations (Cabral, Mahoney, McGahan, & Potoski, 2017). In response, they have tapped into strategies employed by private businesses, such as collaborating when the organization lacks sufficient resources or scaling down financial and human resources (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Public sector organizations also need value creation strategies. They require fresh dynamic perspectives on value capturing and value creation strategies (Dyer, Singh, & Hesterly, 2018).

Academics in the field of organization such as Etzioni (1964), Perrow (1986), Bolman and Deal (2003), and Scott (2008) suggest that managers frequently overlook distinctive characteristics when developing and implementing management models and practices.

Understanding the special characteristics and complexities of social or non-profit organizations is necessary to develop suitable management models or approaches for organizations today (Bryson, 2018). Managers often import strategic management models from other management researchers, business consultants, different industries, and other business sectors, with dubious benefits and results (Krogerus & Tschappeler, 2017).

According to Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2007, p. 12), strategic management includes understanding the strategic position of an organization, strategic choices for the future, managing the strategy, and then putting it into strategic actions. Strategic management has spread to institutions as varied as corporations, governments, social organizations, museums, universities, and hospitals. Academics have questioned its effectiveness because strategic management relies on a form of management that is based on rational thinking and assumptions often not found in an organization. It is also a process that requires significant outlays of time and resources. In addition, the implementation of strategies is even more important in this systems approach to management.

This article analyses the implementation of strategies in complex systems by investigating the practices adopted by the management of two local Zimbabwean government authorities to reduce the gap between management intention and management action. The investigation centres on two large local government authorities in Zimbabwe, known nationally for their excellent service delivery and performance. Specifically, this research paper asks four research questions: (a) How is strategizing done? (b) What practices are developed related to the implementation of strategies? (c) Who does the strategizing? and (d) What similarities and differences are there in the implementation of strategies between the two local government authorities? To answer

these questions, the researchers examined the strategic process itself in each of the two local authorities (Chinhoyi and Gweru). Who are the practitioners that design and create the strategy in local authorities? What strategic practices do organizations develop to account for the various processes and divergent results from strategic management at these local government authorities? The discussion flows from two important aspects of strategic management in organizations. The first is the implementation of strategies, a particularly perplexing challenge to managers. Secondly, organizations are complex systems where ambiguity, unpredictability, and uncertainty greatly influence the way strategies emerge and are then implemented. This research also highlights opportunities for further research and the challenges adaptive complex systems pose to the field of organizational strategy.

Research Questions

The research questions can be formulated as follows:

- How is strategizing done in local government authorities in Zimbabwe?
- What practices are developed which are related to the implementation of strategies?
- Who does the strategizing?
- What similarities and differences are there in the implementation of strategies between the two local government authorities?

Research Objectives

The questions above culminate in the following research objectives:

- To find out how strategizing is done in local government authorities;
- To assess the practices developed to implement strategies;
- To find out who does the strategizing in local government authorities;
- To find out the different implementation strategies adopted by the two local government authorities; and
- To recommend how a system's approach can be used to successfully implement strategies in local government authorities.

Literature Review

Strategy implementation can be defined as the process of transforming intentions into actions. The dichotomy between intentions and actions has been central to the study of strategic management in organizations (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 2001; Mintzberg, 1994; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Stacey & Mowles, 2015).

However, a full discussion of strategy implementation in local government authorities has been undervalued in the considerable literature on strategic management. Having a strategy is important, but carrying it out is even more essential (Murphy, 2007). Strategy formulation and organizational performance has been the subject of much study, but most of the time the problem is not what to do, but how to do it (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). Currently, managers spend their time dedicating to analysis and the elaboration of management scenarios, or making projections of ideal strategies. The most important phase, putting it into practice, is very often ignored.

In general, strategy formulation disregards factors otherwise considered as fundamental to implementation, such as how human beings think, feel, interpret, and base their actions on rationality, which is limited (Simon, 1997). The influence of Weick's (1979; 2009) notion of sense-making in the decision-making process has also been neglected in contemporary times.

Yet strategy plays itself out in action that is often greatly influenced by various interpretations. Divergent interests and political agents make strategy implementation ripe for renegotiation—something that often results

in changes to prior strategic plans and strategic thinking. Enacted strategies are rarely the result of a single manager or person working alone. On the contrary, strategies are developed by a group of people at various levels working together in a most complex process (Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007).

Formulation and implementation, then, are the results of a collective process in which strategic thinking and acting go together. Moreover, the systems thinking does not necessarily end before the action starts (Chaffee, 1985; Mintzberg, 1990; Quinn, 1978; Stacey, 1996; Wildavsky, 1979). As Mintzberg's (1987) craftsman metaphor suggests, the relationship between creation and implementation of strategies is a continuous process in which the strategist, as a craftsman, gives form to the strategy by personal touch; hand and mind working together in a process of constant adaptation. So, like a handstand position (Lipski, 1978), strategy is often created by the people who implement it, sometimes at the very moment in which they create and implement it.

All of this serves to verify the belief that implementers inevitably have criteria and use them to interpret intended strategies in their own way (Wildavsky, 1979). Organizational managers and their members construct reality based on how they observe the world, a piece of information that shows up in their strategic choices, motivations, and attitudes concerning their performance. In this context human strategic thinking is based on understanding and actions are grounded in the interpretation of information, personal experience, metaphors, puzzle solving, and the meaning ascribed to organizational events (Daft & Weick, 1984; Morgan, 1998; Weick, 1976; 2009).

Strategic meaning is not necessarily subjective, but socially constructed by the context and intentions of the organizational managers and employees. This principle applies to, what to do, how to do it, and the actions that flow from a framework of strategic meanings to which the managers and members of the organization subscribe. Cognitive factors contribute to the notion that the strategic process is a socialization because organizational agents are considered to have a past, interests, and preferences, and that these factors affect how they make strategic choices and how they enact strategies (Daft & Weick, 1984; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998; Pettigrew, 1977; Rouleau, 2005).

According to Whittington (1996), strategies as a function of management are shaped by a mixture of analysis, instinct, routine, spontaneity, luck, and mistakes. The competitive advantage is not a result of the strategy itself, but of the competence with which it is performed. It is important to understand sense-making in groups, something that inevitably involves understanding activities in terms of what people do, how they interact (Weick & Roberts, 1993), as well as the influence of sense on what people do. Of equal importance are the tools and practices adopted in the strategic management of organizations. Most of the time, the process and practices adopted are not even known or evaluated by organizations. Little attention is paid to personal relationships and inter-group relationships, or political processes important to formulating and implementing organizational strategies, especially in social or government organisations. The activities and practices adopted have a significant influence on organizational results (Barley, 1986), which means good performance does not always relate to rationally prepared plans, and vice versa. The implementation of strategies may even be the result of unintentional actions or organizational practices developed to take place in parallel with the strategic plan of the organization.

A more accurate examination of the practical perspective in complex systems allows the identification of important elements of this system and their influence on the implementation of strategies. Elements like complexity, variability, unpredictability, instability, interactions, and repetitive causal relations constitute elements that are present in complex systems. Furthermore, the presence of a great number of agents interacting,

the agents' autonomy, as well as rules for the system operation, self-coordination, cooperation, and self-organization, form a unique organizational environment that characterizes complex systems. However, it is employee's creation, innovation, structures, and production that give meaning to complex organizations today. The implementation of strategy in complex systems is characterized in the research field as a unique exploratory action and in the practical field as a challenge for managers in the sense of reviewing paradigms, mental maps, beliefs, and perceptions with implications for the entire group and individual behaviours.

Studies that consider the practical perspective of strategic thinking reveal that strategic management specifies certain management behaviours and outcomes and how the change in complex organizations actually should occur, as Jarzabkowski (2005) stresses in her work about universities. The influence that sense-making and organizational agents' interpretation have on the implementation of strategic changes is discussed by Rouleau (2005), who highlights the importance of middle managers. More recent studies have also associated the practical perspective with the investigation of how the order in complex adaptive systems (Campbell-Hunt, 2007) is maintained, which concurs with the proposals of this study.

Strategic Management in Complex Organizations

Organizations have long been analysed as complex social systems. In recent times researchers have applied theories of complexity to analyse aspects of complex organizations—how they function, what managerial practices they use, and how to measure performance. One important theory is the complex adaptive system. The complex adaptive system refers to systems in which agents or members seek to adapt to the environment (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999). Stacey and Mowles (2015) describes it as “a number of agents interacting with each other according to schemas, that is, rules of behaviour, that require them to inspect each other's behaviour and adjust their own behaviour in light of the behaviour of others”. Thus, complex adaptive systems learn and evolve by adapting and thereby surviving, by processing information and building schemas based on experience as they move along.

Implementing strategic action becomes a serious challenge to managers of complex organizations. The process becomes more and more complex because of characteristics like volatility, unpredictability, uncertainty, and the wide variety of interactions among multiple autonomous agents. Unlike the concept of dominance in the related literature, strategic management in complex organizations is not the result of previously established rational intentions through a formally planned process. In these organizations, non-linearity is constantly influencing decision making and developing actions. This is further reinforced when considering the limits of human rationality according to Simon (1997), by the autonomy of their members, by the intense relationships between members that have diverse interests and beliefs, and by the interdependence in the production of goods and services.

In this complex organizational context, decisions and actions are more the result of political, structural, and symbolic aspects than rational or logical ones (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Etzioni, 1964; Pettigrew, 1977; Scott, 2008). In practice, strategy occurs interdependently—the result of cooperation and interrelationships in an environment that is neither inert nor stable, let alone predictable; which places more importance on the interpretation of reality, improvisation, and creativity of organizational members (Stacey, 2011). In complex organizations, non-linearity—illustrated by the diversity of responses to the same stimuli—observations are like a shadow system, parallel to the legitimate system. In the shadow system, agents establish informal and spontaneous relationships while interacting with the legitimate system. It is precisely in this informal context that

the great majority of strategies are generated and enacted in complex organizations (Stacey, 2011). Furthermore, it is from the agents' capacity to interact, learn, and create that strategies emerge. Stacey (1996, p. 4) states: "Together we construct in our minds the world we live in; the kind of world we construct depends critically upon the ways of thinking that we share with each other". For this reason, understanding strategic practice in complex organizations requires looking into how organizational members make decisions, make sense of organizational phenomena, and operate strategies. Sometimes these two roles overlap or become confused, relegating strategy to the implementation stage rather than the decision stage as a natural development of creativity and interaction, because thought and action are closely related. The process of implementing strategies in complex adaptive systems differs from traditional systems and theories (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999). Organizationally complex conditions and challenges affect strategic management practices in these organizations. It is conditioned through the autonomous managers, a variety of agents, and the unpredictability of organizational behaviour. This conditioning influences the way strategies emerge and are implemented in complex organizations. It is a challenging process in practice, because traditional strategic thinking models do not generally take into consideration the characteristics of complex organizations or how they demand extra effort from managers to overcome limitations, for instance the strength of their informal system and corporate culture. Whether complex or traditional, the strategy execution process is determined by the participation of different strategists at various hierarchical levels (Campbell-Hunt, 2007). The consolidation and involvement of a large number of organizational agents in strategy implementation heightens the importance of observing the process from conception to operation. This could aid our understanding of how and where execution happens, as well as the practices that contribute to the strategic process. Hrebiniak and Joyce (2001) refer to practice into theory and theory into practice as a necessary development to better understanding of the transformation of strategic intention into strategic action. The strategic conception as a social practice underlines the strategist's role as someone who has the capacity for interacting, perceiving, and making choices through a combination of intentions, interpretative efforts, intuition, and subjectivity (Stacey & Mowles, 2015; Whittington, 1996).

Strategic Management in Local Municipal Authorities

In an effort to manage local authorities efficiently in this current age of results-orientation, management thinking requires public organizations to increase their capacity for strategic management. They have to use fundamental management processes that integrate all major activities of the local government authority and all the functions and direct them towards advancing the local authority's strategic agenda. Strategic management in local government authorities is concerned with strengthening the long-term viability and effectiveness of the public sector organizations, which improves the strategic implementation of both substantive government policies from the external environment and their management capacity. In local government authorities, strategic management integrates all other management processes to provide a systematic, coherent, and effective approach to establishing, attaining, monitoring, and updating the local authority's strategy and objectives. In local government authorities, strategic management brings integration in the sense of:

- tying together the internal management processes and local government initiatives towards the desired outcomes in the external environment;
- focusing its attention on all functional divisions and throughout various organizational levels to build common goals, themes, and issues; and
- linking operational tactical day-to-day decisions with long-term strategies and objectives.

This all occurs within a complex dynamic institutional and the political environment within which public sector organizations operate. An effective strategic management competence is indispensable for maintaining or strengthening the fit between the government organization and its external stakeholders. Strategic management in local government authorities allows for managing of results within a clear context of vision, mission, objectives, and values.

Strategic management has been addressed in the public administration literature (Koteen, 1989; Nutt & Backoff, 1992; Rabin, Miller, & Hildreth, 1989; Stiess, 1985), but by no means as extensively as it is discussed here. It is discussed in this article from the perspective of systems thinking, strategic planning, and systems approaches. However, some more recent articles have been focusing on the role of strategic management in the public sector and have been discussing implementation issues and strategies in an informative manner. The very important purpose of this present article is to raise awareness of the critical importance of systems thinking in strategic management in government organizations, to define the contemporary critical elements in a holistic systems model of strategic management, and to discuss the strategic government process in local authorities today.

The Municipality as a Complex System

What is a system? Is a municipality a system? Every system comprises two significant characteristics: Firstly, a system is created from component elements, or subsystems, that are entirely related to each other in some way. Secondly, a system has a structure or a met system that determines how these elements relate to each other. Today everything that a municipality does or takes charge of can be thought of as interconnections, and therefore as a system. For instance, a town's budgetary procedure can be thought of as an arrangement of connections between approaching and assessment income, the costs of city offices, the town's road programme, the town's transportation plan, the town's water and waste management, public works, the needs of the local government authorities, the housing needs of the residents, the electricity demands of the town, public infrastructure development needs, communication needs, the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the city council. These all influence the strategic administration of the municipalities and what it could offer to the residents. We can envision these connections as complex adaptive systems from both the internal and external environment.

Systems Thinking as an Instrument for Local Municipalities

Systems theory has to culminate in practical application. In the business world this could take a considerable length of time, sorting out global business trends and generating new business forms and systems thinking models. Currently very little research had been done on systems thinking as applied to local government authorities. As of late, systems thinking ideas and models have become a vital part of strategic planning methods for local government authorities, an area that has been neglected by many governments worldwide and business researchers. Many of the systems thinking techniques are not applicable to governments and these techniques are unknown in many local governments' municipalities, as explained by the very few published articles on this research area. If the local government municipalities were aware of these various systems and thinking tools, they would better understand their complex organizations as parts within parts, different functions working together. Systems thinking could assist municipalities with understanding the job of key resources such as their government infrastructures, information technology, and communications, revenue collection, and service delivery.

Research Strategy

Who do systems complex adaptive thinking researchers investigate? They focus on the inside and outside

of a very large complex and unpredictable, enterprise, an economy, a living body, a city, a town, or a biological community, where a little movement in one place can deliver mammoth changes in everything. Today complex systems thinkers are not quick to adapt and use dilapidated tools to bring strategic change. You need to work at it, regardless of whether that implies thoroughly examining the whole organizational system or thoroughly pushing off ideal strategic models. Complex thinking in government organizations appears to use fewer tools to do with pushing current models than it does with trained reasoning, joined with a deliberate search for better organizational performance. The criteria that guided the selection of the two Zimbabwean local authorities used as case studies, namely Gweru and Chinhoyi, are similarities in size and social characteristics, similar road networks, and similar population size. They are towns that house the headquarters their respective provincial capitals in the two different provinces, namely the Midland (Gweru) and Mashonaland West (Chinhoyi) provinces. There is a great demand for service delivery from their communities and a demand for greater municipal manager performance in these two local government authorities. The researcher's interests in the recent professionalization of government municipal managers since 2016 and the Zimbabwean government on its adoption of various strategic management approaches to its local authorities all influenced the writing of this article. A further important consideration for selecting these two cases was their large number of council wards and political variables, the number of years they have been in existence and their management structures. The Gweru municipality is decentralized throughout Gweru, while the Chinhoyi municipality is centred in Chinhoyi town.

Research Approach

This is an evaluation of two city councils that both boast a substantial impact on their communities. They both require great numbers of public members and municipal management involvement. There is no universal way to collect the various public strategic thinking opinions from municipal managers, which may cause disagreement as to whether all or the right strategic thinking opinions were captured. In spite of this limitation, the subsequent research approaches were used in gathering the relevant information for this article. The research adopted a comparative qualitative case study technique to capture as much information as possible on the topic of systems thinking in two complex government organizations. This article hopes to aid Zimbabwean local authorities with their management in future. The main methods that were used are explained below.

Direct Observations

Two Zimbabwean local authorities were selected for observation and in-depth investigation. Zimbabwe is made up of 10 provinces: Matabeleland North and South, Mashonaland East, West, and Central, the Midlands, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Manicaland, and Harare. There is comparative standardization in the management structures of the local authorities, which makes generalisation from observations possible. The observations involved two large cities in two different provinces, namely Mashonaland West and Midlands, to examine their strategic thinking activities and public government operations at these two complex municipalities.

Structured and Unstructured Discussions With the Relevant City's Municipal Managers

The research sought to establish an overall impression of the system thinking at local authorities in Zimbabwe. Thus, government municipal managers and the management involved in making day-to-day decisions regarding the operation of these complex systems were interviewed and consulted regularly during the writing of this research paper. The objective of these interviews was to establish their current strategic thinking patterns, their decision-making processes, to understand their complex organization and systems and their responsibilities in the management process within their municipalities. An open-ended structured interview schedule was used

together with unstructured discussions. Participants included various municipal managers and officers from Gweru and Chinhoyi, although the latter were not forthcoming with information.

Archive Information

The improvement and development of the two local authorities has received extensive coverage in the Zimbabwean media. As such, the researchers looked into the media archives, daily newspapers, internet, related past government policy documents, and other pronouncements to trace all relevant information that could reveal the strategic thinking in Zimbabwean local authorities. An analysis of these archive documents dating from February 2012 to May 2018 helped to shed more lights on the complex adaptive systems. These were critical, since no comprehensive strategic documents have been issued by the relevant local authorities explaining their strategic thinking, visions, missions, objectives, and operations in a complex adaptive environment over the last 10 years. The internet and newspapers enabled the researchers to track the various top management thinking and their new policy pronouncements, as well as the views on and the use of traditional thinking models in Chinhoyi and Gweru.

Issues discussed in these documents included:

- Lack of quality/timely data and information within the public organization;
- Unclear municipal directions.

Analytical Review

Based on the qualitative information collected from a variety of sources, the researchers conducted an analysis to note the current municipal trends and consistency in their strategic thinking in the local government organization so as to get an overall impression of their complex adaptive system's design. In doing so, both positive and negative aspects in the strategic management systems' thinking process and its implementation were unearthed. While accepting that there is no universal framework for strategic planning, design, implementing, enacting, visions, goals, mission, and operating objectives and preservation of stable public government systems, the researchers sought to find out which best practice and strategic thinking models the Zimbabwean government was benchmarking its "new" complex adaptive strategies for its local authorities.

Evaluation Criteria

In assessing the two case studies, this article was guided by above the five research criteria to get answers to the four research questions. These will then be later discussed in the two sections on the research results. These above research criteria are used in the hope of providing credible answers to research questions raised earlier in this article.

Data Collection

Data were gathered from May 2016 to February 2018 in three ways: interviews, non-participant observation, and the five research criteria applied to the municipal documents from the two local government authorities since January 2012 to April 2018. The researchers selected this research design with three sources of different data collections to avoid possible biases that could result from a single source of data, particularly when retrospective analysis is involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Eisenhardt, 1989). This research adopted a semi-structured model of data collection composed of open-ended and standardized questions with the purpose of identifying how government organizational agents enact strategies and interact when implementing adopted practices and strategies, and, especially, how these complex thought processes coexist in two municipalities.

The researchers interviewed a total of 14 managers from the Gweru municipality directly involved in the local authority strategic management. Among them were three management executives, one superintendent, one planning coordinator, four senior managers, and five middle managers. In Chinhoyi, the researchers interviewed a total of 12 managers, including the two general directors, one chief executive planner, four senior managers, and five middle managers. The researcher piloted and validated the interviews with local authority managers who were independent individuals. All the interview answers were documented in writing. Some interviews were recorded using a cell phone and then transcribed. In addition, one researcher took notes as a non-participant observer in a field diary. On the whole, the data numbered more than 580 pages. Archival materials included municipal strategic plans from various previous years, municipal reports of previous strategic activities, a large number of previous government publications, separate past publications from the two Chinhoyi and Gweru municipalities and some information was sourced from the official websites of these two local authorities. Information gathering was therefore based on document analysis and interpretative techniques. The variety of methods for gathering data allowed the use of the qualitative triangulation approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1987) to assure the validity of the information obtained. The research data were qualitatively triangulated by comparing it to various types of publications, interviews, and observation strategies.

Data Analysis

This section presents the data on the two case studies and provides an analysis with descriptions and comments about the strategic management approaches adopted by these two local authorities. The researchers identified the strategic actions of the two local authorities, as well as their formal procedures used to formulate strategies, allocate resources, monitor, and control. The researchers examined the different levels of unfolding thinking and the interaction between the municipal managers as they take charge of their given municipal strategies and how this process contributes to the implementation of the overall strategy in these two case studies. The two municipalities are now discussed separately below.

The City of Gweru

General information and history.



Figure 1. Map of Gweru.

Table 1

General Information on Gweru

Coordinates of the City of Gweru	19 27'41" S, 29 48'08" E coordinates
Country	Zimbabwe
Province	Midlands
Founded	1894
City	Gweru (Provincial capital)
City status	1971
Elevation	1,424 m (4,672 ft)
Population total (last census 2012)	143,073 people

Gweru has a strategic position, as it links the country with neighbouring countries like Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique. Gweru City was founded in 1894 by Rd. Leander Starr Jameson. Gweru (called Gwelo until 1982) is a city close to the middle of Zimbabwe. It is the administrative capital of the Midlands province. In 1914, Gweru became a municipality and it achieved city status in 1971. The given name of Gwelo changed to Gweru in 1982. Before becoming a municipality, Gweru was identified as “The Steep Place” after the Gweru River’s high banks when it was first occupied by the Matabele people. It was initially a military base for the colonists.

Today the municipal area of the Gweru City Council covers about 30,000 hectares and the population as at the 2012 census was estimated at 143,073 and is now estimated to be floating around 200,000. The city is divided into 18 wards that are represented by elected councillors.

The Gweru municipal area has rich deposits of gold, chrome, iron, asbestos, and platinum and supports several mines. It is known for vibrant farming activities involving cattle, crop farming, and commercial gardening of crops for the export market. The Midlands province covers the central part of Zimbabwe and is a multi-ethnic province and home to the Ndebele, Karanga, and Zezuru tribes. Gweru has direct road and railway links with the major urban centres and the neighbouring countries.

As a provincial capital and hub of economic activities in the Midlands province, this city attracts large numbers of migrants from surrounding rural areas. The Gweru Municipality has a vision to be a clean, green, and dynamic city. Their mission is to provide effective and efficient services to the people of Gweru.

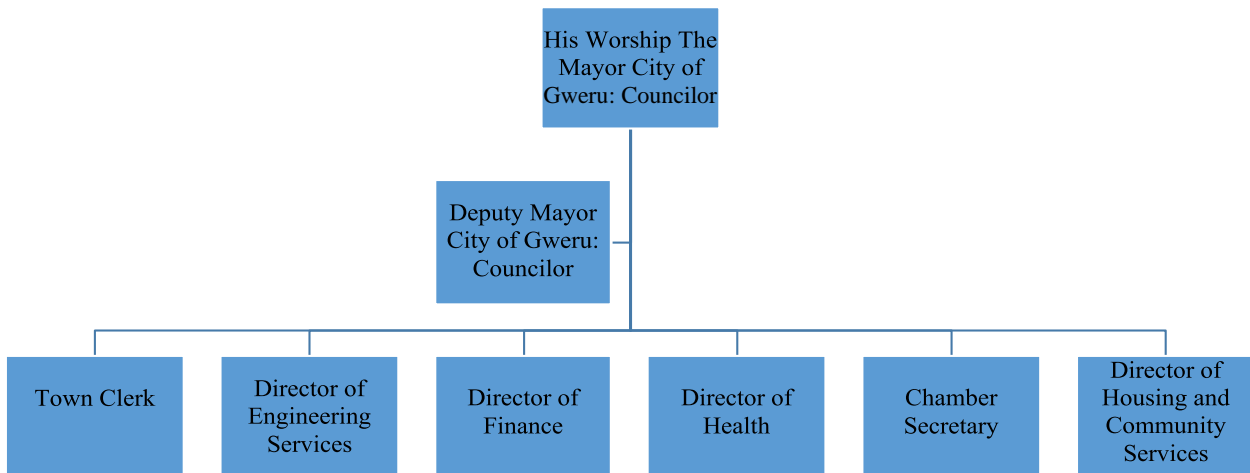


Figure 2. The organizational structure of Gweru’s local authority.

Gweru’s current mission and vision. Mission: “Gweru City Council is committed to good governance, the provision of cost effective services to its residents and promoting local economic development.” (Source: Gweru City Council official website). Vision: “To be a dynamic, green and prosperous city.” (Source: Gweru City Council official website).

The municipal organizational structures in Zimbabwe are defined by a government act. The Urban Councils Act Chapter 29 Section 15 governs the 32 urban councils in Zimbabwe. The urban councils established in terms of the act sort into different categories, namely local boards, which are the smallest in the hierarchy, town councils, municipal councils, and city councils. The city councils are run via a policy-making body consisting of elected councillors and a mayor. The council is essentially responsible for legislative, financial, and governance issues, essentially the executive management.

Executive management team of the Gweru. Gweru’s executive management is led by the town clerk and is assisted by the directors of engineering services, the directors of finance, health, housing, and community services, and a chamber secretary. Gweru’s city council has five departments, namely Engineering, Housing, Health, Chamber Secretary, and Finance. The town clerk is accountable for all actions by council officials under his/her administration and ensures that all departments operate efficiently and effectively (Commonwealth Report, 2017). Line manager’s support heads of departments in city councils, they are the coordinators and team leaders.

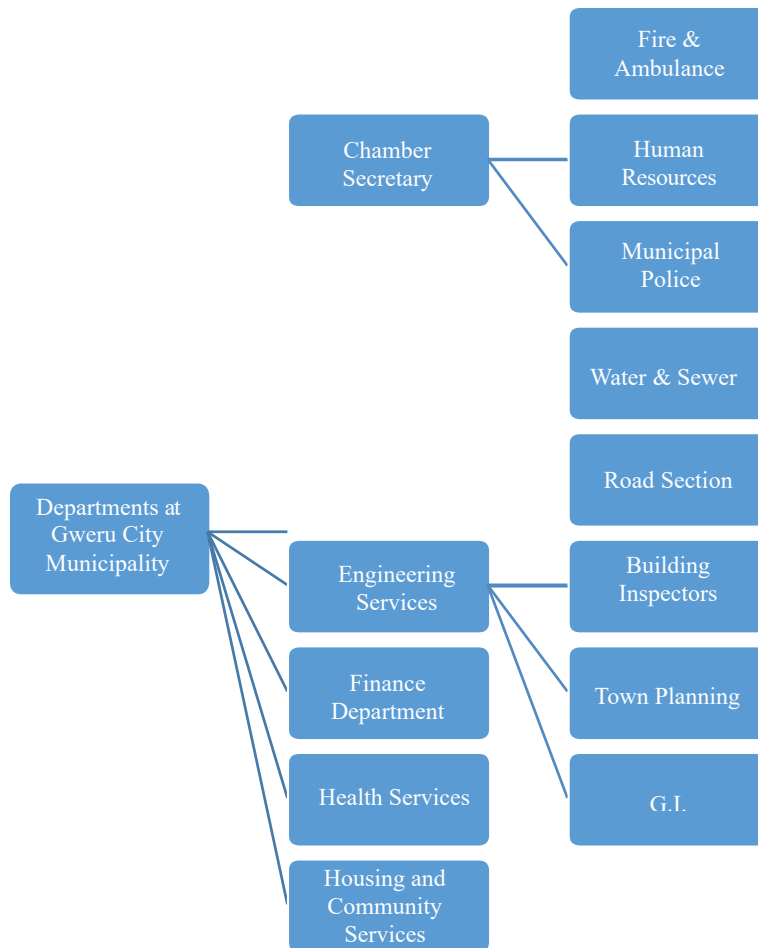


Figure 3. The departments of the Gweru local authority.

The managers enact municipal policies and are responsible for delivering efficient service delivery to the community. In the town clerk's department, there are several managers who lead the auditing unit, the chamber secretary manger, human resources, the security, housing, and parks; the engineering manager has town planning, water sewage, valuation, roads, and projects, and a workshop. The health department manager leads the clinical and environmental units and the treasury manager leads the information and technology, revenue, and cost control cutting units. Managers in this study are defined as municipal employees who occupy management positions and have subordinate staff that receive instructions and report to them.

The non-executive managers of the Gweru local authority. Non-executive managers are managers elected by residents and these consist of the mayor and councillors. The mayor is nominated by the council to chair council meetings. While Zimbabwean city councils comprise of executive mayors, they are held responsible by the full council. The city council is the city's legislative body, which comprises of nominated and appointed councillors and is led by a mayor. The councillors are elected by residents and are answerable to the residents. It ought to be mentioned that council decisions are prepared by the council and a full council comprises both executive and non-executive managers. According to Roberts et al. (2017), once decisions are made in council, city managers have to implement them whether they agree or not.



Figure 4. Images of Gweru.

Implementation of strategies in Gweru. In Gweru, management has worked hard to resolve the various stakeholder conflicts of interest and to teach managers to live with the unpredictability and volatility of the Zimbabwean economy. The implementation of strategies in the municipality is very difficult and is influenced by the political thinking of MDC and Zanu PF councillors and rather than on the rationality of the municipal managers or on the strength municipal framework and organizational structures. Pettigrew (1977) and Bolman and Deal (2003) note that conflicts of interest among the organisation's various stakeholders hinder strategic

thinking in organizations. Management has attempted to manipulate the various municipal stakeholder groups to minimize strategic resistance and to engage them in the organizational change process, especially the top leaders and the various opinion and policy makers. The management negotiated with the groups throughout strategic plan preparations and implementation. One informant noted that rather than working with all collaborators, they worked with “forty people that spread the organizational culture, planning and quality to the rest of the organization”. The municipal administrators then created specific managerial positions to make available for specific departmental needs and training needs.

Strategic objectives currently embraced by Gweru. The strategic objectives of the Gweru local authority are:

- To provide potable water and waste water management,
- To provide an efficient and effective public transport system,
- To provide an efficient and effective solid waste management system,
- To provide decent and affordable accommodation,
- To provide health services,
- To promote local economic development,
- To promote sound environmental management systems,
- To promote sound local governance,
- To provide coordinated and orderly spatial development,
- To mobilize and ensure efficient utilization of resources,
- To provide services to residents at an affordable cost in a more responsive, effective, and efficient manner
- To promote public participation in local government as a means of enabling and encouraging people to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens,
- To provide an efficient emergency services,
- To provide overall strategy for the City of Gweru (Gweru City Council official website, 2018).

Gweru’s municipal management clearly and transparently presented formal strategic plans and goals so they could be easily communicated and understood by all organizational members and other important stakeholders. These tactics are consistent with Chaffee’s interpretive model (1985). Her model addresses the social construction of reality; emphasizing the political, procedural, and psychological nature of the strategy. In this model people interpret strategies based on their beliefs, interests, and worldview and they act based on their interpretation. Furthermore, management demonstrates strategic actions, objectives, and performance indicators to members of the organization. Gweru’s municipal management discusses the strategic difficulties encountered and the achievements of some strategies, then further analyses the need for additional actions to achieve more strategic objectives. These management evaluations provide an opportunity for future analysis and review of the various issues that emerge from the implementation of strategic actions. Stacey and Mowless (2015) suggests that these actions constitute the exercise of self-control, which is characteristic of a complex system.

Gweru’s municipal management often uses specific practices in the implementation of strategies involving various agents and hierarchical levels. In this scenario, Gweru’s municipal management is decentralized in as much as interaction among those involved in the strategic implementation and those who then implement the strategic activities are not connected and these managers are not popular, as they disturb the municipality’s status quo. The application of Gweru’ corporate strategies becomes a very difficult and challenging process in practice for its municipal managers. It is through the development and the practice of sense-making that municipal

managers in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe can tap fully into its human resource capabilities. The province has a university, the Midlands State University (MSU), but the municipality is not utilising its Midlands State University business school graduates. One participant reported that

personal experiences are taken into consideration, rather than a person’s expertise and level of education when it comes recruiting Gweru municipal managers. Thus municipal managers cannot apply and execute the formulated strategic plan and they have no strategic actions in place to achieve their objectives, no annual plan of work among managers and others employees.

According to this participant “a person uses their personal experience in everything” and thus managers are lacking strategic thinking skills. The following table serves as an example of Gweru’s strategic plan.

Table 2
Gweru’s Strategic Plan

<p>Strategic Plan</p> <p>From the Town Clerk’s Desk, Gweru City Council</p> <p>“I am delighted to present this Strategic Plan for the City of Gweru for the period 2018 to 2022. This document is a road map on the journey to be travelled by the City from now into the distant future. The full implementation of our plan will unlock opportunities which will see Gweru meeting the aspirations of the community, partners, clients and key stakeholders as stated when the plan was developed. Our efforts will be channelled faithfully bearing in mind that our vision is a Sustainable Prosperous City of Choice by 2030. We shall remain ambitious and committed to providing quality services to rate payers, community, partners, clients and key stakeholders. We present in our Strategic Plan 2018-2022, our vision, mission and goals for the next five years. We intend to maintain our dynamic trajectory towards becoming a leading and a Sustainable Prosperous City of Choice by 2030, excelling in quality service delivery by ensuring that our employees are prepared professionally for the fast-changing global environment of the 21st century. Although the five years embraced by this Strategic Plan represent a relatively brief period, we are nonetheless confident that through the support of rate payers and all stakeholders coupled with a dedicated workforce by working together we shall be able to attain the set goals. I would like to thank the dedicated people who were part of the formulation process of this Strategic Plan. They sacrificed numerous hours of their time towards the completion of this important document. Their immense efforts helped us to come up with this policy document that will guide City of Gweru and enable the City to focus on our Vision to become ‘A Sustainable Prosperous City of Choice by 2030’.</p> <p>Please join me in implementing this well thought plan”.</p> <p>From The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Gweru City Council and the Executive team.</p> <p>(Source: this strategic plan is taken from Gweru Council official website)</p>

One can observe that the practices and praxis adopted by the city of Gweru’s municipal management in implementing its strategies tend to decrease the complexity of the execution of strategy. The elements of organizational complexity (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Stacey, 1996) are very difficult to put in practice, but easy to classify in theory. Thus practice and theory becomes a major strategic challenge in the city of Gweru when it comes to the implementation of their strategies.

Group autonomy is a strong characteristic of complex organizations such as local authorities, universities, or hospitals where many professionals make up the labour force and trust is very important. One participant

argued: “knowing what to expect from people and at the same time not letting them so free to do whatever they wish”. Maintaining a dialogue is a praxis that produces good results in integrating efforts between the shadow system and the legitimate system. The work of opinion leaders as members of groups comprising the organization created the belief that “if someone is against something, it is because at least an analysis of what is being said is needed”, according to one participant. The upper management initiated interaction between groups, both vertically and horizontally, reinforcing what Axelrod and Cohen (1999) suggest when they refer to interaction patterns. These patterns, developed by organizational agents, are important for the process of strategic management. The City of Gweru’s municipal management communicated not only that they will be heard, but that they will also be accountable. When plans, actions, and objectives are systematized, organizational members accept their responsibilities and contribute to the process. At the same time, many would criticize the rationality of systemizing. The city lives with unpredictability, uncertainty, a variety of interactions; the stakes are raised because its major service focus is service delivery. Training and legitimated practices such as total quality management and the city ISO certification programmes have helped make the process understood as a necessary condition for the adoption of new procedures and, consequently, for the construction of a new culture focused on results. The new pattern is necessary for sustainability.

The Chinghai Municipality

General information and history.



Figure 5. Map of Chinhoyi.

The history of Chinhoyi. The town of Chinhoyi used to be called Sinoia during the colonial era. Its name is derived from Tingyi, a Lozwi/Rozwi chief who is thought to have been a son of Lukuluba and related to Mukuruva by the Zezuru, who was the third son of Emperor Netjasike. The Kalanga were Lozwi/Rozwi, but their name was changed to Sinoia by the white settlers and later Chinhoyi by the Zezuru. Sinoia was established in 1906 as a group settlement scheme by a wealthy Italian called Lieutenant Margherito Guidotti, who encouraged 10 Italian families to settle there. The Second Chimurenga War (War of Liberation) started in this town in the area that is now the Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital.

Table 2

General Information on Chinhoyi

Coordinates of the City of Chinhoyi	17 °21'100" S, 30 °12'00" E coordinates
Country	Zimbabwe
Province	Mashonaland West
District	Makonde district
City	Chinhoyi Municipality
Established	1906
Elevation	1,158 m (3,799 ft)
Population total (Last census 2012)	79,368
Time zone	CAT

Municipality of Chinhoyi.*Figure 6. The municipal buildings of Chinhoyi.*

Municipality of Chinhoyi is a local authority which was enacted by an act of parliament, the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29.15 in order to deliver services and promote development at local level as a means towards raising the standards of living of urban populations. The historical development of the municipality can be traced back to the last quarter of the 19th century during the colonial era. (Municipality of Chinhoyi official website, 2018)

The original Chinhoyi municipal authority was a village management board selected in 1914 to scuttle the water delivery system and drive the refuse removal services and various other sanitary endeavours. This village management board run the village until 1946. Due to the expansion of the town, it was elevated to a town management board (TMB) and the town showed enormous growth during the time of the town management board. The board was recognized in 1946 and served up until 1974 when the town was elevated to municipal status. Chinhoyi Municipality was established in 1974 on the 1st of July and its first mayor was elected on that day. The local authority of Chinhoyi has a strategic vision “to become an industrialized city of preference in Zimbabwe”. However, it intends to accomplish this vision through effective and efficient delivery of quality services to all its stakeholders. Chinhoyi town is subdivided into 16 administrative wards. At present the council consists of 16 councillors, one of whom is selected by the councillors as a ceremonial mayor. The local authority has also assumed the governmental and strategic planning functions over Alaska and Shackle ton. Chinhoyi municipality has already benefited from the proposal of various management strategies that aim to accelerate service delivery, such as the strategy to accelerate access to sanitation and hygiene since July 2013 to June 2017.

Chinhoyi is situated 115 km northwest of Zimbabwe's capital city Harare on the main road to the resort town of Kariba and to the boarder of Zambia. Chinghai town is extremely lucky to have inherited a moderately well gravelled and tarred road network, although reduced road expansion and maintenance issues have attributed to the corrosion of this infrastructure, and for the duration of the rainy season, a number of roads are difficult to use. It is home to several government ministries and departments at provincial level, which means the whole of Mashonaland West is administered by Chinhoyi. The population of Chinhoyi has been gradually growing and was 55,968 during the 2002 census (CSO, 2002) and 79,368 according to the last census in 2012 (from preliminary census report *Zim Stat 2012*). The Chinhoyi municipality estimates that there are 14,000 plots (not including Alaska and Shackleton, where there are 891 and 840 residential plots respectively). The Municipality of Chinghai has medium to low density housing that accommodates middle to high income earners in areas that include Riverside, Orange Grove, Golf Course, Mzari, Mapako, and part of Ruvimbo. Chinhoyi municipality also includes 11 high density low income residential suburbs: Rusununguko, Brundish, Chikonohono, Rujeko, Gadzema, Hunyani Mpata, Ruvimbo 1 & 2, Katanda, Mpata, White City, Cold Stream, Cherima, Old Single Quarters, Dzakanaka, Chitambo, and Pfungwa. The municipality adopted the two mining suburbs, Alaska and Shackleton, which are wards 14 and 15 respectively and which increased its population. These suburbs were adopted by the Chinhoyi municipality subsequent to the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC) closing its operations in 2000. This shutdown left a gap not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of service provision. Chinhoyi municipality has applied for city status. If the application is successful, the municipality of Chinhoyi will gain additional autonomy in terms of strategic planning and decision making. The shift from town to city status will give support and flexibility around the procedures to borrow money, potentially raising their revenue from central government. Chinghai municipality managers think it will improve investor confidence. Chinhoyi is a college town, hosting two of the country's major universities, namely Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). The principal secondary schools in Chinhoyi include the three government high schools, namely Chinhoyi High School, Chemagamba High School aka Chinhoyi No. 2, and Nemaconde High School, together with the private high school Lomagundi College. Chinhoyi houses the Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital, the largest and most modern referral hospital in Mashonaland West. Some of the hotels in town include the Chinhoyi Hotel in the centre of town, the Orange Grove Motel, about 1 kilometre northwest of the town on the road to Karoi and the Caves Motel, located about 8 kilometres northwest of town, next to the Chinhoyi caves. Tourist attractions in Chinhoyi include the Chinhoyi Caves in the Chinhoyi Caves National Park. The limestone caves were first described by Frederick Courtney Selous in 1888.

Strategic thinking in Chinhoyi. In 2014, Chinhoyi began a massive restructuring process to professionalize its management employees, an effort that is still ongoing. Managers with exceptional strategic thinking skills were selected by the human resources department. The aim was to bring about many new strategic organizational changes and the adoption of complex organizational systems to strategic management during this time of professionalization.

Vision and mission of Chinhoyi. Vision: "To become an industrialized city of preference in Zimbabwe." (Municipality of Chinhoyi official website, 2018). Mission: "Chinhoyi Municipality is committed to the efficient and effective delivery of total quality services to its stakeholders." (Municipality of Chinhoyi official website, 2018).

Chinhoyi's current corporate values. The municipality's corporate values are:

- Transparency,

- Equal opportunities,
- Economy—good corporate governance,
- A motivated workforce,
- Stakeholder satisfaction,
- A learning organization (Municipality of Chinhoyi official website, 2018).

The strategic management plan included some of the organization's medium-term strategic goals such as improving service delivery, the pursuit of self-sustainability through reduction of operational costs; establishment of a reputation as a renowned provincial city; improving quality of service; and creating new mechanisms for feedback and learning.

The systems thinking context at Chinhoyi's municipality. The City of Chinhoyi's municipality is strategically located along the Harare-Chirundu Highway that leads to the Zambia boarder. This allows for easy access for exporters and importers and the Kariba dam, which provides hydro-electricity to the whole of Zimbabwe. Its exceptional strategic management formulation and systems thinking efforts became a source of envy from other government provinces and business leaders across Zimbabwe. Its strong management implementation influence and control systems delivered the best service delivery from 2015 to 2017. The city of Chinhoyi's municipality has its own unique strategic plan that allows it to execute its goals and strategies. This process creates an annual plan every year, which sets out various strategic actions that include a tightly monitored budget, all arranged through a standard complex system and rational thinking processes.

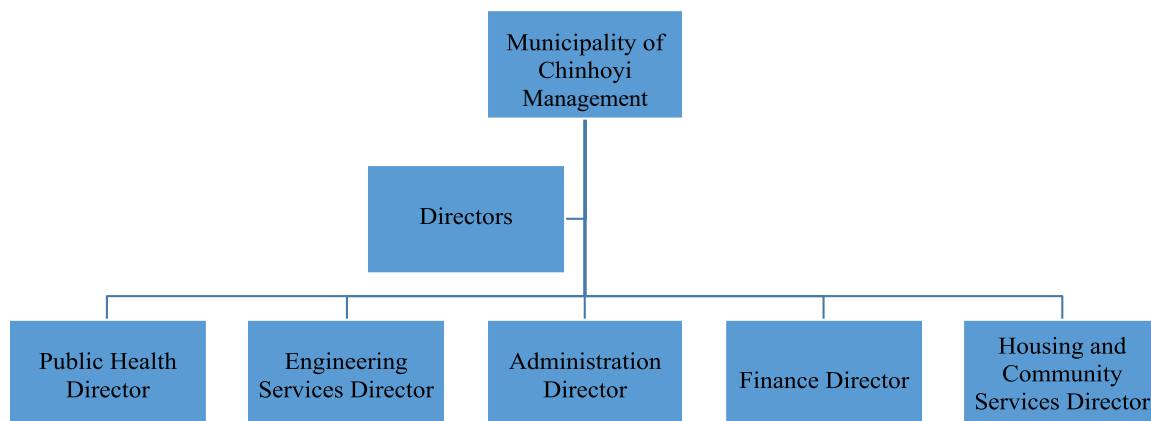


Figure 7. Chinhoyi's organizational structure.

Strategic management thinking techniques are applied and are evident both inside and outside the municipality in such instances of decision-making and follow-up. The executive management of the city of Chinhoyi's municipality conducts weekly meetings where their directors present the current status of their embarked strategies through various strategic thinking systems. Meetings with the senior and junior municipal managers' teams occur weekly as well. Even though interactions are constant, the pattern of thinking and interaction, as stated by Axelrod and Cohen (1999), are mostly situated at the executive level, thus never quite reaching the operational thinking level.

Since August 2016, Chinhoyi's municipality has defined and outlined its strategic goals and complex actions and these are rarely changed or adjusted. Nonetheless, the municipality is vulnerable to many environmental challenges and unpredictability, like all complex organizations. There are always new demands confronting organizational management and thinking, which requires large capacity to adapt to internal changes and to define

new ways of thinking through new priorities and reallocating resources. The Chinhoyi municipality continuously finds itself pressured to change previously established strategic plans, goals, objectives, and actions.

Departments of Chinhoyi's local authority. The Chinhoyi municipality continuously engages with the external environment: particularly government legislation, governmental resources, and unpredictable shifts in the Zimbabwean economy, and various urban council plans. Beyond this scope, the Chinhoyi municipality management continuously interacts with numerous stakeholders, different government ministries, e.g. the ministry of public works, the ministry of rural and urban development, the ministry of mining, ministry of agriculture, ministry of transport, and many other ministries, government agencies such as Environment Management Agency (EMA), and Zarnet, the Posts and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe, the Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe, regulating agencies such as Powered, Africom, Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe, and society in general. The complex adoption of various strategic management approaches indicates the need for municipal management to think with professionalism and to have credible systems that can serve to inform better decisions, actions, and controls. The Chinhoyi municipal managers are consistently developed through training and must have tertiary qualifications such as bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. The municipality has development programmes for all its middle managers and various officers. The municipality designed a customised managerial information system (MIS) that allows for quick strategic thinking and fast decisions making. The MIS defines 100 indicators of feedback from the organizational systems, something that is considered fundamental for strategic control, especially for reviewing or measuring strategic objectives, actions, and various managerial processes across the entire organizational structure.

Findings and Results Discussion

Results

The research was a qualitative case study of two very different municipalities situated in two very different provinces in Zimbabwe. This article used the comparative research methodology through interviews. In total 26 municipal managers representing the two different managements participated in the research, 14 municipality managers from Gweru municipality and 12 Municipality managers from Chinhoyi. Municipal managers' strategic thinking in this study was measured using unstructured and structured interview questions that divided into eight components. These are:

- How much time does municipal managers spend on strategic thinking?
- How much commitment do municipal managers have to their corporate strategy?
- Does the municipality lack strategic priorities in complex situations?
- Are municipal managers affected by status quo in their organisation and do municipal managers show understanding of what strategy is?
- Do municipal managers have training and tools for thinking strategically in complex adaptive situations?
- Do municipal managers have strategic alignment techniques that they use to implement their corporate strategies?
- How important is quality and timely data and information to municipal managers?
- Are municipal managers unclear about their municipality's strategic direction?

The above exploration of the challenges associated with the use of strategic thinking was documented.

An open-ended structured interview was used together with unstructured discussions. This mainly involved various municipal managers and officers from Gweru and Chinhoyi. Municipal managers were asked the research

questions and eight sub-questions in the interviews. The interviews took place at the two municipal premises and lasted between two to three hours each. All the responses were written down in counter books.

Gender composition of Gweru municipal employees. The result shows the total number of Gweru municipal employees, 1,200, 68% are males and 32% of the employees are females. This means the Gweru municipal council has a majority of male employees.

Gender composition of Chinhoyi municipal employees. The result shows the total number of Chinhoyi municipal employees, 366, 63% are males while 37% are female employees. The Chinhoyi municipality is predominantly a male organization.

Gender composition of Chinhoyi municipal managers. The result shows that the Chinhoyi municipality has 83% male managers, while 17% are female managers. Most of the strategic thinking is dominated by male managers.

Gender composition of Gweru municipal managers. The results show that the Gweru municipality has 79% male managers and 21% female managers. The strategic thinking at Gweru municipality is predominated by male managers.

Gender composition for Gweru and Chinhoyi municipality. The results show the number of municipal manager interviewed in both municipalities. A total of 81% of the interviewed managers were males while a total of 19% were female managers. These two separate municipalities have a higher number of male managers than female managers. Strategic thinking and strategic planning mainly rest in the decisions of male managers.

Results from the first interview question. The result shows that from the total of 26 municipal managers, 96% of the respondents showed that they spend most of their strategic processes in strategic thinking sessions and that they have strategic planning meetings every week at their work place. Only 4 % of the managers interviewed never spent any time in strategic thinking sessions in their departments.

Results from the second interview question. The result shows the responses to the second interview question. A total of 72% municipal managers were fully committed to the strategic planning at their respective municipalities, while 28% of the respondents had no commitment to the strategic plan of their municipalities since they were not involved from beginning of the strategic thinking process.

Results from the third interview question. The result shows the respondents to the third interview question. A total 60% of the respondents interviewed had many strategic priorities in place in their complex organization, while a total of 40% municipal managers showed a great lack of strategic thinking priorities.

Results from the fourth interview question. The results show the total number of municipality managers who are affected by municipality status in their strategic thinking. Fifty-six per cent of the managers were greatly affected by their status quo, while 44% of the managers were not affected. Their current job position on the municipal organization structure influenced their level of thinking in their complex organization.

Results from the fifth interview question. The above results show that only 52% of the municipal managers understood their organizational strategies, while 48% did not understand their future strategies as the strategies change frequently.

Results from the sixth interview question: Lack of strategic alignment in the municipality. The results show that 50% of the municipal managers saw strategic alignment of their municipal corporate strategies with their functional goals and objectives and felt that they were in line with the corporate strategies of the municipality. Fifty per cent of the respondents felt that they did not see any strategic alignment of their corporate strategies and

their functional objectives. Thus their strategic thinking was not in line with the corporate strategies of the municipality.

Results from the seventh interview question. The results show that a total of 90% of the municipal managers interviewed saw their municipality as a large complex organization, since it has many different stakeholders and was operating under conditions of economic unpredictability and political uncertainty in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, only 10% of the municipal managers did not see their organization as a complex organization, and did not see any complex corporate strategies.

Discussion of the Results

For public organizations to measure the strategic thinking of their managers there is a need to have key strategic performance indicators and performance standard sets. The current study of Gweru and Chinghai in Zimbabwe assessed eight performance aspects, using qualitative structured and semi-structured interviews. The response from these municipal managers on these aspects helped to answer the four research questions. A variety of factors were identified by the respondents such as strategic communication, control of municipal costs (financial), strategic planning, teamwork, problem solving and technical understanding (internal methods/organization procedure), and leadership management (learning and growth potential). The article was a qualitative comparative case study which described two very different local authorities. All 26 line managers participated in the research. Generally, the managers' performance regarding the quality of service for customer needs, financials, internal procedures, and learning, and growth is poor at both municipalities.

Municipal managers who performed above average or outstanding felt that technical understanding of the municipalities' future strategic plan was important. Some municipal managers interviewed felt that the executive management of the two municipalities influenced the managers' leadership styles, so it cramped the line managers' leadership styles, so the municipal managers could not think strategically in complex adoptive situations. The strategic planning and organizing of the two municipalities were viewed by its municipal managers as merely a glossy paper document with a five-year plan ending in 2022 and they saw no need and pressure to implement these strategies. The municipal managers that were interviewed felt that communication lines were very bad in their respective municipalities, some managers did not know what is going in their public organizations critical information is often not disseminated. Some information was communicated very late, while some information was never communicated to other line managers. The result is no timorously communication between line managers and different departments. The municipal managers interviewed mentioned that there were many strategic thinking problems in their respective municipalities, thus making functional and departmental performance, analysis, and resolution very difficult. Most of the municipal managers interviewed said they did not depend on other line managers and top executive management when implementing the strategic plans due to the lack of proper organizational structures and no proper reporting lines. Controlling costs proved to be very difficult for both municipalities, so the municipalities are cash-strapped and have no money to increase service delivery. During the interviews many municipal managers were not certain of the future of their own jobs. Gweru intends to cut half of its current employee workforce, and Chinhoyi is planning to cut 100 jobs through future retrenchments, but this corporate strategy has not been implemented yet. Employees still have their jobs. This results in the low levels of performance and low levels strategic thinking, low levels of innovation, a lack of organizational change, no organizational learning development, all of which affect service delivery and the performance of both municipalities.

Practical Implementation of Strategies in Chinhoyi

The implementation of strategies in Chinhoyi's occurred in two phases. The first was a review of internal processes that support and qualify middle managers for work directed at strategic management. The second was dedicated to solving conflicts of interest among stakeholders in the strategic process. Political rationality, as stated by Pettigrew (1977) and Bolman and Deal (2003), is also present in the majority of cities' initiatives flowing from the administration. They attempted to weaken the shadow system and deal with the loose coupling of the groups in senior management and in operations. Chinhoyi's municipal managers establish, transmit, and guide the implementation of rules, internal controls, performance indicators, and all other management tools to improve processes affecting strategic practices. The process of centralization in Chinhoyi's is focused on channelling efforts and practices to implement strategies in the economic, political, and structural domains. It considerably reduced the city managers' autonomy and reduced the involvement of lower levels of management in the strategic process. Chinhoyi has different categories of strategies that were adopted, revealing some elements of complexity when classifying the practices and praxis adopted by the city to implement strategies

Practical Implementation of Strategy in Gweru

Gweru focuses on decision making and on setting city goals and strategies. Strategic management practices were curtailed, especially because middle managers did not understand where and how to implement strategies. This made the work of agents directly responsible for operations more difficult. As implementation became more centralized, one participant acknowledged that strategic management is effective only when "it is popular, democratic and clear for the whole staff of the institution". For the same municipal manager, strategic actions require interaction and broadcasting among participants because individuals must have

awareness at least for their field of performance, of what is expected from his/her professional performance, which are the great objectives of the area so that he/she can have a vision of the whole and how he influences the global results of the unit.

The perception in Gweru shows that participation is key to achieving better results in implementing strategies. One municipal manager stressed this when he said that the expectation is that in 2017 the "strategic decisions of the strategic planning and of the main guidelines include the functional and technical staff." This testimony stresses the importance of participation by the operational agents, as the middle managers mentioned. Participation reinforces the practical perspective of the strategy and the interaction present in the theory of complex adaptive systems.

The General Public Perception of the Two Municipalities

The general public perception is that both the Gweru and Chinhoyi have very poor service delivery strategies in place. Refuse is sometimes not collected for months, there is often no water supply to some households, they have poor sewerage systems resulting cholera outbreaks, the road systems have collapsed in both provinces, roads have more potholes than 10 years ago, and the two municipalities have no money to repair basic infrastructures such as government schools, stadiums, and general hospitals. These two municipalities are failing to provide their communities with more rural clinics. More strategic thinking sessions and tools are needed in both these municipalities to increase their service delivery performance in the respective communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations

While the approaches of managers in public organizations should be tailor-made for volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) situations, certain bases have to be covered, no matter what the organization's circumstances are, for example:

- A strategy for building a capable public organization must be put in place.
- Sufficient resources should be allocated to strategic plans and for critical activities.
- The organization should establish strategy-supportive policies throughout the entire public organization.
- Best practices and mechanisms for continuous improvement in service delivery should be drafted.
- Complex adaptive support systems that enable municipal personnel to carry out their strategic roles with proficiency and accuracy in decision making should be established.
- Rewards and incentives should be tied to the achievement of key strategic targets.
- The corporate culture of the municipality should be shaped to fit the future strategic plans.
- There should be strategic leadership.
- A capable public organization should be built given the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. This entails:

- putting together a strong management team with the right chemistry and mix of skills;
- building core competencies and organizational capabilities that create a sound community deliverance foundation;

- organizing business process and decision-making in a manner that is conducive to successful strategy execution; and

- Allocating sufficient resources to strategic plans and critical activities.

- Strategy-supportive policies should be drafted throughout the entire public organization. This entails changes and transformation in work practices and how internal operations are conducted within the local municipalities. However, asking individuals to alter established procedures and behaviour always upsets the internal order of things. Individuals may exhibit some degree of stress and anxiety about how the changes and transformation will affect them, especially when the changes may eliminate jobs. Well-conceived public policies and procedures aid implementation. On the other hand, out-of-sync government policies are barriers. It is very important to ensure that only policies that are supportive of strategy implementation are established.

- Best practices and mechanisms for continuous improvement in service delivery should be identified. This implies that each department and organizational unit has to benchmark its performances and specific tasks and activities against other municipalities. This is a pre-requisite if value-addition activities are to be performed as effectively and efficiently as possible. Many strategic management authors today assert that a strong commitment to searching out and adopting best practices is integral to effective strategy implementation.

- Complex adaptive support systems that enable municipal personnel to carry out their strategic roles with proficiency and accuracy in decision making should be established. There should be support systems and processes. Public organizational strategies cannot be implemented or executed well without a number of support systems for business operations. This entails putting in place government policies and guidelines on how certain functions will perform against some form of benchmarking or reference point or specification. Standards can be

developed within the public organizations that guide operatives on work that should be done, and to be achieved in order to accomplish the set the vision, mission, and strategic objectives.

➤ In this information technology age, many functions can be automated. Innovative state of the art government support systems can be the basis for better service delivery.

Designing strategy-supportive reward systems in municipalities is very important these days. This helps in enlisting public organization-wide commitment by all its municipal managers and employees in better carrying out their strategic plans and thus motivating individuals and rewarding them for high-quality performance. This can be achieved through giving employees monetary rewards for the desired behaviour by top management of the municipality. The reward may also take the form of personal praise, public recognition, promotion, or other improvements in their status quo. One manager noted “the redesign of the organizational models” that started in April 2017 in most municipalities across Zimbabwe faced many difficulties in its strategic implementation. Some participants added that these strategic thinking difficulties “are even more present in their Municipality since there is a great resistance to strategic thinking and application of these various department and functional factors when it comes to its implementation”. Thompson and Strickland (1998) argue that the most dependable way to keep people focused on the objectives laid out in the strategic plan and to make achieving these objectives a way of life up and down the organization, is to generously reward individuals and groups who achieve their assigned targets and denying rewards to those who don’t. Building a strategy supportive public corporate culture is one of the key management challenges today. Every public organization has a unique organizational culture, i.e. each has its own business philosophy and principles, its own ways of approaching problems and making decisions, its own embedded patterns of “how we do things around here”, its own taboos and political dos and don’ts, in other words, its own ingrained beliefs, behaviour, and thought patterns and varied business practices. Thus public organizations are complex and have varying values, beliefs, traditions, operating styles, and very different internal work environments. It is important to create a perfect fit between municipality strategy and their communities. Aligning strategy, the community’s needs, and service delivery are among the toughest management tasks facing municipality managers and leaders—easier said than done.

Conclusions

This case study confirms the existence of complexity and serves as an excellent example of closing the gap on the various relationships between internal and external groups in the business environment. This gap is strongly influenced by the complex systems procedures and the autonomy of municipal managers in their decision making endeavours. This suggests that systems thinking (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Stacey, 1996) and legitimate systems management are interconnected and should be developed by the executive management in Chinghai and Gweru, even if it seems unsuccessful at the present moment. Managing complex organizations such as government organizations, is a modern challenge of great proportions. The complexity of local authorities, like the nature of their services, is complicated by organizational structure, the lack of professionals, and the unproductive interactions among its various agents, the dominance of specific interest groups, and too many internal politics. There is also continuous vulnerability, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the external environment. All of these factors strongly influence managerial practices and performance. The strategic management of complex systems, like local authorities, requires more-than-usual attention by managers to the strategy implementation process and its complexity.

Managerial approaches imported from the business sector based on rational models are simplistic; they do not work in complex environments like local authorities. If attention is not paid to the complexities of the local authorities, managers will risk destabilizing their organizations and reducing their performance. Even though the local authorities have made some progress lately in professionalizing their management teams as represented by the growing number of experienced and well-educated managers, municipality management still struggles to fill the many vacant positions within their municipalities because of corruption and nepotisms. Current municipal managers lack the professional preparation and training to carry out the strategic plans and have no visionary skills necessary for the job. The Zimbabwean government is failing to take into consideration all the unique characteristics and complexity of its local authorities across the country, thus creating a service delivery gap across all 10 provinces.

Contribution of the Study and Future Research

The study enriches the theoretical understanding of three concepts: local government authorities, complex organization, and strategic thinking. There is a need to redirect management mind-sets towards developing human resource capabilities that generate great strategic thinking and employee commitment, which are key to individual municipal managers' performance and which help to enhance better service delivery (Gerber, 2017). This study applied these three concepts to the municipal context in Zimbabwe, thus embarking on an in-depth exploration of how municipal managers think about strategy in their complex environments. Future research may look at the influence of employees' strategic thinking and the performance of city councils in Zimbabwe; the influence of strategic thinking on the performance of local government employees; and the influence of strategic thinking attributes that can help satisfy community needs. Future research can also focus on the complex systems of municipal financials, and finally future researchers can investigate the internal methods/organizational procedures and learning and growth of local government authorities in various communities and different countries across the world. Gweru and Chinghai are encouraged to implement strategic thinking that is linked to their performance management and to then put in place complex organizational structures that work with modern information management systems for all their employees, including line managers, so that they may see the need for addressing performance issues in their subordinates. Once line managers know that they are assessed in terms of strategic thinking performance, they may see the need to address the strategic performance of their subordinates and all other employees.

There is also a need for human resources skills that can be of assistance in positively influencing employee performance and thus increasing better service delivery by the whole local authority. The result of the study indicates that Gweru and Chinhoyi might have incompetent municipal managers. This management incompetence means that current municipal managers do not have the strategic thinking and the technical understanding to do their jobs or do not seem not to care. These research findings seem to support the poor performance and the service delivery challenges currently faced by Chinghai and Gweru in two very different provinces in Zimbabwe. Chinhoyi and Gweru are encouraged to recruit management employees with the essential strategic management skills, the correct thinking capacity, and the required management behaviours and to facilitate their management performance systems with rewards.

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