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The Role of Political Factions in Leadership Reputation in Local Government: Perspectives of Senior Management

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Recent reports with damaging content of media clips and other sources concerning those in leadership were to some extent found to be linked to political factions and instability within local government. Desktop research and interviews were conducted with senior managers within local government, with academics and other experts. Findings on the factors affecting the reputation of senior managers in local government revealed that the appointment of senior managers through a process directly linked to the majority rule of the municipal council opens the entire process to manipulation by the dominant forces within the governing parties. This affects the reputation of senior managers as they are immediately linked to the dominant force within a party and senior managers stop being public servants by conduct and only become servants of the dominant leaders due to their appointment. Senior managers who associate themselves with factions become compromised as they become the extension of that particular faction in the administration and the decisions taken are tainted by subjectivity, leading to damage to their reputation. Senior management appointments should not be political and they should not allow being lobbied or even lobby for positions as they will forever be indebted to those politicians. Instead, they must educate themselves in order to secure appointments.

Keywords: Reputation, Reputation management, Factionalism.

Introduction

Senior managers in Local Government are appointed by the Council, in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act: Regulations on the appointment and conditions of employment of senior managers (2014). The position paper on Appointment and removal in the public service and municipalities (April 2020) argues for reforms of the rules and procedures that govern appointment to, and removal from, administrative posts in South Africa's public service and its municipalities. The aim is to substantially reduce corruption and the influence of patronage in South African politics while enhancing democratic control, professionalism, and developing effectiveness in South Africa's public administration. More specifically, through a survey of comparative and domestic democratic experience, the

paper argues that to build a public administration that is suitably insulated from illicit and inappropriate political interference, South Africa needs to make significant adjustments to its public personnel practices. Centrally, it needs to create an independent administrative check on appointment and removal processes, by assigning certain stages of these processes to independently constituted bodies. The creation of this check is a condition for the whole system of administrative checks and balances. The primary purpose of this position paper is to establish the general need for this reform.

In this regard, discussions refer to the appointment, promotion and placement of officials in positions within government administrations as being the subject of intense daily discourse by those working within the state and political organisations. It is highly contested, attracting frequent accusations of impropriety and unfairness. In particular, the role of political functionaries in determining human resource processes has attracted furious debate. Concepts like 'cadre deployment' and 'political appointment' have come to be frequently used in a pejorative sense. In this regard, there is no doubt that cadre deployment, as the term indicates, is the determining factor when these senior appointments are made and the role of factions cannot be undermined. The local government environment in South Africa gained some dominance of patronage, especially cadre deployment, as a result of association with a certain faction (Isandla, 2011).

However, Motsohi (2015) defines a faction as a group, with a degree of organisation, shared identity, binding agreement on common goals, disciplined groups, conscious of their own existence that exist to achieve a certain objective. These groups are said to be associated with patronage, self-interest and often self-enrichment. "Because you agree to associate yourself with a certain faction, some benefits might be derived, which mainly pertains to the control of resources and deployment" (Isandla Institute, 2011:25). A relationship characterised by factions is as good as when those common goals or binding agreements are met, however, challenges of persecution/treasure hunt, characterised by tug of war/logrolling and finally reputation damage kick in.

Reputation is the main asset of any organisation and managing reputation is therefore one of the major tasks of executives and board members. Warren Buffett (Chairman and CEO, Berkshire Hathaway) once said: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently". The lessons to learn from this quote are manifold. Firstly, it demonstrates that risk is a social construct. Secondly, it shows that people tend to perceive it as a threat and totally miss the dual aspects of risk. Thirdly, it implies that people should react and learn from past errors and improve their behaviour. Benjamin Franklin used to say, "it takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, but only one bad deed and the good reputation is immediately lost". Today, his words are more relevant than ever before. The rapid onset of mass media communication in the second half of the twentieth century has fundamentally changed the established principles of corporate practice in many areas. Prior to the advent of the media era, the reputation of business entities, or even individuals, was not only hard to build but also well-guarded (Laitin & Wildavsky, 1988).