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COVID-19 governance, leadership and decision-making in Gauteng

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Abstract

The onset of the pandemic prompted one of the most ambitious efforts at adaptive governance of the democratic era in South Africa. Extraordinary measures were put in place to achieve cooperative governance vertically across the spheres of government, and horizontally across the functional departments. Many important and innovative measures were achieved in this process, impelled by the sense of urgency and common purpose inspired by the fact of the pandemic. Simultaneously, and predictably, the ability to achieve the full intended adaptive response was conditioned by a number of existing factors and structural realities in a complex city region and a transitional society. Observations emerging from this case study, noting important adaptive achievements as well as significant limitations, provide valuable insight into some of the conditions and requirements that enable and support effective approaches to adaptive governance in a sub-national context of this nature.

Central to the adaptive strategy formulated to address the pandemic was a disaster-management governance structure intended to facilitate both increasingly collective decision-making as well as the flow of decisions, information and responsiveness through the complex reaches of government and the health-care system. While the logic of this new structure has been affirmed, it became clear that some of the systems, scriptures and cultures of the existing government structures persisted in the new arrangement, and the need for adaptive capabilities among the personnel had been underestimated. Important insights have emerged into how some of these constraints were overcome over time.

Further, it became clear that the existing conditions and interests at play in the wider socio-political landscape continued to be present and challenged efforts at adaptive responses. Significantly, it became clear that the adaptive 'centre of gravity' needed to evolve over time from top-down leadership and direction towards increasingly localised decision-making and responsiveness, based on the best available knowledge and local capacities.

In conclusion, a view emerges of a complex set of considerations that inform efforts at adaptive governance in the highly challenging context of a pandemic impacting a city-region. These considerations include the role of leadership in forging common purpose, purposive organisational structures, adaptive dispositions within these structures, the capacity for organisational learning, the influence of wider political and economic interests, and the ability to achieve a distributed and diffused responsive agency on the ground.

1 Introduction: overview and key questions

This chapter for the case study on the Gauteng Provincial Government's response to COVID-19 outlines the specific governance measures initiated to respond to the pandemic, and describes and analyses the political and administrative leadership, decision making, day-to-day coordinating, intergovernmental and operational structures, systems and processes established to manage the pandemic in the Gauteng City-Region. The focus falls mainly on leadership and governance of the pandemic *within* the Gauteng Provincial Government itself. However this is

also considered in relation to what was established in the other spheres of government, national and local, with some specific attention to the metropolitan municipalities.

In discussing questions of leadership, decision-making and governance of COVID-19, it is inevitable that there will be some reference to what was done to manage, for example, the health response, social safety nets such as food parcel distribution, or plans for economic recovery. However the fuller details of policies adopted, strategies pursued and actions taken within these specific areas of the response are left for other chapters. This chapter therefore looks at the COVID-19 governance architectures and practices across government, rather than the governance of any particular dimension (health, economy, etc.) of the crisis.

The approach taken in this chapter is descriptive and analytical, in that the research teases out key insights from the successes and apparent limitations that can be synthesised into learnings. However, the intention is not to be evaluative, in the sense of scoring the adequacy of the response, or appraising what was done against a hypothetical ideal type of what ought to have been done. Instead, successes and weaknesses are indeed highlighted, based mainly on observations from research respondents, but with the intention of reflecting on the intention to achieve adaptive governance. The aim is to pinpoint areas that proved to be challenging, or where improvements could conceivably be made, rather than to expose or critically judge any leader, manager or organisational unit for what was done or what was not accomplished. Adaptive governance is a continuing objective for government, and this chapter is intended to provide insight to support this quest.

This chapter covers the following ground:

- Provision of the conceptual framing informing this chapter
- Outline of the key decision making and operational structures and systems established at the start of the crisis in March / April 2020
- Reflections on leadership
- Experience at operational levels
- Strengths and weaknesses of intergovernmental relations
- The role of data in decision-making
- Reflections on adaptive capabilities

Across the analysis in the chapter we consider a number of overarching questions:

First, to what extent did the COVID-19 crisis expose existing weaknesses in government capability, relative to the extent to which the crisis also enabled an opportunity for 'reset' – a chance to establish new systems, structures and ways of working that could provide a basis for better governance into the future? This was a question posed by Provincial leadership figures relatively early in the response-planning. The answer is a dynamic one. The research suggests competing narratives of successes and shortcomings. Governments are continually confronted with multi-dimensional classic 'wicked issues' that need adaptive responses across the traditionally organised functional areas of government. In this particular instance, these

competing narratives reveal a government that, while facing a massive new external challenge in the form of the pandemic, had nevertheless to confront significant existing internal challenges. Put simply, in order to fix the crisis, it had to fix the problems that had accumulated in the past, and which were bedevilling efforts to address the future.

Second, therefore, to what extent was dynamic leadership able to overcome well-established institutional practices and cultures that, in the harsh light of an unexpected and massive crisis, were shown (again) as dysfunctional? Was government able to respond adaptively and demonstrate innovation and agility in the face of a grave new societal threat?

Third, more specifically, to what extent was government able to navigate the inherited accountability systems, bureaucratic arrangements, organisational values, and day-to-day routines that typically inhibit the setting and pursuit of new transversal-government agendas? Put differently, what kind of associative intent and dispositions could be mustered in the interests of framing a common purpose, in a context where the institutional hardware and software of government historically resists signals for newly-directed efforts that need significant cross-institutional collaboration?

To properly contextualise these questions a more detailed conceptual framing is warranted.

2 Conceptual framing

An analysis of the governance approaches adopted to managing the pandemic needs to be situated in a wider conceptual landscape that helps to clarify the significance of what has been attempted, and that frames the value of the insights emerging from this case study. There is much to be learned from the ambitious responses to this challenging conjuncture.

The notion of 'adaptive governance' has taken on enhanced salience in the context of the 'urban turn' and the understanding of the role of cities and city-regions in achieving increasingly sustainable patterns of human behaviour in an interconnected and interdependent global context. Many of the assumptions, explicit or implied, underpinning the achievement of various multilateral development objectives (like the Sustainability Development Goals, for example) speak to the capacity of governments and their partners to respond differently into the future, changing the patterns of the past in order to address deep societal inequities and the likelihood of globally distributed catastrophes (which include the effects of climate change, economic crises and pandemics, among others). The implication is that government needs to work more innovatively itself, but also in greater collaboration with its social partners, so as to bring varied and complementary capabilities to bear on complex structural phenomena and the 'wicked problems' that threaten global well-being (Moore 2016).

This approach is inscribed in South Africa's quest for 'cooperative governance' to function across the architectures of government, and in the institutionalisation of this ambition in the form of departments of cooperative governance within the respective spheres, and in mechanisms to advance 'intergovernmental relations' (IGR) between the spheres. The authors of many policy frameworks have emphasised the necessity for collective and coordinated efforts across the arms of government to address common purposes. The challenge of 'associative governance', where

various sectors work in concert towards common goals, is a fundamental requirement for tackling many (or most) of the complex challenges facing contemporary urban society. This requires thoughtful policy architectures, packages of interactive measures, and organizational structures that act as co-ordinating platforms for aligning different (often competing) interests. The global experience is that achieving this form of associative governance is difficult and elusive.

It is widely recognised that in the South African context these provisions have worked unevenly. Cooperative governance arrangements seldom function as opportunities for collective planning and coordination, or platforms for tracking and monitoring progress on shared purposes (DPME & COGTA, 2018). In the context of the Gauteng city-region, co-ordinated efforts directed towards complex outcomes seem relatively rare, and the architectures for this co-ordination seem not yet well-developed, in spite of the intentions inscribed in the mandates for COGTA.

Various analysts have observed that the widespread difficulty in achieving associative governance may be due to the strength of existing traditional approaches to government, the historically very successful Weberian division of labour across defined functional areas, which succeed in accumulating specialised knowledge, expertise and routines to address a very specific domain of performance. A set of strongly established precepts, and systems of evaluation and reward, are accumulated within the functional bureaucracy, and senior figures in such a structure may have dispensations to distribute in one way or another in codified and legitimate forms of patronage. A powerful and self-sustaining logic accretes within such bureaucracies, and this may result in very successful performances of the mandate (in the best cases), but also encourages an independence and self-sufficiency that is not naturally open to signals from outside. The flow of power and authority within that structure depends on the maintenance of strong insulations and autonomy.

The injunction for functional departments, or even spheres of government, to work cooperatively provides something of a challenge to the traditional order of a previously relatively autonomous organisational unit, and suddenly a much greater complexity of ends and means has to be accommodated. This has implications for systems of authority, for protocols of decision-making, for the kinds of information needed, for the mediatory and cross-functional skill-sets of staff at every level, for fiscal processes, and for accountability and the allocation of rewards. In other words, effective coordination across functional areas, or across spheres of government, implies very much more complex organisational functioning, higher order skills, and different approaches to conceiving and delivering on common purposes (which are inherently likely to be complex in their nature). In the absence of conscious measures to achieve greater reciprocity and coordination between cooperating partners, the patterns of established behaviours may prove resilient and resistant (Heller, et al, 2019). Where collaborative modes are successfully achieved, often under the conditions of crisis and emergency, it is possible that the new associative patterns eventually weaken and revert to prior patterns, unless stable measures are put in place to institutionalise the new adaptive mode (Storper 2014).

These comments above consider chiefly the internal forms and capabilities of government structures that enable or hinder the achievement of cooperative governance. However, these structures are also embedded in larger landscapes of regulatory affordances and ambiguities, where powers and responsibilities are sometimes shared between two or more spheres, or are

ambiguously defined. Government is further located in a terrain of established or competing interests, the flows of economic and political power, and societal interest groups. A transitional society like South Africa seeks some degree of redistribution of societal goods, with lively contestation between existing interests and newly-aligned emerging elites. Finally, the Gauteng city-region is a rapidly growing set of urban agglomerations, characterised by deep inequalities. These are deeply challenging contexts in which government must seek to achieve its objectives, which include a greater distributive equity while at the same time steering an economy that must be vibrant, innovative and inclusive. To do this, government has to consider, firstly, the strength and reach of its political authority and the extent to which it is able to generate a collective consensus on priority common purposes. Leadership may need to navigate both inter-party political competitiveness (where more than one party holds sway in some administrations in the city-region) as well as intra-party differences of opinion among competing factions. Secondly, as we've noted above, adaptive governance requires particular forms of capability (not least the ability to work transversally), not just in the form of skilled individuals but also in teams and units that can pursue complex objectives, and have the confidence and authority to make decisions across distributed fronts. Finally, in as much as government is always societally embedded, the willingness of social partners and communities to respond and cooperate will be conditioned by the perceptions of legitimacy and the levels of trust alive in that context (Heller et al, 2019).

These factors together make for a highly demanding governance agenda, and the arrival of a devastating pandemic is perfectly calculated to exemplify the extent to which government has succeeded in assembling adaptive capabilities for 'normal' governance in a fluid and dynamic city-region, let alone for responding to the exigencies of a far-reaching and unprecedented emergency.

3 Gauteng's COVID-19 response structures and systems

3.1 Key structures and systems established at the start of the response

It is clear that government leadership very quickly understood the gravity of the approaching pandemic, and that this would require extraordinary measures, beyond the current public health provision already in place. National government moved swiftly to ensure that messaging about the crisis was communicated, and the South African public were able to anticipate the announcement of the State of Emergency by President Ramaphosa and make preparations for the impending lockdown. At no point was the seriousness of the emergency underplayed (as has been noted in some other contexts internationally), and communication about the health impact of the pandemic, and measures to contain this, have been consistent. At both National and Provincial levels, government moved decisively to establish the structures of government to manage a national emergency, striking a clear note of centralised 'command' that signalled simultaneously the seriousness of the crisis, and the top-down approach that would be taken to initiate and coordinate responses to the situation.

The prevailing accounts of how structures and systems were set up to manage the COVID-19 crisis tend to emphasise that establishment followed the declaration of a nationwide state of disaster in mid-March 2020, and that the structures cascaded through each of the three spheres of government in line with the prescripts of disaster management legislation and regulations. These accounts also suggest that the structures mirrored one another across the different parts of government.

For example, a report from the National Department of Cooperative Government (COGTA) to the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) dated 30 April 2020 provides this diagram, after noting how provincial and local government set up co-ordinating and joint technical disaster management structures similar to that institutionalised in the national sphere (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020).

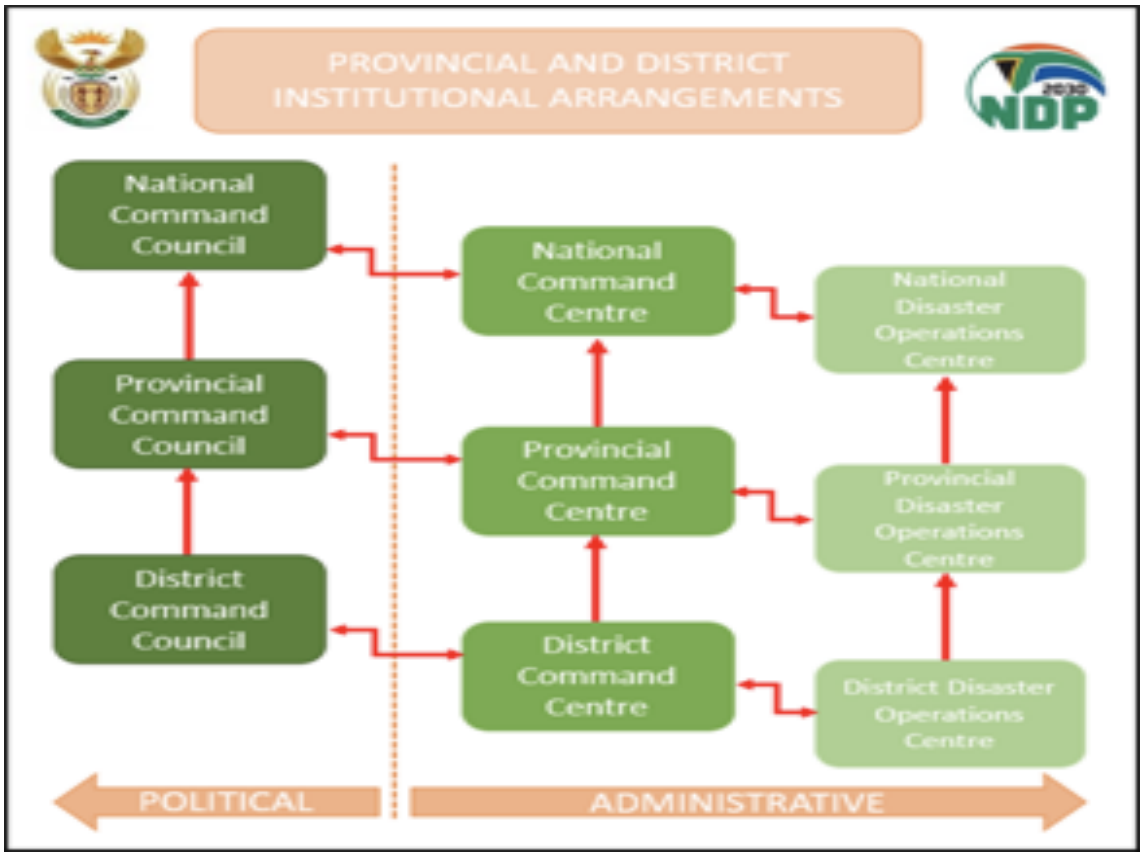

Figure 1. Provincial and District institutional arrangements for responding to COVID-19 (Source: National Department of Cooperative Government (2020))

However, it is worth considering to what extent the institutional architecture of government's COVID-19 response strictly followed provisions for disaster management, and to what extent there was variation across different parts of government. A closer look reveals considerable adaptation of disaster management arrangements. It also indicates significant variation in what was established in the Gauteng City-Region – provincially and locally – relative to the arrangements in national government.

The Department of Cooperative Governance (2020) report explains that the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs declared a national state of disaster in terms of Section 27(1) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) on 15 March 2020, through publication in Government Gazette no 43096. It then goes on to detail the 'Establishment of Disaster Coordination Structures'. These included:

- The National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), chaired by the President and made up of relevant ministers, meeting three times a week.
- The National Command Centre, comprised of Directors General of departments whose Ministers constituted the NCCC, and serving as a technical committee to this structure, also meeting three times a week.
- The National Joints Operations and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) meeting daily to coordinate the national response. This was comprised of key components of South Africa's security cluster – the South African National Defence Force, the State Security Agency and the South African Police Services – as well as Director Generals of key departments involved in the COVID-19 response. It was supported by the National Disaster Management Centre in COGTA. The NATJOINTS established various workstreams to deal with different aspects of the disaster, including 'public health containment', 'social', 'economic', 'border control', 'legal and regulatory', and so on.
- Interestingly, the National Disaster Management Centre in COGTA was responsible for chairing the 'public health containment' workstream, and processing reports for this workstream into the NATJOINTS. This workstream dealt with dissemination of public hygiene information, strengthening of surveillance, identification of quarantine facilities, etc.
- The National Disaster Operations Centre, activated to coordinate with provincial and local disaster management centres. (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020)

While this might appear, at first glance, to be an array of structures established in terms of South Africa's disaster management law, only the National Disaster Management Centre is expressly provided for in terms of the National Disaster Management Act (57 of 2002). This raises the question of the basis on which the other structures, especially the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC), were set up.

Various reports indicate simply that the NCCC was 'established by the President', being first announced to the country in President Ramaphosa's address to the nation on 15 March, and then meeting for the first time on 17 March (Hunter, 2020).[1] It's exact status was clarified only gradually as its decision making powers were subsequently questioned in parliament, and then through court cases brought to contest the ban on cigarette sales during lockdown. Hunter (2020) quotes various figures who describe the NCCC as a structure of the National Cabinet, akin to an inter-ministerial committee set up to deal with a specific matter, or a grouping of ministers making up a Cabinet cluster. It is reported that while it initially only had 19 Ministers as members, membership was subsequently extended to all cabinet members (Harrison, 2020).

[1] Although note that Harrison (2020) records that the structure was "established on 18 March".

Though the President referred on numerous occasions to the fact that the NCCC had taken a decision, it was subsequently clarified that as a sub-structure of Cabinet it had no decision-making power in and of itself, and needed to refer final decisions to a full sitting of Cabinet.

In Hunter's account the nature of the NCCC was perhaps best explained by then Presidential spokesperson Khusela Diko. Hunter quotes her as arguing that the NCCC was required because 'Cabinet as a construct is not agile and is not flexible':

> "*It has very unique rules on how it should conduct its business and how matters are brought before it. The command council therefore is an operational mechanism tasked with coordination and management of the state of disaster. It has no constitutional standing and where any policy decisions need to be made, these are recommended to Cabinet*" (Khusela Diko, quoted in Hunter 2020).

Standing at the pinnacle of the country's COVID-19 management structures the National Coronavirus Command Council is therefore seen as an exemplar of an adaptive governance response, built on a recognition of insufficient crisis-response capability of the existing structures.

As with the national arrangements for responding to the crisis, the institutional architectures of Gauteng's COVID-19 response were partially dictated by legal provisions for disaster management emanating from the legislation, but also saw considerable adaptation of existing structures and systems, and innovation on what was envisaged by national government.

3.2 Setting up Gauteng's COVID-19 response structures: national directives meet the reality of pre-existing arrangements

In some respects the structures established by the Gauteng Provincial Government to respond to COVID-19 were indeed directly mandated by national government using the legal provisions for disaster management. Following the declaration of a national state of disaster on 15 March a series of regulations, directions and guidelines were issued either by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, or by other Ministers as appropriate. One such Direction – GN R399, COVID-19 Disaster Response Directions – was issued by the COGTA Minister on 25 March 2020 (subsequently amended on 30 March by GN R432), applicable to all provinces and municipalities. Amongst other items[2] it dealt with requirement for provincial and local government to set up appropriate institutional arrangements and formulate COVID-19 response plans (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020).

Section 6.8 of these Directions required that Provincial COGTAs and Offices of Premiers should: immediately establish a Provincial Command Council as well as coordinating structures to support national institutional arrangements; support the establishment of joint operation centres in district and metropolitan municipality, including by making resources available to supplement capacity if necessary; and monitor the impact of interventions *inter alia* by

[2] Including municipal obligations around basis services, sanitizing of public spaces, identification of quarantine facilities and emergency procurement, amongst others.

submitting weekly consolidated reports to the national disaster management structures (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020).

Municipalities were similarly directed to: establish a District Command Council as well as coordinating structures to support national and provincial institutional arrangements; participate in joint district and provincial disaster management structures to ensure a coordinated response to COVID -19, and monitor progress on interventions by submitting weekly consolidated reports to the provincial and national disaster management structures (Department of Cooperative Governance, 2020)

A further COGTA Circular (10 of 2020) followed on 4 April. This provided Terms of Reference for Provincial and Municipal Coronavirus Command Councils and Provincial and Municipal Coronavirus Command Centres. This circular aimed to give more clarity to provincial and local government on the institutional arrangements required, including membership of these structures, in order to ensure a consistent approach across the country (Harrison, 2020).

The Gauteng Provincial Director General, who was central to establishing arrangements following these prescripts, emphasises that the province was at pains to ensure alignment with national structures and systems in the interests of cooperative government:

> *The directive that came from National Government indicated that the National Coronavirus Council had been established with the Command Centre of NATJOINTS. Provinces and municipalities were expected to establish the same structures and the membership of those structures was outlined. When I set up the Gauteng one I sat with the DG in the Presidency, and I asked about the structure of the agenda so that even this would match.*

However, it also needs to be recognised that the process of establishing COVID-19 response structures in line with national expectations met with pre-existing realities that required rapid problem solving, and in turn adaptation and innovation.

On the one hand, the establishment of province-wide COVID-19 structures following the COGTA directives encountered a set of structures and working arrangements that had been initiated within the Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH) earlier in March. As the Director General explains:

> *When we started early days in March it was responded to as a health emergency and the Department of Health was the first one that set up response structures, including a structure that they called a war room. In this war room they invited departments and various other role players and when people were not quite co-operative the MEC spoke to myself and the Premier, and after attending one meeting of the war room I realised that I needed to pull the Gauteng Province in its full might into the war room as we called it at the time. This was now when we were in the state of disaster and before the lockdown, and before the directives had been written and the provincial structures were outlined.*

This embryonic GDoH structure, initially called the war room, was eventually redubbed 'the nerve centre' when the Provincial Disaster Management Command Centre came to be commonly known as 'the War-room' to help distinguish it from the Command *Council*. While it was clearly

not functioning optimally before the Premier's Office took charge of an 'all of government' COVID-19 response, it does need to be recognised that it was a prior structure. When the other parts of the response architecture were assembled it was certainly fitted in – in the words of the DG 'like a puzzle piece' – as the body in charge of the 'comprehensive health response'. But various respondents in this case study noted how GDoH was slower than other part of government to respond to the signals for central coordination through the nationally mandated arrangements, and reorient itself as one of a number of workstreams reporting in to the overarching new governance structures.

On the other hand, the province had to confront limitations in the capability of its extant disaster management structures and offices. The DG recalls that:

> *The structures were set up at national and we discussed with colleagues at national and they indicated what their expectations were of provinces. We accordingly activated the Provincial Disaster Management Centre in accordance with the National Disaster Management Act. But because the physical building was very small it would have actually made sure that we don't respond. It was so small that we were sitting on top of each other literally, and with the social distancing requirements and the number of people who were expected to come into the Command Centre, we then took a decision that we needed a different building … and we moved the Command Centre to Ormonde.*

Rashid Seedat, head of the Delivery Support Unit, speaks even more pointedly about the limits of the arrangements pre-defined to be available in the event of a disaster such as COVID-19, and how this required an adaptive response:

> *Our so-called Provincial Disaster Management Centre was actually completely inadequate in a whole number of ways, and this was actually supposed to be our safety net in the event of a crisis breaking out. Within a week or two we had to move out of the building we were in, and this was supposedly a building that had been purpose-built for this kind of function. So at that level we were unprepared, and yet in terms of getting the systems right, we were able to perform well.*

In sum, the Gauteng governance arrangements did accord with what had been spelled out as required in national directives drawn in terms of legal provisions for disaster management, and efforts were made to ensure that what was set up aligned with national requirements. But the Province's COVID-19 response architectures needed to be adaptive right from the start, contending with both pre-existing working arrangements established in the Gauteng Department of Health, and the reality of disaster management capacities that were not fit for purpose regardless of what national government might have envisaged in its instructions.

3.3 An overview of the Gauteng arrangements

As Gauteng confronted the limits of its existing disaster management capacity, and moved rapidly to procure new offices within which to convene warm bodies involved in its crisis response, it began to establish the various structures that would be core to governing its COVID-19 strategy.

The key governance structures are formally described in a report, dated 26 August 2020, by the DG to the National Command Council on the Gauteng Provincial Government Response to the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic: March-July 2020 (Director General of Gauteng, 2020). This report notes that these "governance structures for managing the COVID-19 project in line with the disaster management legislation" were approved on 25 March 2020 by the technical clusters of the Provincial Executive Council (EXCO, or Provincial Cabinet). It is noteworthy that 25 March was the same day that COGTA issued Direction GN R399, which amongst other things required provinces to establish Command Councils and supporting structures. The DG's report provides the following diagram of these structures. While it is clear in overall terms, there are important nuances hidden behind this simplifying figure.

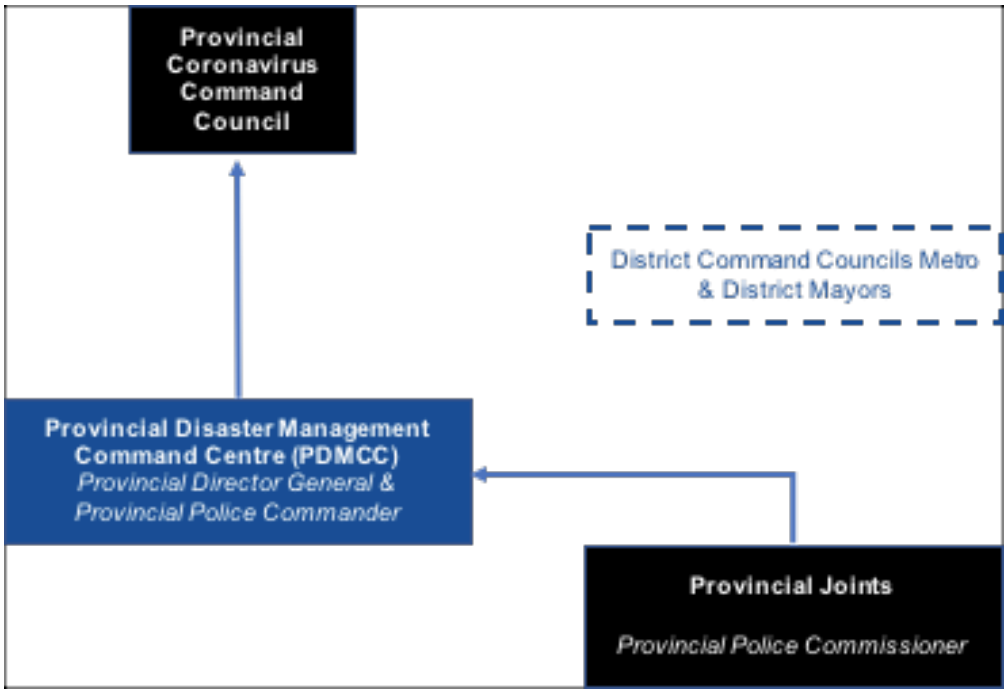

Figure 2. Overview of Gauteng Provincial Government institutional arrangements for responding to COVID-19 (Source: Director General of Gauteng (2020))

As required by the COGTA Directions of 25 March, Gauteng established the **Provincial Coronavirus Command Council (PCCC)**. This of course mirrored the NCCC at national level. Chaired by the Premier, the PCCC included Provincial Members of the Executive Council (MECs), the provincial DG, and the provincial police commissioner. It held meetings twice a week, taking reports from the Command Centre, and was responsible for the following:

- Providing directives in line with National Coronavirus Command Council
- Setting targets to be achieved and enforcing accountability against these performance measures
- Determine appropriate COVID-19 response policies for the Gauteng City Region

- Providing strategic guidance to the other structures described below
- Resolving escalated issues that could not be dealt with in other structures; and
- Unlocking national resources for use in provincial government and municipalities

The Director General's report is somewhat ambiguous on whether the PCCC is, strictly speaking, a decision making body. Interestingly it is not described as a 'structure of Cabinet' in the same way as the NCCC has on occasion been characterised. On the one hand, according to the DG's report, the PCCC "considers proposals for medium-term to long-term measures for approval by EXCO", suggesting that it must channel resolutions for final decision to a full sitting of the Provincial Cabinet. On the other hand the report also says that the Province's District Coronavirus Command Council takes responsibility for clarifying "the operational implications of directives, policies *and decisions* from the PCCC".

Secondly, Gauteng set up a **Provincial District Coronavirus Command Council**. It is important to understand that this is not the District Command Councils represented on the diagram above. Following the national directions each metro (Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane) and each district (Sedibeng and West Rand) established its own COVID-19 response structures, with each headed by Command Council (or equivalent) specific to that municipal area. The Provincial District Coronavirus Command Council was a co-operative structure across provincial and local government. It met twice a week, bringing together the provincial political leadership with metro and district mayors.

Lastly, and most importantly, Gauteng also established a **Provincial Disaster Management *Command Centre* (PDMCC)**. The structure became colloquially known as the War-room, and was the operational core of Gauteng's response, meeting daily on each week day for several hours starting at 3pm each day. It cannot be fully understood outside of a description of the Programme Management Office (PMO) and six workstreams as outlined below – which together constituted the unique interpretation Gauteng gave to a structure that was mandated by national directive.

In formal terms the PDMCC, or War-room, is described in the DG's report as responsible for the following:

- Monitoring and assessing performance (against the provincial COVID-19 strategy, as executed by the workstreams)
- Mitigating risks identified by or arising in the workstreams
- Resolving issues escalated from the workstreams, or alternatively escalating these to the PCCC
- Challenging approaches being taken to delivery to address impending risks, and
- Promoting cooperation amongst work-streams and external interfaces. (Director General of Gauteng, 2020: 17).

The War-room was made up of representatives of the Programme Management Office, workstream leads (with this role filled by departmental Heads of Departments), representatives of the ProvJoints, and provincial representatives from a range of national departments and

agencies. Interestingly the diagram above suggests that the chairing of the PDMCC was shared between the Provincial DG and the Provincial Police Commissioner. It is possible that this because the structure was seen as a cognate of the National Joints Operations and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) that, supported by the National Disaster Management Centre, met daily to coordinate the national response. But in fact the joint chairs of the PDMCC were the provincial DG and the MEC for Health.

The War-room is understood in a varied and multidimensional way by respondents interviewed for this case study. In one sense the War-room is a *structure of government* with a clear role and purpose. In another sense the War-room is understood as a *system of institutionalised practices, a daily meeting with its routines* – mostly the systematic 'taking of reports' – that, over time, served to orchestrate common understandings, strategic direction and consensus. In yet another sense the War-room was also in fact a physical space in an office park in Ormonde in southern Johannesburg – a true operational centre for day-to-day and incident-by-incident disaster management. Social distancing requirements, especially after the War-room saw three COVID-19 outbreaks, meant that after a while activities enabled by it became more virtual. But it was nonetheless still a physical centre – with officials at desks and screens on walls holding various dashboards.

3.4 The definition of the Programme Management Office and workstreams

At the same time as new structures were being defined the Gauteng Provincial Government resolved to seek technical assistance in the setting up of systems required to support a programmatic approach to tackling COVID-19. In the final days of March 2020 GPG approached Deloitte & Touche to secure technical services, and on 2 April the province accepted an offer from the company that it would provide some R2,8 million in consulting time pro-bono, helping to define and establish a Programme Management Office (PMO) and associated workstreams. This generous offer translated into some 60 days of technical assistance, rolling out from mid-April.

The COVID-19 response strategy adopted by GPG is interwoven with the PMO and the workstreams – integrated via the War-room – that it supports.

Through a risk identification process, Gauteng identified key risks associated with COVID-19, and then moved to structure a six part strategy to respond to these. Each component of the strategy was then structured as a workstream, integrating key officials from across different departments into the shared space of a transversal programmatic area.

Figure 3. Gauteng Provincial Government six pillar strategy responding to COVID-19 (Source: Director General of Gauteng (2020))

Each of the workstreams was then, through a process of iteration, divided into a number of sub-workstreams. Below is a diagrammatic representation of these sub-workstreams from early in the process, but it must be recognised that these saw considerable evolution over time.

	Sub-workstreams						
Comprehensive Health response (Work stream interface)	Epi & Surveillance	Case Management	Health Infrastructure	Ports of Entry and Health Travel	Laboratory Services	Emergency Medical Response	Research
Social Security response (Work stream interface)	Food Security	Housing for Vulnerable Groups	Education Continuity	Sports and Recreational Activities	Donor Management		
Enforcement and Compliance (Work stream interface)	Transportation	Business & Commerce	Strategic Sites, Public Facilities and Areas	Hotspots & Vulnerable Areas	Industries (Industrial Business)		
Economic Response (Work stream interface)	SMME Economic Response	Transportation and Logistics	Agriculture	Manufacturing & Green Economy	Construction	Trade, Travel & Tourism	Financial & Business Services
Local Government (Work stream interface)	Adoption of IDP and Budget (ICT Support infrastructure) Budget Reprioritization (Revenue Loss)	Water Provision and Sanitation	De-congestion of Informal Settlements and Services to Hostels	De-contamination/ Sanitization & Waste Management	Business continuity Plans Coordination & Analysis	Burial Capacity (Cemeteries) and Crematoria)	Local Economic Development Response
Government Continuity (Work stream interface)	Planning	Service Delivery Redesign	Workforce Strategies	Change Management	Continuity and OHS		

Figure 4. Gauteng COVID-19 response strategy: initial design of workstreams and sub-workstreams (Source: Director General of Gauteng (2020))

Each of these six workstreams was headed by a stream lead, a Head of Department from the departments brought together in the new cross-cutting space. However, each workstream was given structured 'secretariat' support by identified high level project managers making up the PMO. While each workstream was formally held accountable – through regular reporting – by the War-room, the PMO was therefore the operational lynchpin that held the workstreams together. Its role was defined as follows:

- Provide a centralised management structure to coordinate all efforts in response to COVID-19
- Securely manage a centralised information repository for all workstreams for record-keeping, data-analysis and reporting
- Coordinate the activities of workstreams, and set the cadence of their work
- Provide individual project portfolios and reporting capabilities to each of the workstreams to ensure standardisation and accuracy
- Escalate and flag issues to be addressed by the PDMCC governance structures to quickly extinguish potentially disruptive and damaging activities
- Ensure interfaces between all structures of government and other external stakeholders
- Provide assurance on response delivery by making sure that resources and capabilities were available in line with regulations
- Lead the planning and implementation of government continuity as required. (Director General of Gauteng, 2020: 19).

The key capability of the PMO was its head, carefully selected 'mandarins' (a term used by a number of respondents) who interfaced with HoD leads, and a number of dynamic young officials playing a variety of secretariat roles, it is worth noting that as designed by Deloitte the PMO was envisaged as a rather expansive structure, with a number of posts to be filled to cohere centralised capacity. An indication of this vision is diagrammatically represented in the following figure.[3]

[3] It is worth noting that there were many other aspects of the Gauteng Provincial Government's COVID-19 response structures and systems that evolved over time, and are not covered in this rapid research report. These included a key role played by the South African National Defense Force in mid-2020, the establishment of the Premier's Advisory Committee on COVID-19 (PACC), and the effort to mobilise ward based war-rooms.

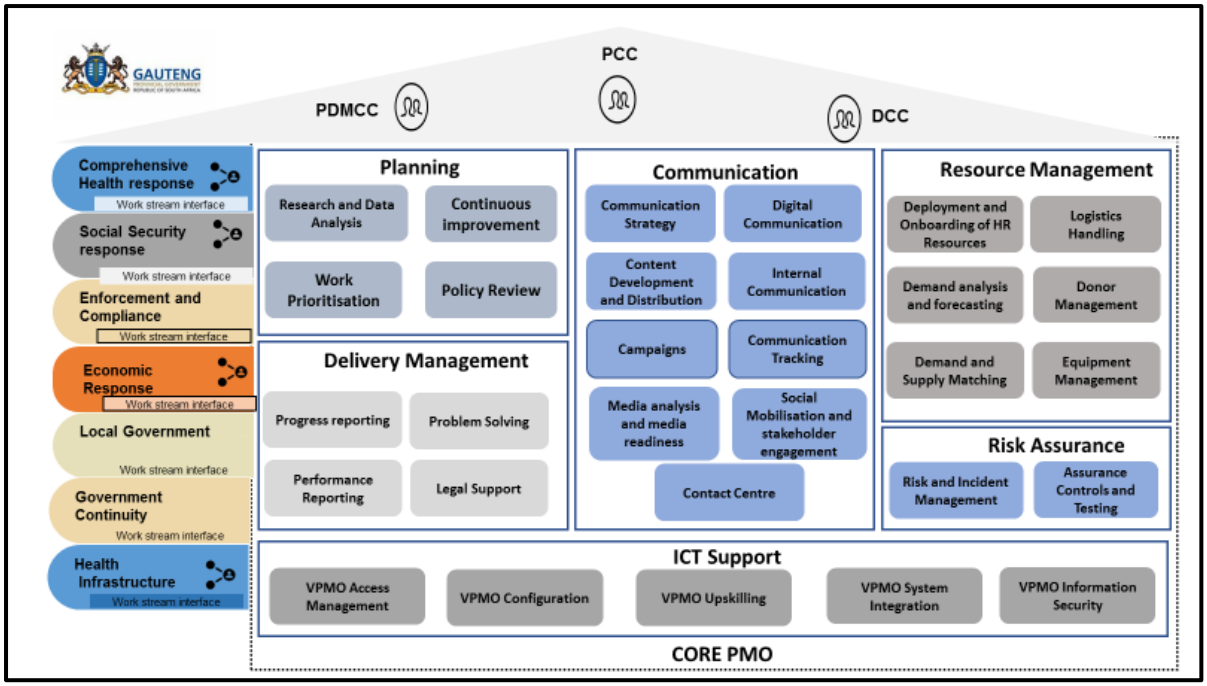

Figure 5. Design of the Gauteng COVID-19 response Programme Management Office (PMO) as originally envisaged (Source: Director General of Gauteng (2020))

4 The role of leadership

We should not underestimate the foundational acknowledgement by leadership in Gauteng of the seriousness of the emergency. This acknowledgement included, firstly, the gravity of the crisis; secondly that it was not simply a health emergency but would have a 'whole society' impact; thirdly, that all arms of government horizontally and vertically would need to respond; and finally that a qualitatively different model of governance would be required to address the pandemic. By itself, this acknowledgement reflects an essential starting point for effective leadership - an inaugural grasp of what is to be confronted, and what it would take to respond appropriately. As we have seen elsewhere internationally, this has not always been the case.

From the outset, the leadership in the Gauteng city-region moved swiftly to establish the alternative structures of governance intended to coordinate and drive the response to the pandemic in the city-region. The intention was made clear immediately that the systems needed to be city-region-wide and this would bring both Provincial and Local Government administrations into close alignment with each other. As noted above, structures were established to enable political and administrative leadership layers to meet very regularly and it is clear that, for some time into the crisis, these were respected and provided almost unprecedented depth and continuity of engagement between these spheres of government in the GCR. As one senior COGTA official noted in late June: "For the first time, I am able to have meetings with City Managers three to four times a week".

In these constitutive processes, the top leadership, mostly in the form of the Premier himself, was active in shaping the governance response, liaising upwards with the National Command Council, and then working politically across the city-region, convening the Provincial Command

Council, meeting at least weekly with all the mayors of Gauteng, the provincial MECs, and the nationally-allocated Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Senior officials commented:

> *We had visible leadership from our politicians. The Premier said that there was no way we could wage a battle if the leaders were sitting in the bunkers. He said "The frontline must see the leadership".*

Further, the Premier took on the public role and in articulating the public messaging, including the regular television broadcasts, where he hosted the scientific advisors and re-iterated the strong public health messaging that informed the approach to the pandemic.

There was a further 'crisis-within-a-crisis', when the concern emerged about corrupt practices in the procurement of PPE equipment. At this point, the Premier took the lead in informing the public in frank and forthright terms about the problem, and clearly articulated a strongly ethical stance on the matter.

> *This does not seem like something that just happened, it seems like it was a proper plan designed to ensure that rules are not followed and as quickly as possible people make a quick buck. We want the money recovered. These people must go to jail.*

The leaderly stance of the Premier was reflected in the activities of other senior officials in the Office of the Premier, who worked in a facilitative fashion across the workstreams, and in relation to partners who were supporting government. As will be noted later in this chapter, a strong reflective ethic was encouraged, with frequent opportunities arranged for critical feedback on how the pandemic was being managed in the city-region. The fact that deeply entrenched limitations could not adequately be surfaced and addressed in these opportunities should not detract from the culture of reflexity and adaptive responsiveness that was being encouraged by this layer of leadership.

At the level of the GPG Command Centre and War Room, the role of the Director General was seen by many as pivotal in providing the high-level leadership that gave definition and purpose to the new coordinating structures. This role involved expressing a high-level vision of the common purpose around which the various functions needed to cohere. However, the shift from the traditional line-department structures of government towards greater coordination and integration of these functional areas was not universally welcomed. The long-established autonomy of these 'silos' was challenged by this approach. Senior leadership noted:

> *It took a long time for the collaboration to take effect, and this was to be expected. Government operates in silos, and between departments, the walls are even harder.*

Officials in the War Room commented on some of the dynamics that helped to sustain these 'walls':

> *I think the DG got a lot of pushback. There was a lot of resistance to the plan and the approach. We can understand now why this would be: when people can operate behind closed doors, within their circle, it is easier to keep things within that circle. But when you open the door to other parties, then you have people reflecting on your work and having oversight. With oversight, the gaps and loopholes become apparent. And that is where the resistance came from; people didn't want to allow others in to look at what they were doing.*

... It was a territorial resistance, with people not buying into the fact that we are one government with a common goal.

In addition to navigating this resistance, the DG needed also the ability to knit together the differing functional contributions needed for the multifaceted responses. A senior officer commented:

The DG exercised immense leadership. She provided the vision for what was needed in this coordinated approach, she brought people together and told them what had to be done. So while there were discussions and debates, there were things that had to be done and we all had different responsibilities in order to get there. ... For quite a while there was a lot of frustration because people felt overwhelmed by the amount of work, and there was frustration from the DG as people were not doing what they were supposed to be doing. People were working hard but not necessarily systematically, but she was very persistent, and adamant. I would not say that the DG's leadership was forceful: it was convincing. She put forward an argument ... why the coordinated multi-sectoral, multi-level and inter-governmental approach was what was needed to fight this pandemic.

It took them a while to appreciate what we were asking them to do, but once they did, then the gelling happened. ... We could have spent a lot more time on change management but we didn't have that time. Because of the time constraint, people realised they either had to work here, in this space, in this way or else they would be left by the wayside. We made it clear that we would be moving along irrespective.

It thus became clear that the new structural form was a necessary but not sufficient component of what was needed to achieve coordinated governance, and persistent guidance and attention to detail from leadership figures was essential to creating the conditions in which other chemistries of organisational change would emerge, as will be noted in the next section of this chapter.

5 Experience at operational levels

5.1 Adaptability to new 'workstream' ways of working

The Project Management Office (PMO) was constituted partly on 'workstream' guidelines from the WHO, and on a model developed for GPG by Deloitte on a *pro bono* basis. The model of the PMO was affirmed by most respondents as an excellent structural vehicle for managing responsiveness to the pandemic, succeeding in the longer run in achieving the intention of coordinated responses from across the functional areas of government.

What Deloitte gave us was a good basis for government as a whole to interrogate the way it works, and how collectively we could put systems in place to allow for a more holistic understanding of the situation and response. ...There was a dire need in government, and COVID presented the opportunity for us to begin looking at coordinated responses for government intervention.

However, in the early months of the lockdown, the model and its requirements were unfamiliar for many officers and it took time for operational staff to adapt to the new mode of working. A senior GPG officer commented as follows:

> *In the beginning, when Deloitte first came on board, it took us a while to get going. It was a fairly complex form that they were proposing and it was perceived as being complex. Many people struggled with this complexity, and the conception of how reporting would need to be executed. It took weeks of labour, trying to work through the Deloitte system.*

Another officer noted:

> *There was a naïve perception that if everyone sits in one room, important things will happen. But as waves of people were called in, there was no clear communication about how it would all work. Government employees were really motivated and willing, but much was unclear. Who does what, where?... Deloitte gave us the framework and we were allocated into sections, but we had to work it out for ourselves.*

The logic of the original structural blueprint was sound, but in addition to the framing role of top leadership, the functioning of it in effect had to find definition organically, rather than through a controlled exercise of the design.

It became clear from interviews that, aside from this framing provided by leadership, the emergence of actual transactions across functional areas had to be undertaken through the emergence over time of transversal relationships across the invisible but powerful boundaries of the silos. In other words, working relationships and reciprocal trust needed to be forged between individuals who previously were unknown to one another. A new social fabric needed to form in order to give effect to the collaborative intent of the PMO.

> *The upside was that officials communicated among themselves and gained a maturity of understanding – people from different departments were discovering each other for the first time. I'm finding some really efficient individuals, and developing personal and supportive relationships. We were shocked that it took so long to get things working, so we took responsibility ourselves to make things work.*

Respondents noted however that the quality of these relationships was important, not least because of the real 'pull' of the continuing responsibilities and accountabilities of original line departments, where continuity of normal service provision under conditions of lockdown was a challenge by itself. Furthermore, the sensitivities of how line departments would appear in the eyes of others continued to encourage hesitancy and discretion. Individuals who were open to the collaborative ethic needed thus to comport themselves judiciously in relation to their departmental colleagues, while simultaneously working across boundaries to advance the common purpose. Respondents spoke of the need to "use personal influence", "find opportunities" and exercise the skills of intermediation to solve problems collectively.

> *You have to think above and beyond oneself to deal with this, to resolve certain things. I can say my character has been tested.*

> *The kind of skills needed for cooperative work are becoming clear. We can start to identify the "go-to people" for this kind of work.*

It is possible to infer from responses that individuals who were able to respond adaptively to the situation displayed particular levels of capability and receptiveness, and it would be intriguing to explore if there are some individuals who are more 'adaptively disposed' than others, and what it would take to generate these skills more systematically.

Respondents noted that, over time, a network of capable and co-operatively-disposed people has arisen, and that this has enabled the collaboration. Respondents also spoke of the important mediatory contribution of figures from the Office of the Premier, who also worked to assist some workstreams to respond to the emergency.

It seems however that some line departments remained more resistant to the integrative ethic than others, and many respondents expressed frustration with some functional areas in particular. One respondent noted:

> *One workstream ... hasn't taken off ... it is very resistant to change. ... we have now put them onto a different reporting cycle – now only once a month – because it takes time to show results. We feel they are too slow: six months later and they still have not established (a key relief initiative). (This Department) is too slow. They are following rather than leading.*

Another respondent ascribed some delays to regulatory constraints:

> *The (workstream) has been slow to respond – by October, the (relief initiative) had yet to be launched, and relief funds not yet distributed – the procurement guidelines issued by National Treasury were holding up the process so we had to go back to the drawing board.*

In some lagging contexts, leadership made efforts to provide support, and allocated assistance from the Office of the Premier. Respondents noted that while this support seemed to have been welcomed in some quarters, other (often political) quarters viewed the measures as 'interference'.

5.2 The role of data in decision-making and governance

Central to the success of the integrated model of governance that was intended is the quality of information that flows through the system. Essentially, the central coordinating structures, and the respective work-streams, are each intended as a platform for creating a synoptic view on the progress of the pandemic, enabling collective planning of responses and interventions, and multi-dimensional monitoring of their effects. The quality and currency of information is at the heart of the function of this model and its chance of success. Given that the pandemic was understood to be a 'whole society' crisis, rather than only a health crisis, information on the full range of effects of the pandemic and the lockdown needed to be gathered, analysed and fed into the various structures and systems of the governance model. Further, given the need to interrupt the spatial spread of the disease across communities, and given the disparities of impact on the economic and social wellbeing of the population, it is critical that the information is spatially referenced, to enable targeted responsiveness.

A senior figure, commenting on the imperative for "an agile and responsive system in a pandemic", noted the following:

> *One of the key things that builds this agility is having access to information for decision making. We are now at 2000 cases a day so our strategies need to change, and the changing of strategies is reliant on data. Evidence is needed for the decision-making process that is such a central part of governance. The rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic is making quicker access to information fundamental to decision making, with quicker turnaround times and (for it to be) acquired in more intelligent ways. … it needs to be gathered and then made available at a quality that people can trust. This is needed to empower people working at different levels to be able to use data to make decisions. Structurally this involves actually delegating to them the authority to make decisions, so that the GCR can be more responsive to these kinds of challenges.*

As the pandemic unfolded, it became clear that access to trusted and current data to enable decision-making was uneven at best. The consequences of inadequate data provision could influence operational strategies on the ground:

> *There is no direction … on how to interpret the data. When there is data presented, we would like to know how it was derived, analysed and how it could be explained to the citizens. … With our limited resources we tried to cover areas where we thought the spread might be: so we focussed on the inner city only to find out later the spread was predominantly in (the) west.*

In some cases, like the hotline for food relief, a very capable tool was made available to record the requests for food. Having good quality information about food insecurity was especially important, given that a number of agencies were active in providing food relief, and increasingly centralised control needed to be exercised to coordinate these efforts.

> *We had to report on the number of (homeless) shelters … and then we were asked to indicate what assistance we needed. We reported this to the War Room and the PDMC. The result was that there was double dipping – both assisted us and at one stage we had two to three trucks bringing food from different entities.*

It seems that high-quality data systems were available from the Department of e-Government, but that these were unevenly used in the work-work-streams. Availability of reliable and up-to-date data on the spread of Covid-19 infections remained a challenge, including timeously generated spatially-referenced data. This frustration appeared to have complex origins, beginning with the level of training at the point of data generation, and continuing in fitful difficulties in making the data available across organisational boundaries, for reasons that remained somewhat obscure. Eventually, the most consolidated record of the progress of the pandemic seemed to be captured on a dashboard developed and managed by the GPG's IBM partner based at the Tshimologong precinct.

It quickly became clear that the assistance of partners would be helpful in managing the data, and analysing the trends of the pandemic. For example, a team at Wits University were able to provide frequent modelling services to anticipate the possible progress of the pandemic, and the GCRO assisted with analysis of the localised trends and patterns in the spread of the disease. Data scientists from the University of Pretoria provided strategic advice, while geo-coding work was done by the International Systems Research Institute (ESRI).

Given the wide impact of the pandemic and the accompanying lockdown, it was important for data on other dimensions of impact to be recorded – for example the impact on the economy and jobs in precarious communities, or the incidence of gender-based violence in locked-down households and so on. One respondent noted in October:

The data is still not enough to advise us what to do. We don't have data on the impact on the economy and on livelihoods. We knew from the GCRO's work that there was vulnerability, especially related to access to services. But it was very difficult to know the impact on industries.

One senior figure commented on the issue as follows, noting that the issue of data integrity and usage is a complex systemic question that has implications for the quality of data, for its appropriate distribution, for the skills of the users of data, for the levels of discretion awarded for decision-making based on the data, and for the social partners who can assist government in the complex and challenging approaches to evidence-informed governance:

> *Then there are issues of the availability and timeliness of data for people at the coalface. Responsive governance requires that the data needs to get to people immediately and in a format that they can use. … To what extent is data or information viewed as an asset to be jealously guarded? … We know from experience that we need to focus on the human element: … what is being done to strengthen their capacity to use data? … And then strengthening people's capacity to use the data at different levels (in government), which comes with the authority to use it: are they empowered and mandated to make decisions on the basis of the data? … What are we doing to strengthen our data quality? What engagements and relationships do we need to have between the GCR and scientists and academics to help us improve the quality of data? … The important question is how we sustain these relationships and take them through to the post-COVID era.*

In summary, the availability of comprehensive high-quality information, its distribution and effective use needs to be a foundational requirement for effective governance, but it seems clear that this was not sufficiently established within pre-pandemic government, and this weakness subsequently manifested in the adaptive structures configured for the crisis. Underpinning an effective system of intelligence for governance must be a deep cultural orientation towards evidence-informed decision-making, as well as strongly developed information management capabilities throughout the system. The absence of these qualities, combined with a disinclination to share data within government and externally, stand as fundamental obstacles for effective adaptive governance.

6 Reflections on adaptive capabilities

As noted earlier, the South African government moved quickly and decisively to construct a systemic response to the threat of the pandemic, and we've noted above the structures and systems that were established to this end. In Gauteng, the Provincial Government quickly realised that the existing Disaster Management infrastructure was inadequate, and moved swiftly both to identify suitable physical facilities and to create organisational structures designed to facilitate a synoptic and coordinated response to the emergency. It is clear that they intended a qualitatively different mode of governance from the normal structures of routine

government, and that they quickly moved to give effect to a city-region model, that would have provincial government working hand-in-hand with the cluster of local government authorities in Gauteng. This was an ambitious response, implemented with considerable speed and with little or no lead-up time for careful planning and preparation. The shape and character of governance, as well as the physical facilities for the coordinating core, had to be assembled and given effect very rapidly. Simultaneously, arrangements needed to be made for the continuity of 'normal' government functions under circumstances that would provide for staff members a degree of protection from Covid-19 infection. Under these circumstances, it is entirely predictable that the bold intentions of this policy approach would encounter some difficulties and unanticipated hurdles. Of particular interest in this study is the degree to which leadership would steer the adaptive intent through these difficulties to secure its objectives. Put slightly differently, what levels of organisational learning and responsiveness were at work, fine-tuning the initiative as inevitable challenges arose? What was the extent of established adaptive capability in the face of an unprecedented and fast-changing set of circumstances, and to what extent was new adaptive capability emerging?

Adaptive learning in complex organisations includes instituting proactive initiatives for monitoring, reflection and change, including drawing on insights from partners, which in turn depend on the encouragement of receptive and generative cultures of reflexivity. Learning in organisations is an inherently social and political set of processes, dependent on the levels of trust and reciprocity, and the political affordances of any context (Rashman, *et al.* 2009). Inevitably, structures and approaches designed for one era of government may not be suited for a new one, and so appraisal is needed of the 'fitness for purpose' of structures and functions, and the readiness to undertake adaptive modification (Greiling & Halachmi, 2013).

It is clear that the set-up and function of the Provincial-level Command Council and Command Centre were predicated on the intention for continuing reportage from all workstreams, and the achievement of a synoptic view of the progress of the pandemic and the effectiveness of the preparations, interventions and responses. In other words, these constituted the platforms for collective organisational learning and responsiveness. Insights from respondents indicate that the routines of these patterns of oversight and accountability were rigorously pursued, and by all accounts, government was functioning more-or-less seven days a week. This set of structures, and the determined management of its routines, provides the vital form and coherence of the governmental architecture and its cognitive intent.

The form of this system of oversight was strongly asserted and sustained by the leadership, although some reservations were expressed by respondents on two accounts. The first was reflecting the (inevitable) higher transaction costs of an integrated architecture and prompting the experience of some officials (in both provincial and municipal structures) of 'reporting overload', involving reportage to multiple structures simultaneously, and the logic and effect of the reporting systems were not always evident to those on the ground. The second reservation arises from the constraints noted earlier in the form of some inherited line-department cultures that were slow to respond to the transparency required by the cooperative ethic. This was noted as a concern about the quality of what was reported, in that 'face-saving' responses may have trumped the more frank assessments that may have been necessary.

> *(Some of the officials) were very report-driven …. (Some) didn't seem to think about the implications of their reports or why they had to do them – they were focussed on getting the numbers, and getting everything into 'green', because they used that robot designation. I don't think that they really understood the gravity of what they were meant to do.*

Respondents noted that cultures from within some home line-departments inhibited openness of disclosure, in that critique was discouraged, especially in the presence of the departmental leadership or outsiders, and that this influenced the reporting to the various platforms. One respondent noted the expressions of a newly arrived political leadership figure who took over a Department in the middle of the pandemic:

> *(We could see) his expression of righteous anger and disbelief about the Department! … He said "is it really this bad?"…. He would visit clinical facilities; in his first two weeks he visited 30-40 different facilities. He was appalled by the conditions. He told us that as part of Cabinet he had been listening to reports from (the Department), and he said that all of our principals had been engaged in a huge cover-up because none of this comes up. None of what is on the ground is anything at all like what the Premier's entourage have understood. There is a fear of exposure – everything must look green, even though it's fiction.*

It seems that in some cases this inhibition found effect in the workstreams themselves. This is a pattern found in many organisations, and the salient point is that cultures of open disclosure and confronting problems need consciously to be developed, and local-level leadership is crucial to fostering this.

However, it is clear that the conception of the convergent reporting systems, and how they were firmly modelled by the leadership, clearly established the flows and connectivity that, if the quality of data and the cultures of learning were suited to this adaptive purpose, would comprise the baseline neural architecture for better informed and increasingly collaborative government. Especially at leadership levels, this model was experienced as generative and productive, and future initiatives towards (for example) city-region governance are bound to draw on this precedent.

Equally important in the move towards adaptive systems is the need for vigilance, since necessary processes of destabilizing and changing routines open up the possibilities for unintended consequences. Shortly after the commencement of the lockdown, an audit team was directed towards likely areas of difficulty - food distribution and PPE procurement. The problems in the latter were quickly identified as early as April 2020, and the matter was escalated to the Special Investigations Unit (SIU). This investigation, and the subsequent SIU report on the problems, resulted in the departure of a number of top-level figures in the Gauteng Department of Health, in an important demonstration of consequence management by the provincial leadership.

A key strategy for innovation and learning includes drawing on the insights and experience available outside of one's own circles. To what extent were the strengths and exemplars of partners recruited to inform the adaptive strategies? Evidence gathered for this case study reflects several examples of important proactive work with partners, initiated by the leadership. For example, in a very demonstrative initiative to generate reflection and debate, the Office of the Premier launched a series of 'Governance Dialogues' facilitated by, and including, university

partners, which was initially conducted for figures within provincial government, and then widened to include participation from other spheres and partners. The intention was both to sharpen insight into the current adaptive measures, as well as consider the possible implications for approaches to city-region governance into the future.

An important question was whether there was room for the approaches initiated at the outset to be adapted, based on learning generated along the way and insights provided by non-traditional partners? One key evolution in the approach was the development of the ward-based strategy, which saw a much more localised set of multi-disciplinary interventions targeted at emerging or anticipated 'hotspots'. In this case, a number of respondents acknowledge the influence of senior military advisors, invited by the Premier, who brought particular skills and tactics to the management of the pandemic. What is notable is the openness of leadership levels to advice and approaches from a quarter not usually accommodated in government, and the willingness to move swiftly towards innovative strategies.

7 Concluding comments

> *One of the biggest lessons is that state capacity to manage a crisis of this proportion is dependent on the cumulative investments that a state has made on its ability to govern, do and manage. Mazzucato and Kattel (2020)*

The approach to tackling the pandemic taken by the Gauteng Provincial Government was highly ambitious, with the intention of achieving a radical model of cooperative governance. This was instituted very swiftly, with little opportunity for careful preparation and re-orientation of officials, and under conditions of deep apprehension about the impact of the virus. Under these circumstances, it is to be anticipated that not all would proceed according to plan. However, the fundamental governance architecture of the initiative has proved resilient, both in its effect and in its value as a precedent for the future. Taking this broad view into account, there are also emerging a number of valuable insights around the conditions that tend to contribute towards, or constrain, the approach towards increasingly associative forms of governance.

Ultimately, it is clear that divergent orientations towards adaptive government have arisen during these first months of the pandemic. On the one hand, an ambitious and radical effort is swiftly undertaken to construct an architecture designed to achieve unprecedented levels of cooperative governance, followed by an emergent uptake of associative and collaborative practices in some quarters. On the other hand, numerous respondents have pointed to some key functional areas which demonstrated significant incapacity and/or resistance, in large measure based on dispositions that pre-existed the pandemic. In some cases, these weaknesses were well-known and documented, and an important line of future enquiry will be to understand why long-standing problems have been difficult to remedy. Doubtless these problems have complex origins, and may be complicated by powerful structural and socio-political factors, and a thorough and very frank analysis of the phenomenon is needed in order to design approaches to solving the problem. The fact that Gauteng managed to cope (on the health front at least) with the June/July surge of 2020 should not deflect from the need to understand and remedy line departments whose weaknesses became all the more evident during the pandemic. The insights

arising from this case study suggest that the ability to address underperforming functional areas is an essential component in achieving adaptive governance more generally in the city-region, and responding to current and future crises of this nature specifically.

Finally, insights arising from the case study confirm several key elements that contribute to the successful function of adaptive systems. The first is the central importance of the integrity and flow of high-quality information through the system, and the capacity of staff at every level to work effectively with data. The achievement of evidence-formed decision-making depends on a comprehensive data-oriented culture and strongly-established analytic skills base, together with a clear understanding of how flows of data come together to constitute the strategic intelligence needed for governance. Secondly, we are reminded of the essentially social and political character of dynamics that inform the micro-ethnography of organisational behaviour. Officials are socialised into patterns of performance that can contribute towards, or work against, the objectives of agile and innovative government, and under rapidly changing conditions, staff members may experience a paralysing regulatory dissonance. The task of engendering a population of adaptively-oriented civil servants requires both requisite levels of capability and an accumulated culture of associatively-disposed orientations. Finally, and drawing heavily on the preceding considerations, is the ability to achieve organisational learning, which includes both a clarity of realisation and the ability to act productively (and often collectively) on those insights. The achievement of adaptive governance is never achieved in theory, or in planning, but in the execution of ambitious intentions, and the willingness to confront and respond to the inevitable lessons.

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