REVISITING ADMINISTRATTIVE 'CAPACITY' IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

V. Naidoo
Department of Politics
University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

This article examines the issue and concept of administrative *capacity* in South Africa's public service. It critiques the use of the term capacity on conceptual grounds, by outlining three perspectives, two of which have been pre-eminent in the post-apartheid transformation of the public service. These are the *possession* of capacity and the *acquisition* of capacity, which function on the availability of sufficient resources (typically human/personnel) to implement programmes and deliver services. In contrast to these two perspectives, a third interpretation of capacity is pursued, which emphasises the influence of organisational and operational conditions on capacity. This article will argue, and illustrate using empirical data, that this third interpretation of capacity can offer useful contextual insights and give greater dimension to conventional and more narrow resource-based definitions of administrative capacity.

INTRODUCTION

There has probably been no more frequently cited issue as *capacity* in the transformation of South Africa's public service. The subject of administrative capacity, generally referring to the functional ability of government bureaucracy, has become entrenched in academic, political, policy and popular discourse on government performance, where its presence has often denoted the government's *lack of capacity* to implement programmes and deliver services. This characterisation of capacity can generally be traced to the circumstances inherited by the public service after 1994, which was tasked with significantly expanding the scope and altering the character of its methods to respond to previously neglected and highly impoverished constituencies, under the apartheid policy. This prompted a concomitant increase in the capacity of the bureaucracy

to respond to relatively greater demands from the population. Having noted this, the post-1994 bureaucracy's apparent lack of capacity must also, as a matter of function, factor in the outcome of significant efforts to restructure and reform the public service since.

It is the intention of this article to revisit the issue of capacity as it has been characterised since public service transformation began after 1994. By revisiting the issues meant administrative capacity is treated not as a policy reality of, or necessity to, this process, but as a conceptual device capable of yielding broader impressions about the functional challenges facing government bureaucracy in South Africa. More specifically, the central argument, employing a tripartite definition of administrative capacity, will be that a dominant twofold view of capacity, which in South Africa has emphasised firstly the possession and secondly the acquisition of sufficient resources (typically in the form of human/personnel, but also financial and physical) to implement programmes and deliver services representing an inadequate conceptual yardstick. In this regard, the pre-eminent twofold view fails to capture the broader effects on capacity generated by organisational and operational conditions present in the public service.

By outlining a third interpretation of capacity, which focuses less on what constitutes capacity and more on what influences it, this article will present a scenario, using empirical data, in which the implementation of public and especially development policy objectives have suffered from, as well as provoked, organisational and operational conflicts and inconsistencies. This has moreover directly impeded the capacity of the public service to implement key socio-economic programmes. These observations will correspondingly expose the limitations of conceptualising capacity as primarily an effort to augment, improve, and transform the resourcing capabilities of the bureaucracy, notwithstanding the saliency of this interpretation in the South African context.

This article draws on material from the author's doctoral research which was intended to inform a search for factors influencing the capacity of government departments to implement development programmes. Two case studies were examined, namely the Expanded Public Works Programme and the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme.

ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

Although the term capacity is terminologically generic and therefore not uniquely tied to the subject matter of Public Administration as an academic discipline, capacity as an issue has, for decades, occupied the attention of researchers in comparative and development public administration, which has examined the reconstruction of post-colonial bureaucracies in developing countries. It could be argued that South Africa's political transition in 1994 simply expanded the focus of this research, with the issue of administrative capacity being foremost amongst the concerns of academics and policy makers alike. As indicated earlier, key to this concern was whether a unified non-racial post-1994 bureaucracy would possess the capacity to deliver on the huge socio-economic service delivery expectations accompanying the country's democratic transition. This has

been reflected, in academic circles, by contributors throughout the earlier as well as the more recent period of public service transformation. Fitzgerald (1992:63), for example, expressed concerns about capacity even before the 1994 watershed, by anticipating that 'even assuming a comparatively non-violent transition and the adoption of an enlightened and coherent development policy, a future post-apartheid state will face severe constraints regarding its direct development capacity'.

Also commenting prior to the country's political transition, Koster (1993:5) suggested that the capacity for strategic policymaking and planning should be the starting point for broader public sector transformation, where changes in the development circumstances of South Africa (and hence being able to respond to these conditions) were considered paramount.

Three years following South Africa's political transition, Wallis (1997:89) used the term capacity when describing the developmental and transformational challenges facing public administration in this period. He stated that "the difficulty facing the [South African] public services might well be summed up by depicting them as overloaded … The issue of institutional capacity is clearly linked to overloading." In the same year, Fehnel (1997:374) extended Wallis's concern about overloading affecting capacity, by arguing that the 'new [South African] government has the legitimacy which the prior government lacked, but it lacks the management capacity to plan and implement reconstruction and development activities on the massive scale it has promised.' Finally, Luiz's (2002:594, 596, 601) more recent assessment of South African *state capacity* was prefaced by the argument that 'state-led development will have disastrous consequences where the state does not possess the capacity to formulate and execute a developmental vision'.

The significance of the South African state and its public administration possessing sufficient capacity to respond to an increased demand for socio-economic services also emerged in interviews carried out with academics as part of the doctoral research on capacity (2007). One academic recalled that:

> *The state in essence was in a position where it provided services to less than eight or nine per cent of the total population, so immediately then you have a raise in demand for services from 10 per cent of the population to 100 per cent of the population, you suffer from a serious lack of capacity in terms of the basic competencies, so that's, that is an issue.*

Another academic also characterised the South African state as having a limited capacity to respond to an increased demand for services after 1994, but this time cited the contributory effect of having to dispense with a previously authoritarian approach to rendering services to the citizenry:

> *[B]ut I think it did in fact greatly heighten the awareness in bureaucracies of the need for communities, and although that will result in tensions, I mean I'm a great believer in the idea that tension is not necessarily a bad thing, and that would be an example I think of the kind of creative tension that was produced as a result of the growth of expectations and the limited capacity of bureaucracy to respond to them.*

A fixation on the post-apartheid state bureaucracy's possession of sufficient capacity to meet expanded service delivery demands has also been evident in government policy documents and reviews. For instance, the influential *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* (1994), recalling historical neglect of service delivery by the apartheid bureaucracy in particular areas of the country, argued that "the capacity to implement development programmed [sic] in rural areas is a serious bottleneck, which will be addressed as a priority" (*Government Gazette,* 1994:41). A year later, the *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service* (1995) revealed another dimension to the possession of capacity imperative, by observing that:

> *The discriminatory effects of the apartheid educational system, coupled to the relative lack of opportunities for in-service education and training for disadvantaged groups within the public service, has led to a serious problem of capacity.*

The WPTPS elsewhere highlighted the importance of instituting affirmative action programmes in the public service, *as part of a broader approach to human resource development and capacity building.* The link drawn by the WPTPS between, in this instance, *building* capacity and human resource development through special attention to affirmative action lent added context to the necessity of the state possessing sufficient capacity to meet expanded service demands. The association between building or, what will be referred to as the acquisition of capacity, and the quality of the bureaucracy's human resources, was to be underscored in various subsequent policy documents, including the *White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service* (1997); the *White Paper on a New Employment Policy for the Public Service* (1997); the *White Paper on Public Service Training and Education* (1998); and the *White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service* (1998).

An emphasis on capacity building has been displayed in other analyse. Examples include McLennan and Wooldridge's (1995:102, 111) early concern that South Africa lacked the capacity and skills (i.e. a focus on human resources) to shift from a public administration oriented to performing regulatory and law enforcement functions, to one performing developmental functions. They then identified various skills areas deemed more appropriate to this new focus, which public servants would presumably then need to acquire in order to operate effectively in a changed environment. This included a range of general and specific skills pertaining to administrative functioning, including policy, finance, planning, project management, information technology, change management, interpersonal skills, decision-making and communication. Picard (2005) also discussed the acquisition of capacity at length by focusing on human resource development and training in particular. Finally, Barichievy, Piper and Parker (2005:381) observed that the term capacity assumed a *particular nuance in South Africa in recent times* where actions by the government in particular have indicated a strong emphasis on education and training, which corresponds with a focus on the acquisition of capacity.

An early manifestation of the significant imprint made by the possession/acquisition interpretation of capacity could be found in a series of provincial public service *audits*

conducted by the Department of Public Service Administration, under the title of 'Dr. Ncholo Reports' (DPSA, not dated), after the then Director-General of the DPSA. Together, all nine provincial public service reports contained several references to *capacity*, which directly corresponded with the twofold interpretation that had already been developing. The document was replete with references to *lack of, limited, no* and *insufficient* capacity, along with *outsourcing* capacity, interspersed with other references to capacity *building, developing* capacity, and *creating* capacity. This was however likely motivated as much by design as by circumstance, given that the terms of reference for the audits emphasised the availability of sufficient capacity in the provinces to render services, with the review needing to address *the institutional design of the provincial administration[s] and its capacity to deliver government policy and services to the residents of the province*. A similar scenario was evident in a ten year review of government programmes implemented since 1994. Although a considerably smaller number of references to *capacity* appeared, the vast majority of these related either to the possession of capacity or the strengthening or building of capacity. As with the DPSA provincial report, these included references to *sufficiency, shortages, adequacy, poor,* and *limited* capacity, as well as *building* and *improving* capacity (The Presidency, 2003).

In summary, the issue of capacity in assessments of South Africa's post-apartheid public service has exposed concerns that its constituent organisations have lacked the ability to deliver on the expanded and varied development needs resulting from the country's democratic transition. These concerns have been voiced in critiques questioning whether the country's public service possesses the requisite or sufficient capacity to respond mainly to the socio-economic development demands assumed after 1994, and where this has been judged not to be the case, that efforts should be directed at increasing or building this capacity. Such a twofold interpretation of the term assumes the existence of a particular standard of capacity. Thus employing the term to characterise the public service has tended to be translated into some measure of sufficient human, as well as material and financial resources (suggested by the phrase *lack of*). Capacity is, as a result, treated as an item which is judged to be either adequately present in the public service or not, and if not, requires remedy.

A dominant twofold interpretation of capacity represents a necessary but insufficient conceptual treatment of the issue, if viewed not simply as an available pool of resources (mainly human) to give effect to service delivery demands. A third possible interpretation of capacity might benefit from a broader perspective on the issue, which would deviate from defining what capacity is, or constitutes, to querying what influences the condition of capacity. Plainly and perhaps obviously, such a perspective would recognise that the public service constitutes more than the sum of its available resources, but operates as an interconnected institutional and organisational framework. Such a perspective can interestingly be traced back to a very early examination of public service transformation in South Africa, in which a Presidential Review Commission (1998) appointed to evaluate post-1994 restructuring and reform efforts made the following statement:

> *Both national departments and the provinces [which legally constitutes the public service in South Africa] repeatedly pointed to the fact that weaknesses*

> *in the structures and practices of inter-governmental relations led to poor coordination within and between different departments and spheres of government, creating an incapacity to implement national programmes*

The curious nature of the PRC's comment in the context of the present discussion is its drawing of a direct linkage between the condition of capacity, or *incapacity* as it was observed, and weaknesses in the functioning of structures and practices within and between government departments. The significant point is that these structural and operational problems were said to be *creating an incapacity*, or to be adversely influencing the capacity of public service organisations to implement programmes. This view did not then try to define what capacity is, in the predominant resourcing sense, but pointed rather to a particular set of conditions which influenced it. The next section will develop this particular perspective of administrative capacity.

OUTLINING A CONCEPTUAL PATH FOR REVISITING ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

The argument presented in section two essentially concerned how administrative capacity was employed to critique the transformation of the South African public service. Three perspectives were outlined: the first two operated in tandem and stemmed from a view that capacity in the public service constituted a desired level of resourcing (mostly human resourcing) which was often not in place, and therefore needed to be rectified (i.e. through *building* capacity). A third view adopted a broader approach, focusing on the effect of organisational and operational conditions on the capacity of the public service to deliver services and implement programmes. Although all three perspectives can reasonably be said to express a concern for whether the public service is capable of delivering on its considerable service and programmatic mandate, distinguishing amongst the perspectives, especially the third, assists in acquiring a fuller appraisal of the capacity problem. For conceptual purposes, the perspectives might be summarised as follows:

- the *possession* of capacity, usually based on assessments of whether the public service has a requisite or sufficient supply of capacity to be able to function; where this is found not to be the case it is judged to be lacking capacity. This has mainly been linked to human resources, but may also include material or financial resources.
- the *acquisition* of capacity, which focuses on capacity being built or strengthened where the public service is judged to be lacking it.
- factors that *influence* capacity, which focuses on the organisational and operational conditions under which the public service and its constituent organisations function, and examining the extent to which these adversely affect the capacity to deliver services and implement programmes.

Differentiating the more common resource-based definitions of administrative capacity from a wider organisational and operationally-based viewpoint is evident in academic

literature, especially scholarship examining the role of bureaucracies in development, or comparative and development public administration. This view has also become more visible in South African government documentation. As a start however, it is useful to consider VanDeveer and Dabelko's (2001:25) characterisation of the term, where: "capacity, like incapacity, is contingent on contextual factors associated with the public sector functions under examination". Nelissen (2002:13) similarly referred to "effective administrative capacity" as the capability of governing bodies to act, and the context within which that action occurs. It is the mention of context in both references, and specifically the context of functioning in the public service, which speaks directly to the third perspective of capacity. Grindle and Hilderbrand's (1995:445-447) work on public sector capacity in developing countries, which explicitly discusses the subject of capacity in relation to a system of public sector organisational, inter-organisational and extra-organisational relationships and environments, provides useful material for deciphering this context, to which they attributed the following elements:

- *Action environment* referring to economic, political and social surroundings within which government administrations carry out their activities.
- *Institutional context* of public administration, comprising the rules and procedures regulating government operations and the activities of public officials, and the responsibilities that government assumes for development initiatives. Building on Grindle and Hilderbrand's description of the 'institutional' context, the public 'institution' is distinguished from the public 'organisation' where the institution represents the underlying legal, policy and strategic framework that governs the work of government organisations. This follows from Lusthaus, Adrien and Perstinger (1999:6), citing North's employment of the term.
- *Task network* referring to the inter-relationship between organisations in the public, as well as private and non-governmental sectors, towards the accomplishment of specific tasks.
- Public *organisations*, viewed as the building blocks of the task network, where the focus is on understanding how the structures, processes, resources and management styles of organisations, which can be said to represent a particular set of dynamics within an organisation, affect the establishment of goals, structure work, define authority relations, and influence performance. This is more sanguinely reflected in Jreisat's (2002:25) statement that *organisations coordinate and facilitate individual efforts, converting them into sustained collective actions that accomplish or service goals, above and beyond the capacity of any individual.*

In their treatment of capacity, Grindle and Hilderbrand factored in a wider web of intra-, inter- and extra-organisational relationships and institutional settings. More specific to the perspective of capacity being advanced, they note that the institutional context, for example, could either. "Constrain or facilitate the accomplishment of particular tasks", thus it, could constrain or facilitate *the capacity* to accomplish these tasks (Grindle and Hildebrand 1995:447). It is the recognition that broader factors could hamper the ability or capacity to pursue administrative tasks, which highlights

the third perspective of capacity's concern for the impact of organisational and operational conditions.

The contingency of public service capacity on the functional environment of bureaucracy has elsewhere been mentioned by Umeh and Andranovich (2005:47), who indicate that the process of capacity requires an assessment of an organisation's capabilities at more than one level: managing intra-organisational relationships, managing inter-organisational relationships, and an organisation's management of wider political, economic, and social relationships. Wallis (2000:135) also suggests that assessing capacity should move beyond the competence of staff members, which emphasises the possession of capacity, to capture wider organisational and operational factors, including the structure of and co-ordination between public organisations. Mokgoro (2000:3-5) similarly added that an emphasis on training initiatives alone, reflecting the acquisition of capacity perspective, was an inadequate response to understanding the issue of administrative capacity in South Africa. Drawing on Grindle and Hilderbrand's work, he suggests that an interpretation of capacity be linked to the ability of public servants to navigate their organisational and institutional environments, where the public service was described as a complex system composed of many interdependent and interrelated subsystems.

A consequence of how administrative capacity has been linked to underlying public service organisational and operational circumstances has engendered more specific and critical references to inhibitors of capacity. This has been especially prominent in the South African case, as portrayed by a number of academics interviewed as part of the author's doctoral research. One academic cited the effects on capacity of how inter-organisational authority arrangements are defined (e.g. decentralisation)

> *For me … that is the level of lack of capacity, it is not higher up in the system, it also lies there in terms of poor decentralisation, because the theory tells us … that decentralisation means decision-making power being dislodged from the top and diversed [sic] down to the bottom giving people power, but they don't really have power.*

A second academic contributor also raised concerns about inter-organisational authority relations, but this time emphasised the effects on the *co-ordination* of government programmes:

> *[A]nd then the question of the lack of or the insufficient co-ordination between the stakeholders in implementing the [development] programme ... and as you mentioned there is an attempt to integrate ... but who co-ordinates, and whoever co-ordinates, do they have the political power to make decisions, sometimes a co-ordinator is the junior partner, and simply because someone needs to do the job, but the rest wouldn't really listen or participate, and that's a tricky one.*

A third academic however presented a different scenario, where administrative capacity was affected by difficulties attempting to 'integrate' policy across departments and levels of government:

> *[H]ow do you integrate services, how do you integrate ... things like the RDP, things like the extended public works programme ... and the cluster system ... that [South African President] Mbeki introduced in the late '90s ... assuming a capacity to work transversally, as well as in your silos, and ... there were a lot of debates about that as well, because you have to run programmes that threaded transversally through government. Just, just organising functions like, a lot of functions that we had in Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the policy was us, national, but the implementation was provincial, and that was a huge problem. The Western Cape government ... at the time didn't have an environmental unit ... they had a conservation unit, but there were a lot of people who were obsessed about conserving plants and animals and looking after the national parks, which is all very well, but they had no capacity to administer things like environmental impact assessments ... we tried to persuade them ... so even in a silo, there's problems of joining things up.*

Other critical literature discussing the impact on capacity of public service organisational and operational arrangements have also noted the hampering effects of 'bureaucracy' as a functional style, as opposed to a colloquial term for government administration in developing countries. This has in particular been attributed to hierarchical relations of authority and the adherence to general rules of operating (Esman, 1991; Milne, 1973). While even a brief survey of this scholarship would overly extend the boundaries of this discussion, the essence of the argument has been that conforming and adhering to structural and operational procedures have adversely affected the capacity of government bureaucracies implement development activities. This was given an especially concise description by Bryant and White (1982:24):

> *[J]ust as development has its obverse in under-development, development administration has its observe in administrative incapacity. Administrative incapacity is an inability to respond to needs conveyed by citizens. It is characterised by swollen bureaucracies encumbered with formalistic procedures that delay rather than expedite service delivery and program implementation.*

The core of Bryant and White's submission is their equating bureaucracy with administrative capacity (or *in*capacity), on the basis of swollen public organisations hampered by formalistic procedures that impeded the implementation of service delivery and (development) programmes. The incapacity of public bureaucracies to implement development programmes was therefore viewed as being constrained by characteristics reflected in organisational makeup and functional practice. Recognition of a kind of organisationally-induced inability to respond to what were viewed as relatively more complex development policies is also cited by Dwivedi and Henderson (1990:15), who argue that development bureaucracies need a framework that is, *inter alia*, more 'flexible in its operation'. Kiggundu (2002:293), recording bureaucracy's 'limitations' in industrialised

and developing countries, including a need to shift focus from "bureaucracy to organisation and management of complex, interdependent systems operating in dynamic environments". The saliency of these observations to South Africa, which also encompass earlier references to inter-organisational relationships, was usefully conveyed by one academic respondent:

> *[T]here are certain features of bureaucracy that we have to deal with, I mean I think there's still a very rigid bureaucratic style in this country, it comes out in things like the silo mentality … departments working in their individual silos, a lack of co-operation between governmental structures whether it be on the basis of horizontal links or vertical links, whether it be between provinces and the centre [national level], whether it be between different departments working at the centre or indeed different departments working in the province, that kind of rigidity … compartmentalism, which are features of bureaucracy, which I think are widely regarded as being dysfunctional … these new development strategies can only be successful if you can find ways of sort of … across some of these departmental constraints, these bureaucratic constraints*

With these observations in mind, and before examining data on organisational and operational conditions influencing administrative capacity, this section will conclude by acknowledging the increasing prominence of this third perspective of capacity in South African government documentation. This was usefully encapsulated in an article written by officials of the Department of Public Service and Administration, entitled*: Assessing capability in the public sector* (Schoonraad and Radebe, 2007). The authors specifically cited efforts undertaken in the wake of former President Thabo Mbeki's call in 2004/2005 to examine whether the public service had the capacity to implement government programmes. Citing a series of *capacity assessments* carried out by the DPSA, the authors noted that the President's call, which essentially reflected a possession of capacity perspective, and which accompanied other research on skills needs in the public service (see Ministry for the Public Service and Administration, 2004), was in fact being extended to examine wider organisational, institutional and operational vectors influencing capacity. Findings presented from capacity assessments in various government departments revealed the following impediments:

- overly complicated national policies adversely affecting the ability of local and provincial implementing agents to comply with;
- what was referred to as *balancing mandates*, which cited the effect of employing mandatory *labour intensive* construction methods referring in this case to the public housing sector, and which was found to have delayed the ability of government to meet expectations attending other policy commitments (i.e. the eradication of informal settlements);
- the effect of 'Collaboration and co-ordination during planning and implementation';
- *regulatory constraints*, referring to adherence to financial management legislation such as the PFMA and the MFMA, and specifically 'supply chain management'/procurement procedures, which contributed to delays in implementation; and

- what was described as the 'Institutional environment': pointing to over-centralisation of functional authority by, in this case, provincial departments of health over the running of hospitals, and which was said to have created a 'disincentive for managerial innovation'

(Schoonraad and Radebe 2007:118-119)

Other findings from DPSA capacity assessments were published in a departmental report on lessons from the transformation process, prepared for a fifteen year review study on government performance compiled by the Presidency. The DPSA (2007:37-38) drew the following conclusions:

> *The question remains "whether we have the all-round capacity, the proper organisational structures and the resources, successfully to implement our developmental programmes". Resources do not present the most serious challenge; what are lacking in some areas are the skills, systems, coordination and institutional arrangements to efficiently and effectively deploy those resources. There is still a great deal of fragmentation in the macro-organisation of the state. Government systems, although evolving, leave a lot to be desired.*

The DPSA's capacity assessments were not the only example displaying concern for wider organisational, institutional and operational impediments to capacity. The only detailed reference to the findings of a confidential 2005 Cabinet report prepared by the Forum of South African Directors'-General (FOSAD) in response to President Mbeki's call also submitted proposals that transcended a narrow resource-based perspective to capacity. These included the reconfiguration of departmental structures; recommendations regarding the 'political-administrative interface', or the functional relationship between ministers and heads of department; and harmonising monitoring and evaluation among co-ordinating departments DPSA (2007:3). The FOSAD report was also interestingly entitled: *A Cabinet Discussion Document on the Capacity and Organisation of the State*, seemingly attributing greater breadth to the issue of capacity than has been previously recorded.

This section has shown an increasing saliency of the third conceptual interpretation of capacity in the South African government. The next section will present the author's own data, gathered between 2007 and 2008, on organisational and operational factors affecting the capacity of public service organisations to implement programmes.

ASSESSING EMPIRICAL DATA ON FACTORS AFFECTING ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

This section will draw on empirical data gathered on organisational and operational factors found to have influenced the capacity of South African public service agencies to implement government programmes. The data took the form of qualitative interviews (a total of 45 were completed during 2007) conducted mainly with senior

public servants charged with implementing government programmes designed to promote socio-economic development. These consisted of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), a large scale job creation initiative; and the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP), a small farmer support and development scheme. As the format and purpose do not allow a detailed account of these findings to be presented, this discussion will be confined to a broader summary of findings refer most directly to observations made about the third interpretation of capacity presented in section three. In short, to what extent did the findings bear out observations made earlier, that is, reflected intra and inter- organisational as well as institutional constraints on capacity, exhibiting problems with sharing responsibility over functional mandates (i.e. decentralisation), integrating work, co-ordinating work, and inhibiting features of structural and operational conformity (i.e. bureaucratic).

Overall, the findings generated a surprisingly mixed impression of factors affecting capacity. Before discussing these, the factors themselves are catalogued under four overarching themes:

- the functional accommodation of demands introduced by a programme;
- inter-organisational authority relations;
- the adaptability of programme objectives ; and
- the flexibility of programme operating rules.

Based on the literature reviewed earlier, the former two factors resembled classic *bureaucratic* impediments on capacity reflecting an adherence to underlying administrative routines. The first concerned the bureaucracy's functional accommodation of demands introduced by the programmes, which illustrates the effects on capacity of conforming to general rules of operating. In the case of CASP, a factor which stubbornly constrained the implementing capacity of both national and provincial departments of agriculture to respond to the programme's important land reform clientele was the temporal disjuncture experienced in releasing agricultural support services under CASP, to beneficiaries who had to first access land via separate government land reform programmes (i.e. Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development programme). This disjuncture was essentially created by a misalignment in the rules governing when CASP could release agricultural support services, and rules applying to the provision of land to beneficiaries. This was further complicated by the fact that these rules were functionally embedded in the procedures of distinct departmental bodies, i.e., National and provincial departments of Agriculture, on the one hand, and a national Department of Land Affairs, both of which astonishingly reported to the same political head in the national sphere! (Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs).

In the EPWP case, it was found that monitoring and reporting procedures exercised by provincial infrastructure-delivery departments had adversely affected the ability of the programme's co-ordinating department (the national Department of Public Works, DPW) to ensure consistency in the all important job creation outputs being reported. A DPW official attributed this problem to *huge inconsistencies* in outputs being reported, citing provincial departments of roads and transport responsible for infrastructure provision.

This was further traced to multiple and overlapping reporting procedures being followed in these departments. In this instance the official described a scenario where one official in a department's finance section wrote the 'Treasury report', a financial accounting from provincial departments on how they spent their overall PIG (Provincial Infrastructure Grant) allocation, whilst another departmental official prepared the 'EPWP report', which was more generally directed at reporting on the department's performance on the programme. Inconsistencies in reporting could ultimately be linked to the fact that, on one hand, the EPWP constituted a stand-alone programme for which distinct departmental functional responsibility for performance reporting had to be assigned. However, the monies allocated to provincial departments for the EPWP was embedded in a pre-existing financing instrument (PIG) administered by the National Treasury (Department of Finance), which included conditions for financial as well as performance accounting, and which then required adherence to a separate reporting protocol.

The second overarching theme, inter-organisational authority relations, approximated the effects of hierarchical structures of authority on capacity. More interestingly though, these capacity constraints were more strongly expressed through horizontal and decentralised configurations of inter-departmental authority, as opposed to vertical arrangements stressing more centralised authority. This did not, however remove the saliency of hierarchy itself, where the circumstances attending decentralised and horizontally configured structural arrangements did expose capacity constraints arising from conflicts of hierarchy, expressed through inter-organisational authority relations.

In the CASP case, concerns were expressed about *turf* issues and inter-organisational *impositions* developing between the national Department of Agriculture (DOA), which performed a monitoring and oversight role under the programme, and provincial departments of agriculture, which were responsible for on-the-ground implementation, and which were in effect then subject to the DOA's monitoring and oversight. These concerns raised the risk of conflicts of hierarchy developing between the national and provincial departments of agriculture, where the DOA and provincial departments not only shared constitutional authority for implementing the agriculture function, but also, at an operational level, both catered to farmer support activities such as those included under CASP. The potential for conflicts developing was especially onerous for the capacity of the DOA to monitor and evaluate provincial department's performance under CASP. One official noted for instance that it had become necessary for the national department to consider placing individuals on the ground (that is, in provinces) to 'verify' the status of provincial CASP projects, which raised a concern about a 'turf issue' developing. Another official offered a related and more candid description of underlying factors contributing to and affecting the DOA's ability to perform oversight, based on the potential inconsistency between service delivery priorities defined by the national department as opposed to provincial departments:

> *What I'm trying to say is that there, that, and that's probably the intention is for us [DOA] to be able to say we want to ensure, if it was for example the pillar of training … it would be our intent to ensure that that happens, now, in as much as there might be a disjuncture … in as much as the priorities*

> *of the province might be slightly different, it could then be that we are imposing upon them something which is either an opportunity for them, or not an opportunity but some sort of imposition … so it could be at that level that there might be … well, we've got this money but, okay we'll run after it and we'll spend, so the quality will be lower on this spend because it might not have been their priority.*

A similar but more complex scenario was evident in the EPWP, where instances of hierarchical conflict affected the capacity of implementing departments to assume specific roles and responsibilities (i.e. co-ordinator versus co-ordinated) attached to its diverse collection of implementing departments, which were grouped according to four sectors. This functioned on vertical as well as horizontal axes (i.e. national-provincial, national-national, provincial-provincial), and was evident at the level of rank designation of officials. The impact of these designated roles was most interestingly played out amongst departments on the same or horizontal line of authority. A case in point was the national department which, in referring to aspects of the monitoring role it was expected to perform as sector co-ordinating department, particularly the validation of other sector department outputs, argued that:

> *Now I cannot institute that kind of mechanisms to another national department … I do not have the capacity or the locus standi to be able to go and institute those kind of things and then in addition ask my staff to conduct site inspections … So I just think it's not possible to be able to conduct site inspections on behalf of another department, even as a sector lead department I just don't think it's possible.*

This department was clearly concerned that validating peer department outputs, as part of its co-ordination brief, would not only impact on its available resource capacity, but also infringe on the equivalent status of authority that it shared with other sector departments.

A more surprising set of findings on factors affecting capacity were less attributable to underlying organisational, institutional and procedural conduct. These were rather more sensitive to how programme policy imperatives shaped their translation into practice, and in the process affected administrative performance. This was revealed in one instance by the extent to which the objectives introduced by the programmes could be accommodated, or were adaptable, to prevailing departmental practice.

In the case of CASP, a concern expressed by just over half of provincial departments interviewed stemmed from the objective requirement that 70 per cent of the monies they received for farmer support under the programme had to be directed at beneficiaries of government land reform programmes, who were, for the most part, new entrants to farming. This included concerns expressed about the capacity of some provincial implementing departments to enhance the production sustainability and economic success of a beneficiary pool consisting of relatively inexperienced clients with divergent intentions towards farming. The issue was whether CASP was likely to be constrained by the extent to which it could assist its targeted beneficiaries to achieve economically

viable production, through provincial implementing departments that were historically more familiar with rendering farmer support services to more experienced producers. This suggests a tension between one of the programme's core objectives: providing post-settlement support to land reform beneficiaries, and a key output of its second core objective: strengthening existing agricultural support services, which was intended to enhance the *productive capacity and economic success* of its beneficiaries (Division of Revenue Act: Frameworks for Conditional Grants to Provinces 2004, 2005). This example also revealed the limited operational flexibility that provincial departments appeared to have in shaping the beneficiary clientele being prioritised under the farmer support objectives of CASP.

A similar but potentially more serious scenario was evident in the EPWP, where diverse departments in the programme's four sector groupings were expressing difficulties adapting to the labour-intensive and job creation imperative underpinning the programme. Despite sector departments contributing to the EPWP being afforded space to incorporate the labour-maximising and job creation aims of the programme into their existing functional activities, prevailing service delivery demands and related ideological tensions with a labour-intensive and job creation philosophy (e.g. in the Infrastructure, Social and Environment and Culture sectors), contributed to this difficulty. This to some extent confirmed observations about *balancing mandates* and its effect on capacity, described earlier by Schoonraad and Radebe (2007:118-119). In relation to the EPWP, these difficulties adversely affected the capacity of sector departments to adapt existing service delivery and programme implementation approaches to comply with core objectives of the programme. It would also impact on the capacity of the Department of Public Works, as the programme's overall co-ordinator, to fulfil a key function of this role: encouraging and influencing the adoption of labour-intensive methods and prioritising job creation.

A related and more serious capacity impediment for implementing departments was attributed to the flexibility of operating rules introduced by the programmes. In both cases, implementing departments were limited in the extent to which they could configure their service delivery activities in response to the programmes' policy objectives, which adversely affected their capacity. In the CASP case, and despite the specification of six agricultural support service pillars being promoted by the programme, and direct references claiming otherwise, provincial departments of agriculture enjoyed little *de facto* control over the interpretation, selection and sequencing of these services, which prioritised the delivery of on/off farm infrastructure, and which effectively limited their ability to cater to other service needs identified in their regions. It was suggested moreover that the maintenance of this situation was objectively influenced by provincial departments having to prioritise the needs of land reform beneficiaries, where infrastructure was cited as having been a historically neglected service directed at this clientele. More significantly, the constraints experienced by provincial departments of agriculture resulting from the limited extent to which they could control their service interventions, and the corresponding emphasis on infrastructure, were most markedly evident in the human resource deficiencies (i.e., available engineers to advise on infrastructure improvements) and physical resource impediments (i.e., cumbersome procurement rules governing the

purchase of infrastructure equipment) this exposed. The underlying operational contributor to procurement constraints, in this example, gives a more nuanced complexion to the regulatory impact on capacity of adhering to procurement rules in the public service, described earlier by Schoonraad and Radebe (2007:119).

A similar yet more complex situation was observed in the EPWP case, where inflexible and in some instances inconsistent and conflicting operating rules/protocols governing job creation and training provision under the programme inhibited the capacity of departments in some sectors to fashion existing interventions to comply with these rules, and to correspondingly contribute to the programme's objectives. An extensive legislative and non-legislative framework of operating conditions and guidelines were attached to the Programme, to which implementing departments had to adhere. This was the case notwithstanding claims by one senior official interviewed that statutory conditions governing labour-intensive job creation and training, which were initially negotiated in the construction industry before the EPWP's creation, were never meant to apply more broadly to various, that is multisectoral, government public works programmes. With this said, some implementing departments (particularly in the environment and culture sector) noted that these operational conditions favoured the delivery of infrastructure, and which essentially afforded limited flexibility for non-infrastructure delivery departments to adjust to in order to contribute to the EPWP's labour-intensive job creation objectives. This adversely affected their operational capacity to demonstrate compliance.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to conceptually unpacked the issue of administrative capacity in an effort to generate a wider understanding of its effects in the transformation of South Africa's public service. Reflecting on this period, this paper submitted that three interpretations of administrative capacity were evident: the first two, which have been predominate in the period, viewed capacity as a function of resourcing, and were characterized by the bureaucracy's possession of capacity and its related acquisition of capacity, where the former was judged as deficient. A third interpretation of capacity focused on factors in the wider organisational and operational functioning of the public service, which influenced the capacity of public service organizations to deliver services and implement programmes.

While it was argued that the relative obscurity of the third interpretation of capacity in the early years of public service transformation, it also illustrated that this perspective was not completely absent in early debates (see Presidential Review Commission 1998), whilst becoming increasingly prominent in more recent government discourse, from about 2005. Building on academic literature, interview data and recent government discussions which have reflected this third perspective of capacity, the paper then showed, through the use of empirical data on the implementation of key government programmes, that factors affecting the capacity of the South African public service could be linked to underlying organisational and operational conditions that approximated classic *bureaucratic* constraints. It also found, more interestingly, that factors stemming from the policy objectives of the

programmes themselves had a significant effect on organisational and operational practice, notwithstanding the mention of such policy effects earlier (see reference to integrating policy across levels of government by academic respondent on page 11; Schoonraad and Radebe's own reference to the impact of labour-intensive construction methods).

With reference to these findings, at least two observations are offered about capacity in South Africa's transformed and evolving system of public administration. The first is a clear need for critical analysis of public service transformation to employ the issue of capacity with greater intellectual versatility in order to address its multi-dimensional composition, as borne out in the academic literature. While it was encouraging to see that such a multi-dimensional outlook was already being displayed by sections of the South African government, such as the DPSA capacity assessments referred to earlier, other evidence reveals a continuing disjuncture between the resourcing face of capacity, and the effect of conditions in the broader organizational functioning of the public service.

This disjuncture is for instance observed in a 2005 document entitled a *Framework for Managing Joint Programmes*, which outlines a set of guidelines to be used by departments when jointly implementing government programmes. This covers initiatives such as the EPWP and CASP. The disjuncture emerges from the document's explicit reference to capacity, which, following the conventional approach that has seen the term limited to problems arising from 'lack of capacity and capability deficiencies in government departments', is later defined and distinguished as follows:

> *There is therefore a clear distinction between what can be referred to as capacity and what is referred to as capability. Capacity is more related to issues of human resources (personnel, budget and infrastructure) whilst capability relates to competency, that is, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to achieve goals. (Governance and Administration Cluster 2005:6).*

This description displays an obvious focus on the possession of human capacity and what was distinguished as *capability*, which is essentially a derivative of the former meant to refer to the application of capacity. A wider reading of the document indicated however that nowhere was an explicit connection being drawn between this interpretation of administrative capacity and potentially influential factors in the wider organisational and operational environments in which programmes were being jointly implemented. Indeed, the following statement seemed to partially illustrate this disconnect:

> *This framework is aimed at addressing the weaknesses in the current procedures and processes of planning, budgeting and implementation that are hampered by weak capability to deliver. (Governance and Administration Cluster 2005:3)*

A relevant question arising from this statement, in view of how capacity is applied, would ask: to what extent can current procedures and processes of planning, budgeting and implementation also have an effect on the capability to deliver? This effectively turns the aim described above on its head, by recognising that the capacity to deliver could be as much a function of organisational and operational conditions as an enabler of these.

The second observation, whilst not directly related to the issue of administrative capacity, is no less significant for the broader study of public administration in South Africa. It concerns the close interplay between policy content and implementation capacity, where over the period of public service transformation an initial phase of policy development was said to have given way to a subsequent phase on policy implementation. McLennan and Orkin (2009) elsewhere in this edition described this, with reference to public service management development, as the *policy state* (1994-1999) moving to the *implementing state* (1999-2004). Brynard (2007:363) similarly noted that in the 1990s South Africa was predominately at the stage of policy formulation, where the government's second term has largely shifted the focus to policy implementation, describing the latter as the 'implementation phase of policy'.

It would be disingenuous to ascribe to these researchers a dichotomous view of policy and implementation, in the context of their full analysis, and perhaps akin to the longstanding debate between politics, policy and administration. The conceptual approach to administrative capacity employed has however revealed that, beyond making a temporal distinction, the content of policy encapsulated in its political and regulatory directives can have direct and adverse effects on its implementation. There is therefore considerable scope for more intensive case-based qualitative analysis of the interrelationship between policy and its implementation. This could build on similar observations stretching decades by scholars in development management and implementation studies. This includes Van Ufford's (1988:11-12) reference to the effects of development policy on bureaucracy; and Grindle's (1980:5, 21) observation that there had been little attention given to linking characteristics of policies and programs to their subsequent implementation. These characteristics moreover included: 'choices made about policy and program definition, and their effects on subsequent implementation efforts', which in fact resonated with case findings presented.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barichievy, K., Piper, L. and Parker, B. 2005. Assessing 'participatory governance' in local government: a case study of two South African cities. *Politeia*, 24(3):370-393.

Bryant, C., White, L.G. 1982. *Managing Development in the Third World*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Brynard, P.A. 2007. The Policy Gap in South Africa. *Journal of Public Administration*, 42(3):357–365.

Department of Public Service and Administration. 2007. *Improving the Performance of the Public Service: Lessons of the Transformation Process.* Available from: http://www.presidency.gov.za (Accessed 16 January 2009).

Department of Public Works. 2007. *Fourth quarterly report – Year 3. 19 July*. Pretoria: Department of Public Works.

Dr. Ncholo Reports: *Provincial Task Team Reports. Not dated.* Available from: http://www.dpsa.gov.za (Accessed 16 January 2009).

Dwivedi, O.P., Henderson, K.M. 1990. State of the Art: Comparative Public Administration and Development Administration. *In* Dwivedi, O.P., Henderson, K.M. (eds.) *Public Administration in World Perspective.* Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Esman, M.J. 1991. *Management Dimensions of Development: Perspectives and Strategies*. West Hartford: Kumarian Press.

Fehnel, D. 1997. Donors and Development. *In* FitzGerald, P., McLennan, A., and Munslow, B. (eds). *Managing Sustainable Development in South Africa, Second Edition.* Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

FitzGerald, P. 1992. Networks and Structures for Development in a Democratic South Africa. *Africanus: Journal for Development Administration*, 22(1&2):60-66.

Governance and Administration Cluster. 2005. *Framework for managing joint programmes*. December 2005.

Government Gazette. 2005. *Frameworks for Conditional Grants to Provinces: Detailed Frameworks on Schedule 4 and 5 Grants to Provinces.* Number 27487.

Government Gazette. 2004. *Frameworks for Conditional Grants to Provinces: Detailed Frameworks on Schedule 4 and 5 Grants to Provinces*. Number 26230.

Government Gazette. 1994. *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development.* Number. 16085.

Grindle, M.S. 1980. Policy content and context in implementation. *In* Grindle, M.S. (ed.), *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Grindle, M.S. and Hilderbrand, M.E. 1995. Building Sustainable Capacity in the Public Sector: What Can Be Done? *Public Administration and Development*, 15:441-463.

Heady, F. 1998. Comparative and International Public Administration: Building Intellectual Bridges. *Public Administration Review*, 58(1):32-39.

Jreisat, J.E. 2002. *Comparative Public Administration and Policy.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kiggundu, M.N. 2002. Bureaucracy and administrative reform in developing countries. *In* Kirkpatrick, C., Clarke, R. and Polidano, C. (eds.) *Handbook on Development Policy and Management.* Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar.

Koster, J. 1993. *Public Sector Transformation in South Africa: A Strategic Perspective.* Johannesburg: Development Bank of Southern Africa.

Levin, R. 2005. *Building implementation capacity for sustainable growth and development. Speech to the SMS Conference.* Available from: http://www.dpsa.gov.za (Accessed 16 January 2009).

Luiz, J.M. 2002. South African state capacity and post-apartheid economic reconstruction. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 29(8):594-614.

Lusthaus, C., Adrien, M., and Perstinger, M. 1999. *Capacity Development: Definitions, Issues and Implications for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation*. Universalia Occassional Paper, No. 35. Available from: http://www.universalia.com/files/occas35.pdf (Accessed 7 April 2005).

McLennan, A. and Orkin, M. 2009. Strategies and Skills: Government Approaches to Management Development. Unpublished presentation.

McLennan, A. and Wooldridge, D. 1995. Training. *In* McLennan, A., Wooldridge, D. (eds.) *Policies for Public Service Transformation*. Kenwyn: Juta and Co. Ltd.

Milne, R.S. 1973. Bureaucracy and Development Administration. *Public Administration*, 54(4):411-426.

Ministry for the Public Service and Administration. 2004. *Current skills profile and future skills needs of the public sector.* December.

Mokgoro, J. 2000. *Transforming the Public Service*. Centre for Policy Studies Policy Forum 9. Johannesburg.

Nelissen, N. 2002. The Administrative Capacity of New Types of Governance. *Public Organization Review*, 2(1):5-22.

Picard, L.A. 2005. *The State of the State: Institutional Transformation, Capacity and Political Change in South Africa.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

The Presidency, Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services. 2003. *Towards a Ten Year Review: Synthesis Report on Implementation of South African Government Programmes.* Pretoria: The Presidency.

Rondinelli, D. 1993. *Development Projects as Policy Experiments: An Adaptive Approach to Development Administration.* Second edition. London: Routledge.

Schoonraad, P. and Radebe, T. 2007. Assessing capability in the public sector. *Service Delivery Review*, 5(3):115–122.

South Africa Government Online. *Report of the Presidential Review Commission on the Reform and Transformation of the Public Service in South Africa.* 1998, 27 February. Available from: http://www.gov.za (Accessed 22 February 2009).

Umeh, O.J. and Andranovich, G. 2005. *Culture, Development, and Public Administration in Africa*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc.

VanDeveer, S.D. and Dabelko, G.D. 2001. It's Capacity, Stupid: International Assistance and National Implementation. *Global Environmental Politics*, 1(2):18-29.

Van Ufford, P.Q. 1988. The hidden crisis in development: development bureaucracies in between intentions and outcomes. *In* Van Ufford, P.Q., Kruijt, D., and Downing, T. (eds.) *The Hidden Crisis in Development: Development Bureaucracies*. Tokyo: The United Nations University.

Wallis, M. 2000. Development Planning in South Africa: Legacies and Current Trends in Public Health *Public Administration and Development*, 20(2), 129-139.

Wallis, M. 1997. The Problem of Bureaucratic Administration. *In* FitzGerald, P., McLennan, A. and Munslow, B. (eds.). *Managing Sustainable Development in South Africa*. Second edition. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.