

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROCUREMENT STAKEHOLDERS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUTER BUS INDUSTRY: THE CASE OF GAUTENG

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This paper investigates the relationship between the key stakeholders of the commuter bus industry in Gauteng Province and its effect on performance. The paper is descriptive and exploratory in nature and employed a mixed-method research approach. The data were collected from a sample of 18 respondents who are key stakeholders directly involved in the procurement of subsidised commuter bus services in the Gauteng province using face-to-face interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. The findings revealed that the procurement practices employed, namely, interim, negotiated and tender contracts, have complicated the stakeholders' relations. Limited relations prevail with stakeholders preferring the procurement practice employed (while operators prefer the negotiated method and the government prefers the competitive method), compliance with the policies and a commitment to building the industry as a whole, to mention but a few. The paper then recommends that the government needs to continue working on the relationship with the operators for the betterment of this industry. All operators should be considered or consulted in all communication and/or planning.

Keywords: procurement, relationship, commuter bus industry, Gauteng province, South Africa

Introduction

In the South African public sector, procurement is seen as a strategic tool for socioeconomic development. To provide uniformity in this function, it is guided by the Supply Chain Management Policy Framework developed in 2003 (Ambe 2016: 280). The adoption of the supply chain management (SCM) framework led to the development of the SCM policy. Hence, each government entity is driven by its own SCM which is unique to its operations. Nevertheless, the commuter bus industry is complex and its operations are not in line with the recommended regulations. Procurement in the industry is marred by a number of challenges, such as the fact that no new contracts have been concluded since 2001 (Walters & Manamela 2016:3). In addition, the current practices favour the subsidised (commonly known as the formal) operators over the unsubsidised (informal) ones, with the former benefitting from government contracts. In addition, most of the old operators are still in the system, limiting the opportunities for new operators to enter the market successfully.

Although transport policies have been developed to guide this industry, they have not been fully implemented and have led to the current operational challenges this industry is facing (Walters, 2014:4). For example, stakeholders disagree on the specific procurement practices to apply and this has added to the general dysfunctionality in the industry (Simpson, McKay, Patel, Sithole, Chipp & Mambo 2012:23). According to the Southern African Bus Operators Association

(SABOA 2015), the procurement practices being employed in the industry do not meet the needs of South Africans, neither in terms of business opportunities and growth for the operators, nor in terms of the rendering of commuter bus services; this affects commuter services at large. There is a huge gap between the ideal commuter bus industry and the actual operations (Munshi 2014:1). However, limited studies have been conducted on the commuter bus industry in South Africa exist (Walters & Manamela 2016:11). Most of the studies on the commuter buses focus on policy implementation such as Walters (2014) and Luke and Heyns (2013). Following the deliberations above, a research gap was identified. Hence the need for this paper.

This paper investigates the effect of the relationship between the key procurement stakeholders on the performance of the commuter bus industry in Gauteng. It then makes a contribution to the body of knowledge by providing an understanding of the benefit of a coordinated relationship between these shareholders on the performance of this industry in Gauteng, as well as South Africa at large.

Literature review

This section of the paper provides a review of the relevant literature. It explores procurement in the public sector management context, as well as procurement methodologies within the commuter bus sector. It concludes with a discussion of the effects of the relationship between the stakeholders on the performance of the commuter bus industry.

Procurement in public sector management

Fourie (2015:38) defines procurement as a business function with an economic activity, a business process in a political system, and as a strategic profession. It can also be used as a social tool, allowing tax money to be returned to domestic residents, creating more jobs and reducing imports (Fourie 2015). It has also been used by governments to achieve socioeconomic objectives, such as improving the economy, protection against foreign competition, stimulating competition within industries and various other economic benefits (De La Harp 2009:6). In South Africa, under the apartheid government (pre-1994), procurement practices favoured large, established companies and it was difficult for small businesses to participate in business with the government (Ambe 2016:279). When the new government took power in 1994, procurement was given a constitutional status and was put under the management of the National Treasury (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss 2012:245). Owing to a number of inconsistencies within the procurement functions, both provincial and in municipalities, the Supply Chain Management Framework was introduced to bring about uniformity in public procurement.

Procurement methodologies within the commuter bus sector

Commuter buses are used within the commuter bus sector, which falls under the auspices of the Department of Transport (DoT) and forms part of the public transport spectrum (Walters, 2014:1). This sector is then further divided into municipal buses, the new Bus Rapid Transit system and subsidised and unsubsidised buses (DoT 2013). Procurement practices in this industry are guided by the White Paper on National Transport of 1996. In the commuter bus industry, the standard procurement methods that are used are based on the methods used in the general public procurement in South Africa, but adapted to the specific needs of this sector (Ngcamphalala & Ambe 2016:7).

- Stakeholders within the commuter bus industry

In this paper, the procurement stakeholders in the commuter bus industry consisted of subsidised commuter bus operators in Gauteng and the Department of Transport. For this paper, twelve subsidised commuter bus operators were chosen to eliminate saturation of information and six government officials were chosen (officials of the National DoT and Gauteng Provincial Department of Roads and Transport that are involved in the commuter bus industry). From the actively involved government officials, four officials from the National DoT and two officials

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from the Gauteng Provincial Department of Roads and Transport were chosen to participate in this research. These were selected on the basis of their involvement in the commuter bus industry, ranging from contracts allocation, policy development and institutional policies within public transport. They were at different levels of seniority, experience and expertise within the industry to allow reliable contrasting views for a rich analysis. Gauteng was chosen because its subsidies constitute the biggest chunk of the government's budget for commuter buses.

- Procurement practices employed within the commuter bus industry

The following procurement practices are employed within this industry: interim contracts, negotiated contracts and competitive contracts (Walters 2010:362).

Interim contracts

Interim contracts (ICs) were concluded in 1997. This was intended as an interim measure by the government to allow the existing operators the opportunity to hand back their operating permits, as part of the process to prepare for the tendering system and to help the operators become financially 'fit' (Walters 2010:362). This was a ticket-based subsidy system. Subsidies were paid according to the number of tickets sold and the costs and losses were claimed by the operator (Walters 2010:363). The main disadvantage of these contracts was their vulnerability to dishonest activities on the part of some operators and some government officials who were defrauding the system, which resulted in the government not getting 'value for money'. They are currently operated on a month-to-month basis.

Tender contracts

These contracts were concluded in 1997, following the challenges caused by the ICs. The government had to introduce these without delay in line the White Paper policy objectives (Walters 2010:363; 2014:2). These contracts are government controlled, with the government specifying the required services and inviting operators in an open market to tender for these services. They are currently operated on a month-to-month basis.

Negotiated contracts

This form of procurement was introduced between 1999 and 2000 through the National Land Transport Transition Act (NLTTA). Originally, it was intended to assist government-owned and municipal operators, since they were financially 'unfit' to participate in competitive tendering (Walters & Cloete 2008:1163). This form of contract is flexible and allows bus operators to negotiate contract conditions before accepting the contractual terms (Simpson et al., 2012:23). In this contract, provision is made for the Model Tender Document (MTD), issued by the DoT. They are currently operated on a month-to-month basis. Below is a summary of the procurement practices employed within the commuter bus industry in South Africa.

Table 1: Procurement practices within the commuter bus industry in SA

Types of procurement	Contract characteristic
Interim contracts	Introduced in 1997 as a transition arrangement between government and existing operators. Were meant to last for three years initially. Currently operate on a month-to-month basis.
Tendered contracts	Based on a standard contract document. Mostly stand-alone services in rural or urban areas. Five years originally. Currently operate on a month-to-month basis.
Negotiated contracts	Mostly applicable to state-owned and operated buses. Five years originally. Currently operate on a month-to-month basis.

Source: Author's own compilation

The effects of the relationship between procurement stakeholders on the performance of the commuter bus industry

The relationship challenges facing this industry stem from the introduction of the procurement practices employed by the set policies, which have led to many challenges, such as, among others, a lack of funds to cover the operational demands of the industry (Sibande 2013:1; Walters and Heyns 2012:37; Walters 2014:2). Since the introduction of these contracts, the National Department of Transport has had to approach the Treasury Committee annually for additional bus subsidies (DoT 2002:2), since there have been constant shortfalls in the operational budgets in this industry. This is a real and serious dilemma facing government. The government (through the DoT) is busy with efforts to improve the industry and its operations (Sibande 2013:1). This will be done through continuous improvements to the current status of operations and the allocation of contracts and the future plans for an integrated transport system. However, because of South Africa's complexity, specifically in public transport, and because of our history (Mitchell & Walters 2011:251), while it might be a challenge to involve all parties, it is an imperative.

Within the commuter bus industry, the following attributes in relation to the relationship between the key stakeholders were identified from the literature review:

- Commitment on policy implementation

Policy implementation refers to the mechanisms, resources and relationships that link policies to programme action (Mthethwa 2012:37). Luthuli (2007:96) concurs that public policy is useless if no proper implementation strategy is in place to ensure delivery. Public policy implementation should consist of organised activities by government directed at the achievement of the set goals and objectives. Within the commuter bus industry, the delay in the full implementation of the policies guiding the procurement practices shows a lack of commitment from the government's side. According to various studies (DoT 2002:8; Mitchell & Walters 2011:242; Walters 2014:2), there have been a number of amendments to the procurement practices employed, which at times may be viewed as not having been thoroughly researched from the beginning. These have led to the extension of subsidised bus contracts on an ad hoc basis. These policy implementation inconsistencies affect the relationship between the stakeholders and are holding back the growth of the industry.

- Compliance on policy implementation

It is important that the actors or those whom the policy affects be taken into account (Tebele 2016:89). It is therefore no surprise that without compliance with a public policy, a public policy is in danger of being unsuccessful because the reaction of those at whom the policy is aimed cannot be controlled (Tebele 2016:89). Within the commuter bus industry, operators are also not fulfilling their contractual obligations. For example, according to Jacob Khawe, chairperson of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature Committee for Roads and Transport, PUTCO is supposed to operate with 152 buses in Soshanguve (on the far outskirts of the city of Tshwane), but they have only 123 buses, making them 27 buses short (Haynes 2017:2).

- Coordinated relationship amongst stakeholders

Coordination reflects engagement in joint activities relating to structure or process between organisations (Roberts-Lombard, Mpinganjira and Svensson, 2017:4). Based on the literature review, in the commuter bus sector, there is limited coordination amongst the stakeholders which affects industry performance. The delay in the proper implementation of these policies has led to most of the subsidised operators feeling some animosity towards the government and its initiatives and the industry at large (Walters 2010:366). According to Heyns and Walters (2012:48), some of the interim operators had concerns that the government was forcing them to share 40% of their operations with the taxi industry and small bus operators, since there were limited funds to cover the operational needs of the industry. This contributed a great deal to the negative relationship between the government and the operators. Operators feel the industry has been neglected by government and is stagnant (Venter 2015:1). The government is focused on the BRT system, injecting money into it, while the bus industry is collapsing due to the lack of funds to cover the operations.

- Consideration in allocating subsidies

In the implementation process, political, financial, managerial and technical resources are needed (Mthethwa 2012, 42). Throughout the policy implementation process, it is important to ensure that those who oppose the policy change do not block access to these critical resources. At times, the policy outcome is different from what the planners conceive as a result of the change process and the conflict occurring in the implementation stage. This is true with the commuter bus industry. The set policies are not fully implemented when it comes to the allocation of subsidies. Operators feel the government lacks consideration when it comes to the adjustment and increment of subsidies. The government wants operators to offer good quality services when they are not being paid well. Malijeni Nqaleni, the National Treasury intergovernmental relations deputy director concurred with this, when she said South African public transport operators need “to do more with less” as the economy contracted and the national fiscus faced increasing financial pressure (Venter 2015:1). Since 2009, subsidy allocations have been reduced and this has led to serious cash flow and profitability problems for many operators (Venter 2015:1).

- Commitment in organising the industry

For governments to successfully implement policies, they require democratic public participation, where policy makers and the public continually engage in dialogue, examine the consequences for fundamental values, as well as sharing the burdens and benefits (Mthethwa, 2012: 42). In the national sphere, different stakeholders should be involved in order to reduce political pressure on the government. If the government is the only planner with no public involvement in the development and implementation of policies, then the commitment to render quality services will be compromised. In the commuter bus sector, operators feel the government is struggling with the reorganising of this industry (Schalekamp, 2015:10). There is still a lot to be done when it comes to transforming and restructuring this industry, for example, to implement the complex policies (SCM policy); to address human and political interferences; and to limit inadequate understanding of, or attention given to, the implementation phase of policies (Mitchell & Walters 2011:252). In short, the relationship is strained. Operators do not trust the government (Walters 2008; Walters et al., 2012:52). Walters and Heyns (2012:42) concur, saying the government is applying a top-down approach instead

of involving the operators in the planning and reforms in the industry. According to Finn and Walters (2010:356), the relationship between government and the operators is worsening. The level of trust is damaged and the operators would love to see the government being “more forceful” in dealing with this industry, especially in its contractual obligations.

In response to the operators' concerns, the government is requesting them to be patient and flexible in terms of the reconceptualisation of the practices in the industry in line with the National Development Plan, which calls for a streamlined urban transport system (Munshi 2014:1). The operators also have to align their operations with Gauteng’s plan, which aims at integrating all the different public transport sectors into an effective service. From this brief discussion, it is evident that the government is doing everything in its powers to remedy the challenges between these stakeholders, but as alluded in the introduction, this industry is complex and it is not easy to balance the needs of all the parties. To further explain the relationship between the key stakeholders and its effects on the performance of the commuter bus industry, and based on the literature review, the paper provides a conceptual framework, highlighting the positive and negative effects of a coordinated relationship or the lack of a relationship on the performance of this industry. Figure provides this framework.

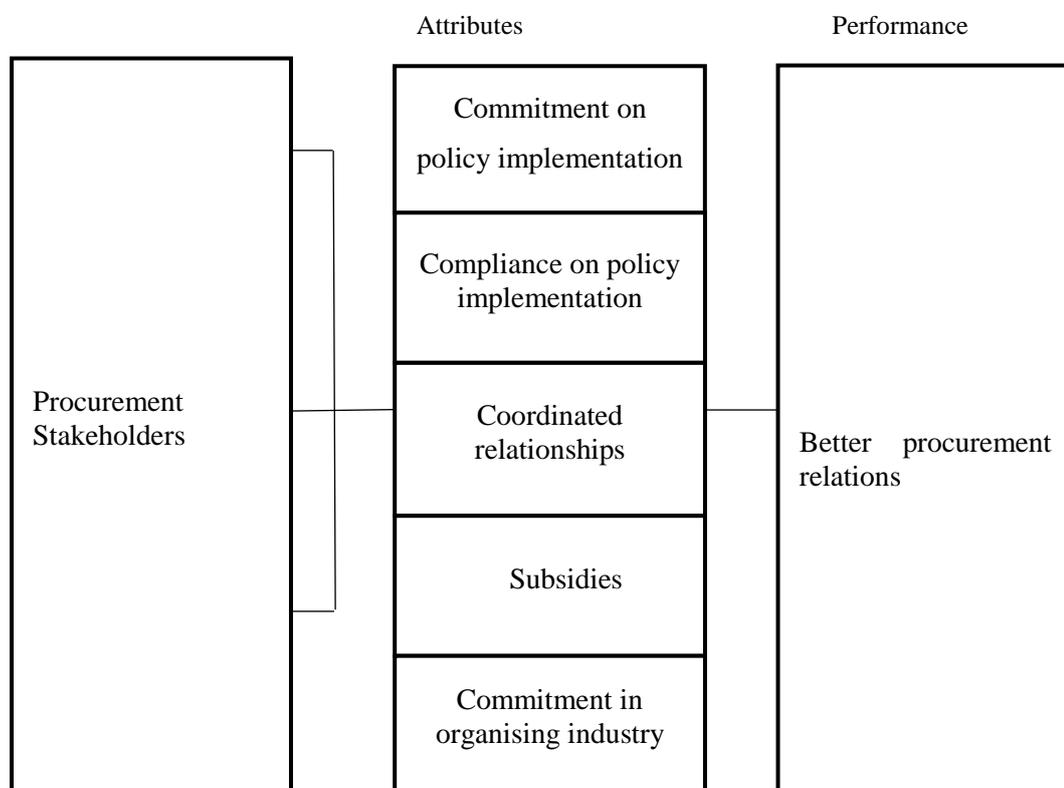


Figure 1: Conceptual framework on the relationship between the stakeholders

Source: Compiled by author

From the above framework, it is evident that a coordinated relationship has a number of positive benefits for the commuter bus industry, especially in terms of its growth and financial stability.

Research and Methodology

For this paper, a research objective to establish whether a trusting relationship exists between procurement partners in the commuter bus industry was achieved using a mixed-method approach. This aimed to investigate the relationships within the commuter bus industry and obtain an in-depth understanding of these relationships using both a quantitative and a qualitative research methods, over two phases. Phase 1 involved an in-depth literature review and Phase 2 consisted of a face-to-face interview questionnaire containing semi-structured

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questions that was conducted with government officials and commuter bus operators. Questions consisted of open-ended questions where the respondents had to justify their responses (mixture of quantitative and qualitative research). These questions assisted the researcher in reaching the final conclusions of the paper and also allowed for the achievement of triangulation.

A total of 18 respondents (12 commuter bus operators and 6 government officials) were interviewed. This population was not large enough to warrant a quantitative research approach. A further limitation was the limited amount of literature on procurement practices employed within the commuter bus industry. Fortunately, literature is available on procurement in general. The questions in the questionnaire were guided by the literature review to address the research problem and to answer the research objectives. The questionnaire consisted of a five-point Likert response format with different end points, namely, 1 (no extent) to 5 (very great extent), 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and ranking with end-point 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important) and respondents had to respond to statements relating to the relationship between the stakeholders in the commuter bus. The data collection was conducted by the researcher in order to develop a relationship and build trust with the respondents (especially the commuter bus operators), who have proven to be sceptical about government's intentions on a number of occasions, as experienced by other researchers such as Walters and Manamela (2016: 4). The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics by means of the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 24). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the main features of the data in quantitative terms, and inferential statistics were used to determine statistically significant differences. The open-ended responses were used to give more meaning to the respondents' views on questions, where applicable (Gray, Williamson, Karp and Dalphin 2007:44).

Findings and Discussion

This section of the paper presents the findings and a discussion on the perceptions of the respondents on the relationship between the procurement actors within the commuter bus industry in South Africa.

Relationship between stakeholders in the commuter bus industry

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert response format, statements relating to the relationship between the stakeholders in the commuter bus industry with end points 1 (no extent) to 5 (very great extent) the extent to which they agreed with the status of the relationship. The responses were measured in mean values and standard deviations as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Perceptions of the respondents on the relationship between stakeholders in the commuter bus industry

Statements	Mean	Std. deviation	
	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic
Lack of commitment on policy implementation by government	3.39	.164	.698
Lack of compliance on policy implementation by operators	3.33	.140	.594
Lack of coordinated relationship between government and operators	3.00	.243	1.029
Allocated subsidy does not meet operators' operational demands	4.61	.183	.778
Lack of commitment by government to build the industry	3.67	.323	1.372

Source: Author's own compilation

As indicated in Table 1, what was most concerning to the respondents with regard to their relationship was "the allocated subsidy not meeting the operators' operational needs" with a

mean value of 4.61. This was followed by “the lack of commitment by government to build the commuter bus industry” with a mean value of 3.67, and then “the lack of commitment on policy implementation by government” with a mean value of 3.39. The least concerning factors were “the lack of compliance on policy implementation by operators” with a mean value of 3.33 and “the lack of coordinated relationship between the government and the operators” with a mean value of 3.00.

While most of the respondents acknowledged that the allocated subsidies not meeting their operational needs was their main concern, the overall stakeholders’ relationship is above average although there is a definite need for improvement. This shows this issue with subsidies to be the crippling factor in the industry, as confirmed by SABOA at their 2017 conference (SABOA 2017). This then means that the government needs to continue working on the relationship with the operators. All operators need to be consulted in all communication or planning. What is also evident at the moment is that most of the small bus operators are in the dark regarding the reform processes in the industry that are currently underway. This brings about division amongst the operators. Accordingly, such a divided industry is weakened and, hence, its success and overall performance and growth will be compromised. If the key stakeholders do not pay attention to their relationship, the industry will collapse.

Analysis of responses from open-ended questions

This section provides a summary of the data acquired from the open-ended questions. These data were used for triangulation to assist the researcher in reaching the final conclusions of the paper.

Following the interview discussions, a theme emerged in the verbal data obtained in response to the question on the differences in perceptions regarding the relationship between the procurement actors within the commuter bus industry. The findings follow.

With regard to the relationship status between the stakeholders, it emanated from the interviews conducted that there is a coordinated relationship between the stakeholders. The majority of the respondents indicated that the relationship has definitely improved when compared to the time when the interim, tender and negotiated contracts were introduced. Others, however, still felt that the relationship is poor.

Some of the respondents indicated that there is commitment from the government to implement the set policies. They advised that the government has tried to support the industry by training people for the effective implementation of the set policies.

“There is commitment, but there are some impediments. For example, issues like capacity. You have to build the capacity. You might not be able to keep the capacity in-house. Because there are very few people who specialises. Also, the market forces dictate ... if there is demand in the private industry, you cannot hold on people” (Respondent 1).

Some respondents indicated that they too sometimes do not comply with some of the policies.

“Yes, there are inconsistencies from our side. For example, they say if for some other reason you fail to break a shift, you need to report the government, but how can that be? How can you report on something that will take your money?” (Respondent 3)

Most of the respondents indicated that there is a harmonious relationship between the government and operators, and that there are open channels of communication.

“We have a relationship ... let me take our operations for instance. We have a relationship with government, because most of the time we communicate, even if they don’t meet our expectations, but there is that coordination” (Respondent 4).

The findings from the open-ended questions reiterate what was found in the literature and from the descriptive data; that is, that there is coordination amongst the key stakeholders in the commuter bus industry. These parties just need to capitalise on this for the betterment of the

industry. Table 3 below presents a summary of the relationship status between the stakeholders, based on the open-ended questions.

Table 3: Relationship status between the stakeholders:

Theme	Description
Commitment on policy implementation by government	There is commitment on the policy implementation. The challenge is just the capacity to implement these.
Compliance on policy implementation by operators	Some of the operators are not consistent, because they do not report when they cannot honour their shifts.
Coordinated relationship between government and operators	There is a harmonious relationship between the respondents.
Subsidy not meeting operational demand	The allocated funds do not meet the operators' operational needs.
Commitment by government to build the industry	There is commitment, but there are too many challenges hindering the effective operation of the industry.

Source: Author's own compilation

Conclusions

This paper investigated the relationship between the actors within the commuter bus industry in South Africa. It was established in the literature that the delay in the proper implementation of these policies has led to most of the subsidised operators feeling some animosity towards the government and its initiatives, as well as the industry at large (Walters 2010:366). However, the results revealed that there is a harmonious relationship between the stakeholders (government and the bus operators). This means that the stakeholders can sit together around the table, although all is not well. The results also revealed that there are other inconsistencies that affect the relationship, with the most rated being that “the allocated subsidies do not meet the operators' operational demands”, followed by “the government's lack of commitment to build the industry” and “lack of government commitment to policy implementation” (mean value of 3.39–4.61). “The lack of compliance on policy implementation by the operators” and “lack of a coordinated relationships between the government and the operators” were rated the lowest (mean value of 3.00–3.33).

It can therefore be concluded that the results confirm the findings from the literature that there is a correlated relationship between the stakeholders in the industry in relation to the selected relationship elements, however, there are a few elements that still need some attention, namely, the funding, compliance with the policies and a commitment to build the industry as a whole. From this discussion, the stakeholders need to invest in building this industry in order for it to grow and contribute to job creation in South Africa.

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