Journal of Policy and Leadership (JPL)
Vol. 11 Issue 2, January-June, 2025
https://jpl.mzumbe.ac.tz
DOI: 10.1234/jpl.2025.001
Published by the School of Public Administration and Management, Mzumbe University

Beyond the Desk: The Everyday Managerial Practices of Executive Directors in Local Government Authorities

George Romanus Igulu

School of Public Administration and Management P.O.Box 2 Morogoro, Tanzania
Department of Local Governance and Management Studies, Mzumbe University, Tanzania

Correspondence: gigulu@mzumbe.ac.tz

ABSTRACT

This study examines the managerial roles and daily practices of Executive Directors in Local government Authorities (LGAs), drawing on self-reported responsibilities and observational insights into their everyday routines. The research employed a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and observations to explore both the formal roles and the lived experiences of the directors. Surveys were administered to 184 LGAs, garnering 83 responses (77 complete) through simple random sampling techniques, focusing on six role categories: interpersonal, informational, decisional, operational, strategic, and diplomatic. Role performance was assessed using a structured questionnaire developed from theoretical models of managerial behaviour. To complement the survey findings, eight in-depth case studies (three urban and five district LGAs) were conducted, selected based on the performance and tenure of the directors. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, as well as direct observations of council management team meetings. Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically, while quantitative data were processed using SPSS to produce descriptive statistics and reliability tests. Findings indicate that executive directors perceive nearly all managerial roles as central to their work, although variations emerge in the degree of emphasis placed on these roles. In practice, their work clusters around four key activities: administrative coordination, citizen engagement, project monitoring, and departmental supervision. The study highlights a disconnection between formally perceived roles and actual practices, illustrating that contextual demands, local expectations, and individual discretion shape managerial work. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of public sector leadership in decentralised governance systems.

Article Info:

Received:
12/10/2024
Accepted:
16/05/2025
Published:
23/05/2025

Keywords: Executive Directors, Decentralisation, Local government Authorities, Managerial Practices

How to cite: Igulu, G. (2025). Beyond the Desk: The Everyday Managerial Practices of Executive Directors in Local government Authorities. *Journal of Policy and Leadership*. 11(2) 64-87

INTRODUCTION

The government of Tanzania has adopted a decentralised local government system to enhance development and service delivery across the country. Currently, there are 184 Local government Authorities (LGAs) established under the Local government (District and Urban Authorities) Acts of 1982, comprising both urban (town, municipal, and city councils) and district-based (village, township, and district councils) entities (PORALG, 2024). These LGAs are mandated to maintain peace and good governance, deliver essential social services such as health, education, water, and roads, and promote socio-economic development. They have the legal authority to create bylaws, formulate plans, and mobilise resources to meet local needs (Rugeiyamu et al., 2019).

The LGAs are governed by a dual structure comprising elected councillors (the full council, which serves as the highest decision-making body) and appointed civil servants led by Executive Directors (Swai et al., 2022). These Executive Directors are appointed by the President (for urban Local government Areas) or by the Minister responsible for local government (for District Local government Areas), as outlined in the Public Service Act (2002) and related regulations. Once in office, they are entrusted with a wide range of administrative and technical responsibilities, supported by departmental heads, sector specialists, and various stakeholders. Their duties necessitate interaction with political actors such as MPs, councillors, District Commissioners, and Regional Commissioners—relationships that frequently involve negotiating between political interests and administrative mandates (Swai et al., 2023).

Operating within a dynamic legal and institutional framework, Executive Directors play a pivotal role in local governance. They must coordinate efforts among the central government, local politicians, citizens, NGOs, and the private sector while ensuring compliance with national policies and regulations. This complex environment requires executive directors to balance competing priorities, navigate political tensions, and uphold standards of accountability and performance. These demands raise fundamental questions about their appointment process, the scope of their responsibilities, and how they manage the practical realities of leadership within the local government system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Appointment of Executive Directors in the LGAs

Various laws and regulations, including the Public Service Act of 2002 (as amended in 2007) and the Standing Orders for Public Service of 2009, govern the appointment of executive directors. The procedure is comparable to that of other civil servants. Article 5, section 1 of the Public Service Act of 2002 states that the Minister responsible for Regional Administration and Local government appoints executive directors of LGAs, while the President appoints

city council directors. This is distinctive because all other local government public servants are appointed by the LGA council (Section 6, Article 5, Public Service Act 2002).

By the Standing Orders, a vacancy for an executive director is advertised nationally (Standing Order D 9), and applicants must submit their applications accordingly (D10). Although not explicitly stated, non-public service applicants must first apply to become civil servants and provide a complete employment record supported by documentary evidence (D11). Positions are open to both men and women, and selection is based on merit, efficiency, eligibility, and suitability, with merit and suitability taking precedence over seniority (URT, 2009).

In practice, many executive directors are promoted from within the public service, such as from departmental heads or smaller LGAs. Promotions are also based on proven merit and suitability (Article D50 Standing Orders, 2009). However, what qualifies as "suitably qualified" is not clearly defined. The Local government Service Scheme, based on the Public Service Act 2002, specifies that a Master's degree is required for the position and outlines associated functions and salary scales.

Performance evaluation is conducted through OPRAS (Open Performance Review and Appraisal System), with annual reviews conducted by supervisors (Standing Orders D62-D74). Candidates undergo a secret vetting process (Standing Order D31) to ensure ethical conduct. The appointing authority selects one candidate from a list of three deemed suitable, and the appointment is finalised through an official letter (Standing Order D32). The appointment may result in new vacancies in the LGA, triggering further procedures (URT, 2009).

Overall, the central government has a significant influence on the appointment process. The Minister or President acts as the appointing authority, while the Ministry for Regional Administration and Local government oversees the entire selection process. The centrally regulated scheme stipulates educational qualifications, leaving local government areas (LGAs) with minimal influence over the selection. Consequently, executive directors may feel more accountable to central government officials than to local government area (LGA) council members, which could impact how they perform their duties and seek career advancement (URT, 2002, p. 2009).

Tasks and Responsibilities of the Executive Director

The Local government Act of 1982, along with the appointment letters issued by the appointing authority, define the core responsibilities of the executive director. Essentially, the executive director serves as the head of the local government service in a Local government Area (LGA). In this capacity, they serve as the chief administrator, responsible for managing the office and overseeing subordinates, including departmental heads. This broad role can be categorised into three specific types of responsibilities.

First, the executive director is responsible for overseeing human resource management within the LGA. This includes completing performance appraisal forms for department heads and supervising the procedures for appointments, confirmations, promotions, and performance reviews of all LGA employees. These responsibilities are mandated by the Public Service Act and the Standing Orders, and the executive director must ensure their implementation (URT, 2002: 2009).

Second, the executive director serves as the primary Liaison between the central government and the local government area (LGA). They are responsible for implementing central government directives by distributing them to relevant departments and ensuring their effective execution. Appointment letters typically instruct executive directors to coordinate the preparation of development plans and budgets for the LGA's key components of the central government's administrative system (Mollel, 2010). In this capacity, the executive director also serves as the accounting officer, accountable for financial management, revenue collection, and expenditure compliance. They must respond to audits by the Controller and Auditor General or a parliamentary committee for local governments (LGAs). Furthermore, they are responsible for maintaining effective relations with lower units of local government, such as wards and villages, by ensuring clear delegation and good working relationships, as specified in all appointment letters.

Third, executive directors operate within a political context. They serve as secretaries to the full council. They are responsible for initiating and coordinating council meetings following elections, as specified in Article 63 of the Local government (District Authorities) Act and Article 29(2) of the Local government (Urban Authorities) Act. They must notify councillors in writing about meeting logistics (Article 30 Urban Authorities Act), oversee meeting orders, and adjourn meetings that lack a quorum (Article 41 Urban Authorities Act). They also maintain records of councillors' disclosures regarding conflicts of interest (Article 71(6) District Authorities Act). They are instructed to advise the full council on legal and technical matters as per their appointment letters (URT, 1982).

Ultimately, the executive director acts as a public liaison. Appointment letters must address citizen complaints and concerns within their local government area (LGA). This duty closely relates to their administrative responsibilities, as citizen complaints frequently reveal shortcomings in policy implementation or service delivery. Feedback from the public enables the executive director to monitor and guide subordinates, ultimately bolstering the effective execution of central policies and council decisions.

The Executive Director's Work Environment

The responsibilities of executive directors indicate that they operate in a multi-stakeholder environment involving councillors, department heads, lower-level unit officials (such as town or ward officials), central government representatives, citizens, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This wide array of actors requires the executive director to navigate a complex administrative and political space.

Councillors are elected every four years (or appointed via 'special seats') and represent citizens at the ward level. Their role is to articulate local concerns within the full council and ensure these are reflected in the LGA's development plan (Mollel, 2010; Swai, 2017). They also chair ward committees and report on the implementation of development. Supporting them are officials from lower units who assist in implementing council decisions.

Standing committees, composed entirely of councillors, assist the full council by preparing decisions related to service delivery (Local government Act of 1982). Although councillors dominate these committees, executive directors are responsible for preparing the relevant plans, budgets, and proposals that inform committee deliberations (Hulst et al., 2016; Mafuru et al., 2015). Departments within the LGA—such as health, education, planning, and finance—are headed by individuals with technical expertise who work alongside executive directors to implement plans and perform daily functions.

Executive directors also collaborate with central government ministries and agencies. The Ministry for Local government, along with sectoral ministries for health, education, water, and agriculture, provide instructions and programmes to be executed by the LGAs. These central agencies also maintain regional and district offices, which act as extensions of the national government. Regional administrations oversee local governments, offer implementation guidance, and monitor performance. Executive directors are members of the Regional Consultative Committee (RCC), which coordinates regional development planning (Regional Administration Act No. 19 of 1997).

Furthermore, executive directors must collaborate with legally recognised NGOs that operate in sectors such as health, education, and water (Non-Governmental Organizations Act of 2002). Their activities should align with public policy, necessitating that the executive director verify and coordinate their plans. Despite this extensive responsibility, executive directors are centrally appointed without the formal consent of those with whom they work, such as councillors or department heads, underscoring the significant influence of central government in local administration.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Participants and Area of the Study

This paper aimed to examine the managerial roles of executive directors, focusing on their self-reported roles and daily routines. To achieve this, we drew on information collected by Igulu for his dissertation (Igulu, 2023). In addition to the formal roles of the executive directors, the paper also considers the experiences and perspectives of the executive directors themselves regarding how they execute their roles in local governments (LGAs). A mixed-methods research approach was employed, utilising surveys, observations, and interviews to describe and explain the operations of executive directors. The survey was conducted with 77 out of 83 executive directors of the LGAs to explore their managerial roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how executive directors perform their roles within their daily routines.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis Plan

The Survey

The first part of the survey focused on the executive directors, who were the main subject of the study, describing their managerial roles within the LGA. The survey aimed to address the question: What managerial roles are displayed by executive directors in the LGA? The study variable was managerial roles, exploring the nature of the executive director's work, which was assessed using a set of variables as indicated in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Managerial Role Performance

Role category	Number of roles	Example role	Example of role (item) statement
Informational	4	Spokesperson	I disseminate the council's information to the community
Interpersonal	3	Leader	I lead and motivate my subordinates
Decisional	8	Resource allocator	I decide where my council will put its efforts and resources
Operational	6	Operator	I make sure that day-to-day operations are being completed
Strategic	6	Coordinator	I ensure that all efforts are coordinated to achieve the council's goals and strategic plan.
Diplomacy	3	Figurehead	I represent the council in formal matters

The survey targeted all executive directors in all 184 local government areas (LGAs), encompassing both urban and rural areas. This resulted in a response of 83 who filled out the questionnaires. However, out of the 83 sample, only 77 respondents, equivalent to 92.7%, completed the entire questionnaire. The majority of respondents are male, aged 51-60, with at least 10 years of experience in the public sector. The majority of the executive directors held a university

degree, specifically a master's degree, with diverse professional backgrounds ranging from planning to human resources and from economic development to finance and accounting.

The questionnaires were distributed to executive directors during meetings attended by all executive directors. These meetings were organised by the ministry responsible for local government. Once the dates and venues were published, the meeting organisers were approached to seek permission to introduce the study to the audience. Following the introduction and obtaining consent, participants were provided with questionnaires that they were required to complete and return to the researcher either on the same day or the following day. The researcher distributed the questionnaires during three consecutive meetings of the executive directors. This approach aimed to increase the response rate, particularly from those who had not completed and returned the questionnaires in previous meetings (Anasel et al., 2019).

The Case Study

The case study aimed to enrich the findings from the survey (Yin, 2003) and to analyse the actual activities performed by executive directors in their local government areas (LGAs), how they set priorities, allocate time among activities, and the reasons behind their actions. Eight local government areas (three urban and five rural) were selected for this study. The selection of LGAs occurred in two stages. The first stage involved selecting four regions from the seven zones using a simple random technique. The second stage involved selecting three urban and five district Local government Areas (LGAs) from the list of all LGAs in the aforementioned four regions. The eight LGAs were chosen based on the following two criteria. The first criterion was the performance of the local authority; that is, local authorities with both good and poor performance were deliberately selected. The second criterion stipulated that the executive director must have worked in the respective council for at least three years. This ensured that the executive director had been involved in the planning and implementation of activities for at least one financial year. The study began by generating ideas in the four local government areas (two urban and two rural districts). It was subsequently followed by the validation and confirmation of these ideas in the remaining four LGAs.

The primary method of data collection in the case study was the use of interviews. Eight executive directors and their respective department heads were interviewed. The interview process was guided by a pre-developed interview guide that structured the fieldwork. Specifically, the eight executive directors were asked about their responsibilities, the issues they prioritise, and how they allocate their time across different roles. Prior to the actual interviews, the respective executive directors were contacted by telephone to be briefly introduced to the study. Most interviews took place after office hours to accommodate the schedules of the executive directors. The interviews were conducted in

Kiswahili (the national language of Tanzania) and lasted between one and two hours. They were recorded and subsequently transcribed into English.

Meetings of the Council Management Teams were observed to establish interaction patterns in the discussions and communications between the executive directors and department heads. The main objective of the observation was to identify what the executive director did, the kind of people he/she contacted, and the possible time spent on various activities inside and outside his/her office.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey were coded, entered, and organised into a data matrix using the statistical package SPSS version 22. The package enabled the computation of descriptive statistics about the research question. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) and reliability tests were performed. The first computation conducted was descriptive statistics, which involved summarising the data in terms of frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Cronbach's alpha tests were conducted to assess the internal reliability of the scale and its items, determining whether the items could be combined to measure the same constructs. The reliability test focused on the nature of managerial roles. The results indicate that all alpha values are below 0.65, meaning that none of the sets represents a single factor, and consequently, none of them can be treated as a single scale. Apart from that, a reliability test was used to enable the deletion of items that did not sufficiently measure the same constructs or variables. Data analysis also involved combining multiple items (computational variables) that measured the same constructs into a single variable.

Data from the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the research objectives (Anasel et al., 2019). The transcribed texts were analysed through content analysis, wherein codes were developed based on the theory and the text. As the main objective of the case study was to explain what the executive directors do in the LGAs, the results were organised to complement findings from the survey.

Ethical considerations were observed before, during, and after the study. Permission to conduct the research was sought and granted, and the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding the information collected. The participants were informed that the data collected was solely for academic purposes, with access restricted to the researcher only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Managerial Roles Performance of the Executive Directors

The six managerial role categories distinguished by Glick (2011a, b) and Lau & Pavett (1980) are, in succession, interpersonal roles, informational roles, decisional roles, operational roles, strategic roles, and diplomatic roles. Concerning each role within each category, the questionnaire respondents had to indicate the extent to which they perceived it as part of their job. More precisely, they were required to rate the degree to which they agreed with the statement that it is part of their job.

Table 3.1 Presents Descriptive Statistics based on the data Collected Using the Questionnaire in a Sample of 83 Executive Directors.

Table 3.1 Role Performance Variables as Measured by the Executive Directors' Questionnaire

Category	Role*	N	mean	SD	Not (S)A	(S)A
Information	Monitor	83 83	4.42 4.46	0.52 0.53	1,2% 1,2%	98,8%
l roles	Disseminator					98,8%
	Commander	83	3.23	1.13	53,0%	47,0%
	Spokesperson	83	4.45	0.63	4,8%	95,2%
Interpersonal roles	Leader	83	4.59	0.52	1,2%	98,8%
	Motivator	83	4.23	0.75	14,5%	85,5%
	Director	83	3.88	1.06	22,9%	77,1%
Decisional roles	Entrepreneur	83 82	4.27 4.37	0.75 0.68	13,3% 9,8%	86,7%
	Disturbance Handler					90,2%
	Conflict Handler	83	3.58	1.14	32,5%	67,5%
	Resource Allocator	82	3.69	1.08	43,9%	56,1%
	Task Master	83	4.02	1.28	22,9%	77,1%
	Staffer	82	4.11	0.88	19,5%	80,5%
	Negotiator	83	3.96	0.80	19,3%	80,7%
	Problem Solver	83	3.63	1.03	43,4%	56,6%
Operational roles	Organizer Analyzer	83	4.16	0.89	14,5% 4,8%	85,5%
		83	4.54	0.59		95,2%
	Controller	83	4.49	0.59	4,8%	95,2%
	Operator	83	4.49	0.53	1,2%	98,8%
	Technical expert	82	3.81	1.08	30,5%	69,5%
	Consultant	83	4.48	0.63	7,2%	92,8%
Strategic roles	Coordinator Planner	83 83	4.59 4.42	0.52 0.78	1,2% 8,4%	98,8%
						91,6%
	Vision setter	81	4.24	0.73	9,9%	90,1%
	Strategist	83	4.10	0.74	13,3%	86,7%
	Transformer	83	3.93	0.82	22,9%	77,1%
	Creator/Maintainer of culture	83	4.19	0.71	12,0%	88,0%
Diplomacy	Link	83 83	4.10 4.39	0.82 0.73	16,9% 7,2%	83,1%
roles	Figurehead					92,8%
	Liaison	83	3.87	1.06	25,3%	74,7%

N = number of respondents; SD = standard deviation; (S) A = (strongly) agree (rating options in the questionnaire); ratings ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) *Role labels as used by Glick (2011a), some of them for clarification reasons extended.

The means of the ratings on the 5-point scale are presented alongside the percentages of respondents who utilised the last two and the first three rating options. These latter figures, which together total 100%, indicate the percentages of respondents who say that the involved role does or does not form part of their job. This method of presenting outcomes reflects the approach taken by Glick (2011a).

Overall, the results indicate that the vast majority of respondents view nearly all roles within each category as part of their jobs. This is evident in the rating means, which, except for one role, are all above 3.5. It is also reflected in the response percentages of '(strongly) agree', which, aside from a couple of roles, are all well above 70%. However, differences exist between respondents, as shown by the displayed standard deviations, and among roles.

In the category of 'informational roles', one role stands out as relatively unrecognised by the respondents, as it is not viewed as part of their jobs by 53% of them. This role is the 'Commander'. In short, the respondents perceive themselves as engaging in extensive communication, both within and outside the organisation, with the notable exception of communicating orders to their employees. In the category of 'Interpersonal roles', the role of the 'Director' is the least recognised, with 22.9% of respondents not considering it a part of their job. The respondents perceive themselves as highly active in their interactions with employees but least so in terms of providing work instructions.

In the category 'Decisional roles', four roles, 'Conflict handler', 'Resource allocator', 'Taskmaster', and 'Problem solver', are viewed by a substantial minority of respondents as not explicitly forming part of their job (corresponding figures: 32.5%, 43.9%, 22.9%, and 43.4%). A common denominator of these roles, shared by others in the category but not all, is that the role incumbent personally interferes in ongoing processes rather than merely guiding those processes. In the category of 'Operational roles', one of the roles, 'Technical expert', is perceived by a considerable minority (30.5%) of the respondents as something that lies outside their job description. A notable distinction between this role and the others in the category is that the role incumbent functions as a content specialist rather than as a generalist.

In the category 'Strategic roles', the role of 'Transformer' is the least recognised, with 22.9% of respondents not viewing it as part of their job. The uniqueness of this role, compared to others in the category, lies in its focus on

organisational change in response to shifts in the surrounding world (the others are more or less explicitly inward-focused). In the category 'Diplomacy roles', one of the three roles is not recognised by a substantial minority (25.3%) of the respondents. It is the role labelled 'Liaison with outside actors. It entails person-to-person diplomacy by the role incumbent with individuals outside the organisation.

Administrative Activities

The first main activity that executive directors perform is administration. Executive directors are often occupied with reading files, letters, and other correspondence. These documents come from two distinct sources. One source includes offices and individuals outside the LGA, such as central government offices, ministries, NGOs, and regional and district offices. The second source comprises individuals and offices within the local government areas (LGAs), including various departments and sections. There is no specific number of letters, files, or correspondence that the executive director receives each day; the quantity varies from day to day.

The letters and files come with various directives and demands. Most correspondence from the government provides directives and requests information, such as reports on activities performed in the LGA. The internal files and letters seek approval for the use of funds, report back on implementation, and request permission to travel, along with similar enquiries.

From the interviews, it is clear that the executive directors review all the files, letters, and correspondence received from the relevant sources. He/she reviews all the paperwork to determine which issues can be addressed by which department heads. Then, the executive director assigns tasks and provides directives to department heads, instructing them to supply the necessary information or take action and report back to the executive director. Each time a task is delegated to a head of department, the executive director files a note regarding it alongside the correspondence. Such letters and correspondence are sent to the central office before being forwarded to the relevant department heads. Other letters and correspondence require a response from the executive directors themselves, and they handle these issues personally.

Another general consideration is that administrative activities are often the first tasks that executive directors undertake upon arriving at the office in the morning. However, these activities are routine and ongoing, occurring throughout the day. Each afternoon, the executive director receives new sets of letters and correspondence. Typically, they continue working late after formal hours (normally 3.30 pm) to clear their desks. As one of the executive directors

indicated, however, sometimes letters and files remain unattended until the following day. This is how the executive director puts it:

> From 2 pm, sometimes up to 8 pm, depending on the number of tasks before me, I address issues on my desk, such as reading the mailbox and files. Of course, I always prioritise issues, such as requests for funds and approvals, so that other processes can proceed.

Given these general observations, variations exist among different executive directors. Consequently, there are differences in how these directors prioritise activities when delegating tasks to department heads. Attention is given to letters and files that require prompt responses and have immediate or short deadlines. The executive directors employ various techniques to monitor the delegated tasks, letters, and files. Some executive directors make photocopies and place them in separate files. These files serve as archives to ensure follow-up and track the implementation of the directives.

Other executive directors jot down the tasks they assign to department heads in their diaries. These directors keep diaries on their desks and use them to document everything requiring close follow-up. In an interview with one of the executive directors, she pointed out that she records the specifics of the requirements and deadlines for each letter and files them in her diary. The diary enables her to follow up and track deadlines effectively. It also helps her maintain control, closely monitoring all issues in her organisation. This is how the executive director puts it:

> You see this diary; I use it to record all the directives I give to the department heads. I write down the type of assignment or directive and the date it is supposed to be completed. Therefore, when the head of the department does not submit, I have the right to call and request it.

Attending Citizens

The second activity that the executive directors highlight as one of their principal tasks is engaging with citizens. These include ordinary members of the community, visitors, and officials from the central government or other institutions. They visit the LGA to discuss various issues or problems with the executive directors, seeking solutions from them. The overall picture is that the executive directors invite these individuals into their offices daily, where they listen and discuss various matters with them. According to the respondents, most executive directors begin attending to citizens and visitors between 8:00 and 9:00 am. While handling their administrative duties, the executive directors set aside time throughout the day to meet with citizens and other visitors.

Another general observation is that most visitors do not make an appointment in advance to see the executive director. In the interviews, the executive directors noted that most citizens they speak with come and queue outside

their office to request a meeting. Visitors may have to wait for hours until the executive director is finally available to meet them. It is, therefore, common to find some citizens queuing on benches or chairs outside the executive director's office. The secretary of the executive director controls who enters the office, allowing one person in at a time. Since the executive directors have no way of knowing who will appear before them, they are unable to prepare for the meetings and explore the issues that visitors will raise. This complicates the executive director's ability to create a schedule and plan for such meetings. This is how one of the executive directors puts it:

> From 9 o'clock, I start receiving different people who come to my office with various problems or issues. You do not know the issues these people bring forward unless you hear it from the department head. So, you listen to their problems and try to solve them. I know that all these people should be content with my answers, at least because they come to me knowing and believing that when they see the executive director, they will get the answers to their problems.

The executive directors state that they are unable to schedule specific days and times to meet with citizens and other visitors. Establishing fixed visiting hours is discouraged by the ministry responsible for local government authorities. Consequently, the executive directors view arrangements such as allocating a day each week or an hour daily for visitors or receiving visitors by appointment only as a breach of their job description. In their appointment letters and job descriptions, it is explicitly stated that addressing the needs and requests of citizens is one of their primary responsibilities. Citizens who visit the office of the executive director present a wide range of demands and issues. Some arrive with individual concerns, such as a dispute over a plot of land between villagers, seeking a resolution on the matter. Others come with requests for their villages or wards, such as a plea for additional funding for a project.

It is essential to note that most supplicants who approach the executive directors have previously met with a head of the department but have not received the requested outcome. Therefore, pleading a case with the executive director is seeking a remedy from a higher authority. For instance, in one of the LGAs, a supplier of stationery to the LGA complained of encountering long delays in payments for his deliveries. He turned to the executive director after the head of the department dismissed his request for timely reimbursement, citing a lack of funds that impacted some payments.

> I supplied the council with stationery, but every time I came to ask for my money, the treasurer kept telling me the council had not yet received money from the government. However, I saw other people who did receive payment. That is why I wanted to talk to the director. I know if he sees me, he will direct the treasurer to pay me.

One of the executive directors pointed out that there are citizens who approach the executive director directly without first consulting a head of department or another subordinate administrator:

> Some people are sometimes not satisfied with what they get (in reply) from the heads of departments. So they decide to come to me to express their discontent. When such a situation arises, I normally contact the department head. We all sit together and resolve the issue. However, other people sometimes just like to hear from the director.

Visiting Projects

The third activity mentioned by the executive directors is visiting projects. These projects include the construction of classrooms, wards in health facilities, maintenance or building of roads, water sources, houses, and offices at the village or ward levels. The projects are funded by the LGA, which often reports on their progress to national government agencies. Each of the executive directors in the case study visits projects implemented in their local government areas (LGAs). The primary purpose of these visits is to gather accurate information about the level of project implementation. This information is utilised to prepare reports for the central government when requested and for council meetings. For example, one executive director said in an interview about information for the councillors:

> I always require a detailed report from department heads. So, I sometimes ask them more, call them and ask about the issues. However, I sometimes visit sites and projects in person…for example, during our council meeting, it was decided that we should establish a border buffer zone along the mountain to prohibit human activities beyond that border. So, we had to visit the project to see how it is being implemented.

However, there are variations in this activity. Some executive directors maintain a scheduled plan for visiting projects. One of the executive directors dedicates weekends, particularly Saturdays, for project visits. Accompanied by a team of department heads, he travels from project to project, gathering information on-site. This is how he explains it:

> Every Saturday, my team and I go to the field to inspect projects, ensuring value for money and progress. We refer to the contract to determine when the project started and when it should be completed. We record our observations, which are then discussed during our Monday morning meeting, and the resolutions are given to the department heads for implementation.

Most executive directors, however, go on inspection tours whenever they have no other activities to perform at the LGA. Additionally, an executive director may occasionally make what is called a ‘surprise visit’. These are unplanned visits to various projects. An executive director might be prompted to conduct such a visit due to a request, particularly

for funds; the executive director will then want to assure himself/herself of the project's progress before approving additional funding. This is how one of the executive directors puts it:

> I also do some surprise visits. For example, this week, I had three visits to different projects. I was receiving requests from department heads to approve payments for completed jobs, but I was unsure about the quality of the work that had been done. Therefore, I had to visit the project to verify the details and approve the payments.

As mentioned earlier, some executive directors employ a team of department heads to conduct visits and gather information. However, some executive directors prefer to visit alone or occasionally take just one head of department with them. The reason for going solo or with minimal assistance is that the director wishes to keep the inspection visit confidential to prevent the distortion of information.

> 'My approach is that I do not tell the heads of departments when we will be visiting projects. I believe that if you tell them in advance about your plans, you make them irresponsible. So, I always take them by surprise. This makes them proactive in their activities. I cannot accept that the head of the department, let us say the education department, works only in the office; she has to go out and find out about the problems that heads of schools and teachers are facing. So, if I as a director can visit schools and be told all these problems, I think for a reasonable head of department, just by seeing what I do, he will leave the office and visit schools, too.'

Supervising Heads of Department

The fourth activity carried out by executive directors is supervising department heads. The executive directors undertake this task in various ways. One method involves having the heads of department sign an 'attendance register' at the director's office to ensure their presence. To facilitate this, the executive director arrives early in the morning before the others. When a head of department arrives, they must meet the director and sign the register. This allows the director to monitor who is present and working during office hours. The brief interactions while signing the register help the director keep track of the activities the heads of department plan for the day.

A second frequently used method is the weekly, or sometimes daily, meeting with all department heads, often referred to as 'the morning prayer'. These formal meetings involve the executive director and heads of department. Most meetings take place on Monday mornings between 8:00 am and 9:00 am. Each meeting lasts no more than one hour of discussion. The executive directors utilise these meetings to assign tasks to the heads of departments. These tasks stem from the plans of the LGAs and directives from the full council.

Additionally, some tasks arise from directives received from the central government and other institutions. The executive directors also use the same meeting to request and receive weekly reports from the department heads.

These reports detail the implementation of activities and tasks performed as a result of the assignments and directives given to department heads. Furthermore, the heads of departments utilise the meeting to present their proposed tasks or activities for the upcoming week. Thus, the meeting serves as a platform for sharing information between executive directors and department heads.

The overall picture that emerges from the above is that every executive director conducts meetings such as the 'morning prayer'. This meeting is used by the executive directors to assign activities to department heads and to receive reports on implementation and work plans from them. However, based on interviews and observations, there are variations in how meetings are planned. Some executive directors hold a morning gathering every day to discuss specific issues. For example:

> Every morning, we hold a meeting that we call the 'Morning Prayer'. We typically start the meeting at 7:30 am. In this meeting, every head of the department presents, very briefly, what he/she did yesterday and what he/she is going to do today. In most cases, the meeting lasts for one hour.

Other executive directors conduct morning prayers only once a week. In the meetings, they discuss several issues.

Discussion

The first research question was to what extent the executive directors of LGAs perform the roles that are part of the categories identified by Glick (2011a, b). The categories in question encompass interpersonal roles, informational roles, decisional roles, operational roles, strategic roles, and diplomacy roles. The findings reveal that the role of executive directors, as described by them, encompasses the full range of Glick's management categories. Glick's research indicated that these categories collectively represent the entire job functions of CEOs in US firms. Consequently, the role of executive directors in Tanzanian LGAs is similar to that of the average US CEO. In a sense, it could even be argued to be broader, as in one of the categories, one of the operational roles, the CEOs in Glick's study were found to be only moderately active, whereas this was not the case for the LGA executive directors' positions.

The fact that the executive director's job encompasses a broad spectrum of role categories does not imply that it also includes every role within each category. On the contrary, the study by Sancino and Turrini (2009) indicates that, within each category, one or two of the roles appeared to be less recognised by the respondent directors as part of their job. These roles are the ones labelled as 'Commander', 'Director', 'Conflict handler', 'Resource allocator', 'Taskmaster', 'Problem solver', 'Technical expert', 'Transformer', and 'Liaison with outside actors'. Thus, executive

role directors have less reason to pursue parole and may be less able to do so (Glick, 2011). A common characteristic of these roles is that the role incumbent personally and autonomously initiates courses of action rather than guiding actions that others have initiated. This reflects a characteristic of the LGA executive director's position, indicating that they are expected and enabled to guard processes rather than shape them within their organisation.

The pattern of outcomes described above aligns with patterns identified in other studies of management roles in public organisations (Allan, 1981; Mintzberg, 1971, 1990; Anderson, Murray, & Olivarez, 2002; Dargie, 1998). Similarly, high-level managers appeared to engage in a wide range of role categories, and certain specific roles seemed to be less prominent. A distinction among the studies, including the current one, pertains to those less prominent roles. One difference between the current study and each of the three other studies is that the role of the figurehead, which emerged as a prominent one in the present study, was notably absent in the other studies. This may reflect a particular characteristic of the executive director's job (well in line with the more general characteristic mentioned above): serving as the formal representative of the LGA to the outside world.

There is a notable variation among executive directors regarding their overall enactment of managerial roles (the extent to which they tend to fulfil the broad spectrum of roles that collectively shape their job). The research findings do not indicate that this variation is linked to the different types of Local government Areas (LGAs) that exist, nor to the education or professional experience of executive directors. However, relationships were found between overall managerial role enactment and other factors, including personality, social capital, age, and gender.

The overall involvement of executive directors in managerial roles was negatively related to the personality trait of agreeableness. Agreeableness was strongly linked to three other traits: extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience, forming a cluster. This finding can best be summarised by stating that a negative relationship exists between that cluster and overall managerial role enactment. We did not observe a relationship between other personality traits, such as conscientiousness, and overall enactment of the managerial role. These findings, taken together, are puzzling due to discrepancies with the outcomes of other research (cf. Barrick & Mount, 1991; Santino & Turrini, 2009; Tengblad, 2006). First, while agreeableness was identified, conscientiousness, considered alongside extraversion, is typically recognised as a predictor of managers' performance quality. Second, the relationships observed between the Big Five personality traits and job performance generally tend to be positive rather than negative. The variable in the present study, overall managerial role enactment, is, strictly speaking, not the same as job performance quality; however, this does not account for the discrepancies.

The overall involvement of executive directors in managerial roles is positively related to one aspect of social capital: the support they receive from their peers, specifically other executive directors of local governments (LGAs). Engaging actively as a manager is closely tied to maintaining strong relationships with these actors. This may explain the variation among executive directors concerning their enactment of overall managerial roles. Glick (2011) found a difference between younger and older executive directors in their perception of the extent to which overall managerial role enactment is characteristic of their job. This was also supported by Mafuru and Mpenzi (2015), who found that executive directors view overall managerial role enactment as highly characteristic of their job. Younger executive directors do so more than their older counterparts. There is also a difference between male and female executive directors in terms of how they perceive the overall managerial role enactment as characteristic of their work. On average, executive directors regard overall managerial role enactment as highly characteristic of their job, with male executive directors more likely to do so than female executive directors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

From these findings, executive directors primarily engage in routine activities, including gathering and distributing information, as well as assigning tasks within the administrative units of the local government area (LGA). These activities align well with the managerial roles of the 'monitor' and the 'disseminator.' The responsibilities of executive directors in the LGA encompass the entire spectrum of managerial role types. The typical executive director of the LGA can be referred to as a general manager. Across the entire range of role elements in the role of executive directors, the aspect of autonomously initiating courses of action is less emphasised than the aspect of guiding actions that other agents have initiated. The executive director primarily acts as an implementer of decisions rather than an initiator.

The administrative behaviour of the executive director primarily qualifies as bureaucratic behaviour in a bureaucratic environment. This aligns with the analysis of the executive director's behaviour in terms of managerial roles: three categories dominate: the informational, the operational, and the interpersonal. The prevalence of bureaucratic behaviour in the day-to-day activities of the executive directors is not accidental but rather by design. While there are differences between executive directors regarding the extent to which they engage in their managerial tasks, these differences are neither substantially related to the type of LGA they preside neither over nor to features of their

background. The greater an executive director's 'richness' in terms of social capital (enjoying the support of important actors around his/her job), the more he/she engages in the entirety of his/her managerial tasks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the government should revise and clarify the job descriptions of executive directors to emphasise not only administrative oversight but also strategic leadership, resource management, and community engagement. This revision should be accompanied by training programs and policy directives that promote proactive decision-making and leadership autonomy at the local government area (LGA) level. Additionally, there is a need to introduce performance-based appraisal systems that explicitly assess executive directors across all six managerial role categories: interpersonal, informational, decisional, operational, strategic, and diplomatic.

Practical and Policy Implications

The local government system in Tanzania is an implementation of the decentralisation policy by devolution. This policy officially emphasises the autonomy of Local government Areas (LGAs) to plan and implement their policies. The literature and empirical evidence, however, indicate that the implementation of the development by devolution policy in terms of local government autonomy falls short of reality (Mollel, 2010). To a large extent, the central government maintains substantial control over the functioning of the LGAs, including, for this matter, appointing and instructing the executive director. As described earlier, the executive director is at the centre of the administrative functioning of the LGA, given that the executive director serves as the linking pin between central and local government and, as such, acts as the agent of the central government in local government, making the executive director instrumental for centralised control. To enhance the executive director's position in the LGA as a leader rather than a bureaucrat, it would make sense to have the full council participate in the appointment and assessment of the executive director, as well as in the drafting of the job description. The appointment of executive directors by the full council will enhance the autonomy of the Local government Association (LGA). The full council will be more in control if it is authorised to establish the executive director's job description and to assess the executive director's performance periodically. By extension, the full council should also have the power to initiate, if called for, a disciplinary measure such as the firing of the executive director on the grounds of poor performance as defined by different policy guidelines. As found in this study, social support, especially from councillors, is beneficial for the executive director's functioning in the LGA, and full council involvement in the appointment procedure will enhance such social support.

Additionally, this will enhance the autonomy of the full council to define the expectations of the LGA in terms of the executive director's performance and the LGA's overall performance. In the current setup, the executive director operates under two superiors: the central government, which is the appointing authority, and the full council, for whom the executive director is expected to deliver his services. In such a setup, the executive director's accountability is divided, which may impact their functioning in the LGA.

Furthermore, the study observed that the assessment of the LGA's performance, as institutionalised in the annual audit report, is primarily financial. Audit reports have also been used as a tool to assess the performance of the executive director. The audit reports provide only a weak assessment of the LGA's actual performance. This is especially evident in the case study, where some Local government Areas (LGAs) faced significant challenges despite receiving a clean audit report. Audit reports are, therefore, not the only source to assess the functioning of the executive director. Formally, there is the OPRAS system that is prescribed to assess the executive director. This seems a better tool to assess the executive director's functioning, especially if the full council is also involved in the assessment.

Limitations and areas for further studies

This study investigates the managerial roles and daily practices of Executive Directors in Local government Authorities, combining self-reported responsibilities with observational insights into their everyday routines. A mixed research approach was employed. Further research should be conducted in other local government authorities, as only 77 out of 184 local authorities completed the questionnaire. Additionally, there is a need to adopt a single approach through a longitudinal design.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank all individuals and government officials who participated in this study.

REFERENCES

Allan, P. (1981). Managers at work: A large-scale study of the managerial job in New York City government. *Academy of Management Journal*, 24(3), 613–619.

Anasel, M. G., Swai, I. L., Lameck, W. U., & Igulu, G. (2019). Emerging Issues from Conducting Researches in Tanzania: Reflections from Selected Cases. *Journal of Policy and Leadership*, 8(1), 5-23.

Anderson, P., Murray, J. P., & Olivarez, A. (2002). The managerial roles of public community college chief academic officers. *Community College Review*, 30(2), 1–26.

Baker, J., Wallevick, H., Obama, J., & Sola, N. (2002). *Local government reform process in Tanzania: Towards a greater interdependence between local government and civil society at the local level* (Research and Development Report No. 6)

Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The Big Five personality dimensions and job performance: *A meta-analysis. Personnel Psychology,* 44, 1–26.

Dargie, C. (1998). The role of public sector chief executives. *Public Administration*, 76(1), 161–177.

Glick, M. B. (2011). *The Role of Chief Executive Officer*, PhD Dissertation

Glick, M. B. (2011). The role of chief executive officer. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 13(2), 171–207.

Hulst, R., Mafuru, W., & Mpenzi, D. (2015). Fifteen years after decentralisation by devolution: Political-administrative relations in Tanzanian local government. *Public Administration and Development*, 35(5), 360–371.

Igulu, G. (2023). *Leadership effectiveness of the executive directors of local government authorities in Tanzania* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Groningen.

Lau, A. W., & Pavett, C. M. (1980). The nature of managerial work: A comparison of public-and private-sector managers. *Group & Organization Studies*, 5(4), 453–466.

Local government Act. (1982).

Mafuru, W., Mpenzi, D., Lyatonga Swai, I., Tefurukwa, O., Masue, O., Ngowi, R., & Lameck, W. (2015). *Politico-Administrative Relations in Tanzanian Local government Authorities*. Available at SSRN 2561813.

Mintzberg, H. (1971). Managerial work: Analysis from observation. *Management Science*, 18(2), B97–B110.

Mintzberg, H. (1990). The manager's job: Folklore and fact. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(2), 163–176.

Mollel, H. (2010). *Participation for local development: The reality of decentralisation in Tanzania* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Groningen].

Sancino, A., & Turrini, A. (2009). The managerial work of Italian city managers: An empirical analysis. *Local government Studies*, 35(4), 475–491.

Swai, I. L. (2017). *The relative participation and influence of female councillors in the decisions of the councils in Tanzania* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Groningen].

Swai, I. L., Igulu, G., Uhahula, F. C., Kaamo, K. J., Enos, E. J., Mkazeni, N., ... & Anasel, M. G. (2022). The Institutional Frameworks Guiding Decision-Making in Tanzanian Local government Authorities: Are They Gender-Sensitive? *UONGOZI Journal of Management and Development Dynamics*, 32(2), 81–94.

Swai, I. L., Uhahula, F. C., Ndesekio, V. E., Nyakega, C. T., & Igulu, G. (2023). Conflicts among councillors in the local government authorities: A tale of Msalala District Council. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 12(2), 7–19.

Tengblad, S. (2006). Is there a 'new managerial work'? A comparison with Henry Mintzberg's classic study 30 years later. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(7), 1437–1461.

The United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of People with Disability*. Geneva: United Nations Organisation.

The United Nations. (2008). *The convention of the rights of persons with disabilities: the convention in brief.* https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rightsof-persons-with-disabilities/the-convention-in-brief.html.

The United Nations. (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. Available from: http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals.

The United Republic of Tanzania (1997). *Regional Administration Act No. 19. -1997*. Tanzania government Printers. Dar es Salaam

The United Republic of Tanzania (2002). *Non-Governmental Organizations Act. -2002*. Tanzania government Printers. Dar es Salaam

The United Republic of Tanzania (2002). *Public Service Act. -2002, amended 2007*. Tanzania government Printers. Dar es Salaam.

The United Republic of Tanzania (2003). *Public Service Regulations* -2003. Tanzania government Printers. Dar es Salaam

The United Republic of Tanzania (2009). *Standing Orders for Public Service -2009*. Tanzania government Printers. Dar es Salaam

The United Republic of Tanzania. (2010). *The Persons with Disabilities Act, -2010*. No.9. Dar es Salaam: government Printers

The United Republic of Tanzania. (2019). *The Local government Finance Act [Cap 290 R.E 2019],* Dar Es Salaam: government Printers.

Tirusew, T. (2006). An Overview of the Development of Inclusive Education in the Last Fifteen Years in Ethiopia. In Savolainen, M Matero & H. Kokkala (Eds). *When All Means All: Experiences in Three African Countries with EFA and Children with Disabilities*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Development Policy Information Unit*, pp.58–68.

Tiwari S, Savastano S, Winters P & Improta M. (2022). Rural economic activities of persons with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Oxford Development Studies.* 50(4):321–35

Tracia, M. A., Mesheshab, H. S. & Horner-Johnson, W. (2024). *Public health dimensions of disability*. https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/social-model-of-disability

Tsengu, V. D., Brodtkorb, S. & Almnes, T. (2006). *CBR and economic empowerment of persons with disabilities: CBR as part of community development, a poverty reduction strategy*. London: University College London Center for International Child Health.

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. (1976). Fundamental principles of disability. https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf

Wameyo, J. (2015). *Effect of Microfinance Services on the Growth of Self-Help Groups for Persons with Disabilities in Kenya.* Nairobi: University of Nairobi.

Wangari, M. (2012). *Policy guidance note: the role of empowerment for poverty reduction and growth in OECD, poverty reduction and pro-poor growth: the role of empowerment,* OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264168350-4-en

World Health Organization and World Bank. (2011). *World Report on Disability. Geneva*: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2001). *The international classification of functioning, disability and health.* Geneva: World Health Organization. www.drpidisability.apps01.yorku.ca

World Health Organization. (2011). *World Report on Disability. Geneva*: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2022). *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities*. Geneva: World Health Organization

Yin, R. K. (2003). Designing case studies. In Qualitative research methods (Vol. 5, No. 14, pp. 359–386). Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods (5th ed.*). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.