



Enhancing Service Delivery Through Organisational Justice: The Case of a Local Municipality in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine, from the perspectives of municipal workers, how a local municipality in Mpumalanga, South Africa, could enhance service delivery through organisational justice. As a concept, organisational justice refers to employees' perceptions of the fairness of organisational rules and policies, their actions and attitudes about their work, and their confidence in or mistrust of management. We contend that maintaining organisational justice may help resolve various delivery service issues. Guided by the social exchange theory (SET), municipal workers' opinions were accessed through a qualitative research design. In-depth interviews were used as data collection tools. The collected data were examined iteratively and critically. It was found that Municipal employees thought a just workplace was calm, where management distributed resources equally to all employees (distributive justice), applied policies and procedures consistently (procedural justice), provided truthful justifications for all decisions made (informational justice), and engaged in quality interpersonal interaction with all employees while putting organisational procedures into practice (interactional justice). However, processed data indicated that there was a disparity in resource distribution, a lack of transparency and participatory decision-making processes, a deficiency in information provision, and a culture of dismissiveness among municipal officials in the municipality. All these factors hindered effective service delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the current research is to explore how service delivery through organisational justice can be enhanced using a case study of the local municipality in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Service delivery according to [Shittu \(2020\)](#) refers to the extent to which the services provided by the municipality meet or exceed the expectations of the beneficiaries (general public). The researcher argues that these services are essential because they have a direct and immediate effect on the quality on the lives of the people in that community. [Group \(2022\)](#) states that when planned and managed well, urbanization contributes to economic growth and poverty alleviation, as well as to climate change mitigation and adaptation. According to the [\(UNEP\) \(2014\)](#), service delivery should be a continuous, cyclical process for creating and delivering user-focused services. International studies on municipal service delivery have for example, been conducted by [Din et al. \(2023\)](#) in the context of Pakistan; [Group \(2022\)](#); [Kalonda and Govender \(2021\)](#) in Namibia; [Hailu and Shifare \(2019\)](#) in Ethiopia; [Schoute et al. \(2018\)](#) in the Dutch local government setting; [Ali \(2017\)](#) in Tanzania; [Kim and Warner \(2016\)](#) in the US municipalities. These studies point to the ability of cities to deliver infrastructure and services effectively, and to manage built environments and local economies productively [Group \(2022\)](#); existing service delivery and customer satisfaction of selected federal ministries/organizations in Ethiopia; ([Hailu & Shifare, 2019](#)) the influence of service, political, governance, and financial characteristics on municipalities' choices; ([Schoute et al., 2018](#)) the role of good governance practices in enhancing service delivery in public institutions. ([Ali, 2017](#)) A study by [Schoute et al. \(2018\)](#) in the Netherlands, has shown that half of the municipalities have switched their mode of garbage collection between 1998 and 2010, with two-thirds of the switches being towards outside production, mostly by contracting out. This means that the delivery of public services has been the subject of major reforms, in particular at the local government level.

Whilst municipalities are expected to make sure that people in their local areas have at least the basic services they need, which are: water supply, sewage collection and disposal, refuse removal, electricity and gas supply, municipal health services, municipal roads and stormwater drainage, street lighting, municipal parks and recreation, there seems to be no commitment, accountability nor consequence management. Furthermore, although the local municipalities in South Africa, are required to prioritize completing their missions to provide high-quality services to the populations they serve by dividing scarce resources across competing departments to accomplish this purpose, they have hopelessly failed millions of communities, especially in black townships (areas specifically demarcated to the Africans) and in the

rural areas (UNEP) (2014) (Cutu, 2021; Seyitoglu & Ivanov, 2020). However, the local municipalities' inability to provide basic services has resulted in an increase in service delivery protests, some of which have caused irreparable harm to the government and public property. A large body of research (Cutu, 2021; Hadunka, 2020; Khota, 2020; Moatshe, 2018) indicates that there is a connection between effective local governance and successful service delivery. The researchers consequently, argue that inadequate service delivery within municipalities in South Africa generally and particularly in the Mpumalang province, might result from a lack of organisational justice. Considering the foregoing, researchers such as; Thusi et al. (2023); Enaifoghe (2022); Oseremen (2019); Ndezu and Muller (2018) highlight that in South Africa, countless complaints from frustrated residents, including bad/poor management and non-management, death threats, deterioration conditions persist in the local municipalities. Indeed, the municipality has been consistently performing poorly in delivering essential services, such as providing clean water, maintaining roads, and ensuring functional street lights. Consequently, the community has become increasingly frustrated, leading to violent protests and the destruction of community vehicles and infrastructure. These protests further exacerbate the challenges faced in service delivery. Additionally, municipal employees themselves are discontented as they have to work in poor conditions and receive inadequate wages. This lack of satisfaction among employees can contribute to decreased productivity and hinder the municipality's ability to meet the community's needs effectively. While the local municipality's inability to deliver basic services could be due to a lack of resources, corruption, inadequate financial management, and political parties' obsession with controlling the council, issues related to fairness and justice within the municipality cannot be ruled out.

Indeed the municipality serves as a suitable case study for investigating the relationship between organisational justice and service delivery due to the aforementioned reasons. Furthermore, because it is a rural municipality, it is located in an area with unique social, economic, and political characteristics that may influence service delivery challenges. South Africa has a history of racial and economic inequalities, and municipalities in the country often face significant service delivery backlogs. This context provides an opportunity to examine how organisational justice practices may impact service delivery outcomes in a rural challenging environment. Apart from that, the municipality selected for the study is likely to be a representative of many other municipalities in South Africa and beyond. It is a medium-sized municipality, which is relatively more manageable for research purposes, while still presenting a range of complexities and challenges commonly encountered in local government settings. This allows for a detailed examination of the dynamics between organisational

justice and service delivery in a realistic and practical setting. Additionally, the lead researcher had already cultivated good relationships with the municipality enabling him to conduct in-depth interviews regarding issues of fairness and justice and gather valuable insights from the perspective of municipal workers.

According to [Mwrebi et al. \(2018\)](#), issues of fairness and justice are synonyms and associated with the perceptions and reactions of an individual to the presence of fairness in an organisation and capture what that individual feels or evaluates to be morally correct rather than viewing it to be something prescriptive. Organisational justice is thus linked to how employees view the fairness of the rules, regulations, and treatment they experience at work. Fairness in the workplace, according to [Colquitt, Scott, Rodell, Long, Zapata, Conlon, and Wesson \(2013\)](#), manifests itself along several dimensions, including how organisational outputs, like salaries, are distributed among the employees, how management makes decisions that have an impact on the employees, and how employees interact with one another and management. This indicates that expectations regarding inputs and outcomes are shared in job partnerships. Managers must reciprocate in certain ways just as employees are expected to act and conduct themselves in certain way as outlined by organisational norms and policies. The notion of organisational justice [et al. et al. \(2013\)](#) and service delivery are centred on the fairness of how this is done, employees' equitable perspective regarding methods used by managers to run the organization, the treatment of workers by the organization, and workers' response to the treatment.

[Colquitt et al. \(2013\)](#) discovered a favourable association between organisational justice, employee performance, and citizenship behaviour in a meta-analysis study that reviewed the justice literature. The inference is that employees feel motivated, devoted to, and satisfied with their occupations when they sense that fairness exists in the workplace ([Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013](#); [Zhang et al., 2014](#)). In the long run, this leads to improved job performance, which in the case of this inquiry also translates into better worker productivity and effective service delivery. We argue that organizational justice could be used to encourage employees' commitment and motivation to work and improve service delivery in the municipality given the failure of the Mpumalanga municipality to provide basic services to the communities it serves; as well as the numerous service delivery protests that have occasionally resulted in damage to public property ([Thusi et al., 2023](#)). In this research, two questions are raised considering this context: a). How do employees in a local municipality conceptualize or view organizational justice? b). How could organizational justice be applied to improve municipal service delivery? Considering the stated research questions, the purpose of this study is to investigate how municipal

employees view the idea of organizational justice and how it might be applied to improve service delivery in the municipality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To foreground the current study, the Social exchange theory (SET) was found relevant because it sheds light on what transpires in groups or collaborative settings in the Mpumalanga municipality where resources must be shared (Nunkoo, 2016). According to this theory, interactions within organizations are governed by a range of social exchange norms that define resource exchanges, employer-employee relationships, and the quality of give-and-take commitment behaviours. Ahmad et al. (2023) and Cook (2015) suggest that Social exchange theory (SET) is one of the most influential theories in social sciences, which has implications across various fields. Despite its usefulness being a typical social transaction, there is a need to look at it from the lens of psychological transactions to further its evolution and to identify future directions. Jahan and Kim (2021) offer that Exchange ideology (EI); is a pre-existing general belief system that the individuals bring to the exchange relationship with the entire community or organization. Jahan and Kim (2021) suggest that exchange ideology (EI); is a pre-existing general belief system that the individuals bring to the exchange relationship with the entire community or organization. In the researchers' schema, the SET, establishes the groundwork for societal relationships that involve codependency among people and communities. The fundamental concept of SET is dependent on a give-and-take interaction, psychological contracts, and reciprocal obligations between municipal employees and their employers in the context of this research (Cherry, 2023). Thus, organizational policies and procedures implemented within the Mpumalanga municipality should reflect how employees are compensated and how they interact with management and their coworkers. The researchers argue that when employees are content with the laws, policies, and practices of their employers, they could become more productive and committed to service delivery within the municipality (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2014).

Additionally, according to SET, employees value working environments that allow for their professional growth as a kind of compensation et al (2010) . Accordingly, when employees feel that their employers are treating them unfairly, their morale suffers, which has a detrimental effect on their commitment, productivity, and in this situation, service delivery Birtch et al. (2016). Another important issue that the SET addresses is the sharing of organizational resources. The theory maintains that workers generally value receiving equal compensation for their efforts. While rewards could come in the form of aiding in employees' skill development, they can also come

in the form of fair compensation, certificates of appreciation for a job well done, providing adequate resources to complete tasks, etc. [Wikhamn and Wajda & Hall \(2014\)](#). The claim made by [\(Verbruggen et al., 2015\)](#) that providing employees with chances connected to their jobs boosts their dedication to work and, in this case, improves service delivery, goes against this observation. Contrarily, a lack of support for employees encourages negative work-related attitudes such as absenteeism, the desire to quit, and a lack of work ethic, all of which result in subpar service delivery [Yang \(2012\)](#). Some researchers [Roch et al. \(2019\)](#) use the social exchange theory to explain how procedural justice affects employee performance. According to the theory, employees and the organization engage in frequent, reciprocal social contacts within the workplace ([Kashyap & Chiang Rangnekar 2014; Birtch, & Van Esch, 2016](#)). The relationship between employees and the organisation will have an impact on procedural justice ([Kashyap & Chiang Rangnekar 2014; Birtch & Van Esch, 2016](#)). According to [Walumbwa, Christensen-Salem, Permann-Graham & Kasimu, 2020](#)), employees' connections with businesses might vary from being ones of social exchange to ones of commercial exchange depending on how they see procedural justice. Relationships involving economic exchange are by their very nature transactional, based on brief exchanges, and quid pro quo ([Aydin-Küçük, 2020](#)). For [Walumbwa et al. \(2020\)](#) social exchange connections are typically characterised by concepts like loyalty, emotional links, continuity, and mutual support among employees. Thus, in the researchers' schema, municipality employees might exhibit more productive work behaviors when social exchange relationships exist and subsequently impact on effective service delivery.

Justice Distribution and Worker Performance

Employees must believe they are receiving equal portions of distributed organizational resources for distributive justice, which is simply defined as sharing organisational outcomes equally among employees, to work ([Hayek, 2022; Marescaux et al., 2019; Moroni, 2020](#)). To put it another way, distributive justice emphasizes equity regarding the economic and social results of decision-making rather than the decision-making process itself ([Eisenberg, 2020; Hayek, 2022; Moroni, 2020](#)). [N Nameda et al. \(2022\)](#) purport that the distribution of responsibility also requires exploration in the context of research on development and distributive justice. Research by [Moroni \(2020\)](#) and [Hayek \(2022\)](#) indicate that by contrasting the organisational outcomes, they receive because of their work inputs with those received by referent of others, it is contended that employees will develop a feeling of distributive justice. The inputs that employees bring to their jobs include things like performance, effort, time, effort, knowledge, and skills. Wages, promotions, social rights, honours,

sanctions, paid time off, responsibilities, duties, physical resources, and training facilities are examples of organizational outcomes. Because distributive justice emphasizes results, it will force employees to react and be evaluated in cognitive, emotive, and behavioural ways about the outcomes (Kutaladze & Tsulaia, 2021). Therefore, if any assessment of distributive justice indicates that it is unjust, it will have an impact on the person's emotions (causing rage, unhappiness, anger, or guilt), cognition (such as distorting inputs and outcomes cognitively), and ultimately behaviour (such as decreased performance or withdrawal) (Clercq & Pereira, 2020; Khaola & Rambe, 2021).

Procedural, Administrative Justice and Worker Performance

Procedural justice pertains to treating employees with respect, fairness, and dignity, regardless of rank and status, in all facets of work life. This involves clear communication about organizational policies, procedures, and the decision-making process. Consistent and transparent policies give employees a clear idea of what to expect from management, creating a sense of trust in the organization. Therefore, the concept of procedural justice refers to how staff members view the means and procedures utilised to distribute organisational results among them. In other words, managers' or managers' representatives' need to provide fair communication to employees during the distribution of organizational outcomes following formal organizational procedures is related to employees' perceptions of procedural justice (Clercq & Pereira, 2020; Khaola & Rambe, 2021; Suliman & Kathairi, 2013). Bolger and Walters (2019) divided the perception of procedural fairness into two categories, namely, fair outcomes and formal procedures.

The fairness of formal processes is determined by how the employees feel about the methods employed to distribute results. Fair outcomes refer to the degree to which employees believe that the pre-established processes utilized in the distribution of results were fair. Bolger and Walters (2019) further identified two sub-dimensions of procedural justice. The first of these focuses on the structural features of the techniques applied when deciding how to distribute resources. Giving employees the freedom to speak up and use their thoughts and methods during decision-making processes is a part of this component, which is referred to as lawful transactions. The second component of the problem is whether policy and practice are applied equitably by decision-makers when making decisions. The way the outcomes are described is typically more significant than the outcomes themselves in the context of procedural justice since it pertains to the fairness of the decision-making process surrounding organizational outcomes (Clercq & Pereira, 2020). K Kutaladze and Tsulaia (2021) claim that when staff members believe that organisational outcomes have been

distributed unfairly, they first question the processes that give rise to these outcomes. Once they conclude that the processes are unfair, they then try to alter their behaviour to make things right again within the company. In this setting, procedural justice influences employees' feelings, attitudes, and behaviours in an organisation, much like distributive justice does [Kutaladze and Tsulaia \(2021\)](#). The way that employees see procedural fairness has an impact on their attitudes and behaviours toward the decisions that managers make within the business, but it also serves another symbolic purpose by improving the rapport between workers and managers. Accordingly, procedural fairness can have a favourable impact on an organisation by improving staff members' loyalty to the business and their faith in their boss ([Suliman & Kathairi, 2013](#)).

Justice in Interaction and Worker Performance

Interactional justice involves treating employees with respect, dignity, and consideration. This includes being respectful and polite in all communication, providing feedback, and offering support for work-related stress. Employees who feel valued and respected will be more motivated in their roles, leading to higher productivity. Indeed, when speaking with their superiors, employees look for fairness. According to [B. N. Z.-W. . N. A. Miao R. \(2021\)](#), and [Newman et al. \(2021\)](#), interactional justice is the perception of justice among employees that is concerned with educating them about the subjects of organisational decisions as well as the attitudes and behaviours that they are exposed to during the implementation of organizational decisions. It is based on peer-to-peer relationships. In other words, it conveys the attitude and conduct that managers expose to their staff to when they carry out (distributive and procedural) procedures ([Hayek, 2022](#); [Moroni, 2020](#)). Interpersonal justice and informational justice are said to be the two sub-dimensions that make up interactional justice ([R. Miao et al., 2021](#)). The concept of interpersonal justice emphasises the value of compassion, respect, and regard in interpersonal interactions, especially between managers and employees. On the other side, informational justice focuses on providing employees with accurate information when it comes to organisational decision-making. Employees are inclined to focus on means of communication and reciprocal connections within the organisation when they contemplate injustice in the workplace, but they are likely to focus on job results while considering justice, according to [Cojuharenco and Patient \(2013\)](#). Employees will respond with improved job performance if supervisors or management representatives fairly contact them ([R. Miao et al., 2021](#); [Unterhitzenberger & Bryde, 2019](#)). Long-term strong interpersonal relationships and communication can result from interactional justice ([Unterhitzenberger & Bryde, 2019](#)). Indeed, the social exchange theory holds that interactional

fairness is what determines whether employee-administration connections have a favourable or bad impact on job performance (Unterhitzenberger & Bryde, 2019). This idea contends that if staff members are content with their interactions with management outside of their formal positions, they will volunteer to take on extra responsibilities, which will improve their performance in the context of those responsibilities. Interactional justice is one method mentioned by some academics who contend that using financial incentives alone to encourage workers is costly and time-consuming (Khaola & Rambe, 2021). The fairness of the interactions between employees and administrators throughout the distribution of organizational results into relational considerations. This implies that employee will feel valued and recognized as a member of the company if there is fairness between managers, staff, and themselves. Employees may be motivated by these pleasant sensations to reciprocate by acting in ways that go beyond the scope of their regular work duties (R. Miao et al., 2021; Unterhitzenberger & Bryde, 2019; Zhu et al., 2023).

Information Justice and employees' performance

Information justice means that employees have access to accurate, complete, and relevant information about their job and the work environment. This positively impacts their job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity. It also leads to better decision-making that benefits the company and the workers. One way of ensuring information justice in an organisation is to ensure effective communication. Effective communication on the part of employers may lead to conceptions of informational and interpersonal justice (De Clercq & Pereira, 2021). D De Clercq and Pereira (2021) assert that is vital for organisations to use effective communication when informing staff members of decisions. The use of effective communication boosts confidence in both management and the organisation When businesses must eliminate multiple work jobs, for instance, it is crucial to communicate the reasons for the layoffs to every employee and to treat those who are let go with respect and fairness.

From the literature, as explored above, it is evident that distributive justice, procedural justice, information justice, and interactional justice are all crucial in enhancing a worker's productivity. They lay the foundation for a positive workplace culture, which is essential for productivity, engagement, and overall satisfaction. When workers are satisfied positive organizational outcomes are more likely to occur. In the context of this study, we argue that the prevalence of these "justices" in the Mpumalanga local municipality could be a motivation for employees to ensure service delivery to the communities.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study, positioned within an interpretivist, constructivist paradigm [Petty et al. \(2012\)](#), was found suitable for the current research because qualitative approaches are primarily used in the constructivist paradigm. A qualitative, constructivist approach is coherent with our quest to establish how municipal workers conceptualise organisational justice and how such understanding could enhance service delivery from their perspective. Thus, the social world of the selected participants' knowledge and experiences that is contextual to organisational justice in the Emfuleni local municipality informed the case study approach. The chosen qualitative approach in the current research enabled the researchers to produce comprehensive reports that deepened their understanding of organisational justice that is context-bound, concerning the Mpumalanga local municipality. Thus, [\(Palinkas et al., 2015\)](#) suggests that interpretivists prefer qualitative methodologies such as case studies and ethnography because these techniques frequently produce extensive reports that are required for interpretivists to completely comprehend the circumstances of the case they are studying.

Population and Sampling

From the population of 20 employees within the local municipality, nine were selected for in-depth individual interviews, using purposive sampling. The selected participants included five office-based employees, two electricians, one employee responsible for filing, and a cleaner. The managers were deliberately left out because we believe that the culture of an organisation should filter down to the lowest level employee if it is productive. The criterion used to select participants was based on their having at least five years of experience in their current positions. We also believed that if organisational justice and service delivery existed, it would be evident in how the lowest level of employees execute their tasks. We also believed that having conversations with the cluster of employees we selected might elicit close to honest responses without covering up information to align with institutional policies. In the researchers' schema, these informants had the necessary knowledge, background, and expertise to serve the current study's objective [\(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sim et al., 2018\)](#) and they met data adequacy criteria, which pertain to the appropriateness of sample composition and size [\(Palinkas et al., 2015\)](#).

Data collection

Data on participants' attitudes, values, reasons, meaning-making, and self-understanding regarding organisational justice and service delivery were gath-

ered through individual, detailed, semi-structured interviews. The primary objective of utilising qualitative data collection methods was to obtain textual material for research, encompassing written or spoken statements by participants that may not have been observable by the researchers. Data were collected from nine employees of the Emfuleni local government to gain an understanding of their opinions on organisational justice and service delivery. [Neubauer et al. \(2019\)](#); [Creswell \(2013\)](#); and [Bryman \(2012\)](#). Qualitative research aims to investigate the “what” and “how” of human experience and its importance concerning organisational justice and service delivery. The Emfuleni local municipality conducted interviews with employees to assess the techniques, instruments, and outcomes utilised for data collection, which led to a deeper comprehension and evaluation of organisational justice. [Creswell \(2014\)](#) states that qualitative interviews allow for participation and the exploration of unanticipated themes by researchers. Interactivity in [Punch \(2013\)](#) helps to counteract the researcher-centered bias often found in written surveys, which are limited to measuring information that is already known or anticipated to be important to the researchers. The researchers utilised the interview method to ask questions and offer suggestions to gather extensive information from the chosen participants ([Hesse-Biber, 2017](#)). The researchers initiated the study with an overarching question: “What is your interpretation of organisational justice?” The participants had the liberty to answer any of the questions presented to them ([Saunders et al., 2018](#)). The researchers believed that informal, conversational interviews were best for collecting in-depth contextual information by asking open-ended questions about organisational justice.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is an iterative and complex process of carefully searching and organising data to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon under study [Tan \(2017\)](#). The qualitative data analysis process entailed organising, interpreting, and presenting the data in a meaningful way to reveal insights, patterns, themes, and stories that improved understanding of organisational justice within the Emfuleni local municipality [Strauss and Corbin \(1990\)](#). Phenomenological analysis was found to be appropriate for this study ([Vault, 2011](#)). [Creswell \(2013\)](#), because it was influenced by the researchers’ constructivist perspective, as well as their scientific and cultural backgrounds [Tan \(2017\)](#). The researchers used a computer to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews and file notes into paper and electronic files ([Creswell, 2014](#)). During the analysis process, the researchers immersed themselves in reading and re-reading the transcripts, allowing them to become close to the data and analyze with an open practical attitude. Because the data could not be seen, the

researchers isolated them and then related them to the necessary theoretical notions. According to , the analysis should demonstrate the researchers' ability to think critically and extract meaning from data via critical reading and informing the researchers of theories and studies on the subject being examined. [Bawalan \(2012\)](#) proposes that the epoche in qualitative research, for example, is the process by which researchers can remove, or at least become aware of, their prejudices, perspectives, or assumptions about the topic under examination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data uncovered several concerning findings related to the unequal distribution of resources, lack of transparency and employee involvement in decision-making, insufficient provision of information to employees, and a dismissive culture among municipal officials. These findings are summarized in Table 1, which is organized into three columns. The first column outlines the main themes identified through data analysis, the second column lists the subthemes that contribute to these main themes, and the last column provides operational definitions that clarify the meaning of each theme. This ensures that readers have a precise and explicit understanding of the themes that emerged from this study.

The themes (findings) as captured in Table 2 are now explained, discussed analysed, and interpreted concerning the existing literature on organizational justice.

Disparity in resource distribution

It was found that Municipal employees thought a just workplace was one that was calm, where management distributed resources equally to all employees (distributive justice). However, the study found a significant disparity in the distribution of resources and services across different areas within the municipality. This impacted the employees' willingness to work. Consequently, neighbourhoods were consistently neglected, leading to unequal access to essential services such as water, healthcare, and education. Interviewed employees confirmed that this imbalance resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and frustration among both employees and residents. In the words of P3, "We are told that the municipality has no budget for our salaries this month. How sure are we whether it is only the workers on the lower rank that are missing salary payments? This is unfair. The managers get fat salaries. It is unfair. We are also told there is no money to fix potholes, maintain roads, or fix street lights. What a shame!".

Table 1.
Themes, sub-themes, and operational definitions

Theme	Sub-themes	Operational definitions
Disparity in resource distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal budgetary allocation • Unequal training opportunities • Unequal access to municipal resources like vehicles • Ineffective resource allocation. 	Unequal distribution of municipal resources among municipal employees, leading to their poor performance.
Lack of Transparency and participatory decision-making processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion from important discussions • Exclusion from decisions that directly "affected our lives." • Lack of information on municipal projects. • Unaware of the municipal budget. • Lack of meaningful engagement with employees. 	Exclusion of employees from participation in decision-making.
Deficiency in information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of accurate information. • Lack of timely information to employees • No timelines • No delivery plans • No work progress updates 	Absence of relevant information needed by municipal employees to do their work effectively.
Culture of dismissiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rude behaviour • Disrespect • Indifference 	Municipal officials show a disdainful attitude toward employees; especially those regarded at a lower rank.

Apart from inequality in incomes as explained by the respondents, participants indicated that they experienced unequal training opportunities, had unequal access to municipal resources like cars, and ineffective resource allocation. For example, asked whether he had ever witnessed or experienced any unfair treatment within the municipality, P3 answered in the affirmative. In his own words, "Here there is favouritism. The big bosses favour their relatives and friends. As an outbound worker, I need all the necessary equipment and cars before I leave the station. But in many cases, only those close to team leaders are given all the necessary equipment." This finding suggests that the lack of equitable resource distribution hampers the ability of local governments to provide consistent and effective services to all communities. Respondents indicated that in many cases sewage overflows on streets for months; endangering the health of the residents, because of either inadequate manpower, resources, or just the municipality's inability to respond to residents' needs promptly. In cases like this one, where some employees possess more resources than others, it emerged that the communities served by the latter group do not receive services of an equal standard. P6 indicates in this regard that "in the townships, sewerage will overflow in the streets for months and months and residents will leave without electricity for weeks and weeks! this cannot happen in the suburbs."

Lack of Transparency and participatory decision-making processes

The study revealed a lack of transparent and participatory decision-making processes within the municipality. Community members reported feeling excluded from important discussions and decisions that directly affected their lives. The absence of fair procedures eroded trust and undermined the legitimacy of the local government. For example, asked how he felt about the fairness of the policies and procedures within the municipality, P2 epitomised the feelings of the other participants. In his own words, the participants indicated that “most of us do not even know how much money the municipality has. We know nothing about the budget of this municipality. What we know is that we have lots of money for the managers to drive expensive vehicles and to live in big mansions; while we the workers are not paid for some months.” P2 then went further on to explain how employees are excluded from important decisions, especially decisions that directly affected their lives. Asked whether employees did not participate in municipal affairs through their trade unions, P2 revealed that trade union officials are compromised and, in many instances, tend to side with management. Indeed, P3 indicated that “we workers want meaningful participation in decision making. The way it is now some of our comrades (union officials) work with management to oppress us.” Asked what they would have wanted to see regarding ensuring transparency and participatory decision-making, the respondents responded thus:

P1: Ordinary workers should be allowed to contact the municipal managers; I mean the manager should be easily accessible so that we as workers can directly voice our concerns and grievances.

P2: I think our leaders must proactively publish information regarding government activities, policies, regulations, budgets, and projects. Only the favoured ones, I mean their colleagues are given information about the tenders.

P4: We need to know how decisions are reached. Our managers must tell us how they make decisions to give tenders, to build some projects and maybe they should also be consulting the masses in the townships.

P5: With me, I feel that at least once every month management should meet all workers and the community to explain the successes and failures of the municipal leadership.

P7: Municipal should consult workers when budgeting to avoid corruption.

Overall, the sentiments were that there was a need for open communication, engaging stakeholders, and involving employees and communities in decision-making processes. Respondents indicated that and fostering transparency and accountability, municipal managers can ensure that local government operates

in a transparent and participatory manner.

Deficiency in information provision

Whilst the respondents indicated that they would have wished to engage in quality interpersonal interaction with all fellow employees and management, the study identified a severe deficiency in the provision of accurate and timely information to them. Participants for instance indicated that there was no transparency regarding service delivery plans, budgets, and progress updates. This led to a sense of alienation and disempowerment among the municipal employees. Explored literature indicated that delivery plans and progress updates provide a roadmap for municipal workers to follow, outlining the objectives, priorities, and timelines for service delivery. However, from the responses of the participants, employees in the municipality are neither given delivery plans nor timelines to accomplish their tasks. Respondent P7 for example remembers a time when he was assigned the duty of repairing faulty streetlights one morning. The respondent indicates that managers should have at least a week's schedule as opposed to assigning employees duty as and when they arrive for duty on the same day. According to [Haque et al. \(2021\)](#) when these plans are deficient or non-existent, there is a lack of clear direction and coordination among employees. This can result in confusion, duplication of efforts, and inefficiencies, leading to delays and poor-quality service delivery. In the words of P6, "instances of two teams of employees converging at a site where the work is meant for one team is not uncommon in this municipality."

There is also a need to note that delivery plans, progress updates, and budgets serve as tools for monitoring and evaluating the performance of municipal workers ([Voorn et al., 2019](#)). In the absence of these documents or with significant deficiencies, it becomes challenging to hold workers accountable for their actions or progress. This lack of transparency can lead to complacency, unaddressed inefficiencies, and a lack of incentives to improve service delivery. However, P7 said that "my problem with this municipality is their failure to guide us. We have no schedules. We are not aware of what our next assignment will be. Actually, there is no plan. Only our leaders know what will come next."

Asked about the methods of communication the municipality uses to inform employees about what is going on within the organisation, P7 said, "What I can tell you is that whatever method they use, it is faulty." Responding to the same question, P5 aptly captured the insufficient communication channels within the municipality. The respondent indicated thus, "Sometimes messages are sent to us through Whatsapp or SMS, but not all of us have data all the time. You will only read the message when you add data on

your phone.” It further emerged that insufficient communication channels also manifested in the management’s inability to provide feedback regarding municipal projects accomplished and those outstanding and their unwillingness to share municipal budgets with employees and communities. According to Voorn et al. (2019), these insufficiencies further exacerbate the problem, hindering employees’ ability to voice their concerns and seek redress.

From the contents of this section, lack of transparency has not only led to complacency, unaddressed inefficiencies, and a lack of incentives to improve service delivery but also employees’ inability to participate and get fully engaged in municipal affairs. This has resulted in services that do not adequately meet the needs and expectations of the community.

Culture of dismissiveness among municipal officials

According to Cremer (2020) treating employees with respect, dignity, and consideration is part and parcel of interactional justice. However, processed data in this study illuminated a prevalent culture of disrespect, indifference, and dismissiveness among municipal officials toward employees. Participants reported instances of rude behaviour, neglect, and even corrupt practices. Such negative interactions eroded workers’ trust and created a hostile environment, adversely affecting the quality-of-service delivery. The following excerpts from answers to a question that solicited participants’ views on the relationships with their managers or team leaders aptly capture the type of interaction between employees and their managers.

P1: Well, my relationship with my manager, I can say it is not bad but sometimes the manager feels himself (is arrogant). He is not respecting all of us, especially those working as cleaners and in the gardens.

P2: Some managers and team leaders are good to us, but some don’t listen to our views. They only respect their friend’s views.

P4: Some of the leaders are rude.

P5: Some managers seem not to care, what can I say...indifferent?

P7: The relationship with them (the managers) is ok, but what I do not like is that there are cases when they think they have all the solutions. Anyone’s suggestions are wrong. That bothers me.

All interviewed participants confirmed that the culture of dismissiveness among municipal leaders toward employees inevitably led to a lack of workers’ engagement, poor communication, and collaboration, and decreased workers’ trust and satisfaction. These consequences ultimately contribute to a decline

in service delivery quality. This finding confirms [Unterhitzenberger and Bryde \(2019\)](#) and [R. Miao et al. \(2021\)](#) assertion that employees will respond with improved job performance if supervisors or management representatives contact them in a fair manner.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's conclusions are restricted to the particular municipality in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Caution should be taken when trying to apply these findings to different municipalities or situations. The study depended on the perceptions and opinions of municipal workers about organisational justice and service delivery issues. Subjective impressions impacted by human biases or personal experiences may affect the validity and reliability of the findings. This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on in-depth interviews. Although this method offers in-depth and detailed understandings, it might not encompass the complete range of experiences and viewpoints. Future research should utilise quantitative methodologies to validate and expand upon the current findings. This study primarily examines the viewpoints and encounters of municipal employees. Future research should involve more stakeholders, such as community members, local government officials, and other relevant parties, to gain a more thorough insight into service delivery difficulties and potential solutions.

In future research, researchers might compare the results of this study with those of other municipalities in South Africa or various countries to evaluate the connection between organisational justice and service delivery. This could aid in identifying similarities and discrepancies, offering insights into the efficacy of organisational justice initiatives in improving service delivery. Additionally, performing a longitudinal study to monitor the evolution of employee attitudes toward organisational justice and service delivery would offer a more profound insight into the dynamic interplay of these connections. This could aid in identifying the elements that influence good or bad developments in these areas and guide actions accordingly. Future studies should also assess the efficacy of targeted interventions designed to improve organisational justice and service delivery. This may include executing and evaluating the effects of policies, training initiatives, or leadership interventions aimed at fostering equity and enhancing service delivery results. Future research could explore how employees' views on organisational justice relate to community satisfaction with service delivery, offering significant insights. This research could investigate how organisational justice impacts employee happiness and community satisfaction, resulting in improved service delivery outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study explored organisational justice and service delivery at a selected municipality in the Mpumalanga province, South Africa. This study provides important insights into the factors that hinder service delivery in the local government. The findings indicate that there is a significant disparity in resource distribution, a lack of participatory decision-making processes, a deficiency in information provision, and a culture of dismissiveness among municipal officials. These factors collectively contribute to the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of service delivery in the municipality. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the municipality takes immediate action to address these issues and enhance organisational justice. Firstly, steps should be taken to ensure fair and equitable distribution of resources, prioritizing areas or sectors that are most in need. This will help to bridge the gap between resource-rich and resource-poor areas, leading to more effective service delivery. Secondly, the municipality needs to promote participatory decision-making processes, involving local communities and stakeholders in the planning and implementation of service delivery initiatives. This will not only enhance transparency and accountability but also ensure that the services provided align with the actual needs and preferences of the community. Furthermore, the municipality must improve information provision mechanisms to enhance communication and transparency. This can be achieved by implementing effective information dissemination strategies for all employees and the community at large. Lastly, efforts should be made to address the culture of dismissiveness among municipal officials. This can be done through training programs, workshops, and accountability mechanisms that promote professionalism, respect, and a customer-oriented mindset among employees. Overall, by addressing the disparities in resource distribution, promoting participatory decision-making, improving information provision, and addressing the culture of dismissiveness, the municipality can significantly enhance service delivery and ultimately improve the work conditions of all employees and the lives of its residents. The municipality must prioritize these recommendations and work towards establishing an organisational justice framework that enables efficient and effective service delivery.

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