Marriages of Inconvenience
The politics of coalitions in South Africa

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Preface

For all the critique of interparty coalitions, they become inevitable – and essential instruments of governance – when absolute majorities are not realised in an election. Such governments are, in a sense, a product of the people’s will in that the electorate asserts a lack of overwhelming confidence in any single contestant in the polls.

Marriages of Inconvenience: The politics of coalitions in South Africa is a research-based volume that collates and interprets lessons that South Africa should take to heart in managing such eventualities. It draws from domestic experiences as well as from case studies on the rest of the African continent and generic instances further afield.

Coalitions in various iterations have been a part of the South African polity since the attainment of democracy in 1994. This started, nationally, with a ‘grand coalition’ in the form of a Government of National Unity as mandated in the interim constitution. Coalitions have also found expression in some of the country’s provinces. After the transition, multiparty governments were sustained at national and provincial levels either as a matter of necessity due to election outcomes or for other political considerations.

At local government level, coalitions have been relatively commonplace in South Africa from the onset of democratically elected municipalities in 2000, with many situations where no single party attained an absolute majority. This gained prominence from 2016 when many metropolitan governments and some large towns became sites of coalition politics. The coalitions have taken a variety of forms, including co-governance arrangements and service-and-supply
agreements where minority governments are propped up by other parties on an issue-by-issue basis.

This volume seeks to distil the factors that leverage successful coalitions, along with those that occasion drawbacks. On the whole, it would seem that South Africa is poorly equipped for coalition politics. While instability in coalitions is not unique, this is not an inevitable product of multiparty governance. In many countries, and indeed in some municipalities in South Africa, there is appreciation of the need to govern cooperatively, constructively and in the popular interest when coalitions become inevitable. In some jurisdictions, the culture of coalition politics has become ingrained.

Relevant to all these experiences are critical issues such as electoral and party systems, political culture and the quality of political leadership.

There is recognition of the stabilising effects of coalitions when political parties co-operate and deliver effective governance, through mature consensus-building. But there is also acknowledgement of co-governing arrangements that evince debilitating competition during various phases of the electoral cycle. Some fall apart and get reconstituted. In these instances, governance and service to the public are severely compromised.

Across various chapters of this volume, critical questions on how to stabilise coalition governance in the South African setting are identified. The first pertains to whether there should be post-election workable coalition agreements that are lodged with, and assessed (but not vetoed) by, a competent authority. The second is whether, at local level, the option of a proportional collective executive system – as distinct from an executive mayoralty – should become mandatory when a single party or coalition of parties is unable to attain an absolute majority. Thirdly, strict observance of the laws on the appointment of bureaucrats and on the role of politicians in administrative decisions, including procurement, is even more crucial under coalition government.

There are, however, limits to constitutional and legislative regulation. Interparty goodwill and cooperative and constructive relations cannot be legislated. The maturity of party leaders and citizen activism are both critical in ensuring stability. And so, engendering a culture of stable coalition politics in South Africa may take time and more practical experience; but it is in the nature of party politics that this cannot be attained in a linear fashion and for all time.

The Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) hopes that Marriages of Inconvenience will help inform the exercise of coalition politics in South Africa. Understanding the determinants of positive and negative experiences, we hope, will nudge parties towards constructive and sustainable coalitions. At the core of this is a commitment to serve the people’s economic, social and political interests.

MISTRA wishes to thank the authors and the teams across the publication chain, as well as those who contribute to the Institute’s sustenance. May the insights in this volume promote rigorous discourse and prudent coalition practice!

Joel Netshitenzhe
Executive Director
The impact of coalitions on South Africa’s metropolitan administrations

Crispian Olver

South Africa’s eight metropolitan municipalities differ substantially from the remaining 256 municipalities in terms of their sheer size, resources and economic activity. They are home to 39.9 per cent of the population, generate 55.9 per cent of the national GDP, and spend 59.3 per cent of local government revenues (Stats SA, 2016; Arndt et al., 2018; National Treasury, 2020). The scale and economic importance of such massive conurbations require unique governance arrangements, which emphasise long-range vision and planning, innovation, and the management of complex systems, in addition to the bread-and-butter local government issues of utility services, land-use planning and community services. In recognition of their unique needs, metropolitan areas are governed by integrated single-tier municipalities, while the rest of the country is governed by a two-tier system of local and district municipalities.
On the interface between politics and municipal administration, Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociology, argued that for modern bureaucracy to be effective, it had to be separated from both politics and the personal interests of its incumbents. Instead, it had to be constituted according to objective rules, with each office having a clearly defined sphere of competence arranged in a hierarchical manner under a rigorous system of discipline and control. Above all, a bureaucracy had to be meritocratic, its personnel selected and appointed on the basis of competence, with promotion according to performance, not political connections (Weber, 1978: 331). Weber commented that the involvement of political parties in appointments to the bureaucracy could lead to disastrous outcomes, and saw the relationship between bureaucracies and political parties as inherently fraught. He argued for a clear separation between the spheres of politics and administration (Weber, 1978: 395).

Subsequent authors have questioned the empirical basis of the distinction (Evans, 1995; Svara, 1999; Peters, 2001; Alford et al., 2017). The Weberian tradition has been criticised for presenting the challenges faced by managers as a set of binary choices, when it is more akin to a blurred zone that requires skilful navigation. Svara (1999) talks about the mutual interdependence and interconnections between politicians and senior administrators. Alford describes the relationship with politicians as characterised by ‘interdependency, extensive interaction, distinct but overlapping roles’, with ‘political supremacy and administrative subordination coexisting with reciprocity of influence’ (Alford et al., 2017: 755). According to Alford, most public-sector managers view the dividing line as blurred, a zone of interaction within which a range of practices and behaviours take place. There may be merit to both Alford’s and Weber’s versions. For instance, Peters (2001) has suggested that the line of separation between politics and administration is a device, a ‘useful fiction’ that can structure the debate and legitimate certain actions. Evans (1995: 32) argues that bureaucracies must be both autonomous and embedded, combining the meritocratic aspects of Weberian bureaucracy with institutional channels that allow for constant social renegotiation and engagement about goals and policies.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This political-administrative interface has vexed democratic local government almost from the inception of the current system in 2000. For instance, in a comprehensive review of the new local government system undertaken in 2009, tensions between politicians and municipal administrations were found to be widespread, with insufficient separation of powers between political parties and councillors, and in turn between councillors and the municipal administration. Political factionalism and polarisation were found to have contributed to the deterioration of municipal functionality. This was ascribed to battles over access to state resources, which had led to a ‘culture of patronage and nepotism’ and rendered the formal municipal accountability system ‘ineffective and inaccessible to many citizens’ (De Visser and Steytler, 2009: 99).

Such tensions have not been restricted to local government. In its thoroughly researched and consulted diagnostic report, the National Planning Commission listed tensions in the political administrative interface as contributing to the uneven performance of the public service as a whole, and bemoaned the level of political influence over the day-to-day operations of the public service (NPC, 2011: 24). A rich body of South African literature has sought to explain the extent of political influence over public administration (Von Holdt, 2010; Netshtitenzhe, 2012; Chipkin, 2013; Beresford, 2015; Chipkin and Swilling, 2020). In the context of the political transition, the state has been viewed as the focal point for new classes seeking access to state resources, linked to the rise of patronage-based party politics (Von Holdt et al., 2011; Netshtitenzhe, 2012; Beresford, 2015). Others have described the process of transformation of the state as a deliberate effort to bring the state under political control, in which loyalty and adherence to party policy were more important than impartiality and autonomy (Chipkin, 2016: 19). As part of this project, political discretion was introduced into the recruitment process and even the design of posts, and in the absence of entrance examinations or performance-related career advancement, the administrative autonomy of the state was reduced.

The extent of political interference has been confirmed by municipal managers, who have cited numerous instances of political pressure in the appointment of staff and the awarding of contracts, sometimes backed by threats to life and family members if they did not comply. The Institute of Municipal Managers’ annual conference observed that conflict between mayors, municipal managers and speakers was an accepted part of their working conditions (SALGA, 2017). Successive auditor-general reports into the state of municipal finances have commented on the extent to which political infighting at the council level and interference in municipal administrations have weakened oversight and resulted in a lack of consequences for poor financial management. According to the auditor-general, the role of political leadership is critical – their inaction, or inconsistent action, creates a culture of no consequences: ‘The leadership sets the tone at the top at municipalities. If the municipality’s leaders are unethical; have a disregard for governance, compliance and control; and are not committed to transparency and accountability, it will filter through to the lower levels of the municipality’ (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2019).

The appointment of ‘politically aligned’ senior management in municipalities is a widespread practice, but as a South African Cities Network survey of the built environment in cities found, politically connected senior officials can at times be useful, linking administrative projects to political support and imperatives. However, they are also vulnerable to conflicts that may arise between them and political players. This becomes particularly problematic at junior levels, in instances where political intervention is sought to address minor administrative matters and disciplinary issues. In addition, successful working relationships between councillors and administrations become heavily dependent on the personalities involved. As noted by the South African Cities Network, ‘Personality clashes between MMCs [members of mayoral committees] and officials or mayors and officials can derail projects, as can difficult management styles, and some may be interested in the abuse of the state for their own ends. This is a significant threat to built environment projects and spatial transformation’ (Foster, 2019: 19).
THE IMPACT OF COALITION POLITICS

Electoral outcomes have interacted with what appears to be an already vexed interface between politics and administration in different ways. The South African local government electoral system combines ward-based representation with a proportional representation (PR) system that ensures parties are represented in council in proportion to the total number of votes they receive. This has accentuated the role that political parties play in municipal affairs and, compared to first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems, has also resulted in more frequent instances where there is no outright majority for any party.

Coalition governments have been a feature of South African local government since the system was introduced in 2000. Municipal managers have noted that conflicts between political and administrative spheres were accentuated in coalition governments where political tensions were hardwired into the ruling coalition (SALGA, 2017: 21). The South African Cities Network survey commented that ‘(c)oalition based executives are inherently unstable, and minority coalitions are particularly unstable, with executives particularly sensitive to political wind changes... Senior management instability also leads to uncertainty and low morale amongst mid-ranking officials, driving out those with transferrable skills’ (Foster, 2019: 3).

However, other coalitions have proven successful in managing the affairs of their local constituencies. For instance, a survey by Good Governance Africa found that of the 20 best performing municipalities in the country, five were governed by multiparty coalitions. They ascribed this to improved levels of oversight of those administrations. Coalition partners supposedly had a collective interest in preventing the abuse of office by other partners, and the increased oversight, coupled with the consequences of the coalition slipping up, helped to limit abuse and improve government performance (Good Governance Africa, 2019).

The positive effects of coalitions on governance in some municipalities initially appeared to accord with the metropolitan experience. Until the 2016 local government elections, the only example of coalition government in metropolitan areas had been in Cape Town (2006–11), in which the Democratic Alliance (DA), with 43 per cent of the seats in the council, had assembled a coalition with smaller parties to hold a narrow majority. During this period, the city manager and a large proportion of the senior managers who had been appointed under the previous African National Congress (ANC) administration were replaced. Nevertheless, the current city manager in Cape Town, Lungelo Mbandazayo, who worked in Cape Town at the time, noted that while the then mayor, Helen Zille, micromanaged the administration, she achieved results. ‘Helen always gets things done. She is not the person to just refer you to someone else. She will always follow up. She does not leave you in the lurch. If you want something done, she will follow up until she gets what she wants. I didn't have a problem with that’ (Olver, 2019: 81). The DA promoted Cape Town as a good-governance model and used it to build its electoral base, going on to win an outright majority of 61 per cent in the 2011 local government elections.

METRO COALITIONS POST-2016

Disruptive political developments in the metros were to impact negatively on metro administrations, sometimes dramatically. The events highlighted the difficulties faced by coalition governments.

In the 2016 local government elections dramatic changes occurred, with four previously ANC-run metropolitan municipalities falling under coalition governments. The DA obtained 46.71 per cent in Nelson Mandela Bay, 43.15 per cent in Tshwane and 38.41 per cent in Johannesburg, enabling it to pull together multiparty coalitions with the support of other smaller parties, including a confidence-and-supply agreement with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The ANC narrowly missed a majority in Ekurhuleni and retained control through a coalition with smaller parties (Table 10.1).

The coalition in Ekurhuleni was to prove remarkably stable, headed by the outspoken ANC mayor Mzwandile Masina, who remains an advocate of the ANC’s so-called ‘radical economic transformation’ faction. The ANC needed only one party to pull together a majority coalition, but entered a formal coalition with the African Independent
Marriages of Inconvenience

There have been some disagreements between the ANC and coalition members over the treatment of officials implicated in financial irregularities, but the coalition has remained intact.

The nature of the DA-led metro coalitions post-2016 took a particular form, as these were minority coalitions without a voting majority in council. The EFF initially supported the DA-led coalitions on a confidence-and-supply basis, in which they did not accept positions within the mayoral committees, and instead supported the election of the mayor, the approval of the budget, and other matters on an issue-by-issue basis. There was no formal coalition agreement between the EFF and the DA, which led to some difficulties for the administration in responding to subsequent divisions.

The EFF held the balance of power in Johannesburg and Tshwane, and neither the DA nor the ANC could muster sufficient votes to control council without their support. In Johannesburg, the mayor, Herman Mashaba, had a more collaborative relationship with the EFF, partly because the EFF had been given considerable influence over appointments, procurement and policy decisions in the metro. However, Mashaba resigned as mayor in October 2019 due to a divisive battle within the DA, providing an opportunity for the ANC to persuade the smaller parties in the council to side with them and form a new coalition government.

The impact of coalitions on South Africa’s metropolitan administrations

In Tshwane, the DA’s first mayor, Solly Msimanga, had a turbulent history and was replaced in February 2019 with Stevens Mokgalapa, whose tenure was similarly troubled. As relations with the EFF soured, the DA’s engagement with the EFF became increasingly fractious, to the extent that the mayor could no longer secure meetings with the EFF.

In Nelson Mandela Bay, the DA could potentially rule with smaller parties alone, excluding the EFF, but when the United Democratic Movement (UDM) deputy mayor, Mongameli Bobani, was removed in April 2017 over allegations of corruption, the coalition did not have sufficient votes in council to muster a majority. The trigger came in August 2018, when the EFF vowed to remove DA mayor Athol Trollip to punish the DA over its land policy. The DA’s coalition partners switched sides, collaborated with the ANC to remove the DA from power, and installed a new coalition with Bobani as mayor. After a disastrous tenure during which new allegations of corruption surfaced, Bobani was removed in December 2019, and an interim ANC mayor installed. Bobani succumbed to COVID-19 in November 2020. On the day of his funeral a warrant for his arrest was issued by the Hawks, along with warrants for nine prominent ANC leaders and officials, over their alleged involvement in fraud relating to the city’s Integrated Public Transport System. The following month the ANC lost control of the municipality to a DA-led coalition, with DA provincial leader Nqaba Bhanga elected mayor.

MANAGEMENT INSTABILITY UNDER COALITION GOVERNMENTS

There was significant administrative upheaval following the 2016 elections, with new city managers appointed in three of the four coalition-run metros. The South African Cities Network survey of senior management in metros following the elections noted that in cities led by coalitions, senior officials felt inadequately protected from their MMCs and the mayor. In two instances, this was attributed to weak city managers who avoided conflict and were focused on their own survival (Foster, 2019: 5).
Despite changing its municipal manager, Ekurhuleni’s management team appeared to stabilise. Subsequently, nevertheless, the chief financial officer, the executive director for transport and the chief operating officer were suspended over alleged financial misconduct, with coalition partners raising concerns that the action taken by the municipality had been too lenient (Madia, 2019).

In Johannesburg, there were considerable changes in management following the elections. Many senior management contracts were due for renewal, and in the process very few of the previous incumbents were reappointed. The incoming mayor, Herman Mashaba, openly claimed that the senior management were loyal to the previous ANC regime, were implicated in corruption and were trying to undermine his administration. Disciplinary cases were instituted against a number of managers, sometimes on spurious charges, and, together with expiring contracts and some resignations, this led to changes in the posts of city manager, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, head of legal services, head of the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department, executive director for human settlements, executive director for planning and executive director for transport, as well as the chief executive officers of the Johannesburg Roads Agency, Pikitup, and Johannesburg Water and City Power, among others. A DA MMC at the time was critical of the wholesale changes, saying that ‘(h)e [the mayor] has gutted the administration, pulled much more power into this office than [the former ANC mayor] Parks [Tau]. Officials are now scared to sit on procurement panels, they are scared about any bending of rules to get things done’. However, the removal of managers seemed to come unstuck when it came to finding suitable replacements that were acceptable to coalition partners. As the former MMC explained, the leverage given to the EFF over appointments resulted in poorly qualified staff being appointed.

In Tshwane, the city manager took up the post six months after the election, by which time the organogram had been changed. The city manager was able to fill the new posts, but commented that he was under pressure to appoint specific people in certain positions, which was the source of much friction between the city manager and the executive mayor. According to Mosola, he (Mosola) simply refused to appoint staff that he considered unfit for the position.

Nelson Mandela Bay initially retained the city manager, who had been appointed some nine months previously and had not made wholesale changes to the administration. But after the DA had been removed from the coalition, one of Bobani’s first moves was to suspend the city manager over allegations of corruption and improper advice to council. National Treasury noted the suspension ‘of a very capable city manager’ (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019). At the time of writing, some 18 months later, the case had still not been finalised, even though Bobani was no longer the mayor. In addition, other key senior executive positions had not been filled, including those of chief financial officer and head of corporate services. Furthermore, the Integrated Public Transport System was being run by an acting head ‘whose skills and experience in how the [Integrated Public Transport System] works is very questionable’ (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019: 3). The city manager, Johan Mettler, also noted that in Nelson Mandela Bay certain executive director positions were filled by persons he did not consider suitable for the position, but given that he had, by that stage, been suspended, he was powerless to do anything.

The extent of the turbulence in metropolitan administrations is demonstrated by comparing the average tenure for municipal managers. In local government as a whole, they last an average of three and a half years (Foster, 2019: 19), while in metros the average tenure is 15 months (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2019: 16). As the auditor-general noted in making this finding, stability in key leadership positions correlates closely with both financial and overall performance (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2019: 16). The South African Cities Network study also found that the effect on lower levels, particularly mid-ranking officials, was profound, resulting in uncertainty and low morale, and driving out those with transferrable skills (Foster, 2019: 3).
Political interference in the administrative affairs of the metros, which was already a feature of the pre-2016 system, continued under metro coalitions.

Previous studies have documented extensive political interference in the Ekurhuleni metro administration, for instance, in the housing delivery process (Marutlulle and Ijeoma, 2015) and in supply chain management (Legodi, 2017). Since the 2016 coalition, Ekurhuleni’s governance and institutional arrangements appear to have been stable, and it has managed to improve its key performance areas for governance from 76 per cent in 2015/16 to 82 per cent in 2017/18 (Bell and Baloyi, 2019: 15). However, the auditor-general commented that the level of assurance provided by senior management, internal audit, the audit committee and the municipal public accounts committee had regressed during the 2017/18 financial year (Bell and Baloyi, 2019).

In Johannesburg, there have been reports of political interference in the affairs of the administration under both ANC (Comrie, 2018; 2019) and DA rule (Mailovich, 2018; Phillips, 2018; Brümmer and Reddy, 2019). During Mashaba’s term, the chief executive officer of the Johannesburg Roads Agency resigned over the mayor’s failure to stop interference by the Johannesburg Roads Agency board chair in supply-chain matters (Phillips, 2018). The stability of Mashaba’s administration seemed to depend on certain coalition partners being granted access to areas of influence and patronage, namely the Johannesburg Roads Agency, in the case of the IFP and the EFF (Phillips, 2018), and various appointments, insourcing arrangements and tenders, in the case of the EFF (Reddy, Brümmer and amaBhungane, 2018; Brümmer and Reddy, 2019). The consultations required by coalition politics also caused administrative decision-making to slow down. The executive director in charge of the transport department found that everything took twice as long to arrange: ‘It’s a nightmare. I have reduced my targets, not because I do not have the skills in my department, just because of how long it takes to get a decision. And it is affecting our credibility,’ explained Seftel.17 National Treasury assessed the state of governance in Johannesburg during the 2018/19 financial year as fragile, and noted that while council continued to meet and conduct its business, the progress with decisions from the municipal public accounts committee had been poor (Voigt, 2019).

In Tshwane, the city manager found that MMCs and other councillors had already formed relationships with the administration and were used to giving direct instructions to them. The city manager took a hard line on the relationship between executive directors and MMCs. He insisted that if any MMC or councillor wanted to give an instruction to any of his staff, it must be in writing and brought to the city manager’s attention. Drawing such a definitive line was not popular, because it shut down opportunities for ‘any opportunistic behaviour’: ‘I had to make it absolutely clear that I was the boss, and that I was the only person who could give instructions to the administration. In fact, I took disciplinary action against a number of managers for transgressing this instruction,’ said Mosola.18 The former city manager commented that heads of departments preferred the previously blurred lines of accountability, in which they could get instructions from both the city manager and the MMC, as the gap this created allowed for gaming the system and corrupt transactions to take place. In his efforts to hold the line between the administration and politics, the city manager felt that he never had support, either from managers or from politicians.19

In the context of fractious coalition politics in Tshwane, decision-making became unduly delayed. The arrangement with the EFF meant that on most strategic issues the DA had to consult at a senior level with the EFF to reach a decision. Only then could the matter be passed on to the city manager for implementation. For the officials, this created a potentially chaotic situation that was difficult to manage. Every process became extended because of the consultation that was needed with different political parties, and what would normally take one week to achieve was pushed out to four weeks. This forced a level of micro-management on the city manager that was almost impossible to sustain.20

As the DA’s relationship with the EFF imploded in Tshwane, the city manager became the effective interlocutor between the parties,
forcing him to broker agreements between them. As a result, the city manager became involved in the politics of the city, and he felt that he had crossed the line that should exist between politics and administration. He was forced to play this role for a two-year period, before he himself fell out with the council leadership and left the city in August 2019. 'The management of the city under these circumstances was very difficult,' said Mosola. National Treasury commented on the situation in the metro, noting that the lack of a clear majority and differences in party policies were risks that affected the city’s institutional stability (Maja, 2019).

Even in the previously stable Nelson Mandela Bay coalition, problems arose after April 2017 because it was difficult for the administration to predict whether items would pass council. In the circumstances, planning became impossible, as the officials had to constantly take account of new contingencies or initiatives demanded by coalition partners. The city manager, Johan Mettler, found that the coalition arrangements and pressure on delivery had created the space for certain politicians to bypass the normal lines of accountability. The relationship between city managers and their subordinates was already somewhat confused, with executive directors who are meant to report to the city manager having direct engagement with their MMCs. Mettler found that certain MMCs now took to issuing direct instructions to their executive directors without going through the city manager: ‘Suddenly everyone in the municipality had become an expert on something. I found that there were parallel operations running in finance and electricity. This resulted in accountability for delivery becoming really confused, and it tested the relationships in the municipality like never before’.

In Nelson Mandela Bay, the officials found themselves also being drawn into coalition politics. Even if the mayor supported an item, he still had to consult his caucus and his coalition partners, and in many instances would come back to the administration with a compromise formulation, which the city manager then had to implement. The city manager found that he had to try and anticipate these compromises to be prepared for what ensued. Frequently he had to engage with MMCs and coalition partners informally, outside the formal channels of communication, to solicit their views on matters. The consequence of the extended consultation processes was that there was less time to act once decisions were made, while the volume of work, especially having to deal with additional considerations from council, increased. As a result, the entire system became stressed, and this was felt throughout the organisation. This led National Treasury to conclude that ‘(t)here have been many worrying signs of the loss of many of the past governance and financial gains in Nelson Mandela Bay over the last 3 months, upon entry of the new coalition government’ (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019: 3). The extent of the political fallout between the coalition partners in Nelson Mandela Bay was even observed by the normally sanguine auditor-general, in noting that the political infighting negatively influenced their assessment of the assurance provided by council, the mayor and senior management (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2019: 17).

At the same time, municipal managers and section 56 managers are not merely passive bystanders, and they themselves have an impact on the political sphere that can affect the balance of power between coalition partners. Municipal managers strongly influence what information councillors from different parties receive, and shape the policy alternatives that are presented. Officials can delay or redirect decision-making processes and can set the terms for debates in ways that clarify, obfuscate or distort issues. At times, municipal managers are required to give legal advice on highly political matters, which can tip decision-making in favour of one or other party. Officials have also been active or passive collaborators in directing resources from municipalities to political parties, and some stakeholders, such as organised labour, are active participants in municipal politics in their own right, supporting particular coalition partners. While political interference is often presented as a one-way, top-down phenomenon, it frequently cuts both ways.

**Policy uncertainty**

Other than in Ekurhuleni, a high degree of policy uncertainty accompanied the changes in coalitions, particularly when this affected long-range planning instruments that were used to inform operational
decisions. For instance, there appeared to be an incoherent stance on core development planning concerns, such as social and spatial integration, densification and mixed-income settlements. This may reflect the inevitable learning curve that new political leadership needs to undergo. In Nelson Mandela Bay, this had been assuaged by a sound working relationship between the city manager and the DA mayor, Athol Trollip, but relations with the subsequent coalition under Bobani deteriorated. In Johannesburg and Tshwane, in particular, the DA appeared to be unable to have consensual discussions on policy issues within its coalition, and technocrats who had to deal with these issues ended up being caught in the middle. In Johannesburg there was resistance to the carefully constructed spatial development strategy, especially insofar as it related to the Corridors of Freedom, which was seen as the previous administration’s legacy, and with which the mayor did not wish to be associated. The officials had to find ways to broach the same issues using different language. For instance, the officials obtained traction with the concept of ‘transit-orientated development corridors’. While the corridors were in the interests of some property developers, there were inherent conflicts between the DA’s pro-market approach, which protected the interests of middle-class residents and large developers, and the EFF’s approach to land invasions and land expropriation without compensation. The planning executive director found an inability to rise above narrow party considerations, and described the confused approach to spatial planning as ‘fake it as you go’, as opposed to real consensus around spatial-planning objectives.

In Tshwane, similarly, policy dissonance was most marked over land. It was not possible to get any council decision on land or development, particularly if it involved council land. Any references to land had to be taken out of council decisions. For two years no city-owned land could be made available to developers, and the city was only able to offer long-term leases to developers. This had a massive impact on the development of the city, not least because the city was unable to raise revenue, which it sorely needed, or to make use of other tools normally at its disposal to drive development. As the city manager noted, ‘The fallout went to the extent of stopping projects even after they had been approved by council. The overall impact was that the city was unable to fulfil its obligations, and to provide the services that it was meant to.’

This confused approach to policy extended to other catalytic projects, such as the bus rapid transport systems, Rea Vaya in Johannesburg and Are Yeng in Tshwane. In Johannesburg there was a high degree of emphasis on performance targets, such as fixing potholes and traffic lights, but complex integration projects such as Rea Vaya did not feature on the agenda. National Treasury noted that Johannesburg was underspending on the public transport network grant, which funded the Rea Vaya system, due to delays in awarding contracts for key components of the system (Voigt, 2019: 18). Even in Ekurhuleni, ‘implementation challenges’ were noted with regard to the Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network (Bell and Baloyi, 2019: 4), although this had more to do with supply chain issues than policy alignment.

Similar findings emerged from the South African Cities Network study, which found that instability in both the politics and the administrations threatened the long-term strategic vision for spatial transformation and the ability to land spatially transformative built-environment projects. This was particularly evident when it came to allocating budgets to spatial transformation projects and spending those budgets (Foster, 2019: 18).

The impact on the budget process

The most difficult problems arose in terms of preparing and adopting budgets, and in containing the fiscal fallout from unaffordable compromises. While Ekurhuleni, with its stronger coalition structure, did not appear to experience difficulties in passing the budget, this was a problem in the three metros under DA-led coalitions, as in the case of budget adjustments. These coalitions did not have sufficient votes in council to muster a majority, and it was difficult to predict whether items would pass council. The EFF held the swing vote in each council, and insisted on certain measures to get their budgets passed.

In Johannesburg, the EFF insisted on insourcing all previously outsourced personnel contracts. Mayor Mashaba’s view was that all previous contracts implemented by the ANC were corrupt, so he
had no problem with abandoning existing outsourcing contracts. As a consequence, Johannesburg placed approximately 10,000 additional staff on the payroll. The rushed and politically driven insourcing affected service delivery. For instance, the guards at the Rea Vaya stations did not get communications facilities or a back-up centre, and were unable to effectively safeguard stations and passengers. The Westbury station was vandalised during protests when the security staff ran away. Executive directors in Johannesburg also complained that undue delays in signing off the budget were impacting on their performance. The executive director for transport commented that ‘(a)ll my performance indicators are down; in fact, my performance is the poorest it has ever been. Part of the reason is that the city manager spent six months before he signed the budget. Everything was set up, but the city manager went back and forth, and refused to sign.’

In Tshwane, the 2019/20 budget adjustments were never approved, which meant that there was no budget for some urgent items that needed funding. The compromises reached as part of securing approval for the budget were sometimes unaffordable. For example, an additional 1,500 security guards were insourced at a cost of approximately R1.2 billion per annum, in a city already in financial distress. The city manager advised the executive mayor and council in writing against this measure. The metro already had an excessively high personnel budget, with some 28,000 staff with an overall low level of productivity. The former city manager complained that ‘(i)t would take 10 people to do a job that one person could do. By my calculation there were 13,000 excess staff [inherited from previous administrations], and we had to find a way to cut numbers. This was a critically important issue that needed attention, but it was not possible to have this sort of discussion with the politicians.’

In Nelson Mandela Bay, the city manager reported that the 2017/18 budget became ‘a free-for-all’, with every councillor wanting spending items added for their wards. The multiple amendments pushed out timelines and caused the municipality to miss its deadlines for submitting the draft budget. The final budget was only submitted in June, almost at the start of the financial year. In addition, the EFF used its leverage with the already fractured coalition to push for insourcing, and approximately 500 workers were insourced, without following proper procedures. The auditor-general subsequently flagged this as a material irregularity, which council had to rescind. The city manager obtained a legal opinion and tried to insist on proper procedures for the initial batch of workers. By April 2017, the coalition was already fractured and the EFF pushed for a further 100 workers. It then became a free-for-all, and no procedures or requirements were followed. In the 2018/19 financial year irregular expenditure went up by R1.2 billion.

Unsurprisingly, these impacts on budgets and financial management have shown up in the metros’ financial sustainability and audit reports.

The financial health of a municipality can be assessed using the cash coverage index (Table 10.2), which measures the length of time, in months, that a municipality can manage to pay for its day-to-day
expenses using just its cash reserves. An index above three months is good, an index below one month is seriously concerning, and an index between one and three months is average but with some concern.

The cash coverage data indicate that both Ekurhuleni and Nelson Mandela Bay have remained financially healthy, although the decline in cash coverage in Ekurhuleni raised concern. Tshwane was in a poor financial position before 2016 and remained so after 2016; its cash coverage rose only slightly to one month, which remains critically below the three months it should be at. Johannesburg showed a marked deterioration since the 2016 elections – its cash coverage fell below one month in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Another measure of financial health is the extent to which municipalities are able to spend their capital budget, which usually includes large infrastructure projects, and is a good measure of their ability to plan, implement and spend responsibly, and hence of their overall capacity (Table 10.3). Municipalities should be able to spend at least 95 per cent of their capital budgets. Between 85 per cent and 95 per cent spending is a concern, while below 85 per cent is extremely worrying.

In terms of capital spending, both Ekurhuleni and Nelson Mandela Bay have shown improvements since the 2016 elections, while Johannesburg deteriorated in 2016/17, followed by a recovery in 2017/18. Tshwane showed marked deterioration in both years.

National Treasury’s own assessment of the financial health of the metros during the 2018/19 financial year provides additional insights into these aggregate indicators. Ekurhuleni was noted to be financially viable; however, cash was reducing at a high rate due to operating deficits (Bell and Baloyi, 2019). In Johannesburg, it was noted that the city’s deteriorating financial position threatened its longer-term financial sustainability. This was driven by a decrease in cash and cash equivalents of R856 million, outstanding creditors of R13 billion, a decrease in the consumer collection rate to 90.7 per cent, and an increase in electricity losses to 23.3 per cent (Voigt, 2019). Tshwane was already under a financial recovery plan, and while the city had cash in the bank, this was not sufficient to cover its liabilities and its fixed monthly costs (also known as cost coverage). The delay in collecting revenue (more than 30 days) was adding to the fragility of its finances (Maja, 2019: 19). Nelson Mandela Bay’s financial position was noted to be stabilising, but there was an increase in outstanding debtors, reflected by an 86 per cent collection rate, well below the average for metropolitan municipalities (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019: 5).

The impact on corruption
Corruption has been previously documented in metropolitan municipalities falling under ANC rule, but the laxity in financial controls, unstable political environment and short-term nature of many of the political interests combined to create a fertile environment in which corruption could flourish under coalitions. As the Tshwane city manager commented, ‘Everyone was in it for themselves. The DA and EFF politicians and the officials were all trying to eat. Because the centre did not hold, the conditions for corruption mushroomed.’

Table 10.2: Cash coverage index in selected metropolitan municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Cash coverage index (months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekurhuleni</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshwane</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela Bay</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 10.3: Underspending of capital budget in selected metropolitan municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Underspending (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekurhuleni</td>
<td>-19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>-17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshwane</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela Bay</td>
<td>-7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted earlier, corruption had been documented in the Ekurhuleni metro prior to 2016 relating to housing delivery (Maruthulle and Ijeoma, 2015), supply chain management (Legodi, 2017) and the 2010 World Cup (Madia, 2019), and subsequent to 2016 there had been financial irregularities reported in relation to the finance and transport divisions (Madia, 2019). It does not appear that there is a higher incidence of corruption, and based on the governance indicators, the incidence of corruption has probably fallen.

In Tshwane, there were prominent instances of corruption under the previous ANC administration. The ANC had pushed through a costly outsourcing of its electricity metering and revenue collection to an underqualified company, PEU Capital Partners, without competitive tendering. The 10-year contract value was estimated at R27 billion, and, according to the newly appointed mayor (at the time), Solly Msimanga, the city was losing more than R630 million annually (Poplak, 2017). There were allegations of political corruption in other areas as well – security tenders, the rollout of smart meters, the free wi-fi-hotspot rollout and the bus rapid transit system, and the Tshwane metro police deputy chief was alleged to be at the centre of a large tender-fraud system (De Waal, 2011). Following the 2016 elections, concerns were raised regarding a contract with engineering company GladAfrica to project manage Tshwane’s entire capital budget valued at R12 billion. The lack of a competitive appointment process and excessive fees paid on the GladAfrica contract raised serious concerns. After defending the contract for some months, the city manager eventually agreed the contract was irregular, based on findings by the auditor-general, who red-flagged some R317 million paid to GladAfrica.

In Nelson Mandela Bay prior to 2016 there had been prominent instances of corruption relating to the bus rapid transit system, various supply chain contracts and the housing delivery process, linked to the regional ANC patronage machine, which have been extensively documented (Olver, 2017). After 2016, allegations of corruption surfaced implicating the (second coalition) mayor, Mongameli Bobani, in relation to public health contracts. The officials involved in the contract were implicated in terms of a forensic report and found guilty of fraud. As the city manager noted, a toxic mix of short-term political gains predominated at the expense of long-term service delivery. The tendency to do corrupt deals increased. There already was some low-level corruption taking place, but during this period councillors were able to give instructions directly, especially from the different factions. Even though the ANC were not in the coalition, the regional executive started once again giving direct instructions into the administration... Coalition partners had to look after each other’s interests, especially in the light of the lawlessness that the second coalition in the [Nelson Mandela Bay municipality] ushered in.

There were allegations of corruption under the previous ANC administration in Johannesburg, relating to a conflict of interest of former MMC for finance (and subsequent ANC mayor) Geoff Makhubo, and his involvement with Regiments Capital, which managed aspects of the city’s finances. The new DA mayor for Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba, prominently led an anti-corruption campaign. The city’s group forensic and investigation services announced in 2019 that it had completed over 100 forensic investigations into serious criminal cases from the previous administration which had been reported to the Hawks (City of Johannesburg, 2019). Despite Mashaba’s allegations and much-vaunted clean-up operation, the period of the DA-led coalition has not been without its own scandals. In January 2018 Mashaba suspended his MMC for finance over allegations of nepotism (Nicolson, 2018). There were allegations by metro officials that the EFF was given control over key appointment processes in the city of Johannesburg as well as patronage over tenders. This was described as a quid pro quo for the EFF working with Mashaba’s DA-led administration (Reddy, Brümmer and amaBhungane, 2018). For instance, an investigation exposed corruption in a 2017 tender for Johannesburg’s fleet-management services with a value of R1.26 billion (Brümmer and Reddy, 2019). There is no evidence that the DA itself benefited from these contracts, but the investigations appeared to confirm that resources were being diverted to particular coalition partners to hold the coalition together.
The Gauteng City Region Observatory Quality of Life survey\textsuperscript{46} provides some insight into the long-term trends in aggregate levels of corruption in each of the Gauteng-based metros (Figure 10.1). Respondents were asked whether they had ever been asked to pay a bribe to a government official, traffic cop, policeman or other public servant. While the responses are not specific to local government, they do provide insight into the overall level of public-sector corruption experienced by residents in each of the metros.

While the incidence of corruption appears to be increasing overall in Gauteng (reflected in the rise of the percentage of people who have been asked for a bribe), this increase is accentuated in Tshwane, while the other metros track the overall Gauteng trend fairly closely. Given the often piecemeal and sometimes anecdotal nature of corruption allegations, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding whether corruption levels in metropolitan administrations have changed significantly before and after 2016, but there is enough evidence to conclude that the conditions have been created for corruption to persist.

\textit{The impact on service delivery}

Service delivery in the metros has been affected in various ways. Ekurhuleni increased its built-environment performance targets\textsuperscript{47} from 71 per cent in 2016/17 to 73 per cent in 2017/18; water losses decreased from 30.6 per cent to 28.5 per cent, and electricity losses from 13.4 per cent to 11.7 per cent (Bell and Baloyi, 2019: 14). In Johannesburg, the city reported a performance of 56 per cent against service delivery indicators for 2017/18; electricity losses increased from 20.2 per cent in 2016/17 to 23.3 per cent in 2017/18 but water losses declined from 26.8 to 25.5 per cent (Voigt, 2019: 4). In Tshwane only two out of 13 service delivery and budget improvement targets were achieved in 2017/18.\textsuperscript{48} The biggest challenges related to water provision (water losses increased from 23 per cent in 2016/17 to 28 per cent in 2017/18) and land invasions, with a mushrooming of informal settlements stretching the city’s ability to meet service-delivery targets (Maja, 2019: 19). In Nelson Mandela Bay it was noted that the city’s service delivery performance was deteriorating, with only 52 per cent of service delivery targets met in 2017/18, down from 81 per cent in 2016/17.
2016/17 (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019: 5). Reasons cited were an upsurge in invasions of private and public land, illegal occupation of completed and unallocated houses, and disjointed planning between the city and human-settlements department. Water losses jumped from 36 per cent in 2016/17 to 41 per cent in 2017/18, well above the norm of 15–30 per cent for metros (Mashoeshoe and Mokgabodi, 2019: 6).

The Gauteng City Region Observatory Quality of Life survey allows for comparison between the Gauteng-based metros over time, with the survey results for 2017/18 providing insights into the situation in each metro a year after the 2016 local government elections (Figure 10.2).

The survey results provide a mixed picture. There was some improvement in citizen satisfaction before and after the 2016 elections in all the metros, although the overall results were low. On the other hand, respondents indicated a decline in assessments of community improvement and condition of water services across all the metros. Comparisons between the metros across all the indicators indicate that Tshwane was underperforming and Ekurhuleni better performing, compared to their peers and Gauteng as a whole. These trends confirm the assessments by National Treasury noted above.

SUMMARY OF THE IMPACTS ON ADMINISTRATION

The changes that have taken place in metros run by coalition governments need to be understood against the broader background of local government in South Africa. Regardless of whether municipalities are run by coalitions or majority parties, the interface between municipal administration and council politics is vexed – political instability in council has a deleterious effect on administrative performance, and political interference in administrative appointments and procurement is one of the primary drivers of corruption in local government. The inherent instability of municipal coalitions, and the trade-offs that are required to keep coalition partners together, have combined to accentuate their impact on municipal administrations. This has been particularly difficult in the context of coalitions involving partners with diametrically opposed ideological or policy positions.

In the three metros run by such coalitions, political instability and policy misalignment have fed into management instability, with a high turnover of key management positions. Officials have found themselves pulled into playing political-brokering roles as coalitions fell apart, and lines of accountability within the administration have been subverted (although political interference has also been extensively documented under previous ANC administrations). The added requirements for consultation have created delays in administrative processing, and substantially slowed down municipal performance. This has been particularly evident with respect to the budget-approval process, and is also reflected in declining service delivery performance and deteriorating financial viability. At the same time, unauthorised expenditure has increased substantially in three of the four metros under coalition governments.

For municipal administrations, coalition governments are undoubtedly harder to manage, although this is not insurmountable. Municipal administrations seek stability and predictability; they are slow-moving bureaucracies that need time to gear up different policy orientations. Such stability is normally found in a majority dispensation or a coalition whose politics are fundamentally stable. The difficulty arises when there is no political stability and the administration is unable to anticipate change.

POSSIBLE REMEDIES

Various suggestions have been put forward to ameliorate the dysfunction in the political/administrative interface. The role played by political leadership in relation to the administration is instrumental. For instance, the auditor-general has spelled out practical steps that leaders can take to improve accountability (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2019: 7):

- Set the tone from the top through ethical leadership, good governance and accountability.
- Capacitate and stabilise the municipal administration, and keep it free from political interference.
enable and insist on robust financial and performance-management processes and controls, as well as regular, credible reporting to enable all levels of leadership to perform their monitoring and oversight function.

• Ensure consistent, appropriate and swift consequences for transgressions and irregularities.

These suggestions are well made, and much will be achieved if they are adopted by political leaders in local government, but the auditor-general has been making these points each year with little traction.

The South African Cities Network report focused its recommendations on the practical steps that officials in the built environment could follow to improve performance relating to their projects (Foster, 2019: 15):

• Cultivate allies in the administration and among politicians for particular projects.
• Find political cover from the mayor or other politicians.
• Be flexible and willing to repackage projects to provide a politically acceptable mix of projects.
• Stay above politics but be aware of political dynamics so that pitfalls can be avoided and common ground found.
• Find the right messenger, particularly for conveying contentious issues.
• Build a case around financing projects and lock in the budgets.

While this advice is germane to all metros, it could as easily be read as an officials’ guide on how to survive coalition politics. It should be noted that seeking cover from political office bearers could prove to be a risky strategy if party officials become involved and exploit the situation.

With respect to issues that are specific to coalitions, the managers interviewed as part of the research for this chapter made some useful suggestions. There are practical steps that parties can take to make coalitions more predictable. For instance, a formal coalition agreement, even if the agreement with the partner was only on a confidence-and-supply basis, would assist to clarify the terms of the relationship, not just for the political parties involved, but, crucially, for the managers who are required to interpret and implement coalition decisions. The foundation of a coalition should be a mutually agreed framework that sets out some commonly agreed principles on how the parties should agree or disagree on matters. While coalition agreements certainly can help, it was also noted that without an underlying level of trust and commitment, they are insufficient to hold a coalition together.

Party caucuses play an important role in mandating the political stance adopted by political leaders. Similarly, regular coalition caucuses can assist to hammer out policy differences and provide a guide to the mayoral committee members. Of course, ideology also matters; coalitions are going to be easier to manage if they are based on certain common principles and policy positions. For the DA and the EFF, for example, this is particularly difficult, as they occupy opposite ends of a spectrum of policy options.

The executive mayor model has been raised as problematic by some managers, pointing out that the composition of the mayoral committee under an executive mayor does not have to be proportional to the parties in council. This works for majority governments, but coalition and minority governments may be better suited to the executive committee system that is widely followed in KwaZulu-Natal. The suggestion has been made that the trigger for the executive mayor system should be a majority of 50 per cent plus one. Alternatively, following an election, the largest party could have a window period during which it may attempt to form a government, failing which the default executive committee arrangement kicks in.

Other managers felt that the problem was not, in fact, a legal one, but rather one created by political parties who assume powers that they do not have in law. As Mosola explained, ‘We need to make it clear that executive mayors and MMCs can get into serious trouble with the law for transgressing it. The city manager is obliged to explain this to them. Executive mayors just grab these powers and bully the administration into submission.’ Mettler clarified this in a conversation he had with his executive mayor when he said that ‘the how is mine, the what is yours’. As the head of the administration, the city manager is the only...
person who should give instructions to the administration. Politicians cannot assume to take executive powers; the law does not permit them to do so. The operative word for politicians is ‘oversee’, whereas the terms used in legislation for city managers and executive directors is ‘manage’ or ‘execute’. In this respect, the executive mayor model creates some difficulties, as it gives the mayor the notion that they are actually in charge of implementation.

Good faith, professionalism and respect for each other’s roles are fundamental in the relationship between the city manager and the executive mayor, but it must also extend to the broader political and administrative environments to make coalitions work. As was pointed out by Mettler, this cannot be legislated, but must be voluntarily embraced by the parties: ‘The administration must be allowed to present facts and, if necessary, bad news, and not be accused of having an agenda in doing so.’

The Institute of Municipal Managers similarly concluded that role clarity and an open relationship between the mayor and the municipal manager are critical to effective governance. The Institute’s conference report noted that ‘(t)rust is central to good governance. As the interface between the political and administrative spheres in local government, municipal managers need a trust relationship with all political parties to function effectively’ (SALGA, 2017). This requires a balance between political leadership and administrative management, an agreement on common goals, and an understanding by both sides of where to draw the line between effecting a political mandate and implementing administrative imperatives. Alford et al. (2017: 755) suggested that such understandings be encoded in public service bargains or compacts entered into between politicians and public servants around mutually agreed values, objectives and ways of working. Given the renewed focus on social compacts in the South African context, this could well be a practice that could have traction in local government.

The relationship of trust between politicians and officials must be founded on a respect for the roles and responsibilities of the different functionaries [officials and politicians]. As municipal managers have emphasised, these roles are already clearly set out in legislation. Reinforcing lines of accountability is important for the smooth running of the administration. In this regard, the political neutrality of the municipal manager is crucial. This theme was taken up by the National Planning Commission when it urged that ‘(t)here is a societal demand for an official who is committed to the management of the City of Cape Town and who has the policy direction from the mayor, but who is not a politician’ (NPC, 2011: 24). Municipal managers have similarly urged that their orientation should be politically neutral. Given that legislation prescribes that a municipal manager’s contract cannot extend beyond a year after any local government election, the incoming governing party has the option to retain or change the incumbent. In the interest of continuity and political non-interference, an appointment should be made on purely technical grounds to ensure political neutrality. The managers also noted that in the current climate of deep and divisive distrust within local government, however, it was difficult if not impossible for a municipal manager to maintain trust relations with all political parties (SALGA, 2017: 24).

The other solution that has been raised by municipal managers relates to their permanent appointment. The local government system before 1994 treated town clerks and other local government managers as permanent staff, which gave them a measure of autonomy and insulated them from political interference. The introduction, after 2000, of maximum terms of five years was meant to accelerate transformation in the system but also opened it up to abuse. The Institute of Municipal Managers noted that ‘(i)ncompetent and abusive leadership are serious issues that need discussion and resolution. Autocracy, dictatorship and even physical abuse are realities in some municipalities’ (SALGA, 2017). They also worried that when abuse was reported to Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the provincial MEC for local government, matters were not followed up, there were no consequences, and managers consequently felt that government was not protecting them. As a result, competent managers left the system at a high rate. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) conference concluded that ‘(t)he Local Government system needs to be reviewed, with an emphasis on professionalising the municipal manager environment to provide legal and other protection against, inter alia, the contravention of labour regulations and discourage political interference’ (SALGA, 2017: 25).
CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter I noted that some authors have found that the normal functioning of government requires public managers to engage with politics in various ways. This has been borne out by the South African local government experience. The former city manager for Johannesburg captured this point when he stated that ‘while the job of a municipal manager is not political, it does require interacting with all political parties equally and having the conviction to act in the best interest of a sustainable municipality’ (SALGA, 2017: 24). While South African municipal managers have agreed that they should accept deployment in a political environment as a reality, this did not mean that they had to accept the deployment of incompetent people without the skills for the job at hand (SALGA, 2017: 26). Clearly, managers’ engagement in the political domain involves working in a zone with a high degree of ambiguity, but this may well be necessary, given the demands of the situation. As Alford et al. noted, while politicians are meant to deal with external policy actors, in practice this role is shared with senior officials (Alford et al., 2017: 757).

The traditional view of the relationship between the political and administrative spheres is that these domains must be separated by a clear dividing line, and that measures are required to sterilise the bureaucracy from political interference in administrative decisions. The legislative framework in South Africa reinforces the Weberian distinction, and it is imperative that both political parties and officials respect and reinforce the autonomy of bureaucracy and protect its institutional integrity. But this is only the starting point for sound relationships between political and administrative spheres. In reality, the dividing line between the domains is blurred, and managers are required to engage with politics in various ways. The interface is better conceptualised as a privileged zone of interaction within which a range of practices and behaviours take place. In the absence of clear guidelines about how to navigate the zone, informal rules predominate, and even these are fluid and open to interpretation. There are positive examples of informal rules that have been developed based on mutual support and interdependence, distinct but complementary roles, and reciprocity of influence. In their most advanced form, these informal rules can constitute a compact between politicians and public servants around mutually agreed values, objectives and ways of working. Given the accentuation of political-administrative interactions in municipal coalition governments, such compacts could form an essential basis for successful coalition governments in the future.

REFERENCES


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Part IV

Experimenting with coalition governments:
Core case studies and emerging cultures

Anchored in Part I, which sets out the range of democratic South Africa’s coalition government experiences, the in-depth case studies of South Africa’s post-2016 local governments in this section reveals the dynamics that dominate the field. The metropolitan case studies of coalition practice in South Africa reveal the contours of the metropolitan cliff-hangers in which governance comes second, dwarfed by interparty war by means of coalition politics. The studies show the party politics and political strategies that characterise the new coalition politics in South Africa. The section explores, furthermore, how coalition politics in two of South Africa’s provinces, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, in the earlier decades of democracy helped position interparty coalitions firmly in the culture of conquest by coalition.