

**Examining the Administrative 'Capacity' to Implement Development Programmes
in South Africa¹**

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*The capacity of the public service to deliver and expand basic services
will be the hinge between a stable political economy driving development...,
or a volatile country beset with massive inadequacies in service delivery.*

(McLennan, Wooldridge 1995: 91, with reference to South Africa)

1. Introduction and Overview of Research Problem

The use of the term 'capacity' to characterise the ability and performance of the post-apartheid South African government has become a common topic of debate since the country's transition to democracy in 1994. A general scan of relevant speeches, policy and strategy documents, government reports and academic writing illustrates the widespread employment of the term. Its ubiquitous appearance has even become a talking point in itself, with some remarking that the government's lack of capacity had become a South African "catch phrase of the 1990s" (Cheryl Walker 1998). Capacity has been used to characterise a wide spectrum of government activities, from socio-economic issues such as land reform, assisting emerging farmers, and poverty alleviation, to security services such as policing and intelligence.²

¹ This paper has been constructed for the IPSA conference in Fukuoka, Japan, from part one of an ongoing Ph.D. study being pursued by the writer.

² See for example Business Day. 6 April 2006. Emerging Farmers Query State Policy; and May, J. 1998. Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Report prepared for the Office of the Executive Deputy President

A particularly good example of the prevalence of the term capacity to characterise the performance of South African government administration is contained in the publication, *Towards a Ten Year Review* (2003). The document, which contains the South African government's assessment of its post-apartheid performance implementing public programmes, makes thirty-one references to "capacity", most of which could be generally distinguished by the performance, inherent, and acquired ability of its public administrations. The term capacity was applied to a range of activities, including standard administrative tasks such as policy development, implementation, and project management; to more specialised tasks such as information technology, corruption investigations, delivery of basic services (i.e. water, sanitation, electrification), in addition to those mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph; and to public administrations working with non-governmental actors.

Despite the widely spread and characteristic application of the term capacity, contained in government as well as academic publications, a more descriptive understanding of the factors influencing capacity has tended to remain unclear. In other words, it is more often the case that employing the term capacity to characterise the administrative performance and ability of government administration is implicitly treated as given, be it due to human, organisational or infrastructural constraints. References to administrative capacity do not therefore sufficiently isolate and describe factors that could be said to influence the functional performance and ability of state administration. The consequences of this analytical shortcoming for drawing an accurate picture of

and the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Poverty and Inequality, Summary Report, 13 May 1998. See also 2002 and 2003 State of the Nation Address. Available from: <http://www.gov.za>

government capacity may be quite considerable, in view of McLennan and Wooldridge's implicit suggestion that understanding the factors driving administrative capacity will be pivotal to envisioning the kind of development path South Africa might take.

Given the dearth of attention directed at empirically isolating and describing factors influencing the administrative capacity, this study proposes that a more descriptive scientific inquiry of the phenomenon be undertaken. The established literature on international development, and comparative and development administration, which have dealt extensively with the concept of capacity, will be consulted, together with the literature on South African administrative transformation. These observations will enable an analytical framework to be developed.

2. Utilising the Theme of 'Development' to Explore Administrative Capacity

The post-apartheid transformation of South African public administration was in large part premised on a fundamental change in the state's approach to implementing 'development' activities, making this a potentially useful theme on which to base a more descriptive inquiry into capacity. Much of the South African scholarship referring to administrative capacity is also set within the context of development public policy. The evolution of an administrative approach to development emerged from a general consensus that a reformed and restructured public administration needed to spearhead the task of improving the welfare conditions of all South Africans, in a non-prejudicial and equitable manner. Post-apartheid public administration inherited a complex organisational system that managed the implementation of development activities on the

basis of racial classification. The objective of the system was to plan and implement development activities in general adherence to policies sanctioning the delivery of separate and disproportionate services to the country's inhabitants based on race.

Malcolm Wallis (1997: 87) punctuated this by noting that "...development programmes in the [Black African] homelands can essentially be seen as attempts to make apartheid work." Noam Pines (1979: 5) added that the most prominent feature of community development under apartheid, which covered the issue of poverty, was its "system-maintaining" properties, resulting in government officials being unlikely to promote socio-political processes outside of, but parallel to the established political structure. The White Paper on Reconstruction and Development (1994: 41) summarised the development challenge facing the post-apartheid government, by stating that: "The capacity to implement development programmed [sic] in rural areas is a serious bottleneck, which will be addressed as a priority". Dick Fehnel (1997: 374) noted just a few years into a post-apartheid administration that the "new 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."

Since the dissolution of apartheid, significant changes have been made to the structure, functions and development "orientation" of South African public administration. Section 195 (1) (c) of South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution stipulates for example that public administration must be "development-oriented", which

the Public Service Commission (2002) has interpreted as programmes designed to eradicate and relieve conditions of socio-economic poverty. The challenge of implementing activities designed to reduce chronic socio-economic poverty and stimulate corresponding growth has, as noted by the RDP White Paper and Fehnel's observation above, cast administrative capacity into stark relief.

Taking into account the significant attention directed at the administrative capacity to implement development activities, along with the need for a more descriptive study of factors influencing 'capacity', this study is proposing an exploratory study of the South African government's capacity to implement development activities. The following research question is therefore presented:

What are the factors influencing the 'capacity' of public administration to implement development activities in South Africa?

3. Adopting a Working Definition of Capacity in an Administrative Context

The primary analytical objective of this study will be to identify and describe factors affecting the capacity of public administrations to implement development activities. A secondary objective will be to identify a theoretical means of determining the significance of these factors affecting capacity. The purpose of this inquiry, in response to the research problem described earlier, is to empirically substantiate the largely characteristic use of the term 'capacity' to evaluate the performance and ability of public administrations in South Africa.

In order to proceed with this objective, a working definition of capacity will have to be agreed. Generally speaking, the use of the term capacity in the broad policy and academic literature to characterise the functioning of South African public administrations, appears to contain at least three dimensions:

- Government's *ex post facto* performance, i.e. where specified objectives have not been adequately achieved, typified by references such as "poor capacity", "capacity shortages/constraints"³,
- Government's *inherent* ability to respond to public policy priorities, which in the context of post-apartheid transformation takes into account reforming administrative structures and re-orienting policy priorities,
- Government's *acquired* ability to respond to policy priorities, through efforts to build or strengthen its capacity (i.e. "capacity building").

In an effort to identify an appropriate working definition of capacity, the descriptive nature of the research question will have to be taken into account. In this regard the *ex post facto* dimension to its meaning may not be a suitable basis for pursuing this inquiry, because implicit in this dimension is the hypothesis that public

³ See for example *Towards a Ten Year Review* (2003)

administration does not have the requisite capacity (i.e. lacks capacity). The validity of this hypothesis is in principle not the concern of this study.

The *acquired* ability of government administration to perform, through defined efforts to build and strengthen its capacity, is also not directly relevant to this study. The distinction between building or strengthening capacity as an end goal and describing capacity as an administrative means was observed by Peter Morgan (2003: 6-7), who in the context of international development research, submitted that capacity could be distinguished as a development objective in and of itself, or as an osmotic by-product that was hopefully to result from the overall design and implementation of development activities. The research question does not concern itself with capacity as a development objective in and of itself, as part of a defined effort to build or strengthen capacity.

One is left with a working definition of capacity that emphasises the *inherent* ability of public administrations to respond to (development) public policy priorities. This definition would accept then that there are intrinsic elements in the functioning of public administration that would allow for an analysis of its corresponding capacity. In an effort to identify what these elements are, the academic literature that most closely pertains to studying administrative capacity in development contexts will have to be surveyed. This will involve a review of the scholarship in comparative and development administration, in an effort to identify an analytical framework capable of isolating and describing factors influencing the capacity of public administration to implement development activities. Constructing this analytical framework will also need to recognise the normative

uncertainty stemming from capacity's association with the implementation of 'development' activities. Finally, the explanatory power of the analytical framework can be further strengthened by reviewing the literature on post-apartheid administrative transformation, in order to isolate issues that have been explicitly linked to capacity.

4. Identifying the Features of Administrative 'Capacity' as *Inherent Ability*, and Development

This objective of this study is to identify and describe factors influencing the capacity of public administration to implement development activities in South Africa. Its working definition of capacity consists of the inherent ability of government administrations to respond to public policy priorities, which in this case will consist of development policy priorities (activities). As mentioned before, the identification of an 'inherent' ability to implement development activities suggests that public administrations possess the innate means of responding to these constructs. This notion is generally supported by the academic scholarship on administrative capacity in development contexts.

John Cohen's (1995: 408-409) discussion of capacity in the public sectors of developing countries for example rejects the wide variation of definitions generated by scholars and practitioners, spanning a range of features such as ability, talent, competencies, efficiency, and individual qualifications. He opts instead for a definition of capacity that focuses on the capability of administrative officers to plan, implement, manage or evaluate policies, strategies, or programmes designed to impact on social

conditions in communities (Shafritz 1986 quoted in Cohen 1995: 409). The innate means of public administration is defined by the planning, implementation, management and evaluation of specific policies, strategies or programmes containing a developmental objective.

Although not employing the term 'capacity' as a focus of her study, Heather Nel's (2001) assessment of development programme implementation in South Africa captures the term implicitly by focussing on the inherent ability of local government administration to employ a "project management approach" to implement development activities. Moreover Nel's (2001: 610) description of this approach coincides closely with Cohen's more explicit description of capacity, emphasising the role of public administrators to conceive, prepare (i.e. plan), implement, and evaluate development projects.

Merilee Grindle and Mary Hilderbrand's (1995: 445-447) concern with building capacity for development directs its lens at the innate organisational means of public administrations. The writers promote an analytical framework for understanding capacity based on various levels comprising and/or interacting primarily around the organisational framework of public administration. These include:

- *Action environment*: referring to economic, political and social "milieux" within which government administrations carry out their activities;

- *Institutional context* of public administration, comprising the rules and procedures guiding the activities of public officials and the responsibilities government as a whole assumes for development initiatives, together with the enabling resources;
- *Task network*: constituting the various relationships that public administrators establish with government and non-government agents in performing tasks;
- Public *organisations*, and understanding how the structures, processes, resources and management styles of organisations affect the establishment of goals, structure work, define authority relations, which ultimately promote or constrain performance;
- And finally the *education and training* available to public administrators.

The levels attributed to administrative capacity by Grindle and Hilderbrand extend the boundaries of the innate ability of administrative agents to plan, implement, and evaluate policies, strategies or programmes, by situating the actions of these agents in a wider organisational and environmental setting.

Other writers have also argued that organisational and environmental settings have a bearing on how capacity is understood. In their discussion on “building administrative capacity” in developing countries (with particular attention to Africa), Ogwo Umeh and Gregory Andranovich (2005: 47) submitted that the process of capacity

requires an assessment of an organisation's capabilities at more than one level: managing intra-organisational relations, managing inter-organisational relationships, and the organisation's management of wider political, economic and social relationships. Writing from the perspective of public development planning in South Africa, Malcolm Wallis (2000: 135) also suggested that capacity must be evaluated by more than one level, comprising the institutional structure, linkages and co-ordination between institutions, and levels of support (i.e. resources) received by institutions, which may include inter-organisational resource transfers.

Other notable South African scholarship on capacity includes Fanie Cloete's (1999) article "Conceptualising Capacity for Sustainable Governance", and his follow-on article: "Achieving the Capacity for Sustainable Governance". Cloete's (1999: 14-15) analysis adds further dimension to an understanding of the inherent ability to respond to development policy priorities. In the first instance though, he adds to a multi-level organisational understanding of capacity by drawing on Savitch's work in conceptualising the term as the structural, functional and cultural ability of the public service to implement the policy objectives of government, and specifically those objectives aimed at raising the quality of life of citizens. The "structural and functional" ability of public administration encompasses its inherent organisational and task-related framework. The "cultural" ability of public administration brings into play an additional feature, which Cloete does not describe. Chapter two will debate the utility of associating the term 'culture' with administrative capacity, given its historical association with ethno-centric analyses in the comparative and development administration literature.

The second and more significant observation made by Cloete (1999: 91) concerning the inherent ability of public administration was described as follows:

The answer to the question about the capacity needed to achieve the policy implementation objectives...seems to be the commitment and ability to implement in pragmatic ways those elements of accepted strategic management which are appropriate in a given context.

A third feature is now being introduced into an administrative description of capacity. Adding to an understanding of inherent ability as the planning, implementation, and evaluation conduct of administrative actors, and the organisational and environmental contexts in which they function, is their employment of "strategic management". One can recall Fehnel's earlier reference to a "management" capacity to implement reconstruction and development activities in South Africa.

The notion of management, including its "strategic" employment, will be the subject of some discussion in constructing this study's analytical framework. Indeed the analytical framework and theoretical premise for examining capacity will be based on how the idea of management and its strategic character have been applied in studies evaluating the performance of development activities. An advantage of employing this particular explanatory construct is that it will be shown to take into account all features associated with administrative capacity that have been described in this section. Specific reference will be made to Samuel Paul's (1982) work, *Managing Development*

Programs: The Lessons of Success, Louise White's (1987) *Creating Opportunities for Change: Approaches to Managing Development Programmes*, and accompanying work by Derick Brinkerhoff (1991b).

5. Proposing an Analytical Framework to Explore Administrative Capacity

It is necessary to point out that this study's review of the comparative and development administration literature has opted to view capacity from the perspective of the administration of *development*. This definition presumes that there are particular functional qualities that enable or impede public administrations from effectively implementing defined development activities. In proceeding to identify what these qualities of capacity might be, the use of the term "management" has appeared as a potentially useful analytical marker.

To 'manage' the implementation of development activities lends a distinctive character to the capacity to administer *development*. The term makes a number of appearances in the comparative literature, including Ferrel Heady's (2001: 300) reference to weaknesses in trained administrators with "management capacity", developmental skills and technical competence related to the execution of defined development interventions. Koteen's (1972: 47) decades-old discussion of "Key Problems in Development Administration" also observed this situation, remarking then that two decades of assistance to developing countries had produced significant improvements in administrative systems relative to sustained deficiencies in "managerial capacity". He

went on to argue that "National development programs...have too often fallen short of expectations for reasons of managerial weakness."

Milton Esman (1991: 41) also employed the term management to describe the development-related actions of public administrators. According to him, the term was said to comprise the performance of various activities including rendering advice to political superiors, technical and managerial expertise, control by public administrators of vital information, and their maintenance of ongoing contacts with relevant public constituencies. The term was also used in a South African context by Fanie Cloete, who earlier gave it a "strategic" complexion submitting that the concept possessed particular elements which could facilitate an understanding of the capacity to achieve policy implementation objectives.

Samuel Paul (1982) and Louise Whites' (1987) treatment of the term management to describe the role of administration in and performance of development programmes has been deemed especially pertinent to this study. White, with reference to Warwick (1982: 41-42 quoted in White 1987: 21), begins by submitting that the term "administrator", and thus administration, suggests people who carry out tasks designed by others, whereas the term "manager" and thus management, implies a broader range of activities displaying features of initiative and flexibility. The significance of such a terminological distinction has been challenged in the public administration scholarship, with Laurence Lynn (2003: 15) observing that arguments supporting a distinction between management and administration, though exhibiting a long history in the

literature, often seem “arbitrary”. He supported this position by citing instances where opinions differed about which of the two terms represented the more general concept compared with the more specialised.

Reaching consensus on a terminological distinction between “management” and “administration” is ultimately not material to the significance of management as a marker of capacity to administer *development*. What is significant is the attributes attached to management that are said to have a bearing on the inherent ability of public administration to implement development activities. In this regard, both White and Paul infused their discussion of management performance with additional meaning by pointing to “strategic” interventions or tasks.⁴ Although the writers did not explicitly refer to the strategic performance of these interventions/tasks in terms of ‘capacity’, it is argued that the framework they erected for assessing performance must reasonably assume an inherent ability of public administration to function/perform, as per the working definition of capacity adopted earlier. Moreover, Derick Brinkerhoff (1991b: 12) submitted in Guidelines for Managing Development Programmes that:

Capacity and performance are integral to each other. The best way to build capacity is through actual performance, and the best way to achieve performance is by building capacity

⁴ White (1987: 21-22) refers to Kiggundu’s distinction between *organisational* tasks and *strategic* tasks in building her framework for analysing development programme management performance. Strategic tasks were considered critical in the implementation of development activities.

Although this study is not seeking to “build” capacity through performance, it is attempting to descriptively understand capacity by observing the performance of development activities. With this said, both Paul and White introduce performance-related variables, called “strategic management interventions” and “programme management functions” respectively, which together represent a kind of analytical tool that could be used to explore the explanatory significance of ‘management’, and which could further enable an identification of factors influencing the capacity of public administration to implement development activities. A comparative illustration of management variables proposed by Paul and White is depicted in table 1 below:⁵

Table 1: “Strategic” management interventions/functions, Capacity, and the Administration of Development

Samuel Paul (1982: 103-104)	Louise White (1987: 24-29)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Environment:</i> Forces external to a development programme, which creates opportunities and constraints for its survival and expansion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with and co-ordinate multiple organisations and groups • Expand programme resources and political support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strategy:</i> Longer-term choices concerning programme’s goals, distribution of services, policies, action plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to Development Content of Programme Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Structure:</i> durable organisational arrangements, distribution of authority, reporting relationships within the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the Development Capacity of Implementing Organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Processes:</i> Application and sharing of work, information, influence and power by a programme manager to direct their energies toward desired common goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise leadership

⁵ White (1987: 21-22) does not explicitly apply the term “strategic management” to understanding the performance of development activities in her functional framework. However, with reference to Kiggundu’s work, she does stress the importance of “strategic” tasks in the administration of development.

It is submitted that these interventions/functions don't simply impact the performance of development activities to achieve their desired objectives, but can be traced to their inherent ability (i.e. capacity) to do so. Brinkerhoff (1991a: 22) for example defined capacity as the latent ability of the (development) programme organisation to generate outputs, where this was in turn related to the ability to effectively combine existing physical, human and administrative resources to produce results. It can be reasonably assumed that this latent ability to produce results is itself dependent on the combination of these existing innate resources, which it could be said are representative of variables listed in table 1. On the same token, in posing the question "what accounts for the poor performance of public interventions on the development front", Paul (1982: 3) cites Waterson's (1965) observation that few developing countries had, *inter alia*, the administrative "capacity" to cope with development programme preparation and implementation, where it would again be reasonable to suggest that programme preparation and implementation entail the kinds of activities present in table 1.

One might consider the import of Paul and White's framework of strategic management interventions/functions as a useful analytical instrument for observing performance-related factors affecting the capacity of public administration to implement development activities. With this said however, the theoretical picture emanating from the frameworks was left unclear. The theoretical implications of the frameworks presented did however become clearer when White's framework was compared with that of Paul. For example, White's set of five functions, in comparison to Paul, qualified the direction of its functions, i.e. *contributing to development content...*, *enhancing*

development capacity..., *expanding* programme resources..., etc. The advantage of her depiction is that it would give clearer focus to an analysis of these functions in case examples, thereby facilitating the recognition of constraints affecting the inherent ability of these functions to be carried out.

The disadvantage of White's framework for examining administrative capacity is ironically also attributable to the more narrowly-qualified direction given to its functions. This may reduce the observational scope of other potential factors, not just those acting as a constraint on the direction of these functions, influencing the capacity to carry these out. Capacity defined earlier as the inherent ability to respond to public policy priorities may require, in this portrayal, a more open set of functions to capture the breadth of the concept. Samuel Paul's set of four strategic management interventions would appear to be more suitable in this regard. Paul's framework, when compared with White's representation, does not generally qualify the direction of the management interventions, whilst including under the headings *environment, strategy, structure, processes*, more than one activity that could potentially exhibit factors influencing the performance-related capacity of these interventions.

Paul's (1982: 103-104) framework also distinguishes itself by arguing that the key to an understanding of strategic management is maximising the "positive interaction" effects and seeking congruence amongst interventions, which were again not pre-determined. Congruence was defined by the degree that mutual fit and compatibility could be maintained between these functions, contending that the greater the degree of

congruence the more likely it was that programme performance would improve. Paul (ibid) noted that empirical studies had previously come to support the hypothesis that there was a positive relationship between organisational performance and “congruence” amongst the interventions listed in table 1.

Theoretically speaking then, the notion of congruence could enable this study to not just identify factors affecting administrative ‘capacity’, but to describe the significance of these factors as they may impact on the ability of programme administration to maintain congruence, as defined above. This would also appear to speak to Cloete’s search for “those elements” of accepted strategic management that could assist in understanding the capacity to implement and achieve policy objectives.

6. Defining the Primary Context for Exploring the Capacity to Implement Development Activities

Hopefully a reasonably well-formed basis is being laid for devising a useful analytical instrument to observe factors influencing the capacity of public administration to implement development activities. In an effort to give foundation to this study’s objective of understanding how strategic management action influences capacity, it is necessary to contextual the object of capacity. This paper referred earlier to the development administration literature evolving more than one perspective of capacity. The objective of the first expressed a concern for the development of broad administrative (functional) capacity. The objective of the second directed its concern more narrowly to the functional capacity to implement development activities. It is these

development tasks or activities that represent the object of this study's interest in capacity, and it is the nature of these 'activities' that needs to be clarified.

Towards this end, a return to Samuel Paul (1982) and Louise White's (1987: 12) work on the management of development activities finds both writers cloaking these interventions in the form of "programmes", and in the process giving more tangible parameters to the object of administrative capacity. Paul (1982: 6) prefaced his analysis by arguing that it was the recognition by governments that "development tasks" called for strategies and organisational forms different from those relevant to their maintenance tasks,⁶ which led them to create "programmes" and "projects" with identities of their own. Paul's (1982: 9-10) programmatic description of development activities exhibited the following four features:

- *Policy Sanction:* This would normally stem from a specific legislative enactment preceding the creation of a new development programme. Executive sanction will suffice if a programme is part of an already existing national development plan;
- *Development Focus:* Contrasting with regulatory programmes whose development impact might be indirect, development programmes would

⁶ "Change" was an important element distinguishing "development" from "maintenance" tasks. Stone (1965: 52) remarked for example that the administration of development was a radically different function than the maintenance of law and the conduct of "routines", which typified the approach of colonial administrations. Gant (1979: 20) also described the term as having a purpose related to change, innovation and movement, contrasting with maintaining the status quo. Heseltine (1977: 22) envisioned a "new role" for the bureaucracy that would dispense with the generally paternalistic and instructive approach of colonial administrations, geared more towards the maintenance of law and order than "development".

be expected to generate economic and social outcomes (measurable and immeasurable) consistent with national development goals such as income growth and distribution, and improvement in quality of life.⁷

- *Organisational Identity:* A development programme must be characterised by an identity of its own in terms of an organisational structure, budget and personnel. Even though a programme may be under the administrative control of a ministry or department, it should be possible to identify it by reference to a relatively permanent organisation with its own structure, assignments, tasks and responsibilities, and reporting relationships.
- *Replication:* The programme's mission tends to be the replication or adaptation of a "developmental product" or "service" over the entire country or some of its constituent regions for the benefit of a specified client group.

It is submitted that the features said to make-up a development "programme" will facilitate a search for potential factors influencing the capacity to implement these particular constructs. In the first instance, "policy sanction" equips the development programme with a formal public mandate, which defines and regulates the corresponding actions of public bodies. This not only confirms the disciplinary context of this study (i.e. *public administration*), but also situates the development programme in a wider

⁷ This study interprets 'development' activities in terms of socio-economic interventions, including employment and income generation, and the alleviation of poverty.

constituency of entities (particularly other public bodies) that may assist or impede its functional capacity to so act.

Secondly, a “development focus” explicitly qualifies this study’s interest in the administration *of development*, by expressing a concern for the capacity of public administrations to implement *development* activities. Moreover these activities ought to be socio-economic in nature, targeting themes such as employment and income generation, and poverty alleviation. Development “focus” also speaks to the “strategy” variable in Paul’s framework of strategic management interventions, by giving content to the programme’s capacity to make corresponding choices, goals and plans.

Thirdly, the programme’s distinct “organisational identity” enables an examination of structural and process-related factors affecting capacity, again referring to Paul’s framework of strategic management interventions for implementing development activities. Finally, the geographic replication of a development product or service can be used to firstly verify an activity’s “development” focus, as well as to assess its functional capacity through observing how it engages with particular beneficiary groups.

In an effort to obtain contextual support for retaining a programmatic description of development activities, one could consider Heather Nel’s (2001: 609) observation that the RDP White Paper, mentioned earlier in this paper, adopted a “programme-based” approach to state-driven development that assembled many individual projects under a national programmatic scope. Although it has been observed that the programme/project

distinction in comparative and development administration has been overdrawn (see White 1987: 6), the distinction would appear contextually beneficial if the programme construct represents a more viable means of assessing the capacity of state-driven initiatives in South Africa.

The development programme construct has been quite visible in the South African state's approach to development policy interventions. The Public Service Commission (2003: 15) for example has interpreted the constitutional principle of development-orientation as "programmes that aim to alleviate poverty".⁸ State-driven national programmes directed at poverty alleviation and corresponding socio-economic growth are common in South African public administration, cutting across various departments. Some of these programmes adopt an explicit poverty thrust⁹ while others remained oriented towards improving poor socio-economic circumstances.¹⁰

In an attempt to identify and describe factors influencing the capacity of public administration to implement development activities, "programmes" designed to alleviate socio-economic poverty and encourage corresponding growth will define the specific context of this study. Features of these programmes should include one or more of the following: income generation, employment creation, and skills development. Development programmes will not therefore, in the context of this study, entail

⁸ Although the PSC uses "programme" in defining its criteria for assessing development-orientation, it uses "project" and "programme" interchangeably and indistinguishably elsewhere in its evaluation framework.

⁹ The Department of Social Development and Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (South Africa) both run poverty relief programmes.

¹⁰ This includes the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (Department of Agriculture) and the Expanded Public Works Programme co-ordinated by the Department of Public Works.

infrastructure provision or the delivery of basic services, such as water and sanitation, electricity and housing.

7. Proposing an Analytical Framework to Explore Administrative Capacity

Based on the discussion thus far, this study argues that Samuel Paul's framework of strategic management interventions, used previously to examine the performance of development programmes, can also be applied to generate observations of the inherent ability (capacity) of programme administrations to perform these functions. In so doing it can enable the identification and description of factors influencing the inherent ability (capacity) to implement development activities. An added benefit of the framework is that it could also expose the significance of factors influencing capacity, by testing the theoretical notion of "strategic management", or elements affecting an effort to maximise the positive interaction and seek congruence amongst the interventions. The analytical framework is illustrated in appendix 1.

To facilitate the logic of the framework's construct, it is necessary to conclude this paper by demonstrating how a more critical examination of the concept of capacity may increase the explanatory power of the framework. This is due to the normative uncertainty enveloping the concept of capacity to administer 'development' activities, and isolating the features associated with administrative capacity in the wider context of South African administrative transformation.

8. The Normative Face of Administrative Capacity and Development

Developing an analytical framework of capacity based on a “strategic management” framework cannot on its own define the foundation on which this research inquiry can proceed. This study will demonstrate that the relationship between a government administration’s inherent ability and its response to development priorities is in reality a more complex matter. This degree of uncertainty was captured by Grindle and Hilderbrand (1995: 445) in their definition of public sector capacity in developing countries, as the “ability to perform *appropriate* tasks effectively, efficiently and sustainably”.

This paper has thus far introduced features of capacity in the context of public administration, which speak to the inherent ability to respond to public policy priorities. Barry Bozeman (1993: 236) presented this side of the argument when he held that few would dispute the notion that effective and efficient public management is a prerequisite to development. Grindle and Hilderbrand are however suggesting that there is something less certain in how the ‘appropriateness’ of development tasks is determined, which could potentially influence how one understands the capacity to implement these tasks.

Capacity’s normative face was also observed by Coralie Bryant and Louise White (1982: 23, 25), who made reference to a “paradox of development administration”. Here, administrative incapacity is said to deepen under-development, but strengthening

administrative capacity could also impede development by retarding the course of political development, defined as the power of leaders and the public to act as an oversight and participatory counter-balance to the discretion of administrators. This hypothesis suggests that as administrators develop their *acquired* ability to manage resources, they are likely to impede the expansion and contribution of political institutions in how resources are managed for development.

The paradox appears most acute in the implementation of 'development' activities, stemming in part from the difficult and sensitive nature of these interventions, involving questions of equity and access in an environment of resource scarcity (ibid: 25, 27). The paradox appears especially problematic for the citizenry, or beneficiaries of development, and their ability to influence the administration of development activities. This when compared with political executives who, presiding over public administrations, retain a great deal of influence over the development resources that administrators manage, as well as the means of strengthening their capacity.

The paradox of development administration would seem to suggest that engaging in efforts to enhance the administrative capacity of administrators to implement development activities, which, given the complex and sensitive nature of these interventions could be viewed positively, may minimise and/or marginalise the involvement of political and public constituents in how these activities are implemented. Although the paradox emphasises the *acquired* ability side of capacity, there is little to suggest that the inherent ability of administrators to manage development resources via

defined activities could not equally result in the contributions of political executives and public constituencies being minimised or sidelined. The logic of the paradox raises substantive questions about the construction and determination of appropriate development tasks, and how this impacts on the inherent capacity to execute these tasks.

9. The Transformation of Public Administration in South Africa and Capacity

The transformation of South African public administration has been largely driven by the macro reform and restructuring of administrative structures and functions. The impetus behind this process was the abandonment of the policy of apartheid, or separate development, which resulted in the public institutionalisation of separate and qualitatively disparate services administered to populations based on race. Pierre Hugo (1990: 111-112) referred to apartheid's grip on the nature and form of public administration, by citing an interview with the Chairperson of the Commission for Administration, predecessor to the post-apartheid Public Service Commission. In this citation the Chairperson remarked that the "whole structure (of public administration) is imbued with the apartheid policy – it has become a way of life".

The implications of structural reform and in particular a shift in orientation to development public policy had a noticeable impact on public administration 'capacity'. Malcolm Wallis (1997: 89) summed this up well by commenting 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 his

decades-old discussion on development administration, Koteen (1972: 47) echoed a similar scenario referring to a United Nations official's suggestion that planned development (in the context of developing countries) revealed a necessary disequilibrium where administrative load is continuously outpacing administrative capability. Jan Koster (1993: 5) also argued that the "capacity" for strategic policy-making and planning in South Africa should be the starting point of public sector transformation, in a context where changes in the development circumstances of the country were paramount.

Clearly then there was agreement that a post-apartheid public administration's structural and planning capacity would come under pressure as a result of the development circumstances inherited by a new government. In researching this question in greater detail, this study has identified three features residing in the context of transformation that have in varying degrees been used to explain public administration's capacity, and in particular its ability to implement development activities. These issues comprise *institutional transformation*, *skills*, and *human resource transformation*. A brief summary of how each of these issues could potentially clarify an understanding of administrative capacity is presented below.

Firstly, a review of institutional transformation has yielded at least two perspectives that might enlighten an understanding of capacity. The first relates to the inherent ability of the state to interact with societal actors in the implementation of development programmes. Potentially significant factors influencing capacity viewed from this perspective could stem from a review of the means utilised by public

organisations to interact with development programme beneficiaries. In view of the South African context, this should pay particular attention to the effect of decentralising programme functions and promoting the participation of programme beneficiaries.

The second perspective would assess the inherent ability of administrators to navigate formal and informal institutional processes governing the implementation of their mandated development programmes, conveying something about their ability to engage with and influence laws, policies and strategies facilitating the achievement of programme objectives. In the South African scenario, this should pay particular attention to the statutory, policy, strategic, administrative and inter-governmental relationships between development programmes and the public organisations within which they function; and between programmes and other public organisations involved in its implementation.

A review of skills capacity to implement development activities has also turned up at least two characteristics that can strengthen the application of capacity's analytical framework. The identification of these features was guided by a speech made by the South African state President, who described administrative skills capacity as raising public service skills levels and ensuring its managerial and technological modernisation, linked to a "clear understanding of the developmental tasks of a democratic state" (Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to the First Joint Sitting of the Third Democratic Parliament, Cape Town, 21 May 2004).

The first characteristic pertains to the inherent ability to “manage” a development activity, or programme, emphasising the co-ordination of various activities through a system or network of service production and delivery (Brinkerhoff 1991b: 2). Brinkerhoff (1991b: 2) and White’s (1987: 10) observation that programme administrators typically have to balance the needs and objectives of various activities, together with Paul’s (1982) mention of a desirable state of congruence between these activities, assist in exposing an inherent technological ability to engage with the development content of programmes, and with it the second characteristic of skills capacity. The South African context could be captured by emphasising the inherent ability of programme administrators to effectively target and direct programme services to intended beneficiaries, and how choices concerning the nature and distribution of services are justified.

A review of human resource transformation in public administration has observed the prominence of changing the racial composition of the bureaucracy. Racial transformation has however been discussed in relation to administrative capacity, despite its highly sensitive overtones and exceedingly difficult scientific premise. The difficulty the association poses for scientific inquiry was confirmed by Robert Cameron (2004: 19-20), who noted that there had been no specific study on the effects of affirmative action on service delivery performance in South Africa. Setting aside the problematic analytical scenario presented by this question, this study will have to somehow engage with the debate concerning racial transformation as a factor in explaining administrative ‘capacity’ to respond to development priorities. It is suggested that the issue can be incorporated into the analytical framework on the basis of two characteristics.

The first relates to whether racial transformation has played any factor in government administrators being inherently better able to engage, through observed channels and instruments, with development programme beneficiaries? This effectively pits observations of white African paternalism, guardianship, and trusteeship over black African development beneficiaries during apartheid, against black African cultural empathy and socio-linguistic facility with generally the same group of beneficiaries in the post-apartheid period.

The second variables asks whether racial transformation has played any factor in the inherent ability of government administrators to better identify and comprehend the socio-economic content of development programmes? This effectively pits the question of black Africans possessing an “in-depth” understanding of the development needs of beneficiaries, against a situation during apartheid where these needs were overridden by a “development from above” approach driven by primarily white African administrators, where beneficiary involvement and preferences were less significant for setting goals and determining methods (Butler, Rotberg and Adams 1977: 162)

10. Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to propose an analytical framework for descriptively identifying and analysing what factors influence the ‘capacity’ of public administration to implement development activities in South Africa. The construction of the proposed framework has come out of a logical discussion of pertinent conceptual,

theoretical and contextual features associated with the study of administrative capacity in developing countries.

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