“Impact of municipal employees’ perceptions of fairness in human resources management practices on motivation: evidence from a South African Province”

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SECTION 1. Macroeconomic processes and regional economies management

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Impact of municipal employees' perceptions of fairness in human resources management practices on motivation: evidence from a South African Province

Abstract

In South Africa, the problem of service delivery cuts across all municipalities as manifested by citizen protests across the country on almost daily basis. To mitigate the costs associated with the protests, the South African government has placed emphasis on the role played by human resources management through instituting legislative frameworks, such as the the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service (1997). Despite this effort, the human resource management practices of municipalities continue to be criticized, by both municipal internal staff and citizenry. Service delivery in the South African context is regarded as one of the cornerstone indicators of how the government affords its citizens access to quality life as enshrined in its constitution. This paper is one of the studies based on the South African context attempting to explain the problem of service delivery by looking at perceived fairness in human resource management (HRM) practices by employees of municipalities and how such perceptions affect their motivation to work. Using the tenets of the organizational justice theory, the authors hypothesize that perceived HRM practices of municipalities can be predictors of employee motivation. Quantitative data collected from employees of nine randomly selected municipalities in the Free State Province are used to create indices for the different HRM practices as well as employee motivation. Significant correlation tests are performed. Results show a positive correlation between perceived fairness in the HRM practices of municipalities and employees' motivation at .05 and .01 levels of significance. This means that fair HRM practices of municipalities promote employee motivation.

Keywords: justice perceptions, motivation, service delivery, municipalities, motivation.
JEL Classification: M5, M51.

Introduction

The provision of quality service that is of high standard by municipalities in South Africa is given effect by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). As such, all municipalities have made the delivery of quality service an important agenda in their functionings. Within the South African context, it is the responsibility of the local government sphere (municipalities) to provide water, dispose refuse, and so on. However, a closer look at and analysis of current levels of service delivery protests, it is prudent to concur with Portfolio (2008) as far as citizens are concerned, municipalities are not delivering services as they expect. In fact, poor service delivery by municipalities has led to many protests across the country, resulting in challenges such devoting precious time to deal with the protests, demotivation for those employees dealing with it, and in some instances destruction of property and fatalities. These consequences have led the South Africa government regard the role of effective human resource management (HRM) in quality service delivery a priority. This commitment is expressed in the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service (Republic of South Africa, 1997) which emphasizes that [….. public service human resource management results in competent and well-managed workforce]; […human resource management in the Public Service should become a model of excellence, in which service to society stems from individual commitment instead of compulsion]. What this entails is that people management issues in the South African municipalities are critical, especially for those responsible for it, and it should be done professionally. However, with the rate at which service delivery protests are taking place, HRM practices of municipalities have become a subject of daily criticism. Within the realm of such criticisms, there is still dearth of evidence on how the manner in which HRM practices of municipalities are done affects employees' motivation to deliver quality service as espoused by the central government of South Africa. Additionally, from literature, recent studies on perceptions of organizational justice and employee work attitudes have been done in universities (Jawad, Raja, Abraiz & Tabassum, 2012) and the corporate world (Williamson & Williams, 2011) in different contexts as the present study, leaving scope for investigating similar variables in a different organizational context within a country in transition, such as South Africa.

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The paper is part of broad research into the poor service delivery problem in municipalities across South Africa. It contributes to this debate of service delivery by assessing the extent to which perceptions of fairness in HRM practices of municipalities affect employees' motivation to work and deliver quality services in one of the provinces of South Africa. Using the theory of organizational justice, we argue that the poor quality of services being delivered by municipalities in South Africa could be explained by determining employees' judgement of fairness in HRM practices and how such judgement relates to employees' motivation. The study sought to answer the question, 'To what extent do employees' perceptions of fairness in municipal HRM practices relate to their motivation to work and deliver quality services?'

1. Literature review

1.1. Theoretical framework. The concept of justice or fairness in management is best explained, among other theories, by the organizational justice theory (Greenberg, 1987). Borrowing from this theory, a number of authors have written about justice perceptions (Colquitt, 2001; Bakhshi, Kumar & Rani, 2009; Thurston & McNally, 2010). Organizational justice is essentially the perception of fairness and the reaction to those perceptions in the organizational context (Greenberg, 1987). It regards how employees judge the behavior of the organization towards them and the resultant reactions (attitudes and behaviors) to such perceptions (Diner, 2014). This means that organizational justice plays a crucial role in terms of how justice and fairness are applied within organizations. Within the context of municipalities in South Africa, there is no doubt that employees' perceptions of how fair or unfair HRM practices are done can be linked to employee motivation to work hard and deliver the required quality services. For example, suspicions of employment, promotions, pay rise, or development opportunities based on 'cadre deployment' are most likely to be perceived by employees as unfair. What this entails is that municipal employees who perceive injustice and unfairness in HRM practices might be dissatisfied and demotivated to meet the ultimate goal of the organization which, in South Africa, is delivering quality services to the respective customers. Pourezzat and Someh (2009) added by indicating that the observation of injustice is one of the most important indexes influencing personnel to attribute such injustice to some observable events or situation within their work environment. It is, thus, fair to contend that unfair HRM practices by municipalities can lead to negative perceptions among employees, which will ultimately lead to them becoming demotivated to do their best in their work.

1.2. The concept of HRM. Among the myriad of organizational resources considered critical to organizational performance and ultimately organizational survival, the human resource compliment is often heralded as the most prized. To buttress this view, Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono and Schultz (2008) argue that organizations cannot function without people. The capacity of municipalities to sustain themselves lies in their potential to employ the right people, make the best use of employees and manage them properly, according to Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield (2011). The HRM concept was popularized in the 1970s, by behavioral science research showing that people needed to be managed as resources rather than as factors of production, or as human beings who act solely on the basis of emotions. HRM assumes people as vital and valuable assets for achieving desired organizational goals (Gennard & Judge, 2005). Many scholars (Taylor, 2008; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2007; Grobler et al., 2011; Berman, Bowman, West & Van Wart, 2010) have defined HRM differently, but they all agree that HRM is a strategic and proactive management of employees in a manner that guarantees optimal fit between employees, their jobs and the organization so that employees can reach desired levels of satisfaction and the organization can meet its desired goals. This definition implies two things: (1) South African municipalities must exercise foresight in managing their human resources (employees) in order to deliver quality service to citizens. This is important because growing literature on the negative sentiments about HRM in municipalities seems to paint a bleak picture on quality service delivery. For example, Paradza, Mokwena and Richards (2010) conducted a study on 12 municipalities in the Western Cape, Northern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal and found that most residents perceive municipalities as a ground for nepotism, corruption and discrimination in municipal appointments. The definition also allows an examination of HRM practices in municipalities from theoretical framework that emphasizes fairness in HRM practices and then links with employee motivation, among other issues.

1.3. Regulatory context of HRM in South Africa. HRM in South Africa, whether private or public sector, is regulated by a number of legislations. According to Ferreira (2012), the intention of labor policy is to create a labor environment that is free from conflicts and conducive to constructive and harmonious labor relations. Legislations on HRM practices are subject to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (Republic

of South Africa, 1996) and are meant to ensure justice, equality, fairness and so on – all that guarantee fundamental human rights. Other acts such as the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 (Republic of South Africa, 1995) as amended in 2002 advance economic development, social justice, labor peace and democratization of the workplace. The Act also deals with issues such as freedom of association, collective bargaining, strikes and lockouts, and unfair labor practices such as unfair dismissals. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 as amended in 2002 (Republic of South Africa, 1997) specifies the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers to ensure that employees enjoy certain minimum conditions of employment through the creation of secure, equitable and harmonious working relationships (Ferreira, 2012). It regulates working time, leave, remuneration and termination of employment, while The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998) aims to achieve equity in the workplace by: promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination (Nonco, 2012).

Besides these, the Public Service Regulation Act 103 of 1994 (Republic of South Africa, 1994); the Public Service Act 103 of 1994 (Republic of South Africa, 1994); the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), and many others that are too numerous to list or discuss here have bearing on how HRM must be practiced in South Africa. It is self-evident that all the legal ingredients exist in South Africa for promoting justice and fair play at the workplace. Regrettably, shortage of qualified staff to implement them has been identified as a challenge to service delivery in municipalities and the filling of vacant positions in municipal administration management structures (Paradza et al., 2010).

1.4. Political context of HRM in South Africa. According to Senyucel (2009), effective HRM relies on the conditions within a particular organizational setting. Therefore, the apparent political polarization of municipalities in South Africa has the potential of negatively affecting the HRM contexts that can be viewed as a pre-cursor to unacceptable HRM practices, prompting the occurrence of behaviors such as nepotism and the 'cadre deployment' strategy (Mashala, 2012). Cadre deployment within South Africa's political spheres refers to the appointment of people belonging to a certain political party (usually the ruling party), in government departments, regardless of qualifications or experience. Opposition parties in South Africa, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) are of the opinion that a number of municipalities are full of employees whose knowledge of local government issues is questionable because of being deployed on 'cadre' grounds (Republic of South Africa, DA, 2012). The ruling party, the ANC, is the one often accused of such deployments, to the extent that HRM practices in municipalities have suffered criticism daily – being accused of illegitimate and counterproductive (Ahmad, 2010). Commenting on the issue of cadre deployment, Kanyane (2012) bemoans how it is devoid of merit and promotes loyalty – the latter being regarded as not congruent with the provision of good public service. Similarly, Areff (2012) concurs when he notes that the deployment of incompetent people in South African municipalities based on the political polarization of municipalities does not augur well with the dictates of organizational prowess in delivering services efficiently and effectively.

Research evidence supports the above assertions. For example, the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) (Republic of South Africa, 2009) provided evidence of posts being filled in the Free State Province municipalities in the country on political grounds. Similarly, Paradza et al. (2010) reported on political inference among three municipalities in the Free State Province and in some provinces in the country, while Dzansi and Dzansi (2010) found that the employment of unqualified persons based on political party affiliation needed the attention of government as it appeared to have been so rampant in government departments in the Free State Province. Within the government itself, there is widespread acknowledgement that the notion of HRM as a panacea for service delivery has not been realized (South African Local Government Association (SALGA), 2011). This revelation by SALGA enables one to come to the conclusion that the quality of HRM practices in municipalities, is compromized by some political interference.

With authors such as Kabene, Orchard, Howard, Soriano & Leduc (2006) positing that effective HRM has become crucial and critical to the achievement of individual and organizational goals and objectives, South African municipalities are challenged to create work place settings, that is, policies and programs that promote fair treatment of every employee regardless of political affiliation. Indeed, an environment where employees are all treated equally has ramifications for sustainable service delivery within South African municipalities.

1.5. Towards fair or just HRM in South African municipalities. Both organizations and individual employees have goals to be met and neither should be achieved at the expense of the other. According to Strydom (2008), performing HRM well can lead

to the success of an organization. This means that judicious HRM appears to be the means through which employee goals can be met without compromizing achievement of organizational goals. Proper management of people at the work place is, therefore, of outmost importance to organizations. When a person joins an organization, one enters into a social exchange relationship with the organization, and they expect to satisfy both their intrinsic and extrinsic needs (Nel et al., 2008; Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2008). Gould-Williams (2007) states that the process of social exchange is initiated by organizations when they signal that they value employees' contributions and are prepared to care for their individual interests and personal well-being. If such is achieved, then, according to exchange theory, employees will reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors, in other words, they will be more willing to exert extra effort and less likely to withdraw membership from the organization (Gould-Williams, 2007).

Municipalities or any organization that seek long term exchange relationship with employees should heed to the views of Gould-Williams and Davies (2005). Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) assert that positive worker attitudes depend on employees' perceptions of how committed the employing organization is to them. A study done by Jawad et al. (2012) found that perceived fairness in distributive, procedural and interactional justice leads towards high levels of organizational commitment. Positive attitudes were taken as highly effective towards organizational commitment. On the same note, one can construe that organizations that care for their employees and recognize their contributions, are likely to have gained positive attitudes from them, such as satisfied, motivated and committed employees, who will contribute effectively and productively to the overall accomplishment of the organization's goals. This implies that proper HRM practices might result in employees being motivated to levels needed for effective quality service delivery in municipalities.

1.6. Overview of international municipal HRM issues. Reference to international HRM issues provides a platform for learning and sharing experiences (Gould-Williams & Mohamed, 2010). A study conducted by Gould-Williams and Mohamed (2010) indicates that Malaysian public service and municipalities recognize the strategic importance of the HRM function for organizational performance. According to these authors, HRM in Malaysian public service in general has evolved from a focus on employee welfare alone to one that emphasizes both human development and optimal productivity. The authors report that important Islamic values that emphasize the need for honesty, self-discipline, motivation, teamwork and consensus are now embedded in HRM practices in Malaysian public service including municipalities. In the United Kingdom (UK), Gould-Williams (2007) evaluated social exchange relationships in local government employees. It revealed that high exchange relationship led to greater discretionary effort and worker motivation, while low exchange reduced workers' motivation, increased workers' stress levels, reduced quality of life and gave a desire to leave the organization. Meanwhile, Blau (1964) had long pointed out that social exchange was voluntary actions which might be initiated by an organization's treatment of its employees, with the expectation that such treatment would eventually be reciprocated in kind. Based on UK findings and Blau's (1964) views, Gould-Williams (2007) concluded that when employees were subjected to unfair treatment at work, they were more likely to leave. A very important finding that Gould-Williams (2007) made was that equitable rewards promoted positive staff motivation leading to their intention to stay and increase work performance and ultimate organizational performance. In Tanzania, the Local Government Reform Program (LGRP) was introduced to improve among other issues quality of service provided by the local government (Mgonja & Tundui, 2012). However, a study by Pallangyo and Rees (2010) identified deficiencies in almost all local government associations (LGAs) in Tanzania. The study found lack of human capacity in terms of: required numbers of employees; lack of competencies and skills and educational qualifications; and failure by the LGAs' ability to attract and retain competent employees. Khaleghian and Das Gupta (2005, p. 1088) also found that just as in many countries, LGAs in Tanzania lack basic administrative capacity to execute their roles leading to poor service delivery. The underlying common thread within the countries discussed is their desire for enhancement of service delivery through competent, self-disciplined and motivated workforce. These international examples, though not exhaustive provide typical issues faced by human resource managers of municipalities throughout the world, South Africa included.

3. Employee motivation

Employee motivation highly influences the performance of employees (Muogbo, 2013). This implies that employee's performance is typically influenced by how organizations manage the work environment that motivates employees. Motivation is, therefore, important for organizational success. This means municipalities must seek to motivate their employees if they are to succeed in providing quality

service. Many authors have defined motivation (Mills, Bratton & Forshaw, 2006; Bagraim, Cunningham, Potgieter & Viedge, 2007; Qammer, 2010; Van Wyk, 2011; Kachornkittiya, Trichan & Lerkiatbundit, 2012). Examining the definitions by these authors, one cannot help but agree with Malik (2010) that motivating employees is a necessary step that every organization that seeks success should take. For municipalities in South Africa, it implies that motivating employees is the key to improvement in the quality of service they currently provide. For the purpose of this study, motivation is: *the uncompelled willingness and enthusiasm of employees to perform work to the fullest of their ability so that the organization achieves its goal or goals.* This operational definition implies that motivated municipal employees will willingly and enthusiastically do more for their municipalities to provide quality service to citizens. It also implies that municipal managers who have a quest for productivity need to arouse employees' interest in doing 'good' to the citizens. Municipalities need to be proactive and employ the right strategies in place to keep employees motivated. Makanyeza, Kwandayi & Ikobe (2013) claim that the major strategies that can be adopted to improve service delivery in municipalities include sound human resource policies that include employee motivation. But the question remains: are South African municipal employees motivated enough to enable their organizations fulfil the constitution's promises to the citizens?

3.1. Motivation to render quality service in South Africa's municipalities. Makanyeza et al. (2013) claim that the major strategies that can be adopted to improve service delivery in municipalities include sound human resource policies that specify strategies for employee motivation. Employee motivation is regarded as important for employee and organizational performance (Muogbo, 2013), regardless of sector or organizational setting. Within the municipality environments (public service), Andersen and Serritzlew (2009) highlight the potential for improving public services by having employees with the right kind of motivation. The right kind of motivation for employees can be rendered when municipalities provide employees with working conditions that will inspire them to be engaged, go the extra mile, and persist in the face of difficulties (Manna, 2008). Manna (2008) further points out that if employees are not motivated, their attitudes are reflected in their job performance. For municipalities in South Africa and elsewhere, employee attitudes may easily be reflected in the service they render to customers. Excellent service quality is the core of customer satisfaction whereas motivated employees are essential for improving the quality of service and, subsequently, retaining the organization's customers (Ahmad, Wasay & Malik, 2012).

Kachornkittiya, Trichan, and Lerkiatbundit (2012) attest that the most important factor contributing to service efficiency among public service employees is to enhance their public service motivation. Thus, motivated municipal employees are the ones to provide high quality services to citizens. This means that municipal employees must be motivated to serve, hence, the concept of public service motivation. With its origin in the 80s, public service motivation is regarded as essential for public sector employees' behaviors. Thus, authors such as Kachornkittiya et al. (2012) state that public service motivation should be done by directing the public employees' motivation more to the public interest. Similarly, O'Riordan (2013) submits that public sector organizations need to develop organizational culture grounded in public service motivation. From these authors' statements, one would ask whether municipalities in South Africa are providing environments for the development of employee motivation, and whether employees in South Africa are motivated enough to provide quality service? Buhlungu, Daniel, Lutchman and Lutchman (2007) argue that in South Africa municipal employees are more self-serving than serving the citizens, implying that they put their interests above the public interests. Manala (2010) also blamed apparent greed and corruption amongst local government employees for disabling service delivery in South Africa. It, therefore, appears that there is lack of motivation on the part of municipal employees in South Africa to provide quality service.

4. Conceptual framework

The literature reviewed thus far is abound with evidence of meddling in HRM practices by political officials in South Africa, especially in the local government sphere (Burke, Noblet & Cooper, 2005). For example, it has been shown that promotions, getting influential positions in the municipalities is a function of what is termed cadre deployment – a term which means jobs for pals (Kanyane, 2012). Studies on organizational justice have also demonstrated that employee motivation is linked to procedures and practices that are perceived to be fair (Nakate, 2011). The concept of employee motivation in municipalities is critical for service delivery because employees who are motivated become engaged and put effort in their work to achieve organizational goals. However, they get demotivated in an environment that does not take into consideration their desires and goals (Brooks, 2006) and respect for issues of equality in HRM practices. Based on these expositions, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed and developed conceptual framework of the hypothesized relationships between employees' perceptions of HRM fairness (PHF) and their motivation (MOT) in municipalities.

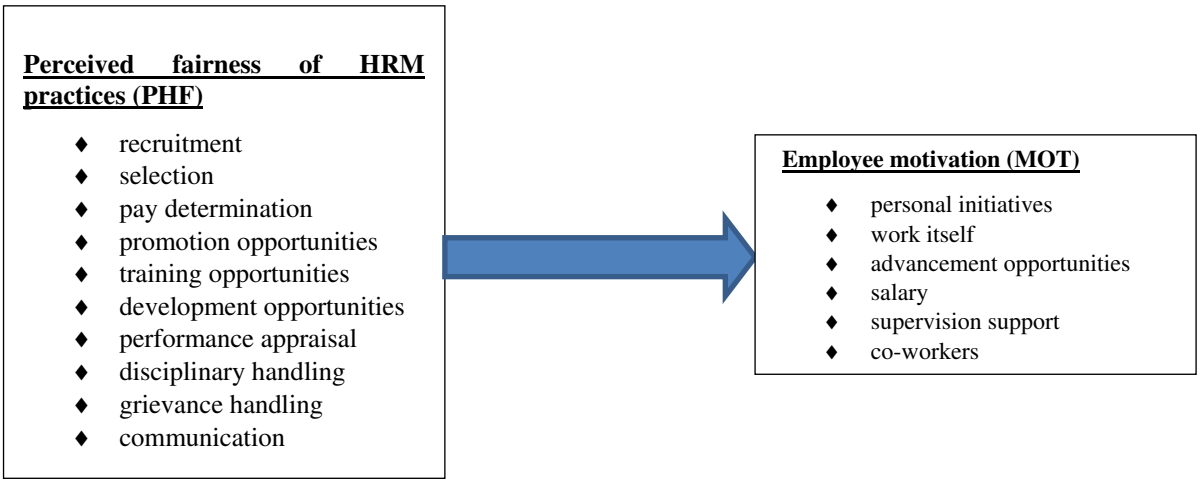

Fig. 1. The conceptual framework

Source: authors' contribution.

4.1. Hypotheses. Based on the above conceptual framework, the study hypothesized that: H_o – employees' perceptions of fairness in HRM practices of municipalities will be negatively correlated with their levels of motivation (MOT); H_a – employees' perceptions of fairness in HRM practices of municipalities will be positively correlated with their levels of motivation (MOT) where H_o and H_a represent the null and alternative hypotheses, respectively.

5. Methodology

The study was based on the empirical normative theory which advocates that the physical and social reality is independent of those who observe it (Babbie and Mouton, 2009). The theory advocates for the stating and testing of hypotheses. In tandem with the logical positivism, a quantitative approach was employed involving the use of numbers to explain employees' perceptions of HRM practices and measurement of their levels of motivation.

5.1. Design. The empirical deductive approach adopted meant that a descriptive cross-sectional design was appropriate for the study. A cross-sectional descriptive design is based on the assumption that the case being studied is atypical of cases of a certain type and, therefore, a snapshot of phenomena at one point in time will provide an indication of the situation prevalent in group form where the case has been drawn (Kumar, 2011). In this case, a description of employees' perceptions of HRM practices and their level of motivation were able to be given.

5.2. Population and sample. The study used a target population consisting of all the 20 municipalities in the Free State Province of South Africa. The municipalities are divided into four district municipalities, namely: Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyana and Xhariep and the Metropolis of Mangaung. Respondents were drawn from a sample of nine simple randomly selected municipalities from the 20 municipalities in the Free State province. The unit of analysis was each individual municipality. A reasonable sample size in quantitative research for a small population is approximately 30% of the population (Wagner et al., 2012). Researchers (Ary, Jacob, Sorensen and Walker, 2014) advocate for sample representivity, and not necessarily its size. Thus, sample size determination can be a result of an 'educated choice'. The nine randomly selected out of the population of 20 municipalities were chosen due to time and financial challenges. The number of questionnaires were restricted to 540, with 60 employees targeted from each municipality. To ensure a high response rate, field workers were trained in data collection techniques and were allocated a few respondents from municipal employees. Out of the 540 questionnaires sent out to municipal employees, only 342 completed questionnaires were returned yielding 61.9% response rate.

5.3. Sample characteristics. There was a gender balance in the sample of employees with males (44.4%) and females (55.6%). All the employees who participated had at least post school certificate. Most (77.2%) of the employees held non-managerial positions; 10.1% held managerial positions, while 12.7% did not reveal their positions.

5.4. Data collection method. A questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The structured questionnaire, using the Likert scale format, was translated into different languages dominating in each municipal area. Census Statistics of South Africa (2011) reports that Afrikaans, English, and Sesotho are dominant in the Free State Province. Literate employees filled in the questionnaire on their own while those who were illiterate were helped by research assistants. The questionnaire was randomly

distributed among municipal employees from various levels of management, as well as non-managerial employees who dealt with customers on daily basis. They were required to respond to Likert-scaled items on the degree of perceived fairness/justice in HRM practices and description of their perceived level of motivation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the scale items. The scale items showed excellent internal consistency, as the alpha values averaged above 0.8.

5.5. Data analysis methods. Data analysis utilized inferential statistical methods. Usually, critics argue that Likert-scaled data imply ordinal scale, which limits the analysis to the use of non-parametric statistical techniques. To avoid such criticism, the initial data were transformed into scalar measures, as recommended by Vyas and Kumaranayak (2006), Allen and Seaman (2007), and Boone and Boone (2012), to name just a few. In the process, indexes were created using principal components analysis for each section of the questionnaire to enable parametric analysis (Vyas & Kumaranayak, 2006; Allen & Seaman, 2007; Boone & Boone, 2012). With principal components analysis, a set of, say, k-variables (or questionnaire items) is combined into a few indices, and such indices are usually arranged in order of importance, by considering their contribution to the total variability of the data (Vyas & Kumaranayake, 2006). In the present study, questionnaire items that dealt with HRM practices were divided into six sections, namely (1) compensation, (2) performance appraisal, (3) disciplinary and grievance procedures, (4) recruitment and selection, (5) training and development, and (6) promotion, with a number of Likert-type questions asked in each section. Each of these sections was assessed in terms of distributive, procedural and interactive justice, with several questions posed for each type of justice indices were created for perceived political influence in HRM practices. The most important index, or the first principal component was considered as an adequate representative of a set of questionnaire items. It is important to also point out that on the five-point Likert scale, a mean below 3 (the median point) suggests that the overall sentiment was negative, and scores above 3 were indicative of a positive sentiment. All these procedures were applied to the motivation variable as well. Pearson correlations were done to determine the relationship between the two variables, perception of fairness in HRM practices and employee motivation.

6. Results/findings and discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine how employees' perceptions of fairness in municipal HRM practices are related to their work motivation. The results of the analysis done are in Table 1. With respect of HRM practices, Table 1 shows summaries of HRM practices indices. The results show that the average responses ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) with means that are generally below 3 with the overall mean being 2.682. Using the decision criteria discussed above, with an overall mean score of 2.682 for the various sections, it is clear that, generally, the respondents were not pleased with HRM practices. This finding concurs with the CoGTA's (2009) argument that lack of justice in HRM practices such as recruitment of the workforce in some municipalities of South Africa through political interference, has led to negative perceptions of how HRM practices are done. In one typical example, CoGTA (2009) revealed salary and benefits disparities of municipal employees of similar ranks in South Africa. Such disparities are likely to invoke employee displeasure with HRM practices. Within South Africa, the development and reforming of labor policy is meant to create a conflict free labor environment that promotes harmonious employee relations (Ferreira, 2012). These results showing municipal employees rating the quality of HRM so low are not surprising. They indicate that squabbles still characterize the South Africa's municipal environment.

Table 1. Summary statistics for HRM practices

HRM practice	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Compensation					
Compensation distribute	288	1.00	5.00	2.485	0.967
Compensation procedural	305	1.00	5.00	2.475	0.936
Compensation interactive	335	1.00	5.00	2.486	1.026
Performance appraisal					
Performance appraisal distributive	325	1.00	5.00	2.455	1.126
Performance appraisal procedural	308	1.00	5.00	2.457	0.940
Performance appraisal interactive	320	1.00	5.00	2.691	0.967
Disciplinary & grievances handling					
Disciplinary/grievances distributive	323	1.00	5.00	2.766	1.033
Disciplinary/grievances procedural	301	1.00	5.00	2.910	0.892
Disciplinary/grievances interactive	326	1.00	5.00	2.966	0.979

Table 1 (cont.). Summary statistics for HRM practices

HRM practice	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Recruitment and selection					
Recruitment and selection distributive	322	1.00	5.00	2.846	1.063
Recruitment and selection procedural	333	1.00	5.00	2.857	1.075
Recruitment and selection interactive	339	1.00	5.00	3.025	1.102
Training and development					
Training and development distributive	327	1.00	5.00	2.620	1.157
Training and development procedural	325	1.00	5.00	2.643	1.065
Training and development interactive	330	1.00	5.00	3.017	1.028
Promotion					
Promotion distributive	334	1.00	5.00	2.349	1.109
Promotion procedural	323	1.00	5.00	2.447	1.091
Promotion interactive	334	1.00	5.00	2.514	1.037
Overall HRM	201	1.00	4.95	2.682	0.847

Evidence from previous studies done in regional places or provinces in other countries have demonstrated that HRM practices such as promotion should be achieved by appointing the most suitable candidate for the position in question (Heathfield, 2011; Nel et al., 2011; Williamson & Williams, 2011). Unfortunately, this is not confirmed by the results of this study, and is also bad for organizational justice in municipalities in South Africa. On an almost daily basis, municipalities across the country are accused of unsanctioned self-seeking and nepotic practices in all aspects of HRM (Dzansi & Dzansi, 2010). With such accusations, it is not surprising that the same municipalities are unable to deliver service at the expected level of quality. With this assertion, it is prudent to conclude that how HRM practices are done has ramifications for employees' justness perceptions of their municipalities, and that employees' justness perceptions of HRM practices may result in a demotivated workforce.

One of the objectives of the study determines municipal employee's level of motivation. To do so, motivation indices were calculated. The summaries for employee motivation indices presented in Table 2 show that the average responses to the questions asked under each section ranged from the lowest score of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) with most of the means above the median value 3. In fact, only two out of the six items were below the median value 3. The average of the means was above the median value 3. Therefore, overall, it can be said that, at the time of the study, generally municipal employees were quite motivated. The high level of motivation should be a source of satisfaction for municipalities since generally, it has been established that motivated public service employees are important for quality service delivery (Andersen & Serritzlew, 2009; Dzansi and Dzansi, 2010; Ahmad et al., 2012; Kachornkittiya et al., 2012, just to mention a few).

Table 2. Level of municipal employee motivation

Motivation	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Mean motivation – personal initiative	327	1.00	5.00	4.139	0.849
Mean motivation – work itself	318	1.00	5.00	3.514	1.128
Mean motivation – advancement opportunities	331	1.00	5.00	2.451	1.198
Mean motivation – salary	323	1.00	5.00	2.438	1.708
Mean motivation – supervision support	329	1.00	5.00	3.146	1.248
Mean motivation – co-workers	330	1.00	5.00	3.610	1.157
Overall MOT				3.2163	

More specific to delivery of quality service by municipalities, Ahmad et al. (2012) attest that in the service sector, motivated employees are essential for improving the quality of service and subsequently, retaining the organization's customers.

The results in Table 3 show that statistically, MOT is related to PHF at the .05 and .01 levels of significance. Of practical importance is the fact that there seems to be positive relationships as all of the *Pearson* correlation coefficients are positive. This finding is consistent with the previous one that found significant positive relationship between PHF and employee organizational commitment (EOC) (Jawad et al., 2012). This is a significant finding because a positive relationship means that the more employees perceive HRM practices as fair, the more these employees become motivated. Furthermore, the relationships can be described as strong as most of the correlation coefficients are above 0.5 (Table 3). Therefore, it can be said that motivation of municipal employees is strongly positively related to HRM practices of municipalities. Since PHF was recorded as low in this study (Table 1), it means that MOT would even have been higher had PHF been high. This finding fits in well with the *person-organization fit* theory as espoused by O'Riordan (2013). Indeed O'Riordan

(2013) did point out that the *person-organization fit* theory suggests that motivation is enhanced when an employee perceives supportive work environment which encompasses quality of communication, good conflict management, collegiality work environment and, not least, good and fair incentive systems – issues that are all central to PHF. Therefore, in line with O'Riordan (2013), this study shows that fairness perception (PHF) shapes municipal employees' motivation.

Table 3. Perceived HRM fairness (PHF) versus employee motivation (MOT)

Pearson correlations			Motivation					
			Motivation – personal commitment	Motivation – Work itself	Motivation – advancement opportunities	Motivation – salary	Motivation – supervision support	Motivation – co-workers
Human resources practices (PHF)	Compensation – distributive	Corr	.190**	.400**	.624**	.696**	.487**	.208**
		p-value	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Compensation – procedural	Corr	.233**	.372**	.623**	.637**	.425**	.193**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Compensation – interactional	Corr	.227**	.441**	.585**	.566**	.434**	.180**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Performance appraisal – distributive	Corr	.145*	.359**	.592**	.497**	.342**	.091
		p-value	.010	.000	.000	.000	.000	.108
	Performance appraisal – procedural	Corr	.246**	.398**	.639**	.494**	.449**	.187**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Performance appraisal – interactional	Corr	.215**	.330**	.587**	.400**	.412**	.153**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.007
	Disciplinary and grievances – distributive	Corr	.205**	.303**	.488**	.422**	.377**	.050
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.383
	Disciplinary and grievances – procedural	Corr	.332**	.458**	.539**	.487**	.468**	.193**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Disciplinary and grievances – interactive	Corr	.251**	.381**	.477**	.445**	.401**	.132*
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.019
	Recruitment and selection – distributional	Corr	.374**	.560**	.623**	.582**	.542**	.217**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Recruitment and selection – procedural	Corr	.317**	.543**	.629**	.527**	.534**	.263**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Recruitment and selection – interactional	Corr	.360**	.557**	.502**	.472**	.519**	.252**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Training and development – distributive	Corr	.225**	.494**	.672**	.561**	.451**	.284**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Training and development – procedural	Corr	.251**	.460**	.643**	.553**	.476**	.227**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Training and development – interactional	Corr	.309**	.498**	.571**	.461**	.457**	.298**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Promotion – distributive	Corr	.255**	.446**	.700**	.582**	.503**	.201**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Promotion – procedural	Corr	.235**	.457**	.697**	.597**	.477**	.187**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	Promotion – interactional	Corr	.228**	.410**	.639**	.542**	.452**	.226**
		p-value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Conclusion

The problem of poor service delivery in South Africa continues unabated and it has become costly to the government in a number of areas, such as having to repair destroyed property all the time protests take place. This means alternative ways of mitigating such effects have to be sought. This study sought to contribute to finding a solution to the problem of poor service delivery among South Africa municipalities by correlating employees' perceptions of fairness in municipal HRM practices with their work motivation. As is deduced from the data analysis, although employees were not happy with the municipal HRM practices, they were highly motivated. Additionally, a positive correlation between the two variables is noted. The conclusion that can be drawn for the study, is that motivating municipal employees by performing HRM functions

fairly could be used to explain and deal with the problem of poor services delivery among South Africa municipalities.

Recommendations for practice and research

The results of the study indicated that employees were not happy with the way HRM practices were done in municipalities. This calls for the need to consider talent management as a concept to enhance HRM practices. Through appropriate talent management practices, municipalities could attract employees to join their workforce. The problem for municipalities will be how to approach talent management without incurring the wrath of employees. From organizational justice perspective, talent management will need to be handled with care and truthfulness, so that the whole process is seen as fair and just in order to elicit positive responses such as increased level of motivation from employees. South African municipalities can also learn a lot from the USA example where McDowell and Leavitt (2011) reported that many local governments have at least three groups or organizational units that share HRM functions and responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, working together as a team led to successful resolution of otherwise seemingly unfairly done HR issues. HRM officials in municipalities need to put aside their political differences, so that they can work as a team in managing HRM fairly. The positive relationship found between perceived fairness in HRM practices and motivation calls for South African municipalities need to appreciate and seek long term exchange relationship with employees through HRM practices that recognize individual's contributions. In other words South African municipalities should rise above personal and political interests and care for their employees' contributions regardless of political affiliation. With this happening and other things being equal, employee motivation and service delivery could improve.

Contribution of the study and future research

The study had contributed to our understanding of the concept of organizational justice in the municipal environment, especially in a nation that is in transition. In terms of practice, the research has revealed the important role that fair human resource management practices could play in motivating employees. This research could have different results if conducted, probably, on a larger-scale to involve all provinces in South Africa. The positive relationship, noted in the study, could be further verified/validated by interviewing political party representatives in each municipality or some employees to establish why they feel HRM practices are not being done justly.

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