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Article

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Monitoring and evaluation strategies: lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unique challenges that necessitate a new approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in local government. The culture of poor performance, high incompetency levels among employees and financial mismanagement – widely publicised in popular media in South Africa – prompted this study to investigate the effectiveness of M&E strategies. The study attempts to determine the effective M&E strategies in supporting two municipalities' response that extends beyond COVID-19. A transformative mixed methods approach was used for data collection and analysis of data. The targeted respondents were solely responsible for COVID-19 activities at the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. In-depth interviews were utilised to collect data from 13 senior municipal managers. A total of 191 questionnaires were despatched to municipal employees and 186 were returned, giving a 97% response rate. The findings depict ineffective M&E tools and inadequate organisational support to sustain best practices on municipal governance. The findings unearthed a linear relationship between the municipalities' leadership failure to implement a performance management system among its workforce and an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases and fatalities. This study attempts to make a valuable contribution in providing municipal employees with tailored work experience that will be relevant for future disasters similar to COVID-19, adding value to knowledge.

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1. Introduction

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns have been raised regarding the state of South African municipalities including corruption, white-collar crime, ineffective M & E systems, and governance violations. Notably, the latter governance pitfalls have pinpointed by a plethora of researchers (Mantzaris & Ngcamu, 2020b; Mlambo & Masuku, 2020; Sibanda et al., 2020). The culture of poor performance, inadequate workforce, and financial mismanagement at a municipal level further highlight the significance of implementing robust M&E systems (Dlamini & Migiro, 2016; Govender, 2013; Kariuki & Reddy, 2017; Levin, 2017; Mello, 2018; Motingoe & Van der Walddt, 2013). In light of these concerns, this study aims to explore effective M&E strategies that can bolster municipal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, transcending the immediate crisis. The main research question guiding this investigation is, 'Are M&E strategies in South African municipalities adequately responsive to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?'

This study investigates and put into perspective the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for service availability. As a result, causes and pressures such as resource constraints are explored as significant

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barriers to the effective delivery of municipal services (Seasons, 2003). Many complicated social, economic and environmental challenges have manifested in municipal government during COVID-19 and need to be addressed (Chaplowe & Cousins, 2016). The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound, affecting life in various ways (Kadel et al., 2020). Governments worldwide grapple with unprecedented uncertainty and challenging trade-offs related to health, the economy, and social issues. This necessitates a new perspective on M&E practices, suggesting their integration into government strategies and emphasizing the need for adaptability in response to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2020; Seasons, 2003).

There is a pressing need for enhanced M&E support for South African municipalities, especially in complex, dynamic development contexts and emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2020). However, the ineffective application of M&E tools in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) and the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCCM) hinders their ability to manage effectively and meet service delivery mandates during COVID-19 (South African Local Government Association [SALGA], 2020). This study's findings have the potential to contribute valuable insights, informing broader crisis management applications and enhancing the adaptability and effectiveness of future M&E strategies in diverse emergency situations.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the relevance of the study and the conceptualisation of M&E as it relates to COVID-19. Section 3 reviews the literature systematically. Section 4 describes the design and methods with Section 5 presents, analyse and discuss the results for the study. Lastly, Section 6 provides the major highlights, conclusions and recommendations for the study.

2. Relevance of the research

This article illustrates the role of M&E in these two selected municipalities in order to enforce initiatives to protect citizens from COVID-19 and to plan for subsequent reactions to improve the national or municipal response against future pandemics (Awasthi, 2020). In dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, municipalities required effective M&E systems more than ever in order to design effective policies (Evans, 2020). As a result, municipal employees need to enhance M&E tools. This includes performance management systems, financial management systems, stakeholder management systems, and data and information management. This is in order to maintain essential services in unprecedented times of crisis in the fight against the pandemic and to ensure community solidarity (SALGA, 2020). The two selected municipalities under consideration have encountered various crises including instances of severe droughts and water shortages, which also contributing to major socio-economic impact (Mahlalela et al., 2020). This situation prompts the necessity for a comparative analysis of COVID-19 with other types of crises to deepen a comprehension of how M&E strategies can be tailored to suit different scenarios.

The impact of COVID-19 will be felt far beyond the pandemic and municipalities have to play a supportive role and move with unprecedented ability to adapt to national and provincial government's changing regulations. The Section 11(3) of the Municipal Systems Act of 2000 highlights the significance of M&E in local government. This section emphasizes the role of M&E in overseeing and regulating municipal services, assessing the impact and effectiveness of various services, policies, programmes, or plans, and the establishment and implementation of performance management systems. This policy guideline does not offer any exemptions or justifications for municipalities to refrain from implementing M&E systems under any circumstances. Hence the human resource management should have continued as usual with revised performance agreements despite these circumstances. This proves that effective M&E strategies are the backbone of successful epidemic elimination programmes, providing countries with important systematic guidelines about when initiatives are required, in order to document the effects and identify where and how a pandemic can be prevented (Kusek & Rist, 2004). Consequently, Fraser-Moleketi (2020) posits that M&E now needs to be located in the broader discourse on sustainable development and the achievement of system-wide development outcomes. There is little or no M&E literature on COVID-19 in particular in the South African local government. This provides an opportune gap which the current study aims to fill. In bridging this gap, the current article seeks to identify effective M&E tools, explores the gaps and limitations in its assessment and ultimately suggests strategies to assess effectiveness rigorously. Accordingly, the study attempts to determine effective M&E strategies in supporting municipalities' response to COVID-19 that extends beyond this phenomenon.

3. Literature review

3.1. A theoretical and conceptual framework: monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19

Monitoring and evaluation are the key concepts to be studied, with a special focus on COVID-19 in local government. To begin with, a monitoring exercise is said to be a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds (Kanyamuna et al., 2019). Meanwhile, evaluation systematically and objectively assesses a policy, programme or project which is an ongoing or completed process, from planning, design, execution and results (Ile et al., 2019). Furthermore, the coronavirus disease 2019 is a newly discovered disease which is an infectious virus (World Health Organization, 2020) that has caused radical instability to governments around the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). The study interlinks these variables in order to achieve a successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to adopt effective M&E strategies in supporting the municipalities. As a result, this study sought to test the null hypothesis that there are no effective M&E strategies and no organisational support to sustain best practice in the two selected municipalities during COVID-19.

Monitoring and evaluation tools are integral parts of the performance analysis of organisations, in addition to the design and implementation phases of plans and projects in many fields (including the COVID-19 pandemic) (Gaskin-Reyes, 2016). This is consistent with the WHO's COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan framework which aims to assess national plans, country and regional response performance and progress (World Health Organization, 2020).

Monitoring and evaluation is used for a variety of goals, including discovering what works, improving and redesigning programme approaches, and determining cause and effect (Kettner et al., 2015). When M&E is successfully implemented, it entails reporting downwards to local communities, and upwards to national government for the purpose of accountability and credibility (Bell & Aggleton, 2016). The relevance of M&E to COVID-19 is that information collecting as part of monitoring permits the supply of information. This helps organisations and stakeholders to access the level of success and achieve goals as well as make progress in the utilisation of available funds (Ile et al., 2019). Evaluation, meanwhile, emphasises the significance of the strategy or initiative in determining the relevance of the goals, the feasibility of the design and implementation, and the sustainability of the outcomes (Awasthi, 2020). Effective M&E systems can promote recovery by ensuring that funds are spent wisely and effectively (Awasthi, 2020). In view of the above, this article sought to conceptualise the effectiveness of M&E strategies during COVID-19 in the two selected municipalities.

3.2. Governance and performance management: studying monitoring and evaluation strategies during COVID-19

The municipalities' leadership failure to implement M&E among its workforce is a significant challenge that has had an impact on municipalities' performance (Ngqobe et al., 2021). This problem could be minimised if the two municipalities adopt M&E strategies as strong governance management initiatives and services (Kanyamuna & Phiri, 2019). There has been an increase in awareness creation of M&E in public and private sectors and organisations (Mkama, 2017). Today, the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) have advocated for stronger M&E systems at the country level, to be used as tools to track performance. This would be for the purposes of accountability, feedback and learning to improve current and future development interventions (Kanyamuna et al., 2020). In light of the need to meet the SDGs and the enormity of demand, the lack of M&E capacity presents a potential obstacle in some countries (Evans, 2020). The use of M&E tools is important in tracking and judging the progress of any project (Mleke, 2020). It is evident that effective M&E is pivotal for good governance and public resource management because it promotes transparency, accountability and a culture of performance (African Development Bank, 2009). A developing country such as South Africa will need to innovate and learn how to continue with vital practices such as M&E under the new restrictive conditions (Fraser-Moleketi, 2020).

In view of the M&E strategies used in municipalities during COVID-19, this study focuses on the performance management system (PMS) as a tool that informs organisational performance for responsible and

responsive M&E (Draai & Zazi, 2021). The change in the implementation of the performance management policy indicates that COVID-19 affected the normal way of conducting performance assessments (Pietersen, 2020). The PMS in the public sector is designed to integrate the performance of employees and the organisation (Malefane, 2009). As a result, this author argues for the necessity of ensuring that individual and team performance is assessed for its alignment with the organisational strategy (Malefane, 2009). It became a challenge to conduct performance assessments during COVID-19 because people were required to work from home (Pietersen, 2020). The lack of completed performance assessments indicates that the system is reliant on human contact and the workplace setting (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021). This suggests that if working from home is to be a future practice, it will be important for the public sector to innovate and develop electronic systems for performance management and assessment (Pietersen, 2020). Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the two municipalities, particularly the conditions of service (Khambule, 2020). By extension, service delivery was also affected as some services were suspended or scaled down as priority was given to essential services (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020). These authors state that municipalities have been required to adopt human and technological shifts in service conditions to ensure integrated human resource practices and the minimal disruption of municipal services (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020).

These shifts could include policies on redefining the workplace, the digital management of performance management, improved leave management linked with working from home and properly managed collective bargaining processes (Pietersen, 2020). This author suggests that in doing so, the public sector could benefit from an integrated strategic human resource system and improved employee performance. Pietersen (2020, p. 446) argues that a paradigm shift is required for sustainable change, even though the temporary solutions regarding conditions of service during the pandemic were relatively well managed. Pietersen (2020) further asserts that municipalities must continue the momentum of considering swiftness when dealing with the conditions of service as this can translate into effective and efficient service delivery. More importantly, the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 challenges should be turned into success stories (Sibanda et al., 2020). The reviewed literature above on M&E as a responsive tool to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities illustrates circumstantial information that is not supported or validated by empirical evidence. This suggests a serious gap in the literature, which requires further exploration by researchers in order to present conclusive evidence.

3.2.1. Transferable strategies and skills

South African municipalities under the pandemic's pressure have transitioned to remote monitoring, a shift emphasized by the need for adjustments in M&E plans and approaches (Pietersen, 2020). This shift not only responded to the immediate challenges posed by COVID-19 but also equipped municipalities with transferable skills and strategies to navigate future uncertainties and changes in the broader landscape. Remote monitoring, although not new, has gained prominence during the pandemic, particularly in conflict areas and crisis situations where physical access to project sites is challenging (Dube et al., 2021). The shift towards remote M&E while beneficial presents challenges and requires municipalities to empower employees with technology and cover connectivity costs. However, this intervention might increase the M&E budget involving substantial expenditures on tablets and smartphones for remote data collection (Ile et al., 2019). Subsequently, the capacity to implement M&E strategies requires to integrate skill development into overall institutional strategies. Identifying skill gaps and implementing targeted capacity-building interventions are key steps in enhancing the effectiveness of M&E in municipalities. Additionally, embedding M&E roles in job descriptions and linking individual performance to the institutional M&E system is crucial. Furthermore, recognition frameworks acknowledging M&E achievements and strategic recruitment and training initiatives became essential components to attract and retain specialized M&E skills (Ile et al., 2019). Furthermore, the scope of M&E extends beyond operational aspects such as strategic elements like policy implementation, stakeholder engagement, and communication strategies.

4. Research methodology

The study employed mixed methods approach within a convergent core design and the results were merged. It was necessary to use mixed-methods design; because it combines both the qualitative and the quantitative data collection analyses and interpretation (Deji, 2019). In-depth interview questions were utilised to collect data and 22 municipal senior managers (heads of directorates/departments) were

targeted for one-on-one interviews. The researchers used their judgement to select the municipal departments that have continued to provide essential services to communities during the COVID-19 lockdown. This includes waste removal, water, sanitation, electricity and disaster management, and safety and wellness. Out of 22 municipal senior managers, only 13 managers were interviewed. The researchers were able to reach the degree of saturation (Guest et al., 2020). The questionnaires were structured according to the specific research objectives and distributed to the municipal employees in different employment categories. The questionnaires were written in English, considering it is a widely used language in municipalities. The structured questionnaires were created using a 1-to-5 Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree, 2 indicating disagree, 3 indicating undecided, 4 indicating agree and 5 indicating strongly agree. A total sample of $n=191$ was sampled, according to the Sekaran (2002) sampling table.

The targeted respondents were solely responsible for COVID-19 activities or operations. In total, 191 questionnaires were despatched and 186 were returned, which gave a 97% response rate. The International Business Machines Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) version 27.0 was used to analyse the quantitative data (Bandalos, 2018) and NVIVO version 12 to analyse the qualitative data. The Cronbach alpha values were 0.888 and the total number of items was 13 (.888 $N=13$), used to determine the reliability of the individual dimensions. The reliability coefficient indicated a high degree of acceptability, in addition to consistent scoring for the different categories of this research (Taber, 2018).

The chi-square (chi-square p -value < 0.001) was used to test the null hypothesis. The chi-square had a value of zero since the fit was perfect (Moore et al., 2013). The p -value of 0.001 was less than the level of significant difference between the number of respondents who agreed and those who disagreed with a statement. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative was accepted since the p -value is smaller than 0.5 (level of significance). In addition, the factor analysis was done to discover patterns and associations among variables (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The factor loading was above 0.5 and was effectively measured along the various components. The standard deviation was made to discover how respondents answering questions varied or deviated from the mean (Quinn & Keough, 2002).

A thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data from the interview schedules and also the one open-ended question from the questionnaires. This eventually provided an opportunity to identify themes used for the discussions in this study (Charmaz, 2009). The research instruments were informed by the research study's objectives and attempts to gather elaborative answers to the research questions. Interviews and questionnaires were crafted using research tools theory (Quad, 2016).

4.1. Ethical guidelines

The researchers were granted ethical clearance by the Nelson Mandela University's Research Ethics Committee to conduct research at the NMBM and the BCMM. During the collection of data, the researchers were guided by the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (Act No. 41 of 2013) (Republic of South Africa, 2013) and maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents throughout the study. This Act aims to protect the personal information processed by public and private bodies, including local authorities (Netshakhuma, 2020).

5. Results and discussion

The research objectives were to determine effective M&E strategies in supporting the municipalities' response to COVID-19 that extends beyond this phenomenon. The dimension of investigating the effectiveness of M&E strategies during COVID-19 was established. This aspect deals with the responses of employees when asked to respond to opinion statements that sought to assess the effectiveness of M&E strategies during the pandemic. Table 1 summarises the scoring patterns. Literature was also used to support and validate the study's findings and interpretations of results to provide additional information to be compared with the existing data (Fouché et al., 2022).

Table 1 reveals that 41% of the participants agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic was handled well in these two municipalities, whereas 34% of the participants disagreed and 24% were undecided. The study shows the negative finding that employees have poor faith in these municipalities' ability to handle COVID-19 effectively, with a disproportionately high percentage of 34% employees who disagreed and 24% of employees who were

Table 1. The effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation strategies during COVID-19.

Sub-dimension	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation	Chi-square test
COVID-19 was handled well	12	22	24	33	8	3,0269	1,17373	< 0.001
Employees clearly understand the monitoring and evaluation system	7	20	20	43	10	3,3011	1,10316	< 0.001
Communication of the lockdown rules and regulations was clear	7	14	11	48	21	3,6290	1,15174	< 0.001
There are adequate policies to support the monitoring and evaluation system	7	22	26	33	13	3,2527	1,13214	< 0.001
Employees' work was monitored during COVID-19	13	17	21	38	11	3,1505	1,22537	< 0.001
The performance management system is used as one of the monitoring and evaluation tools	9	18	29	33	11	3,1989	1,12860	< 0.001
The stakeholders were involved in the COVID-19 response plans	8	12	27	42	11	3,3602	1,07267	< 0.001
All the employees have a performance agreement	18	24	31	21	5	2,7097	1,14920	< 0.001
The performance agreement specifies the objectives and targets that should be met during COVID-19	15	20	28	30	7	2,9409	1,17715	< 0.001
Time frames were set continuously to monitor my work during the COVID-19 crisis	20	23	18	29	9	2,8333	1,29830	0.001
My work is evaluated whenever there is an early indication of poor performance	17	17	26	36	5	2,9570	1,18014	< 0.001
Monitoring and evaluation are concepts for the top managers only	16	20	22	29	13	3,0484	1,28729	0.008
Monitoring and evaluation are very important	8	4	14	32	46	3,9839	1,18311	< 0.001

Source: authors.

undecided. The empirical finding is no different from a previous investigation conducted almost a year ago, as reported by National Treasury (2020). This finding is consistent with a report by National Treasury (2020) that confirmed a lack of accountability in many municipalities and an inability to effectively manage key projects and programmes (the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be excluded).

A theme emerged regarding the managing of COVID-19 pandemic in these two municipalities. The study findings concurred with the finding on the perceptions held by municipal employees. A female interviewee in Economic Development Department at the NMBM expressed that:

I will begin with the M&E practices which I would say, its 50% good and 50% bad. As for compliance with COVID-19 pandemic protocols, I would rate it at about 60% because there are several aspects that have not been done correctly.

A male senior manager in the Spatial Development Department from BCMM had this to say:

Ah ... I would say average. In this sense, COVID-19 has different aspects. There is an issue of personal protective equipment; as far as that is concerned I would say that the municipality has handled that one well because all buildings have [been] supplied with sanitiser, gloves, masks, thermometers, all of that and there are regular checks on people who enter the buildings, so that is practised well. Then we come to the aspect of comorbidities; staff with comorbidities have not been handled well because we have a situation where people [have been] away from work for 12 months since the lockdown level 5 and they have not been back. Yet you see those people in malls, you see them attending functions, even funerals, and post them on social media pages but they do not come to work. And you have a situation where even people who are getting the car allowances are still receiving car allowances whereas they [cars] are not driven for work purposes for a year now; from that point of view, I would say the municipality has not handled the crisis well.

This finding is another one of interest – that managing municipal employees who had health complications or comorbidities were not handled well during COVID-19. This finding resonates with the National Treasury (2020) who established that municipal employees received benefits and grants to which they were not entitled, due to a lack of validation, integration and data sharing across departments. This qualitative empirical finding affirms that risk factors threaten accountability in both metropolitan areas. The competence of municipal officials in management, and accountability is key to addressing and reducing the effects of COVID-19 on citizens (Ball, 2020). This finding confirms that during pandemics like COVID-19, there is a critical demand for stronger, more effective M&E systems, particularly at the municipal level (Fraser & Morkel, 2020; Rosenberg & Kotschy, 2020).

Table 1 indicates that the highest percentage – 53% of respondents – agreed that employees in these municipalities understand the M&E system. This is against 27% who disagreed, with only 20% who were undecided. Despite there being a higher percentage of respondents who agreed that employees clearly understand the M&E system, there is a concern about those who disagreed and others who were undecided. This finding requires further consideration and trust building. This can be done by ensuring that every employee in these municipalities is given the necessary support to clearly understand the M&E system. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Awasthi (2020) who suggests that in the current situation, it is important to emphasise the role of M&E. This is in order to enforce initiatives to protect citizens from COVID-19 and to plan for subsequent reactions to improve the national or municipal response during similar future pandemics. Furthermore, with just 53% of respondents agreeing to this sub-dimension, this reveals that there are gaps and loopholes in these municipalities. This finding confirms the findings of Eresia-Eke and Boadu (2019), who discussed the challenges and gaps in M&E systems, arguing that the absence of the prerequisites for M&E, even within organisations that already have an M&E system, may have a detrimental impact on the performance of the institutions.

The mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension that employees clearly understand the evaluation of M&E systems reveal that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3,3011 and the standard deviation was 1,10316. Again, this shows that a high proportion of municipal employees varied from agreeing to being undecided on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned – that not all employees clearly understand the M&E system. It is worth emphasising the importance and the role of M&E in order for these municipalities to improve their performance in managing and controlling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another emerging theme regards the understand M&E systems in municipalities. A male senior manager in the Disaster Management Department at the BCMM said: 'No, it is only a few, I think that's one of the challenges because there has not been a roll-out on educating employees on how to use M&E systems.' The same response a senior manager from the Disaster Management Department at the NMBM explained: 'On junior level, I would say there could be some improvement where people could be better informed as to M&E, and that this should be rolled out and implemented on a more junior level as well, not just at senior management level.'

This finding implies that M&E is understood better at the senior management level and is not fully implemented for employees across job levels. This finding resonates with the plethora of empirical studies conducted in South Africa. These studies highlight challenges facing M&E systems in municipalities, which are experiencing moderate and significant problems with M&E implementation (Mapitsa & Korth, 2017; Matsiliza, 2019; Mthethwa & Jili, 2016; Ngwakwe, 2020).

Table 1 shows that there is a disproportionately high percentage – 69% of respondents – who agreed that the communication regarding the lockdown rules and regulations was clear, with only 21% disagreeing with the statement. A total of 11% were undecided. This finding is consistent with the suggestion of earlier work as quoted from the literature – that the successful implementation of COVID-19 regulations requires efficient governance, a clear understanding of government policies and continuous M&E (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020).

The sub-dimension regarding the communication of the lockdown rules and regulations were clear and reflect mean score values between 3,6290 and a standard deviation of 1,15174. These results indicate that the respondents were in favour of the statement in this sub-dimension. However, a high proportion of municipal employees who ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension cannot be ignored. This average reveals that there is a gap and a need to ensure that the communication of lockdown rules and regulations reaches every employee.

Although the majority of respondents agreed that communication of the lockdown rules and regulations were clear, there is a concern about whether the municipal employees have been complying with these rules and regulations. One female senior manager in the Economic Development Department at the NMBM revealed an interesting finding, stating that:

To be honest with you, compliance – it's a bit of a problem because even now when you walked in, I'm sure you will tell me what happened when you walked in. There are two people sitting in a small security container. Sometimes when it's hot, they're outside, but when it's cold, the security stays there. That was why you find that most of the people that got COVID-19 in the municipality are securities. Those are the people who worry me sometimes. The cleaners as well, because our cleaners are using change rooms.

This finding is contrary to national studies which have shown conclusively that in instances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, municipalities have to play a key role in protecting communities, particularly those that are vulnerable. This includes careful planning and implementation and the rigorous application of disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention (Corburn et al., 2020). The finding is contrary to several COVID-19 national regulations, relating to section 3(1) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) and section 27(1) of the Act that declares a national state of disaster (Republic of South Africa, 2002). This Act is considered necessary for the provision of relief and assistance, and the protection of the public and their property against the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Republic of South Africa, 2020). The finding above is particularly visible at these municipalities and is consistent with the previous study conducted by Sibanda et al. (2020). These authors analysed the effectiveness of institutional arrangements and governance, municipal enforcement agencies, the efficiency of response plans to the pandemic, and municipal operations. As a result, these authors' findings pinpoint the absence of M&E as having led to non-compliance trends in South African municipalities during COVID-19 (Sibanda et al., 2020).

Table 1 portrays a total percentage of 46% of the respondents who confirmed that the policies were adequate in supporting M&E systems, followed closely by those who had a different perception: 29% disagreed and 26% were undecided. For those who remained undecided, the impression is that they might not be sure about the existence or non-existence of municipal policies. This finding is consistent with the study of Fraser and Morkel (2020) who concur that, although the system of M&E may be in place in South Africa, the levels of performance of government, as evaluated by citizens, remains wanting.

The mean score values displayed in the sub-dimension indicate that the policies were adequate in supporting M&E systems and reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3,2527 and the standard deviation was 1,13214. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect that some municipal employees are in the dark concerning the municipal policies that support M&E. The current research study supports the findings of Gxabuza and Nzewi (2021) – that M&E in these municipalities seems to be at the initial stage and has not been fully established, which is still a problem. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Evans (2020), who argued that now more than ever, each municipal government needs robust M&E systems in order to design effective policies.

Another noteworthy theme that emerged concerns the adequate policies to support the M&E systems. A contrary point of view was expressed by a female senior manager at the BCMM in the M&E Department, who stated:

The M&E still [has] a challenge and the moment senior managers don't see it as their responsibility and [are] not implementing what is really outlined in the framework, then there's a challenge. So there is a gap. It's not really – I don't want to say M&E [is] not effective – I will rather say M&E ... it's not fully implemented. I think nobody really cares. Nobody sees it as important.

Taking these findings into consideration, this result is contrary to a number of studies which concluded that effective M&E policies need to be adopted and implemented to promote good governance in local municipalities (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020; Munzhedzi & Makwembere, 2019). The successful implementation of COVID-19 regulations requires efficient governance, a clear understanding of government policies, continuous M&E and amendments to a weak policy. Furthermore, the disparity in the analysis implies that there may be other policies that employees are unaware of. This is a matter that needs to be addressed in these municipalities in order to promote good performance. The issue of implementation of the framework needs significant change management. The officials responsible appear to be so used to the way things are and comfortable with the old ways of doing things. This empirical finding resonates with Eresia-Eke and Boadu (2019) recommendations that future research should take a critical look at the difficulties confronting government institutions as they attempt to address issues related to the absence of some of the prerequisites for effective M&E.

Table 1 shows a percentage of 49% of respondents who agreed that employees' work was monitored during COVID-19, against 30% who disagreed and 21% who were undecided. This finding implies that not all employees' work is monitored in these municipalities. This finding is opposed to the recent studies conducted by Kanyamuna et al. (2020), Mleke (2020) and Ile et al. (2019) who all concur that the main purpose of monitoring is to identify the progress and shortcomings and to recommend corrective measures to optimise desired results.

The sub-dimension of employees' work being monitored during COVID-19 reflects mean score values between 3,1505, while the standard deviation was 1,22537. This sub-dimension indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on the statement. This average reflects that employees' work was in fact not monitored during COVID-19.

Another theme was whether the work of employees was monitored during COVID-19. Negative findings, meanwhile, were also confirmed by a female senior manager from BCMM in the M&E Department who was interviewed qualitatively. She gave the following feedback when asked if employees' work was monitored during the pandemic:

Most of the reports, you find out the quality is compromised. Also the issue of people who are over 60 years, they were not here; it was a problem because you're not sure whether when the information you get is credible information or not. In some cases, most of the KPIs of the performance information was compromised because there was no movement because people were on lockdown, it was really bad. In terms of time frames, in terms of content, in terms of the personnel available, etc.

This finding has conclusively shown that instances such as the COVID-19 pandemic affected the normal way of conducting performance assessments (Pietersen, 2020). It became a challenge to monitor employees' work during COVID-19 because staff were required to work from home. It will be important for the municipalities to innovate and develop electronic systems to monitor employees' work even beyond COVID-19 as working from home may be a future practice (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020). Monitoring

could include tracking performance, although it is unlikely to establish the reasons for good or poor performance (Ile et al., 2019). This paradigm shift is required for sustainable change, even though the temporary solutions for conditions of service during the pandemic were relatively well managed (Pietersen, 2020).

Table 1 shows a total of 44% of respondents who agreed that the PMS is used as one of the M&E tools, against 27% who disagreed. Only 29% were undecided. This is another highlight of the low percentage of respondents who agreed; when those who disagreed and those who were undecided are combined, they form a majority. This implies that the majority of municipality employees are in the dark concerning the PMS and this leaves a significant gap for improvement. This finding is contrary to the study of Malefane (2009, p. 143) who concluded that the PMS in the public sector is designed to integrate the performance of all employees and the organisation. Seemingly, the PMS in these municipalities has not been fully established.

The mean score values displayed in this sub-dimension – on the PMS being used as one of the M&E tools in these municipalities – reflect that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3,1989 and the standard deviation was 1,12860. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from ‘agreed’ to ‘undecided’ on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the discomfoting situation at the municipalities concerned, as the PMS creates a climate that is not conducive to motivating employees to develop and achieve high standards of performance (Public Service Commission (PSC), 2008). Furthermore, it helps with the management and integration of the performance of institutions and that of their employees (Den Hartog et al., 2004).

According to the theme that PMS is used as M&E tools in municipalities. The study findings have also been confirmed by senior municipal managers who were interviewed qualitatively. They concurred with this finding on the perceptions held by municipal employees. A female senior manager in the M&E Department from NMBM concerned had this to say:

There is no framework from COGTA or whatever. There's nothing – [no] policy, no Act, there's no regulation that governs the performance information on levels below section 56 and 57 managers. Hence in all cities, there is no city that masters employee performance management. For example, in [the] M&E unit, I'm responsible up until section 56 or 57 managers. Then the Human Resource Department is supposed to instil employee performance management from general managers level going down. So there is that challenge.

The necessity for a PMS is to ensure that the alignment of individual and team performance is assessed for its agreement with the organisational strategy (Malefane, 2009, p. 143). The municipalities must continue the momentum of considered swift response when dealing with the conditions of service as this can translate into effective and efficient service delivery. In doing so, the municipalities could benefit from an integrated strategic human resource system and improved employee performance (Pietersen, 2020).

Table 1 shows a high percentage of 53% of respondents who agreed that the stakeholders were involved in the COVID-19 response plans. A total of 20% disagreed and only 27% were undecided. This finding is consistent with the study by Boadu and Ile (2017) who concur that to achieve results through M&E, stakeholder participation is essential because development results have to be defined from a stakeholder's perspective. In addition, the extent to which the results have or have not been achieved can only be established with the co-operation of the stakeholders.

Despite the higher percentage of respondents who agreed that the stakeholders were involved in the COVID-19 response plans, there is cause for concern because of those who disagreed or were undecided. The mean score values in the sub-dimension of the stakeholders being involved in the COVID-19 response plans in these municipalities showed that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 3,3602 and the standard deviation was 1,07267. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from ‘agreed’ to ‘undecided’ on statements relating to this sub-dimension. Much room for improvement is reflected for this sub-dimension in terms of stakeholders being involved in the COVID-19 response plans. Stakeholders are best positioned to volunteer information about the COVID-19 pandemic and if the original problem of concern is being addressed by the developmental initiative (Xue et al., 2013).

Despite the majority of respondents in the quantitative findings agreeing on the theme that the stakeholders were involved in the COVID-19 response plans, there was a contrary view among senior

managers in these municipalities. A female senior manager in the Economic Development Department at NMBM confirmed the following:

Shame, that one has been non-existent and I don't want to lie. It has been non-existent because there's no way that people are having meetings. The only thing that we've managed to do is through social media, but this for me is a problem because it's only able to reach a certain portion of people. So in terms of the media, they've done a very good job. When it comes to road shows and loud hailer, that has also [been] done a lot. The municipality could have done more and we can still improve because remember ... this is a new field. It's a new field and we are still grappling.

This finding is shocking and is contrary to the study conducted by Kusek and Rist (2004). These researchers stated that the knowledge of stakeholders helps an organisation to determine what interests exist and how these can be addressed by the initiative and by the information generated by the M&E system. An understanding of stakeholders is therefore useful in determining results, monitoring and evaluating the extent that results are realised and establishing roles for stakeholders (Kusek & Rist, 2004) – even during COVID-19. This is because many roles and responsibilities require high levels of commitment and only a buy-in on the part of stakeholders can guarantee success and sustainability (Ile et al., 2019).

Table 1 shows a high percentage of 42% of respondents who disagreed that all the employees have a performance agreement, followed by another high percentage of 36% who were undecided, with only 26% agreeing. This finding is consistent with the finding above on the sub-dimension that confirmed the negative perception of employees regarding PMS. It proves that PMSs are absent in these municipalities. As a result, there is no alignment or assessment of individual and team performance to ensure there is agreement with the organisational strategy (Malefane, 2009, p. 143). This finding illustrates a serious gap that needs to be further investigated in terms of why there is no PMS in these municipalities and why the majority of employees do not have a performance agreement.

The mean score value is very low in the sub-dimension that all the employees in these municipalities have a performance agreement. On a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2,7097 and the standard deviation was 1,14920. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension. Much room for improvement is reflected for this sub-dimension, and certain employees at the present time may not have a performance agreement in the institution because of the dysfunctional PMS.

This finding on theme that the employees have a performance agreement in two selected municipalities. A male senior manager in the Wellness Centre Department in the BCMM had this to say:

I don't want to lie; the performance management system is not yet in place in this institution. The performance management system is only at the level of the heads of directorates and that is mainly due to the legislation that enforces the employer to do so. So mainly the people that are measured in terms of their performance are the HODs and the city manager, and they have performance agreements as a result of that.

The PMS is meant to counteract the legacy of poor-performing institutions, particularly to reduce the occurrence of poor service delivery that currently characterises South Africa's local government (Westhuizen, 2016). This finding suggests that South African municipalities need to innovate and learn how to continue with vital practices such as M&E in the new restrictive conditions (Fraser-Moleketi, 2020).

Table 1 shows a low percentage – 37% – of respondents who agreed that the performance agreement specifies the objectives and targets that should be met during COVID-19, against a close 35% who disagreed. Only 28% were undecided. This finding again indicates the negative impression of the absence of PMS in these municipalities. It also resonates with the study conducted by Naidoo (2012), who warned that the inadequate preparation of assessment plans and a lack of strong policy standards for M&E outcomes can yield poor results and recommendations. This may ultimately have an impact on decision-making processes based on facts. This finding proves that it is difficult to achieve municipal objectives and targets if PMS is not in existence, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mean score value is very low in the sub-dimension of the performance agreement specifying the objectives and targets that should be met during COVID-19 in these municipalities. The results showed that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2,9409 and the standard deviation was 1,17715. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension. This finding shows there is significant room for

improvement and that these municipalities need to go back to basics when they are busy with planning. Again, this finding was confirmed by respondents who were interviewed qualitatively on the theme whether the performance agreement specifies the objectives and targets that should be met during COVID-19. A male senior manager in the Wellness Centre Department in the BCMM had this to say:

Well, that goes now to the absence of the employee performance management system, which [has] not been in place. However, having said that, as part of supervision and management, that is just an assumption because it's not something that [should] be done, but it would have been expected that the manager would be able to see if one is performing or not performing because the person is given a job description and duties to do.

This finding implies that the failures of the performance agreement to specify the objectives and targets that needed to be met during COVID-19 emanate from the absence of a PMS. These municipalities are inconsistent in terms of implementing a PMS system and are resistant to change. Consequently, an effective M&E tool would ensure the long-term sustainability of a government that is responsive to the needs and demands of communities (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020).

Table 1 shows the highest percentage of 43% of respondents who disagreed that time frames were set continuously to monitor their work during the COVID-19 crisis, against 38% who agreed and only 18% who were undecided. This finding resonates with the study by Mlambo and Masuku (2020) who concur that the COVID-19 pandemic has also unmasked poor leadership and governance, and the inability of the government to provide a high standard of performance. The mean score value in the sub-dimension that time frames were set continuously to monitor employees' work during the COVID-19 crisis in these municipalities revealed that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2,8333 and the standard deviation was 1,29830. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees disagreed with the statements relating to this sub-dimension. This finding leaves a significant gap for these municipalities. It is disconcerting and illustrates the serious gap that needs to be further investigated regarding why time frames are not set in these municipalities.

A female senior manager in the M&E Department at the BCMM confirmed this finding by saying:

In some cases, most of the KPIs of the performance information was compromised because there was no movement because people were on lockdown, it was really bad. In terms of time frames, in terms of content, in terms of the personnel available, it was bad. It's just the availability and adhering to time frames, timelines. Because remember, when they feed us with information, they get it from project managers. So basically the moment you don't get information, one could delay, it delays the whole report.

These findings confirm and emphasise the negative perceptions of employees regarding time frames being continuously set to monitor their work during the COVID-19 crisis. These municipalities need to consider alternate approaches to continue M&E operations during epidemics so that the ability of M&E to redirect government mitigation efforts is effective (Gaskin-Reyes, 2016).

Table 1 shows a very low percentage of respondents – 41% – who agreed that employees' work is evaluated whenever there is an early indication of poor performance. This was against 34% who disagreed and 26% who were undecided. Despite the higher percentage of respondents who agreed that their work is evaluated whenever there is an early indication of poor performance, the number of respondents who disagreed or were undecided is cause for concern. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Matsiliza (2019) who concluded that South African municipalities rely on consultants and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to perform evaluations. As a result, Matsiliza (2019) further maintained that M&E employees and consultants have limited experience to support evaluations. The mean score value in the sub-dimension of employees' work being evaluated in these municipalities whenever there is an early indication of poor performance showed that on a scale from 1 to 5, the respondents were between 2,9570 and the standard deviation was 1,18014. This indicates that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension. This finding is problematic as evaluations create intervention measures for municipalities to properly manage and to achieve service delivery mandates, which includes operations during COVID-19 (Ile et al., 2019).

The current study noted that there are some contradictions among senior managers on the theme regarding the work of municipal officials being evaluated when there is an early indication of under-performance. A male senior manager in the Disaster Management Department at the BCMM confirmed the following: 'Yes, the strategy is available, because due to quarterly reports, that's where they

see that there is a problem in certain areas because our reports highlight as such. What they do about these reports is a discussion for another day'. A dissenting argument from a participant from the M&E Department at the BCMM opined: 'If "I can be specific. [On] the issue of evaluation, as much as we talk about it, no manager really does reflect [it] in his/her department ... So there is a gap"'.

This study finding partly contradicts the study conducted by Ile et al. (2019) who affirmed that evaluations can be useful for illuminating performance problems, which then allow for the creation of genuine solutions. Indeed, as a rule, whenever there is a gap between expected results and realised results of a project, evaluation becomes mandatory (Chaplowe & Cousins, 2016).

Table 1 shows a high percentage of 42% of respondents who agreed that monitoring and evaluation are concepts for the top managers only, against 36% who disagreed and only 22% who were undecided. This finding is contrary to the study conducted by Mapitsa and Korth (2017) who argued that to properly comprehend the usefulness of the M&E system, the intent of such a system must be openly shared with all employees. This finding shows a significant need in terms of changing the perceptions of employees in these municipalities. The mean score value in the sub-dimension was 3,0484 and the standard deviation was 1,28729. This reveals that a high proportion of municipal employees ranged from 'agreed' to 'undecided' on statements relating to this sub-dimension. These averages reflect the current situation at the municipalities concerned – that there are differing views regarding monitoring and evaluation being concepts for the top managers only. Even though there is not much conclusive or empirical evidence on this sub-dimension, the study conducted by Kusek and Rist (2004) emphasised that managers should be the driving force behind the M&E system while at the same time ensuring the provision of material and human resources to make the system work.

The theme that emerged on monitoring and evaluation in these municipalities are still concepts for the top managers. A male senior manager from the Disaster Management Department at the NMBM gave this perspective: 'I would say there could be some improvement where people could be better informed as to M&E ... this should be rolled out and implemented on a more junior level as well, not just at senior management level'. This finding is consistent with earlier research by Kadel et al. (2020) who noted that M&E must also maintain a clear link with the decision-making system at various levels so as to delegate roles and jointly resolve challenges.

Table 1 shows a highly disproportionate 78% of respondents who agreed that M&E is very important. A total of 12% disagreed and 14% were undecided. The level of agreement was higher for this sub-dimension, indicating that more staff value M&E as being very important. Employees overwhelmingly had an understanding of what is M&E is. This sub-dimension indicates a high mean score value of 3,9839 which shows the respondents are in support of the statement that M&E is very important. The standard deviation was 1,18311. This result supports the findings of Sebake and Mukonza (2020) who consider M&E to be a tool to monitor projects and evaluate service delivery successes and failures in South African municipalities.

The identified theme on the importance of M&E in the two municipalities under investigation. Through interviews with senior managers from both municipalities, a unanimous acknowledgment of the crucial role of M&E emerged. These findings give insight on the pivotal nature of effective M&E practices, particularly in the midst of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The recognition of M&E's importance extends beyond conventional viewpoints, providing a comprehensive understanding of the crisis. This holistic perspective encompasses various dimensions, including health-related aspects like disease management, the effectiveness of healthcare facilities, and the level of community engagement. In essence, the theme emphasizes the integral role that M&E plays in navigating and understanding the complexities of crises, contributing to a more informed and strategic response. In addition, Makwembere and Garidzirai (2021) contends that without regular M&E, which is the situation in most municipalities, irregularities are not detected and proper corrections cannot be timeously implemented. Monitoring and evaluation is only important if management decisions are backed up by accurate facts (Kadel et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion

The dimension of investigating the effectiveness of M&E strategies during COVID-19 was established to address the objective of the study. The findings show significant room for improvement in these two municipalities: NMBM and BCMM. The estimated number of confirmed COVID-19 mortalities stands

at 2,354 in BCMM, while NMBM has reported an excess of 5,104 deaths (Bradshaw et al., 2021). The findings of the study show a low confidence of employees agreeing that COVID-19 was handled well in these municipalities. This implies that there were ineffective M&E strategies and an absence of organisational support to sustain best practice in these two organisations. Consequently, the absence of M&E strategies led to new corruption trends in South African municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Municipal employees are not convinced that they fully understand the M&E system. This suggests that they are not equipped to efficiently understand M&E systems. It also implies that there has been no proactive action taken in these municipalities in dealing with control weaknesses, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, employees are not convinced that communication about lockdown rules and regulations were clear in these municipalities. The research suggests that the communication channels were poor or inadequate, something that has encouraged employees to work in silos and which has had an adverse impact on the COVID-19 contingency plans.

The study findings substantiate the fact that not all municipal employees know that there are adequate policies to support the M&E system. It is noteworthy to conclude that the available policies were not aligned or reviewed to suit or respond to the current pandemic. Furthermore, municipal employees disagree that their work has been monitored during COVID-19. This demonstrates that performance management during the pandemic was absent and that there was no accountability and consequence management. It can be concluded that the line managers are in dereliction of their duties. Instead, they spent their time managing emotions rather than employees' performance, which paralysed service delivery. Similarly, employees were not sure that the PMS is used as an M&E tool. This finding suggests that M&E tools were not formally introduced in these municipalities, giving rise to a culture of poor performance, which continues to persist.

Employees of these two municipalities did agree that stakeholders' involvement was inadequate in the COVID-19 response plans. This finding implies that stakeholders are unwilling to engage in municipal business and have lost trust in these municipalities. This came about as a result of a lack of transparency, financial mismanagement and reports of corruption during COVID-19, which have been widely publicised in the media. Moreover, the study finds that employees disagree that all workers have performance agreements. The latter finding demonstrates that staff are not productive and there are no consequences for poor performance because they are not held accountable for their performance. Although the performance agreement does not necessarily lead to performance, but it helps to establish clear expectations, goals, and a framework for accountability within an organization.

There are differing views on the sub-dimension that a performance agreement specifies the objectives and targets that should be met during COVID-19. Surprisingly, there was appalling disagreement on time frames being continuously set to monitor work during the COVID-19 crisis. Again, municipal employees disagree that their work is evaluated whenever there is an early indication of poor performance. In these municipalities, M&E is perceived as being a concept for top managers only. Nevertheless, the majority of employees value the importance of M&E.

The bleak findings presented on this dimension clearly depict a linear relationship between municipalities' leadership failure to implement the PMS among its workforce and an exponential increase in COVID-19 cases and fatalities in the only two metros within the municipality. This highlights the critical importance of effective PMS in mitigating the impact of public health crises and the need for urgent interventions in municipal leadership practices to enhance pandemic response and outcomes. The empirical finding reiterates the fact that municipal employees are in the dark concerning the PMS. The major findings also show that municipal resources have been abused and that employees have unduly benefitted. The study indicates that municipal employees were still receiving car allowances even though these vehicles have not been driven for work purposes for almost a year. Staff with comorbidities have not been handled well. The findings also highlight that employees such as cleaners and security staff have been at risk of being infected by COVID-19 because they have not been given the necessary support in these municipalities.

7. Recommendations

Taking the findings of the present study into consideration, the study recommends that human resource managers design performance agreements that are aligned with the key indicators of the municipality

and which are relevant to disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no suitable PMS during the disaster; accordingly, human resources led by a specialist should design a PMS that would be effective during disasters such as COVID-19. Employees in different employment categories, including managers, need to be trained on best practice of M&E tools in order to apply this during health-related disasters such as COVID-19. The municipalities need to develop strategies for communication change management. Each municipal department should devise a communication plan that is adjusted on a regular basis to suit employees' needs. The municipalities' policy and planning department should review all policies to respond appropriately to the pandemic and include all other forms of disasters such as floods, storm surges, wildfires and shack-fires, heatwaves, drought and water-shortages, water-borne diseases such as cholera and zoonotic diseases such as malaria etc. This unit should devise municipal by-laws to support the M&E system in order to curb the spread of the virus and other threats.

Municipal line managers should be trained on how to monitor employees – during global pandemics in particular – when people are working virtually. The Human Resource Department and line managers should revisit and revise performance agreements annually to be aligned with the current needs and demands as they relate to COVID-19. The department should also adopt digital tools in order to manage people working from home during this time of COVID-19. These municipalities' policies have not yet been updated to accommodate the pandemic. It is recommended that policies be updated and aligned with COVID-19 so as to ensure compliance with regulations and protocols. For example, because COVID-19 is unprecedented, the human resource development policy on training has been silent. On the subject of social distancing, training – either online or in person – would have an effect on groups as training is often attended by groups of individuals. Other policies may include the HIV/AIDS policy, while the employee wellness policy should also be updated. It is thus essential that municipal M&E and performance management be appropriately designed.

8. Limitations of the study

The limited focus of this study deals with two municipalities; their strategies therefore need to be considered in the broader approach adopted by the South African Government in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. This article deals with the unfolding of the pandemic up until the end of June 2021. Anyone using this article as a case study needs to consider the study's findings in the context of the rapidly unfolding pandemic. When used in a learning context, relevant subsequent events in the COVID-19 pandemic need to be considered, as suggested in the paragraph that follows on recommendations for educational use. Future researchers should use different research methodologies to investigate the type of strategies applied in these municipalities during disasters. The study recommends that the current research be extended by future researchers and be undertaken in other municipalities around the country.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest.

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