CASE STUDY REPORT: REFLECTIONS ON A GTAC PROJECT TO IMPROVE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT IN A PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (PROJECT PN714)

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Contents

Acronyms

DBE	(National) Department of Basic Education
GTAC	Government Technical Advisory Centre
HR	Human Resource Management
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
OTP	Office of the Premier
PARI	Public Affairs Research Institute
RRI	Rapid Results Initiative
SCM	Supply Chain Management
SG	Superintendent General
SGB	School Governing Body
SNP	School Nutrition Programme

Executive Summary

Introduction to the project

- Over the period 2014/2015 period, the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) worked in a provincial department of education on a project which incorporated a number of novel methodologies in the context of GTAC's work. The Project has provided insights for both GTAC and for public sector reform in South Africa more broadly. The following report is a case study of this Project: it aims to provide recommendations for GTAC's further support in the Department and to share some of these insights with a view to supporting discussion and debate amongst those interested in public service improvement.

- The Project was undertaken with the aim of improving supply chain management (SCM) in the Department. After compensation for employment, the Department's largest budget allocation goes to procurement, a core function for supporting learning in schools. Yet Auditor General reports have highligted major shortcomings in the SCM function in the Department over many years. The focus of SCM also spoke to GTAC's mandate, which includes, "building the capacity of state organs in sound financial management."

- The Project involved a team of GTAC consultants working with Head Office in the Province, one District and eight schools. The objective was an improved procurement system with a strengthened organizational culture and levels of performance, which in turn were to benefit the province's schools, their outcomes and the learners whom they serve.

- Numerous other interventions, largely ineffective, had preceded the GTAC intervention in the Department. With this challenge in mind, GTAC sought to increase the Project's chances of success through experimenting with a number of new approaches to project implementation. First, the Project incorporated "action-learning": this involved documenting and formally reflecting on the progress of the Project as it is rolled out and developing a case study of the first phase of the Initiative (i.e. this report). The Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) was commissioned to undertake the "action-learning" component of the Project. In addition, the project used a "rapid results" methodology (which is described below) and, through methods such as coaching, it twinned technical support for SCM and human resources (HR) with support for organizational and individual behaviour change.

Methodology and concepts informing the project

- **"Action learning"** as referred to in this report is a process of reflection and learning that takes place as a project is being implemented. The evolving findings are used to improve the intervention as it proceeds. The process is documented, making it possible to write up case studies from which lessons for wider practice and future interventions can be drawn. PARI researchers documented the implementation of the Project in a number of ways, using a participant observation methodology. Three formal workshops, facilitated by PARI, were held with the project team over the course of Project implementation. These aimed to provide a space to reflect on how the project was progressing and to adapt the approach where necessary.

- With regards to the concepts and methodologies informing work in the Deaprtment – the Project was an attempt to work within a sub-system of the wider organisation with the **hypothesis that change can be effected through developing a critical mass of improved performance** or organisational

culture in that part of the system (such as a unit in SCM). The idea was that this could partly be achieved through positive stories that could motivate for change – eventually "tipping the system".

- The **"rapid results" methodology** was employed to achieve "quick wins" which could motivate this desire for change. This methodology, part of a wider set of tools which goes under the banner of "results based management", involves setting goals to be achieved within a restricted time-frame (usually 100 days). It aims to identify particular challenges that, if addressed, can be catalysts for long term change and can remove bottlenecks which are preventing progress towards such change. Its consultative and participatory approach requires the various role-players to formulate and test solutions; it also requires high-level leadership commitment. The Project included the presence of a "results coach" to support officials in identifying particualr goals, developing action plans for achieving them and monitoring progress on these plans.

- Part of the **theory of change** underlying the project **assumes an essential link between improving technical processes and organizational culture**: technical support is valuable and necessary, but without support for behaviour change is likely to be ineffective given the environment that characterises the Department (we provide a description of this environment in the section below). Staff must be empowered to take decisions and to assume maximum responsibility for their work. A culture change facilitator provided coaching, group facilitation and leadership workshops, and supported the technical team in achieving improvements on specific technical projects in SCM.

- Lastly, GTAC's philosophy in working in the public service is that its **technical assistants should work at the pace of the client department** and to support the client department in taking ownership of the Project. This project therefore aimed to support officials to produce many of the outputs themselves.

- **The focus of Project support at Head Office level:** Here the project aimed to assist with SCM-related HR issues (including the development of job profiles and an improved performance management system), the development of a new Service Delivery Model for the department, and improving procurement processes and systems.

- **Support to the District Office:** This was provided primarily through the "rapid results" process, with a particular focus on improving the district procurement system in support of the Office regaining its order processing function. This function had been taken away from the District Office due to accruals on the Office's procurement system. A second rapid results initiative was focused on improving the finanical and general administration of the school nutrition programme in the District's pilot schools.

Background to the Department

- Established in 1994, the Department consists of a Head Office, over twenty District Offices, many Circuit Offices and thousands of schools. It was formed from former homeland, and provincial apartheid, departments, each with its own functional or dysfunctional systems, structures and routines. Apart from the major technical challenge of amalgamating these organisations whilst delivering on an expanded democratic mandate, developing a cohesive organisational culture to support service delivery remained an elusive goal. The Department has over many years been the subject of media and official enquiries into corruption and mismanagement, with civil society groups pressing it to improve its services. Previous interventions to improve the Department have had little if any effect, other than to give rise to "consultant fatigue".

- Formally, procurement operates as a hierarchical system with District Offices, Head Office and the provincial Treasury responsible for procuring goods and services within given price bands. The majority of the province's public schools are Section 21 schools. They thus have powers to procure for themselves. Few, however, have the capacity to do this.

- Problem areas in the Deaprtment include low staff morale; a poor work ethic; weak financial skills and knowledge; corruption; the fact that many decision-makers are in acting positions; influence is exercised by unions in ways that may be inimical to good management; and the constant state of flux and instability, particularly at Head Office. Relationships between the levels of the Department are poor, as are communications, exercise of authority, performance management and time management.

- Interviews with staff and participant observation in the Department suggests that competing networks of allegiance have developed in the Department, attached to different power bases inside and outside the organisation. These serve to limit the leadership's ability to exert authority over the organisation and to develop shared organisational norms and processes supporting education delivery. These networks attached to different power bases sometimes shape personnel appointments. This serves to shape weak HR capacity, and inappropriate appointments, which has knock-on effects for capacity elsewhere in the system. How precisely these networks operate is not clear; it appears that they are not necessarily involved in illegal activity, even though there is corruption.

- Resistance to change can emerge in part from these interests at odds with the norms of a professional ethos, but can also emerge from the insecurity that the institutional environment generates. Working in this environment is immensely stressful for many of the Department's staff. In this context trust is compromised, and thus trust in the process of change.

- The issues outlined above make it difficult to bring about positive change, with attempts to fix one part of the system hampered by other deficiencies elsewhere. Solutions therefore need to go beyond the purely technical. However, these dynamics outlined above play out unevenly across the organisation.

- Spaces of professionalism, expertise, effective delivery and openness to change exist within the more dysfunctional organisational environment just outlined. This observation of "spaces of professionalism" is important: how to work with these spaces of professionalism has emerged as an important finding of this report.

Project progress and outcomes: experiences of working with Head Office versus the District Office

- There were marked differences between Head Office and the District Office in the extent to which change was observable by the end of the project period. In the participating District Office, clear achievements were made in the pilot sites (the District Office's procurement systems, and the management of the participating school's nutrition programme). In Head Office, there was little support for the project from senior and middle ranking leadership, and little traction. These differences between Head Office and the participating District Office proved very instructive.

- Within **the District Office** (with which the team worked most closely)**, the results of the intervention were as follows:** *by the end of Phase 1 of the project it appeared that procurement processes and systems had markedly improved, with the end user departments now following the procurement guidelines. The practice of user departments by-passing the SCM unit has stopped*

(previously end-users would approach the market directly, and the SCM unit would have no choice but to accept the service providers chosen). Accruals have been successfully removed from the District Office's system. These changes were facilitated by the development of shared tools such as clearer procurement guidelines and a procurement calendar, and improved communication between the District SCM unit and the end-user departments in the District. By the end of the Project, the SCM team and end-users were meeting regularly to discuss procurement issues.

- It seemed clear that these positive changes had come about because technical assistance had been twinned with support for culture change (an approach which is reflected on further below); and that individuals within the district were receptive to and enthusiastic about such changes. However, poor communication from Head Office to the district level, and apparent lack of appreciation by Head Office of the district's routines and deadlines, placed limits on the positive effect that these procurement-related changes could have had.

- **At the school level in the District, the results of the intervention were as follows:** *the project team also observed positive changes in the school nutrition programme. A particularly committed convenor had drawn a growing number of schools into a revised system to improve the programme's quality, procurement processes and compliance with regulations; and to ensure that learners are fed on time and without loss of teaching hours.* The role of the team's culture change facilitator was greatly appreciated by school principals, who expressed a wish that this type of support should continue.

- The wide range of obstacles encountered at **Head Office** level included minimal progress in achieving the HR goals; extremely slow development of job profiles, with their outcomes being weakly, if at all, transmitted to District level; and uncertainty about the form that the service delivery model would ultimately take. This meant that it was difficult to know how far the revised SCM models and procedures would be put into practice. The team's attempts to assist with the skills audit process met with little response within the HR division, a situation complicated by the occurrence of labour unrest in the Department during key periods of the project. A performance management training programme was developed. However, lack of support from the HRD unit meant that this did not take place.

- In the case of the Head Office, significant challenges to Project implementation were faced. The Superintendent General (SG) of the Department was suspended and replaced with an acting SG midway through the Project, and the Acting SG appeared to have little effective authority over a number of the senior managers in the Department. Head Office is highly politicised – in the sense that the distribution of informal power works against or undermines the formal lines of authority and accountability of the organisation. The organisation is operationally dysfunctional, with senior management caught up in day-to-day operational detail (as a substitute for ineffective controls), which leaves them little time for them to engage with the Project appropriately. The District Office however, constituted a "pocket of professionalism", somewhat removed from this environment.

Recommendations for futher possible phases of the Project

Based on the action-learning component of the Project and the analysis undertaken for this case study, the following recommendations are made for a possible Phase Two of the Project. Some of the recommendations have broader applicability for GTAC's work:

1. GTAC should consider continuing with further phases of the project should this be requested by the Department. Some good working relationships with officials and managers have been established and these could provide the basis for further change. Progress in the District Office needs support in order

to become institutionalized, with a further phase focusing particularly at district and school level and with specific partners chosen on the basis of their "absorptive capacity for change".

2. The Project should continue working in SCM given its importance for delivery and GTAC's growing understanding of this part of the system in the Department. Work in schools should be more closely linked to the central focus on SCM. A suggested focus for the culture change and technical work in schools is on how schools can more effectively and efficiently utilise their financial resources.

3. Phase 2 should focus primarily at the district and school level given the prevailing conditions at Head Office, which place constraints on successful intervention. The districts chosen for inclusion in Phase 2 should be identified based on an assessment of their "absorptive capacity for change". The Team suggested that the Project should expand its reach through a phased approach over the next few years. Phase 2 could focus on three to five districts, using the action learning process to guide plans for further expansion.

4. Whilst the majority of Project resources should focus at district level, some work should continue in Head Office. Work in districts requires some interfacing with the Head Office; and some working relationships have been developed with middle management that could be further strengthened to support work being undertaken in district offices.

5. The rapid results process should be carefully deployed. The experience on this Project suggested that specific methodologies such as "rapid results" are not in themselves a solution and can concentrate participants on overly-specific processes which may have unclear or unwanted outcomes. Carefully used, however, they can provide valuable focus and enable clear planning for improvements in particular areas.

6. The twinning of technical support and culture change or behaviour change support (through individual and group coaching, leadership workshops, facilitating conflict resolution, networking individuals interested in change and so forth) should continue and the method further developed. It emerged as a very valuable approach.

7. Whilst there were clear gains made in the District Office pilot site, there is not yet clear evidence (i.e. at the end of Phase 1) of the possibilities of systems wide change through the Project. Expectations to this effect are probably unreasonable given the nature of this environment, the length of time it takes to see organisational change in any setting, and the fact that a set of new methodologies is being piloted through this Project (recall that this was prompted by the observation that previous more conventional interventions have failed). Nonetheless a more refined sense of how the successes made in one part of a district or in some schools will be used to "tip the scale" should be developed by the GTAC Project Team.

Lessons learned for wider applicability

- **This project phase has been valuable for thinking through possible methodologies for working in organizations that do not approximate an ideal-type bureaucracy and that therefore demand an approach different from the formal-rational assumptions of much public administration theory.** Case studies of successful turnaround strategies in developing and middle-income country contexts often credit success to the support of senior leadership. However, change practitioners are frequently faced with the task of leading projects when this support is not forthcoming. The experience of this

project phase suggests that efforts to bring about change do not necessarily have to be abandoned in the absence of support from senior managerial and political leadership.

- It is clear that, even in this poorly-operating system, there are **"pockets of professionalism" or "sites of readiness"** which have the capacity to improve their own performance and, by example and collaboration, to assist that of other schools, districts and individual teachers. PARI suggests that these "sites of readiness" are those where networks that cut across lines of hierarchy and which have interests that run counter to organisational efficiencies and professional conduct are weaker than in other parts of the system.

- **How to identify and work with these pockets of professionalism emerged as a key finding of this project,** with implications for wider applicability. Identifying these sites of professionalism demands particular approach to project scoping and implementation. Given the uncertain and unstable nature of the environment GTAC faced with this project, and which characterise other parts of the South African public service, too much investment in a particular set of outputs or processes at the beginning of the Project may be costly.

- This requires **a degree of flexibility – to adapt to changes in the environment as they crop up and to maximize on spaces of openness to change as they are identified.**

- **Organizational politics have to be taken seriously** as they affect the quality of the educational service provided and the chances of success of any intervention.

- Thus, after having identified clear strategic goals, **a strong scoping or initial immersion phase is needed**, which should therefore assess the broad nature of relational or political issues in the organisation, support the identification of potential sites of intervention, and identify important role players and change agents in the organisation. The skills of a Culture Change Facilitator and Action Learning Facilitators are especially important here – and their input should feed into technical planning.

- **GTAC's approach on this Project of twinning culture change and technical support emerged as a valuable approach.** Previous interventions in the Department tackling only "technical gaps" proved ineffective. Our analysis is that behaviour change is more likely if interventions of this kind are attached to concrete processes and goals (such as technical or administrative tasks); and technical challenges are more likely to be resolved where they acknowledge the inevitable political and relational nature of organisational settings. In the District Office, the culture change facilitator helped to unblock delivery challenges where these are not simply of a technical nature (involving for example a lack of clarity or disagreements around respective roles in the workplace). The focus on concrete technical tasks associated with participants' everyday work environment allowed for grievances, disagreements or challenges to take a tangible form and thus to allow for specific, tangible solutions to be identified. Furthermore, the Project suggests that the culture change tools can also serve to slowly develop networks of support, linking together actors supportive of and eager for change.

- The method of intervention refined through the process of project implementation and reflection is summarised in the diagram below.

STRATEGIC GOALS

TECHNICAL SUPPORT
The focus on a concrete series of technical steps and tasks associated with participants' everyday work environment can allow for grievances, disagreements or challenges to take a tangible form and thus to allow for specific, tangible solutions to be identified

CULTURE CHANGE SUPPORT
Culture change facilitation helps to unblock delivery challenges where these are not simply of a technical nature (relational, political) and builds networks of support (including with unions members supportive of change.

RAPID RESULTS TOOL FOR GOAL SETTING AND PLANNING: Deployed strategically – targeted depending on scale of desired impact and nature of leadership support

RAPID RESULTS TOOL FOR GOAL SETTING AND PLANNING

Scoping by immersion to identify "spaces of professionalism" in which to focus support and where to deploy tools of RR

ITERATIVE PROCESS OF LEARNING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AND ADAPTATION OF DESIGN WHERE NEEDED

ACTION LEARNING

1. Introduction

Over the last year the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) has been working in a provincial department of education on a project focused on improving its supply chain management (SCM). The Project has incorporated a number of novel methodologies in the context of GTAC's work. It provides insights for both GTAC and for public sector reform in South Africa more broadly. The following report is a case study of this Project: it aims to provide recommendations for GTAC's further support in the Department and to share some of these insights with a view to supporting discussion and debate amongst those interested in public service improvement.

There have been multiple "interventions" in the education department in question over the last 20 years (this has included being place under administration by provincial and national government). Most interventions have resulted in limited or no success in improving the performance of the organisation.

With this challenge in mind, GTAC sought to increase the Project's chances of success through experimenting with a number of new approaches to project implementation. First, the Project incorporated a methodology called Rapid Results, which has been used successfully in a number of cases in both developed and developing countries to improve government service provision. Second, as part of GTAC's commitment to reflecting on and improving its own practice, GTAC sought to use a number of insights from other work it has undertaken in the public service to consciously shape the design of this Project. Specifically, this involved twinning technical support in the area of SCM and Human Resource Management (HR) with support for organisational and individual behaviour change, through tools such as coaching. Also as part of GTAC's commitment to organisational learning, the Project incorporated "action-learning": this involved documenting and formally reflecting on the progress of the Project as it is rolled out and developing a case study of the first phase of the Initiative.

The Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) was commissioned to undertake the action-learning component of the Project. As part of a Memorandum of Understanding between PARI and GTAC, the two organisations have been in conversation about piloting an approach that uses ongoing reflection and analysis to inform a public sector intervention as it is implemented. The opportunity to work as part of the GTAC Team on this Project has provided the Institute with important insight into the nature of the South African state and the tricky challenges of public sector reform. We would like to thank the GTAC Project Team members for the openness and sincerity of their engagement in the action learning process. While the name of the Department in which GTAC worked has been withheld, we would nonetheless like to thank officials in the Department who took the time to engage with the action learning team and the Project more widely.

This study proceeds as follows: the next section of the report provides an overview of the action learning methodology employed and the assumptions informing this approach. Section 3 briefly provides some background to the institutional environment of the Department. We then outline the design of the Initiative, the assumptions which shaped the choices of methodology and team structure, and the Initiative's 'theory of change.' Section 5 is a detailed description of how the intervention proceeded in practice. Section 6 analyses the extent to which the Project met its short-term objectives, the factors shaping this, and explores the possibilities for sustainable change in the organisation as a result of the Project. The last section provides a set of insights and recommendations for further possible phases of the Project, for GTAC's ongoing work, and for public sector reform in South Africa.

2. The action learning methodology

PARI's role in undertaking action learning comprised capturing lessons for the Project as it was rolled out; feeding these back to the GTAC intervention team; and writing up a case study of the experience for wider applicability.

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BOX 1: ACTION LEARNING

'Action learning' has been described in a number of ways in the academic and grey literature. It can be broadly classed under the practices known as 'action research' – "solv[ing] real problems while also contributing to [academic] theory".[1] For Raelin, Action Learning is centrally concerned with "behavioral change through public reflection on real work practices".[2] For the purposes of this Project, "action learning" was understood as an approach to change in an organisation, a programme, function etc. in which the challenges and successes of the intervention are reflected on as the intervention is being implemented; this reflection is then used to improve the intervention as it is rolled out further and to inform wider practice. The process of change is also documented to inform future interventions.

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The process of 'capturing lessons' began with PARI making explicit the nature of the problem that the Project sought to address as understood by GTAC; the hypotheses and assumptions underlying the design of the Project; and the outcomes the Project hoped to achieve.

Documenting implementation involved participant observation by PARI researchers; interviews with Departmental officials and other stakeholders in the provincial administration; interviews and reflection workshops with the GTAC Project Team (hereafter also 'The Team' or 'The Project Team'); and a reading of organisational and project documentation. Detailed notes were kept from visits to the Province, and from meetings and interviews with the Team and officials in the Department.

Three formal reflection sessions were held with the Project team, facilitated by PARI. These took place in August and November of 2014 and on completion of Phase 1 at the end of April. A formal report was produced at the end of the first and second reflection sessions. These reports summarised the workshop discussion and provided recommendations for the next stage of implementation. In October 2014, a workshop was held with senior managers in the Department, aimed at providing information about the implementation of the Project as it had progressed and building improved buy-in and support for the Project. A summary report was produced, a copy of which was sent to the Department for circulation to the senior management.

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[1] Gallos, J.V. (Ed). 2006. *Organization Development*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
[2] *Ibid.*

3. Background to the Department

The Department consists of a Head Office, district offices, numerous circuit offices and thousands of schools. When GTAC began working in the Department, Head Office was responsible, at least formally, for the procurement of goods and services above a maximum value, with certain very large tenders to be approved by the Provincial Treasury. In theory, district offices procure goods and services below this value. Each of the District Offices therefore has its own SCM unit (school circuits do not have any procurement competencies). However, in practice the nature of delegations for procurement is far more complex – as we will detail in the story of implementation below (Section 5). Shortly before GTAC began working in the Department, Head Office took away signing power for procurement from all districts that had accruals on their system and / or had not met certain standards regarding financial reporting.

Schools procure a good deal themselves: public schools in South Africa are classified as section 20 or section 21 schools. Section 21 schools are deemed to have the capacity to manage and financially report on the use of their funds (including having control over procurement). Procurement for Section 20 schools is handled by the Head Office. For historical reasons that were not entirely clear to the Team, the large majority of schools were made section 21 schools in the Province, despite many not having the financial capacity to undertake this function. Few schools have administrative and financial staff specifically dedicated to this task.

In the year prior to Project inception GTAC undertook a diagnosis of challenges in the Department in procurement, finance and HR.[3] The Diagnostic found that the there were inadequate systems and procedures in place in SCM and inadequate mechanisms for ensuring that the funds transferred to schools were well managed. High staff turnover (and the short periods of tenure of SCM Head in particular) had contributed to the problem. The Diagnostic noted that, "financial management deficiencies [included] poor budgeting, planning and costing; [and] poor expenditure analysis." Further, "reports from DBE indicate[d] that the department does not disclose irregular expenditure." The Department does not have reliable information systems, including for the recording and reporting of commitments and accruals.

Relationships between the various levels in the education system are poor. Communication up and down the system (from schools up to Head Office and down) is poor. And like some other parts of the public service[4], weak effective authority to performance manage staff exists side-by-side with deference to personnel higher up in the system, manifest in officials often cancelling meetings with their own colleagues to attend last minute meeting requests for personnel higher up in the education system (districts deferring to Head Office, Head office to National).

There appear to be inadequate technical skills in a range of areas, including in SCM and HR. The Diagnostic noted that levels of staff morale and motivation are low and the work ethic described as generally poor. There are many vacancies across the Department, including in SCM, and many people in acting positions. For at least the last year, there has been a moratorium on filling vacant posts due to budget overruns. According to the HR Technical Assistant on the Project, there is insufficient technical capacity at senior level to support an efficient and effective procurement system.

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[3] GTAC / TAU. 2013. Department of Education Diagnostic, Project No. PN714, September 2013.

[4] See for example Von Holdt on the case of the health sector: Von Holdt, K. 2010. "Nationalism, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State: The South African Case." *South African Review of Sociology* 41 (1): 4–27.

As a result of these problems, the Diagnostic notes, the Department is regularly caught in cycles of crisis management. This limits attention on addressing the need for operational improvements and improvements in management capacity generally. The Head Office at least is in a constant state of flux and instability (some districts appear far more stable).

The organisation has been in the newspapers for stories of corruption and mismanagement and has been the target of litigation by civil society groups looking to push the Department to deliver services. This litigation has unintended consequences – sometimes exacerbating crises in the Department and disrupting opportunity for the establishment of stable routines. Interventions from national and provincial level roleplayers have sometimes also had unintended effects, making little impact on organisational performance, but contributing to what a number of commentators have termed 'consultant fatigue'. In the first twelve years after the Department had been constituted it experienced over 20 different kinds of change interventions in HR, finance and basic administration. This pattern has continued.

The Department has had a troubled history since it was first established in 1994, out of organisations from both former homelands and a provincial apartheid administration. Each apartheid-era department brought with it different administrative and HR systems (many of them fairly broken and abused) and different organisational norms and routines. Apart from the major technical challenge of amalgamating these organisations whilst delivering on an expanded democratic mandate, developing a cohesive organisational culture to support service delivery remained an elusive goal. And in this Province in particular, the demands on the system were particularly large: it inherited a substantial population of poor learners and decades of underinvestment in physical infrastructure in schools from the apartheid period.

Interviews with staff and participant observation in the Department suggests that competing networks of allegiance have developed in the Department, attached to different power bases inside and outside the organisation. These serve to limit the leadership's ability to exert authority over the organisation and to develop shared organisational norms and process supporting education delivery. Certain contestations over post grading and other personnel issues (not helped by the incredibly poor state of personnel databases inherited from the apartheid era) have persisted as legacies, still hampering the effective management of personnel and influencing distrust between unions and sections of management. We should note that the relationship between the administration and unions is complex and the boundary between these two groups blurred. Unions are particularly powerful in shaping decision making in the Department and influence, in part, the unevenness of performance management of staff in the organisation. The regulations prohibiting membership of senior management to unions have not been enforced. Many staff in the administration in non-teaching posts have been drawn from the ranks of teachers and are still contracted to the public service under the Employment of Educators Act (with corresponding conditions of service, such as long periods of leave). Interviews with officials noted that this has contributed to divisions within the organisation between those under the Employment of Educators Act and those under the Public Service Act, and to competition between unions for membership. They note that this has further exacerbating labour unrest – which besets the organisation fairly often.

These networks attached to different power bases sometimes shape personnel appointments and other times not. This serves to shape weak HR capacity, and inappropriate appointments, which has knock-on effects for capacity elsewhere in the system. How precisely these networks operate is not clear; it appears that they are not necessarily involved in illegal activity, even though there is some corruption (and it was stated by staff in the Department that a certain degree of chaos in the Department appears instrumental to some interests). Resistance to change can emerge in part from these interests at odds with the norms of a professional ethos, but can also emerge from the insecurity that the institutional environment generates.

Working in this environment is immensely stressful for many of the Department's staff – as interviews with officials was to show.[5] In this context trust is compromised, and thus trust in the process of change.

This institutional environment thus creates a number of challenges for actors concerned to support positive change in the Department. These amount to what some in the public administration and business literature would refer to as a 'wicked problem'.[6] Given the range and complexity of these problems, any attempt to fix one part of a technical or personnel system is hampered by other deficiencies in the system. Weaknesses in technical systems emerge from and then further influence the instabilities and contestations outlined in the paragraphs above. It appears unlikely then that the problems in the organisation are amenable to fixes of a purely technical nature.

We should note that these dynamics outlined above appear to play out unevenly across the organisation. Spaces of professionalism, expertise, effective delivery and openness to change exist within the more dysfunctional organisational environment just outlined. This observation of "spaces of professionalism" is important: this unevenness shaped GTAC Team's experiences in the Department and, over time, shaped the approach to working in the organisation. It has begun to inform an emerging model of public service intervention in such an environment (we detail in the concluding sections of the case study).

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[5] Dynamic Inquiry interviews undertaken as part of this Project – further details provided in Section 5 below.
[6] A problem that is "difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize… because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems." Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem

4. Project design

4.1. Project focus and diagnosis

Taking the lead of the Department's SG, the Project charter (signed in late 2013) focused on improving SCM. The SG was concerned with the Auditor-General's finding of shortcomings in SCM. Furthermore, after compensation for employment, the Department's largest budget allocation goes to procurement, a core function for supporting learning in schools. The focus of SCM also spoke to GTAC's mandate, which includes, "building the capacity of state organs in sound financial management."

GTAC's diagnostic identified inefficiencies in SCM and non-compliance with many policies and procedures as caused by many factors, including instability in senior leadership (such as the high turnover in the SG post and of the head of SCM post), high vacancy rates and too few personnel with appropriate technical capacity in SCM, as well as gaps in policy and procedure (or outdated policy and procedure), gaps in understanding of policy and procedure, and lack of basic supporting administration (inventories and record keeping for example). Furthermore, these inefficiencies and non-compliance were also seen to emerge from what was termed "a problematic organisational culture". The Department was understood as lacking effective performance management – which was seen as both a symptom and a cause of this organisational culture – leaving a good deal of room for staff to deviate from policy and procedure and little support for training and mentorship. This culture (characterised by, for example, lack of dedication to work, not taking responsibility for ones work, a sense of helplessness or lack of a sense of agency, antagonistic relationships between colleagues and so forth) was seen as acting against effective service delivery, and limiting the space for positive change.

The Project then sought to make an impact on both technical gaps in systems and procedure in SCM (and in HR as it affected SCM) and to support the development of an organisational culture more conducive to effective and ethical work in SCM.

The reasons for the gaps in systems and process, high turnover rates, uneven technical capacity and a dysfunctional organisational culture were not specifically unpacked by the Diagnostic or in project inception meetings. At one of the action learning reflection sessions, the GTAC Senior Technical Assistant explains that this was in part because the system was assumed to be too complex and the underlying factors shaping these dynamics too opaque to enable a clear diagnostic.

The specific deliverables under Phase 1 of the Project are listed in the logframe in Annexure 1. At Head Office, support involved the work on HR issues in SCM, work on the development of a new Service Delivery Model for education with a focus on a SCM in the Province and work on procurement processes and systems. Support to the District Office was provided primarily through the Rapid Results process. One of the Rapid Results projects focused on district procurement systems and another focused on improving the Nutrition Programme in schools. Facilitation and coaching work was undertaken with schools and District officials by the Culture Change facilitator.

4.2. Project concepts and methodology

While the focus of the Initiative was shaped primarily by conversations with the Department, the methodology was influenced primarily by GTAC's experience on a number of other projects in the Province and by ongoing conversations in GTAC about experimenting with a range of tools for supporting public sector reform. In particular, GTAC had been in conversation, over a number of years, with

academics and practitioners from the University of Ottawa's Centre on Governance about using a number of practices incorporated under the banner of "results-based" management. This included the 'Rapid Results Approach', which had been used successfully in some cases to deliver impressive improvements in delivery systems in both developed and developing countries. Rapid Results was to be incorporated into the design of the Project.

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BOX 2: RESULTS BASED MANAGEMENT

Results based management is an approach which focuses on achieving outcomes through the setting of clear and achievable goals, the implementation of performance measurement, but also learning, and adapting in order to improve the chances of achieving specific organisational or project goals.

The Rapid Results methodology brings together the group of people who are affected by and implicated in the problem that an initiative seeks to solve. With the support of the Rapid Results coach, the team identifies a goal they would like to achieve in a specific period of time (often 100 days). The goals must be very specific and must be feasibly achievable within the time period. The goals chosen should ideally be seen as a potential building block in achieving broader improvements in the system.

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The Senior GTAC Technical Assistant noted that the Project was an attempt to work within a sub-system of the wider organisation with the hypothesis that change can be effected through developing a critical mass of improved performance or organisational culture in that part of the system (such as a unit in SCM). The idea was that this could partly be achieved through positive stories that could motivate for change – eventually "tipping the system".

The Project aimed to support a positive disposition towards improvements in systems through a number of processes. A culture change facilitator would provide coaching, group facilitation and leadership workshops, but would also support the technical team in achieving improvements on specific technical projects in SCM. Furthermore, the Rapid Results methodology aimed to facilitate 'quick-wins' in the Department: the GTAC leadership hypothesized that where people can be assisted with effecting small improvements in the system over a short period of time, this can provide motivation for or galvanise energy towards further improvements. This process of change was assumed to be more likely where the "quick wins" focused on daily pressure points or challenges routinely faced by officials in the system.

A theory about the possible value of twinning technical and culture change support emerged in part from experiences on another GTAC Project. In 2011 a Provincial Transformation Strategy championed by the Premier, had identified Culture Change as one of the "pillars of desirable public service excellence". The Office of the Premier (OTP) requested support from GTAC in defining and implementing a culture change programme. Implemented in the Province from 2012 to 2014, it aimed to develop a more professional and proactive work culture. The Education Department was one of the participating organisations. In each department, the Project had identified change agents who – after a capacity building process and training in change facilitation - worked with culture change facilitators to develop and support "must-win" projects in each of their departments – focused on some issue of importance as identified by the change agents themselves. An important hypothesis emerged from the OTP Culture Change Project: behaviour change was more likely to be effected if interventions were attached to a concrete series of processes and goals (such as technical or administrative tasks for example). By way of example, awareness about the need for improved communication in an organisation might be created through a workshop with staff on the need for better communication, but change in behaviour would need staff to repeatedly engage in new routines

of interaction and new formal and informal ways of practice. The initiative in the Education Department aimed to incorporate this lesson into project design. It also aimed to work with the culture change agents identified in the earlier OTP Project. We should note that the exact form that the culture change support would take in support of the technical work was not fully clear from the beginning of the Project, but emerged over the course of the Phase 1.

Previous interventions in the Department had worked primarily at Head Office on the assumption that change would filter down to the rest of the system – this assumption had proved incorrect. GTAC wished to pilot an approach that could work through the whole procurement system. The first year of the Project would focus on piloting the intervention in one District and a handful of schools – with the possibility of scaling up the Project over another three or so years. Eight schools in the participating district were selected to participate in Phase 1. The particular district office was chosen because it appeared open to the Project: the District Director had worked with GTAC before – his district was one of the sites in which the OTP Culture Change Project was implemented. Specific project outputs were therefore identified at these three levels in the system – in Head Office, in the participating district office (hereafter 'The District Office') and in the eight schools.

GTAC's philosophy in working in the public service is that its technical assistants should work at the pace of the client department. This project therefore aimed to support officials to produce many of the outputs themselves.

The following diagram is taken from an early GTAC presentation on the methodology for the Project: Rapid Results is depicted as core to the process (shown in the arrows, 'Shape and launch, 'Mid-term review' and 'Final review'), and the Rapid Results approach would be focused on HR or SMC deliverables / goals. This is supported by culture change support, action learning and 'capacity building' efforts (see above on working with officials rather than conducting work for officials).
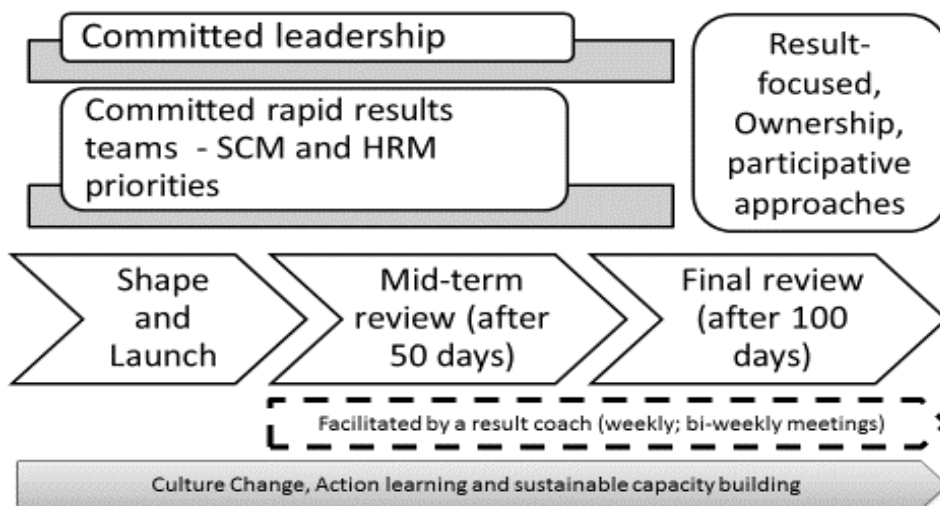
Committed leadership was described as a condition for successes of the Project. As will be described in Section 5, the level of leadership support hoped for was not forthcoming, with impacts for project implementation. However, through the process of implementation and reflection, a model has emerged which suggests some level of change in the system is possible without senior leadership support, or that it is possible to develop some momentum while working to build senior level support. This is an important

finding, as this is precisely the challenge that many public service reformers are faced with in the public service in South Africa face (and practitioners in many other country contexts too).

4.3. Project structure

GTAC brought together a project team from various organisations and consulting firms with technical expertise on SCM and HR, a Rapid Results coach, a Culture Change Facilitator and the team members (from PARI) tasked with supporting 'Action Learning'. Three GTAC consultants were assigned to the Project – a Senior Technical Advisor/Project Manager, a Principal Technical Advisor tasked with high-level client engagement, and another Senior Technical Advisor (who was based in the Province) whose role was to facilitate engagements between the GTAC Team and the Department and support the Culture Change Facilitator.

Each visit to the Province that involved the whole team (Technical Assistants also travelled to the Province individually) started and ended with a team meeting in which decisions were made about the Project. From August 2014, project meetings were held roughly every fortnight via Skype. Over time, the Technical Assistants slowly developed practices for communicating on their various workstreams and assisting each other with brainstorming particular hurdles as they emerged in project implementation.

GTAC envisioned the establishment of a Project Steering Committee that would consist of the SG and other senior level management in the Department, the head of the participating district and the team leaders from GTAC. It was to be the primary forum for making high-level decisions about the Project and keeping the Department abreast of progress. Despite numerous attempts by the Project leaders to constitute the Steering Committee, it was never to meet. Formal communication between the Project leaders and the Department happened primarily through the SG, with the Province-based Technical Assistant helping to schedule meetings and workshops.

5. The Project in practice

Drawing on the conventions of case study writing, the following section of the report takes the reader through a detailed description of project implementation. This detail is included to provide readers not familiar with the Project insight into the nature of working as a consulting team in the Department (one beset by multiple interrelated problems), how this shaped the Project and how the Team reacted to this environment. Further, it is hoped that readers undertaking work in similar organisational settings can identify similarities and differences of experience and approach so that these can be shared in future debates.

Project implementation was punctuated by three formal reflection sessions that formed part of the 'action learning' process. These sessions have been used to periodise the story of project implementation – from February to August 2014; August to November 2014 and from November to April 2015.

5.1. Project inception to first Action Learning Workshop (February to August 2014)

5.1.1. Project inception

The period of 'project inception' is about three and a half months long, during which time the GTAC team meets the Department in March and May and an assessment of SCM is undertaken using a particular diagnostic tool favoured by the SCM consultant. By the end of the May meetings two RRIs have been identified – one at school level and one focused on procurement in the District Office.

Given the complexity of the dynamics in the Department – organisational instability, "change fatigue" and the underlying political dynamics shaping these – the period of the inception phase was not used to the extent it could be to begin to better understand some of these dynamics, to better understand the "pain-points" and preoccupations of the officials involved in the Project and to identify places of support in the Department (this refers not only to formal project champions, but managers who could provide informal support to the Project). What was required was greater immersion by the GTAC Team in the Department to support an improved understanding of the environment and thus to help shape project planning and strategy. This realisation emerged as an important finding and point of reflection for the Team in discussions about how to refine the approach for a possible Phase 2, and is explored in more detail in Section 6 and 7 below.

5.1.2. The Rapid Results Initiatives

In June 2014 the first RRI, focused on the District's order processing (see Box 3 below) begins.

BOX 3: THE RAPID RESULTS INITIATIVES

The Rapid Results Initiative in the District Office: "The District Office is enabled to obtain and retain order processing capability by October 30, 2014"

Earlier in the financial year, Head Office had removed authority to procure goods and services from District Offices that had not met certain standards on procurement and finance. The District Office participating in the Project was one such office. It had a number of accruals on its system that prevented it from being reissued its authority to procure. This created enormous frustration for officials – each order had to be taken to Head Office

for approval, resulting in delays in handling orders for end-user[7] departments in the District Office. The RRI aimed to support the SCM team in the District Office to clear the accruals so that they regain their authority to process orders, and then to assist them retain this function by improving their systems and tools for procurement.

The Rapid Results Initiative with schools: "Achieve 100 percent administration efficiency of the School Nutrition Program in all 8 (pilot) schools by November 21, 2014".

The GTAC team learns that many schools do not comply with regulations guiding the management of the School Nutrition Programme (SNP). Learners are not fed by the stipulated time in the morning and are fed during teaching time. Further there is a good deal of non-compliance with SCM regulations in the buying of food and reporting to the District Offices is apparently poor. The improvement of the SNP programme is suggested as a possible focus by the SG. The RRI will focus on improving the administration of the SNP (improving compliance and reporting on procuring goods and services for the nutrition programme).

In project meetings in June and July the GTAC Team discuss their sense of progress thus far on the District Ordering RRI. The goal appears one that is achievable within the timeframes, but they are concerned about a number of issues. The official tasked with leading the RRI is not considered very confident and finds it difficult to engage with managers above him in the system. Not all of the relevant roleplayers were present in the planning meeting. Whilst a useful meeting has taken place with a Head Office manager, Neville, further support from Head Office (needed for reviewing and signing off on the processes developed) has been limited. Further, the launch of the RR1 (to be hosted by the SG in June) is cancelled at the last minute. A public launch is an important ingredient in the methodology: it is intended to develop support for the RRI from stakeholders who may have some role to play in the process and to ensure that team members feel pressure to perform. By the mid-point review of the RR1 in August the RRI team has effectively been reduced to two active participants. End-users in the District Office are absent from the process. The dates for meeting the RR1 goal are pushed out. The GTAC Project Manager, contacts the District Director, underlining the importance of the involvement of the end-users and senior level support for the initiative.

The first planning meeting for RRI on *school nutrition* involves principals from the eight participating schools and district officials, including the District Office SNP Coordinator, Ms Mbatha. It appears that management of the SNP programme varies across the schools, but on the whole the schools incorporated into the pilot are some of the better performing and managed schools in the District (one of the participating schools has won an award for their SNP programme). Nevertheless a number of the schools are not fully compliant with SCM and other administrative guidelines on the programme and are 'eating' into teaching time in feeding learners.

A workplan is collectively developed and Ms Mbatha is made the 'Project Champion' of the RRI on School Nutrition. She proves herself a proactive leader on the project. Within a week of the first RR1 meeting with schools she has made contact with the Head Office Nutrition Directorate to explain the process and purpose of the RRI. She is to play an important role over the next 100 days in monitoring schools' progress and liaising with the GTAC Rapid Results coach, who checks-in with the RRI teams via phone and visits to the Province.

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[7] End-user departments in this context refers to the other units in the District Office that require the support of their SCM unit to order or procure a range of goods or services for their work – this includes the curriculum support unit, the unit tasked with school support services such as school nutrition etc.

The first RRI milestone (*on district order processing*) is quickly met: the accruals on the District Office system were small (see Box 3 above). The accruals were primarily caused by staff not knowing how to clear data on the order processing system and not knowing how to use the appropriate procurement exceptions available to them. With the assistance of a manager in Head Office SCM, Neville, who was at the RRI planning session, the District Office team are reissued their authority to process orders. Their sense of accomplishment at being reissued this function is short lived: Head Office have made a decision that even if districts earn back the authority to process orders, they must still obtain sign-off for expenditure from Head Office.[8] Head Office is now approving every order for expenditure no matter what the value, causing major bottlenecks in procurement for the district offices. Some of the GTAC Team understands this as a knee-jerk response to the problem of non-compliance by some district offices. They worry about the disincentives that decisions such as this provide to offices that are working to improve their systems and compliance levels.

With regards to a possible RRI in Head Office, Head Office SCM managers suggest that an RRI could focus on the award of two large upcoming tenders. From what the GTAC Team understands, Head office started the process late and have little capacity to check through all the tender submissions. After a long debate amongst the GTAC Team, the decision is taken not to focus an RRI on the two tenders. The Team is concerned that they will get caught in the Department's "crisis response". Given the incredibly tight deadline for awarding the tenders, the Team worries that there will be little opportunity for learning from the process. Later on in the Project the Team reflects that an opportunity to secure the buy-in of the Head Office SCM managers may have been lost in making this decision.

5.1.3. Work on SCM processes and templates in Head Office

In July relevant members of the Team meet with Provincial Treasury to better understand their work on supporting improvements in procurement in the Province. The GTAC SCM consultant, Samir, observes the administration of the two large provincial wide tenders that Head Office is currently managing. Whilst the GTAC team has decided not to undertake an RRI with the Head Office on these tenders, Samir provides recommendations to the SCM unit on how they can improve the immediate process of managing the tenders effectively and wider recommendations on improving checklists and templates for the tender process. As it turns out there is little movement on completing these two tenders until the beginning of the following year.

5.1.4. A change in leadership

The first meeting of the Project Steering Committee is scheduled for July, but when the GTAC Project leaders arrive for the meeting they find that the majority of the senior level management are not present.

In July the SG is suspended on allegations of fraud. An Acting SG is appointed. The precise implications of this change in leadership for the Project is at first unclear. The new acting SG has worked in the Department for a number of years and is familiar with the GTAC Project. He also knows the Project Leaders in a professional capacity from previous work in government. This provides the possibility of continuity of support from the SG's office for the Project. However, given that the new / Acting SG did not initiate the GTAC Project, there is some risk that he will not provide it with the support required. Over

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[8] Districts are responsible for identifying procurement needs, obtaining quotes, appointing providers and so forth, but the final sign off on expenditure is undertaken by Head Office.

the course of project implementation, the Acting SG's support was to be experienced by the Team as somewhat ambivalent. The impact of this is reflected on in more detail in Section 6.

5.1.5. Culture change facilitation

The work of the culture change facilitator has thus far focused on the following interventions: undertaking interviews with a sample of departmental officials to "to access information about organisational culture and climate, and to begin to address the underlying cultural issues that are getting in the way of change and vision";[9] and a three-day 'Resonant Leadership for Results' Workshop in the District Office with 45 participants from the Department, including SCM officials from Head Office, the participating District Office and school principals and SGB members from the pilot schools - the workshop focuses on raising participants' awareness of their own agency and potential for action in solving organisational challenges and developing a sense of group commitment in the organisation.

In the first few months of the Project there were differences in interpretation between some team members about the precise form the culture change interventions would take. Greater clarity on the form this would take emerged out of discussions in the August 2014 reflection session.

BOX FOUR: CULTURE CHANGE FACILITATION

The culture change facilitator uses a range of different group and individual facilitation and coaching techniques aimed at developing the emotional and social intelligence of individual and groups at different levels of the organization in question. The aim is to support participants in the process to feel empowered to shape their conduct and support behaviour change in others that is conducive to a fulfilling work environment. Much of this work centres on developing participants awareness of their environment and how their actions shape this environment. The Culture Change facilitator, Michelle's, approach is influenced by Gestalt theory, neuroscience, and group dynamics facilitation. The work on culture change is supported by approaches that connect the behaviour of leaders with the climate and culture of organizations: one of the founding assumptions is that "resonant cultures produce results and dissonant cultures dull motivation and de-energize employees". Her work in organisational settings is also concerned to support the development of professional identities that can act as alternative source of value and practice to those incentives undermining organisational effectiveness.

5.1.6. First Action Learning Reflection (August 2014)

In mid-August PARI hosts the Team's first formal action learning reflection, bringing in an independent professional facilitator to facilitate the day's discussion. The Team speak of their frustrations with working with the Department – they mention for example how long it takes to pin down officials for meetings. The simple scheduling of meeting and work on project deliverables in the Head Office is hampered by poor internet connectivity, too few computers and restrictions on phone usage. Further, officials appear too used to seeing consultants come and go, handing over responsibility and accountability for decision-making to the consultants. The weak level of support for and engagement with the Project by management was a major concern for the Team.

It is also noted that the GTAC team needs to develop clearer project structures to support team communication and work integration, and that a more structured way of engaging the client could also be found. The Team brainstorms a number of decisions around how to support the integration of the technical

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[9] Report of the Dynamic Inquiry Process, Project PN714, 2014.

and culture change workstreams, especially on the RRIs; begins to plan for a workshop with senior management aimed at developing improved buy-in for the Project; and discusses practical solutions for improving communication within the team and with the client.

5.2. Project progress from August to Second Action Learning Workshop (August to November 2014)

5.2.1. The Service Delivery Model

The need for a changed Service Delivery Model in the Department has been on the table since at least 2001. The Service Delivery Model is the way in which the Department structures its functions and services in order to deliver education (for example, it specifies which level in the education system delivers what kinds of services). Due to a host of issues, such as staffs' sensitivities to changes in organisational structure that will inevitably follow from a new Delivery Model and due to constant change in the position of the SG, the Service Delivery Model has never been finalised. A number of different models have so far been proposed.

For the SG, finalising a new Service Delivery Model has become a priority. GTAC's work is to develop the Service Delivery Model for the SCM function specifically, but delivering this output requires an understanding of the form that the broader Delivery Model will take. GTAC therefore plans to support this wider conversation in order to move ahead with its own work in SCM. The GTAC project leaders perceive that providing the right support for a new Service Delivery Model is crucial: first, it could secure strong buy-in of the SG for the GTAC Project and second, the Service Delivery Model will have major implications for how the entire education system is run in the Province.

The GTAC Team is successful in impressing upon the new SG the need for dedicated resources focused on the development of the Service Delivery Model. In September an external consultant is appointed by the Department to work on the development of the new Model.

The development of a new Delivery Model presents a tricky challenge: if it goes ahead it will have major implications for organisation structures, business processes and so forth. GTAC's intervention should therefore take this into account and support its implementation. Yet GTAC feel they cannot wait for a decision to be made on the form of the Service Delivery Model given that the finalization date is unknown (finalising it will involve an extensive process of consultation across the education system). The GTAC Team feel that a hybrid model for SCM is appropriate given the uneven capacity across the Province i.e. a model in which the better capacitated district offices have full procurement functions, while Head Office managers procurement for the less capacitated districts. This is also the option favoured by the new consultant. The GTAC Team decides to go ahead with assuming a hybrid model in developing new SCM processes for the Department.

5.2.2. Work in HR to support SCM in Head Office

The HR work will focus primarily on Head Office over the next few months: District Offices have a limited role in HR – all recruitment for example is centralised at Head Office (District Offices focuses on administrative tasks). The idea of an RRI with the staff in HR had been suggested at team project meetings in May. However, given the low levels of engagement from the HR unit with her work over the next few months, the Team agrees that it is probably not advisable to conduct a RRI in this section of the organisation. The Team never receives feedback from the HR unit regarding the proposed focus of the HR work in the Department.

The next month work begins working on new job profiles for the SCM staff. Job profiles exist, but they contain too little detail to support performance management – and do not speak to the current configuration of the SCM function. The process of developing the profiles will involve working with staff in HR to take them through the process of developing detailed job profiles, followed by the HR staff developing drafts of the profiles, with the GTAC HR consultant, Sandra's, input, then the HR staff will sit with relevant line managers in SCM to refine and finalise the profiles.

Sandra is assigned three interns to work on developing job profiles – there are serious concerns amongst team members about the limited capacity for skills transfer that the current situation provides. It takes over three months and a number of trips to the Province for draft profiles to be developed which can then be taken to the SCM unit to finalise.

5.2.3. *The Rapid Results Initiatives in the District Office, including culture change support*

The RRI team in the District Office is still being held up by the lack of response from Head Office. Meanwhile, in order to meet the RR1 targets, the involvement of end-users departments in the District Office is also needed. The District SCM unit and the end-users must work together to develop certain protocols and tools to support a more effective system. But the communication between end-users and SCM is poor (despite the fact they sit in the same section of the District Office) – this hampers effective procurement.

Over the next few months, the Culture Change Facilitator (with technical input from Samir) facilitates a number of workshops with the SCM unit, finance and the end-user departments. The workshops facilitate communication and collaboration on practical tasks between the various units in the District Office – this appears to bear fruit by the new year, facilitating improved order process in the Office.

The RR2 is progressing well. Ms Mbatha prepares a submission for the best District in the SNP awards: GTAC's support and coaching features in their submission. By mid September the eight participating schools are feeding learners earlier on in the day, record keeping has improved and schools have submitted their SNP reports to District Office on time. Ms Mbatha has met with the provincial school nutrition department to request assistance in organising a provincial wide *indaba*. The indaba would aim to share the schools' lessons for improving SNP with other schools in the Province. However, there is no budget for such a meeting and the Head Office would prefer not to preempt a provincial wide process of reviewing the SNP currently underway.

5.2.4. *Further culture change facilitation*

Michelle's work in supporting RRI on school nutrition brings her into contact with a host of complicated tensions in schools, sometimes linked to wider contestations over leadership or resources outside the school gates. In a number of these institutions, the post of principal and other positions in the school are vigorously contested by some staff members, with divisions amongst staff members affecting the running of some schools. Michelle is asked by a number of principals (who had attended the earlier emotional intelligence leadership workshop) to provide coaching support for improving staff relations in the schools, which she does. She returns to run further workshop in the school at their request and to provide individual coaching to some of the principals. This work aims at contributing to a school culture that is productive. In the process Michelle shares research into the benefits of developing emotional intelligence about their

work environment. Individual coaching support is also provided to some officials in the District Office and a manager in Head Office in SCM.

In the original design of the Project, culture change support was to include building on the OTP Culture Change Project that had been underway in the Province – i.e. working further with the culture change agents identified in the Department. Recall that the District Office had been one of the participating sites in the OTP Project. While the OTP Culture Change programme continued with other departments, the invited change agents from the Department were no longer actively engaged in the programme and attempts by the OTP and GTAC to convene a meeting of departmental change agents are not successful. Michelle and the GTAC Project leaders conclude that the general malaise in the Department has adversely affected the change agents' motivation to initiate projects.

5.2.5. *Senior management engagement and the October leadership workshop*

The GTAC team leaders meet the Acting SG a number of times over the course of the Project to keep him abreast of the Project and ensure his buy-in. However, by the end of this period (August to November) a proper Project Steering Committee has still not been convened despite GTAC's requests.

Support from Head Office has thus far been weak – manifest by not making decisions on reports and proposals sent to the Head Office by GTAC, not attending meetings scheduled, and providing uneven support for the RRIs in the District Office. In October the GTAC Team hosts a leadership workshop in the Department. The workshop aims to find out more about the reasons for uneven engagement from officials, provide more information about the Project to the Department where needed, and to generate more buy-in for the Project. In addition, the workshop is structured with a view to supporting positive shifts in organisational culture: this was to be done by sharing experiences of working with the Department, to make the wider senior management (i.e. not just those with whom GTAC has been directly engaging with on this Project) conscious of, and invite reflection on, a number of practices by senior management which run counter to organisational effectiveness and to invite conversation from the Department on this feedback. All managers in the Department are invited.

For most senior managers present, the workshop appears to provide much needed space to reflect on organisational culture, and management practices more specifically. The conversation is animated and most participants were involved in the discussion. Of concern, however, was the fact that none of the managers from the HR unit were present, and the SCM managers only arrive after lunch – much of the workshop is therefore taken up with discussions with managers not directly involved on the GTAC Project. It was also not clear if the attention of the SG had been captured by the workshop with GTAC experiencing far less active engagement from the Acting SG than they had hoped for. Michelle regrets that there is no interest shown by senior leaders in the Department to allow Michelle to work with managers to address some of the issues raised in the workshop.

5.2.6. *Second Action Learning Reflection*

The second reflection session is held in mid November 2014. The team considers areas in which they felt the Project had achieved success thus far: supporting movement on an appropriate Service Delivery Model, the facilitation of communication between the SCM officials and end-user departments in the District Office appeared to be supporting progress towards the RRI goal; and the very good progress on the RR2 on school nutrition. Further, the Project had also generated interest from other government stakeholders in the Province, such as the OTP and the Province Planning Commission; offering potential

networks of support for the project if further implemented. There was still much concern, however, about the weak engagement of Head Office, especially of senior HR managers.

It was agreed that the Project should continue with an 'adaptive' approach to intervention: i.e. noting pockets of success and noting areas where the Project could help to get the buy-in of managers. The workshop facilitator notes that the Team should nevertheless develop the model of the intervention in a more concrete way (the methodologies used and the theory of change about precisely how successes in one area could be leveraged to effect changes in another part of the system).

5.3. Final period of project implementation (November 2014 to April 2015)

5.3.1.   Changes in the Department

At the beginning of the new year there a number of significant changes in SCM. First, a group of consultants have been brought in by the CFO to work on getting out the two large tenders (referred to in section 5.1.2 above). Second, a team has been seconded to the Department by the Provincial Treasury to work in SCM (on contract management, IT procurement and infrastructure procurement in particular), as well as in HR. In February the GTAC team flies to the Province to meet with Treasury to find out more about their work in the Department; a number of other teams working on interventions in the Department are also present at the meeting (including the OTP).

By April the Treasury intervention has seen accounting authority taken away from the SG, leaving him in an ambiguous position of authority. A new, 'acting' Accounting Officer is appointed from the Provincial Treasury. The precise reasons for this intervention are not clear. Treasury will be undertaking a major review of the Department's delegations framework (i.e. looking at which levels in the education system should procure goods and services and to what value). The GTAC Team worry that the Provincial Treasury intervention is taking little cognisance of the fragile institutional environment of the Department – possibly further adding to its instability.

Despite the Provincial Treasury intervention, the process of developing a new Service Delivery Model appears to be going ahead. However, the precise form the Delivery Model will take and when it will be implemented is still unclear. Some of the systems and processes developed by GTAC can still be applied even if a hybrid model is not adopted. However, uncertainty around its adoption (and uncertainty around the form of the latest Provincial Treasury intervention) will need to reduce for the organisation to invest time in adopting the improved systems proposed by GTAC and to resource this appropriately.

5.3.2.   HR work to support SCM in Head Office

At the beginning of the new year, draft job profiles have still not been finalised by the HR officials (interns) working with Sandra on the project. Sandra is given the go-ahead from the GTAC project leaders to work on the job profiles herself. The business process for the development of job profiles is also mapped by Sandra for the department to use in future. One of the managers contacts Sandra to obtain copies of the new profiles so he can start using them in the performance management of his staff (the job profiles were sent to the acting head of SCM, but he had not yet circulated them to his managers by the time the action learning team undertook interviews in late April). The extent to which the new job profiles will be used is unclear. Unfortunately capacity building on the development of job profiles in the HR unit has been limited to the training of three interns.

Sandra also attempts to start the skills audit process, but receives little response from the relevant official in HR and a decision is taken that she should work directly with the SCM managers on the skills audit. However, by this stage labour unrest in the department (which continues until at least the end of Phase 1 in April) make conducting a skills audit unwise and it is agreed that Sandra will develop the templates and processes for conducting the skills audit and send this to the acting head of SCM to be able to use when the climate is more conducive.

By the end of April 2015 a performance management training programme was outlined, though training was not undertaken given that this relied on the engagement of the HRD unit, which was not forthcoming. For the same reason, improved performance management contracts are not able to be developed by the end of Phase 1.

5.3.3. The Rapid Results Initiatives in the District Office

When the action learning team visited the District Office at the end of Phase 1 they learnt from the SCM team that procurement has improved markedly: whilst the RRI was not achieved within the planned timeframes, the end-users are now following the guidelines for procurement and the SCM team and end-users now meet regularly to discuss procurement issues. The approach of twinning technical assistance with culture change support appears to have been very successful in ensuring this outcome. On monthly visits to the District Office, the Culture Change facilitator checked on the relationship between SCM and end-users and helped them address a number of small issues as they cropped up.

The District Director has expressed his pleasure with the progress made in improving procurement practice in his Office; he notes that staff have felt supported and motivated by GTAC's presence in the office over the last year. The District Director plans to send the procurement calendar to Head Office to help him better manage regular requests for information or meetings with Head office that take no account of the district office's routines and deadlines. It is here, in the relationship between the Head Office and the District Office, that both he and the GTAC Team feel they have made little impact. Head Office involvement in the RR1 (despite being included as part of the RR1 team in the original planning workshop) has been minimal and the poor relationship between Head Office and the District Office persists.

With regards to the RRI on school nutrition, there has unfortunately been no formal commitment from the District management for a District Indaba. However, by this time Ms Mbatha has brought in more schools to participate in the programme to improve SNP, using the RR2 plans and lessons to support these schools. The RRI on school nutrition has been a success for the participating schools. They have improved reporting on SNP, compliance with regulations has improved and schools have instituted simple, but effective routines to ensure that learners are fed on time, with reductions in the loss of teaching time. In one of the eight schools progress on improving the SNP has been far less impressive, largely it appears, as a result of the staff tensions in the school.

5.3.4. Culture change work in schools

Michelle's coaching and facilitation work in schools continues until the end of Phase 1. One of the principals is a fairly senior SADTU member in the District, who expresses an interest in Michelle undertaking facilitation work with the union, which Michelle sees as an important opportunity to start to engage constructively with this key stakeholder. While no such session has been scheduled by the end of the Project, Michelle has kept in contact with the principal.

The Culture Change facilitator's work in assisting school leadership was greatly appreciated by the principals who approached Michelle to conduct this work. They have expressed their desire for continued support.

5.3.5. *Engagements with senior executive and closure of Phase 1*

In March 2015 the GTAC Project Manager and Principal Technical Advisor fly down for a scheduled Project Steering Committee meeting with the senior management in Head Office. Once again the meeting is not to happen and the Project close out meeting with the client is cancelled by the Department at the last minute, though the GTAC team leaders manage to meet with the SG that week.

5.3.6. *Final action learning reflection (April 2015)*

The final reflection session focuses primarily on debating whether there was sufficient evidence to justify continued support from GTAC in the Department, and making decisions about the approach and sites of intervention in a possible Phase 2.

The Team decide that there is sufficient justification for motivating for a continuation of the Project in the Department. Some good working relationships have been established with officials and managers in the Department that could provide a basis for further change; and the progress made in the District Office requires further support to ensure it is institutionalised.

The Project should continue working in SCM given its importance for delivery and GTAC's growing understanding of this part of the system in the Department. Work in schools should be more closely linked to the central focus on SCM. A suggested focus for the culture change and technical work in schools is on how schools can more effectively and efficiently utilise their resources.

Phase 2 should focus primarily on district office and schools and districts chosen for inclusion in Phase 2 should be identified based on an assessment of their "absorptive capacity for change". The Team suggested that the Project should expand its reach through a phased approach over the next few years. Phase 2 could focus on three to five districts, using the action learning process to guide plans for further expansion.

Whilst the majority of Project resources should focus at district level, some work will continue in Head Office. Work in districts requires some interfacing with the Head Office; some working relationships have been developed with middle management that could be further strengthened to support work being undertaken in district offices. Finally, keeping abreast of developments on the Service Delivery Model (developed at Head Office) was considered important.

GTAC will work to build the support of the MEC and to bring him in as the "symbolic" Project Champion whilst aiming to get access to senior level managers where they can, attending existing senior level management meetings. Obtaining a slot on the agenda of regular meetings was considered more likely than the scheduling of separate meetings on the Project.

Should clearer support for the Project from the SG emerge in the course of Phase 2, the idea was mooted of placing a dedicated GTAC Technical Assistant in the Department who would provide daily project support in the Department, liaise between the Department and GTAC and build further support for the Project in senior management.

6. Reflections on the Project design, implementation and impact

The Project has provided valuable insight for refining an emerging approach for GTAC's work. We should note that where successes in the Department have been achieved these are likely quite fragile and in need of further support to ensure they are institutionalised (in the District Office for example, in the schools in which Michelle has worked). Furthermore, successes have been fairly small when considered in relation to the resources and time dedicated to the Project. Much of this can be accounted for by the very challenging institutional environment that characterises the Department (which we explore in more detail below). Nevertheless the method and structure of the Project can be refined in a number of ways to improve the possibilities and extent of change.

The Project has piloted a range of methodologies or tools: this included the use of the Rapid Results methodology, action learning and the twinning of culture change and technical support. The Project has also been a pilot in another important respect: it provides insight into what kinds of approaches are better suited (at least in the South African context) for interventions in poorly functioning, politicised[10] environments. The test is whether the methodologies referenced above work in such an institutional setting and how they would be deployed to achieve change at scale in the organisation.

6.1. Institutional challenges to change

The Team's experiences working in Head Office and in the District Office (including participating schools) emerged over time as quite different. In the latter site the Team developed a sense of greater achievement, for reasons we reflect on further below. Recall that in Head Office, GTAC's focus was on HR issues in SCM, work on the development of a new Service Delivery Model and work on procurement processes and systems. Support to the District Office was provided through the RRI process (on order processing and the Nutrition Programme), with additional facilitation and coaching work undertaken with schools and District officials by the Culture Change facilitator.

At Head Office, work on the HR workstream received the least support and engagement from management, with impacts on the Technical Assistant's ability to deliver all of the planned outputs. The SCM Technical Assistant also struggled at first to ensure adequate time with SCM managers, and the Culture Change Facilitator received little response to her offers of group facilitation and coaching.

There appears to have been some active resistance to the Project by some managers in the Head Office. Providing support to the Project also required time from managers: there are too many vacancies in senior and technical posts the Department, skilled personnel take on a greater burden of work and senior staff appear to undertake the work of more junior officials. The GTAC Team came to describe the Department as an "upside down organisation" – one in which report writing, planning and substantive content work is delegated to junior staff to undertake, whilst senior managers are caught up in administrative, day-to-day operations (for example, payment of teachers, signing off on all expenditure across the entire provincial education system).

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[10] We use the term 'political' in the formal sense of denoting the distribution of formal and informal power and the relationships of power between individual and group actors. And the term 'politicised' to refer to a situation in which the distribution informal power works against or undermines the formal lines of authority and accountability of the organisation.

The change in leadership of the SG also influenced the support the Project received. The former SG, who initiated the Project, was more engaged with and publically more supportive of the Project. The ambivalent support for the Project by the Acting SG may well be shaped by his precarious position as acting head (within the organisational environment outlined in this study): this may have constrained his effective power to manage and back processes of change. As we were to discover, he exerted uneven authority over his senior team of managers. The GTAC Team may have relied too heavily on one leader (the Acting SG) to build support for the Project; it is probably worth attempting to slowly develop rapport with a few more senior managers in Phase 2. Certainly there were numerous attempts by GTAC to constitute the Project Steering Committee over the year.

The GTAC Team did experience a degree of collaboration and support from some middle level managers in Head Office (at Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director level), especially when these managers recognised the value for their own work in particular outputs being developed by the Team. Whilst this level of management does not have power to make decisions regarding systems wide change, they can be valuable for unblocking minor delivery challenges at an operational level and have working knowledge of system and processes that the technical assistants require to undertake their work. We understand from technical consultants who have worked in the Department that this layer of management is also more stable than Chief Director and Deputy-Director General level.

In contrast to the Team's experiences in Head Office, the work in the District Office has achieved clearer successes. The Project has benefited from the support of the District Director (even if his active involvement ebbed and flowed over the course of the year).

The District Office can be described as a space of professionalism in the wider education system in the Province. Certainly there is much need for improvement in the operations and organisational culture of the Office. Routines and norms considered taken for granted by more effective organisations (such as the simple scheduling of meetings to resolve operational issues) are not sufficiently in place in the District Office. The Director gets pulled into far too many day-to-day administrative issues and into meetings at Head Office. Staff meetings are scheduled through elaborate rituals of agenda setting and (printed and hand-delivered) letters of approval requiring the District Director's signature (even for low level meetings between units on operational matters). Gender dynamics and generational conflict sometimes inhibit effective communication and decision-making. As a result basic problems are often not resolved between different units in the Office. Procurement was improved through the RR1 process in the District Office largely because the relevant GTAC Team members were able to facilitate constructive conversation across units in the Department. There was nonetheless an 'openness' to this conversation amongst District officials in the first place and a set of incentives that supported compliance once improved tools and communication mechanisms were in place. This is an important insight for future work in the Department and for the Project by GTAC more broadly: identifying spaces of professionalism may be vital to ensure some level of Project success. We discuss this further in the recommendations section (section 7).

6.2. Taking organisational politics seriously

In an institutional environment as complex and opaque as that of the Department, a very precise diagnostic of the nature of organisational politics affecting the Department is likely not possible. However, some sense of how this plays out can be discerned, and discussion and debate about the form this takes is valuable for informing practice (for informing the sites of possible intervention, the methods of culture

change support and so forth). All organisations are political in nature to some extent.[11] An organisation's institutional history shapes the form of this politics and in turn this politics will influence organisational norms, practices, values and workplace identities (organisational culture)[12]. Only by the second action learning workshop did a more explicit discussion of some of these dynamics emerge and by the end of Phase 1 had informed some useful ideas about how to negotiate some of these challenges in the next Phase of the Project.

At the last action learning session in April, the Team agreed that participating districts in a possible Phase 2 would need to have some level of absorptive capacity for change, or "readiness for change", in order for the Project to achieve meaningful results. Leadership support would be one component of this "readiness". *We suggest furthermore that such sites are likely (in the context of the particular dynamics at play in the Department) to be those sites where the kinds of networks we described in Section 3 (which cut across lines of hierarchy and which have interests that run counter to organisational efficiencies and professional conduct) are weaker than in other parts of the system. These sites are what we can describe as "spaces of professionalism".* An assessment of whether a site constitutes a pocket of professionalism is certainly tricky, but it does not require us to know precisely how such networks work, and as a Team member pointed out, this will probably be difficult for us to know. What might be useful is a more in-depth scoping phase – further details are discussed below.

6.3. Project design and planning

The Team's work was affected by the degree to which the Department was in flux (this flux appears to be a fairly constant feature of the Department). In the one year in which the Team worked in the organisation the SG changed, the head of SCM in Head Office changed (with a period in which the position was vacant), a major external consulting intervention had just finished and a major Provincial Treasury intervention began! *In contexts such as this, too much investment in a particular set of outputs or processes at the beginning of the Project may be unwise.*

Negotiating this institutional space therefore required a degree of flexibility of approach in project implementation – in order to deal with changes in the environment as they crop up and to maximize on spaces of openness to change as they are identified. Project implementation did involve a degree of flexibility or adaptability. For example, the Culture Change facilitator worked flexibly in the District Office, shifting emphasis in the District Office from individual coaching and team coaching on general leadership issues to supporting the teams with specific challenges cropping up in their day-to-day work and linking leadership coaching to these issues. However, as mentioned earlier, the inception phase of the Project was not sufficiently in-depth to provide the textured detail about organisational politics, sites of resistance and sites of support or openness – as a result a good deal of sincere effort was spent on the HR workstream with limited output, and the RRI in the District Office assumed a level of support from Head Office that was not forthcoming.

Further, Team members have noted that the Project involved a methodology / approach and ways of working together as a team that were new to them (and indeed the Project was both piloting a number of approaches GTAC had not used before and piloting how they might be integrated) – developing a sense of how these various components worked and what was required of them took some time.

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[11] We use the term 'political' in the formal sense of denoting the distribution of formal and informal power and the relationships of power between individual and group actors.

[12] And these in turn will influence organisational politics!

In Phase 2 we suggest that an adaptable approach should be supported by a more in-depth period of project scoping and planning, one that involves a period of immersion in the Department – regular visits to the Deparmtent for formal meetings and interviews and informal conversations. This would then be followed by an iterative process of evaluation and further planning supported by the action learning team. Such a stage of project scoping and planning would involve the entire team. It could then be used to share observations, to develop an integrated project design, and to develop a shared work approach as a team. This is a departure from the usual approach in which a diagnostic and outline of a project design is developed by GTAC prior to commissioning and contracting the technical assistants.

The scoping or "immersion phase" proposed would focus on identifying sites of opportunity and matching different tools (such as RRI) to the context: where might we find a strong Project Champion? Which section of the office appears more hungry for change? Which players are key to draw into an RRI team (for example)? How can their interest be developed? A more detailed scoping phase might have helped truncate the RR1 process (remember that the RR1 process took nine months rather than three) - leaving more time for institutionalisation of the positive changes made in SCM. Certainly, this would not have resolved all the hold-ups in meeting the RR1 goal in 100 days – Head Office support was also needed; and this support was effectively not forthcoming.

The Dynamic Inquiry interviews are an important tool here. And the action learning team can piggy-back the interviews other Technical Assistants and facilitators undertake, or can read notes and transcripts, helping the team to make decisions about precisely where to focus support, when to bring in the Rapid Results methodology and how culture change and technical work can be twinned. More in-depth joint planning sessions early on in the Project would be an important tool to support this process.

Given that the planning phase just described cannot fully identify all opportunities and obstacles, the Project should continue to incorporate a degree of flexibility, supported by a more consciously iterative process of assessment and adaptation of design. Monthly project meetings and action learning sessions would therefore focus as much on reviewing the approach / process and team structure as on on reviewing outputs (this was done to some extent) i.e. discussion would be 'method-lead' as much as 'output-lead', underpinned by constant reference back to key strategic goals that have been workshopped with the client. The action learning team therefore have a key role to play in supporting an on-going reflection on method / process, interfacing more regularly with the project leaders.

6.4. Developing presence and familiarity

Some of the success in the RR1 in the District Office can possibly be attributed to the amount of time that GTAC team members spent on site. This helped to develop a rapport with officials and for the team members to develop a more refined sense of the institutional environment. In the second half of the Project, the Culture Change facilitator spent a good deal of time popping into people offices, having informal conversations. This helped her identify some of the relational and technical issues that required attention. Potentially this approach can feed into the planning process mentioned above, by helping to identify what kind of change is possible, with whose support etc.

Whilst engagement by Head Office officials has been generally poor and a large scale project with Head Office unwise given the current environment, there may be some room to test whether a more regular, quiet presence in Head Office (the SCM unit offered GTAC a permanent desk in the office) could develop greater engagement with middle level management (with whom some rapport was developed) and provide

a better understanding of the dynamics hampering change in this level of the organisation. The nature of the institutional environment in the Department may require a locally-based or locally-available team, and may require the team itself to meet more regularly, supported by the action learning process.

6.5. A tool for change: twinning culture change and technical support

The approach of twinning culture change and technical support emerged as a valuable approach. It was relatively new approach for the Team and a clearer sense of how these processes would work together emerged over time. The potential of this approach emerged specifically through the RR1 in the District Office, where culture change work and technical work were fully integrated.

The support of GTAC in the District Office has lead to end-users now following the guidelines for procurement, and providing information to the SCM unit about their procurement requirements in a timelier manner, with the SCM team and end-users now meeting regularly to discuss procurement issues.

After the fairly desultory start to the RRI in the District Office, the Culture Change facilitator was successful in bringing back the end-user departments into the RRI process. She then guided the group through an initial period of confrontation to begin to start working collectively on a number of concrete deliverables. The SCM Technical Assistant provided advice on how to best structure these tools for more effective procurement and provided ad-hoc advice on how to resolve certain technical issues as they cropped up. The RR1 workplan and support from the Rapid Results coach appears to have articulated a clear goal towards which attention could be directed and a set of concrete steps for reaching that goal. The process of the RR1 (combining all these elements just mentioned) appears to have been more important in facilitating improving procurement than the technical tools themselves.

This does not mean that the technical work could have been substituted by culture change work to improve procurement (though there remains ample need for individual management coaching and other culture change support!). First, while pockets of very good expertise on SCM were evident (mainly in Head Office), there was a clear need for basic technical advice from the SCM unit in the District Office. Furthermore, the focus on a particular process or issue (in this case – order processing and the poor relationship between SCM and end-users) appears to have allowed the grievances of various participants to take a very tangible form and thus for specific solutions to be proposed. At the same time, the expertise of a facilitator experienced in managing group conflict and getting participants to see the potential and value of changes in practice and attitude was also important.

The Culture Change Facilitator has suggested that further coaching work can be provided after the buy-in and trust of the Team has been developed through successes on more technical tasks (supported by facilitation work).

To fully support the behaviour change objectives requires technical assistants to posses a set of skills not necessarily core to their usual work. Michelle stressed that the way the team members interact with the client should support the behaviour change objectives (helping the client to become conscious of their behaviour when interacting with the Team, working within organisational practice and pace to obtain access to officials and so forth). A workshop with all team members on this topic near the beginning of a project / next phase of the Project would be valuable.

6.6. Rapid Results methodology: choosing the right focus, support and timing

The Rapid Results process in the District Office when supported by the culture change facilitation, achieved results in improving procurement in that office. Once it became clear that the RRI goals would not be met within the specified timeframe, it was decided that the process should still go ahead – improvements in procurement could hopefully still be made and the SCM unit clearly required support in this area. However, *as an RRI* (a process which aims to support a team obtain a goal that matters to them in a short space of time), the process did not succeed. It was not completed within the 100 days, taking a full nine months. The RRI on school nutrition did work as intended – with schools achieving results within the specified time, and further, the team leader (Ms Mbatha) used the RRI plans and templates to support more schools. The RRI in schools benefited from a strong and motivated team leader. Further, meeting the RRI goals on the nutrition programme was largely directly within the control of the RRI leader and the participating schools. In order to meet targets on time, the RRI in the District Office was dependent on engagement from Head Office.

As the Rapid Results coach noted, on its own the Rapid Results methodology is not a magical fix. It is one amongst a number of tools that can be used in the project cycle to reach particular goals. First, depending on the nature of the problems the RRI aims to address it may or may not require other forms of support. In the case of the RR2, given the strength of the team leader and the nature of the problems to be solved, the Rapid Results process provided a sufficient tool for participating schools to improve performance on the management of the SNP – and in a short space of time. In the case of the RR1, a good deal of further support was needed in the form of the culture change facilitator and more detailed technical input from the SCM consultant.

Second, we suggest that if not carefully chosen RRI can fix participants into a very defined process with uncertain outcomes. When it is carefully adopted we suggest it offers a valuable tool by providing focus and a tangible plan for improvements in a particular area. In a opaque environment (such as the Department in which the team worked) it may be sensible not to *begin* further phases or a new project with an RRI, but rather to introduce it later in the Project cycle once a clearer sense of the institutional environment is gained, supported by the planning process outlined in the section above. This may help to achieve goals that can be reached in the 100 days (or whatever period is defined as optimal).

An idea brainstormed in the April action learning session was to choose as a focus of the RRI a clear "pain-point" or burning issue for participants to increase the likelihood of their buy-in for the process. This approach is sensible if the chosen focus supports the strategic goals of the Project and the planning and scoping phase above suggests this as a workable focus (a team champion can be identified, relevant stakeholders can be included in the team, it will not run up against too many vested interests etc.).

6.7. The action learning methodology

The action learning process required additional time and energy from team members on top of the challenging task of working in the Department.. Suggestions for how the action learning process can further support an adaptable and iterative process of design and planning have been suggested above. The action learning team should schedule the first action learning session earlier on in the project cycle and should develop more concrete agenda items for monthly meetings which support a flexible approach to project implementation while tying this to the strategic goals of the Project. Project reflections on process and progress should therefore be scheduled regularly, with the action learning team alerting the team to areas in need of possible adaptation and supporting reflection by the Team.

6.8. Scaling up and the possibilities of system wide change

There is not yet clear evidence (i.e. at the end of Phase 1) of the possibilities of systems wide change through the Project. Expectations to this effect are probably unreasonable given the nature of this environment, the length of time it takes to see organisational change in any setting, and the fact that a set of new methodologies is being piloted through this Project (recall that this was prompted by the observation that previous more conventional interventions have failed). Nonetheless reflection on how the Project will be scaled up and how different component of the Project might fit together to create wider impact is important. Thus far the work has focused on one District and eight schools in a system of over 20 districts and thousands of schools.

At the outset of the Project, it was posited that if the RRI process, in combination with technical and culture change support, could achieve small improvements in the system this could provide motivation for or galvanise energy towards the attainment of more systemic change. As the Project was implemented over the following year it became clear that the extent to which daily pressure points were often created by structural and systemic issues not easily amenable to "quick wins". In certain parts of the system, however, improvements were indeed made and have provided the basis for further improvements. Certainly, the RRI process in the District Office has provided a basis for further work in that site, and has helped to refine a methodology that can be taken to other district sites, but has not yet suggested itself as a catalyst for "step-change."

The Rapid Results approach has been used successfully in a number of countries to support major turnarounds in service delivery. Where this has happened, the RRIs have been located at a senior level or focused on systems wide processes and involved the high-level backing and engagement of senior political and administrative staff. [13] Our experiences thus far have suggested that these conditions are currently not present at Head Office and a decision has been taken to focus future support (sensibly we suggest) primarily at district and school level.

A more refined sense of how the successes made in one part of a district or in some schools will be used to "tip the scale" should be developed. Two challenges present themselves.[14] First, a sufficient bulk of senior management support for change at Head Office appears not to be present (it is possible that change will require the support of more than the SG given the extent to which the Department is fractured by competing networks of allegiance and power). Certainly, GTAC should continue to work at developing high-level political support for the Project (and in the last action learning reflection session a decision was made to work at developing the support of the MEC). A more in-depth inception phase may enable the Team to identify outputs or RRIs that matter to some senior managers, helping to develop a degree of buy-in.

Second, the current approach of twinning culture change and technical support is very valuable, though people intensive. Moving from one to more districts will require a larger team of culture change facilitators – good facilitators are not in abundant supply (the technical team can probably be kept small). There are probably limits, if the adaptive and iterative process of planning and execution is retained as the Project

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[13] See for example the Kenyan experience - Sylvester Odhiambo Obongo, Achieving targeted results for Kenyans: introducing results based management in the public service, Office of the President, August 2006.

[14] Certainly this does not suggest the need for a major system's wide administrative intervention – GTAC's approach of working quietly is probably wise to minimize significant push back from vested interested in the status quo.

grows (and we suggest there is much value in this), to the scale at which this methodology can be deployed. This is not a question of whether sufficient resources can be allocated, but the effects of economies of scale. A possible Phase 2 will provide important lessons for whether (and perhaps at what point) project expansion places strain on this fairly intensive way of working. The Team should start to debate more precisely what the ambitions of this Project are over the long term.

The very idea of "spaces of professionalism" suggests than many parts of the education system are not open to the kind of support proposed. Significant improvement in the fortunes of the Department (given that it is embedded in complex social and political dynamics) is likely to require major political support – not simply from the MEC, but across a wider base. In the second action learning reflection in November 2014, the team began a conversation about linking GTAC's work internal to the organisation with external networks of support, slowly identifying actors in civil society, unions, individual politicians and other government partners (in the OTP for example) committed to developing a professional public service culture. The GTAC OTP Culture Change Project appears to have incorporated a rough sense that change at scale might be slowly developed through developing and networking a sufficient sized group of people vested in a professional identity as agents of change. Further conversation in GTAC and with its academic and government partners to refine and debate these ideas would be valuable. Both of these projects have provided formal case studies and rich data to support this debate.

7. Insights for further practice

7.1. An emerging approach

Over the course of the Project a method of intervention has been adapted and refined that is especially valuable for working in opaque and / or politicised environments, where leadership support may be uneven. The approach integrates a number of different expertise and tools that aim to improve operational or organisational performance in a holistic way. Core to the approach is the twinning of technical support and culture change facilitation supported by the process of action learning. The Rapid Results approach is deployed at relevant points in the project cycle to support the attainment of very specific project goals. An iterative project planning process (supported by action learning) enables the project to adapt to changes and challenges in the organisation as they crop up and to maximize on sites of potential change.
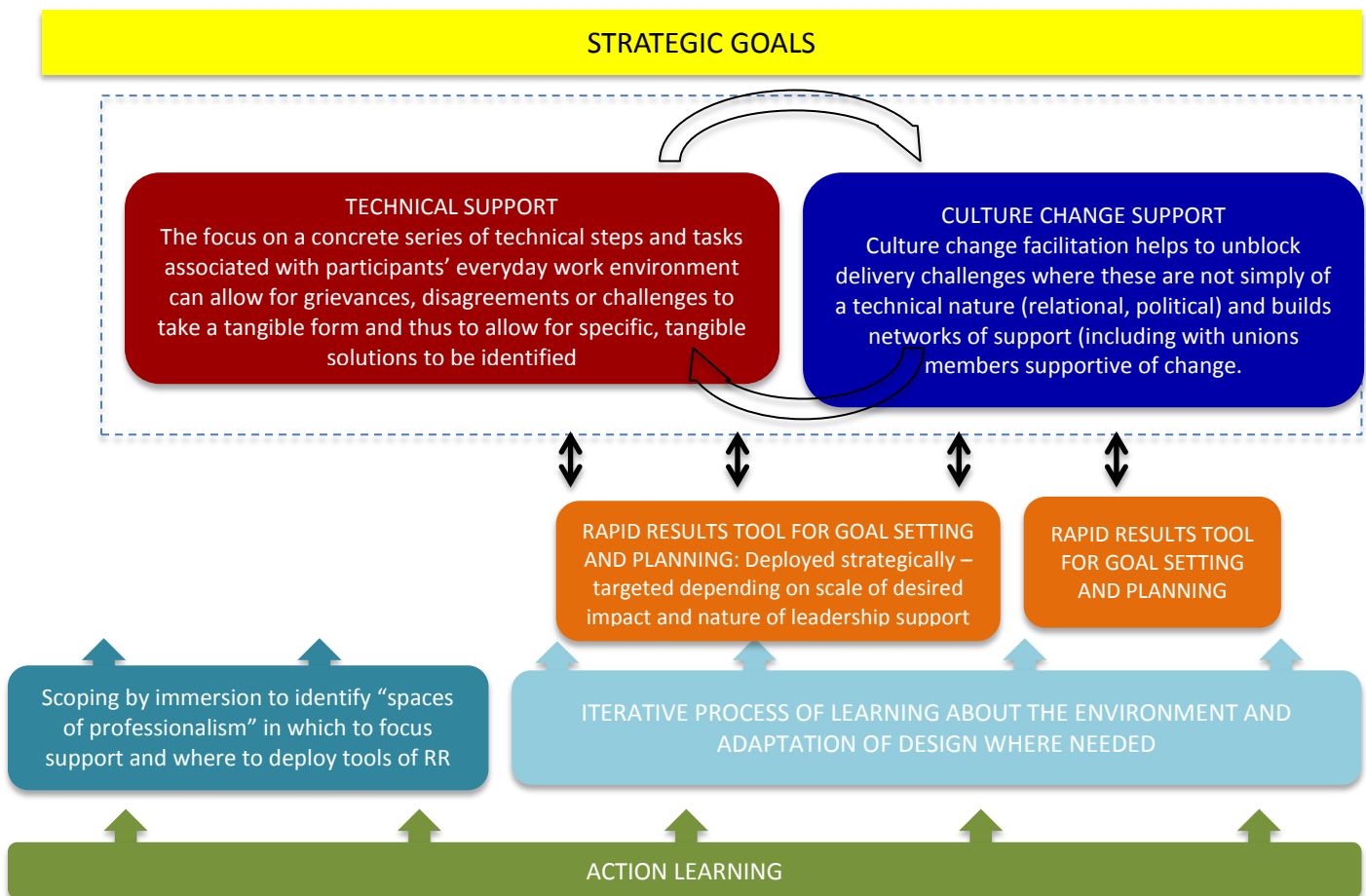
Identifying where in the system to focus support

The project or project phase begins by identifying sites that are relatively change ready i.e. "spaces of professionalism" characterised by a degree of leadership support and by sites which are not too constrained by power relations and networks that cut across lines of formal authority and accountability.

A strong scoping or initial immersion phase supports the identification of these sites as well as identifying important role players in the organisation. The skills of a Culture Change Facilitator and Action Learning Facilitators are especially important here. The team then decides which goals or challenges can be best supported through the tools such as the Rapid Results Approach, culture change etc.) and who the

important role-players in the organisation are. An initial action learning session supports the development of an initial plan, the outputs of which are workshopped with senior leadership.

Twin culture change and technical support to maximize impact

Here the assumption is that behaviour change is more likely to be effected if interventions were attached to a concrete series of processes and goals (such as technical or administrative tasks for example); and technical challenges are more likely to be resolved where they acknowledge the inevitably political and relational nature of organisational settings. The twinning of support works in the following ways: first, culture change facilitation helps to unblock delivery challenges where these are not simply of a technical nature (involving for example a lack of clarity or disagreements around respective roles in the workplace). Second, the focus on a concrete series of technical steps and tasks associated with participants' everyday work environment can allow for grievances, disagreements or challenges to take a tangible form and thus to allow for specific, tangible solutions to be identified. The degree of technical support needed will vary depending on the nature of the goals or challenges identified. Ideally, participants in the process are supported to develop as many of the outputs themselves – using the technical advice to improve the quality of the deliverable. Culture change support can be provided separately where relevant – for example in the provision of individual coaching to managers. Culture change tools can also serve to slowly develop networks of support, linking actors supportive of and eager for change.

This approach does not discount interventions that tackle organizational culture without a technical project to focus on. However, in an organization like the Department where projects focused on relational or organisational culture are not prioritised, the chances of obtaining buy-in from leaders for such work is more likely when it is twinned with what they consider the "real" issues (i.e. work on technical tasks).

Deploy the Rapid Results Methodology at appropriate points or sites

The Rapid Results process can be deployed at various points in the project cycle as a tool to help a team articulate a clear goal towards which attention can be directed; a set of concrete steps for reaching that goal; as well helping to support the speedy resolution / meeting of the identified goal. The RRI goal should have a reasonable chance of being met, the problem to be addressed should be amenable to a structured plan and timeframe, and a team leader can be identified with some degree of effective power (this might be formal or informal) in the organisation / office. The extent to which the RRI goal can galvanise further change will depend on the institutional environment, the level of senior administrative and executive support and so on.

An adaptive and iterative process of planning and implementation

The team works with a degree of adaptability of flexibility to allow the Project to deal with changes in the organisational environment as they crop up and to maximize on spaces of openness to change as they are identified. This flexibility is supported by a strong scoping phase and with an iterative process of reflection and planning, supported by action learning.

Build relationships

Formal steering committees are ideally constituted and meet regularly. Team leaders also use the organisations' regular forums and meetings to keep managers abreast of development and to build relationship over time. As the project proceeds, the team works to carefully develop relationships with

managers and possible change agents inside or relevant to the organisation (significantly, this would include public sector unions).

Action learning supports implementation throughout the project cycle

Action learning involves first an analytical process of investigation in which the team is provided with an improved understanding of the environment in which they work and how the project can be designed or adapted to maximize possible impact. In an opaque organisational environment this does not take the form of a once-off diagnosis, but an ongoing process of learning about the organisation. This learning can take place through carefully designed interviews with staff and other stakeholders, participant observation, attendance at technical and culture change meetings, and drawing on the insights of the culture change facilitator. Action learning then assists the team in deciding when to employ the various tools above (the RRI process, the twinning of technical support and culture change support, or when culture change and technical support can be employed separately). Further, action learning supports reflection and decision making about how to adapt the project as it is implemented and to assist project managers with ensuring that everyday activities support project outcomes. And last, it involves formally capturing lessons from project implementation to support further work and / or to institutionalise learning.

7.2. Implications for wider public sector reform

There is tremendous unevenness in state practice in South Africa, shaped in part by uneven histories of state building under colonialism and apartheid. This makes case studies of this nature all the more important for shaping successful strategies of public sector reform. What works in improving performance in one office in Pretoria may not work in another location of the public service.

This project has been valuable for thinking through possible methodologies for working in organisations that do not approximate Weber's idea type bureaucracy, suggesting a need for an adjustment to the formal-rationale assumptions of much public administration theory.[15] Much of the literature assumes a certain level of organisation effectiveness. Case studies of successful turnaround strategies in developing and middle-income country contexts often offer little insight for practitioners – success is credited to the support of senior leadership. Yet many practitioners are faced with the tough task of leading projects that cannot assume this support will be forthcoming. This Project suggests that the Project of change does not necessarily need to be abandoned should this support not be forthcoming. This context may place limits on the extent of organisational change. A hypothesis has been developed through the work of this Project that deserves further testing: can the spaces of professionalism in a generally poorly functioning and politicised system be strengthened and expanded through the approach proposed in the section above? And what other kinds of support would it require to achieve systemic impact.

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[15] See for example, Charles Lindblom. 1959. "The Science of 'Muddling Through'" In *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2.

Annexure 1: GTAC project logframe

ULTIMATE OUTCOME
Stakeholders of the in the Provincial education system benefit from an efficient and functioning supply chain management

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME
Improved supply chain management (SCM) function at Head Office (HO), District Offices and schools

IMMEDIATE OUTCOME 1
Head Office, the district office and schools use improved SCM procedures and systems to deliver to identified procurement needs

IMMEDIATE OUTCOME 2
Improved operational management of the activities linked to the RRIs

IMMEDIATE OUTCOME 3
Staff in the SCM Head Office, district staff and 8 schools experience an enhanced organisational culture for better performance

SCM OUTPUTS (Non RRI)
1.1 Reviewed checklists for bid evaluation processes
1.2 Reviewed templates for tender evaluation processes
1.3 Agree broad principles for the SCM service delivery model
1.4 SCM delegations framework developed
1.5 Business processes to support the service delivery model developed
1.6 Capacity building programme implemented and support provided

SCM (RRI) OUTPUTS
2.1 The District Office obtains order processing authority
2.2 The District Office retains order processing capabilities
2.3 All SNP funds utilised within current rules
2.4 Learners fed on time with learner contact time maintained

CULTURE CHANGE OUTPUTS
3.1 Dynamic inquiry sessions held
3.2 A Resonant leadership for results training programme implemented
3.3 facilitating change workshops for change agents conducted
3.4 Group coaching sessions held
3.5 Individual coaching sessions held

SCM - HRM OUTPUTS
1.7 A service delivery model for SCM finalised
1.8 Finalised SCM Organisational structure
1.9 Priotisied HR business processes remapped
1.10 A caoacity building programme on the remapped business processesd implemented
1.11 Updated job profiles per SCM position
1.12 A capacity building programme on job profiling implemented
1.13 A competency dictionary produced
1.14 A competency profile per role produced
1.15 SCM staff skills audit conducted
1.16 An SCM training plan developed
1.17 Performance management training materials developed
118 A training programme for HRM trainers on performance management implemented
1.19 Performance contract developed for all SCM staff

RRA OUTPUTS
2.5 An RRA capacity building programme for GTAC implemented
2.6 RRI teams established
2.7 A training programme for RRI teams implemented
2.8 RRI workplans developed
2.9 RRIs launched
2.10 Team leader coaching sessions held
2.11 Team consultation sessions held
2.12 A mid-term review held
2.13 Final reviewed held
2.14 A caoacity building programme for selected coaches implemented

ACTION LEARNING OUTPUTS
3.5 A research protocol produced
3.6 Internal team reflection reports produced
3.7 Client/team reflection reports produced
3.8 A case study produced