

Human resources status and department responsible for recreation service delivery in the North West Province of South Africa

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Abstract

It is a known fact that the provision of recreation facilities alone is not enough, and that there is a growing demand for professionally trained people and suitable department, to develop and enhance the delivery of recreation services. The purpose of this study was to determine the human resources status and department responsible for recreation service delivery in the North West province, South Africa. A mixed-method research design using a questionnaire and focus group were used on a targeted 20 personnel who are responsible for managing recreation at local government levels in the North West Province. Frequencies and phi coefficients were calculated for the quantitative data, while for qualitative data patterns were established. The results show that the majority (75%) of the local governments are in the rural settings whilst 25% found in urban areas with limited resources. It was found that 60% of the personnel are in the middle management with 40% in the top management. A total of 25% of the personnel are reported to have diploma qualification. From the results it is clear that recreation services delivery is widely spread across numerous service points; the Department of Parks accounted for 25%; Social Services 20% and other departments 20%, and 35% uncertainty. The focus groups discussion indicated that no agreement regarding which department must be responsible for recreation service delivery. It is concluded from the present results that human resources and department responsible for recreation service delivery are inconsistent and as such warranting urgent intervention from stakeholders dealing with recreation.

Keywords: Recreation, programmes, service delivery, human resources, management, South Africa.

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Introduction

Long after changes in the democratic and political landscape in South Africa in 1994, problems facing recreation service delivery at local government level still exist and are increasing due to social needs and changes facing the people of today. Statistics in the South African Survey 2006/2007 indicate that some

communities are faced with a high rate of poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS, crime, alcohol and drug abuse (Cronjé, Dimant, Lebone, MaCfarlane & Tempest 2007). Fourie (2006) indicated that despite the lack of recreation facilities and programmes, most South Africans still want to participate in these activities. Regular participation in recreation activities is associated with numerous benefits such as healthy lifestyle as well as economic development. Despite the positive outcomes associated with participation in recreation activities, not even the regulations in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) and the White Paper on Sport and Recreation (2002) could make an impact on the provision of recreation services. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, which is the highest law in the country, states that everyone has the right to a safe and healthy environment. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) further regulates that local government must ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner in order to promote social and economic development.

According to Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) (2001; 2006) and Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO, 2006), human resources are vital when planning and implementing recreation services. Scholtz and Meyer (1990) pointed out that the provision of recreation facilities alone is not enough. There is a growing demand for professionally trained people to develop a variety of recreation programmes in a sustainable manner. The historical roots of recreation provision in local government departments of parks and open spaces may have contributed to this problem, since the people who were first responsible for recreation were gardeners and landscape architects rather than trained recreation professionals (Lourens, 1998). This creates a need for well-trained, equipped recreation personnel in local governments. Skilled managers and resources are needed to manage facilities in a sustainable manner. It is assumed that education and training in recreation may improve skills development and the profession in the field of recreation (Chuene, 2005; Goslin & Goslin, 2002; Mkhonto, 2005; Mothilal, 1999; Tshabangu & Coopoo, 2001; Weimers, 2000). This challenge is not unique to the North West Province and South Africa. Each community needs key people skilled at designing, providing and leading recreation activities and these individuals include municipal staff, other service providers, the private sector and volunteers (ARPA, 2006). According to the ARPA statement, "Municipal governments are closest to the people; they are likely to respond more flexibly, more quickly and more effectively to the needs of the community in matters of recreation and for this reason the municipality is the primary public supplier and facilitator of direct recreation services" (ARPA, 2006).

The inability of decision-makers to understand the value of recreation leads to insignificant recreation provision (Lourens, 1998). According to Goslin (2003), decision-makers' understanding of the role and value of recreation is still lacking. The problems local governments experience is the uncertainty

concerning their approach to recreation service delivery as well as their specific duties, which boils down to a lack of or insufficient policies. Singh and Burnett (2003) identified confusion regarding roles and functions of local government in the implementation of policies. Naidoo (2005) indicated that a lack of recreation policies is a major problem for local governments. As early as 1901-1903, provision and maintenance of parks and facilities were conducted by the engineering department of Johannesburg City Council (Meyer, 1988). In any contemporary community, local governments should be the most important provider of both recreation facilities and recreation service delivery (Hoek, 1978; Scholtz & Meyer, 1990; Sayed, 2003). However, local governments have been found to be passive towards accepting the responsibility to provide recreation facilities and services Hoek *et al.* (1978) and Meyer and Scholtz (1988). As such there is a need for a formal policy regarding who must be responsible for recreation service delivery.

Providing recreation services is critical to the overall development of mankind. The situation regarding the human resource and responsible department for recreation by local governments in the North West Province is unknown. The purpose of this study therefore, was to determine the human resources status and department responsible for recreation service delivery in the North West Province of South Africa.

Methods

Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data from 20 identified Local Governments within North West Province. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) and Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) indicated that mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combine elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. De Vos (2005) refers to a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods used in a single study as effective in providing valuable information.

Participants

The target groups of this study were recruited from the four districts namely Dr Kenneth Kaunda, Dr Ruth Mompati, Dr Modiri Molema, and Bojanala consisting of 20 local governments according to the demarcation of the North West Province. The participants within these areas were personnel who were

responsible for managing recreation at local government levels in the North West Province. Given the nature of this study (the participants comprised of two groups. Group one consisted of 20 personnel from local governments who were requested to complete the quantitative questionnaire. Group two consisted of five people who were identified during collection of quantitative data formed a focus group. The focus group interview took place at the Department of Recreation at the North-West University six weeks after the quantitative data. Approval for the study was obtained (*Ethic no:* NWU-00023-11-S1) from the North-West University's Ethics Committee.

Instruments and procedures

Two instruments were used in this study:

Quantitative data collection: The *quantitative questionnaire* used in the study was adopted from a protocol by Scholtz and Meyer (1990). The questionnaire requested the participants to answer questions regarding information on human resources and which department is responsible for recreation services. The questionnaires were based on two to five likert scales ranging from 1 highly acceptable, 2 acceptable, 3 not sure, 4 unacceptable, 5 highly unacceptable. For analyses of the data, numeric codes in the form of frequencies as well as phi coefficients to determine the differences were used. Prior to the completion of the questionnaire, briefing was done at each measuring point in July and subsequently the identified managers were given a week to complete and submit questionnaire it to the principal researcher. For practical feasibility and to obtain trustworthy feedback the interview took place at the Recreation Department of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

Qualitative data collection: A focus group session took place at a central location, convenient for subjects to be transported to and from the North-West University. The focus group consisted of five people who provided the quantitative data. A qualitative questionnaire was developed using trends identified during quantitative data collection four weeks after data were analysed. The format included open-ended questions with appropriate probes. Questions were designed to examine the perceived problems of recreation service delivery. Questions using individual experience were aimed at discovering what knowledge and skills personnel working in the recreation sectors in the local governments practise to encourage the usage of recreation facilities. All interviews took place on one day. To ascertain the trustworthiness and qualitative procedures during the interview, participants were assured that their answers were confidential and would be used solely for the purpose of this study. In addition, the participants were given coded names according to alphabetical order which were subsequently used in the results and discussion (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Babbie, 2009). Before the interview, participants were also made aware of the recorder, the purpose of the

interview in the research and how long the interview would take (twenty to thirty minutes). The same moderators and observers were present during each of the focus group meetings to keep data accurate and consistent. Moderators participated in training prior to the study. Notes were taken and all sessions were recorded on tape.

Participants in the focus group were informed about the aims and procedures of the study and were subsequently asked to complete and sign an informed consent form. Participants were given the assurance that the information they would provide was confidential and to be used for research purposes and nothing else. Questions were pre-tested on a pilot group of five personnel dealing with recreation services in the local government but who were not parts of the actual group for the study. In addition, the three recreation specialists were interviewed to obtain their views with regard to recreation service delivery. The recreation specialists included Respondent A (PhD in Recreation and Sport Management Respondent); Respondent B (PhD in Recreation Management) and Respondent C (MA in Recreation Management). They all have proven practical experience in the industry.

Data analysis

Two forms of analyses based on the design of the study were followed: Firstly, frequencies for percentages and phi-coefficients were used to calculate the quantitative data. The phi coefficients ($\phi=0.1$ (Small) $\phi=0.3$ (Medium); $\phi=0.5$ (larger)) were calculated to determine the practical significant differences in the measured variables. Secondly, for the qualitative data, the moderator and an observer were present during the sessions and conducted the analyses. Data were first analysed by thoroughly reading through the transcripts and listening to the audiotapes, while extracting any general themes and patterns that emerged. The data were systematically coded, sorted and organised into appropriate categories, patterns and themes. Finally, the researcher (moderator and observer) discussed the results and a final analysis was prepared. Analyses were done with the assistance of a statistical consultant at the North-West University.

Results and Discussion

Urban as well as rural areas were included in this study in order to obtain information of local governments with regard to recreation provision. The North West Province consists of four districts that encompass all twenty-two local governments. The names of the districts are Bojanala Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, Dr. Ruth Mompati and Ngaka Modiri Molema. Rural local governments include Kgetleng River, Leekwa Teemane, Mamusa, Ventersdorp, Naledi, Kagisano, Tswaing, Ratlou, Zeerust, Taung, Moretele, Ditsobotla, Moses Kotane, Maquasi

hills. Urban local governments include Tlokwe, Matlosana, Rustenburg, Madibeng and Mafikeng. Rural local governments account for 75% of all the questionnaires that were completed, while 25% were from urban local governments

In Table 1, only 10% of local governments indicated the availability of human resources (6.7% rural and 20% urban). It is very clear that 90% of local governments lack human resources to provide recreation (93.3% in rural and 80% in urban areas). Though the results showed a small practically significant ($\phi=0.192$) effect between the area and availability of human resources, these factors remain critical towards recreation service delivery. The absences of human resources as a responsibility seem to be a historical trend as noted in the literature review (Meyer, 1997). Lack of human resources has always been a challenge. According to Bennet (1995), Saayman (1997) and Saayman (2002) these factors enable one to determine which recreation services are to be provided.

Table 1: Availability of human resources in rural and urban local governments

Response	Total (N=20) %	Rural (N=15) %	Urban (N=5) %	PHI Coefficient*
YES	10	6.7	20	0.192
NO	90	93.3	80	

*phi coefficient=0.1 (small)

Figure 1, presents the results of personnel responsible for recreation in the local governments. The results indicate that 60% of the officials are directors (senior management) and 40% are mid-level officials (Figure 1). The following positions can be regarded as top management in the public service: acting director, director communications, director infrastructure, director, executive manager, head of department and municipal manager whilst the following positions are middle management: assistant manager, IDP official, manager, sports, sport and tourism.

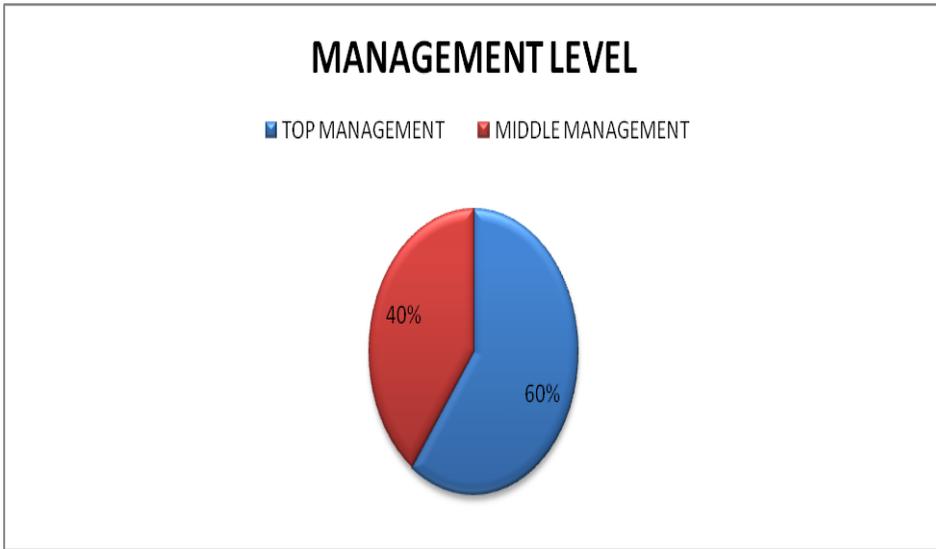


Figure 1: Management level of personnel responsible for recreation in the local governments

Participants were asked how long they had been holding their current positions, and the results in Figure 2, show that 63% of the participants had occupied their current positions for less than 5 years, while 32% had occupied their positions between five to ten years, and only 5% had occupied their positions for more than ten years.

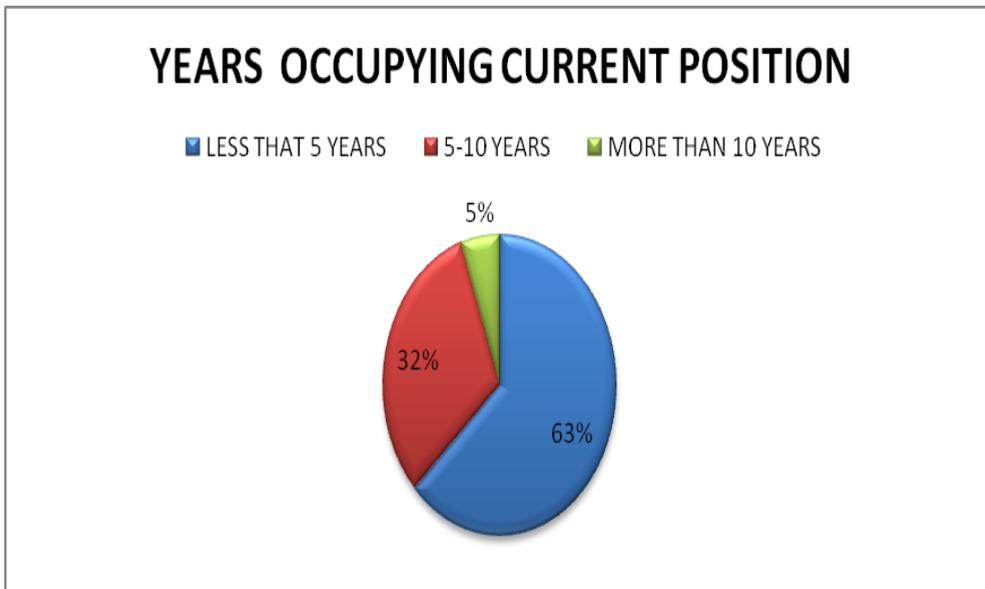


Figure 2: Personnel years of experience in current job position

The reasons why participants did not occupy their current positions for longer periods of time can include the political aspect of jobs (elections) and the

reorganisation of local governments. Most of the senior posts are contracted for the term of office of the mayors. This was done to allow new governments to appoint their own staff, to avoid unnecessary misconceptions about the out-going political office bearers.

It is clear that the majority of the participants who completed the questionnaire have post-matriculation qualifications from different fields of studies with no specification for recreation whilst 5% only have grade 12 (Table 2). The results are therefore in agreement with literature that personnel's working in recreation departments are either not qualified or qualified but lacks knowledge and expertise in the field of recreation. This is consistent with the findings of The Hoek Report (1978), HSRC Research Report (1982) and Scholtz and Meyer (1990). It was found that the absence of professionally trained recreationists indicate that local governments were of the opinion that the provision of recreation and leisure services was the responsibility of the communities (Meyer, 2001). These findings are in agreement with the historical report of Lourens (1998) in which it was revealed that the people who first were responsible for recreation were gardeners and landscape architects and not trained recreation professionals (Lourens, 1998).

Table 2: Participants' qualification levels

Qualification (N=20)	%
B ENGI	5%
BA	5%
B PROC	5%
BTECH	15%
DIPLOMA	25%
GR 12	5%
HONS	5%
MASTER'S	15%
MANAGEMENT	5%
MPA	5%
NO REPSONSE	10%

As such this became a disturbing situation regarding the delivery of recreation, as it contradicted with the recommendations by ARPA (2001); ARPA (2006) and PRO (2006) that human resources are vital when planning and implementing recreation services. Furthermore, Scholtz and Meyer (1990) pointed out that professionally trained people are needed for recreation services to be sustainable.

According to Torkildsen, (2005) management has been derived from the original model of classical management theory of Fayol. The Fayol model of management includes planning (policies, forecasting, objectives), execution (systematic implementation of policies, co-ordination) and control (monitoring performance) Torkildsen, (2005). More recently researchers/authors have added

to Fayol’s model additional functions such as motivation, communication, budgeting and staff development (Torkildsen, 2005). This model can be adapted to meet the needs of different organisations, and can be used as a basic framework for the management of recreation services, facilities and programming, namely: conceptualising, having a mission, direction, goals and marketing strategy; setting measurable objectives; organising, establishing a structure and system; recruiting, training and developing staff; carrying out the plan and obtaining results through people; assisting subordinates and inspiring and motivating them; seeking improvements and appraising results (Torkildsen, 2005:381).

Table 3, responses regarding to department responsible for recreation service delivery are presented. The results indicates that recreation services delivery is widely spread across numerous service points; with the Department of Parks accounted for 25%; Social Services 20% and other departments 20%. In rural areas the Department of Parks accounts for 26.%, Social Services 20%, and other departments 20% whilst in urban areas the Department of Parks accounted for 20%, Social Services 20%, and other departments 20%.

Table 3: Departments responsible for recreation delivery

	TOTAL (N=20)		RURAL (N=15)			URBAN (N=5)			PHI COEFFICIENT*	
	YES %	NO %	NO RESPONSE %	YES %	NO %	NO RESPONSE %	YES %	NO %		NO RESPONSE %
Parks	25	35	40	26.6	33.3	40	20	40	40	0.098
Social Services	20	40	40	20	40	40	20	40	40	0.001
Health Department	0	45	55	0	40	60	0	60	40	0.001
Separate department	0	45	55	0	40	60	0	60	40	0.001
Other	20	20	60	20	20	60	20	20	60	0.001

*phi coefficient=0.1 (small); phi coefficient =0.3(medium); phi coefficient=0.5 (large).

There is small practically significant (phi=0.001) relationship between a certain type of area and whether recreation is provided by Parks, Social Services, Health Department and a separate department or other departments. The results are contradictory with regard to who should be responsible for recreation service delivery. When a follow-up was conducted on a focus group, similar contradictions were observed as outlined in the quotations box below. In the box, the following are supporting statements that were made by respondents (no actual names) A, B, C, D and E during interviews. These results are consistent with the reports and results from previous studies (Hoek *et al.*, 1978; Meyer, 1988; Goslin, 2003; Singh & Burnett, 2003; Sayed, 2003; Naidoo, 2005).

A. *“It should be partnered with parks because immediately you put it with sport, people tend not differentiate between recreation and sport.”*

B. *“This unit falls within community services. It’s a correct allocation to this section and must just be resourced. Recreation itself is not resourced and depends on other unit.”*

C. *“It will be suited to parks and recreation” We don’t have recreation as a unit and I am heading community services as colleagues have said.”*

D. *“How about us taking recreation to cooperative service to be also responsible for the welfare of the communities as well.” “The status core is as colleagues are saying that Recreation is located at community services department.”*

E. *“Sport must be part of recreation” The experience is that when recreation is put with parks recreation plays second role.” “We have established sport and recreation unit and it has become better.” A subsection of sport and recreation is relevant.”*

The focus group further indicated that there is a need for a partnership. The participants in the focus group indicated that recreation should form a partnership with other stakeholders such as provincial government. The following in the quotations box are supporting statements that were made by respondents A, B, C, D and E during interviews.

A. *“Local government should lead problem of recreation and must be within partnership with other stakeholder.”*

B. *“My little contribution will be a question of partnership” Partnership is lacking this should be synergizing the stakeholders to have a way of working together.”*

C. *“Local government being at the forefront must come in to assist the previously disadvantage group.”*

D. *“ It should be local government” Based on my experience annually we go into communities with the mayor to have IMBIZOs with communities.”*

E. *“I fully support the colleagues that partnership is important” “Local government has facilities to present the type of programmes” local government as closer to the communities has assets to do this.”*

The current results indicate that the responsibility for recreation service delivery has not yet been accepted by a single department. It is apparent from these results that a need for partnership should receive more attention so as to accelerated recreation services at local governments. This then suggests that the challenges which have been experienced from the early years regarding recreation service delivery, are not yet being resolved (Botha, 1981). Given these contradictions, an expert working in the field of recreation stated that there is a need to reposition recreation. Davidson (2007) stated that supporting what the community wants, determining what fits the vision of the city and the department, and looking at what is manageable with existing resources and is sustainable in the long-term are critical elements that need to be considered and examined, for there is a need and a desire to explore a way of operating differently. The challenges for local government as recreation service providers is to be anticipated, as early as possible the recreation needs of their communities and new ways of delivering recreation services (Stanley, 1993).

Conclusion

The findings of the present study showed that properly trained human resources are a factor influencing recreation service delivery. Additionally, inconsistency with regard to which department should be responsible for recreation service delivery is evident. It is therefore, recommended that properly trained human resources and the positioning of recreation under the portfolio of sport and recreation in the local government be implemented. This will re-align very well with the national government organogram structures. There is also an urgent need for all stakeholders concerned so that recreation service delivery can be more effective.

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