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Administrators: uneasy is the head

"Uneasy is the head that wears a crown" (William Shakespeare) - this could be no truer than for the numerous administrators who are to be dispatched around South Africa to address the shortcomings of dysfunctional municipalities (see our Briefing on this, municipaliq.co.za). But the track record of administrators is mixed - sometimes a steady hand can steer a troubled municipality back to functionality and viability, but sometimes the individuals appointed with onerous turnaround responsibilities do little more than a superficial exercise that sees a municipality returning to dysfunctionality in a short space of time. This Personality of the Month considers the nature of the role, as well as some questionable appointments in the North West.

How to ensure the best fit for an ailing municipality

Administrators can emerge as the hero of a troubled municipality - bringing experience and confidence in what is needed to turnaround broken financial affairs and poor systems.

Depending on the type of intervention, they can also **move faster and more decisively** than a Municipal Manager, who is accountable to political leadership in the ordinary course of events - a function of the dire steps that are taken during interventions after a municipality had failed to carry out its mandate.

But administrators are not necessarily a panacea, and can come at **considerable cost**. Consider the criticism of Pam Yako, who oversaw Makana's intervention several years ago, at a cost of R3m (www.politicsweb.co.za, www.dailymaverick.co.za), with residents decrying the return of service delivery failures in a massive protest march last month.

The problem with a single individual is that their interventions can be useful at the time, but once they depart, **systemic problems** re-emerge. This, of course, is by no means unique to local government; it is seen in the private sector with management consultants and turnaround specialists who operate in a very specific

context. Hence an ideal administrator needs to be a decisive, experienced manager, a strong leader, as well as forward-looking, leaving and nurturing sustainable solutions.

This is least likely where administration is used as a reshuffling opportunity for a small group of insiders, who may or may not be appropriately skilled for the position. Consider some of the track records of administrators in the **North West** (www.nwpg.gov.za):

Thupi Mokatlha, who has been deployed at **Maquassi-Hills**, was Municipal Manager at West Rand, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda and Matlosana municipalities, as well as the administrator in Ditsobotla - none of which have suggested helpful turnaround templates.

Even more alarmingly, Zebo Tshetlho, dispatched to **Kagisano-Molopo**, comes with a cloud over his name - not only from a lease deal when he was Municipal Manager of Dr Ruth Mompoti District Municipality (www.iol.co.za) but more recently associated with a doomed VBS investment (city-press.news24.com). Eric Matlawe, administrator at **Ditsobotla**, left Rustenburg as Municipal Manager before the end of his term, with a settlement that left several allegations of misconduct uninvestigated (www.security.co.za).

These track records hardly inspire confidence for the already troubled municipalities. It raises the question - if there are not enough single individuals to step into the role of administrator, would it not perhaps be better for the current wave of administrations to rely on a team rather than on a single, potentially flawed individual?

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