

ADOPTING ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION  
AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GCIS) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS: A  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

by

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## **KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A THESIS**

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**ADOPTING ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GCIS) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Key terms:**

Accountability principles, dialogue, good governance, inclusivity, legitimacy, public sector, responsiveness, stakeholder engagement.

## **ABSTRACT**

Accountability is described as the practice of answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account-giving. Accountability is governed by principles used by a broad spectrum of organizations to demonstrate leadership and performance in an accountable, responsible, and sustainable manner. Companies, government, and nongovernment managers are increasingly confronted with stakeholder expectations of organizational accountability. That is why ethical, honest, open, and fair engagement with stakeholders is necessary for an entity to function properly. The adoption of accountability principles in the engagement of the government and the public, allows the public and government to have the same perspectives on the actions, milestones, commitments, and challenges of their country. This, therefore, generates mutual understanding between them. Currently, the literature does not present guidelines for implementing the principles. Also, the literature does not consider the distinctive environment of the government sector (which may affect the practice of accountability in stakeholder engagement). This is a research gap that this study endeavoured to fill.

Through a mixed method approach, the study explored and described accountability principles fit for the public sector, investigated how the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) adopted accountability principles and developed a framework that will act as a guide for the adoption of these accountability principles. The study found that the literature and the documents on stakeholder engagement between the South African government and its citizens advocate for the adoption of transparency, inclusivity, legitimacy, responsiveness, dialogue, good governance, and integrity as essential accountability principles for government engagements with citizens. The surveys administered to citizens to measure the extent to which the GCIS adopts the principles of accountability revealed that the government of South Africa is not transparent, not legitimate, not responsive and does not uphold the stakeholder inclusivity principle with citizens, does not govern with integrity, and, as a result, is not deemed as governing with the notion of good governance.

The study then concluded that the South African government is acquainted with principles of accountability that need to be adopted when engaging with citizens. However, there are limited guidelines on how to implement these practices. A conceptual framework proposing possible accountability principles to be adopted in stakeholder engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding was therefore developed and presented.

The study recommends that this framework be used to guide how adopting accountability principles in the GCIS stakeholder engagements can become a reality. The conceptual framework was based on three elements: principles of accountability, avenues of adopting accountability principles and the attainment and maintenance of adopting accountability principles when engaging with citizens. The main contribution of this study was the formulation of a conceptual framework for adopting accountability principles in stakeholder engagement of the GCIS for mutual understanding.

## IQOQA

Ukuziphendulela kuchazwa njengenqubo yokuphendula, ukusolwa, icala, kanye nokulindeleka ukuba uchaze. Ukuziphendulela kulawulwa yizimiso ezisetshenziswa yizikhungo eziningi ukuze ziveze ubuholi nokusebenza ngendlela enesibopho, enomthwalo, nenokusimama. Izinkampani, uhulumeni, nezimenenja ezingekho ngaphansi kukahulumeni ziya ngokuya zibhekana nokulindelwe ngababambiqhaza ekuziphenduleleni emsebenzini. Yingakho ukuziphatha ngendlela enokulunga, enokwethembeka, enokuvuleleka, nenokungakhethi nababambiqhaza kuyisidingo ukuze isikhungo sisebenze kahle. Ukuqala kokusetshenziswa kwezimiso zokuziphendulela ekuxhumaneni kukahulumeni nomphakathi kwenza ukuba umphakathi nohulumeni bakwazi ukubona ngaso linye maqondana nezenzo, izinyathelo ezibalulekile, ukuzibophezela, nezinselele zezwe labo. Ngakho, lokhu kudala ukuzwana phakathi kwabo. Okwamanje, izincwadi aziyivezi imihlahlandlela yokuqala ukusebenzisa lezi zimiso. Okunye, imibhalo ayisibheki isimo esihlukile somkhakha kahulumeni (esingahle sibe nomthelela enqubweni yokuziphendulela ekuxhumaneni kwababambiqhaza). Leli yigebe lolu cwaningo oluzama ukulivala.

Ngokusebenzisa indlela exubile, ucwaningo luhlolisise futhi lwachaza izimiso zokuziphendulela ezifanele emkhakheni kahulumeni; lwaphenya ukuthi uHlelo Lukahulumeni Lwexokuxhumana Nolwazi (i-GCIS) lwazamukela kanjani izimiso zokuziphendulela; lwaphinde lwakha uhlaka oluzosebenza njengomhlahlandlela wokuqaliswa kokusetshenziswa kwalezi zimiso zokuziphendulela. Ucwaningo luthole ukuthi imibhalo kanye nemiqingo emayelana nokuxhumana kwababambiqhaza phakathi kukahulumeni waseNingizimu Afrika nezakhamuzi zawo ikhuthaza ukuba kungafihlwa lutho, kubandakanywe bonke abantu, kwenziwe izinto ngendlela esemthethweni, kube nokuphendula, ukuxoxisana, ukubusa ngendlela kanye nobuqotho njengezimiso ezibalulekile zokuziphendulela ekusebenzisaneni kukahulumeni nezakhamuzi. Izinhlolovo ezanikwa izakhamuzi ukuze zilinganise izinga i-GCIS esebenzisa ngalo izimiso zokuziphendulela zaveza ukuthi uhulumeni waseNingizimu Afrika awuvezi izinto obala; awuzenzi ngendlela esemthethweni; awuphenduli; awusekeli isimiso sokubandakanyeka kwabo bonke ababambiqhaza nezakhamuzi; awubusi ngobuqotho; kanti ngenxa yalokho, awuthathwa njengolawula ngendlela yokubusa efanele.

Ucwaningo lwabe seluphetha ngokuthi uhulumeni waseNingizimu Afrika uzazi kahle izimiso zokuziphendulela ezidinga ukulandelwa ngenkathi uxhumana nezakhamuzi. Nokho, kunemihlahlandlela enomkhawulo maqondana nokuthi zingaqaliswa kanjani ukusebenza lezi zindlela. Kwasungulwa futhi kwethulwa uhlaka lomqondongqangi oluphakamisa izimiso zokuziphendulela okungenzeka zisetshenziswe ekuxhumaneni kwababambiqhaza be-GCIS ukuze kube nokuqondana.

Ucwaningo luncoma ukuthi lolu hlaka lusetshenziselwe ukuqondisa ukuthi izimiso zokuziphendulela zizosetshenziswa kanjani ngokwempela ekuxhumaneni kwababambiqhaza be-GCIS. Uhlaka lomqondongqangi lwalususelwe ezintweni ezintathu: izimiso zokuziphendulela; izindlela zokwamukela izimiso zokuziphendulela; kanye nokufinyelela nokulondolozwa kokwamukelwa kwezimiso zokuziphendulela ngenkathi kuhlanguyelwa nezakhamuzi. Igalelo elikhulu lwalolu cwawingo kwakungukwaxhiwa kohlaka lomqondongqangi lokwamukela izimiso zokuziphendulela ekuxhumaneni kwababambiqhaza be-GCIS ukuze kube nokuqondana.

## MANWELEDZO

Vhudifhinduleli vhu talutshedzwa sa nyito ya u kona u imela ndavha dzau, u sa vha na phoswo, u hwala mahadani au, na ndavhelelo ya u nga zwi imela wa talutshedza. Vhudifhinduleli vhu vhuswa nga milayo i shumiswaho nga madzangano o fhambanaho u sumbedza vhurangaphanda na kushumele nga ndila ire na vhudifhinduleli nahone i sa nyethi. Minidzhere dza khamphani, muvhuso na madzangano a si a muvhuso kanzhi vha livhana na ndavhelelo dza vhashumisani dza vhudifhinduleli ha tshiimiswa. Ndi ngazwo zwi zwa ndeme u vha na mikhwa, u fulufhedzea, u vha khagala na u sa dzhia sia musi vha tshi shumisana na vhashumisani saizwi zwi zwa ndeme uri tshiimiswa tshi shume zwavhudi. U dzhiwa ha milayo ya vhudifhinduleli kha u shumisana na muvhuso na tshitshavha, zwi tendela tshitshavha na muvhuso uri vha vhe na kuvhonele ku fanaho kha mishumo, maga o swikelelwaho, vhudikumedzeli na khaedu dza shango lavho. Hezwi zwi amba uri, zwi bvedza u pfesesana hu fanaho vhukati havho. Zwa zwino, manwalwa ha na nyendedzi ya u shumisa milayo. Nahone, manwalwa ha dzhieli nthha vhupo ho fhambanaho ha sekithara ya muvhuso (vhune ha nga kwama maitete a vhudifhinduleli kha vhukwamani vha vhashumisani). Itshi ndi tshikhala tsha thodisiso tshine ngudo ya lingedza u tshi dadza.

Nga kha maitete a ngona yo tanganelanaho, ngudo yo sedza na u talutshedza milayo ya vhudifhinduleli yo teaho kha sekithara ya nnyi na nnyi, u sengulusa uri Sisiteme ya Mafhungo a Vhudavhidzani ha **Muvhuso** (GCIS) yo dzhia milayo ya vhudifhinduleli na u bvedza muhanga wa kushumele une wa do shuma sa nyendedzi ya u dzhiwa ha milayo iyi ya vhudifhinduleli. Ngudo dzo wana uri manwalwa na zwo bvedzwaho nga vhukwamani vhukati ha vhashumisani vha muvhuso wa Afrika Tshipembe na vhadzulapo zwi tikedza u dzhiwa ha u vha khagala, u katela vhothe, u vha mulayoni, u fhindula, mufhindulano, vhuvhusi havhudi na tshirunzi sa milayo ya vhudifhinduleli ya ndeme u itela vhukwamani ha muvhuso na vhadzulapo. Tsedzuluso dzo itwaho kha vhadzulapo u itela u kala vhuphara hune GCIS ya dzhia na u shumisa milayo ya vhudifhinduleli dzo sumbedza uri muvhuso wa Afrika Tshipembe a u khou vha khagala, a u iti zwithu lwa mulayo, a u fhindulu nahone a u takuleli nthha milayo ya u katela vhashumisani na vhadzulapo, a u vhusi nga tshirunzi, nahone nga nwambo wa izwo a u vhonali sa mivhuso u vhusaho wo sedza zwa kuvhusele kwavhudi.



Ngudo dzo khunyeledza uri muvhuso wa Afrika Tshipembe u a divha milayo ya vhuḍifhinduleli ine ya tea u dzhiwa musi hu tshi kwamiwa vhadzulapo. Fhedzi, hu na nyendedzi dzi si gathi dza nga ha kushumisele kwa maitete aya. Muhanga wa kushumisele wa muḥalukanyo u dzinginyaho milayo ya vhuḍifhinduleli ine ya tea u dzhiwa kha vhukwamani na vhashumisani na GCIS u itela u pfesesana wo bveledzwa na u kumedzwa.

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# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Accountability can be described as the practice of answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account-giving. Accountability is governed by principles used by a broad spectrum of organizations – global businesses, private enterprises, governments, and civil societies – to demonstrate leadership and performance in an accountable, responsible, and sustainable manner (AA1000, 2018). Companies, government, and nongovernment managers are increasingly confronted with stakeholders' expectations of organizational accountability (Logsdon & Lewellyn, 2017). It is for this reason that Adeoye and Ran (2023), Porumbescu, Meijer and Grimmelikhuijsen (2022), Androniceanu (2021) and Schroeder et al. (2019) argue that ethical, honest, open, and fair engagement with stakeholders is necessary for an entity to function correctly.

This study focuses on accountability in the context of government communication and not public administration. The adoption of accountability principles, that is, the practice of being transparent about the impact of policies, decisions, actions, and associated performance (AA1000, 2018) in the engagement between the government and the public, allows the public and government to have the same perspectives on the actions, milestones, commitments, and challenges of their country. This, therefore, generates a mutual understanding between them. However, the South African government does not consistently implement the accountability mechanism (Maropo, 2018). As a result, accountability deteriorates, and this has an antagonistic impact on the performance of government institutions in South Africa. Therefore, the study aimed to: (1) explore accountability principles fit for the public sector, (2) explore the theoretical relationship between good governance and accountability, (3) describe the extent to which the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) adopts and implements accountability principles, and (4) to develop a framework that will act as a guide to the adoption of accountability principles.



The researcher's main intention in conducting this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge in the government communication management studies and, therefore, yield insights into the implementation of accountability on stakeholder engagement activities, specifically - between GCIS and the citizens as an external stakeholder of South Africa. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background and to explain the rationale for the study by means of the following: A discussion of the background of the research problem, the problem statement, a presentation of objectives, research questions, a brief literature review and the outline of the methodology of the study. The following section presents the contextualisation of the research problem.

## **1.2 THE CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Accountability has moved beyond its bookkeeping origins and has become a requirement for business continuity, necessitating excellent management of public and private stakeholders (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014). The management of stakeholders involves stakeholder engagement, which is concerned with the anticipation and management of conflict, improved decision-making, consensus, creation of stakeholder identification and building relationships (Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen & Laude, 2022). Like any other concept with limitations, the stakeholder engagement concept is not exempted.

The limitations of stakeholder engagement pointed out by Greenwood (2015) is that stakeholder engagement is a neutral practice, neither negative nor positive. He argues that an organization can engage a stakeholder, or set of stakeholders, with ulterior motives or in a deceitful manner just as easily as it can engage stakeholders openly and honestly. Schafer and Zhang (2019) point out that organizations appear to manage stakeholders for an instrumental reason (i.e., performance-based). Waritimi (2011) postulates that organizations tend to listen to and respond to the concerns of stakeholders by virtue of power—undermining the fact that participation of all stakeholders, whether powerful or weak, remains fundamental to organizational excellence. These limitations of stakeholder engagement present an avenue for stakeholder accountability to rectify them. This study argues that the remedy involves an honest and complete inclusion of all stakeholders in the organisation's actions, decision making and issues of value creation (Greenwood, 2015).

Trying to remedy the limitations of stakeholder engagement led to the development of discussions around morally acceptable ways of engaging with stakeholders in the stakeholder management literature. The discussions resulted in the discursive subject of accountability principles, which focus on international regulations of accepted methods in which entities practice their accountability in stakeholder management, reputation management and reporting. The principles are intended for use by institutional bodies interested in developing an accountable and strategic approach to sustainability. Accountability principles will help an organization understand, manage, and improve its sustainability performance (AA 1000, 2018).

Most accountability principles have taken centre stage in the corporate world. Studies such as those conducted by Kaur and Lodhia (2019), Kimani, Ullah, Kodwani and Akhtar (2021), and Safari and Parker (2023) focused on accountability principles in the corporate sector. Those that focus on accountability principles in the South African government sector are limited to studies such as those of Munzhenzi (2016), Maropo (2018), Fagbadebo (2019), Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021), Gasela (2022), Rulashe and Ijeoma, (2022) and Kanyane, Mutema and Zikhali (2022), who mainly looked at the necessity of these principles between the government and its citizens. Currently, the literature does not present guidelines for implementing the principles. Also, it does not consider the distinctive environment of the government sector (which may affect the practice of accountability of stakeholder engagement). This is a research gap that this study attempted to fill.

The study, therefore, intended to bridge this gap by proposing a framework that will guide the government sector on which principles to adopt, and how to adopt and implement or practice accountability principles on stakeholder engagement activities, specifically between the GCIS and the citizens as an external stakeholder of South Africa. Stakeholder engagement in the government sector may differ from the private sector. Therefore, the study's main objective is to explore how the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) adopts accountability principles when facilitating the interactive processes between the government and the people. This aim emanates from the problem statement discussed in the next section.

### 1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Mokou (2021) outlines that the communication task of the South African government is to provide information quickly, transparently and with accountability. The government is similarly responsible for enacting policies to spur the growth of communication structures and enable people to function as active citizens in a democratic environment. The South African government communication policy approved by the cabinet in 2018 argues that government communication is driven by democratic principles of openness and participation and is guided by the basic principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation. Communication, transparency, and accountability are the core of the government's engagements with its citizens in South Africa. However, the accountability mechanism is frequently not implemented in all three spheres of government in South African public services (Maropo, 2018). Therefore, accountability erodes, and this has an adverse impact on the performance of government institutions in South Africa.

Scandals of a lack of accountability and transparency involving public officials and public representatives in South African governance have often captured world attention. Most of these scandals result from the deteriorating ethical behaviour of public officials and public representatives who have become involved in all sorts of malpractices. The eroding accountability issue is not only a problem in South Africa. Bendaoud (2019) outlines that the privatization of housing assistance in Canada is a result of eroding government accountability. Ruth (2018) argues that Populism in Latin America symbolises the erosion of horizontal accountability. Cooper, Tweedie, Andrew and Baker (2023) posit that, in the UK, democratic accountability has been eroded - despite the far greater emphasis formally placed upon meeting the ideal of transparent workings of power. Hence, there is a genuine demand that the public sector strengthen ethics, integrity, transparency, accountability, and professionalism for legitimacy and enhanced public sector performance (Jarbandhan, 2022).

Studies such as those conducted by Kaur and Lodhia (2019), Kimani et al. (2021), and Safari and Parker (2023) focused on accountability principles in the corporate sector. Those that focus on accountability principles in the South African government sector are limited to studies such as those of Munzhendzi (2016), Moropo (2018), Fagbadebo (2019), Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021), Gasela (2022), Rulashe and Ijeoma (2022) and Kanyane, Mutema and Zikhali (2022), who mostly looked at the necessity of these principles between the government and its citizens. Currently, the literature does not present guidelines on how the principles should be implemented and does not consider the distinctive environment of the government sector (which may affect the practice of accountability in stakeholder engagement). This is a research gap that this study sought to fill. Therefore, a cross-sectional mixed-method study to investigate the practice of accountability principles in stakeholder (citizen) engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding was conducted to develop an accountability framework. The research questions and objectives presented in the following section guided the study.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

##### **Main Research Question:**

**RQ0:** How does the GCIS practice accountability in stakeholder engagement as measured by adopting accountability principles?

##### **Specific Questions:**

**RQ1:** Which accountability principles are essential to be adopted in stakeholder engagement in the public sector?

**RQ2:** What is the theoretical relationship between good governance and accountability?

**RQ3:** To what extent is the GCIS adopting and implementing accountability principles, according to stakeholders?

**RQ4:** Which elements will build a framework that will guide the adoption of accountability principles?

All research questions are answered in chapter 8.

## **1.5 THE OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY**

### **Main Research Objective:**

**RO0:** To explore how the GCIS practices accountability in stakeholder engagement as measured by adopting accountability principles.

### **Specific Objectives:**

**RO1:** To describe accountability principles essential to adopt in public sector stakeholder engagement.

**RO2:** To explore the theoretical relationship between good governance and accountability.

**RO3:** To explore the extent to which the GCIS adopts and implements accountability principles according to stakeholders.

**RO4:** To develop a framework that will act as a guide to the adoption of accountability principles.

The achievement of all research objectives is addressed in chapter 8.

### **Research Hypothesis**

**H01:** There is no association between Accountability principles and areas of accountability.

**H02:** There is no association between the communication of accountability and accountability principle.

**H03:** There is no association between stakeholder engagement and accountability principles.

All hypotheses are tested in chapter 7.

This section presents the research objectives and the hypothesis of the study. The following section focuses on a brief literature review of the study.

## 1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study focuses on the principles of accountability for stakeholder engagement. Excellence, amongst other theories, is the grounding theoretical framework in this research, while accountability principles and stakeholder engagement are the major concepts considered in this study. Studies on GCIS's stakeholder engagement have been widely conducted. Semono (2020) describes the role of communication uniformity between the local government in Polokwane and its citizens. Naidoo and Holtzhausen (2020) looked at the role of social media in fostering public participation in GCIS. Motloutsi (2019), explored how the engagement of the South African government with citizens is necessary for calming the rise of protests among the Tzaneen communities. Rasila and Mudau (2012) introduced a communication model relevant to effective public engagement, which goes beyond consultation and mobilisation of community members and sustainable members' participation. Netshitomboni (2007) proposed that 'imbizo' (which is a traditional gathering convened by traditional leaders when there is an issue to be discussed within the community) is an alternate solution for GCIS to achieve effective engagement with the public in another study, Conradie, Morris and Naidoo (2010) pinpointed Thusong Centres as resolutions to providing communities across South Africa with the necessary platform to engage with the government. However, the framework for implementing these engagement principles is not presented.

The study argues that accountability principles could be missing in successful public engagements. However, accountability principles have received significant attention only in the subject of accounting and in the private sector. The considerable growth of accountability literature attests to the aforementioned. Literature by Agostino, Saliterer and Steccolini (2022), Goddard (2021), Wieringa (2020), Cordery, Belal and Thomson (2019), as well as Greco, Sciulli and D'Onza (2015), focuses much on accountable reporting, illustrating that accountability is vital in reporting systems of the corporate sector. The literature is silent regarding accountability as an approach to stakeholder engagement that would yield mutual understanding between the South African government and its stakeholders.

Barker and Angelopulo (2013) argue that society demands integrity from organizations because society is now less trusting of organizational claims and more sophisticated in its knowledge of the organization and its conduct. Therefore, integrating accountability principles in stakeholder engagement could help the GCIS build mutual understanding with the public, allowing them to have credible knowledge about their government, which will build trust and legitimacy.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical framework**

The study is grounded on the Excellence Theory, among the other theories discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. This theory explains how public relations make organizations effective (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). How the organization relates and engages with its stakeholders determines its effectiveness. Therefore, relationships between the organization and its stakeholders are imperative for the success of a corporation. For this study, how the government of South Africa engages with its stakeholders, citizens to be specific, determines its effectiveness. The government is effective when its governance is legitimate (Maropa, 2018). This study argues that this effectiveness for the South African government, achieving mutual understanding with stakeholders and being legitimate, lies in accountable stakeholder engagement.

The study is grounded on the excellence theory's key doctrine that engaging with stakeholders makes the organization effective. However, the study focuses on the adoption of accountability to achieve effectiveness within the South African government. This theory was developed within the public relations field with a focus on the corporate sector, where organizational effectiveness was concerned with how relationships with stakeholders can contribute to boosting revenues. In this study, the theory is used in the public sector setting and not for the economic success of an administration but for reasons of legitimacy and good governance.

## **1.7 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1.7.1 Research Paradigm**

The approach to a research study is primarily determined by the research paradigm selected, which, among others, guides a study with respect to the methodology employed, the view of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and the topic under investigation (epistemology) and the ethical orientation of the researcher (axiology) (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). According to Goldkuhl (2012), pragmatism promotes action instead of merely observing a phenomenon as such, and in accordance with the aim of the current study to identify possible principles of accountability in government communication in South Africa.

A pragmatic research approach was deemed most appropriate for investigating the adoption of accountability principles in real-life settings. Pragmatism is the philosophy of common sense. It uses purposeful human inquiry as a focal point. Inquiry is viewed as a continuing process that acknowledges the qualitative nature of human experience as problematic situations emerge and are recognised. Recognition involves the doubt associated with questioning existing belief systems. Doubt is resolved through critical reasoning and ultimately tested in action (Cresswell, 2017). It is a common-sense philosophy because actions are assessed considering practical consequences. Creighton criticizes philosophy for believing in a universal thought process. Moore (2019) argues that if every real thought (common sense) has some degree of truth as per the philosophy, it also has some degree of error, meaning that research cannot rely on human thoughts as data, which might lead to error. However, the criticism against pragmatism forgets that thinking generates error and truth, that it can shut people together with illusions and things and that the solution is to distinguish one from the other. The point of departure in a traditional view of pragmatism is that the truth is provisional rather than a fixed or objective reality (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This view, therefore, incorporates the notion that there are multiple views of reality, which is in a constant state of flux. Hence, bearing in mind the diversity in the public sector and the challenges it faces to promote its causes and create strong perceptions of its mandate, this research contended that a specific paradigm, such as pragmatism, was needed to explore the sector's multiple realities of adopting accountability principles.



### **1.7.2 The research design**

The present study adopted a mixed-method research design whereby data was collected from various sources (Mentz, 2012). Cresswell (2017) regards a mixed-method research design as a type of research that employs research methods from both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Bryman (2016) concurs and defines mixed method research as comprising a “cross-section design to collect data by questionnaire or by structured interview”, with the specific aim of collecting quantitative or qualitative data.

The design was adopted for its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimising the limitations of both approaches. The design was also a useful strategy to have a more complete understanding of the research problem. The study followed the exploratory sequential mixed method where the qualitative data collection was the first phase, followed by the quantitative data collection phase; this approach was employed for its benefits of providing reliability, validity, and dependability of research results. The study used an online survey and content analysis. The desire usually prompts the decision to combine different data collection methods and the need to understand the topic under investigation thoroughly. The design is further discussed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

## **1.8 THE POPULATION AND SAMPLING METHODS**

### **1.8.1 Target population**

The target population is the totality of persons, events, organization units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned (Huck, Beavers & Esquivel, 2010; Fox & Bayat, 2007; Strydom, 2014). In other words, it is the larger group from which respondents (survey) as well as documents (document analysis) of a study are selected, which, for the current purposes of both the qualitative and quantitative research methods, is the South African citizens, and GCIS’s guiding documents of communication practice.

### **1.8.2 Accessible population**

The accessible population is the population in research to which the researchers can apply their conclusions. This population is a subset of the target population, also known as the study population. It is from the accessible population that researchers draw their samples (Cresswell, 2017); the accessible population is the portion of the population to which the researcher has reasonable access; it may be a subset of the target population (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Pernecky (2016) argues that the accessible population comprises members of the target population willing to participate and will be available during the study. It is often smaller than the target population because the transition to it is potentially characterized by a significant number of individuals opting out of the study. The accessible population are the Tshwane citizens who visit GCIS's information centres as well as cabinet-approved documents that guide the communication practices of GCIS and citizens.

### **1.8.3 Unit of analysis**

According to Keller (2010), the primary unit or unit of analysis in a research study is probably one of the most fundamental considerations when conducting research. Adams (2008) concurs and describes it as the entity about which an inference is made. Such an entity might comprise different units of which social groups, social artefacts, individuals, or organizations are examples. Considering the aim of the present study, which was to propose principles for a conceptual framework in South Africa, combined with the intention to determine the likelihood that the public sector would apply the proposed principles, the unit of analysis in this study is key individuals and documents. Hence, (1) the citizens that the government accounts to and (2) the documents guiding accountability discussed in the above section (1.8.2 accessible population) would serve as sources of information and would be used to investigate how the public sector of South Africa operationalises the adoption of accountability principles. Therefore, the analysis unit included the respondents, the recipients to whom accountability is adopted, that is, the public, and documents that guide accountability in the sector.

#### **1.8.4 Sample method**

Convenience sampling is a method adopted by researchers where they collect data from a conveniently available pool of respondents. It is the most used sampling technique as it is incredibly prompt, uncomplicated, and economical (Cresswell, 2017; Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup & Fitzgerald, 2016). Members are often readily approachable to be a part of the sample. The study conveniently sampled 385 citizens of South Africa who visited the Tshwane information service centres between January and March 2022. Since the population was large, testing the entire community of Tshwane was practically impossible because they were not easy to reach. The Tshwane geographical area was chosen because of a population concentration of 2.3 million within its 2 198 square kilometres (Tshwane, 2010). Tshwane is the second largest municipality in Gauteng and is a large developing community. Also, eight documents guiding the South African government of communication practices and accountability principles were conveniently accessed from the GCIS website in March 2022, only these eight documents were used as they were the only ones updated and relevant at the time of data collection.

#### **1.8.5 Data collection techniques**

This research study combined data collection methods from qualitative and quantitative research approaches to investigate the topic at hand. Document content analysis of eight documents, namely, Comtask Report 2000; White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997; Access to Information Manual for GCIS (2018); Thusong Service Centres: Government Communications Business Plan 2006-2014 (GCIS, 2006); Government Communicators Handbook; Government Communication Policy approved by Cabinet (2018); Green Paper on Service Delivery; National Anti-Corruption strategy (2020) was administered in March 2022. Then, 385 online surveys were administered to South African citizens in June 2022 with only 101 returned.

The underlying rationale was to obtain an in-depth exploration of how the government of South Africa aims to implement accountability principles when engaging with its stakeholders, the citizens of South Africa, to be specific, by means of analysing documents that guide the GCIS's communication practices. Then, examine how the government of South Africa implements accountable stakeholder engagements with its citizens through the administration of a questionnaire to gather the public's views about how the government is accountable to them.

### **1.8.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is defined as the nonnumerical examination and interpretation of observations to discover underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 2007). This kind of analysis can be conducted in various ways, and there is no correct way to do it (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2014). The document content was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which is a systematic approach used to identify themes in the text, code the data and interpret the themes by exploring relationships, commonalities, and the like (Byrne, 2016; Lichtman, 2014:323; Bryman et al., 2014; Lapadat, 2010). Document content analysis was analysed by coding the data, which, according to Schwandt (2001), is a procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks them down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments. Direct quotations and evidence were organized in support of the patterns that emerged.

For the quantitative data analysis, a descriptive analysis method was adopted. Descriptive statistics are generally used in quantitative research to interpret and explain the data by describing coherently (Fouché & Bartley, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012). The questionnaire findings were aptly reported and summarised in Chapter 7 and dealt with the median, means and frequencies. In addition, inferential statistics was used to identify possible general trends and correlations in the data relating to the identified elements and theoretical elements. According to Field (2009), inferential statistics are useful to confirm or reject predictions about a particular issue.

Descriptive statistics was categorised in two ways: numerically using the three measures of central tendency and graphically using tables and graphics. The central tendency was measured through the mean, median and mode. All scores were summarised and divided by the number of test scores to determine the mean. For the median, the middle score of all achieved scores was calculated. Lastly, for the mode, the most common achievement score was looked at (Given, 2008:210).

When analysing quantitative data, the raw data from the completed questionnaires in an electronic format was taken and prepared through coding, entering, and cleaning. During the coding process, information was transformed from one form to another. Data from the questionnaire was changed to a numerical format understood by the analysing program (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:189). For instance, when using a Likert-type scale in a questionnaire, 'strongly agree' was coded number 1 while 'strongly disagree' was coded number 5. Numbers replaced words. Numerical codes were then entered into the computer. Rows were labelled according to cases, while columns were labelled according to scores on specific variables. The last step of preparing data was to check and recheck the data for errors, which were corrected when found to produce valid and conclusive results (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:192). Data was summarised through tables and graphics with the aim of improving the meaning.

## **1.9 ETHICAL ISSUES**

Gorman and Clayton (2005) state that the rights of individuals involved in the research study include confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary participation, no falsifying information, and informed consent. Accordingly, this study employed several methods to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Data was presented as a generalized whole without reference to individuals, maintaining anonymity. Respondents were informed of the nature and purpose of the research in writing and verbally before the data collection. Approval and ethical clearance from the relevant authorities were also sought and acquired before the fieldwork was conducted. Respondents did not receive monetary rewards for participating in the study and were allowed to participate voluntarily and sign a consent form. They were protected from harm by not having personal interaction with the researcher and other participants, to minimise chances of COVID-19 transmission. Data from the content analysis was not falsified.

## **1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study contributes to the literature on government communication management. Currently, the literature by Quick and Bryson (2022); Hove, D'Ambruoso, Twine, Mabetha, Van Der Merwe, Mtungwa, Khoza, Kahn, and Witter (2021); Motloutsi (2019); Garcia-Zamor (2019) provides insight on the importance of government stakeholder engagement. Other scholars such as Kgobe and Mamokhere (2022), Rulashe and Ijeoma (2022), Gasela (2022), Sibanda, Zindi and Maramura (2020) emphasise the significance of an accountable government. However, studies that present guidelines on how to the public sector can be accountable when engaging with stakeholders, citizens to be specific are few in South Africa. This is a research gap that this study endeavoured to fill.

The researcher's main intention in conducting this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge in the government communication management studies and, therefore, yield insights into the implementation of accountability for stakeholder engagement activities, specifically - between GCIS and the citizens as an external stakeholder of South Africa. The researcher is of the view that knowing principles of accountability documented on accountability and stakeholder engagement policy and guiding documents is not enough, the knowledge needs to be actioned. However, if an approach of actioning this knowledge is not prescribed, there is a problem. This study intends to remedy that problem by presenting a framework of actioning accountability principles for stakeholder engagement in the public sector of South Africa.

## **1.11 LIMITATIONS**

The researcher encountered limited challenges with the semi-structured interviews, which were supposed to be conducted but failed. Regarding the online surveys, some respondents had no data to participate; others experienced connectivity errors, contributing to a low response rate and affecting the generalisation of results.

## **1.12 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.12.1 GCIS**

The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) is an entity that delivers effective strategic government communication. It sets and influences adherence to standards and coherence of messages and proactively communicates with the public about government policies, plans, programmes, and achievements. The role of the GCIS is to help the government transmit messages and give account to citizens by the government. The GCIS, according to the Com Task Report (2000), has been designed to maximise the capacity of the existing government communication 'system', restructured in a fundamental way to achieve the goals and objectives of the new system that will develop and strengthen the relationships and partnerships between government and civil society. In this study, the GCIS is the context of the study as the study intends to investigate how the GCIS, as a mouthpiece of the South African government, adopts accountability principles when engaging with stakeholders who are the citizens of South Africa.

### **1.12.2 Public Participation**

Public participation entails an increased involvement of the public in government affairs (Rasila & Mudau, 2012). Public participation is the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities (Frewer, 2013). The Public Participation Framework (2013) defines public participation as a process by which the government, prior to making decisions, consult with the individuals, groups, organizations, and government entities who may be affected by these decisions. According to Rensburg and de Beer (2012), public participation should be at a degree of inclusivity, which entails giving citizens the right to be heard while the government simultaneously accepts the responsibility to be held accountable (AA1000SES, 2018). In this study, public participation is perceived as an engagement of the South African government with any citizen group as a legitimate vehicle for government accountability and societal change.

### **1.12.3 Accountability Principles**

Accountability principles are a rule of conduct that provides a set of overarching values but are non-specific in prescribing behaviour (AA1000, 2018) in daily reporting about the reasons for certain conduct. It is an obligation to provide a formal or informal account and explain those actions for which one is held responsible (Slabbert, 2016). In this process, certain mechanisms articulate accounts and facilitate the justification itself. Accountability principles were conceived from accountability standards (Rensburg & de Beer, 2012). Standards represent predefined rules for behaviour. Standards establish a system under which compliance certifications are awarded to organizations that comply with certain predefined regulations. Performance standards define what an organization should or should not do, such as paying a living wage or preventing discrimination. Conversely, process standards describe the procedures that organizations are supposed to put in place to manage their accountability efforts effectively.

### **1.12.4 Governance**

Addink (2019) states that governance refers to the various ways social life is coordinated, whereas Govender (2013) articulates that governance is about the implementation of laws and the provision of services and products to citizens of the country by the government. Those government programmes should contribute towards an enhanced quality of life for all the people of the country. Governance must imply that the outcomes of public administration are aimed at quality service delivery and improving the general welfare of its people. The institutional arrangement that consigns power to public representatives and officials and then defines the mechanism to hold them accountable is called governance. Therefore, governance is a condition that guarantees the process of participation, transparency of decision-making, rule of law and predictability. In the context of government organizations, public accountability is the provision of information about the activities and financial performance of the government to the parties concerned with the report. Consequently, as an endorsement of transparency, good governance is a mechanism for accountability. The concept of good governance is discussed as a motivation for accountability in this study.



### 1.13 THESIS STRUCTURE

The study has the following chapters. **Chapter 1**, Introduction. This chapter introduces the study, containing the background, problem statement, objectives, brief literature, and an outline of the research methodology employed in this research. **Chapter 2**, The Theoretical Framework. This chapter discusses theories that explain how and why accountability and stakeholder engagement should be practised and demarcate the position of the study in these theories. This chapter presents the theories of accountability, legitimacy theory, agency theory, stakeholder theory, and excellence theory. **Chapter 3**, Stakeholder Engagement. This chapter explores stakeholder engagement, how it is practised in both the public and corporate sectors, and how the GCIS practices it. **Chapter 4**, Accountability Principles. This chapter outlines what accountability is, the importance of accountability practices for both an organization and its stakeholders, how accountability is practised in the private sector, democratic states and specifically how the South African government practices it and how it can further endeavour to adopt it with a specific focus on why it should adopt these principles.

**Chapter 5**, Research Methodologies. This chapter presents in detail the methodologies adopted in this research. **Chapter 6**, Qualitative Results. This chapter presents the results from the content analysis of documents guiding the South African government regarding accountability for engagement with stakeholders (citizens). **Chapter 7**, Quantitative Results. This chapter presents the results from the online survey administered to South African citizens on how accountability and engagement are practised. **Chapter 8**, Conclusion. This chapter presents this research's main findings and conclusions.

### 1.14 SUMMARY

Calls to transform and reposition accountable stakeholder engagement approaches at all organizational levels and in all functions of the organization are certainly not new. Organizations are also aware of their reliance on effective stakeholder engagement practices for beneficial relationships with their stakeholders and survival.

Nonetheless, one of the pressing challenges facing government and non-government entities worldwide is the need to continuously adopt accountability principles in stakeholder engagements to achieve mutual understanding. The advent of accountability presents not only unique challenges to the public sector of South Africa but also opportunities to maximise the stakeholder engagement efforts of the sector towards attaining legitimacy. Stakeholder engagement practices and the adoption of accountability principles by the public sector of South Africa have yet to be fully explored. Currently, the literature does not present guidelines on how the principles should be implemented and does not consider the distinctive environment of the government sector. What is required is an exploration of how this sector could operationalise accountability principles in stakeholder engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding.

This chapter introduced the problem of the study, which is the eroding accountability in the South African government. The chapter provided the background of the problem, the objectives of the study, which are to build a framework for adopting accountability principles when engaging with stakeholders, and a brief literature and research methodology employed in this research. The next chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates the adoption of accountability principles by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) when engaging with stakeholders, citizens to be specific. The previous chapter demarcated the focus of the study which is on accountability principles for public stakeholder engagement. The adoption of accountability principles in public engagements permits the public and government to have the same perspectives on their country's actions, milestones, commitments, and challenges. This, therefore, generates mutual understanding between them. This chapter presents a theoretical framework of the concept of accountability and stakeholder engagement, forming this study's basis. These theories are discussed to identify how and why accountability should be adopted for stakeholder engagement practises; they demarcate the position of the study. The theories the chapter presents are the agency and stewardship theory, legitimacy theory, stakeholder theory, excellence theory and the reflective paradigm.

#### **2.2 ACCOUNTABILITY THEORIES**

##### **2.2.1 Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory**

Two theories have emerged to describe principal–agent relationships in an organizational context: agency theory and stewardship theory. Agency theory assumes a goal conflict exists between the principal, who requires accountability and the agent, who must account. As both parties in the relationship want to maximise their utility, there is good reason to believe that the agent will not always act in the interest of the principal (Du Bois, 2015). This implies that when the agent's behaviour is not controlled or restrained, the principal's goals are unlikely to be fully attained. Due to this problem, the principal–agent relationship will involve some costs called agency costs.

Jegers (2021) define agency costs as the sum of monitoring costs, bonding costs, and residual loss. Monitoring costs refer to the costs the principal incurs to constrain the activities of the agent. Bonding costs refer to the costs the agent makes to convince the principal of her commitment. The welfare loss for the principal, as compared with a situation of complete utility alignment, is called the residual loss. To minimise these agency costs and to counter the divergence of interests, principals seek to motivate agents to act in their interest through monitoring and incentive alignment (Payne & Petrenko, 2019). Firstly, the principal can increase the agent's monitoring level to improve the information he possesses but needs to consider the possibility that stricter monitoring may reduce work effort (Corgnet, Gómez-Miñambres & Hernán-Gonzalez, 2018).

Secondly, the principal may try to align the interests of his agent with his own objectives by offering a contract in which the compensation scheme is altered from effort-based pay to outcome-based pay so that the principal and the agent share a common interest in the performance of the organization (Corgnet, Gómez-Miñambres & Hernán-Gonzalez, 2018). This solution is not very plausible in a government context due to the well-known problems of accurately measuring performance (Newton, 2015; Brown, 2005; Tacon, Walters & Cornforth, 2017). Therefore, to avoid agency problems, the government may focus on appropriately selecting agents. Although agency theory appears to be the dominant paradigm underlying most of the governance literature, researchers have suggested the theoretical limits of agency theory and proposed stewardship as an alternative management theory (Dicke & Ott, 2023).

Stewardship theory has its roots in psychology and sociology and can be divided into two branches (Dicke & Ott, 2023). The first branch also starts from a conflict between the goals of the principal and the agent but assumes that the agent will be motivated to act in the interest of the principal (Jegers, 2021). This implies that, even when the interests of the agent and the principal are not aligned, the agent can attain a higher utility level by acting in the principal's interest because doing so might lead to opportunities for desired personal outcomes such as achievement, affiliation, and self-actualisation (Jegers, 2021). The second branch assumes that the agent's goals are perfectly aligned with those of the principal (Solomon, 2020).

Both agency and stewardship theories focus on the relationship between principals and agents but start from different assumptions and prescriptions. Organizational identification is defined as 'a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organisation's successes and failures as one's own' (Dicke & Ott, 2023). Agency theory assumes that agents with a low identification with the organization may externalise organizational problems to avoid blame. Stewardship theory, in contrast, assumes that agents have a high identification with the mission of the organisation. Therefore, attributing organizational successes to themselves will contribute to their self-image and self-concept (Dicke & Ott, 2023).

Stewardship theory emphasises the agent's tendency to be collectively orientated and intrinsically motivated (Solomon, 2020). An agent is intrinsically motivated if she performs an activity for no apparent reward except the activity itself. In agency theory, the focus is on individualistic, self-serving agents who perform an activity because of external drivers such as financial incentives, status, or other rewards. Although previous agency literature focused only on extrinsic motivation, Dicke and Ott (2023) suggest that the employee's utility function can also partly be determined by intrinsic motives different from the principal's. For example, agents in a healthcare organization may want to help each client as much as possible (quality). In contrast, the principal wants to treat as many clients as possible well enough (quantity).

The agency theory has already been implemented within the government context, where officials acting as agents have been and are being offered rewards or incentives based on their performance to encourage accountability. Subramanian (2018) outlines that government officials still need accountability, although incentives are in place for their good performance. An awareness of the stewardship theory should be done in the government context where officials will heed the call of accountability not based on rewards but on being naturally motivated to good governance, accountability, and transparency. The theory emphasises the importance of focusing on the calibre of office bearers required to respond to the call of stewardship. The public sector has an inherent social responsibility far beyond the private sector. With no expectation of any monetary return, they are responsible for service delivery of basic needs, public health, public safety, food security and development as a public good.

The theory emphasizes that officials who still stand for public scrutiny when called to have a calibre of officials that bear the reputation of legitimacy and good government. The study is of the view that this theory aligns with the accountability principle of “public serving”. For accountability to be achieved, those who need to account should be able to fulfil that role of accounting, taking responsibility, being responsive, transparent, and answerable. Applying this theory in the South African government might resolve South Africans' complaints since 2009. South Africans have been complaining about cabinet reshuffles done to manage political dynamics and not to serve in roles. Amongst other principles, the principle of serving the public becomes necessary for the government.

### **2.2.2 Legitimacy theory**

The legitimacy theory conceives the organization as a social contract linking societal and business interests. The basic concept of this theory is that organizations aim to match their value systems with the values of the larger social system to which the entity belongs (Greiling, 2015; Ntim et al., 2017). The theory, therefore, outlines that the government's values should align with those of the society they serve. According to Suchman (1995:574), “legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions”. Therefore, legitimacy theory provides a societal-led motivation for voluntary disclosure. More extensive public sector organizations generally face greater legitimation needs caused by their higher visibility and influence (Greiling, 2015). The government can only survive if its activities and objectives are supported by society and, as such, perceived to be legitimate. Voluntary disclosures are a building block of this theory (Deegan, 2019); they are desirable by themselves in that they are appropriate actions “expected” of a “professional and well-structured” organisation.

Deegan (2019) breaks down legitimacy into three broad types: pragmatic (conforming to demands), moral (conforming to ideals or adoption of best practices) and cognitive (conforming to established/professional models or standards to demonstrate that the organization has intrinsically worthy characteristics).

The distinction between mandatory (pragmatic) and discretionary (moral and cognitive) disclosures should be useful to preserve a level of uniformity whilst simultaneously allowing organizations to adapt disclosure to their specific circumstances (Chiwamit, Modell & Scapens, 2017). For this study, the legitimacy theory is a mechanism that supports the public sector in implementing and developing voluntary accountability to fulfil governance mandate that enables the recognition of their objectives and survival in a precarious and turbulent environment. The social perceptions of the public sector's activities are reported to the expectations of society. When the government's activities do not respect moral values, the public sector receives a negative reputation from society. These negative images may even lead to the government's failure. The new economic, social, and environmental challenges dictate that governments respect the rules, values, and norms and voluntarily disclose social and environmental information to probe their compliance. Therefore, legitimacy theory plays the role of a justifiable factor for accountability.

In South Africa, the issue of corruption, poor service delivery and poverty put pressure on the government to re-evaluate its values system and to emphasise the importance of legitimacy. Many scholars have criticized enhancing the legitimacy theory (Moloi & Marwala, 2020; Meutia, Kartasari & Yaacob, 2022). Legitimacy theory was sometimes seen only as a 'plausible explanation of managerial motivations' without any real effort to determine how a disclosure may or may not promote transparency and accountability towards non-capital provider stakeholder groups (Meutia et al., 2022) and not like an instrument to be used for making viable predictions (Moloi & Marwala, 2020). Therefore, the public sector must voluntarily be accountable to legitimate their legitimacy. Their accountability should be accompanied by concrete actions that comply with democratic norms and values.

## **2.3 STAKEHOLDER THEORIES**

### **2.3.1 The Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory is concerned with the relationships between an organization and a variety of relevant groups of stakeholders in society (Abd Aziz, Ghadas, & Hassan, 2018). A stakeholder is a person or group that can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives (Freeman, 1984:46; Freeman, 2020).

Therefore, stakeholder theory places great emphasis on identifying and managing key interest groups. The stakeholder concept is intended to broaden management's vision of its roles and responsibilities beyond the profit maximisation functions to include interests and claims of non-stockholding groups (Makwambeni & Matsika, 2022). Shareholders are a substantial class among stakeholders, but other audiences, such as customers, suppliers, employees, local communities, regulators, the media, or the public, may also be important. From a normative point of view, stakeholder theory sets out that organizations must recognise the multiple expectations of their different stakeholders and that it is their duty to provide a full and transparent account of their activities to a broader audience.

In this line, stakeholder theory highlights that corporate accountability should move beyond simple economic or financial performance (Craig & Rowena, 2020). This is because the corporation's long-term survival and success require all its stakeholders' support. Gaining this support and approval requires a dialogue between the management of a corporation and its stakeholders (Kamal, 2021). Previous research has noted that the private sector becomes accountable to stakeholders by power or for financial reasons (Rock, 2020; Ni, 2020; Dmytriyev, Freeman & Hörisch, 2021). This means that the private sector accounts to stakeholders with the power to influence their business and sound financial status that can benefit organizationalbusiness objectives. However, it works differently in the public sector, where accountability must be exercised on all stakeholder groups, both the powerful and the disadvantaged (Barnett, Henriques & Husted, 2018).

Compared with private sector entities, public sector organizations are accountable to a larger variety of stakeholders with less clear prioritisation mechanisms and hierarchies (Greiling et al., 2015). Regarding the public sector, the literature investigating the normative aspects of the stakeholder theory views citizens as equal to the rest of the key stakeholders, with legitimate interests driven by philosophical concepts such as moral ethics, the common good, freedom, fairness, and justice (Yekini, Adelopo, Andrikopoulos, & Yekini, 2015).



However, the literature acknowledges that, very often, variability in the disclosure themes may be due to an instrumental form of stakeholder theory, whereby organizations may strategically orient their voluntary disclosures to target and manage their most important stakeholder(s) (Ntim et al., 2017; Pérez, López, & García-De los Salmones, 2017). Mitchell et al. (1997) argues that managers' behaviour towards stakeholders' demands will vary according to the legitimacy of the different stakeholders and their urgency and power. When there is legitimacy but not power and urgency, managers are not pressured to engage in an active relationship with such stakeholders. However, managers can choose to do so. This may explain why financial and non-financial disclosures are not widely adopted until mandatory requirements are established (Mitchell et al., 1997). For the public sector, the international recognition of transparency and disclosure as tools to improve trust and legitimacy (OECD, 2015; World Bank, 2014) and the recent enactment of legislation requiring public sector transparency could be interpreted by government officials as a matter of urgency.

In a situation of dependency (where there is urgency, and the stakeholders are legitimate but have no power), citizens will depend upon others (other stakeholders or government officials) for the power necessary to satisfy their needs. As has been argued, public sector relationships between the agents (government officials) and principals (citizens) are complex, open-ended, not explicitly defined and not easily monitored (Zogning, 2017; Mitnick, 2015). Therefore, citizens become legitimate stakeholders in the urgency of the public sector reform, although they depend on the power of other stakeholders to make the government's transparency a pursued goal. According to the stakeholder theory, public sector accountability should be to all stakeholders through communication on which relationships are established between the government and its citizens, focusing on mutual understanding (Freeman, Phillips & Sisodia, 2020). This understanding concerns common issues and how the public sector fulfils its responsibility by addressing those issues. Such communication relationships are characterised by collaboration, openness, and listening (Miles, 2017; Barney & Harrison, 2020). This relationship should also be managed strategically through two-way symmetrical communication.

The stakeholder theory contemplates maximising value for all stakeholders aligned with the organisation's strategy to ensure the realisation of mutually beneficial objectives for the organization and stakeholders (Freeman, Phillips & Sisodia, 2020). Donaldson and Preston (1995) identified stakeholder theory's descriptive, instrumental, and normative aspects, which elucidate various aspects. They considered 'Stakeholder Theory' to be essentially instrumental if it creates a framework for examining the connections if there are indeed any, between the practice of stakeholder management and the attainment of numerous corporate performance objectives. The instrumental approach emphasises why an organization acting ethically should lead to competitive advantages.

Every organization is managed by professional managers who are contracting agents. Organizations exist in a competitive environment, which places pressure on them. When organizations have ethically appropriate relationships with all stakeholders, and mutual trust and cooperation exist, the organization has a competitive advantage. According to Clarkson (1994), the descriptive approach proposes that managers behave as if stakeholders matter because of the intrinsic justice of their (stakeholders') claims on the firm. This approach suggests that stakeholder identification and stakeholders' salience to corporate managers are based upon the moral legitimacy of a stakeholder's claim, the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, and the urgency of the stakeholder's issue. The central thesis of their theory is that stakeholder salience will be positively related to the cumulative number of stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. Therefore, stakeholders are engaged in the descriptive approach based on their power to influence an organisation.

Stakeholder engagement is normative when it involves acceptance of all the various stakeholders as persons or groups with legitimate interests in the procedural and/or substantive aspects of the organisation's activity. In this case, the interests of all stakeholders are of primary importance. The normative approach is a derivative of the stakeholder theory. It is specifically concerned with establishing a relationship between the organization and stakeholders within an ethical and morally acceptable framework (Zakhem & Palmer, 2017).

This paradigm is also congruent with the relational view of strategic management, which emphasises the original intention of the stakeholder theory of viewing the organization and its stakeholders in two-way relationships (Freeman et al., 2020). The relationship between management and stakeholders is not concerned with achieving the self-interests of the organization but with mutually beneficial objectives based on high ethical and moral standards.

The functionalist perspective of the stakeholder theory views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation and broadly focuses on the social structures that shape society. A political perspective of the theory of stakeholders opposes a functionalist approach (Garriga, 2021). It is firmly based on economic assumptions and the stakeholders' unique role in an organisation's economic performance. Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2022) present the difference in the political perspective in focus on mutuality, which ensures that values are created with and for stakeholders, diverging from the position of value created solely based on economic purposes, as a capital return.

The stakeholders mobilise other experiences, in addition to the economic one, considering the dynamism of goals, expectations and needs of the networks with whom they interface and act in different networks simultaneously. In this way, a network of stakeholders, rather than being perceived as, for example, competitors, can be assumed to be a contributor network, no longer perceived as restricting their practices to an extended position in the generation of value (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). The descriptive approach of the theory reflects and explains the past, present, and future. It tends to generate exploratory and predictive propositions, whereas the instrumental approach tries to apprehend the connection between stakeholder approaches and mutually beneficial outcomes such as profitability. Therefore, the instrumental is generally used to explore the relationship between causes (the management of stakeholders) and effects (organizational performance).

Normative theory tries to study these relations based on their ethical aspects and philosophical principles. Within this approach, things are done or not done because of their ethical standard, not their profitability.

The instrumental approach of the stakeholder theory, in which the corporation is seen as an instrument for wealth generation and its social activities, including stakeholder management, is the only method to achieve economic results. Private corporations mainly prefer to manage stakeholders from an instrumental approach since their main objective is profit-making (Valentinov & Hajdu, 2021). The corporate strategy of stakeholder management maximises shareholder value as the supreme criterion for evaluating specific stakeholder engagement activities. Public entities operate from the descriptive approach of the stakeholder theory. They prioritise the management of stakeholders who have the power to influence the organisation. Public entities manage relationships with multiple actors. They manage relationships with donors, foundations, and governments. Their engagement is often focused on the “spending of designated money for designated purposes” (Jones & Harrison, 2019). They also manage relationships with clients and “groups to whom public entities provide services,” although it may also include communities or regions indirectly affected by their programs (Jones & Harrison, 2019).

The third category of stakeholders whom public entities prioritise are internal stakeholders, including public entities’ responsibility to its mission and staff, which includes decision-makers and field-level implementers. Currently, studies in South Africa using the stakeholder theory in the public sector are studies such as Ndaguba and Hanyane (2019), who developed a stakeholder model for community economic development in alleviating poverty in municipalities in South Africa. Wondirad and Ewnetu (2019) looked at how the stakeholder theory guides community participation in tourism development as a tool to foster sustainable land and resource use practices in the national park milieu of South Africa. Dzomira (2020) premised his study on the stakeholder theory to examine corporate governance, audit committee performance and internal audit functions in an emerging economy’s public sector. The study believed that these two functions form a part of imperative corporate governance aspects, and their effective performance ensures better service delivery by public sector agencies. Siebritz and Coetzee (2022) evaluated stakeholder influences on the land use application process in South Africa. This study aimed to identify and classify the network of stakeholders involved in the land use application process, which results in allocated land use rights.

This was done by analysing the South African legal framework for spatial planning and land use management and evaluating their a priori influence on this process and land use data. The results of the stakeholder network analysis can guide the identification of (a) suitable custodian(s) for this fundamental geospatial dataset in the context of the South African Spatial Data Infrastructure (SASDI). The study argues that proper management of fundamental geospatial datasets, like land use, determines how well this resource can serve sustainable development goals. South African studies using the stakeholder theory focus on how the public sector can use the theory for growth and development. Issues such as service delivery, poverty elevation and sustainability that have been studied using this theory mainly focus on growth and development. This study intends to bring a new perspective on using the theory to guide the public sector on the approach the government should use when managing relationships with its stakeholders. The study argues that all stakeholders, the rich, poor, weak, strong, literate, illiterate, young, and old, are recipients of accountability. The South African government ought to account for all citizens. The following section presents a discussion of theories of stakeholder engagement.

## **2.4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT THEORIES**

### **2.4.1 Excellence theory: Two-way symmetrical communication**

The excellence theory explains how public relations make organizations effective (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). How the organization relates and engages with its stakeholders determines its effectiveness. Therefore, relationships between the organization and its stakeholders are imperative for the success of a corporation. For this study, how the government of South Africa engages with its stakeholders, citizens to be specific, determines its effectiveness. The government is effective when its governance is legitimate (Maropa, 2018). This study argues that this effectiveness for the South African government, achieving mutual understanding with stakeholders and being legitimate, lies in accountable stakeholder engagement.

The theory views two-way symmetrical communication as the most ethical and accountable approach to communication management (Dozier, 1998:5; Grunig & Grunig, 2000:10, 307-308; Grunig et al., 2000:312, 323, 377-378). Ideally, two-way symmetrical communication should not only focus on achieving the government's goals. This approach should also foster a culture of participation that results in mutually beneficial relationships (communication as a process) that change both the public sector and citizens (Grunig et al., 2008). Communication regarding accountability issues is not used for economic gains through a strategy of one-way information or two-way asymmetrical response.

Currently, the public sectors around the globe are employing an involvement strategy where two-way symmetrical communication fosters involvement and mutual understanding instead of mere propaganda and persuasion (Trapp, 2014). The goal of the involvement strategy is to engage citizens in conversations to “develop and promote positive support” for the government and to understand citizens’ concerns. The intended outcome is establishing relationships based on mutual understanding (Wen & Song, 2017), also identified as an aim of the stakeholder theory. These relationships are formed and cultivated to achieve a strategic advantage for the government but also to the benefit of the citizens since both participate in dialogical communication. This implies that, through dialogue, change takes place and power is expanded, which provides the opportunity for mutual influence between the government and its citizens (Grunig, 2008).

Therefore, the public sector should be willing to expand its power to the citizens, empowering them. In such a case, two-way symmetrical communication can be used to identify objectives that may benefit the government as well as the citizens; the responsibilities can be shared to reach those objectives (Grunig, 2008). In practice, however, the government strives for just enough participation and change to uphold the social order and maintain its own power (Grunig, 2008). The public sector would instead practise the mixed-motive model of negotiation and persuasion. This approach helps them find solutions to problems, reaching the government’s goals and improving its performance, which is also seen as the case in accountability (Moncur, 2006).

In the mixed-motives model, the public sector's focus is on its own interest but not on the disadvantage of the citizens (Grunig & Grunig, 2006). In the process, the government also grasps the importance of promoting the citizens' interests (Grunig, 2008). From a government communication perspective, two-way symmetrical communication seems to be the best way to practice accountability communication. This is because of a balanced focus on objectives for the government and its surrounding society. Such an approach is explained by concepts such as participation, dialogue, empowerment, and change, which guide the communication processes (Grunig & Grunig, 2000:303; Grunig, 2008:170).

#### **2.4.2 Reflective paradigm**

The reflective paradigm describes the relationship between the public sector and society (Holmström, 2018). The reflective paradigm views the public sector as part of a larger society that should be respected instead of having mere relationships with society managed to the government's advantage (Rensburg & de Beer, 2012). The government is, therefore, viewed as part of society and depends on society for its existence. Within the reflective paradigm, the public sector must reflect on its role in society and decide how to service society with accountability (Holmström, 2018). Reflection means that the government relates to itself, its perspectives, and its worldview (Holmström, 2018) within the context of a broader society. According to the reflective paradigm, accountability is a primary communication function that mitigates the conflict between government practices and society's perceptions of these activities (Munzhedzi, 2021; Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021).

Therefore, the communication function informed by the reflective paradigm would guide the government to reflect on societal expectations, values, and norms. This helps the public sector incorporate citizens' issues into their strategy. Based on this reflection, the accountability strategy will be formulated to guide the government to build relationships based on trust, respect, cooperation, and harmony with their citizens. Such relationships should be characterised by dialogue, partnerships, open negotiation, shared responsibilities, symmetrical power relationships, and an understanding of culture and other sociological aspects of the society in which the government services (Holmström, 2018; Maropo, 2018; Rensburg & de Beer, 2012).

These forms of interaction are in accordance with the two-way symmetrical communication model. Through this type of relationship, the public sector is, therefore, seen as accountable towards society, hence earning legitimacy and reputation (Munzhedzi, 2021; Holmström, 2018; Steyn & Niemann, 2014). The reflective paradigm is a theoretical reconstruction of empirical ideals in late modern society. The concept is based on Niklas Luhmann's theories on social systems. In his general social theory, Luhmann describes the dynamics of the social filters through which our perceptions of reality are constructed, that is, how meaning is produced.

Continuous self-referential selection processes constitute these filters (Becerra, 2020) – processes guided solely by their own horizon of meaning, not a communicating subject's intentions and hermeneutic capacities (Luhmann & Theuvsen, 2017). The communicative processes select only from the self-referential, system-specific horizon of meaning. In this respect, social systems are closed systems. However, they are open to the accountability environment in their observations. So, in systems theory, there is never a talk of linear causality and direct adjustment to the environment, only of a social system's – whether society or the government – adjustment to itself. When put under the pressure of selection, the system principally synchronises itself with itself.

However, it can do this in forms sensitive to accountability, as accountability counts only what can be constructed within the public sector (Luhmann & Theuvsen, 2017). Consequently, the conditionality of observation and the difference between the 1st order observation, characterised as reflexivity, and the 2nd order observation of reflection become decisive (Hardjono, Van Kemenade, Hardjono & Van Kemenade, 2021). Reflexivity implies a mono-contextual, narcissistic perspective from within, where the government takes its own worldview. In reflection, the perspective rises to a higher level, facilitating a poly-contextual worldview. A system can observe that other systems perceive the world from quite different perspectives and that its own worldview is contingent, i.e. not natural or necessary, but could be different (Hoche, 2020).



## 2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to identify theories of accountability and stakeholder engagement according to the literature from a government communication perspective. These theories originated from the government's perspective in the field of communication management. Accountability theories, stakeholder theories, the two-way asymmetrical model, and the reflective paradigm inform this perspective. The theories frame the argument that accountability role should be given to credible office bearers according to the Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory.

The Legitimacy theory informed the study that government legitimacy should be voluntary; the government should account for all citizens as per the stakeholder theory, and two-way symmetrical communication that promotes dialogue should be utilised per the argument of the excellence.

Most importantly, the reflective paradigm encourages the government to reflect on societal expectations, values, and norms. This helps the public sector incorporate citizens' issues into their strategy. Based on this reflection, the accountability strategy will be formulated such that it guides the government to build relationships based on trust, respect, cooperation, and harmony with their citizens. Such relationships should be characterised by dialogue, partnerships, open negotiation, shared responsibilities, symmetrical power relationships, and an understanding of culture and other sociological aspects of the society in which the government services (Holmström, 2018; Burger, 2009; Rensburg & de Beer, 2012). This study had to rely on several theories as a building block to the unique theoretical framework that intersect, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and good governance.

It is important to mention that the theory of communicative action, or public sphere theory could offer more insight into the complexities of stakeholder engagement and communicative processes within government accountability contexts. However, they are beyond the scope of the present study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates the adoption of accountability principles by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) when engaging with stakeholders, citizens to be specific. The previous chapter postulates that organization appears to manage stakeholders for an instrumental reason, which necessitates the management of stakeholders for the achievement of business goals and increased profitability. When that happens, organizations are operating with the risk of not receiving compliance from all stakeholders because of failing to adhere to the stakeholder theory, which requires them to manage relationships with all stakeholders and not only those that contribute towards a tangible return of the organisation. Waritimi (2011) argues that organizations tend to listen to and respond to the concerns of stakeholders by virtue of power—undermining the fact that the participation of all stakeholders, whether powerful or weak, remains fundamental to corporate excellence.

The underlying issue is evident not only in the corporate sector but also in the public sector. Naidoo (2013) demarcates that stakeholder engagement may exist only on a conceptual and ideological level in the government communication of South Africa, resulting in the practice of public information, which is a one-way type of communication as opposed to public participation which is characterised by a two-way symmetrical communication. These limitations of stakeholder engagement present an avenue for stakeholder accountability to rectify them. The remedy involves an honest and complete inclusion of all stakeholders in the organisation's actions, decision making and issues of value creation (Greenwood, 2015).

However, the issue of how this accountability can be practically achieved in stakeholder engagement and specifically in public engagement is not well presented in the current body of knowledge as there are still a few studies around communication management in the public sector of South Africa.

Therefore, the study aims to explore how the GCIS stakeholder engagement practices are inclusive of accountability principles. For this purpose, the chapter explores stakeholder engagement and how it is practised in the public and corporate sectors. The comparison stems from the fact that the term stakeholder is widely used in the corporate sector while the public sector uses the term public when referring to their citizens as stakeholders; the two terms hold different meanings. Therefore, the study intends to enlighten the public sector that the public forms part of stakeholder groups.

### **3.2 WHO ARE STAKEHOLDERS?**

Freeman (1999) outlines that stakeholders are all individuals who can affect and be affected by the activities of an organisation. Not everybody who feels affected in some way can enter the practical discourse. Only those with a legitimate interest, at least conceived to be “proper” within its context of occurrence, should enter. Stakeholders can be classified as a narrow group or a broad group. The limited group includes stakeholder groups crucial to the organisation's survival. The general stakeholders are those less directly linked. Narrow stakeholders comprise owners, staff, suppliers, and customers, while broad stakeholders are the community, government, and the environment (Greenwood, 2015).

Stakeholders can also be classified using the stakeholder salience theory, which outlines three dimensions of categorising stakeholder groups: urgency, power, and legitimacy. Urgency focuses on the degree to which the claims made by the stakeholders “call for immediate attention” (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Power conversely involves the ability of a stakeholder to control the broader stakeholder communities. The power of stakeholders may derive from their ability to mobilise tangible social and economic resources and their virtual influence powered by information and communication technologies (Raha, Hajdini & Windsperger, 2021). Finally, legitimacy is delineated as a perception that the stakeholder's actions are “desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The study proposes that citizens fall into the category of government stakeholders. In South Africa, citizens are enduring poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment, which underscore the need for the government to address social and economic development issues. Since 2004, an unprecedented wave of widespread and violent protests has flowed across the country. With the recent service delivery protests over clean water, electricity, proper sanitation, health care facilities and educational resources, the protesters explain that citizens took to the streets to express their discontent because there was no way for them to speak to the government, let alone to get the government to listen to them (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). The abovementioned grievances raised by citizens are basic needs and legitimate concerns to which the government must immediately respond. Therefore, citizens fall under the stakeholders' urgency and legitimacy category.

South Africa is a democratic country where citizens have rights and freedoms. This gives them the power to mobilise social movements. The social movements that have been conducted to force the hand of the government into issues make it evident that citizens also fall within the power category of stakeholders. The #ZumaMustFall campaign, where thousands of South Africans marched in 2017, called for President Zuma to step down as the country's president. The #FeesMustFall campaign was a student-led protest movement aimed to stop increases in student fees as well as to increase government funding of universities and the #ThokoDidizaMustFall campaign where ANC members took to the streets to express dissatisfaction with the nomination of Thoko Didiza as the mayoral candidate for the party in Tshwane forced the government to be listening and succumb to citizens' demands. Therefore, citizens could mobilise and control broader communities. Not only that, but they are also crucial to the survival of the governing party through their voting behaviour, which makes them narrow stakeholders. Therefore, it can be argued that South African citizens can be classified as stakeholders of their government.

The GCIS of South Africa's current communication strategy document (Communications, 2014-2017) outlines the following groups as the South African government stakeholders.

**Table 3.1: South African Government Stakeholder Groups**

| Internal stakeholder | External stakeholders     |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| National departments | Private sector            |
| Parastatals          | Civil society             |
| Municipalities       | Organized labour          |
| Provinces.           | Sectoral groups           |
| Public servants      | Faith-based organizations |
|                      | The media                 |

*Source: (Communications, 2014)*

The above are general stakeholder groups of the South African government. However, these groups do not include citizens who also form part of government stakeholders. When stakeholder mapping is conducted, it is a process that (1) defines aspects of a social and natural phenomenon affected by a decision or action; (2) identifies individuals, groups and organizations who are affected by or can affect those parts of the phenomenon (this may include non-human and non-living entities and future generations); and (3) prioritises these individuals and groups for involvement in a decision-making process (Alba & Bartels, 2019), citizens will not be mapped as they are not listed. Therefore, accountability towards them is likely not to occur. The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1998) presents steps of service delivery: step 1 includes identifying the stakeholder that needs service delivery, and step 2 includes identifying the service need of the stakeholder. When these steps are exercised, they should also be exercised on citizens. Citizens need to form part of this stakeholder list.

### **3.3 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Interaction with stakeholders is a logically necessary activity for an entity. However, Brand, Blok and Verweij (2020) posit that it is possible to operate with another actor without ever engaging him or her as a fellow person; that is, transacting without inquiring about his or her wants, needs, well-being, or capabilities. Ansong (2017) opines that it is possible to engage with stakeholders in an interaction that involves minimum recognition and respect of common humanity and the ways in which the actions of each may affect the other. Hence, stakeholder engagement is heeding a call to the transparency expectations of organizational activities.

Stakeholder engagement is characterised by the organisation's efforts to involve stakeholders in decision-making, for them to participate in organizational activities and recognise the potential influence one's actions might have on another (Noland & Phillips, 2010; Magee, 2012; Jones, Wicks & Freeman, 2017). Stakeholder engagement is a process whereby stakeholder interests are considered when deciding on the organisation's best interests (IoDSA, 2019). Engagement is more than a session on information dissemination and responding to the organisation's ideas. Instead, stakeholder engagement is a meaningful consultation that occurs when stakeholders have the power to influence the organisation's strategic direction and advance new stakeholder opportunities and proposals (Miles & Munilla, 2016). Therefore, organizations must meet stakeholder expectations and manage various stakeholder interests from a business ethics, relationship management, and resource acquisition standpoint (Barney & Harrison, 2020). A contemporary management approach reflects an argument that the interests of key stakeholders must be "integrated into the very purpose of the organization and stakeholder relationships must be managed coherently and strategically" (Henry, 2021).

Stakeholder engagement is classified into three generations. The first generation perceives organizations as not engaging but merely responding to specific interest groups who put pressure on them. This reactive approach is intended to prevent bad publicity and protests from these groups, trying to calm critical voices. The second generation is understood as more proactive in their approach, where organizations intend to increase their understanding of relevant competitive forces through stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagements increasingly became part of risk and reputation management tools (Siebritz & Coetzee, 2022). The third generation of stakeholder engagement is still in the infancy stage, focusing on stakeholder engagement and helping entities build or maintain strategic competitiveness by aligning social, environmental, and economic performance (Leonidou, Christofi, Vrontis & Thrassou, 2020). This alignment will transform stakeholder engagement from a risk-management tool to an element of corporate strategic planning (Leonidou et al., 2020). Organizations need to move from a reactive to a proactive approach to stakeholder engagement for this to happen. Organizations must evolve their practices beyond the reactive crisis-management approach towards a strategy-based creation of opportunities – which is not done only for the purpose of reputation management.

Improved stakeholder engagement includes enhancing strategic stakeholder management in general. Allowing the voices of stakeholders to be heard is an emancipatory process liberating people from suppressive social and ideological settings, specifically those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human awareness (Mabusela, 2017). Ideally, stakeholder engagement enables voices to be heard without one voice dominating the dialogue. Positioning the stakeholder voices closer to the centre of government discourse will reverse their colonisation (van der Merwe, 2020). Organizational colonisation refers to the unobtrusive ways an organisation's meanings, instrumental logic, and managerial values dominate how people understand, think, and act in everyday life (van der Merwe, 2020). It suppresses conflicts of meaning and discourages participatory forms of collaborative meaning creation. Organizations that are open and transparent to stakeholders build trust and social capital, positioning them to contribute more fully to the public good (Kujala et al., 2022).

Stakeholder engagement allows the development of consensual and interactive communication processes (Freeman & Dmytryiev, 2017), allowing participants to generate a shared vision of society. Academics (Maak & Pless, 2016; Miska & Mendenhall, 2018; Siegel, 2014; Stahl & Sully de Luque, 2014; Waldman & Balven, 2014) suggest that the best practice approach to stakeholder engagement is turning away from the calculated, one-off, issues-based stakeholder management to a more holistic, government-wide, stakeholder collaboration. These approaches go beyond organizational buffering and reactive issues management – to provide a source of opportunity and potential competitive advantage for organizations, as well as heightened transparency and inclusiveness for stakeholder communities (Andriof, Waddock, Husted & Rahman, 2017).

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development adds an enriching important distinction by stating that stakeholder engagement does not mean including stakeholders in all decisions or that every stakeholder demand will be met. It implies that stakeholder input should be acknowledged and thoughtfully considered. Stakeholder engagement also does not imply that the organization and its stakeholders will always be able to find common ground - in some cases, both parties may have to agree to disagree (Burchell & Cook, 2008).

Stakeholder engagement is recognised as an emerging management function in literature as well as in practice. There is still a noticeable lack of clearly defined structures and processes for stakeholder engagement (O’Riordan & Fairbass, 2008; Davis, 2017). Models that are currently presented by the literature on stakeholder engagement and accountability are: the model of public participation by Rowe and Frewer (2005) which focuses on the nature and purpose of communication and participation; A discursive decision framework for accountability standards on sustainable reporting by Rasche and Esser (2006) which emphasises that dialogue should not be a mere outcome of applying certain accountability standards, but rather must be a necessary precondition for accountability practices; A typology of stakeholder management strategies by Banks and Vera (2009) which recommends that stakeholder management should be strategic; The effective public communication model for rural development; A model for Effective Stakeholder Engagement Management in ICT (Rasila & Mudau, 2012) which looks at how community members of South Africa feel alienated from government’s programmes and matters of governance in general and that this alienation is due to the lack of effective communication between government and its communities, hence the model introduces relevant effective public participation and rural development which goes beyond just consultation and mobilisation of community members but sustainable members’ participation.

Mamabolo (2018) Proposed a framework for positioning stakeholder engagement theory on the governance of communal farms for land governance in South Africa. The framework was developed in response to the global and continental land use and management debates. The framework guides the leadership of the Communal Property Association to identify all relevant stakeholders and engage them through stakeholders during the decision-making process to the benefit of the citizens and to minimise the negative effects that cause failure in the governance of communal farms. Shabangu (2021) proposed a strategic communication-grounded stakeholder engagement framework for Mitigating Conflict in the Local Government Collective Bargaining Process. This was developed to guide how stakeholder engagement can be used as a strategic communication approach in mitigating labour conflicts in the local government collective bargaining processes in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.



No model incorporates accountability in stakeholder engagement for the Government of South Africa and its citizens. The study argues that stakeholder engagement between the government and its citizens should provide an equitable voice for citizens, a safe space for their contribution, timely input, efficient and effective methods, and a stakeholder-centred orientation that centres on creating value for a broader range of stakeholders. Voegtlin, Frisch, Walther, and Schwab (2020) outline that a safe space for participation can be created by a dialogic stakeholder engagement strategy discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 THE DIALOGIC APPROACH TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Johnson-Cramer, Berman and Post (2013) argue that an authentic organisation–stakeholder dialogue includes co-creating a shared understanding between the organization and stakeholders. Dialogue is a multiplicative communicative interaction between participants. It goes beyond the exchange of information to include building relationships. Such interactions build on the participants' aspiration to listen more deeply, understand fully, and build a collective point of view. The conditions for dialogue include participants committing to suspend judgment and opening their capacity to engage and listen. Dialogue acts as an important information source to work out solutions. Peaceful success is achieved through exchanging information and integrating significant knowledge into an organisation's planning process (Greenwood, 2015). It can, therefore, be argued that dialogue acts as a channel of information and provides opportunities for face-to-face conversations. It works as a symbolic communication tool that demonstrates principles like fairness.

Slabbert (2018) argues that there is a monologue and genuine dialogue. Monologic dialogue is a two-way communication with stakeholders initiated by the organization for asymmetrical, persuasive, and instrumental purposes (Passetti, Bianchi, Battaglia & Frey, 2019). Monologic dialogue can be characterised as a superficial application of stakeholder dialogue. Genuine dialogue, on the other hand, is considered a two-way symmetric practice aimed at mutual education, joint problem solving and relationship building (Slabbert, 2018). For example, Passetti et al. (2019) argue that transparency and information sharing are prerequisites for creating effective stakeholder dialogue that enables an understanding of the different worldviews.

More significant inquiry into others' viewpoints helps develop a greater understanding and creates an opportunity to adopt new ways of thinking. Stakeholders' presentation of these different worldviews sometimes results in conflict and misunderstandings. During such encounters, a genuine dialogic approach to communication is critical (Tomkiv, Liland, Oughton & Ynne, 2017). When the diversity of thoughts and opinions presents moments of conflict and tension, dialogue allows the conversation to be mediated back to a renewed sense of connection, and assumptions get to be explored.

Dialogue occurs when participants desire to interact respectfully and openly with each other at a level beyond the superficial and with a belief that this interaction is possible through communication, which will lead to mutually beneficial and acceptable outcomes. By means of dialogue, participants come to understand the circumstances that led to the disadvantaged position in a particular situation (Mitchell, 2021). Much emphasis is put on the increasing ability of organizations to use the dialogue approach for stakeholder engagements. However, little is known about the workforce of the approach (Gordon, McKay, Marchildon, Bhatia & Shaw, 2020). Little is known about how dialogue should be practised or instead implemented. Payne and Petrenko (2019) note that most researchers are concerned with measuring dialogue competence. Mitchell (2021) notes little research exists on how dialogue should be practised because there is no model for implementation. The following section explores how dialogue is practised in the public sector, given that there is no model to use for this practice.

### **3.3.1 The Dialogic strategies in the public sector**

Dialogue between the public sector and citizens is vital globally. Spieker (2018) conducted a study on German government communication processes with stakeholders. He found that having a dialogue with many stakeholders, such as those of the government, requires strategies. The first strategy used in Germany is addressing different stakeholder groups separately. Representative of different authorities and district citizens have their own behavioural logic and strategic interests. They differ regarding the type and form of information they need. Therefore, providing a substantial discourse requires an approach to addressing similar types of stakeholders in the same arena.

The first strategy requires that politically influential stakeholders are addressed briefly before the information is communicated to citizens and the media at public events. If they are addressed too far in advance, there might be leaks and information gaps to the public, leading to rumours and misunderstandings. This was evident in South Africa during the Covid-19 lockdown. When the president intended to extend the 21 days of level 5 lockdown, politicians were informed way in advance, and the information leaked to the public and caused agitation among communities (News24, 2020). When political parties are addressed too late, they may feel a lack of appreciation and cannot share information with their own stakeholders. This was also evident in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic, when political parties other than the ruling party were not informed why the cigarette ban was not lifted. They felt unvalued and disjointed from the fight against the coronavirus (Rossouw, Greyling & Adhikari, 2021). Spieker (2018) argues that when stakeholders feel separated from an organisation's mission, they hardly commit to mandates orchestrated to achieve the mission.

The second strategy involves using a step-by-step approach to transmitting information to citizens. Too much information at once is counterproductive because (1) it would appear as if everything were settled even though some or many important parameters are not certain yet, and (2) the stakeholders would be overwhelmed with too much information, which affects the comprehensibility significant information as well as the feedback quality (Spieker, 2018). The third strategy involves getting personal, many smaller hearings with a maximum of 70 people, short presentations, and a format where people could contact senders at the information stand that works better (Spieker, 2018). In the South African government, these would include ward committee meetings, traditional imbizo engagements and district meetings. However, these are classic settings where the speaker stands on a podium and addresses a passive audience. This hinders effective dialogue and encourages fierce opposition brought by smaller groups in the audience (Spieker, 2018). Hence, the VEREIN DEUTSCHER INGENIEURE 7001 (VDI 7001) (2014) provides guidelines for dialogue when having a large group of stakeholders. Dialogue can occur in three levels on this guideline: information, consultation, and participation. On the information level, the goal is to explain issues and objectives, the status of the planning, and future steps and raise understanding of the framework conditions.

On the consultation level, concrete proposals are discussed, and ideas and recommendations for adaptation and improvement are developed. Therefore, the direct interaction between the government and the public on the consultation level can be characterised as advisory. The objective is to exchange knowledge and involve diverse perspectives in the design. On the level of participation, the goal is to reach a win-win solution which satisfies the interests of the different groups. As a prerequisite, the involved parties should clarify disputed facts to gather common ground. In most cases, involved parties only reach compromises on some parts of the issues. VDI7001 further provides ten (10) fundamental recommendations (“Basic Rules”) for conducting dialogues. They are as follows: (1) Open-minded and respectful attitude, (2) Clear framework conditions, (3) Early involvement of citizens, (4) Comprehensive fact-finding, (5) Integrations of different interests. (6) Professional process design for fairness and transparency, (7) Integrability of the results, (8) Transparency in financing, (9) Communicate to create understanding, and (10) Wide variety of communication tools, knowing how to hold a dialogue with a large group such as citizens.

Löwner, Bandelow, Gerke, Hillen, Klei, Schmidt and Siefer (2020) and Payne and Calton (2017) present what dialogue should achieve when stakeholder groups are large. First, it should achieve human agency, which is the notion that interactions should be constructive and open to promoting different perspectives of society where the social needs of different stakeholders are all considered. It reduces power differences within social relationships and creates possibilities for sustainable living (Löwner et al., 2020). The second aim that dialogue should achieve is to ascertain the shift from monologed to polyvocal voices during discussions (Slabbert, 2018), in which the different stakeholders, with their socio-political perspectives, have discussions in an open manner. This means allowing more marginalised groups to express their ideas fully. The objective is to democratise stakeholder engagement to recognise and evaluate the different values, assumptions, and interests of all the different actors involved (Arunachalam, Singh-Ladhar & McLachlan, 2016), as well as to contrast the traditional consensus way of promoting the engagement process carried out by organizations (Greenwood, 2015).

The third achievement aimed at is a community identity, which promotes the importance of sharing ideas and opportunities with others to create common purposes. A collective identity is better than an individual identity. The construction of a sense of community serves as the natural glue between the individual and the collective. Tuthill (2020) argues that establishing a sense of community based on a common identity between stakeholders may help break down the self-celebration and self-representation typical of powerful stakeholders and promote the interests of the least powerful stakeholders. When one or more groups of stakeholders pursue their own interests in contrast to the interests of the other stakeholders involved, other stakeholders become more advantaged than others, undermining the overall democratic process (Afreen & Kumar, 2016; Kourula & Delalieux, 2016).

The fourth achievement of dialogue is epistemology, which highlights the need for a debate where the agents involved can express their differences, conflicts, and divergences without the fear of being penalised. Cruickshank and Sassower (2017) state that “the desired outcome is not necessarily resolution of ideological differences but to imagine, develop, and support democratic processes wherein these differences can be recognised and engaged”. The last final objective that dialogue should achieve is the role of experts. Who can play the role of an expert in an open question? An expert should help to open issues for discussion, foster critical examination, guarantee access to information, and improve the knowledge of the non-experts (Cruickshank & Sassower, 2017). An expert should increase accessibility, possibilities to interact and transparent accountability for stakeholders. Birchall (2017) argues that, when it comes to dialogue with stakeholders, the government is required to operate according to the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, and interest in the community.

Lastly, Lunga (2020) and Ellinor and Girard (2023) proposed that social media, radio interviews, television interviews, meetings and door-to-door campaigns have a great potential to facilitate dialogue. This seems like a reasonable proposition, considering the ease with which stakeholders can engage in two-way symmetrical communication with the organization through one-on-one questioning during meetings and door-to-door campaigns, feedback and replies can be received easily on social media, radio callers can seek clarity during radio interviews (Fombad & Jiyane, 2019).

This section discussed the dialogic strategies that the public sector uses to engage with stakeholders, and the next section presents a discussion of strategies that the corporate sector uses for stakeholder engagement.

### **3.4 STRATEGIES OF CORPORATE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

The AAA1000 (2018) invention called for corporations to adopt the sustainability report initiative to engage with their stakeholders. The report is two-sided. It has the demand side, which provides information to stakeholders so that they can assess the economic, social, and environmental impacts of an organisation's activities (Boiral & Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2020). Then, it has the supply side, which enriches companies' accountability about those impacts. From this supply side, sustainability reporting builds trust, improves processes and systems, brings progress on the corporates' vision and strategy, reduces compliance costs, and creates organizational competitive advantages (Global Reporting Initiative [GRI], 2022). Boiral and Heras-Saizarbitoria, (2020) conducted a study on sustainable reporting and stakeholder engagement accountability. They found that sustainable reporting is used as a form of engagement and accountability effort to stakeholders. They argue that corporations should be transparent with information about their activities' impact on their stakeholders. Such disclosure is focused on satisfying stakeholders' information needs because the cooperation's survival requires support from their stakeholders.

Corporations that have not yet adopted the sustainability report have adopted the inside-outside perspective approach of stakeholder management (Aerts, Cauwelier, de Pape, Jacobs & Vanhondeghem, 2022). They now see internal stakeholder management as a strategy for engagement with external stakeholders. They manage stakeholders from an inside-out perspective. They do this by motivating their employees to perform better by providing them with employee ownership and involvement. Employee ownership includes ways in which employees can own stock in corporations they work for. That can improve performance. Employee involvement entails involving employees in decision-making, including participation, teamwork, and communications, offering the means to identify with an organisation's climate and influencing organizational processes (Sharif & Scandura, 2014; Wallace et al., 2016).

Wickert, Scherer and Spence (2016) posit that there are instrumental, relational, and even moral motives by which these practices might be incentivised to engage with external stakeholders. Employees interpret and act on their understanding of the organization and its stakeholders. They are the recipients of work practices that may transform how they relate to the organisation's other stakeholders depending on their perceptions and needs. Employees have instrumental, relational, and moral motivations to do this. From an instrumental perspective, employees may be encouraged to align their interests with those of external stakeholders. That could happen when they are provided ownership and stimulated to participate actively in the company's decision-making, which offers them some level of control. On the relational side, employees might fulfil a need for belonging when they can identify with an entity that cultivates positive relationships with its stakeholders.

Employee ownership and involvement tap into the "roots of psychological ownership" to facilitate this. From a moral perspective, employees are situated to form a mutually beneficial and just scheme of cooperation with stakeholders that supports a relationship of trust (Greenwood, 2015). This moral component further corresponds to employees' needs for a meaningful existence (Wickert, Scherer & Spence, 2016). Employee ownership and involvement, in principle, provide employees with added rights beyond those usually expected of them (Baddon, Hunter Hyman, Leopold & Ramsay, 2017) and provide opportunities for them to develop. Employees contribute valuable knowledge, skills, and abilities that are "classically more fundamental" than the monetary contributions by shareholders. In this respect, employees who are involved and have ownership in the firm may be uniquely positioned and committed to help engage effectively with external stakeholders because they understand the importance of such engagement. Furthermore, when employees are stimulated to have greater involvement, they may be motivated to use their voices to repair or improve the relationship with their external stakeholders rather than resorting to the exit mechanism of simply leaving the organization (Crane, 2020).

Corporations adopting this stakeholder engagement strategy manage their stakeholder relations by moving from the usual "outside-in" perspective, whereby external stakeholders can influence employees, to an "inside-out" perspective, where employees are seen as a channel to achieve external stakeholder outcomes.

The approach of employees being the foundation of influencing external stakeholders is not limited to stakeholder engagement issues. Slabbert (2016) argue that employees' image of the organization could influence external stakeholders' image of the organisation. When employees have a negative perception of the organization they work for, it is most likely that they will openly voice their thoughts and feelings in this regard, which could be detrimental to the organisation's overall reputation and result in the dissolution of its successes. It is still argued that building and maintaining a positive corporate image and employee engagement is essential (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2023). This necessitates that employees should be engaged in the organisation's decision-making processes. It could be argued that within certain sector institutions, it is about transferring responsible leadership and establishing stewardship among employees who will ultimately ensure that the organization does not simply manage expectations between stakeholders; rather, it creates a network of mutual responsibility.

While other non-government entities use the inside-outside approach to stakeholder engagement, others use emotion-based content strategies on social media since posting emotion-carrying content is commended by public relations professionals as an effective way to generate stakeholder engagement on social media (De Luca, Iaia, Mehmood & Vrontis, 2022). Emotions significantly determine stakeholders' information processing and consequent behaviours (Perloff, 2020). Facebook is mostly used as the social media platform for emotion-based messages because it affords unique interactive communication that enables entities to cultivate online communities and sustain transparent, direct conversations with its stakeholders as well as among the stakeholders themselves, which is essential in stakeholder engagement and relationship building regime (Perloff, 2020). This strategy is used because it has been repetitively found that emotion-carrying content is more likely to generate attention and cognitive involvement, feedback provision (Park & Kaye, 2017), and social sharing behaviours than its non-emotion-carrying counterpart, such as a purely informational message.



Li, Ji, Tao and Chen (2022) conducted a study on emotion contagion and stakeholder engagement. The study intended to understand the type of emotional message that fosters stakeholder engagement and found that messages that carry negative emotions on social media are more likely to generate stakeholder engagement. The study also found that companies use an audience-centric approach by connecting with the stakeholders emotionally because emotional expressions add a personal touch to organizational posts, which drive a high level of stakeholder engagement, a goal many organizations strive to achieve. Emotional content touches upon the dimensions of values and beliefs, which drive behaviour (Li, Ji, Tao & Chen, 2022).

Manzanarao, Valor and Paredes (2018) studied how corporate companies engage with stakeholders for corporate visibility in South Africa. The study found that retweets are the highest determining factor in determining the scope of the reach of information. The proportion of the 'bridges' created by retweeting was more than twice that of the 'bridges' created by the following function. Therefore, corporate organizations under study used retweeting as an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and gain visibility by ensuring that their messages have news value. On Facebook, users share their status (Kim & Yang, 2017), whereas on Twitter, users share information and opinions about their surroundings, events, or topics (Kushwaha, Kar, Roy & Ilavarasan, 2022).

The followers of a Twitter account perform a parallel role to that of journalists. Twitter users decide what and what not to share (Kushwaha et al., 2022). They, therefore, perform the role of 'information gatekeeping'. Their engagement with a corporate message could be explained by the 'newsworthiness' of such a message. These companies use traditional news values to make their messaging newsworthy. They share messages that have prominence, have a human-interest factor, are entertaining and are immediate. Manzanarao, Valor & Paredes (2018) argue that when these corporate entities share messages from a traditional news value approach, they achieve more stakeholder engagement reach and visibility of the corporate brand.

Certain organizations believe that stakeholders actively engage in and benefit from communicative actions of searching, deciding on, and distributing information among their communities on social media that help them make decisions, increase their knowledge, act upon issues, and solve problems (Kim & Grunig, 2011; Sedereviciute

& Valentini, 2011). Therefore, social media serves as an important tool for stakeholders to seek applicable information from or about organizations and for organizations to seek direct interactions with stakeholders at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than traditional communication tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011). As Avery, Lariscy, and Sweetser (2010) noted, social media create an instantly available channel for message diffusions, allowing organizations to quickly reply to or even test the message saliency among stakeholders on social media.

While other organizations use Twitter and Facebook to build relationships and communicate transparently and authentically (McCorkindale, 2012), small and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) within Europe differ in their stakeholder approach as compared to well-established corporations as to Albats, Alexander, Mahdad, Miller, and Post's (2020), study on how SMMEs engage with their stakeholders. They found that SMMEs use a stakeholder engagement plan, which helps them first determine who their stakeholders are and their material issues (issues that need organizational attention). The stakeholder plan is used in attempts to gain a fuller picture of those groups of people that can impact the organization or be impacted by it and to engage with them. Using several parameters, such as impacts and regulatory considerations, stakeholders are mapped to establish their relevance to the organisation. With this process, SMMEs can identify a range of material issues that emerge and are likewise mapped to highlight the most pressing issues.

SMMEs in South Africa use Lauber Decker, Leong, Chase and Schusler's (2012) six techniques of stakeholder mapping in preparation for their stakeholder engagement: *focus groups*, *workshops*, *task forces*, *large group planning processes*, *advisory committees*, and *negotiated agreements*. Organizations use *focus groups* for marketing research, bringing together small homogenous groups to discuss participant opinions, ideas, or perceptions (Ansong, 2017). *Workshops* allow organizations to have single events where stakeholders work with the personnel to complete a task related to the topic/issues (Lauber et al., 2012). *Task forces* bring stakeholders together for multiple meetings focused on a specific area/issue to make recommendations. *Large group planning and decision-making processes* bring together over 25 stakeholders for a multiday planning session.

Advisory committees assist organizational leadership with specific programs or activities, providing input relating to policies and other topics. Finally, negotiated agreements involve formalising more structured agreements defining the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group (Lauber et al., 2012).

According to Bialy (2009), mining companies in Poland follow Schultz's (2006) suggestion of organizations developing and following three distinct communication strategies with stakeholders: informing, responding, and involving. The first strategy requires a one-way communication process where the organization "informs" the target audience. This strategy is controlled by top management with no intentions to learn or change. Sharing information in this model is done through developing and distributing media, news, and press releases. Companies engage with stakeholders to minimise production and transaction costs by reducing uncertainty (Herremans, Nazari & Mahmoudian, 2016). The "response" to stakeholders involves two-way communication. However, the flow is asymmetrical, meaning that most of the information is disseminated by the organization to the stakeholder as opposed to from stakeholders to the organisation. Lines of communication, often not face-to-face, exist from the organization to the stakeholders. The organization does not change based on the information it receives from stakeholders but rather aims to change the behaviour and views of the public (Herremans, Nazari & Mahmoudian, 2016). The "involve" strategy is two-way communication in the form of a dialogue in which both the organization and its stakeholders are demanding change from one another, which can be negotiated through face-to-face meetings, including joint decision-making. Stakeholders may propose corporate actions (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), and the process can result in capacity building. Dialogue often results in ideas and increased knowledge for all parties regarding continuous improvement (Van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2008).

Another approach Bialy (2009) reported is that of *differentiation*. The stakeholders of an organization are not universal. Therefore, different methods of engagement should apply. The stakeholder engagement process can take on different forms: one-to-one meetings, interviews, questionnaires and surveys, knowledge exchange groups (including steering groups, advisory panels, and multi-stakeholder forums), workshops, focus groups and other types of meetings, including social events,

practical demonstrations, including participatory events (for example, training, games). This allows ongoing learning within the organization and by external parties and increases accountability to various stakeholders (GRI, n.d.). Awuah, Amoako, Yeboah, Marfo and Ansu-Mensah (2021) argue that most corporations in South Africa use the participation tactic in their stakeholder engagements. This is where people are actively encouraged and mobilised to participate in the actualisation of projects, whereby they are given certain responsibilities, set certain tasks, or are required to contribute specified resources. Upon completion of a project, people are invited to review either the project's success or failure – *participation in evaluation*. Awuah et al. (2021) describe the third type of participation as *participation in benefit*, which refers to the process whereby people enjoy the fruits of a project. Finally, he describes *participation in decision-making*, where people initiate, discuss, conceptualise, and plan the activities that they will conduct as a community.

Every corporate company communicates with its stakeholders in one way or another, directly or indirectly, be it through marketing, contractual relationships, or a myriad of other channels. The following sections drift their focus from how corporate sectors manage their stakeholder relationships to how the government manages its stakeholders with its citizens.

### **3.5 STRATEGIES OF GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

#### **3.5.1 The Use of Deliberative Democracy Theory**

The deliberative democracy theory guides stakeholder engagement practices between the government and its citizens. It emphasises rational, respectful debate, collaborative, legitimate decisions, and relationship building. Deliberative democracy is a political decision-making process covering “debate and discussion intended to produce reasonable and informed opinions” (Makakavhule & Landman, 2020). According to Banerjee (2022), deliberative democracy has four characteristics: a reason-giving requirement, accessibility, binding decisions, and a dynamic process. A reason-giving requirement outlines that stakeholders in a deliberative dialogue need to provide reasons to justify their arguments. Accessibility endorses that deliberative discussion should be open to all stakeholders affected by the issue under debate.

Binding decisions refer to stakeholders' commitment to the decisions made at a deliberative dialogue, and the commitment should last for an agreed amount of time. A dynamic process means that the deliberative dialogue can be reopened and continued later, reserving opportunities for future changes (Curato, Hammond & Min, 2019). The principal aim of deliberative democracy is to produce legitimate decisions that have been justified to all stakeholders (Makakavhule & Landman, 2020; Banerjee, 2022; Curato, Hammond & Min, 2019.). Unlike regular debates, deliberative democracy has formal procedures and rules that stakeholders should follow so that their decisions are legitimate (Makakavhule & Landman, 2020). Besides the formation of legitimate decisions, other benefits of deliberative democracy include helping stakeholders appreciate the perspectives of others, promoting mutual respect, and the possibility of remedial action through continuing dialogue in a dynamic process (Curato, Hammond & Min, 2019), which can be achieved through public participation discussed in the later section.

Tang, Tamura and He (2018) conducted a study on how the Deliberative Democracy Theory is used in different societies. The study found that the Anglo-American idea of deliberation is culturally narrow and insufficiently developed. The United States, for example, is potentially highly deliberative but not necessarily democratic. Chinese authoritarian deliberation is authoritarian in the sense that the top leaders are not elected; therefore, deliberation takes place under one-party domination. The deliberative democracy theory is, therefore, a strategy that other governments use for stakeholder engagement practices.

### **3.5.2 Public Participation**

The second strategy the government uses to engage with citizens is public participation, which entails increased public involvement in government affairs (Rasila & Mudau 2012). Public participation is the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities (Quick & Bryson, 2020). Gloppen (2019) stipulates that public participation or public engagement is a process of information exchange between members of the public and the government or government agencies, which is characterised by some degree of dialogue.

According to Rensburg and de Beer (2012), public participation should be at a degree of inclusivity, which gives citizens the right to be heard while the government simultaneously accepts the responsibility to be held accountable to them (AA1000SES, 2008). The engagement of any citizen group is a legitimate vehicle for government accountability and societal change (Rixon, 2010).

Lumpkin (2018) argues that when the government wants to see change, society must be involved by engaging the beneficiaries themselves and members of the communities where the societal change initiative is taking place. Unless the people and the cultures that are the focus of the change are engaged, the impact of external supporters has been found to be temporarily one-sided or even harmful (Lupton, 2012; Molale, 2019). When initiatives begin within their community settings, the societal impact tends to be relatively stronger (Motloutsi, 2019). The strive to see change also involves engaging supporters such as donors and other regimes of support to provide financial, technical, and social assistance. Under the right conditions, self-organized and self-governing collective actions by small, unified groups can create feasible solutions to challenging social and environmental issues.

Positive societal change occurs when community members, supporters, and entrepreneurially minded agents come together to aggregate resources and create new dimensions (Wilkins, Tufte & Obregon, 2014). Many societal change initiatives occur amongst communities where the people involved in the change process are intimately involved in creating and implementing the solutions. Touching issues such as poverty, homelessness, educational inequality, social injustice, lack of access to health care, and environmental degradation have one core question: "How can a positive societal change be achieved?". Research suggests that including various stakeholders in societal change initiatives, often across sectors, is vital to success (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014).

Engaging community members not only results in change but also results in kinship and citizenry. Kinship refers to the affinity and sense of bonding that occurs among people who are related and share similar characteristics, experiences, and interests, whether they are physically proximal (Verdery, Smith-Greenawa, Margolis & Daw, 2020).

Citizenry entails the common bonds and shared responsibilities of those who live together in a community (Chowdhury, Holbrook & Rannikmäe, 2020). It refers to both rights and responsibilities and can foster a sense of responsibility to participate in the community. Identification with a group with common experiences, history, or physical surroundings evokes feelings of cohesiveness (Nemutamvuni, McKay & Tantoh, 2020). Cohesion can spur the development of shared norms, values, and beliefs (Cantle, 2018). Building on such cohesion, kinship, and citizenry motivates efforts to benefit the community by leveraging the group's collective power to advance its well-being, care for its environment, or preserve a sense of identity and belonging.

Relative to isolated members of society, communities and kin have strength in numbers to improve their conditions, raise living standards, sustain their environment, or bolster economic underpinnings. Hence, the logic of kinship and citizenry reflects local engagement. Although community members may not run the day-to-day operation, their support contributes to the well-being of government initiatives. Citizenry is fostered by public participation, which is information exchange between members of the public and the government. That is when there is some degree of dialogue in the process that takes place, which may involve representatives of both parties in different proportions and, indeed, only representatives of the public who receive additional information from the government before responding rather than simple, raw opinions being conveyed to the government (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019). It is important to note that engaging citizens is not without challenges. The top five barriers to citizen participation are lack of time, promoting their own agenda, loss of trust, poor communication between the public organization and citizens, and weak participation objectives (Migchelbrink & Van de Walle, 2020).

Lanniello, Lacuzzi, Fedele and Brusati (2019) added that additional challenges include failure to understand who to consult, time limitations, and the cost of the processes facilitating participation. Kasaymova (2014) added to the obstacles experienced by public administrators attempting to engage citizens, finding additional challenges, including waning interest in participation over time, funding issues in the implementation of involvement processes, difficulty narrowing citizen priorities, and lack of citizen interest.

To mitigate these challenges and achieve public participation, the South African government has put in place some structures to engage with citizens, such as the Ward Committees and traditional leadership councils (Sebola, 2017). However, as Modupi and Themba (2020) put it, a lack of clarification of the communication roles ward committees and traditional leaders' counsel should play puts them at risk of getting into territorial competition with other structures. Effective communication between government institutions and community members gets hampered. This results in community members resorting to protests for lack of service delivery.

Gasela (2022) proposes that the government use a communication principle when communicating with citizens in customising messages. Breves (2023) outlines that effective and successful persuasion is determined by persuaders' knowledge of the needs of their audience. Correct understanding of the audience seems to be a missing link in government as, in most cases, they believe in a one-size-fits-all approach. An example in this regard is when the government prefers writing the same statement and sending it to all media houses irrespective of their different story angles, editorial styles, and content needs. Effective communication involves situation analysis and communication research (Rensburg & de Beer, 2012). Through communication, community members will be made to take part in initiatives that improve their lives through self-actualization. According to Bloss (2019), the US government uses community stakeholder engagement (CSE) to engage with the public. CSE educates stakeholders or members of the public, identifies the interests of relevant groups, and contributes to research in preparation for trials the government would like to put in place. CSE is seen as a builder of relationships, trust, and legitimacy or more democratic governance by informing or constituting part of the decision-making processes. Some argue that CSE is critical to obtaining community authorisation (Silberberg & Martinez-Bianchi, 2019).

CSE is often called for as a form of decision-making while, in fact, it is the process of inquiry and engagement to influence. It may inform decision-making by providing information to empowered decision-makers. Still, the CSE itself is not a decision-making process because engagement is defined as a sharing or transfer of power.



CSE functions in the following ways: engagement to inquire –where the government is empowered to act on information collected through engagement with the public; engagement to influence – where the government engage to affect the actions of already-empowered public groups; and engagement to involve – where government engage in delegating authority to the public.

The UK government sees stakeholder engagement as the involvement “with” or “by” members of the public rather than “to,” “about,” or “for” them (INVOLVE, 2012). Based on the evidence reviewed by INVOLVE (2009) in the United Kingdom, public involvement positively impacts the quality of the issue outcome. It impacts members of the public who are involved in the issue of engagement (INVOLVE, 2009). The public has a right to be involved in conducting, managing, and governance of publicly funded research to ensure public accountability and safeguarding (Gray-Burrows, 2018).

In their study, Suldoovsky, McGreavy and Lindenfeld (2017) found that the New York Government uses three models of science for public communication: diffusion, dialogue, and participation. The diffusion model signifies a one-way form of communication, where encoders communicate scientific messages to passive audiences with little or no feedback. The dialogue model endorses two-way communication between encoders of the message and various public audiences (Davies, 2021). The participation model, also referred to as knowledge co-production, motivates communicators to be more inclusive of non-scientific perspectives within the process of knowledge production. The participation model is a multi-directional communication model that adopts a practice of science “that is open and reflexive, where boundaries between disciplines and between science and non-science are increasingly porous” (Knoll, Matthes & Heiss, 2020). The participation model differs from the dialogue model in embracing public expertise as an essential component of the knowledge production process.

While knowledge co-production can involve integrating a variety of expertise outside of science, it can also be science-focused, such that non-scientists are invited to participate in the scientific process of knowledge production.

They found that higher levels of perceived scientific expertise are associated with dialogic and participatory communication models, and lower levels of perceived scientific expertise are associated with dialogic and diffusion communication models. This study argues that the emergence of the social bottom line and accountability principles as intrinsic to the public engagement function signals a maturity of the function in strategic management and suggests that ethics is now central to contemporary understandings of what public engagement is about.

The role of public engagement in strategic management is to bring the voices of the public into the decision-making process, and public engagement should be able to reflect the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviours (Grunig, cited in Tilley, 2009: 92). Furman, Bartels and Bolson (2018) studied how the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration can achieve long-term stakeholder engagement practices. They proposed three- process stages of engagement: (1) fact-finding and relationship-building, (2) incubation and collaborative learning, and (3) informed engagement and broad dissemination. Stage 1 involves identifying relevant stakeholders, understanding stakeholder experiences, knowledge, and attitudes, assessing needs, and identifying general concerns and questions. This could be achieved through approaching community leaders, open dialogue sessions with the community or administration of surveys. Stage 2 involves a collaborative exchange of information with identified stakeholders where learning expectations and offerings are communicated. Stage 3 involves decision-making sessions.

On the other hand, social media has become an important part of government-public communication (Tursunbayeva, Franco, & Pagliari, 2017). A recent survey reveal that 148 countries' national governments use at least one social media platform, such as Facebook and Twitter, for everyday government communication (United Nations, 2016). The government stays connected via social media during crises like emerging health epidemics and natural disasters. With crisis-related information-seeking and dissemination are increasingly mediated by social media (Austin, Liu & Jin, 2012).

Government and emergency management (EM) organizations harness these platforms to inform, mobilise, and coordinate action at various stages of a crisis (Houston et al., 2015). South Africa also has WhatsApp as one of the social media channels to keep citizens abreast during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The Tshwane municipality also uses Facebook to keep stakeholders abreast about issues of load shedding, electric outbreaks, pipe bursts and other crisis issues. Other ways that are used are hyperlinks, replying to public messages, retweeting messages to facilitate speedy diffusion, and using hashtags to build online issue communities.

Although government agencies typically use social media as a one-way form of communication channel to inform the public about information (Graham, Avery & Park, 2015), the networked feature of these platforms enables the formation of an ad hoc, multistakeholder communication network (Oktari, Munadi, Idroes & Sofyan, 2020.) that is, a communication network directed by government organizations to target and engage various stakeholders. When embedded in such a multistakeholder communication network, government organizations can optimise resource mobilisation for disaster relief and are also expected to manage expectations (Zhang, Fan, Yao, Hu & Mostafavi, 2019).

### 3.6 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES: CORPORATE VS GOVERNMENT

**Table 3.2: Corporate and Government Engagement Practices**

|                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Corporate Engagement        | Public Engagement          |
| Social media                | Tradition and Social Media |
| Stakeholder Mapping         | Public participation       |
| Sustainability Report Guide | Annual Reports             |
| Inside-outside perspective  | Consultations              |
| Zero-based planning         | Community engagements      |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

From Table 3.2, it should be noted that the corporate sector and the public sector differ in their engagements with stakeholders.

The younger generation primarily uses social media as opposed to elderly people in South Africa. Ninety per cent of the age group between 19-29 years uses social media, while less than 40 per cent of social media users are 69-89 of age (Budree, Fietkiewicz & Lins, 2019). The stakeholder group that falls under the narrow group and is crucial to the survival of the ruling government is the elderly since they have a high level of voting behaviour. The age group 60-89 years have more than 80 per cent turnout in voting behaviour, while the age group 19-29 years voting turnout is less than 50 per cent (Scott, Vawda, Swartz & Bhana, 2012). Therefore, social media in the corporate sector is rightfully used, and the traditional media in general in the public sector is also rightfully used as it is inclusive of crucial stakeholder groups within the South African context.

Community engagements are important for the reach of elderly people in South Africa; however, they are presented as lacking direction, and community leaders do not know how to engage their community and how to engage them (Modupi & Themba, 2020). Public Participation occurs at a literacy level where citizens are asked to comment on a gazetted content. Only the literate and those out of the digital divide can participate. Consultations and annual reports, on the other hand, occur at a professional level where only experts are consulted and reported to on pressing matters. The government can learn from the corporate sector. When the government uses public participation, which can be reached by the literate and those with access to digital resources, corporations use stakeholder mapping, where they identify the demographics of their stakeholders and engage with them at their literacy level with the language they understand and within a context they can reach (Rensburg & de Beer, 2012). Therefore, the government can also learn to map stakeholders before engagements.

When the government engages in community engagements with the same old messages, corporations use zero-based planning to create new, relevant, and valuable messages every time they engage with their stakeholders (Barker & Angelopulo, 2013). Therefore, the government can adopt the approach of creating new messages to keep stakeholders abreast and interested in the messages transmitted to them.

When the government consults with experts, corporations are guided by the sustainability report to engage all stakeholders, experts and non-experts, about the organisation's impact on the social, environmental and economic cluster. Therefore, the government can adopt this strategy and engage with various stakeholder groups. Although the government could learn from the corporate sector on better engagements with its public, both sectors' literature in South Africa does not present the accountability approach to stakeholder engagement, which is the core focus of this study and will be explored in great length in the next chapter.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed the literature on stakeholder engagements from the corporate and government perspective. The concept of stakeholder engagement offers a theoretically well-founded framework for overcoming the problem of accountability. Both the public and corporate sectors are practically not able to consider the remarks on consensus building to make stakeholder engagement itself a more accountable endeavour. As this limitation is recognised, the potential of AA 1000 to develop stakeholder engagement practices in the “right” direction is underscored. Still, “internal reforms” about government stakeholder engagement practice need to be accompanied by modifications at the national level. The study agrees with Maropo (2018) that there is a somewhat naive confidence that the government will voluntarily respond to the increasing public pressure. Without meaningful reforms in governance structures, the current stakeholder engagement practice runs the risk of becoming merely a form of stakeholder management and a public relations exercise rather than practically promoting stakeholder accountability (Gasela, 2022). If stakeholder accountability is about a two-way dialogue and passing power to stakeholders, then action needs to be backed up by effective reforms such as transparency and immediacy on the national level of governmental operations.

## CHAPTER 4

### ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Where transparency and accountability mechanisms are lacking, poor governance and corruption occur, and the needs of the poor are often marginalised. This chapter presents that accountability is key to good governance. People normally consider their government as not transparent and less credible because there is limited disclosure of information from the government to the public regarding their conduct, and there is limited accountability. As a result, there are different perceptions held by citizens and the government regarding value creation for citizens and legitimacy by the government. This has led to dissatisfaction from the public. To address this, the study suggests the adoption of accountability by the government of South Africa when engaging with stakeholders, citizens to be specific.

The previous chapter explored stakeholder engagement and how it is practised in both the public and corporate sectors. The chapter is deficient in the discussion of what governs stakeholder engagement, which is the gap this chapter intends to fill by proposing principles that can act as a benchmark for stakeholder engagement practices. This chapter presents accountability principles that can be adopted in stakeholder engagements and reasons why they are imperative.

Accountability principles are used by a broad spectrum of organizations – global businesses, private enterprises, governments, and civil societies – to demonstrate leadership and performance in an accountable, responsible, and sustainable manner (AA1000, 2018). Managers of companies, government, and non-government alike, are increasingly confronted with stakeholders' expectations of organizational accountability (Logsdon & Lewellyn, 2017). It is for that reason that Adeoye and Ran (2023), Porumbescu, Meijer and Grimmelikhuijsen (2022), Androniceanu (2021) and Schroeder et al. (2019) argue that ethical, honest, open, and fair engagement with stakeholders is necessary for an entity to function properly.

Adopting accountability principles in public engagement allows the public and government to have the same perspectives on their country's actions, milestones, commitments, and challenges. This, therefore, generates mutual understanding between them. Also, accountability allows the government to create value for its citizens, be legitimate, and continue reigning. The discussions presented in this chapter outline what accountability is, the importance of accountability practices for both an organization and its stakeholders, how accountability is practised in the private sector and public sector and specifically how the South African government practices it and how it can further endeavour to adopt it with a specific focus on why it should adopt these principles.

## **4.2. THE EVOLUTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

In the past, literature viewed accountability from a principal-agent approach, an arrangement in which one entity legally appoints another to act on its behalf. In a principal-agent relationship, the agent acts on behalf of the principal and should not have a conflict of interest in carrying out the act. Within the accountability context, agents operating on behalf of the principals are held to account for their actions by the principals (Sjøvaag, Owren & Borgen, 2021). In the public sector, hierarchical accountability relationships involve principal and agent relationships. For example, elected councillors are agents for the citizens who elected them, and local government managers are agents for the councillors. Rendering of accounts requires the agent to provide information about decisions and activities to the principal. Accountability was, therefore, perceived as an externally driven construct in which the principals oversee and control the activities of the agents, and the latter seeks to meet the prescribed standards of behaviour set by the principals (Reddick, Demir & Perlman, 2020). Over time, however, the concept has increasingly been studied from various perspectives and countless ideas have been placed under the umbrella of accountability. Bae (2018) differentiates between the externally focused notion of accountability described above and accountability as an internal dimension motivated by a felt responsibility.

Internal accountability is borne out of a sense of obligation, a subjective responsibility for which management genuinely wants to and chooses to account. For the government, this accountability is linked to their values and ethical spirit as they endeavour to fulfil their responsibilities to their constituents and becomes an intrinsic feature of such citizens (Munzhedzi, 2016; Koenane & Mangena, 2017; Gasela, 2022).

The perception of accountability later evolved into the readiness or preparedness to give an explanation and a justification to relevant stakeholders for one's judgments, intentions, acts, and omissions when appropriately called upon to do so (Kanyane, Mutema & Zikhali, 2022). Accountability was now an evaluation process based on a relationship between an entity and its stakeholders. An entity had to explain and justify its conduct to stakeholders, and then stakeholders would have a forum within which to question the actions of the entity. Finally, stakeholders would be able to pass judgment on the entity, and critically, consequences should be applied to the entity based on that judgment. The issue of accountability was mainly led by legitimacy reasons 're-gain the lost trust' (Cedras, 2021).

Currently, accountability is viewed in terms of the stakeholder theory. This theory facilitates a broader, more inclusive perspective of accountability by emphasising the importance of accounting to and for all constituents, not just those in a position of authority (Salako & Ajibade, 2019). In this context, accountability is frequently discussed in terms of upward and downward accountability (Chu & Luke, 2022). Upward accountability is linked to accounting to regulators and may reflect the notion of external accountability. In contrast, downward accountability focuses on those the organization provides services to and facilitates progress toward a more just and democratic society (Chu & Luke, 2022). It represents the notion of felt responsibility and transfers the right of accountability from those in a position of power to enforce it to all those affected by an organization and its activities. However, they can also have power and 'externally' enforce accountability.



Further, Chu and Luke (2022) observe that the organization is also accountable to itself, including its responsibility to its mission and staff. Therefore, it is important for accountability to be understood in a broader way: as extending itself beyond simply formal reports and accounts. It should also embrace the concepts of how individuals give accounts of and for their daily practices (Ntim et al., 2017). Accountability should be about how it is practised and not only what it is about. First, it is important to understand accountability, which is the presentation of the next section.

#### **4.2.1 Accountability defined**

McGrath and Whitty (2018) define accountability as a process that takes place in daily reporting about the reasons for certain conduct. It is an obligation to provide a formal account and an explanation of those actions and decisions for which one is held responsible. Accountability as a term most times refers to a conceptual umbrella which cuts across various prominent concepts like equity, transparency, responsiveness, integrity, democracy, efficiency, and responsibility (Romzek & Dubnick, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Flinders, 2017; Enofe, Aigboduwa, Audu & Idemudia, 2015). The term accountability has been adopted to represent the popular term used to describe any mechanism that makes powerful institutions responsive to their public (Flinders, 2017). Accountability is the obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in accordance with agreed rules and standards (Munzhedzi, 2017) and that the officer reports fairly and accurately on performance results and mandated roles and plans. Koenane and Mangena (2017) define accountability as a social relationship where an actor is obligated to explain and justify his or her conduct to some significant other. Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) refer to accountability as making public managers permanently responsible for the actions taken in connection with the use of the power given to them by society. Consequently, accountability is an essential element of good governance, holding decision-makers responsible and avoiding the misuse of power (Abhayawansa, Adams & Neesham, 2021). Therefore, Accountability goes beyond controlling public resources to stimulating economic gains and the efficiency of those resources (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). This idea had already been defended by Gasela (2022), according to whom accountability could be understood as a mechanism for controlling results and dialogue with citizens, increasing the capacity to respond to their needs.

In a broad sense, accountability is realised by citizens, who exercise their voting power to reward and punish, by election or exclusion, their rulers and representatives. But it also takes place in a specific way, in the performance of daily activities and how public agents and organizations behave (Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021). Despite the significant diversity of definitions of accountability, the main common features of accountability can be summarised in the following:

- **Being held responsible** is identified as the common denominator, the responsibility associated with whoever has decision-making power. This person is obliged to give account through measurable information with verifiable indicators. Public managers are held responsible for actions taken through the attribution of material rewards (of merit) or sanctions (coercion), considering the results obtained and fulfilment of the legal or regulatory norms in force (Lindberg, 2013).
- **Rendering accounts** represents a mutually related binomial because the latter is a major means of promoting the former since the information provided by management boards allows them to be held responsible for the actions taken in managing public resources (Ajibade, 2019). Consequently, for accountability, it is necessary to assess and disclose information about the actions taken and the resources used, deviations, and the respective justification between what was planned and what was carried out. The whole attribution of responsibility derives from making pertinent and opportune information available (Munzhedzi, 2017; Flinders, 2017; Lindberg, 2013).
- **Transparency** is considered a more wide-ranging concept of accountability. Not only should the availability of information be demanded, but it should also be reliable and accessible, thereby contributing to promoting transparency. The information provided to stakeholders should obey the criteria of comprehensibility, relevance, reliability, and timeliness (Goncalves, 2021). ISSAI 20 – Principles of transparency and accountability indicate accountability and transparency as two essential elements of good governance. Transparency is fundamental in promoting a fight against corruption, improved management, and responsibility (International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions [INTOSAI], 2010).

For this study, accountability is all about being answerable to those who have invested their trust, faith, and resources in public servants. Accountability is an obligation to answer for the execution of one's assigned responsibilities. Accountability in the public sector is the requirement to provide an explanation about the stewardship of public resources and how the resources have been used. Accountability, therefore, becomes a hallmark of modern democracy. It does not permit those in power to be held unaccountable in public for their acts or oversights, decisions, expenditures, or policies.

#### **4.2.2 Mechanisms of Accountability**

Haque (2020) describes the existence of certain basic mechanisms of accountability, such as legislative committees, parliamentary questioning, public hearings, auditing, performance assessments and reports, as some of the most crucial features of the democratic framework.

Legislative committees are established as instruments of the Houses in terms of the Constitution to facilitate oversight and monitor the government. These committees are the "engine rooms" of Parliament's oversight and legislative work. Committees scrutinise legislation, oversee government action, and interact with the public. One of the most important aspects of the oversight function is the consideration by committees of annual reports of organs of State and reports of the Auditor-General. Depending on the purpose of the oversight, the Committee will either request a briefing from the organ of the State or visit it for fact-finding (Nhleko, 2005).

Parliamentary questions provide an opportunity for members to bring to the fore cases of administrative actions and ask for an account from the Ministers concerned, who, in turn, can require the officials in his ministry and department to comply. During regular parliamentary procedures, issues of accountability and administrative problems can be brought up by members to assist with oversight. Public hearings also form part of accountability mechanisms. They are held as part of the public inquiry process. This allows interested parties to expand on written submissions and discuss inquiry issues with Commissioners in a public forum (Nhleko, 2005).

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is a Chapter 10 institution established in terms of Section 196 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. As such, the PSC is mandated and empowered to perform, amongst other functions, investigate, monitor, and evaluate the organization and administration of the Public Services (Public Service Commission, 2018). In South Africa, the PSC is constitutionally mandated to promote and maintain high standards of professional ethics by providing guidelines for developed codes of ethics and conducting ethical workshops and training for all national and provincial public officials (Public Service Commission, 2002:4; Sebola, 2017). This mandate also entails the evaluation of achievements, or lack thereof, of government programs (Public Service Commission, 2018).

Another mechanism is that of the Public Protector's Office, which was established by an act of parliament in South Africa (Sebola, 2015). The office receives and investigates complaints from members of the public against agencies and officials and has the power to investigate and recommend corrective measures (South Africa Info, 2010; Sebola, 2015). Sebola (2015) lamented that in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the functions of the Public Protector are *inter alia*: investigate any conduct in state affairs or the public administration in any sphere of government that is alleged or suspected to be improper or to result in impropriety or prejudice; to report on that conduct and to take appropriate remedial conduct. From the complaints received from the public and investigated, the Public Protector then hold public officials or political office-bearers accountable for the allegation.

Mass media is another mechanism of accountability. Globally, mass media has become a powerful weapon to hold public officials accountable for office conduct. Therefore, mass media can be considered one of the public accountability mechanisms. Mlambo and Zubane (2019), cited in Mamokhere (2020), indicate that in this new dispensation, mass media are becoming a broadly used tool to hold the governing bodies accountable worldwide, including in South Africa. Moreover, the mass media can function as both catalysts for democracy and an instrument of democratic rule that makes the monitoring and evaluation of good governance by ensuring transparency, accountability, and other basic principles. Through its function, the media exposes the abuse of power and ultimately holds public officials accountable for their actions.

Similarly, Ashraf (2014) argues that the mass media is utilized to hold the government and government officials accountable. The mass media exposes what public officials and governments are doing so that the public or people can judge. Through this function, the new media helps to ensure good governance in a democratic system. However, even though the mass media function to facilitate public accountability, there are still challenges associated with their role. Mamokhere (2020) indicates that “Yes, the media function as a catalyst for strengthening good governance and fostering public accountability, there are many challenges to deal with to ensure that mass media function smoothly without fear and favour”.

In practice, the various accountability mechanisms function collectively and connectedly. Legislative committees may, for example, encourage broader beneficiary participation in organizational decision-making while (self-imposed) pressures to account through disclosure reports, which can be scrutinised by the public protector when questioned by the public. Similarly, the public protector allows the public to complain and be responded to. The investigations of the Office of the Public Protector can be published in the media because the mass media ensures that external stakeholders are informed about organizational performance in terms of their mission and their ethical practices in terms of how they conduct their operations. Ultimately, the mechanisms function together to address the needs and interests of different stakeholder groups and offer learning opportunities, encouraging continual improvement and accountability. In this sense, it serves as a springboard for social change (Sebola, 2017). It is perhaps important to note that organizations run a risk of not knowing how to exercise accountability. Hence, it is important to understand the principles of accountability per the following discussion.

### **4.3 ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES**

Principles provide a set of overarching values but are non-specific in prescribing behaviour (Abdalla, Dash, Shorbagi & Taha, 2021) for systems. Principles that yield accountability are those of care, loyalty, and obedience (Waddock & Bodwell, 2017).

Each generally attempts to hold board members responsible for seeking out and considering adequate information on which to base decisions (care), disclosing conflicts of interest and placing the organisation's interests over personal ones (loyalty), and acting within the organisation's mission while also adhering to internal organizational protocols for decision making (obedience). Where there is a failure to meet trustee obligations, executives have a right to charge on behalf of the organisation. Ethics also form part of the principles of accountability. They are the standards that guide the behaviour and actions of all people in a society (Ciulla & Ciulla, 2020). Ethics involves thinking systematically about morals and conduct and making judgments about right and wrong actions that could promote good governance, responsibility, and accountability.

#### **4.3.1 Ethics**

Ethics form part of the principles of accountability. They are the standards that guide the behaviour and actions of all people in a society (Ciulla & Ciulla, 2020). Ethics involves thinking systematically about morals and conducting and making judgments about right and wrong actions that could promote good governance, responsibility, and accountability. Ethical codes guide the actions and performance of public and business enterprise functionaries and values like morality. Ethics assist with the delineation of right from wrong actions in pursuit of good governance (United Nations, 2006). In the process of clarifying what is right, moral actions are essential because they uphold standards and ethics in state-centric governance. The term ethics comes from the Greek word "ethike", which means character. The ancient Greeks conceived issues about what people should do in terms of impact upon character, whether people were of good or bad character. The concern was about a good reputation, revealing the kind of thinking pertaining to character or impact on character. The central term of Greek ethics, "ethike arête", is usually translated as a virtue. The literal meaning is excellence of character or good character traits, including self-discipline, companionship, responsibility, perseverance, honesty, and loyalty.

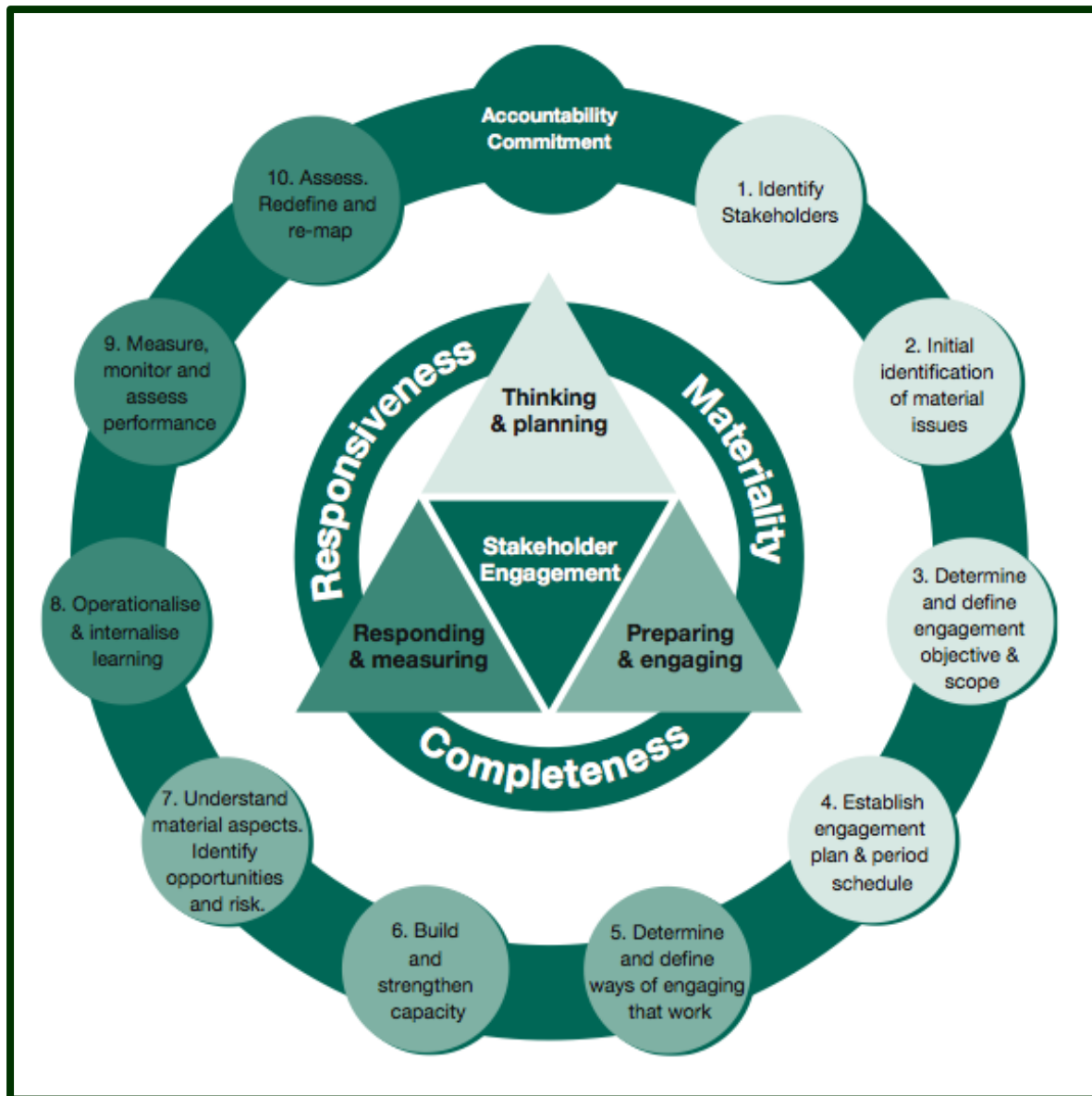
These are essential in corporate governance discourse. Character-based ethics is incomplete because there are other determinants, such as value, justice, and morality (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017). In Greek philosophy, ethics refers to the elements and components of man's character as opposed to the intellect and deals with all aspects of life and behaviour that are good for or valued by man.

#### **4.3.2 AA1000SES principles**

The AA1000SES appears as an appropriate instrument for accountability and was voluntarily designed to enable organizations to measure their performance against a global standard. The transparency of reporting and assurance processes helps engender trust in participating organizations. Although the standard was designed for the private sector, the principles are equally important in the public sector. A set of accountability principles, as per Figure 3.1, are Completeness - inclusion of all activities, stakeholders, and reasons for exclusion, if any; Materiality - inclusion of significant information required to assess social performance; Regularity and Timeliness.

Accessibility - easy and cheap access to social and ethical information by stakeholders and Information quality, which, in terms of comparability, is the reliability, relevance and understandability of content transmitted. The issues of materiality (quantification of the significance of stakeholder concerns), completeness (understanding those concerns) and responsiveness (responding to those concerns) are universal. These accountability principles are essential for both the private and the public sector. For instance, coal mining ought to respond to stakeholders' concerns about air pollution because it is a significant concern that involves stakeholders' health. In the same way, the government needs to respond to stakeholder concerns about basic online teaching and learning resources because access to education is a basic need for citizens. Rasche and Esser (2006), Reynolds and Yuthus (2008), Göbbels and Jonker (2003) and Beckett and Jonker (2002) are among the studies that focused on these principles within the corporate sector. This study intends to centre these principles within the public sector, exploring how they can aid the accomplishment of accountability and what outcomes they can generate when practised by the government to citizens.

Figure 3.1: AA1000SES principles and elements



Source: Bruce, Tec & Shelley (2010)

### 4.3.3 Stakeholder participation

Another principle of accountability is stakeholder participation. Maropo (2018) claims that governance is about collective decision-making. He suggests greater participation of stakeholders and collaboration. According to Koebele (2019), 'collaborative governance' has emerged in response to the 'failures of downstream implementation and the high cost and politicisation of regulation'. It represents 'an alternative to the accountability failures of managerialism'.



More positively, though, and consistent with the concept of 'knowledgeable supervision', Ansell and Gash argue that the trend towards collaboration evolves from the growth in knowledge and capacity. Public participation explicitly brings opportunities for incorporating societal concerns and 'non-standard' knowledge in the governance of risks (Webler & Tuler, 2021). This is consistent with Romzek and Dubnick's (2018) notion of 'accountability as dialogue' relating to the public discussion on which democracies depend.

Webler and Tuler (2021) contend that the public includes many scientifically literate people in modern society. Treating them all as ignorant and uninformed is not only politically incorrect but also pragmatically ineffective, as it discards an opportunity unique to modern democratic societies. Securing public participation and collaboration, though, is not without its problems. English (2000) observes that the more diffuse the affected stakeholders and the more long-term or unclear the problem horizon, the more difficult it will be to represent stakeholders in collaborative processes. Not all stakeholders will possess the skill and expertise to engage in discussions. Hence, Koebele (2019) suggest that successful collaborative governance processes are contingent on time, trust, and interdependence.

Studies on the principle of ethics in government in the past three years focused on ethics around the COVID-19 Pandemic, and these studies were conducted by scholars such as Burgess, Rennie and Moodley (2023); Häyry (2021); Persad and Emanuel (2020); their focus was on ethical leadership, ethical vaccination processes and ethical response to the pandemic. Studies on the principle of public participation in South Africa primarily focused on public participation as a solution to service delivery protests, such as those by Msenge and Nzewi (2021), Mamokhere (2020), Motloutsi (2019), while the principle of the AA100SES were mainly studies in the corporate sector, these studied were conducted by: Sciulli and Adhariani (2023); Carli (2022); Sengur (2021). Therefore, the literature is lacking in discussing these principles in the public sector for good governance and legitimacy, which the study intends to bring forward.

#### **4.4 ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES PRACTICES BY THE CORPORATE SECTOR**

Dalziel, DeVoge and LeMaire (2004) present four principles of accountability within corporate organizations. These are (1) value creation, (2) empowerment, (3) shared accountability and (4) doable roles, each is explored next. Every position in an organization should add value. Each job should have a distinct and meaningful purpose, and each management layer in an organization should add commensurate value in achieving the mandate of an organisation. Value creation requires that reporting relationships make sense and that a job is not just "tucked into" a group because there is nowhere else for that position to report. Organizations should understand that stakeholders depend on them to remain loyal while they depend on their stakeholders to support their mandate. For an organization to remain accountable, it should give its incumbents a role they can fulfil. For example, suppose a relatively junior-level job is assigned too much accountability. In that case, there is a good chance that most incumbents will lack the necessary skills and experience and become overwhelmed. Conversely, suppose too little accountability is assigned to a relatively senior role. In that case, incumbents will likely become bored, and the organization will spend too much and get too little in return.

Empowerment refers to human development within organizations. Internal stakeholders' empowerment is imperative from an inside-outside perspective. When the ones inside are empowered to be accountable, they will be able to reflect accountability to the outside world, which should be responsive to internal needs. Shared accountability sometimes is the best choice in a complex situation. When two jobs share a decision, both must have accountability for the outcome. Both leaders must contribute to the considerations involved and recognise that their decision-making authority will match accountability. When more than two parties are involved shared decision-making requires clearly defined accountabilities and a formal tiebreaker at the next level up who can settle disputes quickly and decisively. In the absence of this, decisions can flounder, and business disagreements can become personal conflicts. A balance between shared and individual accountabilities must be achieved. Tie-breaking responsibilities cannot always be left to the CEO.

When reviewing the literature on the practice of these principles, it can be concluded that value creation is a principle that responds to the consumers' call for organizational integrity (Climent & Haftor, 2021; Harrigan, Roy & Chen, 2021; Prohl & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020 & Grönroos, 2017). In this way, shared accountability makes organizations responsible to their stakeholders, responsive to their needs and flexible to change, which is imperative for business continuity and organizational excellence.

#### **4.5 ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES PRACTISED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

The government can achieve accountability through legitimacy. Legitimacy is defined as the 'generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Deephouse, Bundy, Tost & Suchman, 2017). Legitimacy can be defined in a game theory framework as the ability of leaders to win compliance with new laws or public orders because people share a widespread belief that everyone is complying (World Bank, 2017). Legitimacy links organizations and existing social parameters and is fundamental for growth (Díez-Martín, Prado-Roman & Blanco-González, 2013). The government's legitimacy is also related to its ability to perform its functions adequately (De Rouen & Goldfinch, 2013). For this study, legitimacy is the ability of citizens of South Africa to see their government as being accountable, delivering desirable services and upholding the values of putting people first.

Royo, Yetano and García-Lacalle (2019) conducted a study in Spain to identify the e-disclosure patterns that State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) follow to render accountability to citizens. Spanish SOEs do not consider websites a key medium to communicate with their stakeholders. They do not feel any real urgency to comply with transparency-related legal requirements or legitimate pressures from their stakeholders to keep them informed (Royo, Yetano & García-Lacalle, 2019). Most of them are still anchored in a narrow accountability style that only considers shareholders as the key stakeholders. It is a long way from fulfilling the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommendation that they should be as transparent as listed companies.

Based on their e-disclosure behaviours, three different patterns of accountability have been found in Spanish SOEs: the good (balanced approach to transparency, using their websites as an integrated platform to improve information dissemination to satisfy stakeholder needs), the bad (they hardly disclose any type of information) and the ugly (strongly focused on the disclosure of mandatory information, mainly the financial). According to Akinyetun (2021), the Nigerian government attempts to achieve accountability through legitimacy. The study focused on how the legislature is the engine of democracy and, ultimately, legitimacy for the government in Nigeria. The government of Zimbabwe, according to Chigumira, Chipumho, and Chiwunze (2020), ensures accountability through transparency and devolution, where the statutory delegation of powers from the central government of a sovereign state to govern at a subnational level, such as a regional or local level. It is a form of administrative decentralization.

Unlike the Spanish government, which utilises a narrow accountability style, the South African Government, akin to the Nigerian government, strives for legitimacy. Among its other systems of accountability, South Africa has a system of disclosure and compliance. Still, disclosure and compliance are, however, not the objectives of good governance because the aim of good governance is to ensure success proactively, that goals and objectives are satisfied, and that the obligations of every entity are fulfilled within the ambit of accountability and common responsibility. Munzhendzi (2016) explores how the government of South Africa uses oversight for accountability and legitimacy. Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) explored how accountability mechanisms used in South Africa are effective for good governance and legitimacy. Rulashe and Ijeoma (2022) looked at accountability strategies that the South African government can use to enhance service delivery. Gasela (2022) explored how auditing can enhance accountability for the South African government in service delivery. Therefore, the South African government strives to ensure legitimacy; hence, these scholars explored the mechanisms they use to ensure legitimacy.

The Constitution of South Africa, 1996, Section 41(1) (c) stipulates that all spheres of government must provide effective, transparent, accountable, and coherent government for the country. One of the fundamental problems facing the government in South Africa regarding disclosure systems is a lack of transparency (Maropo, 2018). There is low compliance with Section 14 of The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), which aims to facilitate proactive disclosure as contained in Section 15 through the open provision of manuals making information freely available, which is currently a concern for the government.

“The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) gives effect to the constitutional right of access to any information held by the state and any information that another person holds, and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights” (POPIA, 2002). The law applies to public institutions and private organizations when the requested information is deemed in the public interest. However, no central agency exists to deal with PAIA requests. Every public and private organization is required to publish a PAIA manual on its website, providing the public with clear guidelines on the process, costs, and contact persons for PAIA requests, but this is not forthcoming (Govender, 2012). Nkwe and Ngoepe (2021) concede that, unfortunately, many public bodies seem to hamper access to information, either due to the failure of internal systems or because of the incompetence of the information officers to whom a request has been made. Nkwe and Ngoepe (2021) also affirm that bureaucratic resistance to implementing access to information rights includes the failure to provide manuals (to ensure people-friendly access to the right), difficult requirements for processing information requests and the ineffective PAIA enforcement mechanisms (to ensure compliance by public and private bodies with mandatory obligations in PAIA).

Accountability and transparency are among the rights and expectations of citizens in a democratic society. Leaders should give an account of all their actions, decisions, and their financial spending while in office. It is equally expected that all the activities taking place in government are open to all and sundry within the government. According to Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021), It is imperative to say that these two major tools are lacking in South Africa’s government, which has resulted in political apathy, tax evasion and avoidance government, creating a wider lacuna between government administration and the government people, poor revenue generation,

poor infrastructural development, low and inefficient service delivery by government. Transparency and accountability are essential components of democratic government and governance, nationally and locally.

#### **4.6 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

Accountability in the public sector is the process of accounting for governmental actions or inactions to the public who, through their votes, afford them such positions. The purpose is to enable the public to trust such a government in addition to continuous support in future elections. Accountability, among other things, is required to explain the stewardship of public money and how the money was used. Accountability is not just about the responsibility of public officers and the institutions to the people they support or serve but also includes the willingness of officeholders to submit to public scrutiny. When public entities focus on external means of ensuring accountability, such as monitoring measures, controls, and laws, they neglect issues of accountability that are internal to organizations and individuals, such as integrity and mission. The central problem from this perspective is not how a principal can enforce accountability but instead “how accountability can assist in framing a common script about organizational roles and expectations” (Tacon, Walters & Cornforth, 2017).

In the South African context, internal accountability is practised through oversight, which is informal and formal, watchful, strategic, and structured scrutiny exercised by legislatures in respect of the implementation of laws, the application of the budget, and the strict observance of statutes and the Constitution (Munzhedzi, 2016). Oversight serves the following functions in the South African government: It detects and prevents abuse, arbitrary behaviour, or illegal and unconstitutional conduct by the government and public agencies. It holds the government to account in respect of how the taxpayers’ money is used. It detects waste within the machinery of government and public agencies. It ensures that policies announced by the government and authorised by Parliament are delivered. Lastly, it improves the transparency of government operations and enhances public trust in the government. Transparency is a condition of effective policy delivery (Nhleko, 2005; Madue, 2013 & Gasela, 2022).

overall<sup>55</sup> of the Constitution enables the National Assembly to maintain oversight over all state organs, and Section 92 enables Parliament to hold the Cabinet accountable operationally. Organs of state at a national level and Ministers and their departments are generally held to account by Parliament. At a national level, there is direct accountability to Parliament by national departments, national public entities, and national bodies such as commissions. However, The National Assembly has the right to call state organs at provincial and local levels to account. Still, it does not do so operationally unless there are issues of public importance, national interest, and shared competencies. State organs at the provincial and local levels' accountability to Parliament must be conducted through observance of the Intergovernmental Framework Relations Act and the principles of cooperative government.

When national departments account to Parliament by means which include the submission of reports, for example, annual reports etc., Parliament needs to be informed of the complete picture of the performance of the reported functions. Considering the department's annual report alone may not give the complete picture of the performance of the functions. This is so because national departments have public entities that are agencies for the implementation of their functions, and their activities may not be reported in the annual report of the national department. The annual reports of organs of state that report to national departments must be considered when evaluating the annual report of the national department for Parliament to have a complete picture of the performance of the functions reported on. If further accountability is required, committees could use the Constitution's power to access information from provincial or local government bodies so that the committee has complete information and details on the public function reported on. When a parliamentary committee reviews the performance of a national organ of state, the committee must ensure that the performance of its other entities, that is, subsidiaries of the main organ of state, is included in the report to Parliament. If this is not included in the report, Parliament should, in terms of Sections 56(b) and 69(b) of the Constitution, require the entity to report to it so that Parliament has the complete picture.

In conducting oversight and accountability, the principles of cooperative government and intergovernmental relations must be taken into consideration, including the separation of powers and the need for all spheres of government and all organs of state to exercise their powers and perform their functions in a manner that does not encroach on the geographical, functional, or institutional integrity of government in another sphere. External approaches to accountability, such as Laws and regulations in themselves, are inadequate as instruments of accountability since they represent only a minimum common behavioural standard. Moreover, laws are external regulatory measures with punitive consequences for noncompliance that do little to promote the internalisation of accountability in organizations.

#### **4.7 ACCOUNTABILITY IN A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY**

In the most general terms, democracy is a normative ideal that requires society to be governed collectively by all its members, not just by some dictator, bureaucracy, or privileged elite (Brooks, Ngwane & Runciman, 2020). Democracy, ruled by the people, is a normative principle for organizing the distribution, exercise, control, and legitimisation of power. Accountability is also a principle for organizing the relations between rulers and ruled and constituting a democratic political community and government. Making government and public officials accountable is a democratic achievement. A legitimate order requires strong accountability institutions and control, with officials exercising powers on behalf of the public (Koelble, 2022).

The challenge is that democracy, autonomy, and accountability are slippery and contested concepts. They give some guidance yet are open to competing interpretations and disputes regarding what institutions are most likely to secure accountability and the proper role of citizens, elected representatives, and non-elected officials. For example, whereas almost everyone embraces democracy as an ideal, the term has lost its meaning “in a cacophony of competing interpretations”. There is a need to reconsider what citizens expect from each other and what it means to conduct oneself democratically (Nwogu, 2015; Dryding, 2020; Finn, 2021). Citizenship is the key institution of democratic government, and the people, as a collection of free and equal citizens, are entitled to hold their rulers to account. Officials are obliged to describe, explain, and justify what has happened and why to an authoritative forum.



However, polities called democracies differ considerably when it comes to organizational structures prescribing where powers, autonomy, responsibility, and accountability are to be located. Hierarchical, specialised, and open-access structures include and exclude participants and issues differently and give citizens different roles (Munck, 2016; Gwiriri & Bennett, 2020). Freedom of expression, legitimate opposition, and a free press are institutions that help citizens and officials construct a moral account of a good society, recognise appropriate tasks, ends, and forms of governance, and develop confidence in their mutual motivation and capability for reason and justice. Therefore, accountability in a democratic state is a powerful tool to demonstrate that stakeholders' interests and expectations are properly addressed (Hyndman & McConville, 2017).

#### **4.8 DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY**

Democratic accountability refers to how citizens, political parties, parliaments, and other democratic actors can provide feedback to, reward or sanction officials in charge of setting and enacting public policy (Lieberman & Lekalake, 2022). Well-functioning accountability mechanisms are believed to incentivise governments to work in citizens' best interests. When it comes to the more concrete dimension of service delivery, the critical role of accountability is still a matter of debate. Only a few empirical studies have explored the links between democratic mechanisms and public services, especially regarding the roles played by representative political institutions such as political parties and parliaments (Jelmin, 2012; Singh, 2020). Accountability is considered a necessary condition for preserving democracy and facilitating good governance. Democratic accountability can be achieved through institutional structures that make administrative officials answerable to citizens. These structures make officials answerable in a two-stage process: first, administrative officials are answerable to the representatives of citizens who have the power to remove these officials through impeachment; second, representatives themselves are accountable to citizens through free and fair elections (Olsen, 2017).

This two-stage system of democratic accountability helps ensure that administrative officials will not exercise their authority in ways that serve the interests of certain privileged clients (i.e., "social power," which includes powerful business interests).

Making officials answerable to the public is a way to pressure them to make decisions sensitive to citizens' free, unforced, rational deliberation. A democratic-optimistic interpretation of accountability is that communicative rationality and experience-based learning will generate mutual understanding, adaptation, and improvement through an exchange of reasons and arguments. Accountability is based on discretionary reasoning and argumentation (Ahmed, Adebayo, Udemba, Murshed & Kirikkaleli, 2022). Actors are discursively accountable to one another in an open forum and are supposed to comply with the force of the better argument.

An implication is that the conception of accountability as truth-finding, a neutral technique, correct reporting, and compliance must be supplemented by accountability politics—debates and struggles over what are considered appropriate accountability regimes and good government (Bovens, Curtin, Chalmers, Jachtenfuchs & Joerges, 2016; Fagbadebo, 2019; Koenane & Mangena, 2017). New regimes are often related to political contestation and the rise and fall of political groups, ideologies, cleavages, institutions, and orders. Inequalities in representation and accountability should be arranged to the maximum benefit of the least well-off and must be consistent with other principles of justice (Newman & Hayes, 2019).

Democratic political equality requires that citizens be treated as equals. Modern representative democracies grant disproportionate political influence on the rich over the poor despite the formal equality of the vote. As a result, the interests, opinions, and perspectives of the wealthy are much better represented than those of the poor in democratic assemblies. For example, Maropo (2018) has shown that in South Africa, the views of the poor have almost no influence on the actions of their representatives when these views diverge from those of the rich. The South African Development Research Unit in 2018 shows that the top 1 per cent of the income distribution have views that are significantly different from those of the rest of the South African public and that their disproportionate influence probably accounts for the divergence between what the majority of South Africans want the government to do and what it does (Dryding, 2020).

The problem is not restricted to South Africa. Evidence from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, suggests that politicians in many different politico-economic contexts have tended to maximise the welfare of the “economic elite,” at least over the last two or three decades, rather than the welfare of the least well off or even of the median voter (De Kadt & Lieberman, 2020).

Democratic accountability is not accountability to the elite only. It is the government's answerability to all the public members on its performance (Olsen, 2018; Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). The extent to which a government provides comprehensive information about its attributes and maintains timely communications with its various publics is considered a measure of government accountability (Mayernik, 2017; Brusca, Manes Rossi & Aversano, 2018). Therefore, democratic accountability should be exercised in an open forum, and the government should be expected to make all information available for public scrutiny. However, public sector reporting has been criticized because accountability mechanisms have tended to focus on upward accountability to those in power, such as investors, funders, and experts, rather than on downward accountability to citizens (Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021). However, democratic accountability seems to be a pending issue.

Tuurnas, Stenvall, Virtanen, Pekkola and Kurkela (2019) argue that there is undoubtedly strong upward accountability for spending and nationally set targets, but what is missing is public oversight – the ability of the community to hold the government to account for its actions. To date, South Africans cannot bring their government to account for load-shedding, high repo rates, lack of clean water, poor accessible water in rural areas, lack of resources in rural schools and poor health facilities in public clinics and hospitals. As shown by Tuurnas et al. (2019) and Caperchione, Demirag and Grossi (2017), there may be a democratic deficit exhibited by the government in relation to accountability to citizens.

The literature has acknowledged that the mere disclosure of information is not enough. Accountability requires more than access to information but responsiveness to that information. Information about unemployment, state capture and the collapse of state-owned organizations is currently disclosed in South Africa.

However, there is little information pertaining to how the government intends to respond to these issues. Stakeholder responsiveness is necessary for effective accountability (Cohen, Mamakou & Karatzimas, 2017; Cucciniello, Bellè, Nasi & Valotti, 2015; Shaoul, Stafford & Stapleton, 2012). Responsiveness is how an organization demonstrates its response to its stakeholders and is accountable to them. This may include establishing policies, objectives and targets, governance structure, management systems and processes, action plans, stakeholder engagement, measurement and monitoring of performance or assurance. An organisation's responses may not agree with the views of all stakeholders. Stakeholders participate in developing responses.

The concept of democratic accountability assumes the position of a consensus organizer within a democracy. As a normatively informed idea, it arose amidst the proposals of liberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (Olsen, 2017), being understood mainly as a liability. However, one cannot lose sight of the normative nature of the concept, which, as Little, Schnakenberg and Turner (2022) point out, has the clear purpose of making the State do what must be accomplished. As a result of its broad scope in empirical research, the concept of accountability lacks a more accurate normative treatment to rescue a conceptual perspective that encompasses the actual political problems of democratic societies.

While the normative object is clear, it lacks adequacy to the idea of democracy and how it works in everyday politics because, after all, politics is not restricted to economic management and efficiency. Therefore, the concept of accountability refers not only to the accounting process of rendering accounts but also to the political and democratic process of exercising authority by citizens. A normative discussion of this subject must be able to deal with two crucial issues: (i) the strengthening of a substantive idea of democracy, with accountability understood as a normative principle, and (ii) the operationalization of the concept to the sphere of political institutions and the practices of citizens (Lafont, 2017).

Therefore, accountability is improved by considering the following aspects: (i) voters should be able to know who to assign responsibility for government performance; (ii) voters should be able to vote to remove parties from governments with poor performance; (iii) voters should have institutional instruments to reward and punish governments for the results they produce in several domains (Dahl, 2020). According to this perspective, accountability takes place in the dimension of electoral democracy. Within this minimalist conception of democracy, the key to institutionalising accountability is to reduce the informational deficit and facilitate the opening of state secrets through transparency (Denters, 2017). To mitigate the effects of secrecy in the democratic order, the idea of transparency and good governance assumed an essential role in defining the concept of accountability, as per the discussion below.

#### **4.9 GOOD GOVERNANCE**

Governance refers to the system of values, policies, and institutions by which society manages its economic, political, and societal affairs. Maropo (2018) states that governance comprises complex mechanisms, relationships, processes, and institutions through which groups and citizens articulate their specific interests, exercise their obligations and rights, and mediate their differences. Governance, therefore, means more than the term government. Governance is broader than government, as it involves more societal actors than government and aims to impact all conventional areas covered by the traditional government definition. According to Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021), the government in the broader sense is to govern, rule or control others. Therefore, the core function of government is to make laws. At the same time, Governance is about the implementation of laws and the actual provision of services and products to citizens of the country by the government (Lebotsa, 2022).

Government programmes should and have to contribute towards an enhanced quality of life for all the people of the country. Governance, of course, implies that the outcomes of public administration are aimed at quality service delivery and improving the general welfare of its people (Addink, 2019). According to the World Bank (2016), good governance entails sound public sector management that entails efficiency, effectiveness, economy, accountability, exchange and free flow of information, and a legal framework for development, which comprises justice and respect for human

rights and liberties. For the purpose of this study, good governance is the system of being legitimate with emphasis on the government having the consent of the governed, exercising accountability principles, ensuring that transparency prevails, being answerable, promoting freedom of the media as well as competence for effective policy-making, implementation and service delivery; respect for law and protection of human rights.

#### **4.9.1 Why governance?**

The nature of social problems has changed, and people are antagonised by altered conditions that they want to discuss and address. In the past, the government could direct people to do things or instruct them to deal with social problems they are confronted with, but it is not easily done nowadays (Addink, 2019). The reason is that people are faced with complex and multi-dimensional challenges. Moreover, more citizens are educated, and the world we are living in requires specialised knowledge. Governance is the new term used to capture this new terrain of governing, although governance is fraught with dilemmas (Wettenhall & Bhusal, 2016). The institutional arrangement that consigns power to public representatives and officials and then defines the mechanism to hold them accountable is called governance. This is neither an art nor a science. At best, it is a political process.

Therefore, to have legitimate governance, when a system is designed, it must involve those who will have a stake in that governing functionality. Governance must adapt to the institutional and political environment because it is expected to thrive. It must allow for transparency, representation, and responsiveness (Parkhurst, 2017). Therefore, governance is a condition that guarantees the process of participation, transparency of decision-making, rule of law and predictability. In the context of government organizations, public accountability is the provision of information on the activities and financial performance of the government to the parties concerned with the report. Consequently, good governance, though an endorsement of transparency, is a mechanism for accountability (Keping, 2018). The study is focused on the concept of good governance as a drive to accountability, specifically government accountability.

#### 4.9.2 Good Governance in the Public Sector

Fonseca, Jorge and Nascimento (2020) did a study on the role of internal auditing in promoting accountability and found that auditing is one of the main pillars of good governance in the public sector and must serve accountability. This happens in as much as the obligation of rendering accounts about the management of public resources, considering the public interest, must be carried out transparently, allowing for holding responsibility for the results accomplished.

The internal auditor, therefore, assumes a preponderant role in assigning responsibility and monitoring strategic objectives, supporting decision-making, controlling and preventing power abuses, and identifying situations of risk, fraud or error (Domingos, 2015; IIA, 2012). The accountability of the government and politicians to the public and parliament is generally named public accountability, which includes political and administrative accountabilities as its subcomponents. Public accountability covers all public affairs and resources and all stakeholders. Administrative accountability is a mechanism to hold civil servants within the administration of government accountable. Governance in the public sector usually aims to achieve one or more of the following objectives". (Wang, Teo & Janssen, 2021):

- **Accountability:** To enhance the accountability of governments to citizens, often to improve service delivery, state responsiveness and state-citizen relations; support more informed democratic decision-making or marginalised groups to assert their voice; or decrease public tolerance of corruption or poor governance.
- **Stability and conflict reduction:** To improve debate, dialogue, and tolerance in fragile or conflict-affected societies, often to increase the availability of balanced, reliable, and trustworthy information; reduce the likelihood of hate speech or inflammatory media likely to exacerbate conflict; and enhance social cohesion or build state legitimacy.
- **Transparency:** According to Wang et al. (2021), the decision-making process at councils should make it possible for people to follow and understand. This will allow communities to see how those decisions were made clearly.

- Communities will know what advice and information the council considered and which legislative requirement was followed. It will show that as good governance follows the rule of law, the decisions are consistent with the relevant legislation and are within the powers of the municipal council.
- **Responsiveness:** South African municipalities should always try to serve the entire community's needs appropriately and responsively. Responsiveness must be equitable and inclusive for all groups, including the vulnerable (Wang et al., 2021).
- **Effectiveness and efficiency:** The best available people must be appointed to ensure the best possible results for the community. The South African government should implement decisions and ascertain that a follow-up is done (Wang et al., 2021).
- **Allow participation:** All interested parties or anyone affected by council decisions should have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process through public participation processes. When community members are provided with information, asked for their opinions and given the opportunity to make recommendations, this will lead to better decision-making. It assists the government in meeting its legislative responsibilities and significantly provides governance which has an ethical basis (Wang et al., 2021).

#### 4.10 GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

A transparent process is open to scrutiny. Transparency is especially important when governments face sectoral pressures and other potential conflicts of interest that could lead to policies and regulations that are not always in the broader public interest. Transparency deters governments from being 'sloppy' about implementing best-practice regulatory processes. If a poor decision is made, they should be accountable to the public that regulations have a clear rationale and are in the public interest (Productivity Commission, 2023). In other words, transparency safeguards against simple errors, poor research design, and outright bias of results and conclusions.



Transparency is also the starting point for the more demanding standard of accountability. Without transparency, there can be little accountability. Generally, transparency means openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency in public services means a public office holder is open everywhere and every time possible regarding issues of decisions and actions they take. In furtherance, they should be able to give reasons for their actions and inactions (Porumbescu, Meijer & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2022). When transparency is radical in management, it involves decision-making being carried out publicly. Heald (2006), in his work “What is Transparency?”, sees transparency as an active disclosure.

Similarly, various scholars have defined government transparency as the publicising of incumbent policy choices and the availability and increased flow to the public of timely, comprehensive, relevant, high-quality, and reliable information concerning government activities. Transparency has been generally supposed to make institutions and their officeholders trusted and trustworthy (Meijer, Hart & Worthy, 2018). Transparency International (2012) defines transparency as a way of shedding light on plans, rules, processes, and actions. It is a way to know why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials, civil servants, managers, board members and businesspeople act visibly and understandably and report on their activities. This implies that the public can hold public servants accountable for their actions and inactions. Transparency is one of the surest ways to guard against corruption (Maropo, 2018). Transparency assures the organization that systematic information is provided in an orderly manner and according to laid down rules, principles, and procedures.

According to Pozen (2020), transparency means the reduction of informational asymmetries between citizens and state agents to reduce mismanagements and allow for greater control over unlawful acts within the public sector. As the author points out, ‘with more information, the public can better discern the value added by public action’. In this sense, the concept of transparency emerges as a core value of contemporary public management; its realisation means expanding society’s information concerning the actions taken by public officials and, consequently, encourages accountability. Transparent governments govern better because the expansion of information provides the existence of a less corrupt political market and, in turn, is more efficient.

Faced with incidents of corruption, there is a cry for greater institutional transparency, the opening of public accounts, and the moralisation of politics. Transparency is, in fact, a central element in accountability in such a way that the idea of political responsibility is part of any democratic project (Maropo, 2018). It is impossible to imagine political responsibility without transparent institutions and a reduction in the informational deficit between the common man and democratic institutions.

For it to be consolidated as a political regime, democracy presupposes free knowledge from the part of the ordinary citizen (Pozen, 2020). In this case, for this knowledge to be possible, it is essential that political institutions are clear, informative, and accountable to the ordinary citizen and that the idea of transparency becomes an instrumental value towards the exercise of accountability (Roelofs, 2019). The policy of transparency thereby reduces state secrets, allows free knowledge for society, and allegedly enhances the practice of citizenship. From a conceptual point of view, the notion of transparency means a rule of conduct for public officials. It carries a symbolic power associated with opening processes and results from public affairs associated with the government and the business market (Michener, 2019). It suggests that a reduction in the informational asymmetry contributes to the reduction of investment uncertainties, therefore providing a form of control over the actions of public agents towards the highest possible efficiency.

That is to say, the concept of transparency appears as an issue of informational economy, in which the principal should get the best possible results from public investments conducted in different government agencies and within the market (Heald, 2006). Transparency enables an organization to answer basic questions such as, of whom is information being demanded? What specific information? And for what purpose? (Florini, 1999 in Aigbokhaevbolo & Oziegbe, 2016).

Transparency is characterised by the following:

- A disclosure system.
- Access to information.
- Openness to public participation.
- Absence of undue secrecy.
- Readiness to face and accommodate legitimate scrutiny.

- Humility on the part of executive officeholders through readiness to answer questions raised by citizens.

According to Manamela and Rambuda (2016), “Transparency in an organization is not only about what’s communicated externally but about what’s right on the inside, in the guts of its operations”. As Omowunmi (2016) suggested, structures and procedures often serve as easily monitored proxies for less visible evaluation targets, such as outcomes.

Accountability and Transparency in Government Administration is needed for the following reasons:

- ✓ To confer integrity on public officeholders
- ✓ To generate fulfilment of responsibility
- ✓ To enhance public trust in public officials
- ✓ To resolve the problem of impunity
- ✓ To create a sense of fulfilment in the public office holder
- ✓ To enhance mass public participation
- ✓ To reduce corrupt practices
- ✓ To configure good governance (Adagbabiri, 2015).
- ✓ To address the issues of the integrity of the local government.

Transparency and accountability are essential components of democratic government and governance, nationally and locally (Arneil, 2017). Transparency is, therefore, an instrument of accountability. Transparency is impossible or very difficult, where freedom of access to public information is not guaranteed in law or statute (Zúñiga, Jenkins & Jackson, 2018). Countries have experienced a growing demand for accountability as a key element to the democratisation of the State. This demand has given rise to advocacy towards transparency of State institutions and their subsequent public policies. This advocacy, in turn, aims to make governments accountable before the public.

#### **4.11 GOOD GOVERNANCE IN THE CORPORATE SECTOR**

The most effective approach to accountable governance goes well beyond the macrostructure and delves into the accountabilities of individual jobs and the motives of individuals (Alabdullah, Ahmed & Nor, 2019). However, any portion of the organization must not be treated in isolation. This requires an understanding of organizational dynamics and considerable knowledge about people and the conditions necessary for them to succeed in a role. If accountabilities are explicitly translated all the way to the job level, and all jobs across the organization are aligned, then an organization can be successful. When all the pieces finally come together, an organization will be more resilient and more capable of adapting its structure to the changing needs of its mandate (Ruwanti, Chandrarin & Assih, 2019).

Building a culture of accountability is advisable, where individual achievement directly supports organizational success. Good governance results in the following outcomes for an organisation: sustainable performance and value creation, adequate and effective control by the governing body, and protection and building of trust in the organization pertaining to its reputation and legitimacy. The governing body ensures that the ethics of an organization are managed effectively and that reports and other disclosures enable stakeholders to make an informed assessment of the organisation's performance and its ability to sustainably create value (Johnson, Erasmus & Mans-Kemp, 2019). Good governance leads to the value creation process by appreciating the strategy, risks, opportunities, performance, and sustainable development and ensuring that these are inseparable elements (Gibbons, 2020).

The governing body also ensures that the organization comprises in its composition a balance of skills, experience, diversity, knowledge, and independence needed to discharge its roles and responsibilities. An organisation's governance relies on statutory provisions comprising rules and principles, and such does not exist from the provision of the law (Institute of Directors-Southern Africa, 2016). Good governance is founded on effective and ethical leadership that manifests in professional acts of responsibility and accountability. Effective leadership is being responsible and accountable. It is concerned with morality, which translates to the mannerism of conduct (Bruun, 2020) of those who are serving in varied structures of governance.

#### **4.12 CORPORATE VS PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY**

The government heavily relies on annual reports and parliamentary reports, and using its website as an access to information mechanism is its approach to accountability. As per the argument of Dalziel, DeVoge and LeMaire (2004), the corporate sector outlines that value creation, empowerment and doable roles are necessary principles in the corporate world. The study argues that the government is not repudiated in adopting some corporate accountability approaches.

Overloading citizens with reports and consulting citizens as a public comment phase of issues is asking for their endorsement as opposed to seeking genuine and constructive engagement. As such, issues reach implementation phases with loopholes. It is, therefore, imperative for the government to further add the principle of value creation, which will not be profit-based as per the corporate sector. However, the principle for the government will be citizen-orientated. Allowing the government to create value for their citizens through ensuring that they serve their people with, among others, good service delivery, provision of basic needs and bringing development within communities (Langevoort, 2017) is responsiveness. This, in return, will build legitimacy for the government where a 'generalized perception that the government's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, and beliefs will be developed in the minds of citizens. That builds a great image for the government, and a good image results in business continuity (Rensburg & de Beer, 2012) or a long reign for the government. The government can also adopt the principle of 'doable roles'. This is placing officials in positions they can perform well in. The study argues that doable roles are important not only in the corporate sector. Since 2009 and to date, South Africans have been complaining about cabinet reshuffles that are done to manage political dynamics and not to serve roles positions. Amongst other principles, the principle of doable roles becomes necessary for the government and contributes to good governance.

#### **4.13 SUMMARY**

The chapter reviewed accountability as the processes through which an organization makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities and delivers against this commitment (Brinkerhoff, 2017). The most vital component of this definition is the notion of balance. Unaccountable organizations do not define today's global governance arena, but organizations that are either accountable to the wrong set of stakeholders or focus their accountability on one group of stakeholders at the expense of others.

The key challenge is to create a more balanced relationship in which the interests of the most powerful do not overshadow the voices of those most affected by an organisation's activities. Accountability, therefore, becomes a process that manages power imbalances between the organization and its stakeholders and between its various stakeholder groups. In addition, accountability increases credibility and legitimacy, strengthens governance structures and leads to learning and innovation. It ensures that the needs of stakeholders are addressed in organizational policies and practices. It was highlighted that accountability is governed by principles that differ in the public and private sectors and are applied for different reasons. Value creation, integrity, good governance, and legitimacy are identified as pillars of accountability in both sectors.

The lack of these principles in government would have a detrimental effect on the entire system of governance, whose goal is to strengthen democracy, where leadership and officials should be accountable and transparent to the members of the public. Although the chapter reveals mechanisms that the South African government uses to respond to the call for accountability, a framework that illustrates how accountability can be achieved for all citizens and the outcome of that accountability is still a paucity in the South African government communication management literature, this is the gap that this study intends to bridge. The next chapter presents the methodological stance of the study which explains how the gap identified was practically bridged.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapters were focused on the literature review, where elements and concepts significant to the study were discussed, such as the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), stakeholder engagement (Chapter 3) and accountability principles (Chapter 4). Principles in the preceding chapter were identified from a corporate and government communication perspective to inform the accountability framework in the public sector of South Africa. Based on these principles, an accountability framework will be proposed after a pragmatic evaluation guided by the approaches discussed in this chapter. This chapter outlines and contextualises the research methodology to analyse the proposed elements for a conceptual framework of accountability based on the literature review outcome and feedback from the respondents.

This chapter is set out as follows: firstly, the study's primary purpose and the broad research problem are highlighted; secondly, the research methodology is conceptualised by providing insight into the research paradigm and research design that guides the pragmatic enquiry. Thirdly, the philosophical logic and other research considerations are explained and framed in the context of the adopted research paradigm. Procedures to be followed to ensure the validity and reliability of this study were presented, and limitations and ethical issues were pointed out.

#### **5.2 PURPOSE AND BROAD RESEARCH PROBLEM OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to investigate the practice of accountability principles in stakeholder engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding between the South African government and its citizens. The investigation was conducted to develop a framework. This study aims to identify appropriate elements to include in a conceptual framework for accountability in South African government communication.

The researcher anticipated that such a framework would ultimately direct the public sector on how to adopt accountability to resolve the general research problem of having all three spheres of government in the South African public services not frequently implementing the accountability mechanism (Maropo, 2018), resulting in the erosion of accountability. The erosion of accountability has an adverse impact on the organizational performance of government institutions in South Africa (Diagnostic Report National Development Plan, 2011:56). South African studies on accountability mainly employed a single-method approach. Gasela (2022) used a quantitative approach and administered surveys to Northern Cape provincial administrators when investigating the impact of material irregularity provisions of the Public Audit Act on accountability, oversight, and governance in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) employed a qualitative method and analysed documents available on the topic of the effectiveness of public accountability mechanisms in South Africa and whether they can help realize good governance. Gwiriri and Bennett (2022) employed a qualitative methodology when exploring the balance between democracy and accountability in South Africa. The study will bridge the current methodological gap of adopting a single method for accountability studies in South Africa by employing a mixed-method approach elaborated on in this chapter.

### **5.3 METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS**

This section explains the research methodology that was followed to analyse the proposed principles of accountability in South African government communication.

#### **5.3.1 Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a set of commonly held beliefs and assumptions within a research community about ontological, epistemological, and methodological concerns (Aljafari & Khazanchi, 2013). The term 'paradigm' is described as an essential collection of beliefs shared by scientists, a set of agreements about how problems are to be understood and how we view the world and thus conduct research (Cresswell, 2017). Therefore, these paradigms contain a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide inquiries for research (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).



Such a paradigm constitutes a mental model that influences and structures how the members of a research community perceive their field of study. The approach to a research study is largely determined by the research paradigm selected, which, among others, guides a study with respect to the methodology employed, the view of reality (ontology), the relationship between the researcher and the topic under investigation (epistemology) and the ethical orientation of the researcher (axiology) (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2021), pragmatism promotes action instead of merely observing a phenomenon as such, and in accordance with the aim of the current study to identify possible principles of accountability in government communication in South Africa. A pragmatic research approach is deemed most appropriate for investigating the adoption of accountability principles in real-life settings. Pragmatism is the philosophy of common sense. It uses purposeful human inquiry as a focal point. Inquiry is viewed as a continuing process that acknowledges the qualitative nature of human experience as problematic situations emerge and are recognised. Recognition involves the doubt associated with questioning existing belief systems. Doubt is resolved through critical reasoning and ultimately tested in action (Cresswell, 2017).

Pragmatism is a common-sense philosophy because actions are assessed considering practical consequences. Creighton criticizes the philosophy for believing in universal thought processing. Moore (2019) argues that if every real thought (common sense) has some degree of truth as per the philosophy, it also has some degree of error, meaning that research cannot rely on human thoughts as data, which might lead to error. However, the criticism against pragmatism forgets that thinking generates error and truth, that it can shut people together with illusions and things and that the solution is to distinguish one from the other.

The point of departure in a traditional view of pragmatism is that the truth is provisional rather than a fixed or objective reality (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This view, therefore, incorporates the notion that multiple views of reality are in a constant state of change.

Hence, bearing in mind the diversity in the public sector as well as the challenges the sector faces to promote its causes and create strong perceptions of its mandate, the researcher contends that a specific paradigm such as pragmatism is adopted in this study to explore the sector's multiple realities of adopting accountability principles. According to Dewey (1925), a seminal scholar, pragmatism is a reality comprising objective and subjective elements, or a combination thereof, typical of other paradigms such as the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Furthermore, a pragmatic perspective is distinguished from different approaches that advocate the existence of a single objective reality that can be determined independently of the researcher.

Lichtman (2014), Chilisa and Kawulich (2012), Feilzer (2010), and Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) suggest that pragmatism does not disprove the existence of reality as such but instead regards it as ever-changing and encompassing both objective and subjective views. Hence, a pragmatic research approach does not attempt to produce knowledge representing one reality. Reality is not influenced or determined exclusively objectively or subjectively or by the research approach adopted by the researcher (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). In this sense, it can be assumed to give the researcher leeway to investigate real-life issues based on the understanding that an accurate depiction of an issue or topic does not necessarily depend on or represent the most accurate depiction of reality. Pragmatism involves an end-of-communication research perspective that aptly questions what practical difference the research questions and empirical findings could make on the completion of an investigation (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

The research paradigm adopted for a particular study is deemed to be influenced by assumptions about the belief concerning the existence of single or multiple realities (ontology); considerations such as how knowledge of an aspect is gained, including, among others, the sources of knowledge and their reliability (epistemology); the methods applied (methodology); and the "value set of beliefs" of what is true and justified and that arises from our connection with things (axiology) (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Maree, 2019). These rationales collectively influence the research approach a researcher adopts to examine a topic and the methods used to gather the information (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

In the next section, the philosophical assumptions traditionally linked to research paradigms are explained, after which these assumptions are framed in accordance with the pragmatic stance adopted.

### **5.3.2 The philosophical rationales for this research study**

The philosophical rationales associated with research and the paradigm selected for a research study include epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Durrheim, 2006). The worldview that this research adopted is closely linked to a particular reasoning and its underlying principles, methods and beliefs pertaining to a certain issue. Regarding the pragmatic approach, the empirical enquiry is framed according to the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological thinking evident in other existing paradigms. These are contextualised in the discussions below.

Ontology specifies the nature and form of reality and the researcher's particular beliefs and views of a phenomenon (Byrne, 2016; Bryman, 2012; Bryman, 2016; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Lichtman (2014) provides a simplistic explanation of ontology, that it is the nature of reality, whereas epistemology pertains to how we get to know it (Staller, 2010). The pragmatic perspective likewise thoroughly considers the topic under investigation to identify the specific methodologies needed to develop a better understanding of it (Van Grinsven, 2014; Cresswell, 2017). In a more traditional view of pragmatism, as in the present instance, ontology acknowledges the existence of single and multiple realities with a more pronounced angle towards explaining real-world problems.

Pragmatists argue for a more profound account of how particular issues could be useful by attempting to show "what it is for ... who it is for", as opposed to being concerned with an accurate depiction of reality (Hammond & Wellington, 2020; Maree, 2019). Moreover, as referred to by Hammond and Wellington (2020), these practical uses ontologically determine the issue or matter under investigation. In the context of the current study, the focus was on solving practical problems experienced by the government in accounting to its citizens, which inevitably requires consideration of the topic and selecting the most appropriate research methods.

The pragmatic approach is not prescriptive about which methodologies to apply but focuses on those most fitting for the research study and topic under investigation (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). As stated in Section 5.3.1 above, the approach adopted in the current study recognised that the public sector has multiple views of reality that could be determined by their unique nature, stakeholders, and the communication methods they deem appropriate to further their causes. Hence, a pragmatic view was considered suitable for this study because all opinions were regarded as equally valid and useful to investigate the topic at hand.

Epistemology is described as the way in which an understanding of a phenomenon can be acquired. It refers to the type of methodology and the data collection methods applied in a research study (Byrne, 2016; Bryman, 2012; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Bryman, 2016; Duemer & Zebidi, 2009) concur, adding that this thinking is crucial to any given study because it relates specifically to developing research questions and procedures to analyse the findings (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). According to Bryman et al. (2014), it relates to the issue of acceptable knowledge – what it is or should be as a particular area of knowledge (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). As far as epistemology is concerned, pragmatists are, in a sense, not restricted to any research method, mainly because of the existence of multiple realities. As Cresswell (2017) posits, epistemological concerns about the research methodology and data collection methods of the selected paradigm relate to the issue of the type of collection methods that could be employed to uncover the different aspects of a phenomenon, such as accountability and stakeholder management. Accordingly, using both a quantitative and a qualitative data collection method to investigate elements of the accountability framework was suitable for the current study. In the context of this study, epistemology refers to the sources employed and their reliability to generate knowledge of factors such as accountability and its practice in the government communication context.

Methodology in research broadly indicates the practical ways a researcher studies a topic (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It, therefore, requires consideration of the choices relating to the types of data collection and analysis methods in a particular study.

Hence, methodology concerns the specific ways in which a research study is conducted. Pragmatism does not favour research methods and aims to use the most appropriate methods to examine the existing situation (Cresswell, 2017). It basically refers to how a particular way of thinking is applied to acquire the necessary knowledge. A possible limitation when adopting a pragmatic approach relates to the methodological level and which data collection methods should be used to thoroughly understand the research problem (Bryman, 2016; Berger, 2018). In other words, compared with prominent research paradigms that relate to certain research methods, a researcher adopting a pragmatic approach does not have to use specific methods to collect data. Accordingly, the use of more than one method, as in this study, was viewed as a limitation in data collection and integration. Duemer and Zebidi (2009) contend that using multiple data collection methods can be wide-ranging and time-consuming. Challenges in reconciling different data from multiple data collection methods, such as textual and numerical data, into an integrated research report are also mentioned (Duemer & Zebidi, 2009; Bryman, 2016).

Axiology or value theory generally refers to a researcher's set of morals or ethics (Maree, 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). According to Chilisa and Kawulich (2012), the axiological assumption about what we believe is true influences a chosen paradigm and merits consideration. As Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2021) contend, this rationale focuses directly on the value of a variety of matters such as well-being, fulfilment, and knowledge. According to Bryman (2016), because researchers cannot be expected to be totally value-free or totally detached from their personal beliefs or feelings, they should acknowledge this and be sensitive to their position in relation to the topic under investigation. Based on the preceding discussion, axiology appears to consider factors such as the use of a quantitative research perspective to achieve objectivity (without any value judgements) and the use of a qualitative research perspective that acknowledges the influence of the researcher's beliefs and background knowledge, and therefore, the importance of existing values (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Bryman, 2016).

Axiology is also concerned with the question of the value or worth of a specific investigation that demands recognition as a foundational element of a selected approach (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Therefore, it stands to reason that the researcher needs to reflect on the merit of a given study. In relation to the present study, the researcher should be concerned with whether the study could be justified as being useful to the public sector and, therefore, morally fair to conduct. Validated by the paucity of research principles linked to accountability within government communication practices and management in the public sector, this study should contribute to the way in which accountability could be achieved in practice.

#### **5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Bryman (2016), a research design is a plan to address a “set of research questions”. The purpose is to provide a framework on which the selection of the research methods and the analysis of data are based (Yin, 2014; Maree, 2019; Bryman, 2016). In other words, it is a systematic plan to guide the inquiry from collecting data to concluding a particular study. A more comprehensive view is that it serves as an orientation to conducting empirical research and, as such, dictates the ways in which research should be conducted and how the research results should be interpreted (Bryman et al., 2014; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021).

The present study adopted a mixed-method research design whereby data was collected from various sources (Mentz, 2012). Cresswell (2017) regards a mixed-method research design as a type of research that employs research methods from both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Bryman (2016) concurs and defines mixed method research as comprising a “cross-section design to collect data by questionnaire or by structured interview”, with the specific aim of collecting quantitative or qualitative data. The design was adopted for its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimising the limitations of both approaches. The design was also a useful strategy to have a more complete understanding of the research problem. The study followed an exploratory sequential mixed method where the qualitative data collection comprised the first and quantitative data collection phases. This approach was employed to provide reliability, validity and dependability of research results.

The study used an online survey and document content analysis. The desire usually prompts the decision to combine different data collection methods and the need to understand the topic under investigation thoroughly. Various realities influenced the current study. These included various factors, such as the scarcity of research employing a mixed method approach when investigating the accountability principles adopted by the government of South Africa. However, the data collection methods a researcher selects should complement one another to gain the necessary insights (Maree, 2019). Bryman (2016) concurs and maintains that by using methods from both quantitative and qualitative research, one can appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. The online survey was conducted after the document content analysis process. Since the data collection methods selected for this study are inherently quantitative and qualitative in nature, a concise overview of these two approaches is provided in the next section.

#### **5.4.1 Quantitative and qualitative research approaches**

It is widely agreed that quantitative and qualitative research differ fundamentally with respect to their epistemological, ontological, and methodological orientations, as explained in the earlier section. The philosophical rationales associated with a particular research paradigm The methodological orientations that would disclose the reasons and suitability for selecting the proposed research methods were of particular interest in the current study. The fact that the researcher opted to apply both a qualitative and quantitative research approach necessitates a brief overview because such research methods have unique characteristics and research paths. Both these approaches are now briefly discussed.

The quantitative research approach strives to adopt an objective view of reality as the ontological orientation and focuses mainly on the collection and interpretation of numerical data (Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Neuman, 2006). The quantitative approach was used to describe the magnitude of accountability principles adopted during the engagement between the government and its citizens. A quantitative research methodology is used for descriptive, correlational, or experimental research (Cresswell, 2017).

Quantitative data collection techniques are objective, elaborative, and investigational. “The results achieved from this research method were statistical, logical and unbiased” (Streefkerk, 2019) and research was conducted on larger samples that represent the entire population. Using quantitative methods, the study acquired an objective reality of how the South African government adopts accountability principles when engaging with the public.

By contrast, the qualitative research approach regards reality as an unpredictable and continuously changing state created by people. It is a subjective reality mainly because of the focus on people’s experiences or events to gain an understanding of social life (Bryman, 2016; Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Neuman, 2006). This research approach focuses on examining practical concerns by collecting and interpreting non-numerical data, which includes, among others, policies, procedures, and spoken and written language (Bryman, 2016; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021; Durrheim, 2006; Maree, 2019). The qualitative approach was used to explore the adoption of accountability principles. The focus was, therefore, on the research facts presented by documents guiding accountability and government communication in South Africa. The documents analysed in this study were considered a rich data source with great potential to reveal valuable information about adopting accountability principles as a subjective reality (Maree, 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Therefore, the qualitative research results were not presented as objective data but rather as an interpretation of what is hidden deep within the text (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Cresswell, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative and quantitative research approach was appropriate for this study. The designs provided a holistic focus, allowing the study to explore and describe the adoption of accountability principles by reflecting on different text meanings and respondents’ perceptions and experiences. In this way, the proposed accountability framework will be refined to be theoretically sound and practically relevant.



## **5.5 MIXED METHOD RESEARCH**

Selecting research methods inevitably involves the logic of mixed-method research, which means that research results are supported and reinforced using multiple methods associated with different research paradigms (Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). As Mixed method research further points to, among others, the combination of different sources of information, methods, and researchers (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018). The study adopted a mixed method research, which entailed online surveys and document content analysis. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2021), using mixed-method research to enhance validity should concern all researchers regardless of the selected research paradigm. The mixed method approach indicates the researcher's commitment to gaining an in-depth understanding of a particular topic by approaching it from different angles using different methods, by applying and using (1) different data sources, (2) different fieldworkers, (3) multiple methods, and (4) various theories (Cresswell, 2017; Maree, 2019). Using mixed-method research allowed the study to obtain different perspectives on the topic under investigation. Methodological mixed method was specifically suggested for the empirical part of a study in which more than one research method was combined. The researcher, therefore, believed that the use of mixed methods contributed to an understanding of the reality of government communication's adoption of accountability principles and that this was in accordance with a pragmatic approach. The following section deals with the population, unit of analysis and time dimension, sampling frame sample and sampling methods used in this study.

## **5.6 POPULATION**

A population is the totality of persons, events, organization units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned. (Strydom, 2014; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maree, 2019). In other words, it is the larger group from which respondents (survey) as well as documents (document content analysis) of a study are selected, which, for the current purposes of both the qualitative and quantitative research methods, is the South African citizens, and the documents that guide the South African government on how to engage with citizens.

A sampling frame is defined as the list of “all units in the population from which a sample will be selected” (Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019) that is a close estimation of the population (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The size and geographically dispersed citizens of South Africa, combined with the paucity of research on the adoption of accountability principles and challenges in terms of the accuracy of the database, did not allow for the inclusion of all these population groups and necessitated the selection of the accessible population (Cresswell, 2017).

For the online survey, the three (3) Thusong centres operating in Pretoria (Central, Mamelodi and Atteridgeville) in Gauteng province served as the conveniently sampled frame, where walk-in public members were the respondents. The decision to focus on this city was made considering my proximity to the population groups. Including Thusong centres from other regions would bring considerable financial implications. For document content analysis, the Com Task Report (2000), Thusong Business Plan (2014); Access to Information Manual for GCIS (2018), GCIS Annual Report (2021), GCIS Annual Report to Citizens (2015); Government Communicators Handbook; Government; Communication Policy approved by Cabinet (2018); Green Paper on Service Delivery; White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery; National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020) were analysed.

### **5.6.1 Unit of analysis and time dimension**

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2021), the primary unit or unit of analysis in a research study is probably one of the most fundamental considerations when conducting research. Maree (2019) concurs and describes it as the entity about which an inference is made. Such an entity might comprise different units of which social groups, social artefacts, individuals, or organizations are examples. Considering the aim of the present study, which was to propose principles for a conceptual framework in South Africa, combined with the intention to determine the likelihood that the public sector would apply the proposed principles, the unit of analysis in this study was key individuals and documents. Hence, citizens served at Thusong Centres and documents guiding accountability and government engagement with the public served as sources of information.

Therefore, the units of analysis included the respondents, who are the recipients to whom accountability is adopted, that is, the public, and documents that guide accountability in the sector. It is also necessary to consider the time dimension that determines the type of study to be conducted and guides the collection and analysis of data in the empirical part of the study. This study was cross-sectional, which can be distinguished from longitudinal research (Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019). Cross-sectional research refers to data collection almost simultaneously and, therefore, does not examine the features of a specific phenomenon at more than one point at a time (Neuman, 2011). Moreover, cross-sectional research is commonly linked to both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which, in line with the desire to use a research method from both the traditional research paradigms, fits in well with the idea of selecting a quantitative as well as a qualitative method (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The study was conducted between June 2021 and June 2022. The following section focuses on the sample and sampling methods of the study.

## **5.6.2 Sample and sampling methods**

A sample is defined as a subset of the population (Huck et al., 2010; Strydom, 2011), which is required in instances where it would be impractical to include every individual in the population of a study (Mentz & Botha, 2012; Fox & Bayat, 2007). Researchers often face challenges pertaining to widely dispersed individuals or organizations and limitations concerning resources or access to individuals, to name a few, which necessitate the selection of samples. The issue of sampling was pertinent to the study because centres and the public of South Africa visiting the centres are geographically spread and cannot be accessed. Therefore, the following sampling methods were used.

### **5.6.2.1 Purposive sampling**

Babbie et al. (2007) define purposive sampling as a “type of sampling of non-probability sampling in which the units to be observed are selected based on the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be most useful or representative”. According to Cresswell (2017), purposive sampling attempts to “sample participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions”.

Mentz (2012) supports this view by stating that it normally uses “specific selection criteria to identify the most suitable individuals”. Owing to the nature of qualitative research, purposive sampling is often used to deliberately solicit participants for interviews, as is the case in this study (Laher & Botha, 2012; Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019; Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Staller, 2010). This type of sampling was preferable in the current study because the analysed documents were relevant to the research topic (Bryman, 2016). A purposive sample method was used to select documents for the content analysis to ensure a strategic selection of the South African government's current communication and accountability guiding documents.

### **5.6.2.2 Convenience Sampling**

Convenience sampling is defined as a method adopted by researchers where they collect data from a conveniently available pool of respondents. It is the most used sampling technique, incredibly prompt, uncomplicated, and economical (Cresswell, 2017). Members are often readily approachable to be a part of the sample. The study conveniently sampled the citizens of South Africa who visited the Tshwane Thusong service centres between March and June 2022. Since the population is large, testing the entire community of Tshwane was practically impossible because they are not easy to reach. The Tshwane geographical area was chosen because of a population concentration of 2.3 million within its 2 198 square kilometres (Tshwane, 2010). Tshwane is the second largest municipality in Gauteng and is a large developing community.

### **5.6.3 Sampling size**

The sample size used in qualitative research methods is often smaller than that used in quantitative research methods. This is because qualitative research methods are often concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on *meaning* (and *heterogeneities in meaning*)—which are often centred on the *how* and *why* of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture, scene or set of social interactions. The document content analysis work was not as concerned with generalising to a larger population of interest and did not tend to rely on hypothesis testing but instead was more inductive and emergent in its process.

As such, document content analysis aims to create “categories from the data and then to analyse relationships between categories” (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Morse (2006) recommends guidance and suggests a population size of 5 to 50 participants as adequate for a qualitative study.

Therefore, the eight documents listed below were analysed:

- Com Task Report (2000)
- Thusong Business Plan (2014)
- Access to information Manual for GCIS (2018)
- Government Communicators Handbook
- Government Communication Policy approved by Cabinet (2018)
- Green Paper on Service Delivery
- White paper on Transformation and Service Delivery
- National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020)

Omanga, Lisa, Zekarias and Michael (2014) suggested an equation for determining a quantitative sample size as

$$\text{Sample size } n = \frac{Z^2 p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

Z is the critical value for the desired confidence level,

P is the proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured, and

e = desired level of precision (margin error).

Assume p = 0.5 for maximum variability. Setting confidence level to 95 per cent and margin error of 5 per cent.

In determining the sample for the respondents, Statistics South Africa estimated the population of Tshwane to be 23,000,000, and approximately 72 per cent of the population comprises adults (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

So, the sample of this study was selected from adult community members, which is 72 per cent of the population in Tshwane. Therefore, the population size for the online survey of the Tshwane citizens is 385, calculated as follows.

$$\text{Sample size } n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = 385$$

In accordance with pragmatism as the guiding research approach, it stands to reason that the researcher was at liberty to select data collection methods deemed most suitable to investigate the adoption of accountability principles in the public sector of South Africa. The research method and data collection methods chosen for this study are described in the next section.

## **5.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

In this research study, the researcher combined data collection methods from qualitative and quantitative research approaches to investigate the topic at hand. In terms of the selected mixed-method research design, the sections below outline the data collection methods selected for this study.

### **5.7.1 The online survey and document content analysis as data collection methods**

An online survey and document content analysis were the preferred data collection methods. The underlying rationale was to obtain a broad view by using a questionnaire to gather the views of the public about accountable government communication and then to allow for a more in-depth exploration of certain topics by means of information documented on communication practice guiding documents.

### 5.7.1.1 *Qualitative content analysis*

In this study, qualitative document content analysis was the first method used to gather data to discover the communication approach GCIS and its Thusong Service Centres used in their accountable communication initiatives in Tshwane. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) suggest that a qualitative document analysis reveals meaning in research by critically examining relevant documents. Document content analysis rests on the assumption that texts are a rich data source with great potential to reveal valuable information about phenomena (Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman, 2017). Maree (2019) argues that content analysis is a systematic document review and assessment procedure. Various documents, such as annual reports, press releases, and policy documents, can be reviewed for content analysis. Through document content analysis, the researcher was able to examine GCIS's documented strategies for communication with the citizens. For this study, the following documents were analysed:

**Table 5.1: Documents analysed**

| Document  | Relevance to the study   |
|---|--|
| Comtask Report 2000                                       | This report emphasises the need for improved communication between the government and its citizens, focusing on disadvantaged communities in rural and urban areas. Thusong Service Centres are identified as a means of such communication. So that accountability reaches all.   |
| White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997 | The document, the Department of the Public Service of South Africa (DPSA, 2009), discusses the eight. Batho Pele principles were developed to serve as an acceptable policy and legislative framework for service delivery. These principles are aligned with various constitutional ideals and include responding to people's needs by encouraging citizens to participate in policymaking. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is through the GCIS. Responsiveness is a principle of |

| Document  | Relevance to the study   |
|---|--|
|   | accountability.  |
| Access to information Manual for GCIS (2018)  | This document mandates the GCIS to provide members of the public with information that enables them to be active participants. The document endorses transparency, which is imperative for a democratic and accountable state like South Africa.   |
| Thusong Service Centres: Government Communications Business Plan 2006-2014 (GCIS, 2006) | The South African government's commitment to integrated service delivery and access underpins the 2006-2014 business plan for Thusong Service Centres and forms part of the drive by the government to develop a comprehensive access strategy for citizens, allowing improved engagement with government.   |
| Government Communicators Handbook   | The Government Communicators' Handbook is a toolkit for government communicators and assists them in understanding their roles within the communication system. The handbook also helps government communicators by putting issues into context and providing background, easy reference tips and practical guidelines on issues they will encounter in their daily work, such as accountability and stakeholder engagement. |
| Government Communication Policy approved by Cabinet (2018)                              | The policy document sets out developing policies and programmes to redress the inequalities, presents the audience whom the government must consult and to whom the government must listen and furthermore involves considering the needs and interests of the public and receiving feedback as part of this developmental process.  |
| Green Paper on Service Delivery   | This document aims to address the need for a specific policy and criteria for the transformation priority, transforming (public) service delivery. It also provides the policy and criteria (principles) that would enable national departments and  |



| Document                                 | Relevance to the study   |
|--|--|
|  | provincial administrations to develop departmental service delivery strategies. Accountability is one of the strategies required for service delivery.   |
| National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020) | The NACS is premised on the principle that there should be more emphasis on the prevention of corruption through good governance, transparency, integrity management and accountability in society, and early detection of potentially corrupt practices to supplement the reactive measures executed by law enforcement agencies and other anti-corruption bodies in society. |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

As with any other analytical method in qualitative research, document content analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to extract meaning, develop an understanding of a phenomenon, and acquire knowledge (Maree, 2019). Documents are a credible source of data because they are produced by individuals and institutions within the scope of their everyday professional practice (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Documents are not affected by the research process. The presence of the researcher does not alter the subject of study or the solidity of the document. They are, therefore, unobstructed, and non-reactive, making them dependable and transferable.

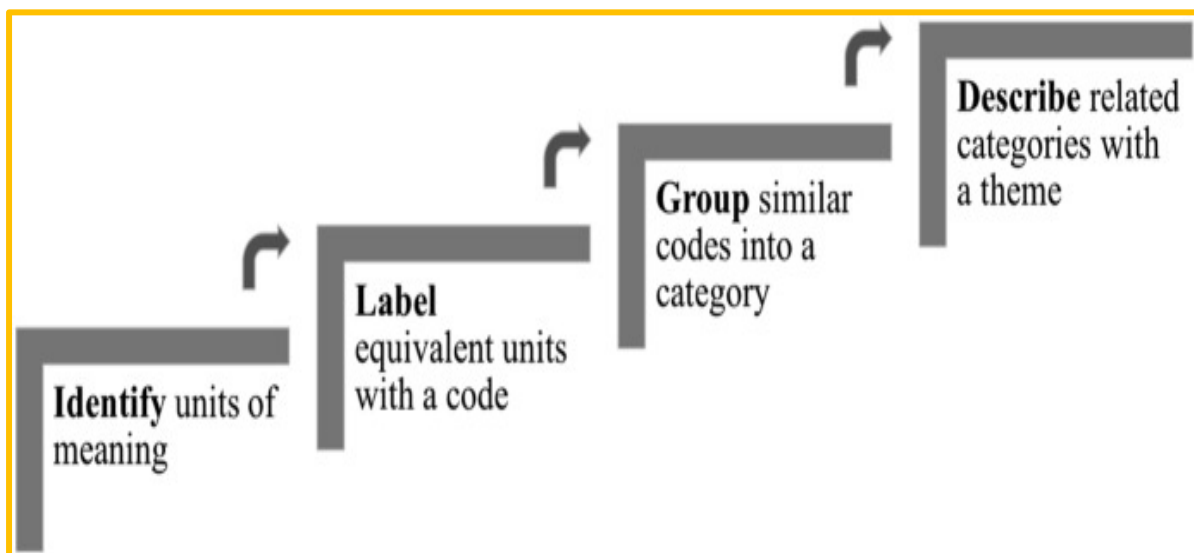
Document content analysis intends to provide background and context, supplementary data, a way of tracking change and developments and verification of findings from other sources of data (Cresswell, 2017). Therefore, the researcher can draw data from the documents to contextualise data collected from surveys. Also, the information from the document content analysis can be used to suggest additional questions to explore in subsequent parts of the triangulation process. Document content analysis greatly contributes to the data pool.

Some limitations of document content analysis are that they provide insufficient data as the documents are not created with the research focus in mind. Another challenge is the low irretrievability of documents (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Entities often do not welcome researchers questioning their strategic public relations motive (1999). Lastly, document content analysis requires reflexivity, which requires an acknowledgement of the possibility of the researcher's influence on the research (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

- Conducting Document content analysis

The documents analysed were purposefully sourced from the GCIS website, and GCIS willingly provided other documents to ensure that the documents were within the scope of the set principles for accountability and stakeholder engagement in the public sector. Document analysis involved skimming, reading and interpretation. This iterative process combined elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the process of organizing information into categories related to the central questions of the research. The content analysis process included generating and using codes, categories, and themes, as per Figure 5.1 below.

**Figure 5.1:** The process of document content analysis



**Source:** Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman (2017).

- Credibility, transferability, and dependability of the findings of the document content analysis

Regarding the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, qualitative researchers focus on accurate measurement and use the terms credible and trustworthy rather than valid and reliable. In qualitative research, the main criteria that ensure credibility and trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Noble & Smith, 2015:34; Wagner et al., 2012:137). Qualitative researchers argue that some studies are better than others and propose that research can be assessed according to its credibility. Credibility uses persistent observation, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, and triangulation (Wagner et al., 2012). Credible research yields believable, convincing, dependable, and transferable results to other contexts and people (Heale & Twycross, 2015:67). To ensure the credibility of this research, the researcher used triangulation, where the same phenomenon was studied using different methods. Document content analysis and surveys were used to measure the same thing.

Dependability in qualitative research refers to different strategies used to ensure that what the study presents as the research findings is credible and trustworthy. It considers the use of different sources of information, various data collection instruments and different researchers to measure the same thing to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings (Wagner et al., 2012; Anney, 2014:278). Therefore, to ensure the dependability of the research, the researcher used different sources of information; documents and citizens of South Africa were the sources of the data for this research.

Confirmability focuses on making sure that results are grounded in the data and assessing the degree of biases present to prove that the data and results were obtained from events and not from the construction of the researcher (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Confirmability can also be ensured through an audit trail. This enables a researcher to trace the findings of the research step by step and record all the things that are done from the start to the end of the research (Shenton, 2004:72). Therefore, all the materials, raw data and notes and completed surveys were kept very well as a confirmation that the findings are not the researcher's construction nor the researcher's judgement.

Transferability refers to the degree to which one set of results can be applied to another context (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016:3). Qualitative research focuses on understanding a particular phenomenon. Then, it looks at the potential transferability of these understandings to another context. It also focuses on providing a thick description and maintaining all versions of the data in their original forms (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The transferability of this study was maintained to its original form, and a thick description of the data was presented.

#### **5.7.1.2      *Online survey***

Neuman (2011) describes a questionnaire as a research method that allows the researcher to systematically pose identical questions to many people and record their responses (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). It comprises a set of questions compiled by a researcher and distributed to respondents who are required to complete it (Maree, 2019). Questionnaires are underpinned by an epistemological position involving collecting and interpreting numerical data, which is generally deemed quantitative (Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019; Neuman, 2011). In line with the nature of quantitative research, questionnaires furthermore strive to collect and interpret information from large numbers of people objectively.

Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2021) describe online or web-based surveys as a web-based data collection method that is accessed through a web browser, which allows for quick and convenient data collection and automatic downloading of responses (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The online survey was administered to the public that visits the Thusong Centres. When the public visits the centres, they fill in registers, provide contact details and tick agree or disagree to being contacted for marketing activities, they also agree or disagree with having their contacts shared with third parties. The researcher asked the supervisor of each centre to send an email invitation with the link to an online survey and introduce the researcher to the respondents who gave consent to be contacted for other activities happening at the centre and those that agreed to have their contacts shared with third party.

The researcher conducted regular follow-ups with the respondents who agreed to participate (telephonically and via email) and monitored the responses on Google Forms. Then, the researcher downloaded the data and exported survey data to Microsoft Excel format, used the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) program for the statistical analysis of the data, presented and interpreted findings and made inferences, and based on these, drew certain conclusions in the context of the study.

The reason an online survey was chosen for this study was mainly determined by the advantages it provides, which included a swift response, reduced costs, the electronic collection and transfer of data, the visual presentation of questions and the possibility of providing point-and-click responses (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Also, the online method of collecting data was applicable in the Covid-19 pandemic, where social distancing had to be kept. However, this data collection method is limiting because it does not allow for a more in-depth exploration or discussion of certain fundamental elements. Hence, the data gathered from the online survey was supplemented by data from the document content analysis method.

### **5.7.1.3      *The design of the online survey***

An online survey software program, Google Forms, was used to design and execute the questionnaire. This web-based questionnaire required respondents to complete the questionnaires themselves online – hence the designation of self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered online, and respondents were allowed to access it via a link in an email invitation. The advantages of using an online survey mainly outweighed the disadvantages. A survey was deemed the most suitable method because it is the most cost-effective and relatively easy way to distribute to a large sample (Mentz, 2012).

Questionnaires contain different types of questions that can be categorised as closed, scale-based, ranking, or open-ended questions, commonly used to collect quantitative data (Atkinson, 2012; Mentz, 2012; Maree, 2019). Closed questions were utilised in this study for the following reasons: they present respondents with options to choose the most appropriate answer, are easier to answer, are deemed easier to process and increase the chance of comparability (Bryman, 2016).

Different response formats were used that allowed the respondents to indicate their answers when completing questionnaires, including but not limited to checklists, rankings, and rating scales (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The response format selected for the present study was a ranking scale, namely the Likert scale. Likert scales are considered most appropriate because they are associated with self-administered questionnaires (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). The size of the Likert scale used in this study is a five-point scale, which is directional, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The preference for employing an even number of choices is intentional. It mainly serves to eliminate a neutral response by encouraging respondents to agree broadly “with” or “against” statements in the online survey (Jamieson, 2008). The questionnaire had six sections. The first section required respondents to give their consent for participating, they had to click on the agree button before proceeding to the main questions. The second section was divided into four sub sections, each sub-section had five items. and the last sections focused on demographic questions.

#### **5.7.1.4      *Reliability and validity of the findings of the online survey***

According to Bryman (2016), the criteria to be considered when forming an opinion on the quality of quantitative research designs include reliability, replication, and validity. Reliability is defined as “the consistency of a measure of a concept (Yin, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012; Bryman, 2016; Maree, 2019) and “the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021; Yin, 2014; Botha, 2012; Delpont & Roestenburg, 2011; Neuman, 2011). A concept can be explained as the labels that people assign to “principles of accountability”. In quantitative research, concepts are usually expressed as independent variables that may contribute to the causes or circumstances, or as dependent variables, which include the aspects that warrant further investigation because of the independent variables (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Miles and Banyard (2007) aptly describe reliability as whether a “test measures something well”.

Reliability mainly refers to three factors, namely the stability of a measure over time so that the results are consistent when repeated or retested by following the same procedure (Yin, 2014; Miles & Banyard, 2007; Bryman, 2016); the internal reliability or consistency of the indicators that make up an index or scale; and inter-observer reliability which refers to whether multiple observers are consistent when used to record observations (Bryman, 2016; Miles & Banyard, 2007). The value of obtaining reliability is, among others, to ensure consistent measurement and to contribute to more accurate calculation of relationships between concepts (Bryman, 2016). Reliability is often mentioned in conjunction with the issue of the degree to which findings can be replicated (Lichtman, 2014). According to Bryman (2016), replication refers to the exact repetition of a particular study that will yield similar findings to those of the initial study (Yin, 2014; Lichtmann, 2014). The value of repeating a research study could underscore the significance of a finding and is perceived to be scientific evidence of research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021).

Validity mainly refers to the “degree to which the research conclusions are sound” (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006) and whether it measures what it set out to measure (Mentz & Botha, 2012; Miles & Banyard, 2007). The main types of validity include measurement validity, internal validity, and external validity. Measurement validity pertains to how well the research really measures what the researcher intended to investigate, and it is often referred to as construct validity (Neuman, 2011; Yin, 2014; Bryman, 2016; Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Internal validity is concerned with causal relationships and concluding whether one variable really has a particular effect on another (Maree, 2019; Yin, 2014). External validity refers to the generalisation of research results (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 2014; Maree, 2019). Put differently, it questions whether, based on the research results, one can accept that the findings represent the views of the whole group (Cresswell, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Validity and reliability were ensured in the study through the following:

#### **(i) Cronbach’s alpha coefficient**

In quantitative research, consistency, also referred to as reliability, is essential to determine the stability of a measurement procedure (Bonnet & Wright, 2015; Delport & Roestenburg, 2011; Barnette, 2010).

The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire as a research method. According to Delpont and Roestenburg (2011), reliability is mainly concerned with what is measured and how well it is measured, contributing to dependable and consistent research results.

There is consensus that no universal rule exists regarding the value range of the Cronbach coefficient, and it is broadly acknowledged that it ranges between -1 and 1 (Bonnet & Wright, 2015). Values below 0.6 are largely considered to represent unacceptable reliability, values between 0.6 and 0.7 are regarded as acceptable reliability and values equal to 0.8 and higher are deemed to indicate excellent reliability (Bonnet & Wright, 2015).

## **(ii) Pearson correlation coefficient**

Correlation coefficient calculations, of which the Pearson coefficient is an example, measure the strength of the relationships between variables (Durrheim, 2006; Fouché & Delpont, 2011). In this study, Pearson's method was used to calculate the correlation coefficients to determine the relationships between the variables in the questionnaire and the strength thereof (Field, 2009; Fouché & De Vos, 2011). It was essential for me to determine the relationships between the elements and theoretical elements that emerged from related literature, as identified in Chapters 2 to 4, for the validity of the results.

### **5.7.1.5      *Pretesting the online survey***

Since the pretesting of the online survey could influence the validity of the online survey, it was piloted and improved prior to implementation. After in-depth scrutiny by the supervisor, the co-supervisor of the study and the statistician who works with the questions in both research methods, the online survey was pretested among communication officers and general workers in the GCIS. During pretesting, random citizens from Pretoria were requested to identify ambiguous, leading, and vague questions, and this afforded me the opportunity to improve the content validity and determine the approximate time it would take to complete the questionnaire. Suggestions and comments about ambiguous and unclear questions were considered



and used to improve the research methods. The respondents involved in the pretesting were not included in the sample. The supervisor and co-supervisor finally scrutinised the adapted research method, input from the statistician was also obtained, and any issues were addressed. Finally, the online survey was professionally edited and administered.

#### **5.7.1.6 Data analysis and interpretation of the findings in the online survey**

As stated previously, the level of measurement in the questionnaire largely determined the type of data analysis to perform. Correspondingly, factors such as the number of respondents, expectations with respect to generalisation and the purpose of the statistical tests required consideration in selecting the most appropriate test to analyse the data (Neuman, 2011). Descriptive statistics are generally used in quantitative research to interpret and explain the data by describing coherently (Fouché & Bartley, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012). The findings of the questionnaire were aptly reported and summarised in Chapter 7 and dealt with the median, means and frequencies. In addition, inferential statistics was used to identify possible general trends and correlations in the data relating to the identified elements and theoretical elements.

According to Maree (2019), inferential statistics are useful to confirm or reject predictions about a certain issue. The researcher categorised descriptive statics in two ways: numerically using the three measures of central tendency and graphically using tables and graphics. The central tendency was measured through the mean, median and mode. To get the mean, the researcher summarised all scores and divided them by the number of test scores. For the median, the researcher calculated the middle score of all achieved scores. Lastly, for the mode, the researcher looked at the most common achievement score (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021).

The researcher transformed the raw data from the completed questionnaires into an electronic format when analysing quantitative data. The researcher prepared the data through coding, entering, and cleaning. During the coding process, the researcher transformed information from one form to another. Data from the questionnaire was changed to a numerical format understood by the analysing program (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:189).

For instance, when using a Likert-type scale in a questionnaire, strongly agree was coded number '1' while strongly disagree was coded number '5'. Words were replaced by numbers. The researcher then entered the numerical codes into the computer. Rows were labelled according to cases, while columns were labelled according to scores on specific variables. The last step of preparing data was the risk assessment, as it renders the results of the study invalid.

Therefore, it was of utmost importance that the researcher checks and rechecks the data for errors, which the researcher corrected when found to produce valid and conclusive results (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:192). Data was summarised through tables and graphics to improve the meaning.

## **5.8 ETHICAL ISSUES**

Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2021) state that the rights of individuals involved in the research study include confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary participation, and informed consent. Accordingly, this study employed several methods to ensure the requisite confidentiality and anonymity. Completing online surveys did not require respondents to include their names for anonymity reasons. Also, it is only the researcher that had access to the completed surveys, the google form site was only accessed through a password that the researcher created for confidentiality.

Regarding the ethical considerations for this study, respondents were informed of the nature and purpose of the research in writing and verbally before the data collection. They were allowed to withdraw at any given stage of data collection. Approval and ethical clearance from the relevant authorities were sought and acquired before the fieldwork was conducted. Respondents did not receive any monetary rewards for participating in the study. They were given an opportunity to voluntarily participate and sign a consent form. They were protected from harm, like personal interaction with the researcher and other participants, to minimise chances of COVID-19 transmission.

## **5.9 LIMITATIONS**

The researcher encountered limited challenges with the semi-structured interviews. They could not be conducted due to the low interest of participants in the topic under study.

Regarding the online surveys, some respondents did not have data to participate, contributing to a low response rate and affecting the generalisation of results. Document content analysis did not provide enough information, leaving a gap that had to be filled by other methodologies.

## **5.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter highlighted the research methodology deemed most suitable to gain insight into the real-life adoption of accountability principles in the government communication of South Africa. The use of pragmatism as a guiding research approach was justified against the background of specific realities that influenced this study, such as the paucity of accountability principles in government communication management. Furthermore, the various considerations relating to a research study were justified. In the context of this study, the use of purposive sampling, online survey, document content analysis, and appropriate analysis methods was comprehensively discussed and justified. The methodological approach adopted served to determine how the public sector adopts principles of accountability by focusing on how this is currently done. The findings of the empirical part of the study will be discussed and interpreted in Chapter 6, which also deals with the reporting and interpretation in the context of qualitative research and Chapter 7 reports on quantitative research, respectively.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PRESENTING AND INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS OF DOCUMENT CONTENT ANALYSIS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The research approach for the qualitative part of this study was explained in the preceding chapter and subsequently implemented. This chapter explicitly discusses and interprets the qualitative research findings, explicitly the document content analysis. It is important to note that the study followed the exploratory sequential mixed method, where the qualitative data collection was the first phase, followed by the quantitative data collection phase. The document content analysis was conducted to understand how the government of South Africa is set to account to citizens when engaging with them. The principles of accountability identified by following this method were used to feed the quantitative part of the study, and the principles revealed by the document content analysis were tested later using the quantitative approach.

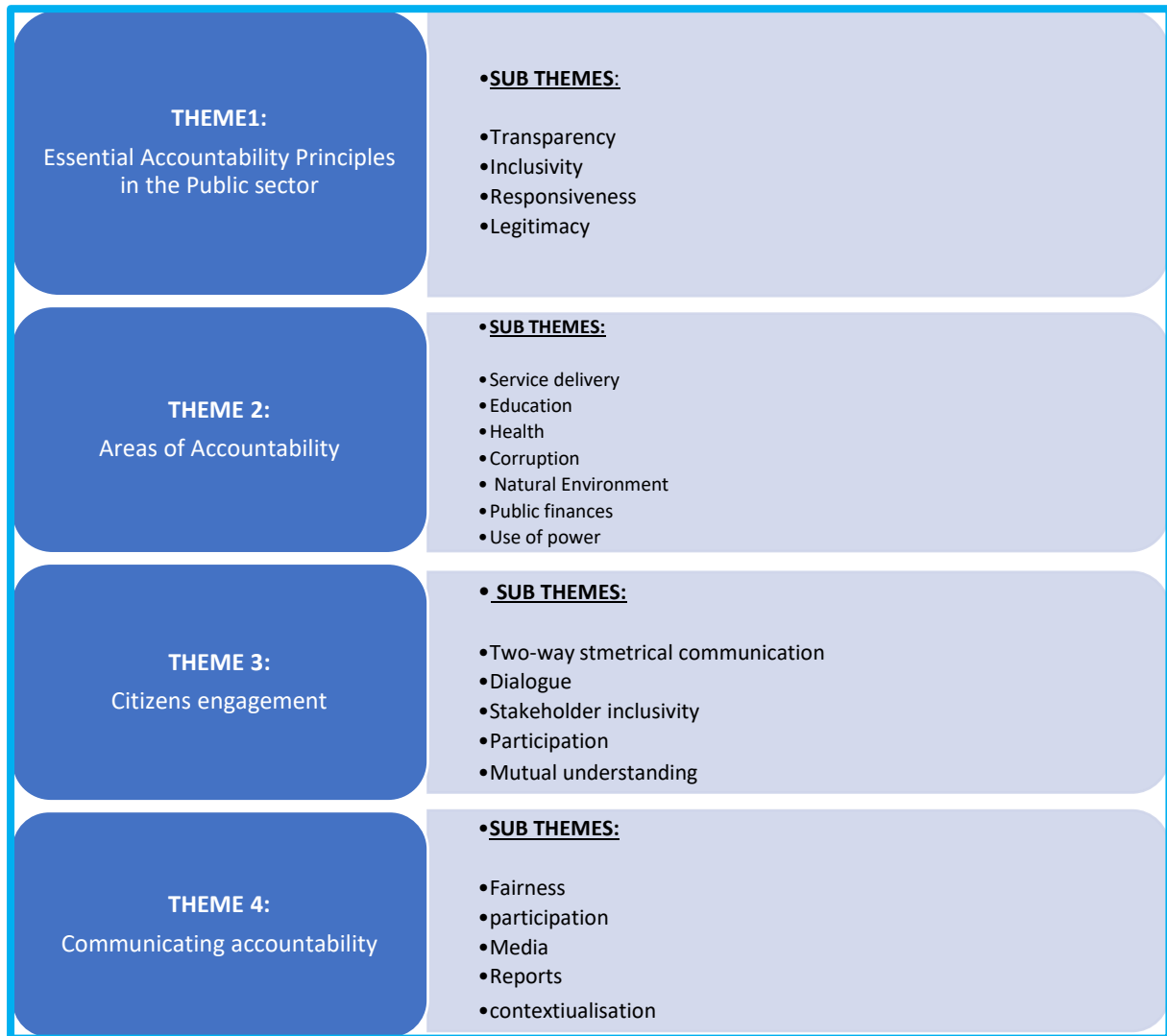
The first part of the study comprised of document content analysis where eight documents (Com Task Report, 2000); Thusong Business Plan (2014); Access to Information Manual for GCIS (2018); Government Communicators Handbook; Government Communication Policy approved by Cabinet (2018); Green Paper on Service Delivery; White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery; National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020) that guide government accountable stakeholder engagement were analysed.

#### **6.2 QUALITATIVE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS BY MEANS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

The main reason for using document content analysis as a research method was to gain insight into the topic under investigation, which is generally concerned with the government's adoption of accountability principles when engaging with citizens.

Data collected through document content analysis was analysed using a thematic analysis involving coding, categorising, and theming. Based on similarities within the collected data, the following thematic map, as presented in Figure 6.1 below, was created that forms the structure of the thematic findings of the study:

**Figure 6.1: Thematic Map**



*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

Figure 6.1 above presents themes that emerged in the document content analysis. The first theme was the principles of accountability that appeared most in the documents, seemingly as significant and representing what accountability is for the South African government: transparency, inclusivity, legitimacy, integrity, good governance, and responsiveness.

The second theme emerged around issues of accountability. A critical area for accountability appeared to be service delivery, education, health, natural environment, corruption, public finances, and use of power issues. The third theme emerged as citizen engagement, focusing on how citizens should be engaged. Lastly, a theme of communicating accountability emerged from the document as imperative for public participation.

## **6.2.1 Essential Accountability Principles in the Public Sector**

The essential accountability principles in the public sector emerged as a theme in various documents that guide the practice of accountability for the South African government. Among different principles that govern the realisation of accountability, there are principles that are essential, and these principles are discussed in the next sections.

### **6.2.1.1 Transparency**

One of the pillar principles for accountability to be realized is transparency, it emerged as a sub-theme for essential principles of accountability in the public sector. Transparency means the reduction of informational asymmetries between citizens and public officers to reduce mismanagements and allow for greater control over unlawful acts within the public sector. With more information, the public can better discern the value added by public action. In this sense, the concept of transparency emerges as a core value of integrity; its realisation means expanding society's information concerning the actions taken by public officials and, consequently, encourages accountability.

The Government Communication Handbook (2014-2017) is the recent handbook on government communication after the (2012-2011) version. It outlines that the "GCIS is responsible for setting up the Government Communication System and continuously working with the rest of the government to communicate and inform the public about the policies and programmes of government aimed at improving their lives".

The handbook further outlines that the *“communication system is grounded on the Constitution and Bill of Rights, which guarantees the right of access to information – committed to openness, accountability, and transparency”*. The White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery (1998), which is the only white paper on transformation and service delivery available online following the (1995) edition, attests to the significance of transparency by stipulating that *“openness and transparency are the hallmarks of a democratic government and are fundamental to the public service transformation process”*. The existence of the government in a democratic country depends on the building confidence and trust between the public sector and the public they serve. A key aspect is that the public should know more about how national and provincial departments are run, how well they perform, the resources they consume, and who is in charge. Therefore, transparency and accountability are crucial.

The Government Communication Policy (2018), the recent policy on government communication after the one documented in 2014, outlines that *“government communication is driven by democratic principles of openness and participation and is guided by the basic principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation”*. Chapter 10 of the constitution, Section 195 (g), outlines that *“transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information”*.

The literature outlines that transparency provides assurance to the organization that systematic information is provided in an orderly manner and according to clearly laid down rules, principles, and procedures. Transparency is the starting point for the more demanding standard of accountability. Without transparency, there can be little accountability. It is, therefore, impossible to imagine political responsibility without transparent institutions and a reduction in the informational deficit between the common man and democratic institutions. For it to be consolidated as a political regime, democracy presupposes free knowledge from the part of the ordinary citizen. In this case, for this knowledge to be possible, it is essential that political institutions are clear, informative, and accountable to the ordinary citizen and that the idea of transparency becomes an instrumental value towards the exercise of accountability (Lebotsa, 2022).

Literature presented by the Productivity Commission (2023), which outlines that a transparent process is open to scrutiny. Transparency deters governments from governing without integrity and being 'sloppy' about implementing best practice regulatory processes. The policy of transparency thereby reduces state secrets, allows free knowledge for society, and allegedly enhances the practice of citizenship.

The South African government guidelines on transparency align with the literature. Both advocating for openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency is grounded on the excellency theory, which advocates for how government relations make government effective. The study, therefore, argues that when the government relates with citizens in a transparent manner and governs them with integrity, the aim of good governance and legitimacy will likely be effective.

#### **6.2.1.2      *Responsiveness and Legitimacy***

Responsiveness and legitimacy are sub-themes that also merged under essential principles of accountability in the public sector. For accountability to be realized, the government ought to be responsive and legitimate. According to the seminal author Suchman (1995:574), "legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Therefore, legitimacy theory provides a societal-led motivation for voluntary disclosure. In general, larger public sector organizations face greater legitimation needs caused by their higher visibility and influence (Greiling et al., 2015). The government can only survive if its activities and objectives are supported by society and, as such, perceived to be legitimate.

Voluntary disclosures are a building block of this theory (Deegan, 2019); they are desirable by themselves in that they are appropriate actions "expected" of a "professional and well-structured" organisation. The legitimacy theory emphasises unified values between the government and its citizens. Therefore, responsiveness in action should be one of those values.



The “responsiveness in action” emanates from the critique of the legitimacy theory, which was a ‘plausible explanation of managerial motivations’ without any real effort to determine how a disclosure “may or may not promote transparency and accountability towards non-capital provider stakeholder groups” (Chiwamit, Modell & Scapens, 2017). Therefore, the public sector must voluntarily be accountable to legitimate their legitimacy. Their accountability should be accompanied by concrete actions realised in compliance with democratic norms and values.

The White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery (1998) introduces a fresh approach to service delivery: an approach that puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes, and behaviour within the public service and reorients them in the customer’s favour, an approach that puts the people first. This does not mean introducing more rules, centralised processes, or micro-managing service delivery activities. Instead, *“it involves creating a framework for the delivery of public services that treat citizens more like customers and enable the citizens to hold public servants to account for the service they receive”*. This framework frees up the energy and commitment of public servants to introduce more customer-focused ways of working. The approach is encapsulated in this initiative’s name - **Batho Pele** (a Sesotho adage meaning ‘People First ‘).

The framework emphasises that the government should be responsive to its citizens. However trivial, the response to a complaint should completely account for the individual’s concerns and feelings. Where a mistake has been made, or the service has fallen below the promised standard, the response should be immediate, starting with an apology and a complete explanation, an assurance that the occurrence will not be repeated, and then whatever remedial action is necessary. Wherever possible, staff who deal with the public directly should be empowered to act themselves to put things right. The South African government principle of **Batho Pele** fits into the legitimacy theory, which postulates that government values should align with those of the society they serve. Chapter 10 of the constitution, Section 195 (e) stipulates that *“People’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking”*. The South African Government is guided by being responsive to citizens.

The literature also alludes to the issue of responsiveness. Tuurnas et al. (2019) argue that mere disclosure of information is not enough. Accountability requires more than access to information but responsiveness to that information. Responsiveness is how an organization demonstrates its response to its stakeholders and its accountability to them. This may include establishing policies, objectives and targets, governance structure, management systems and processes, action plans, stakeholder engagement, measurement and monitoring of performance or assurance (Cohen, Mamakou & Karatzimas, 2017; Cucciniello, Bellè, Nasi & Valotti, 2015; Shaoul et al., 2012). Therefore, responsiveness is a principle of accountability, resulting in legitimacy.

### **6.2.1.3      *Inclusivity***

Inclusivity is another sub themes that also merged under essential principles of accountability in the public sector. For accountability to be achieved, the government must exercise inclusivity which entails giving citizens the right to be heard while the government simultaneously accepts the responsibility to be held accountable (AA1000SES, 2018).

The Com Task Report (2000:5) outlines that *“the new government communication and information system needs to be better coordinated and more focussed in its messages. It should strengthen the capability of the government to communicate its policies to the people and be streamlined, credible, cost-effective, and highly professional. It will need to engage better with civil society to create a dialogue between government and the public”*.

The Government Communication Policy (2018) stipulate that Communication is *“a key strategic service – to ensure that information is widely accessible within the public space, to engage citizens in conversation around critical issues and to empower citizens to participate in not only shaping government policies but also in taking up opportunities that affect their lives”*. The policy document further emphasises that citizens should participate actively in communication activities that directly impact their lives.

The inclusivity approach is educational, not instructional – in this instance, the government must interact and provide the public with socio-economic and developmental information so that they can make sound judgements about their lives. In these interactions, the government must listen to citizens, answer their queries, and give feedback about progress to encourage positive change within communities.

It is therefore, argued that the Com Task Report and Government Communication Policy documents advocate that the South African government adopts a developmental approach to communication with the fundamental values of democracy, openness and participation applying. These documents that guide the government's inclusivity approach align with the stakeholder theory, which outlines that the relationship between the government and its society is established between the government and their citizens through interactive communication. Therefore, the documents, literature and theory facilitate a wider, more inclusive perspective of accountability by emphasising the importance of accounting to and for all constituents, not just those in a position of authority (Salako & Ajibade, 2019).

## **6.2.2 Areas of Accountability**

The areas of accountability in the public sector emerged as a theme in various documents that guide where accountability needs to be practiced by the South African government. It was not enough for the guiding documents to document drivers of accountability being principles. It was also essential for the documents to map out areas where these principles should be implemented. The following sections presents areas where accountability should be practiced as sub-themes to the “areas of accountability” theme.

### **6.2.2.1 Service delivery**

Service delivery emerged as a sub-theme under areas of accountability. One of an area that are identified as crucial for accountability is service delivery. It is the mechanism through which public services are delivered to the public by local, municipal.

Sewage and trash disposal, street cleaning, public education, and health services are some of the examples of public services deliverables. The White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery (1998) emphasises that citizens should be accounted for service delivery issues such as health care, education, water and sanitation, a fair justice system, a sustainable environment, housing, and safety. It further argues that users of public services are to be consulted about their needs and priorities. Chapter 10 of the constitution, Section 195 (d) reserves that *“services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias”*.

The Green Paper on Transforming Service Delivery (1996) presents that *“Improving the delivery of public services means redressing the imbalances of the past and, while maintaining continuity of service to all levels of society, focusing on meeting the needs of the 40 per cent of South Africans who are living below the poverty line and those who have previously been disadvantaged in terms of service delivery”*, such as black women living in rural areas. The Green Paper on Transforming Service Delivery further stipulates that a fresh approach is needed: an approach that puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes, and behaviour within the Public Service and reorients them in the customer’s favour. This does not mean introducing more rules, centralised processes, or micro-managing service delivery activities. Instead, it involves creating a framework for delivering public services that puts citizens/ customers first and enables them to hold public servants to account for the service they receive - a framework that frees up the energy and commitment of public servants to introduce more customer-focused ways of working. The framework consists of seven simple principles derived from the policy goals set out in Chapter 11 of the WPTPS, which are aligned with Democracy and Accountability.

The Principles of Public Service Delivery Democracy and accountability require:

- Consultation: Users and consumers of public services should be consulted about the level and quality of the services they receive and, wherever possible, be given a choice about the services offered.
- Service standards: Users and consumers of public services should be told what level and quality of service they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.

- **Courtesy:** Users and consumers of public services should be treated with courtesy and consideration.
- **Information:** Users and consumers of public services should expect full, accurate information about the services they are entitled to receive.
- **Openness and transparency:** The public should expect to be told how national departments and provincial administrations are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.
- **Responsiveness:** Users and consumers of public services should expect that, when the promised standard of service is not delivered, they will be offered an apology, a full explanation, and a speedy and effective remedy and that any complaint will produce a sympathetic, positive response.
- **Value for money** the public should expect public services to be provided as economically and efficiently as possible.

The Green Paper further outlines that, from now on, national departments and provincial administrations will be required to consult the users and consumers of their services regularly and systematically about the services they provide. Consultation serves several purposes. First, it allows the public to influence decisions about public services that affect their welfare. It can also foster a more participative and cooperative relationship between the providers and users of public services. Just as important, a consultation will provide essential information about where national departments and provincial administrations' priorities should depend on improving services.

From the end of 1997 onwards, national departments and provincial administrations will be required to publish standards for the level and quality of services they provide. Service Standards must be relevant and meaningful to the individual user. This means that they must cover the aspects of service that matter most to users, as revealed by the consultation process, and set in relevant and easily understood terms. Standards must also be precise and measurable so that users can judge for themselves whether they are receiving what was promised, e.g., by stipulating the length taken to authorise claims, issue identity documents, answer letters, the number of citizens who in future will have access to the services provided, what services will in future be provided, etc.

More concrete examples may include health departments stipulating the key standards a patient can expect in a hospital, which may include how long they can expect to wait at the outpatient clinic, the maximum waiting time for a non-urgent operation, the name of the person responsible for their case; the information they are entitled to receive about their treatment, etc. Under the Principles of public service delivery, the concept of courtesy goes much wider than asking public servants to give a polite smile and saying 'please' and 'thank you', though these are certainly required. It embraces an entire code of behaviour which calls for public servants to put themselves in the shoes of the users of their services and to treat them with as much consideration and respect as they would want to receive themselves. It means ensuring that the words 'public service' are a day-to-day reality for every citizen/customer they deal with. The principle of public service delivery requires that all public servants' behaviour be raised to the best level.

Regarding service delivery, the green and white papers align with the literature. Government programmes should and have to contribute towards an enhanced quality of life for all the people of the country. Governance has, of course, to imply that the outcomes of public administration are aimed at quality service delivery and the improvement of the general welfare of its people (Williams, 2009:52). Sustainable development is aimed at achieving human development while considering both present and future generations. To evaluate its sustainability, the government should adopt a "triple bottom line", which would include economic performances and economic reporting for the country and social and environmental aspects of government performance. The government must also account for social, health and environmental issues affecting citizens.

### **6.3.3 Citizen engagement and communicating accountability**

Engagement and communicating accountability are also themes that emerged on the accountability guiding documents. The argument in the document is that accountability needs to be implemented and that implementation occurs through communication and engagement with those accounting to. Therefore, engagement and communication are vehicles of accountability from the South African government to its citizens.

South African Government, through its oversight and accountability model (2005), outline that accountability is practised through oversight, which is informal and formal, watchful, strategic, and structured scrutiny exercised by legislatures in respect of the implementation of laws, the application of the budget, and the strict observance of statutes and the Constitution (Nhleko, 2005). Oversight serves the following functions in the South African government: *'it detects and prevents abuse, arbitrary behaviour, or illegal and unconstitutional conduct on the part of the government and public agencies; it holds the government to account with respect to how the taxpayers' money is used, and it detects waste within the machinery of government and public agencies. Lastly, it improves the transparency of government operations and enhances public trust in the government'*. Transparency is a condition of effective policy delivery (Nhleko, 2005). When national departments account to Parliament by means which include the submission of reports, for example, annual reports, Parliament needs to be informed of the complete picture of the performance of the functions reported on.

Considering the department's annual report alone may not give the complete picture of the performance of the functions. This is so because national departments have public entities that are agencies for the implementation of their functions, and their activities may not be reported in the annual report of the national department. The annual reports of organs of state that report to national departments must be considered when evaluating the annual report of the national department for Parliament to have a complete picture of the performance of the functions reported on. If further accountability is required, committees could use the Constitution's power to access information from provincial or local government bodies so that the committee has complete information and details on the public function reported on. When a parliamentary committee reviews the performance of a national organ of state, the committee must ensure that the performance of its other entities, that is, subsidiaries of the main organ of state, is included in the report to Parliament. If this is not included in the report, Parliament should, in terms of Sections 56(b) and 69(b) of the Constitution, require the "entity to report to it so that Parliament has the complete picture. Therefore, the government accounts to citizens through annual reports".

The Government Communication Policy (2018) emphasises that the *“media must be given equal access to information, and all interactions with them must be professional”*. The target audience determines which media the government selects when engaging with media. According to the study by Lekalake and Nkomo (2016), most South Africans have consistently supported a “watchdog” role for the news media. Citizens perceive the media as overwhelmingly effective in the role of constantly investigating and reporting on government mandates, mistakes, and corruption.

The media is one of the approaches governments use to engage with citizens for accountability practices. The GCIS 2014/2015 Annual Report to citizens outlines that the “GCIS continues to provide platforms for citizens to interact with the government and be able to access government information”. Some 746 marketing events for Thusong Service Centres and integrated mobile units were also implemented to ensure communities can access government information and services. The GCIS 2020/2021 Annual report outlines that the GCIS’s responsibility of ensuring an informed and empowered South African citizenry took centre stage, and the department responded positively to the heightened demand for information.

Due to COVID-19 and the need to constantly communicate developments as and when they occur, social media accounts were also updated on Saturdays and Sundays to cover key government programmes and provide as up-to-date information as possible. Traffic on the gov.za Twitter and Facebook pages increased dramatically during the review period. The 2020/21 financial year saw growth of the government website ([www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za)), the top South African Government website and the first result on Google for the South African Government. Most citizens visit the website to obtain government information. This again demonstrates the responsiveness of the GCIS by ensuring the availability of information on digital platforms influenced by the environment prevalent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.



GCIS also implemented the Intergovernmental Coordination and Stakeholder Management program, which is implemented through mediated and unmediated communication and sound stakeholder relations and partnerships. The program aims to improve relations with the media, strengthen the intergovernmental communication system informed by the District Development Model (DDM) and inform and empower citizens. The programme's functions are organized into the following subprogrammes:

- **Media Engagement** leads and drives interaction and communication between the government and the media. This subprogramme enables effective liaison between government, cabinet and ministers, senior government officials and the media. It manages ongoing media liaison services to the government by providing government information, establishing, strengthening, and maintaining working relationships with foreign media and independent media, and establishing relations with South African missions and parliamentary stakeholders to disseminate government information and key targeted messages.
- **Cluster Communication** provides strategic communication, planning, coordination, and support to the communication committees of clusters. It provides leadership and professional project management services for cluster communication campaigns. The unit also coordinates the Government Communicators' Forum (GCF) that underpins the government communication system. It also coordinates the functioning of the Internal Communicator's Forum (ICF) and ensures that the internal government machinery is well-informed about upcoming campaigns and developments. It further drives the induction of government communicators and the professionalisation of government communicators and principals across the three spheres of government.
- **Provincial and Local Liaison (PLL)** ensures that the communication coordinating forums at the provincial level are functional and lend support and advice to communication systems across local government through the district offices of the GCIS. The subprogramme implements outreach programmes to widen access to government programmes and policies by the public.

It is also responsible for promoting Thusong Service Centres to the public and ensuring that government departments send different print products and materials to these centres. The Thusong Service Centre business report outlines that the government engages with citizens through the Thusong centres, which aims to put the information needs of citizens first in the communication process. Some of the salient features of this approach relate to the expressed need for face-to-face interaction between the government and the people. A high premium is placed on the introduction of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to such communities. Using such modern means as the Internet, e-mail and computers, the aim is to promote literacy and access to technology. Political neutrality and acceptance by the communities of the centres are also important. The primary focus of development communication and information is to empower the poor and disadvantaged.

These communities have limited access to information and are the main target of the government's socioeconomic programmes. Thusong Service Centres are viewed as a means to operationalise the development communication approach as well as to address information and service imbalances at a local level by bringing government closer to the people. In the context of South Africa and the historic marginalisation of poor communities, it is seen as a critical and necessary way of addressing the inequitable spread of service delivery.

The Thusong Service Centre programme, in this context, results in the following:

- Government services such as pensions, social grants, health, education, passports, identity documents (IDs), libraries and the use of computers will be accessed in one integrated place
- People from the community will be able to get the information they need through a single, integrated
- government site
- People will not have to travel long distances to access government services and information.
- There will be better communication between the government and the people
- Communities will be more informed about government programmes
- Thusong Service Centres will be centred on community events and democratic processes.

Much work remains to be done in meeting the government's information needs and the service needs of South Africa's citizens. Many people remain marginalised regarding convenient access to aspects of government service delivery. In some cases, challenges around access relate to a lack of communication and information, while in other cases, challenges relate more strongly to physical access issues. This lack of access negatively impacts citizens' quality of life and developmental prospects. Increasingly, it is being realised that meaningful developmental progress can only be addressed at the local level, where needs are more clearly understood and where the interface between government and citizens occurs.

The Thusong Service Centres concept is a powerful tool in enabling this interface and directly impacting improving citizens' quality of life. This recognition is reflected in the prominence of the concept in various policy statements. As per the argument of the excellence theory, the government ought to have a two-way relationship with citizens for its mandate to be effective. The Thusong service centres are symbolic of two-way interaction between the government and citizens. Unfortunately, the service centres are not functional in all areas. Citizens are not even informed about them. As a result, accountability in these centres is only communicated to citizens who have access to these centres.

The use of the media to communicate accountability aligns with the stakeholder theory, as the theory emphasises that the government should have a relationship with all citizens, whether they are in positions of power or not. The media does that. It reports to everyone. However, transparency and dialogue are not integrated with the media's communication of accountability. Citizens cannot dialogue with public officials during news reporting. They just get a report, comment, and interact with the reporter, not the responsible official. Media is regulated in terms of what they can publish and not (Hamelink, 2015). Therefore, their transparency is limited.

## 6.4 SUMMARY

This chapter presented an analysis of government communication strategy documents. The findings revealed that the government has documents that outline the importance of accountability and engagement with the public. Issues of transparency, public participation and service delivery are the most accentuated in the anti-corruption, white paper, green paper communication handbook and policy documents. However, the government is just informed of these accountability principles they should implement. The documents guide them to be transparent and respond to service delivery issues, for instance, with no implementation framework. The risk of not knowing how to implement the guidelines provided in the documents is failed operationalisation. In Chapter 7, the results of whether the principles guiding the government on accountability and engagement with citizens have been realised or not are presented. Chapter 7 will inform the study of whether South Africa's government is operating at risk of knowing what to do but does not know how to do it.

The need for a framework that the study intends to develop will be confirmed in the following chapter, which presents findings from the quantitative part of the study where the South African government's adoption of accountability principles when engaging citizens is described by citizens.

## CHAPTER 7

### PRESENTING AND INTERPRETING QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented the results of the first part of the study, namely, document content analysis. The documents were analysed to explore how the GCIS is guided on adopting accountability when engaging with stakeholders, citizens to be specific. Therefore, internal accountability was explored, focusing on how the government aims to adopt accountability. This chapter presents external accountability judged by stakeholders; the results describe how the GCIS implements accountability when engaging with citizens. This chapter describes how the results explored in Chapter 6 are implemented according to stakeholders. Therefore, internal accountability is compared to external accountability. What the government set out to do (aim) as per the results in Chapter 6 is compared with what they achieved (image) as per the findings in this chapter, and explicitly discusses and interprets the quantitative research findings, explicitly the online survey.

This chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, the biographical and demographic data is presented. Secondly, the responses of the respondents per item are stated and interpreted using descriptive statistics (mean, median and frequencies) and one-way frequency calculations. Thirdly, the results of the Cronbach coefficient alpha test and Pearson's correlation coefficient test are reported and interpreted to establish the internal reliability and, therefore, the strength of the linear associations per element. Determining the internal consistency of the items per element and for the sections was deemed vital to obtain statistical evidence of whether these could be grouped. Fourthly, the overall internal reliability for *each individual section* is reported. The sections and items in the questionnaire represent the elements derived from the analysis of the theoretical framework (Chapter 4) and the literature review (Chapters 3 and 4) and

As stated in Section 5.7.1.2 in Chapter 5, a Likert scale comprising certain statements was employed in the questionnaire that requested respondents to select the option that best describes how their government practises a certain aspect (as per a neutral statement). It could not be assumed that all the statements would fully represent the exact way in which the government adopts accountability. The focus was, therefore, on obtaining an indication of the likelihood that the government would attend to the proposed elements and theoretical aspects. The present study should be valuable in filling the gap in the existing research on the question of investigating the practice of accountability principles in stakeholder engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding. 385 surveys were distributed with only 101 returning. The following section presents the biographical and demographical data of the respondents of the study.

## 7.2 ANALYSIS OF SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The researcher specifically endeavoured to collect information that could impact the practice of accountability by the South African government. Therefore, it was empirical for the study to include South African Citizens older than 18 years who visit Government information centres for engagement and participation. Engaging with government information centres makes them more acquainted with issues of public participation, public engagement, government accountability and governance, which are themes that the study mainly focuses on. The biographical and demographical data frequencies will first be reported in the next section. The biographical and demographical groupings of the Accountability Questionnaire respondents are presented in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1: Biographical and demographical data of the questionnaire respondents**

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Female        | 51               | 50.5              | 50.5              |
| Male          | 50               | 49.5              | 100.0             |
| Total         | 101              | 100.0             |                   |
| <b>Race</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| Black         | 57               | 56.4              | 56.4              |
| White         | 17               | 16.8              | 73,2              |

|                             |                  |                   |                   |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Indian                      | 17               | 16.8              | 90,1              |
| Coloured                    | 10               | 9.9               | 100.0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100.0             |                   |
| <b>Age</b>                  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| 18-38 Years                 | 57               | 56.4              | 56.4              |
| 39-59 Years                 | 34               | 33.7              | 90.1              |
| 60 Years and above          | 10               | 9.9               | 100,0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100.1             |                   |
| <b>Citizenship</b>          | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| South African               | 101              | 100.0             | 100.0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100,0             |                   |
| <b>Years of residence</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| 15-20 years                 | 13               | 12.9              | 87.1              |
| 20 years and above          | 88               | 87.1              | 100.0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100,0             |                   |
| <b>Employment sector</b>    | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| Government                  | 44               | 43.6              | 43.6              |
| Private                     | 35               | 34.6              | 78.2              |
| Unemployed                  | 12               | 11.9              | 90.1              |
| Student                     | 10               | 9.9               | 100,0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100,0             |                   |
| <b>Qualification</b>        | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Cumulative</b> |
| Postgraduate qualification  | 51               | 50.6              | 50.6              |
| Undergraduate qualification | 23               | 22.7              | 73.3              |
| Matric                      | 27               | 26.7              | 100,0             |
| Total                       | 101              | 100,0             |                   |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

The biographical and demographical data of the survey respondents, as reflected on Table 7.1, reveals that 50.5% of the respondents were female and 49.5% were male. Therefore, the study was able to include almost 50 per cent of each gender of the population. Cornell (2018) argues that balancing the gender of the population in research results is a balance of perspective, as males and females have different frames of reference. Therefore, the study presented unbiased perspectives about the extent to which the GCIS adopts and implements accountability principles, according to stakeholders (citizens).

The population included 56.4% of blacks, 16.8% of whites, 16.8% of Indians and 9.9% of coloureds. The 2022 South African census reveals that South Africans define themselves under five categories: Black South African at 76.4.1%, White South African at 9.3%, Coloured South African at 10.7%, Indian South African at 3.1%, and others at 0.5%. Palmer and Burchard (2019) outline that research participants should reflect the diversity of various cultures and conditions and that the lack of diversity among research participants has serious ethical and research consequences. This includes impeding the ability to generalize study results. Therefore, the study included 80 per cent of each population category, representing the diversity of various cultures and conditions in South Africa.

All the respondents were above the age of 18; therefore, only adults deemed mature and responsible by the constitution of South Africa were included in the study. One hundred per cent of the sample were South African citizens. The study is about the accountability of the South African government; therefore, South African citizens are most acquainted with how the government accounts to them. Of the respondents, 87.1% have been residing in South Africa for more than 20 years, while 12.9% of the population have been residents of South Africa for 15-20 years, they have spent enough time engaging with the government and have enough experience to justify the extent to which the GCIS adopts and implements accountability principles when engaging with them.

Forty-three per cent of the population works in the government sector and can be regarded as a source of accountability. They have a better insight into what and how accountability is implemented. 3 per cent of the population is employed in the private sector, and 11.9 per cent is unemployed, of which 9.9 per cent comprises students. Therefore, 57 per cent of the respondents represent recipients of accountability and understand how accountability is implemented to them by the government during the engagement. The study was, therefore, able to present the extent to which the GCIS adopts and implements accountability principles. Fifty per cent of the population hold postgraduate qualifications, 22 per cent hold undergraduate qualifications, and 26 per cent have an NQF Level 4 qualification. All the respondents are regarded as literate and, therefore, understood the research items presented within this study, making their responses reliable.



### **7.3 ANALYSIS OF SECTION B: ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES EXPECTED IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

Section B investigated principles essential and expected by the public from the public sector. As argued from the accountability perspective, under Section 3.4, principles generally attempt to hold board members responsible for seeking out and considering adequate information on which to base decisions, disclosing conflicts of interest and placing the organisation's interests over personal ones, and acting within the organisation's mission while also adhering to internal organizational protocols for decision making. Where there is a failure to meet trustee obligations, executives have a right to charge on behalf of the corporation. Transparency, integrity, inclusivity, answerability, legitimacy, and good governance are part of the public sector's accountability principles. They are the standards which guide the behaviour and actions of all people in a society (Ciulla, 2014). These principles allow members of an organization to think systematically about morals and conduct and make judgments about right and wrong actions that could promote good governance, responsibility, and accountability.

Table 7.2 below presents the quantitative findings of the accountability principles the South African government practices for its citizens.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree. The normal distribution parameters, the mean, mode, and standard deviation were used to describe the data distribution of the selected questions.

#### **7.3.1 Accountability Principles practised by the South African government, according to citizens of South Africa**

The descriptive statistics of the accountability principles the South African government practises on citizens are reflected on Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2 Descriptive statistics of the accountability principles practised (n = 101)**

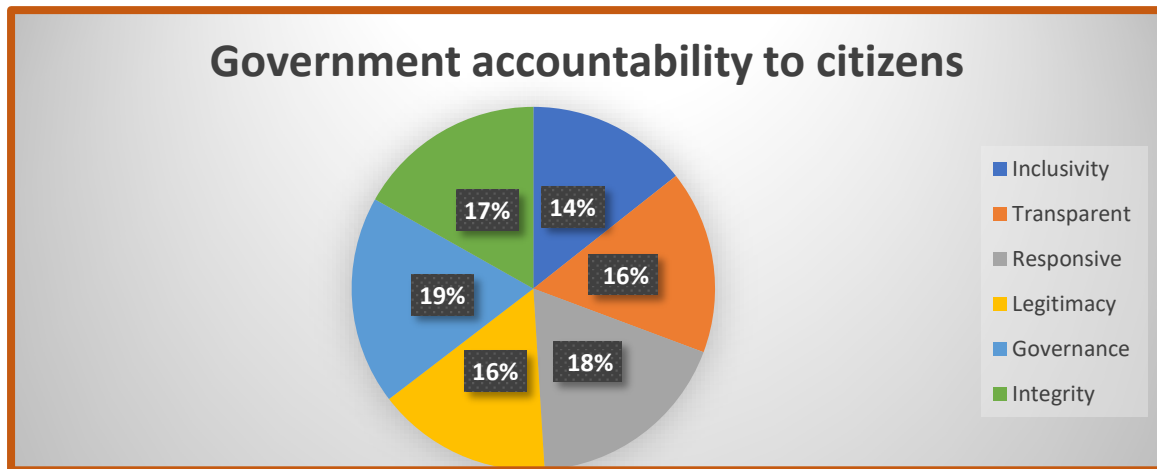
|  | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean<br/>(<math>\bar{X}</math>)</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Mode<br/>(<i>Mo</i>)</b> | <b>Std.<br/>(<i>SD</i>)</b> | <b>Skew</b> | <b>Kurt</b> |
|--|----------|--|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| The Government includes me as a citizen when identifying public issues and finding solutions   | 101      | 2,4                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 1,53                        | -0,17       | -1,68       |
| The Government is transparent about internally held information that citizens are entitled to. | 101      | 2,2                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 0,97                        | -1,50       | 1,30        |
| The Government is responsive to the public about its mandate.                                  | 101      | 2,2                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 1,56                        | -0,15       | -1,62       |
| The Government appoints officials in roles that they can perform well in.                      | 101      | 1,9                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 0,7                         | -1,30       | 1,97        |
| The Government is legitimate (conforming to the law or rules).                                 | 101      | 2,2                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 1,10                        | -1,80       | 1,09        |
| The Government governs with integrity.   | 101      | 2,1                                    | 3             | 1                           | 1,11                        | -1,91       | 1,10        |
| The Government practices good governance.  | 101      | 1,9                                    | 2,0           | 1                           | 0,99                        | -1,51       | 0,52        |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

As reflected in Table 7.2, all the questions have a mode of 1, meaning most participants choose 1 as their level of agreement with the items. Therefore, most citizens strongly disagree with their government's practice of these accountability principles.

**Figure 7.1: Summary of results on the practice of accountability principles by the government according to citizens who disagree and strongly disagree with statements**



*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

As per Figure 7.1 above, 14 per cent of the respondents outlined that the government does not include them on public issues. Therefore, stakeholder participation as a principle of accountability is not practised. Governance is about collective decision-making; however, the manifestation of what governance is about is not evident in South Africa. According to these results, a collective decision-making approach is not adopted. Literature argues that 'Collaborative governance' was created in response to the 'failures of downstream implementation and the high cost and politicisation of regulation'. It represents 'an alternative to the accountability failures of managerialism'. Lack of public participation in the South African government specifically takes away opportunities for incorporating societal concerns as well as 'non-standard' knowledge in the governance of risks. Based on the results, the notion of 'accountability as a public discussion on which democracies depend is undermined.

Although the literature presents participation as a principle for accountability, the survey result from the public reports that the government of South Africa is not guided by the literature as it does not engage in a dialogue or promote public participation on issues of the country. Moore (2019) outlines that the government should engage the public with public health, education system, service delivery, public finance, policies, environmental, safety and justice issues.

Therefore, a lack of citizen inclusivity results in a lack of accountability on these issues. In their study, “Assessing South African Government’s Use of Social Media for Citizen Participation”, Fashoro and Barnard (2021) found that all provinces and municipalities have social media accounts created to foster public participation. However, these platforms are used mainly for information broadcasting and as an extension to their websites. There is limited engagement and inclusivity where these exist. Biljohn and Lues (2020) looked at citizen participation, social innovation, and the governance of local government service delivery in South Africa; they found that citizen participation is not used for social innovation during conversations about service delivery. Therefore, the issue of citizens not being engaged or included in government issues is not only on issues of accountability as per the focus of the study, but citizens are also not engaged on issues related to service delivery, social change, and just being kept abreast with day-to-day developments. Citizens are only informed by the government. The practice of inclusivity incorporates listening and responding to citizens, which is missing in South Africa’s government's engagement with citizens.

Sixteen per cent of the respondents argue that the government is not transparent. Transparency is the starting point for the more demanding standard of accountability. Without transparency, there is little accountability. Transparency in public services means a public office holder is open everywhere and every time possible when it comes to issues of decisions and actions they take. In furtherance to this, they should be able to give reasons for their actions and inactions (Gil-Garcia, Gasco-Hernandez & Pardo, 2020). The lack of transparency in accordance with the results means that public officials and civil servants in South Africa do not act visibly and understandably when reporting on their activities. This implies that the public cannot hold public servants accountable for their actions and inactions - transparency, one of the surest ways to guard against corruption, is missing in South Africa.

Hence, the citizens of South Africa argue that their government is not transparent about its governance. Therefore, the literature on the importance of transparency is not adhered to in government communication with the public in South Africa. Marais, Quayle, and Burns (2017) explored the role of access to information in enabling transparency and public participation in governance in South Africa and found that there is poor access to information.

Citizens cannot access information unless they are acquainted with someone in a high position to get information for them. Maropo (2018), in his study 'The lack of accountability and transparency in local government in South Africa', found that, indeed, there is a challenge of lack of transparency in the local government of South Africa. The results of the South African government's lack of transparency outlined by the respondents of this study align with the results of the lack of transparency by the South African government from other studies in South Africa.

Eighteen per cent of the respondents delineate that the government is not responsive to its mandate. Therefore, the government does not try to serve the needs of the community appropriately and responsively. Responsiveness must be equitable and inclusive for all groups, including the vulnerable. However, results show that there is no pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes, and behaviour within the Public Service to reorient them in the customer's favour, where people (citizens) are put first. Citizens are not treated more like customers and can hold public servants accountable for the service they receive. This means that no framework frees up the energy and commitment of public servants to introduce more customer-focused ways of working. According to Jelmin (2012), an unresponsive government is no government at all. Therefore, when the government is not responsive to their mandate, they are as good as non-existent and not legitimate.

Sixteen per cent of the population outline that the government is not legitimate, 19 per cent of the respondents maintain that the government does not practice good governance, and 17 per cent of the population claim that the government does not govern with integrity. The government promises citizens free houses, jobs for the youth and free service delivery, but 62 per cent of the youth is unemployed in South Africa (Stats SA, 2022). Municipalities do not service community members who owe municipal rates (Tshwane, 2023), which means that the government does not honour its promises and does not govern with integrity as per the results.

Mamokhere (2022) studied the pragmatic implementation and promotion of sound governance principles in realising Sustainable Development Goal Six (6) in South Africa. He found that there were ongoing challenges that South African municipalities are confronted with in realizing SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) because of poor

governance. Therefore, explore common sound governance principles for sustainable development. He suggested that to realize SDG 6, sound governance principles should be promoted and pragmatically implemented. Munzhedzi (2021) analysed the application of governance principles in managing COVID-19 in South Africa for future lessons. The study found that the application of the governance principles was not adequately adhered to and suggested a balance between a special need to manage pandemics and adherence to standard principles of good governance to ensure accountability in the use of state resources whilst ensuring effective management of a disaster. South Africa is perceived to be a country characterized by a lack of good governance, not only by the respondents of this study but also by respondents of other studies. Not only does it lack good governance on issues of accountability, but also service delivery and crisis management issues.

#### **7.4 ANALYSIS OF SECTION C: AREAS WHERE ACCOUNTABILITY IS PRACTICED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT**

Section C investigated areas where the South African government practises accountability according to the citizens of South Africa. The National Development Plan (NDP) sets out a long-term vision for the country. It is the programme through which South Africa aims to advance radical economic transformation through development planning. The government's 2019 – 2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework outlines the priorities to be accounted for in the Sixth Administration and the interventions required across South Africa's national development pillars.

The seven priorities are:

- Economic transformation and job creation.
- Education, skills, and health.
- Consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services.
- Spatial integration, human settlements, and local government.
- Social cohesion and safe communities.
- A capable, ethical, and developmental state.
- A better Africa and World.

Transforming South Africa into a developmental state requires building critical and necessary capabilities to foster an environment that mobilises government and non-government contributions to realise changes in the socio-economic structure and the culture of society. Over the medium term, the government prioritises engagement between executive, legislature, and judiciary leadership on strengthening governance and accountability. During this period, the government further commits to managing the political-administrative interface more effectively, reducing the levels of fraud and corruption in the private and public sectors, and rationalising the Public Service Governance System (NDP, 2013).

Table 7.3 below presents the quantitative findings of the areas where the South African government practises accountability. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree. The normal distribution parameters, the mean, mode, and standard deviation were used to describe the data distribution of the selected questions.

#### 7.4.1 Areas where accountability is practised by the South African government, according to citizens of South Africa.

The descriptive statistics of the areas where the South African government practises accountability on citizens are reflected in Table 7.3 below.

**Table 7.3: Descriptive statistics of the areas where accountability is practised (n = 101)**

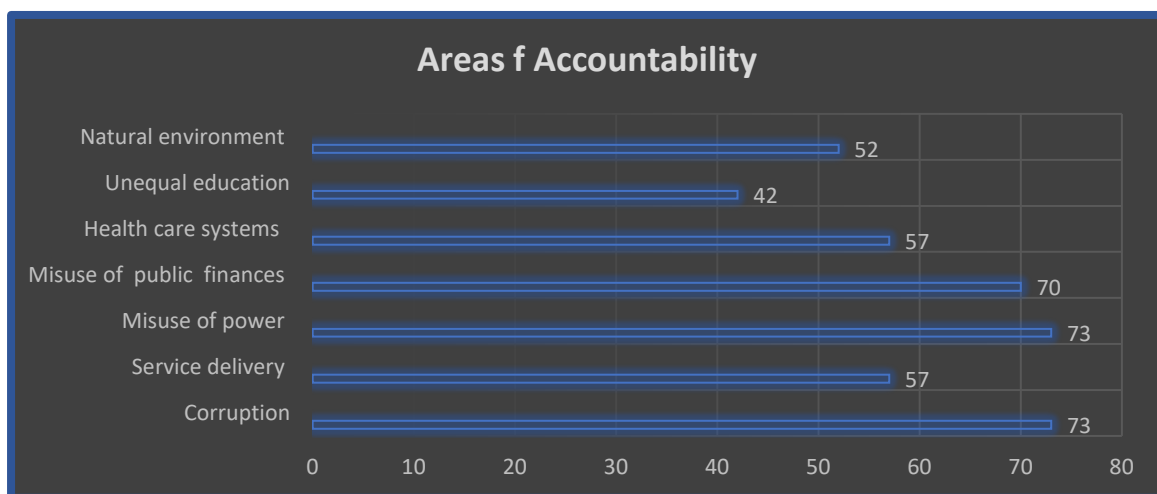
|   | N   | Mean<br>( $\bar{x}$ ) | Median | Mode<br>(Mo) | Std.<br>(SD) | Skew  | Kurt  |
|---|-----|-----------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|-------|-------|
| The Government is accountable when there are corruption allegations against government officials. | 101 | 2,1                   | 2,0    | 1            | 1,47         | -0,15 | -1,80 |
| The Government is accountable when service delivery issues arise.                                 | 101 | 2,7                   | 1,0    | 2            | 0,99         | -1,70 | 1,50  |
| The Government is accountable when the public complains about                                     | 101 | 2,2                   | 1,0    | 2            | 1,66         | -0,45 | -1,92 |

|  | N   | Mean<br>( $\bar{x}$ ) | Median | Mode<br>(Mo) | Std.<br>(SD) | Skew  | Kurt |
|--|-----|-----------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|-------|------|
| misuse of power by officials.  |     |                       |        |              |              |       |      |
| The Government is accountable when there is misuse of public finances.         | 101 | 2,3                   | 1,0    | 2            | 1,6          | -1,09 | 2,47 |
| The Government is accountable for the health care service systems.             | 101 | 2,5                   | 3,0    | 2            | 1,10         | -1,80 | 1,09 |
| The government is answerable for the unequal education system in South Africa. | 101 | 2,5                   | 1,0    | 2            | 1,25         | -1,27 | 1,30 |
| The government accounts for natural environmental issues.                      | 101 | 2,6                   | 3,0    | 2            | 2,99         | -1,01 | 0,92 |

**Source:** Researcher's own compilation

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. As reflected in Table 7.3, most of the questions have a mode of 2, meaning most participants choose 2 as their level of agreement with the items. Therefore, most citizens disagree with the practice of accountability in areas where their government requires accountability.

**Figure 7.2: Summary of results on the areas that require the practice of accountability principles by the government according to citizens who disagree and strongly disagree with statements**



**Source:** Researcher's own compilation



Conferring to Figure 7.2 overhead, 73 per cent of the respondents outlined that the government is not accountable when there are corruption allegations against government officials. This means that in South Africa, corruption eats away at the very fabric of society. Therefore, South Africa is not free from corruption. South Africa is not based on the values of integrity, transparency and accountability, respect for the rule of law, and zero tolerance for corruption in keeping with the objectives of the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) and South Africa's international and regional obligations. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) was developed against the backdrop of numerous judicial commissions of inquiry instituted since 2018 and aimed at uncovering wrongdoing, including wide-ranging acts of fraud and corruption across state institutions. Information presented at these proceedings points to a critical failure by the government to ensure the integrity of its staff and systems or an inability to identify undesirable conduct and/or criminal behaviour and to curb it.

Although the government has measures in place to fight and account for corruption, most of the citizens outline that the government does not account for corruption, which includes misuse of power by public officials and misuse of public finances. This is because corruption across all sectors occurs despite oversight structures, notably the national and provincial legislatures. Ineffective oversight contributed to the 'disappointing audit results' and 'stunted growth towards the desired audit outcomes' within national and provincial state entities, as noted by the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA). This also leads to questions about the nature and extent of the political-administrative interface, which extends into the area of accountability and highlights the need for strong institutions and systems.

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents argue that the government is not accountable when service delivery issues arise, 73 per cent of the respondents delineate that the government is not accountable when the public complains about misuse of power by officials, 70 per cent of the respondents demarcate that the government is not accountable when there is misuse of public finances, 57 per cent of the population outline that the government is not accountable for the health care service systems, 42 per cent of the respondents maintain that the government is not answerable for the unequal education system in South Africa, 52 per cent of the population claim that the government is not accountable for natural environmental issues.

The literature by Edom (2020) argues that the government delivers services like education, health, safety, transport, water, electricity, welfare, and housing on a massive scale. The Public Service is the implementing arm of government. Everything that must be done to develop our country and to deliver services to the people depends on the work of public servants. Public Servants have an enormous task and play an important role in making service delivery work for the people. Even so, respondents argue that the government is not accountable when service delivery issues arise, the government is lacking in accounting for the health care service systems, the government is not answerable for the unequal education system in South Africa, the government is not accountable for natural environmental issues. Overall, the NDP outlines areas that should be prioritised and accounted for by the country to develop. However, from the responses, it seems like the South African government is not accountable in the priority areas being education, health, finance, and justice system for an ethical state, service delivery by the local government and misuse of power for social cohesion.

Smith and Benavot (2019) looked at improving accountability in education: the importance of a structured democratic voice and found that there is poor accountability in the education policy system of South Africa and that there is an absence of voices of stakeholders who work, learn, and teach in schools and other educational institutions. Policies in education are not accounted for, and stakeholders in education are not given an opportunity to voice out their opinions on these impractical policies. Mukinda, Van Belle, George and Schneider (2020) explored the accountability for maternal, newborn and child health: a case study of the South African health system and found that there was no accountability for the lack of resources and funding to cover maternal, newborn and child health in local hospitals of South Africa. Rulashe and Ijeoma (2022) conducted an exploration of public accountability and service delivery at the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. They found a lack of communication between the local government and the residents. Poor implementation of accountability mechanisms and capacity issues, that is, lack of training and resources, contributed to the ailing public accountability and service delivery issues. What respondents of this study articulated on the government's lack of accountability in education, health and service delivery is attested to by other studies.

## 7.5 ANALYSIS OF SECTION D: HOW ACCOUNTABILITY IS COMMUNICATED

Section D investigated how the government of South Africa communicates accountability. Dalziel, DeVoge and LeMaire (2004) outline that the government heavily relies on annual reports, parliamentary reports, and political debates and uses their website to access information. These are their approaches to accountability. Table 7.4 below presents descriptive results of how the South African government communicates accountability to citizens.

### 7.5.1 How accountability is communicated by the South African government, according to citizens of South Africa

The descriptive statistics of how the South African government communicates accountability to citizens are reflected in Table 7.4 below.

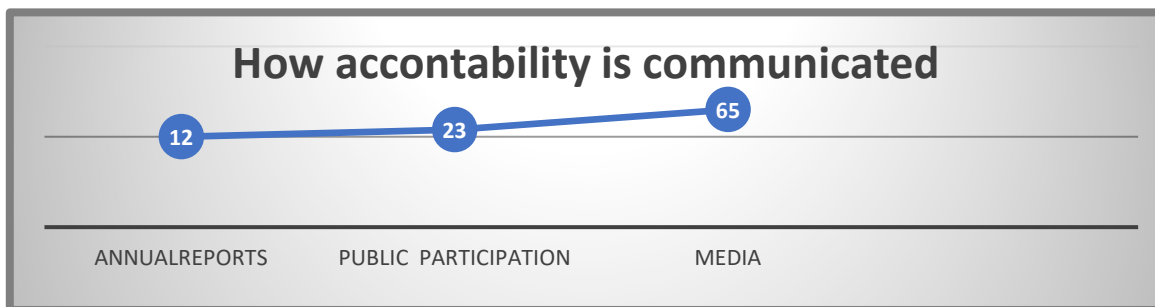
**Table 7.4 Descriptive statistics of how accountability is practised (n = 101)**

|  | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean<br/>(<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Mode<br/>(<i>Mo</i>)</b> | <b>Std.<br/>(<i>SD</i>)</b> | <b>Skew</b> | <b>Kurt</b> |
|--|----------|--|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| The Government uses annual reports to account to us.                 | 101      | 3,2                                    | 3,0           | 4                           | 3,47                        | -0,05       | -0,80       |
| The Government uses public participation platforms to account to us. | 101      | 2,4                                    | 3,0           | 2                           | 1,76                        | -0,15       | -0,72       |
| The Government uses the media to account to us.                      | 101      | 3,1                                    | 3,0           | 4                           | 0,10                        | -0,18       | 0,09        |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. As reflected on Table 7.4 above, most of the questions have a mode of 4, meaning most participants choose 4 as their level of agreement with the items. Therefore, most of the citizens agree with the use of the media and annual reports for the communication of accountability by their government.

**Figure 7.4: Summary of results on how accountability is communicated by the government according to citizens who disagree and strongly disagree with statements**



*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

Based on Figure 7.4, 65 per cent of the respondents argue that the government uses media to account for them. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents agree that the government accounts to them through annual reports. Accounting through reports and the media is a mere disclosure of information, and it is not enough. Accountability requires more than access to information but responsiveness to that information. The excellence theory on which the study is grounded emphasises a two-way symmetrical communication for excellence to be achieved in organizations. Therefore, annual reports and the media do not resemble two-way communication when it comes to accountability. Likely, excellence in accountability is not achieved since the principle of communicating accountability is not adhered to.

Fifty-four per cent of the respondents maintain that the government does not use public participation platforms to account for them. This means that citizens are not provided with a degree of inclusivity, which is a process of giving citizens the right to be heard. At the same time, the government simultaneously accepts the responsibility to be held accountable to them. Not having public participation includes not helping stakeholders appreciate the perspectives of others, promoting mutual respect, and the possibility of remedial action through continuing dialogue in a dynamic process that can achieve social change. Fashoro and Barnard (2021) argue that the challenge with public participation platforms that the government of South Africa uses to account is that they are not communicated to citizens; most of these platforms are online, and they are not accessible by all citizens due to the digital divide, and lastly, they use one language which all citizens do not understand due to different literacy levels.

Also, they offer a linear type of communication and do not necessarily foster dialogue between the government and citizens. The study is of the view that the engagement of any citizen group is a legitimate vehicle for government accountability and societal change. Based on the results of this study and that of Fashore and Barnard (2021), the government of South Africa is not riding in that vehicle.

## **7.6 ANALYSIS OF SECTION E: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DURING ACCOUNTABILITY**

Section E investigated how the government of South Africa engages stakeholders during accountability practices. Interaction with stakeholders is a logically necessary activity for an entity. However, Brand, Blok and Verweij (2020) posit that it is possible to operate with another actor without ever engaging him or her as a fellow person; that is, transacting without inquiring as to his or her wants, needs, well-being, or capabilities. Stakeholder engagement is heeding a call to the transparency expectations of organizational activities. Stakeholder engagement is a process whereby stakeholder interests are considered when deciding on the organisation's best interests (IoDSA 2009). Miles (2016) argues that engagement is more than a session on information dissemination and responding to the ideas of the organisation. Instead, stakeholder engagement is a meaningful consultation that occurs when stakeholders have the power to influence the organisation's strategic direction and advance new stakeholder opportunities and proposals.

### **7.6.1 The practice of stakeholder engagement during accountability in the South African government, according to citizens of South Africa**

The descriptive statistics of the practice of stakeholder engagement during accountability by the South African government on citizens are reflected in Table 7.5 below.

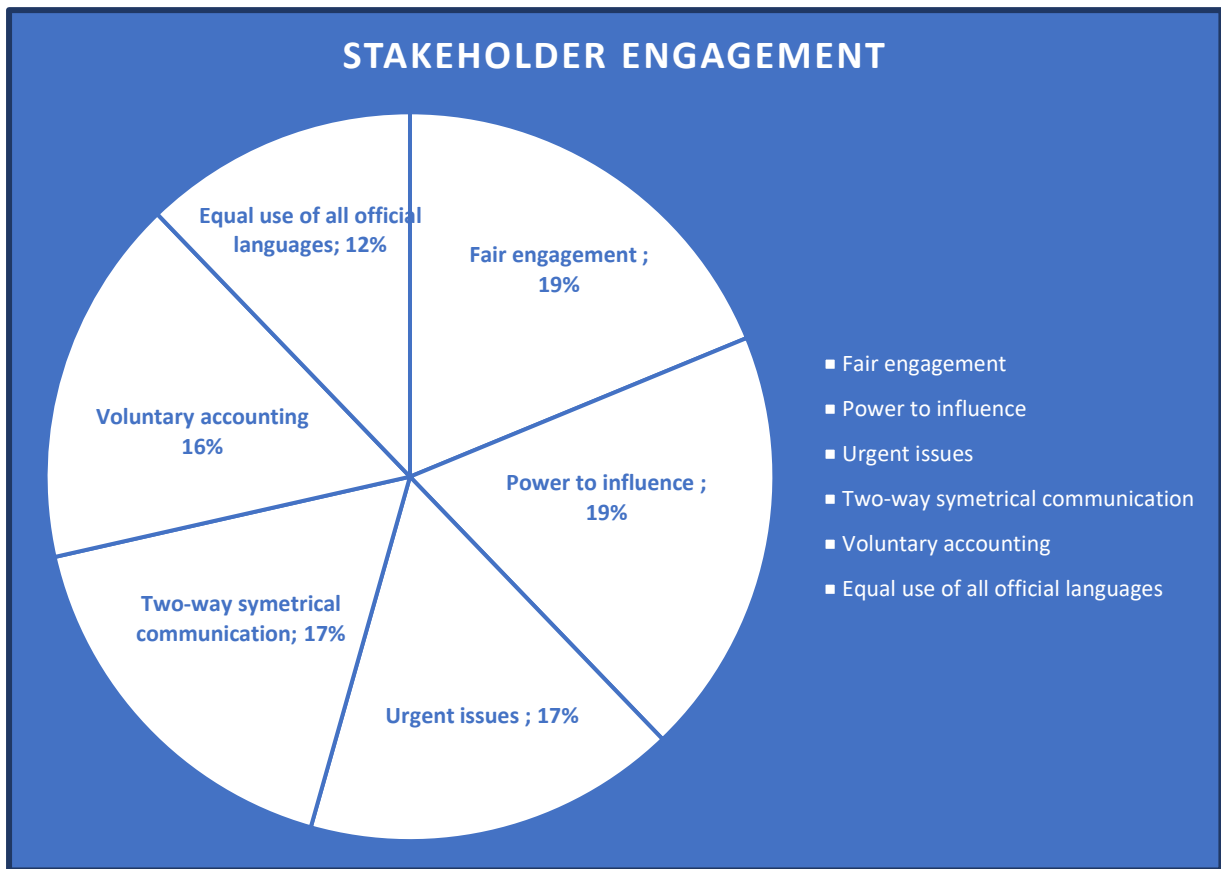
**Table 7.5: Descriptive statistics of the practice of stakeholder engagement during accountability (n = 101)**

|   | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean<br/>(<math>\bar{x}</math>)</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Mode<br/>(Mo)</b> | <b>Std.<br/>(SD)</b> | <b>Skew</b> | <b>Kurt</b> |
|---|----------|--|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| The Government engages with all citizens fairly during accountability.                      | 101      | 1,1                                    | 2,0           | 1                    | 1,17                 | -0,25       | -1,90       |
| The government only engages with citizens who have the power to influence.                  | 101      | 4,1                                    | 4,0           | 5                    | 2,76                 | -0,05       | -0,02       |
| The Government engages with citizens only when issues need immediate attention.             | 101      | 2,1                                    | 1,0           | 4                    | 0,08                 | -0,08       | 0,05        |
| The Government engages with citizens through a two-way communication style when accounting. | 101      | 2,0                                    | 2,0           | 1                    | 0,08                 | -0,28       | 0,05        |
| The GCIS considers the equal use of all official languages in their communication efforts.  | 101      | 2,1                                    | 2,0           | 1                    | 0,10                 | -0,18       | 0,09        |
| The Government accounts voluntarily to me as a citizen.                                     | 101      | 2,1                                    | 2,0           | 1                    | 0,10                 | -0,18       | 0,09        |

**Source:** *Researcher's own compilation*

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with different items using a five-point Likert scale (1 to 5) where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4= Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. As reflected on Table 7.5, most of the questions have a mode of 1, meaning most participants choose 1 as their level of agreement with the items. Most of the citizens strongly disagree with the statement that the government engages with everyone fairly, uses all official languages and engages with them using a two-way symmetrical communication approach. Also, most of the citizens strongly agree with the statement that the government engages with citizens who have the power to influence and that the government accounts for emergency issues only.

**Figure 7.5: Summary of results on how citizens are engaged during government accountability practice according to citizens who strongly agree and strongly disagree with statements.**



**Source:** *Researcher's own compilation*

As per Figure 7.5 above, 19 per cent of the respondents argue that the government does not engage with all citizens fairly when accounting for government projects; also, 19 per cent of the respondents maintain that the government only engages with citizens who have the power to influence. This means that accountability is not legitimate or justified to all stakeholders. The deliberative democracy theory guides stakeholder engagement practices between the government and its citizens. It emphasises rational, respectful debate, collaborative, legitimate decisions, and equal relationship building. However, legitimate engagement between the South African government and all citizens is lacking.

Seventeen per cent of the population claim that the government engages with citizens only when issues need immediate attention. Sixteen per cent of the respondents maintain that the government does not account voluntarily to them as a citizen. Twelve per cent outline that the government does not use all official languages equally in their communication efforts. In comparison, 17 per cent of the respondents argue that the government does not engage with citizens through a two-way communication style when accounting. This means that stakeholder engagement between the government and its citizens does not provide an equitable voice for citizens, a safe space for their contribution, timely input, efficient and effective methods, and a stakeholder-centred orientation that concentrates on creating value for a broader range of stakeholders.

When the government wants to see change, society must be involved by engaging the beneficiaries themselves and members of the communities where the societal change initiative is taking place. Unless the people and the cultures that are the focus of the change are engaged, the impact of external supporters has been found to be temporarily one-sided or even harmful. The South African government is governing with the risk of not getting compliance from citizens because the citizens do not form part of governance.

The challenge of poor engagement mechanisms between the South African government and its citizens is not only witnessed in the results of this study. Foster (2019) explored South Africa's tools for urban public engagement. He found that there are challenges in administering public participation, challenges such as a lack of clarification of the communication roles ward committees and traditional leaders counsel should play, and this puts them at risk of getting into territorial competition with other structures because of effective communication between government institutions and community members get hampered. Motloutsi (2019) looked at the necessity of stakeholder engagement practices in Greater Tzaneen Municipality to eliminate the challenge of poor communication mechanisms among employees by the municipality and community members. He argued that poor public engagement mechanisms used by the local government to citizens do not foster dialogue, mutual understanding, and trust. As a result, communities express their dissatisfaction by engaging in protests of civil unrest.



The study suggested that engagement with citizens should be to all and on an inclusivity level as opposed to an informative level. The results of the South African government's lack of customising messages, using a blanket approach when creating and transmitting messages and engaging citizens with the power to influence and undermining the valuable contribution that other citizens can make is evident not only in this study but also as a finding from other studies.

## **7.7 FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Suitability of the inter-correlation matrix for factor analysis was confirmed with KMO, which measured .71, i.e., above the recommended value of .6. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-square value was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(561) = 3907.25; p \leq .001$ ), therefore indicating the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis.

Four factors that obtained about 86.18% of the variance in the factor space were postulated according to Kaiser's (1970) criterion and extracted by means of Principal Axis Factoring. The rotated and sorted factor matrix was rotated and sorted by means of a varimax rotation. Four distinct factors (accountability principles, areas of accountability, the communication of accountability, and stakeholder engagement) were extracted. The results obtained from the iterative reliability analysis of the extracted factors are as follows: Factor 1, accountability principles (measured by seven items), yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .90, indicating acceptable reliability. Factor 2, areas of accountability (measured by seven items), yielded an acceptable Cronbach Alpha of .79, representing judicious reliability. Factor 3, the communication of accountability (measured by three items), yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .70, indicating appropriate reliability. Factor 4, stakeholder engagement (measured by six items), yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .70, signifying applicable reliability.

## **7.8 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE SUB-SCALES**

The measurement accuracy is a function of two things: (a) the extent to which the items measures what it sets out to measure (defined as validity), and (b) the precision with which the variable is measured (defined as reliability) (Malholtra, 2010; Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

A summary of the factor analysis procedure and iterative reliability analysis results are presented in Table 7.6 below.

**Table 7.6: Summary of the factor analysis and iterative reliability analysis procedure**

| Item per dimension  | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted | Dimension reliability                              |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| The Government includes me as a citizen when identifying public issues and finding solutions.     | ,936                             | Accountability principles<br>Cronbach's Alpha 0,93 |
| The Government is transparent about internally held information that citizens are entitled to.    | ,905                             |  |
| The Government is responsive to the public about its mandate.                                     | ,905                             |  |
| The Government appoints officials in roles that they can perform well in.                         | ,912                             |  |
| The Government is legitimate (conforming to the law or rules).                                    | ,936                             |  |
| The Government governs with integrity.  | ,935                             |  |
| The Government practices good governance.   | ,905                             |  |
|   | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |  |
| The Government is accountable when there are corruption allegations against government officials. | ,926                             | Areas of accountability<br>Cronbach's Alpha 0,92   |

| Item per dimension  | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted | Dimension reliability  |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| The Government is accountable when service delivery issues arise.                           | ,891                             |  |
| The Government is accountable when the public complains about misuse of power by officials. | ,936                             |  |
| The Government is accountable when there is misuse of public finances.                      | ,881                             |  |
| The Government is accountable for the health care service systems.                          | ,876                             |  |
| The government is answerable for the unequal education system in South Africa.              | ,891                             |  |
| The government accounts for natural environmental issues.                                   | ,936                             |  |
|   |                                  |  |
|   | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |  |
| The Government uses annual reports to account to us.  | ,961                             | The communication of accountability<br>Cronbach's Alpha 0,96 |
| The Government uses public participation platforms to account to us.                        | ,958                             |  |
| The Government uses the media to account to us.   | ,958                             |  |

| Item per dimension  | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted | Dimension reliability                           |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
|   | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |   |
| The Government engages with all citizens fairly during accountability.                      | ,989                             | Stakeholder engagement<br>Cronbach's Alpha 0,99 |
| The government only engages with citizens who have the power to influence.                  | ,989                             |   |
| The Government engages with citizens only when issues need immediate attention.             | ,989                             |   |
| The Government engages with citizens through a one-way communication style when accounting. | ,990                             |   |
| The GCIS considers the equal use of all official languages in their communication efforts.  | ,989                             |   |
| The Government accounts voluntarily to me as a citizen.                                     | ,989                             |   |

**Source:** *Researcher's own compilation*

As reflected in Table 7.6, the results obtained from the iterative item reliability analysis of the four scales yielded the following Cronbach Alphas. Accountability principles Cronbach's Alpha 0,93; areas of accountability Cronbach's Alpha 0,92; the communication of accountability Cronbach's Alpha 0,96 and stakeholder engagement Cronbach's Alpha 0,99 indicating acceptable internal consistency reliability (Pallant, 2020).

## 7.9 NORMALITY TEST

A normality test was conducted to determine if the data collected with the questionnaire was drawn from normally distributed data. The reason is that this is a requirement for some of the statistical tests, for example, two-way ANOVA (Pallant, 2020:62). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) was designed to test normality by comparing the data to a normal distribution using the same mean and standard deviation as the sample (Pallant, 2020:62). Any significant value above 0.5 indicates normality and parametrical inferential statistical methods can be used in the analysis.

**Table 7.7: Normality test results ( $n = 101$ )**

|                                      | Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup> |     |      | Shapiro-Wilk |     |      |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|------|--------------|-----|------|
|                                      | Statistic                       | Df  | Sig. | Statistic    | Df  | Sig. |
| Accountability Principles Scale      | ,190                            | 101 | ,000 | ,883         | 101 | ,000 |
| Areas of Accountability Scale        | ,254                            | 101 | ,000 | ,797         | 101 | ,000 |
| The practice of accountability Scale | ,209                            | 101 | ,000 | ,879         | 101 | ,000 |
| Stakeholder engagement Scale         | ,317                            | 101 | ,000 | ,807         | 101 | ,000 |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

As presented in Table 7.7 above, non-significant results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnova test ( $Sig. > 0.05$ ) for all the scales suggest a violation of the assumption of normality and that non-parametrical inferential statistical methods need to be used in the data analysis (Pallant, 2020:62). The results of the Inferential statistical calculations were conducted on the data collected from the survey are presented in the next section.

## 7.10 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS TESTED

Inferential statistical calculations were conducted on the data collected with the Accountability Questionnaire to make inferences and predictions about the South African population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The inferential statistical calculation findings will be presented in the next section.

### 7.10.1 Inter-correlations between sub-scales

A non-parametric measure of the Spearman rank correlations was conducted to assess how well the association between two variables can be described using a monotonic function (Pallant, 2020). The direction of the association between two variables can be positive (the scores of the variables move in the same direction) or negative (the scores of the variables move in the opposite direction). The association between the four variables is presented in Table 7.8 below.

**Table 7.8: Inter-correlations matrix (Spearman rank correlations) ( $n = 101$ )**

|  | Accountability Principles | Areas of accountability | The practice of accountability | Stakeholder engagement |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Accountability Principles                                    | 1                         |                         |                                |                        |
| Areas of accountability                                      | -.388**                   | 1                       |                                |                        |
| The practice of accountability                               | -.499**                   | .614**                  | 1                              |                        |
| Stakeholder engagement                                       | -.452**                   | .683**                  | .713**                         | 1                      |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). |                           |                         |                                |                        |

*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

The results of the inter-correlations matrix will be used in the hypothesis testing below.

**Hypothesis H1:** Association between Areas of accountability and principles of accountability.

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no association between Accountability principles and Areas of accountability.

As reflected in Table 7.8 above, a negative statistically significant association exists between Accountability Principles and Areas of accountability ( $r(n = 101; p = 0.01) = -0.388$ ).

**Finding:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states that there is an association between accountability principles and areas of accountability.

**Hypothesis H2:** Association between the communication of accountability and accountability principles.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no association between the communication of accountability and accountability principles.

As reflected in Table 7.8 above, there is a negative statistically significant association *between the communication of accountability and accountability principles* ( $r (n = 101; p = 0.01) = -0.499$ ).

**Finding:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states an association *between the communication of accountability and accountability principles*.

**Hypothesis H3:** Association between stakeholder engagement and accountability principles.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** There is no association between stakeholder engagement and accountability principles.

As reflected in Table 7.8 above, there is a negative statistically significant association between Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability Principles ( $r (n = 101; p = 0.01) = -0.452$ ).

**Finding:** Based on the above evidence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, which states an association between stakeholder engagement and accountability principles.

## 7.11 SUMMARY

This chapter presented and interpreted the results of the quantitative part of the research by means of descriptive and inferential statistics. The quantitative research results were reported in terms of one-way calculations, calculations of the Cronbach coefficient alpha and Pearson's coefficient tests to determine the overall reliability for each section and between all the sections in the questionnaire.

The biographical and demographic information of the individuals who completed the questionnaire were analysed in this chapter. The study included almost an equal number of males and females. The population consists of four different races (blacks, whites, Indian and coloured). All the respondents were over the age of 18 and deemed mature and responsible by the constitution of South Africa were included in the study. One hundred per cent of the population are South African citizens, and different classes were included in the study.

The respondents outlined that the South African government does not practice accountability principles when engaging with citizens on issues that concern them. Of importance was the realisation that many respondents argued that the government only practices accountability when there is an emergency crisis-related issue. Typically, when they must answer for their mandate, they do not account.

The respondents are of the view that their government accounts for individuals who have the power to influence, who are in higher positions and that normal citizens who are in inferior positions socially are not accounted for. These findings were reviewed against the existing literature, theories, and previous studies of accountability. It was found that the South African government has previous literature to inform them but they did not implement the guidelines. The study argues that the government does not know how to implement the guidelines; hence, a framework will be proposed in this study to guide the government on how to implement the guidelines and principles of accountability. The framework is proposed in Chapter 8 with the conclusion of the study.



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the conclusions of the study, including formulating guidelines for adopting accountability principles in stakeholder engagement of the GCIS and its citizens. Firstly, the links between research objectives and related research questions and the focus of the study are reiterated to indicate how the main research problem was addressed. Secondly, the proposed framework is presented and motivated. Thirdly, the proposed elements of the final conceptual framework are discussed in detail. Each element in the framework is comprehensively discussed and explained in accordance with the pragmatic approach of the study by making suggestions for the practical application of the framework in the government sector communication sector. Fourthly, the conceptual framework is graphically illustrated by means of the arrangement of the different elements in the framework and followed by a concise overview. Fifthly, the key requirements deemed essential for adopting accountability principles when engaging with stakeholders (citizens) are highlighted. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for possible future research on the topic. The exploratory and descriptive nature of the study disclosed meaningful possibilities for further research.

#### **8.2 RELATING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The following sections discuss how the qualitative and quantitative results addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 answer the research questions objectives set in Chapter 1.

##### **8.2.1 Research Question and Objective 1**

This research question – *Which accountability principles are essential to be adopted in stakeholder engagement in the public sector?*

*To describe accountability principles essential to adopt in public sector stakeholder engagement.*

The question and objective were addressed in Chapter 4, the accountability literature review chapter. Specifically, it was necessary to explicate the principles of accountability essential for the public sector to adopt when engaging with stakeholders, being its citizens. Contemporary views on accountability principles were conceptualised. An extensive literature review revealed that legitimacy, integrity, and good governance are essential principles for the public sector to adopt when aiming to achieve accountability when engaging with citizens. Therefore, research question 1 was answered and research objective 1 was achieved through the literature review.

### **8.2.2 Research Question and Objective 2**

Research question 2 – *What is the theoretical overview of good governance?*

To explore the theoretical relationship between good governance and accountability.

The question and objective were addressed in Chapter 4, the accountability principles literature review chapter. The study needed to understand the relationship between accountability and good governance. The literature revealed that good governance includes accountability and that being accountable means practising good governance. According to the World Bank (2016), good governance entails sound public sector management that entails efficiency, effectiveness, economy, accountability, exchange and free flow of information, and a legal framework for development, which comprises justice and respect for human rights and liberties. The Department for International Development (2013) defines good governance by focusing on the aspect of legitimacy, emphasising that the government should have the consent of the governed, exercise accountability standards, ensure that transparency prevails, be answerable, promote freedom of the media as well as competence for effective policy making, implementation of service delivery, respect for law and protection of human rights.

### **8.2.3 Research Question and Objective 3**

To further achieve the main research problem, research question 3 was formulated as follows: *To what extent is the GCIS adopting and implementing accountability principles, according to citizens?*

To explore the extent to which the GCIS adopts and implements accountability principles according to stakeholders.

The question and objective were addressed in Chapter 7. It was necessary to get the stakeholders' (citizens') views regarding the extent to which GCIS implements these principles. It was found that the government of South Africa is not transparent to citizens, meaning that the government is not clear, accountable, and truthful with citizens about how they are spending taxpayers' money when many areas in South Africa are still under-resourced with basic needs such as clean water, proper sanitation, good health care facilities and safe schools. The transparency of the laws and potential penalties for breaking them are not openly discussed. The government was said to have no legitimacy, governing with no integrity, was unresponsive and did not practice good governance. This entails that the government of South Africa is not deemed as doing right by the citizens. They make promises and never fulfil them, they listen to citizens' concerns and do not respond to them, they create laws and do not adhere to those laws themselves. When decisions are made, the citizens are omitted. Only their endorsement is required, but not their genuine participation in conversations around decisions taken.

#### **8.2.4 Research Question and Objective 4**

Which elements will build a framework that will guide the adoption of accountability principles?

To develop a framework that will act as a guide to the adoption of accountability principles.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 were devoted to answering research question and objective 4 –In the chapters presented afore this chapter, different elements that can be considered for the conceptual framework were discussed.

Elements include countability principles, avenues of accountability principles and attainment and maintenance of adopting accountability principles in engagements with citizens. The conceptual framework with proposed elements is presented in the next section.

### 8.3 KEY ELEMENTS FOR THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Insights emerged from the data gathered by means of the document content analysis and an online survey that contributed to a better understanding of how the South African government, through the GCIS, adopts accountability principles when engaging with its stakeholders, the citizens, to be specific. The overall findings were viewed as complementary and are concurrently summarised as proposed in an integrated manner. The intention here is not to repeat the qualitative and quantitative research results specified in Sections 6.3 to 6.6, Chapter 6, and Section 7.2 of chapter 7 but rather to extract and present key elements for the proposed framework.

**Element 1:** Principles of accountability; it should be noted that accountability, like any other issue of governance, should be governed. Therefore, it is important to present principles that can guide the government on what accountability is and should be. It is impossible to adopt that one is not acquainted with. Romzek and Dubnick (2018) argue that a principle is a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief, behaviour, or a chain of reasoning. Element 1 is, therefore, necessary as it will present the foundation and a tentative reflection of what accountability is.

**Element 2:** Avenues of adopting accountability principles; the most important action is adopting and practising. When the concepts are known when the 'what' is answered, applying it becomes imperative. The second element of the framework will present how accountability can be practised on citizens of South Africa. It focuses on how accountability can be communicated.

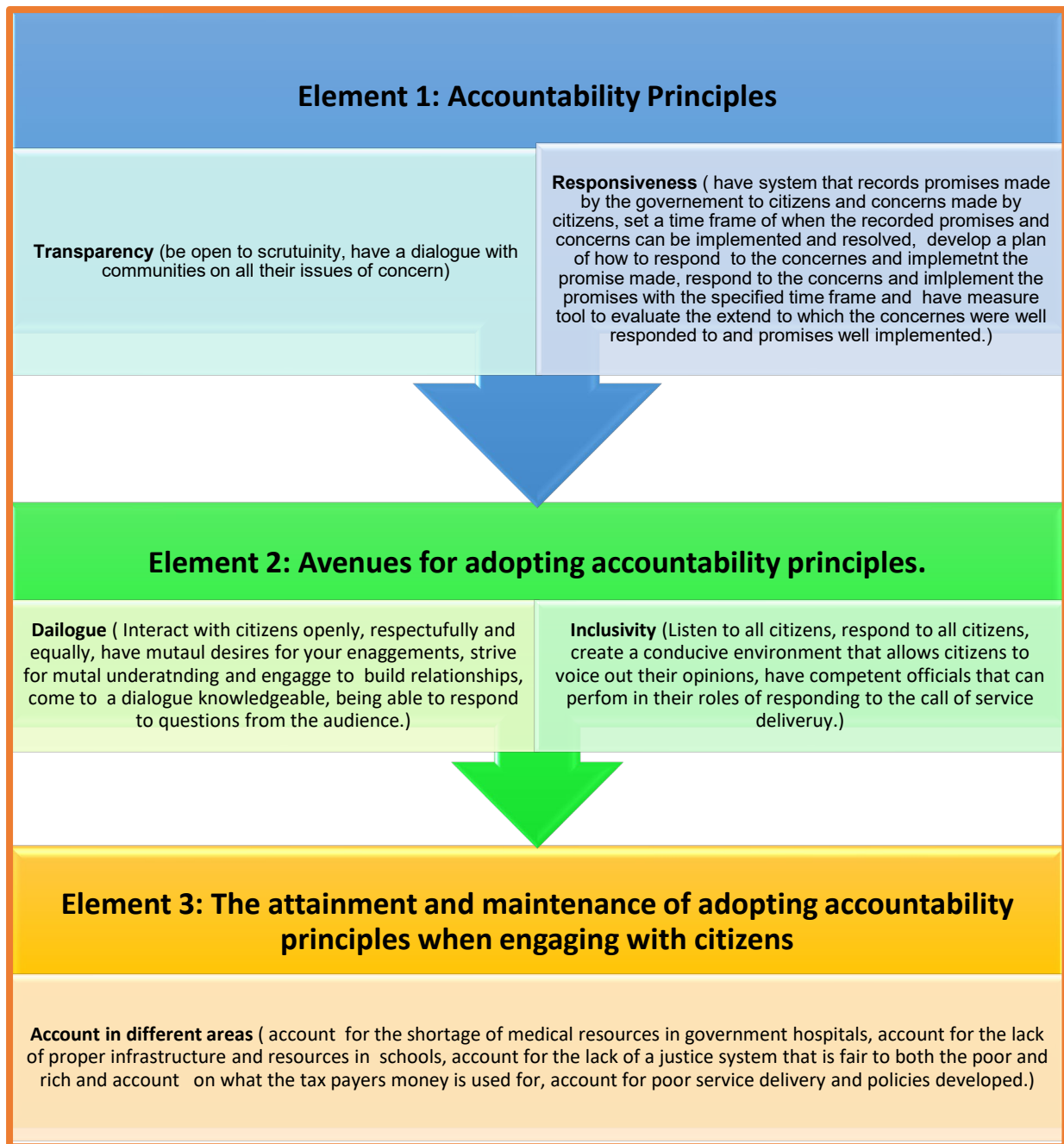
**Element 3:** The attainment and maintenance of accountability principles when engaging with citizens, business continuity and longevity emanate from maintenance. The practice must be maintained for accountability to live long in government communication management efforts. The third element of the framework will present directions for maintaining the adoption of accountability principles when engaging with citizens. This element advocated that there are areas where accountability should be practised as an effort to maintain the practice.

The study argues that when accountability is practised in one area, stakeholders or citizens in another area will not experience it. Suppose the government is only accounting for education and not natural environmental issues. In that case, environmentalists will have a different perception of the government being accountable as they do not witness accountability in their area of interest. It is, therefore, substantial for the South African government to practice accountability in different areas and maintain a holistic perspective of the adoption and practice of accountability in their stakeholder engagements with citizens.

### **8.3 THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADOPTING ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GCIS) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS**

The purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual framework for the adoption of accountability in GCIS's stakeholder engagements. A conceptual framework is included in Figure 1.8. in response to research objective 4.

**Figure 8.1: Proposed conceptual framework**



*Source: Researcher's own compilation*

The proposed conceptual framework was developed as per the guidelines of the data collected after careful reflection on and attention to the data presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

## **8.4 SYNOPSIS OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADOPTING ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GCIS) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS**

### **8.4.1 Element 1: Accountability Principles**

The purpose of this element was to investigate the necessary principles of adopting accountability in GCIS's engagement with citizens.

#### **8.4.1.1 *Transparency***

On the transparency principle, the study looks at how this transparency can be achieved and the benefits and challenges of a transparent government. Of significance was the argument that accountability and transparency are among the rights and expectations of citizens in a democratic society. Leaders should give an account of all their actions, decisions, and their financial spending while in office. It is equally expected that all the activities taking place in government are open to scrutiny. It is imperative to say that these two major tools (giving an account of all actions and being open to scrutiny) are lacking in South Africa's government, resulting in political apathy, tax evasion and avoidance of government. This has created a wider lacuna between government administration and the government people, poor revenue generation, poor infrastructural development, and low and inefficient service delivery by the government. Transparency and accountability are essential components of a democratic government and governance, nationally and locally.

Transparency is especially important when governments face sectoral pressures and other potential conflicts of interest that could lead to policies and regulations that are not always in the broader public interest. Transparency deters governments from being 'sloppy' about implementing best-practice regulatory processes. If a poor decision is made, they should be accountable to the public that regulations have a clear rationale and are in the public interest (Productivity Commission, 2023).

Transparency is the starting point for the more demanding standard of accountability. Without transparency, there can be little accountability. Generally, transparency means openness, communication, and accountability.

Transparency in public services means a public office holder is open everywhere and every time possible when it comes to issues of decisions and actions they take. In furtherance, they should be able to give reasons for their actions and inactions (Porumbescu, Meijer & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2022). When transparency is radical in management, it involves decision-making being carried out publicly. Heald (2006), in his work, "What is Transparency?", sees transparency as an active disclosure. Similarly, various scholars have defined government transparency as the publicising of incumbent policy choices and the availability and increased flow to the public of timely, comprehensive, relevant, high-quality, and reliable information concerning government activities. Transparency has been generally supposed to make institutions and their officeholders trusted and trustworthy (Meijer, Hart & Worthy, 2018). Transparency International (2012) defines transparency as a way of shedding light on plans, rules, processes, and actions.

Based on the qualitative findings of this study, it seems that the government acknowledges the importance of transparency since their policy documents on communication advocate for transparency. However, the quantitative findings reveal two aspects of concern for government engagement with citizens. Firstly, it is apparent that the government is not transparent with citizens because most disagree with the statement "the government is transparent". Also, the policy documents that guide government communication with citizens only state that the government should be transparent. Still, these documents do not necessarily discuss how this transparency should be practically achieved.

Transparency is, in fact, a central element in accountability in such a way that the idea of political responsibility is part of any democratic project. From a conceptual point of view, the notion of transparency means a rule of conduct for public officials. It carries a symbolic power associated with opening processes and results from public affairs associated with the government and the business market. It suggests that a reduction in the informational asymmetry contributes to the reduction of investment uncertainties, therefore providing a form of control over the actions of public agents towards the highest possible efficiency.



The need for the government to be transparent to citizens was emphasised in the overall findings in Chapters 6 and 7. Therefore, it is recommended that government organizations seriously consider being transparent to their citizens when engaging with them. The literature also featured strongly that transparency is a way to know why, how, what, and how much. Transparency ensures that public officials and civil servants act visibly and understandably and report on their activities. This, therefore, implies that the public can hold public servants accountable for their actions and inactions. Transparency is one of the surest ways to guard against corruption. Transparency provides assurance to the organization that systematic information is provided in an orderly manner and according to clearly laid down rules, principles, and procedures.

#### **8.4.1.2      *Responsiveness***

The literature has acknowledged the principle of responsiveness that the mere disclosure of information is not enough. Accountability requires more than access to information but responsiveness to that information. Currently, in South Africa, information about unemployment, state capture and the collapse of state-owned organizations, amongst others, is disclosed. However, there is little information pertaining to how the government intends to respond to these issues. Stakeholder responsiveness is necessary for effective accountability (Cohen, Mamakou & Karatzimas, 2017; Cucciniello, Bellè, Nasi, & Valotti, 2015; Shaoul et al., 2012). Responsiveness is how an organization demonstrates its response to its stakeholders and is accountable to them. This may include establishing policies, objectives and targets, governance structure, management systems and processes, action plans, stakeholder engagement, measurement and monitoring of performance or assurance.

Based on the qualitative findings of this study, it seems that the government is acquainted with the significance of responsiveness. The White Paper on Service Delivery emphasises that the government responds to the needs of the people and puts the needs of the people first. Even so, quantitative findings reveal an area of apprehension. It is apparent that the government of South Africa is not responsive to citizens based on most citizens disagreeing with the statement “the government is responsive”.

It is, therefore, imperative for the government to be responsive, not only during a crisis but be responsive to everyday challenges and needs of the citizens. The legitimacy theory emphasises unified values between the government and its citizens. Therefore, responsiveness in action should be one of those values. The “responsiveness in action” emanates from the critique of the legitimacy theory, which was a ‘plausible explanation of managerial motivations’ without any real effort to determine how a disclosure “may or may not promote transparency and accountability towards non-capital provider stakeholder groups” (Chiwamit, Modell & Scapens, 2017). Therefore, the public sector must voluntarily be accountable to legitimate their legitimacy. Their accountability should be accompanied by concrete actions realised in compliance with democratic norms and values.

#### **8.4.2 Element 2: Avenues for adopting accountability principles**

The purpose of this element was to investigate areas necessary to receive the practice of accountability principles when engagement with citizens occurs.

##### **8.4.2.1 *Dialogue***

This element aimed to discover insights into the ways in which the principles of accountability can be adopted. The three main opportunities for practising accountability, evident in the literature and empirically investigated in this study, include stakeholder inclusivity and dialogue. The quantitative findings on this element generally indicate that the government does not engage in a dialogue with citizens, and it was found that the government does not exercise inclusivity in terms of engaging with everyone equally and not only engaging but also responding to them. Neglecting these avenues could impede the successful adoption of accountability principles. Dialogue occurs when participants desire to interact respectfully and openly with each other at a level beyond the superficial and with a belief that this interaction is possible through communication, which will lead to mutually beneficial and acceptable outcomes. By means of dialogue, participants come to understand the circumstances that led to the disadvantaged position in a particular situation.

Johnson-Cramer, Berman, and Post (2013) argue that an authentic organisation–stakeholder dialogue includes the co-creation of shared understanding between the organization and stakeholders. Dialogue is a multiplicative communicative interaction between participants. It goes beyond the exchange of information to include building relationships. Such interactions build on the participants’ aspiration to listen more deeply, understand fully, and build a collective point of view. The conditions for dialogue include participants committing to suspend judgment and opening their capacity to engage and listen. Dialogue acts as an important information source to work out solutions. Therefore, it can be argued that dialogue is a symbolic communication tool that demonstrates principles like fairness. Passetti et al. (2019) argue that a monologue and genuine dialogue exist. Monologic dialogue is a two-way communication with stakeholders initiated by the organization for asymmetrical, persuasive, and instrumental purposes (Slabbert, 2018). Monologic dialogue can be characterised as a superficial application of stakeholder dialogue.

Genuine dialogue, on the other hand, is considered a two-way symmetric practice aimed at “mutual education, joint problem solving and relationship building” (Passetti et al., 2019). Dialogue aims to ascertain the shift from monologed to polyvocal voices during discussions (Brown & Dillard, 2013) in which the different stakeholders, with their socio-political perspectives, have discussions in an open manner. This means allowing more marginalised groups to express their ideas fully. The objective is to democratise stakeholder engagement to recognise and evaluate the different values, assumptions, and interests of all the different actors involved (Arunachalam et al., 2016) as well as to contrast the traditional consensus way of promoting the engagement process carried out by organizations (Greenwood, 2015). The third achievement aimed at is a community identity, which promotes the importance of sharing ideas and opportunities with others to create common purposes. A collective identity is better than an individual identity. The construction of a sense of community serves as the natural glue between the individual and the collective.

Dialogue is a word everyone thinks they understand, a “primitive term” (Chaffee, 1991:62) that is so self-evident it seems not to need definition. However, there are various ways of practising dialogue. According to Bohm, Factor and Garrett (1991), dialogue is not practised through a discussion, a word that shares its root meaning with ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion’, which involve breaking things up. Nor is it debate. These forms of conversation contain an implicit tendency to point toward a goal, hammer out an agreement, try to solve a problem or have one’s opinion prevail. It is also not practised as a ‘salon’ approach, a kind of gathering that is informal and most often characterized by an intention to entertain, exchange friendship, gossip, and other information. Although the word ‘dialogue’ has often been used similarly, its deeper, root meaning implies that it is not primarily interested in any of this. Dialogue should be practised as an interaction “in which collective learning takes place and out of which a sense of increased harmony, fellowship and creativity can arise”.

Dialogue should be practised through the five principles of dialogue proposed by Kent and Taylor (2002).

1. Mutuality refers to the ties that inextricably bind two entities. Kent and Taylor (2002) related mutuality to the connection between organizations and their stakeholders and said it was “characterized by an ‘inclusion or collaborative orientation’ and a ‘spirit of mutual equality’”. Therefore, for dialogue between the government and its citizens, a shared sense of relationship must exist that transcends the immediate and reciprocal exchange of benefits.
2. Propinquity describes the conduct of two-way communication, which facilitates the involvement of people in matters that concern them. This requires “immediacy of presence” (Kent & Taylor, 2002:26). Dialogue between the government and its citizens should occur when decisions are still mutable, and participants can compromise.
3. Empathy in dialogue is demonstrated through supportiveness and the existence of a communal orientation between participants (Kent & Taylor, 2002:27). This orientation is expressed through confirmation, such as positive responses to the contributions of others to the communication.

4. True Dialogue acknowledges the place of risk in the interactions between participants, as they make themselves vulnerable by engaging with a wide range of people, some of whom they might not ordinarily choose to engage with. This exposes participants in true Dialogue to unanticipated experiences and consequences, which their positive orientations allow them to frame as opportunities rather than threats. Therefore, the government should be able to engage with a wide range of citizens and not only those with the power to influence, as per the argument of Warritin (2011).
  
5. Finally, true Dialogue requires participants to commit to each other and genuine participation in the communication they are involved in. As Kent and Taylor (2002:30) put it, “Dialogue rests on a willingness to ‘continue the conversation’— not for purposes of swaying the other with the strength of one’s erudition, but as a means of understanding the other and reaching mutually satisfying positions”. Therefore, both the government and its citizens should be committed to reaching a mutual understanding.

#### **8.4.2.2 Stakeholder inclusivity**

The concept of inclusivity - stakeholder participation is at the heart of all value-based leadership because listening to and responding to the concerns of stakeholders – whether they be powerful or weak – remains fundamental to corporate excellence (Waritimi, 2011:167). This concept implies that all the different voices should be heard and actively included in the organisation. The environment where people voice their opinions should be conducive to this, allowing mistakes and vulnerability without apportioning blame or any power games being played. It is proposed that, within the inclusivity-participation spectrum, people should be given a platform to air their opinions. This should be achieved with stakeholders having no fear of being shuttered and not facing a situation where they cannot openly voice their opinions. Inclusivity is much more than a stakeholder engagement process. It is the commitment to be accountable to those on whom the organization has an impact and who have an impact on it and to enable their participation in identifying issues and finding solutions. It is about collaborating at all levels, including governance, to achieve better outcomes.

Accepting accountability to those it has an impact on (its stakeholders) does not mean that an organization must do everything that a stakeholder requests, nor that it loses the responsibility to make its own decisions. Inclusivity requires a defined process of engagement and participation that provides comprehensive and balanced involvement and results in strategies, plans, actions, and outcomes that address and respond to issues and impacts in an accountable way. An organization seeks a comprehensive understanding of who its stakeholders are and a comprehensive and balanced understanding of their needs and concerns and how they engage. The way in which an organization engages with stakeholders will depend on the capacities of both and the maturity of the existing relationship.

Stakeholder inclusivity is practised through:

- Making a commitment to be accountable to citizens that the government has an impact and who has an impact on the government.
- Having in place a process of citizen participation that is applied across government communication efforts, which is integrated with government institutions, and is ongoing and not 'once off'.
- Having in place, or having access to, the necessary competencies and resources to operate the citizen participation process, which includes identifying and understanding citizens, their capacity to engage, and their views and expectations.
- Identifying, developing, and implementing appropriate, robust and balanced engagement strategies, plans and modes of engagement for citizens.
- Facilitating understanding, learning, and improving government communication.
- Establishes ways for citizens to be involved in decisions to improve sustainability development.
- Building the capacity of internal stakeholders and supporting building capacity for external stakeholders (citizens) to engage and address conflicts or dilemmas between different stakeholder expectations.

### **8.4.3 Element 3: The attainment and maintenance of adopting accountability principles when engaging with citizens**

It was deemed prudent to investigate ways in which the adoption of accountability principles can be continued after it has been accomplished. Hence, the specific purpose of the theoretical aspects of this element was to explore the aspects through which accountability can be sustained. An aspect that featured prominently in the literature included in the empirical research is adopting accountability in different areas. This means accountability can be sustained if it does not use the blanket approach but occurs differently in a different area that requires accountability. It is important for the government to account for the education, justice and health system, financial well-being of the country, service delivery and appointment of officials in their office of duty separately. The broad findings for the aspect of being accountable in different areas indicated that government does not account for all different areas, such as accounting for the shortage of medicine in government hospitals, accounting for the lack of proper infrastructure in rural schools, accounting for the lack of a justice system that is fair to both the poor and rich and accounting for the use of taxpayer's money, service delivery and how officials are placed into office. Based on the results, it was evident that the government fails to fully embrace accountability in different areas separately.

South Africa suffers from several issues, including poor service delivery and a lack of accountability in areas concerned with citizens' basic needs (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). The government is seen as the vehicle for service delivery (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). All initiatives and programs, including housing, water supply, sanitation, and roads, necessitate accountable government functionaries for them to acquire the confidence and trust of citizens, who will then take ownership of it, assuring its success and, in the end, sustainability (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). A government official must answer to someone or something other than himself. Accountability, however, should not be restricted to public expenditure; it should also involve reporting on progress, performance, failures, accomplishments, and the overall exercise of responsibility granted by a superior authority (Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022).

As a result, public accountability entails guaranteeing that persons with a public mandate to govern and administer public offices are obligated by law to answer and justify their acts and conduct in a pre-determined venue (Ncube & Tullock, 2015). The moment one takes power or begins exercising vested authority to use public resources, public responsibility often begins (Ncube & Tullock, 2015). Financial accountability is not the only type of accountability; it is an important part of public accountability. Still, the entire process of public accountability frequently involves questions about how public funds are spent, how public authority is exercised, and how public institutions operate (Wasserman, 2020). This applies to national and provincial government agencies, as well as district and local governments and government enterprises (Nyawo, 2017).

The government ensures community development through a decentralized system by providing services funded by taxes. This practice should be enforced through public accountability to remove any maladministration or corruption. The White Paper on Public Service Transformation (Batho Pele) was introduced on November 24, 1995. It sought to outline transformation priorities, one of which was Transforming Service Delivery (Administration, 1997). This is because the effectiveness of a changed South African public sector in providing services that meet the basic requirements of all South African citizens will be the most important criterion (Administration, 1997).

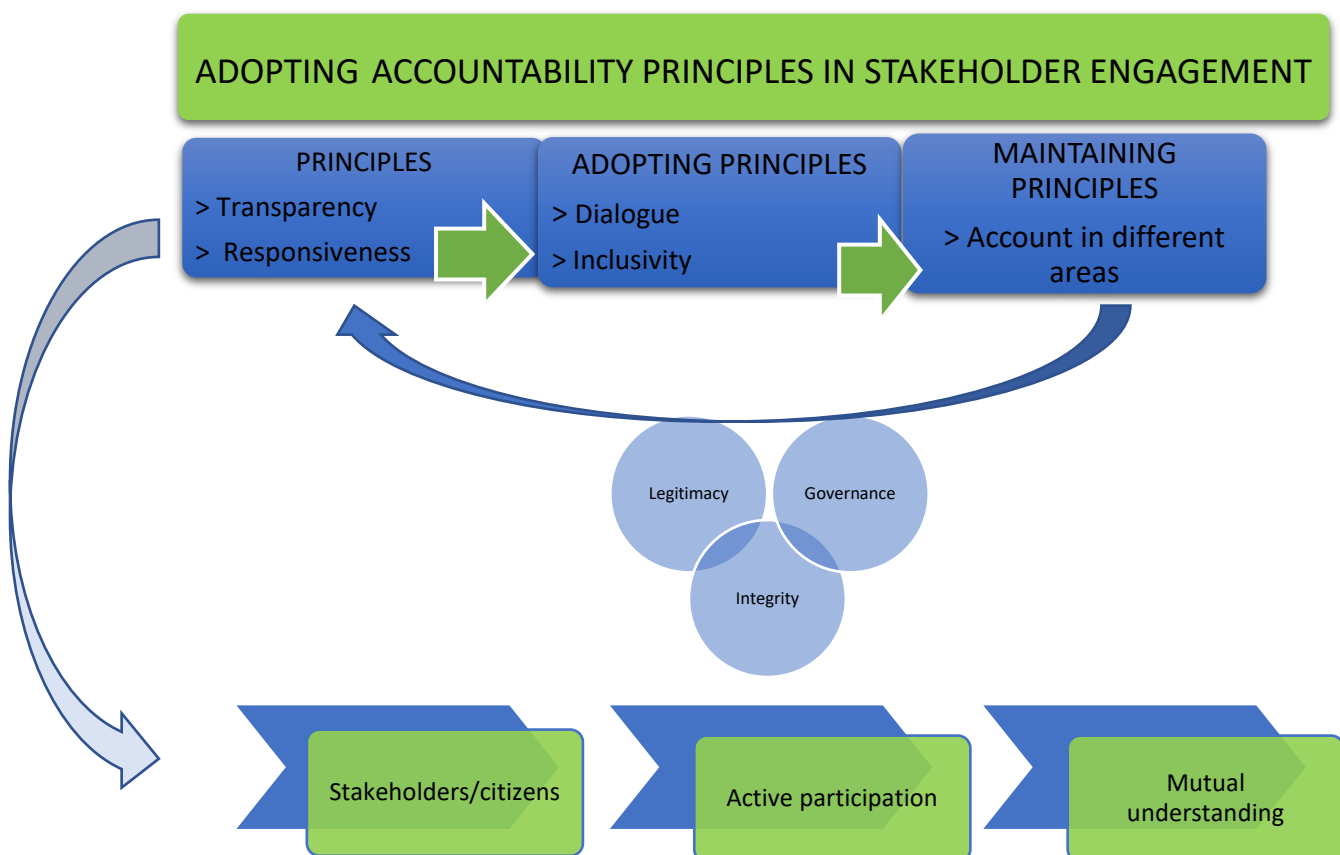
The ultimate purpose of the public service reform initiative is to improve service delivery, advocate for an accountable public administration and declare accountability and transparency to be the foundational pillars of public service and service delivery to a privileged minority who has been given responsibility and authority to perform public services (Munzhedzi, 2016).



## 8.5 REPRESENTATION OF THE REFINED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLES IN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENTS OF GCIS FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Figure 8.2 below is a simplistic representation of the elements of the refined conceptual framework as per the guidelines of data collected and the literature. It is followed by a concise overview of the framework.

**Figure 8.2:** A refined conceptual framework for the adoption of accountability principles in stakeholder engagements of GCIS for mutual understanding



*Source: researcher's own compilation*

### 8.5.1 A concise overview of the representation in Figure 8.2

The foundation of the conceptual framework. As stated earlier and in line with the literature review and data collected, the proposed framework was based on three overarching values that the literature advocated for.

They are represented in the centre of the figure, namely legitimacy, integrity, and governance, which are maintained by the principles of accountability presented under the second layer of Figure 8.2.

When the principles, namely, transparency and responsiveness, are adopted through inclusivity and dialogue in all areas, legitimacy, governance, and integrity will be achieved. It will result in mutual understanding with stakeholders being citizens in this study. The Department for International Development (2013) perceives good governance as an aspect of legitimacy, emphasising that the government should exercise integrity. These can be achieved by exercising accountability standards, ensuring transparency prevails, being answerable, being responsive to citizens through the implementation and service delivery, respecting the law and protecting human rights. This is neither an art nor a science. At best, it is a political process. Therefore, to have legitimate governance, when a system is designed, it must involve those who will have a stake in that governing functionality. Governance must adapt to the institutional and political environment because it is expected to thrive. It must allow for transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness.

Therefore, governance is a condition that guarantees the process of participation, transparency of decision-making, rule of law and predictability. The participation of citizens in legitimate governance is heeding a call to the transparency expectations of the government. Johnson-Cramer, Berman and Post (2013) argue that authentic participation of citizens includes the co-creation of shared understanding between the government and citizens. It is a multiplicative communicative interaction process between participants. It goes beyond the exchange of information to include building relationships. Such interactions build on the participants' aspiration to listen more deeply, understand fully, and build a collective point of view. Therefore, the framework guides the government to be transparent and responsive in all areas of their citizens' concerns, with adherence to inclusivity and a genuine dialogue for legitimacy, governance, and integrity to be achieved.

## **8.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

It was envisaged that the primary contribution would be in the field of communication science, in general, and the adoption of accountability principles by the government when engaging with citizens. The main contribution of this study is the formulation of a conceptual framework for the adoption of accountability principles in stakeholder engagement of the GCIS for mutual understanding. The study could, therefore, be extended to the field of communication management and successfully combines elements from multiple disciplines that are generally not combined in a comprehensive framework, namely government communication and reputation management. The following two subsections emphasise the contributions of the study, starting with theoretical contributions across multiple fields, followed by contributions to practice. The following points highlight the most pertinent theoretical contributions:

Insight was gained into the adoption of accountability principles from a stakeholder engagement perspective. In addition, the study should make significant contributions in a practical sense because it explores the real-life settings of government communication with citizens and suggests ways in which the government could apply the framework in practice. It, therefore, provides operational points for the practice of stakeholder engagement by means of accountability principles.

The primary motivation for the study was the paucity of research and literature dealing with how accountability can be achieved for all citizens and the outcome of that accountability in the South African government communication management. Hence, the study provides insight into the principles of accountability in government communication. These approaches can be adopted in the implementation of accountability when engaging with stakeholders and the extent to which principles in the framework could be maintained.

The broad knowledge gained is useful because it gives prominence to the value of the accountability approach to stakeholder engagement to maximise government communication efforts on public concerns. The lack of research on adopting accountability principles in South Africa's government communication with the public and information on how accountability can be achieved required a comprehensive consideration of a wide range of existing theoretical viewpoints to ultimately uncover those that could collectively serve as the study's theoretical basis. This study identified and presented specific classical theoretical views and theories of and perspectives on genuine stakeholder engagement, democratic accountability, ethics, and dialogue, which are relevant to the topic and, therefore, provide a possible theoretical basis for similar studies.

Elements of accountability were discovered that proved to be significant to the adoption of accountability in government engagement with the public, namely transparency, responsiveness, dialogue, and stakeholder inclusivity. These were later confirmed to be key to the goal of the South African government, which is the Batho Pele principle. Being open, responding to needs and concerns, and allowing true and meaningful dialogue to occur where opinions are included with no discrimination is putting the needs of people first.

The need for the South African government to move from a reactive to a proactive approach to stakeholder engagement was identified. The government must evolve its practices beyond the reactive crisis-management approach towards a strategy-based creation of opportunities – which is not done only for the purpose of reputation management. Improved stakeholder engagement includes enhancing strategic stakeholder management in general. Allowing the voices of stakeholders to be heard is an emancipatory process liberating people from suppressive social and ideological settings, specifically those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human awareness.

This study identified and emphasised stakeholder engagement as a process enabling voices to be heard without anyone's voice dominating the dialogue. Positioning the stakeholder voices closer to the centre of government discourse will reverse their colonisation. Organizational colonisation refers to the unobtrusive ways an organisation's meanings, instrumental logic, and managerial values dominate the ways people understand, think, and act in everyday life. It suppresses conflicts of meaning and discourages participatory forms of collaborative meaning creation. Organizations that are open and transparent to stakeholders build trust and social capital, positioning them to contribute more fully to the public good.

A unique contribution was the proposition of and motivation for the government to put officials in roles they can perform well in so that integrity is achieved, and accountability flows naturally. The study discovered that accountable stakeholder engagement requires responsible leadership, a form of leadership that considers the concerns of stakeholders and incorporates them into an organisation's decision-making processes. Such leadership shows a broad sense of accountability toward stakeholders, whose interests they try to balance and ultimately focus on delivering to the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, and environmental performance.

The proposition that accountability be viewed in terms of the stakeholder theory is significant. This theory facilitates a wider, more inclusive perspective of accountability by emphasising the importance of accounting to and for all constituents, not just those in a position of authority. In this context, accountability is frequently discussed in terms of upward and downward accountability. Upward accountability is linked to accounting to regulators and may reflect the notion of external accountability. In contrast, downward accountability focuses on those the organization provides services to and facilitates progress toward a more just and democratic society. It represents the notion of felt responsibility and transfers the right of accountability from those in a position of power to enforce it to all those affected by an organization and its activities. However, they can also have power and 'externally' enforce accountability.

The following points highlight the most pertinent practical contributions:

- 1 The framework contributes to accountability practices in the government sector by providing guidelines on how to adopt accountability principles when engaging with citizens for mutual understanding.
- 2 The study also provided insight into the ways accountability from a communication perspective is planned and approached by the government and accountability is executed (through oversight). This was achieved by conducting empirical quantitative and qualitative research.
- 3 It was revealed and confirmed that the adoption of accountability principles cannot be a blanket approach but should occur in different areas specifically.
- 4 The conceptual framework should further empower those communication professionals responsible for engaging with citizens who are employed in positions other than those typically associated with communication management.
- 5 The study highlighted the uniqueness of government communication, namely that much emphasis is placed on external communication with their stakeholders and that the adoption of accountability thereof is vital to achieving desirable legitimacy and good governance. This justifies the distinct focus on external communication adopted in this study and conceptualised, as opposed to adopting a holistic view of both internal and external communication.

## **8.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although the study should help to counter the absence of research on the overall topic of accountability in government communication, certain limitations and opportunities for future research need to be considered. The following limitations were identified:

Relevant accountability theories with a stakeholder engagement focus are lacking. This compelled the researcher to consider theories relating to individual stakeholder engagement and accountability concepts. Hence, no individual theory could serve as the basis of the study.

Despite abundant information on accountability, government communication and stakeholder engagement, limited sources could be identified that specifically provide information on these concepts in the government of South Africa

Interview participants were reluctant, and the study had to collect data through surveys and content analysis only. The study would have benefited also from rich, in-depth and first-hand information.

The formulation of selection criteria could, in a sense, be considered a limitation because communication and accountability documents that were not online or provided by GCIS were excluded.

This study adopted a narrow focus that mainly concentrated on the adoption of accountability principles of the government's external communication. This provides an opportunity for further research to analyse the adoption of accountability in both internal and external communication.

Although the quantitative responses were adequate for meaningful statistical analysis and interpretation and provided adequate statistical support for the combination of the items into the three main elements of the conceptual framework, the population from other provinces could have been beneficial to the study.

A possible limitation of a pragmatic view relates mainly to the methodological level and which data collection methods to employ to thoroughly understand the research problem. Hence, in comparison with other prominent research paradigms that prescribe research methods, a researcher following a pragmatic approach lacks direction in this regard. The selection of the methods in this study could, therefore, be viewed by some as inadequate despite the profound contributions.

## 8.8 FURTHER RESEARCH

The study focused on the adoption of accountability principles in stakeholder engagement, which focused on external communication. Future research can also focus on adopting accountability principles with internal stakeholders. The government also needs to account for internal stakeholders, such as employees, for the inside-outside approach of accountability to be achieved. When internals are accounted for, they can easily account for externals.

The literature presents categories of stakeholder groups in the corporate sector. A classification of stakeholder groups for the public sector is less known. It is, therefore, imperative to know stakeholder groups in the public sector, and future research can focus on that.

In this study, there appeared to be a gap in causality because the literature posits that some elements of accountability could be deemed both causes and effects when the organization engages with stakeholders. Hence, empirical research is needed on the causal relationships between, for example, the identified elements.

There is limited empirical research explicating the principle of responsiveness. The issue of what the government should be responsive to is limited to service delivery in the literature. Future research can focus on which other areas the government should be responsive in and how.

A unique requirement focused on in the corporate sector was achieving accountability through employing officers who can perform well in positions placed in. This principle is not explored in the public sector as a requirement for accountability. Future research can explore how the issue of doable roles impacts accountability.

More in-depth research on the ways in which the framework could be adapted to specifically accommodate local government is recommended.



## **8.9 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY**

Several conclusions can be drawn from the research done, which are in line with the objectives of the topic of the study. In conclusion, it must be highlighted that accountability is critical in government engagements with citizens. The study aimed to explore how the GCIS practices accountability in stakeholder engagement as measured by the adoption of the accountability principle and develop a framework that will guide the adoption of accountability when engaging with citizens.

Through the administration of content analysis and literature review, the study found that documents with principles to guide government communication exist. Government has at their disposal documents that guide them on how to engage with citizens. Although these documents emphasise that government should be accountable to citizens, they do not guide in terms of how this accountability should be practised. Hence, the online survey results revealed that the government is not accountable to them. The gap found was a gap between knowing accountability and implementing it. Therefore, the study developed a framework that will guide the implementation of accountability principles when the government engages with citizens. Thus, the study achieved its objective.

Legitimacy and integrity are key to good governance, and accountability is the main factor in legitimacy. The lack of accountability and transparency leads citizens to have little confidence and trust in government efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness. This is aggravated by unfulfilled political promises and abuse of power by public representatives and municipal officials. This study has made it clear that there is a serious lack of accountability in the South African governance space. Although the government has suitable oversight bodies, policies, procedures, and acts for good governance, the poor state of this governance level is due to the lack of accountability.

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