

Challenges in the Implementation of Performance Management System in Namibian Public Sector

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Abstract: Organizational performance of the management system helps top management achieve strategic business objectives and goals. It provides valid and useful information for making strategic decisions concerning employees. It includes information on employee performance, and organizational and supervisor's expectations. Despite the benefits arising from the implementation of a well-designed performance management system, the public sector in Namibia still faces challenges when it comes to its realization. It is against this background that this study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by the public sector in the implementation of a performance management system in Namibia. The study used a qualitative research method and collected data through interviews. The sample consists of 42 participants. The data gathered was reviewed against the literature on the subject. The thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the data, where core topics emerging from the discussion and interviews were grouped and analyzed. This research identifies a lack of training and proper orientation in performance management as primary challenges in adopting a performance management system in the public sector. The other contributing factors include inadequate monitoring and evaluation, the shortage of policies supporting the implementation process, poor communication in performance planning, performance reviews, poor feedback on performance and lack of employee involvement in the implementation of the performance management system. Hence, management should provide training and workshops to sensitize the employees on the aims and benefits of a performance management system and develop policies to enforce compliance in the public sector.

Keywords: Implementation, Namibia public sector, Performance Management System

1. Introduction

Performance Management (PM) is the provision of a holistic, ongoing advance to the management of performance (Armstrong, 2017). In contrast to the traditional approach to management, which focuses on management by command, PM focuses on the theory of managing by agreement in advance. The author argues that PM is a means of getting better results from a whole organization by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards, and competence requirements. PM is a process of identifying performance and outcomes and evaluating the results of those outcomes against the organization's strategic objectives and goals (Moullin, 2017). Accordingly, PM requires planning, managing, and reviewing performance in such a way that the whole process leads back to the planning stage in a circular flow. In this way, PM is an ongoing process. PM establishes a shared perspective about what needs to be attained. PM is a combination of interconnected activities and processes that are taken holistically for promoting and enhancing organizational objectives (Armstrong, 2009; 2017). PM is a corporate arrangement rather than an individual arrangement (Armstrong, 2009).

PM focuses on directing employee energy toward achieving strategic organizational goals (Gerrish, 2016; Moulder, 2011). PM is a process that focuses on the contributions of managers and employees working to achieve corporate objectives (Mone, London, & Mone, 2018). Line managers play a vital role in the PM process, which is essential for organizational effectiveness. Performance management is a continuous communication process between employees and line managers aimed to unleash employees' potentials and improve organizational effectiveness. Therefore, PM harmonizes a holistic and logical variety of human resource management practices that collectively encourage and contribute, to the improvement of organizational effectiveness (Armstrong, 2017).

PM is a process primarily serves to interpret the organization's strategic objectives then break them down into understandable organizational goals (Amos, 2004). Without strategic objectives, the organization lost the appropriate direction. The breakdown of strategic objectives into key deliverables is critical in effective performance management (Armstrong, 2017). It assists the organization in assessing the effectiveness of organizational performance. Management involves the establishment of PM objectives, assessment against corporate goals, and subsequent organizational performance (Gerrish, 2016).

The objective of Performance Management System (PMS) is to ensure that employees, line managers and other management teams take necessary actions to meet the overall goal and objectives of an organization (Amos, 2004; Sales, 2019). The conventional PMS focused on financial and productivity measures. Yet, the alternate measures proposed in the last two decades were designed concerning strategy. They included a variety of other performance measures (Mohammad, 2018). According to the author above, the alternative means of PMS include efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, quality, customer satisfaction, innovations and employee satisfaction in addition to financial indicators. Strategically oriented PMS measures incorporate key performance indicators to quantify efficiency, productivity, quality and effectiveness of actions undertaken by the organization as a way of monitoring, controlling, managing, and performing the activities (Mohammad, 2018; Popovič, Hackney, Tassabehji, & Castelli, 2018). The data generated by PMS must be accurate, relevant, timely and easily accessible to employees, line managers, Human Resources Managers, and other management teams for informed decision making in the organization (Popovič et al., 2018). Despite all the well-documented benefits arising from the implementation of a well-designed PMS in various industries, the public sector in Namibia still faces challenges in the implementation of PMS. It is against this background that this study investigates the challenges faced by the public sector in the implementation of PMS in Namibia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Performance Management Systems in Organizations

Organizations are institutional arrangements that allow a group of people to pursue a common goal, with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities amongst members of the organization (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018; Gerrish, 2016). The authors above suggest that an organization is a social unit of people, systematically structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals continuously. An organization has systems of authority, different positions and control with an influence on organizational performance (Frederiksen, Kahn, & Lange, 2020; Gerrish, 2016).

An organization may be regarded as a planned and coordinated activity undertaken by several people to achieve a common goal, where the organization provides a social arrangement for the controlled performance of collective goals. The organization must have a management structure with systems and procedures that determine relationships between functions and positions and subdivides and delegates roles, responsibilities and authority to carry out defined tasks. The

arrangement enables people to cooperate to accomplish organizational objectives. The public sector in Namibia still faces challenges in the implementation of such a useful tool.

In ensuring the change in organizational performance, an organization needs to design a system to monitor the contributions of employees and business units to the intended organizational goal. According to Schot and Steinmueller (2018), decision-makers focus their attention on what they want the system to accomplish, how it will fit with other methods, and how those systems might need to be changed. When designing a Performance Management System, its ethical framework should be considered due to different components that need to be simplified for accuracy (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018).

2.2 Implementation of a Performance Management System

London, (2004) argues that a lot has been achieved in providing alternative performance measurement systems that are more "balanced", but little has been done to guide implementers on how to go about introducing PMS. The study further argues that management requires a company that can employ a performance measurement system. It is acknowledged that "...there are many different (measurement) approaches that can be implemented. However, it is noted that at the end of each of the management processes, managers have reached the stage of deciding what to measure, but nothing has been executed. Kaplan and Norton (1996) observe that scorecard projects can fail due to a lack of technical knowledge and awareness of implementers of the performance measurement system, including defects in the structure, choices of measure and organizational challenges in the process of developing the scorecard and inappropriate change management processes including lack of employee engagement and middle management, poor communication and leadership during the implementation phase.

According to Dubey (2017), there is little knowledge about the actual mechanisms which have positive effects on the success of PMS. This can be explained by the fact that the different studies focus on the design and the implementation of the PMS rather than on the success factors of Performance Management in the organization. Franco-Santos and Otley (2018), assert that more attention must be given to the success factors of Performance Management. The authors further argue that in most cases, when looking at the success of the organizational performance, one tends to look at subjective quantitative issues instead of looking at the evidence in an in-depth qualitative manner.

Assessment of organizational readiness plays a significant role in ensuring organizational effectiveness (Shah, Irani, & Sharif, 2017). Effective implementation of PMS is essential to improve organizational efficiency. The involvement of stakeholders in the planning of corporate strategy is one of the approaches expected to stimulate adoption and ownership and better performance towards goal attainment (Bryson, 2018). Stakeholders' commitment to PM issues is one of the elements of a successful implementation of PMSs. An effective management style is essential in the successful implementation of PM, especially the visible attitude of being willing to share information (du Plessis & van Niekerk, 2017; Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Continuously conveying ownership to the divisions about what the organization wants to achieve can ultimately contribute to success factors of the implementation of a PMS (Mone, 2018).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Expectancy theory

The expectancy theory provides the conceptual basis for remuneration driven performance management. The doctrine holds that employees are motivated to change their behaviours or performance if such change is rewarded (Armstrong, 2012). There are two ways of recognizing excellent performance in organizations in terms of the remuneration-driven approach, namely: pay progression and performance bonuses (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018). The former refers to the rise in remuneration to a higher package. Performance bonus, on the other hand, is a once-off cash reward based on performance.

The remuneration-driven performance management approach places a priority on short term matters at the expense of capability issues which are long term. This approach tends to be costly when the design is incorrect. While legislation binds departments to not spend over a certain percentage of the remunerative budget on rewarding performance, this often fails to take into account that the return on the performance remuneration programme may not equal the implementation costs (Lockett, 1992). The Expectancy theory only highlights a single aspect of performance management which is the appraisal. It tends to undervalue the importance of other human resource development activities.

Goal-Setting Theory

The Goal-Setting Theory was developed by Latham and Locke in 1979 (Latham & Locke, 2018). This theory focuses on four approaches which link goals and outcomes. These include target attention at priorities, encourage efforts, challenge individuals to utilize their expertise and knowledge to improve their chances of success, and enhance innovation. Goal-Setting Theory promotes aspects of performance management such as agreeing on objectives, giving feedback and conducting reviews. This theory takes on a development-based approach to performance. The purpose of development based on the performance management system is to improve the capacity of both the organization and employees by linking the objectives of individual employees of the organization. Competence is regarded as a prerequisite for performance because it is only through their aptitude and knowledge that employees can perform satisfactorily (Sanghi, 2016). Identification of training needs, as well as providing skills development, is a fundamental part of performance management (Popovič et al., 2018). It is through training and development that employees can develop in the areas identified as requiring improvement. Gary, (2009) argues that this is an opportunity for employees to take charge of their personal and career development. Performance reviews should, therefore, focus on the future and potential development instead of the past and criticism. In developing an employee, the objectives of both the organization and supervisor will thus be attained (Mohammad, 2018; Sales, 2019).

Organizational goal setting is likely to be more effective when people participate in setting those goals than just being assigned to them. Also, managers and employees need more flexible training on how to set the goals to ensure that they are detailed and aligned to the organizational objectives (Frederiksen et al., 2020; London, 2004). The organizational goals are critical elements of Performance Management as they ensure that the entire organization agrees on, owns, understands, commits, and contributes towards the achievement of the organizational objectives. Goal-setting demands purposes of PMS and should be communicated clearly within the organization (Johanson, Almqvist, & Skoog, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology adopted in investigating the challenges in the implementation of a performance management system in the Namibian public sector. The research design selected for this study is explained in the next subsection.

3.1 Research Design and Setting

This study adopted a qualitative approach as the investigators were interested in gathering non-numerical information through recording and capturing the diverse responses (Willig, 2013) on the challenges faced by the public sector in the implementation of performance management system in Namibia. This study conducted in Windhoek-Namibian, Windhoek is the capital city of the country; where the headquarters is situated.

3.2 Research Participants and Sampling

A sample of 42 management staff participated in this study ranging from the top management, senior management and line managers using a purposive sampling technique. All the

participants were in the management team. They were knowledgeable enough to provide information on the challenges of performance management system in the public sector, as they were also responsible for appraising the performance of their subordinates.

3.3 Procedure

The researchers approached the Namibian public sector for gatekeeper letter and introduced the study. The gatekeeper assisted the researchers in reaching out to the participants, thereby confirming their availability for face-to-face interviews with the researchers. The participants who agreed to participate in the study gave oral consent. The researchers then informed them their participation in this study is voluntary and have the right to withdraw at any stage of the interviews. Participants' were assured their confidentiality and anonymity are protected in this study. Permission to audio record the interview was requested from each participant and granted accordingly. The authors conducted interviews in Windhoek at a time allocation convenience to each participant. A semi-structured interview guide was developed, which had ten main sections including their experiences on performance management and feedback, challenges experienced in the implementation of performance system in Namibian public sector, interpersonal relationship with subordinates and human resources department. Details on selected interview questions are presented in Table 1. The duration of the interview with each participant was about half an hour. Participants were not rewarded for participating in the interviews. All participants voluntarily expressed their interest to take part in this study after highlighting the primary purpose, and other sub-objectives of the study to them. Participants assured that their personal information and other demographic data would be classified. The identities of participants were protected using pseudo-names to refer to their views.

Table 1: The interview schedule

The main segment of questions	Some examples of questions
Insights on performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your understanding of Performance Management? • What would you describe as the key objectives of a PMS? • How would you describe your company's PMS?
Implementation of performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any specific areas that you felt/feel strongly about concerning the company's PMS implementation activities? • What did you like most and, what did you not like most? • What do you consider to be the top three (3) things that the company did correctly or incorrectly during the implementation of the PMS?
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe how the PMS communicated during the implementation phase? • To what extent did management acknowledge employees' genuine concerns. • How would you describe the communication methods employed as predominantly top to bottom or bottom-up or inclusive? Explain?
Managerial implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were in charge/ control of the organization, what would you have done (or would you do) differently during the implementation process? • In your opinion, what areas require immediate attention to resolve the challenges faced with the company's PMS? • How do you see the company's PMS in future? Do you see it being a success or it will fail?

3.4 Data Analysis

The audio-recordings during the interview sections were transcribed for further analysis by investigators. The significant themes concerning the challenges in the implementation of performance management system were highlighted, and the researchers reached over 96% agreement. In cases of disagreement by the investigators, the audio-recording was replayed for further clarifications and discussions by authors until consensus was reached. An autonomous assessor was engaged to review the transcription, and areas suggesting the need for more explanations highlighted for additional deliberations by authors. The non-numeric data were manually analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2006; 2014) six phases of thematic analysis. The process included:

- Familiarisation with the data
- Generating initial codes
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the report

Also, Creswell and Miller (2000) recommendation were followed by the authors to ensure the validity of qualitative research by obtaining feedback on what participants intended (participant validation) during the interview. It achieved through summarising what they said to validate their views. At data analysis, stage authors discussed the initial themes until the agreement was reached. Cross-validation and group explanation are essential to enhancing intersubjective understanding, analytic rigour and soundness of the analyses of the results (Steinke, 2004). For concealing the private information and other demographic data of participants at the research, pseudo-names were incorporated to refer to the interviewees' expressions.

4. Results and Discussions

Analysis of interview transcripts revealed six major themes:

- Lack of consultation
- Lack of flexibility
- High level of conformity to process
- Existence of silo culture
- Poor communication
- Poor training of implementation officers

The key findings from the study revealed the following as the key challenges faced by the public sector in the implementation of the performance management system in the public sector.

4.1 Lack of Consultation

The study found that one of the critical challenges faced by the public sector in the implementation of the performance management system is the lack of consultation between policy developers, implementation officers and the employees themselves. The study found that employees were not adequately consulted during the development of the policy framework. In some cases, problems emerge as a consequence of employees not being clear as to what is expected from them and what role they should play in the implementation of this framework. Result of the policy is not performing regard to intended goals and objectives, and this misunderstanding has caused disparities in the application of the tool.

4.2 Lack of Flexibility

The study found that the dominant features of the public sector comprise of a rigid structure, control and conformity. The study found the lack of flexibility to be a consequential stumbling

block to the successful implementation of the performance management system in the public sector. The public sector needs to create an enabling environment first before rolling out the program; this is pivotal towards the successful attainment of annual performance targets. It, therefore, becomes imperative for the public sector, the Ministry of Education, in particular, to invest in practices that will facilitate and encourage optimal performance instead of being primarily focused on rule-bound procedures that are inflexible and frustrate adaptation to change. In agreement with the view expressed by Denison (2011), and Schein (2010); Yin (2014) argues that a work environment characterized by rigid policies and procedures has the repercussion of delays in effective implementation and consequently stifles overall performance

4.3 High Level of Conformity to Processes

The study also revealed that the presence of a high level of conformity to processes and procedures within the public sector has the effect of stifling out of bounds thinking. While this may seem to bring consistency and order in the daily operations, it, however, was noted to be a hindrance to creativity. It is mainly the case in instances where employees in the Ministry of Education are required to deliver customized and differentiated service. Also, this focus on conformity results in discouraging innovation in the processes and ultimately negatively impacting on the drive for continuous process improvement. This rigidity does not help in the creation of an enabling environment that would lead to the successful implementation of the performance management system.

4.4 The Existence of Silo Culture

The findings from the study further revealed that the existence of a silo culture, where internal departments within public sector work in isolation from others is a stumbling block to the successful implementation of the performance management system in the public sector. There was consistency in the submission of this argument. Managers from successful multinational enterprises invest both time and resources to ensure that information flows freely between sections, units and departments (Porter, 2010). Then it ensures that all aspects of the organization are functioning effectively as a unit. Boyle (2008) states that this is another contributing factor to how silo cultures enter the organization. Schein (2010) further concurs that departments, especially in a large organization, tend to work in isolation. As a result, there are no platforms for other departments to appreciate what the interdepartmental roles are towards the attainment of the overall ministry or organizational goal. This view is strengthened by Denison (2011), who argues that in the absence of teamwork silo cultures may crop up. The author further cautions that in recent years the silo culture has been recorded as one of the leading causes of organizational ineffectiveness.

4.5 Poor Communication

The findings from the study also pointed to poor communication as another main challenge faced in the implementation of the performance management system in the public sector (Sutheewasinnon, Hoque, & Nyamori, 2016). Often-times employees are not cognisant with the set annual performance targets expected from them. The development process of the objectives is often undertaken exclusive of employees and efforts are not made to articulate the provisions of these targets. As such, employees remain oblivious to the ministry's performance targets and their expected roles towards feeding to the target's implementation matrix. According to Schein (2010), in ensuring productivity and efficiency, it is paramount for both managers and employees to invest in uniform interpretation and application of core values in the organization and each party must be familiar with what is expected from them.

4.6 Poor Training of the Implementing Officers

The study found that management poorly trained to put the organizational performance management system into operation. Adequate staff should be equipped with the necessary resources required in implementing the regulatory performance management system for

positive outcomes. Measuring policy outcomes forms part of policy review and, its intended course is highly critical during policy review.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends that there should be proper training on performance management cycle in line with managers and employees key performance indicators. The training should focus on how performance management system works and how it will be used in the Namibia public sector as well as its intended goals and objectives. On poor communication of the performance feedback, this study recommends extensive communication and marketing of the performance management system to employees and managers. Effective communication is fundamental in ensuring that employees and managers understood their expected levels of work outcomes within the public sector.

This study aimed to investigate the critical challenges that the public sector is facing in the implementation of the performance management system. The findings from this study support theory development in that performance management system are a unique tool for organizational performance improvement as it identifies the key areas where the organization is falling short. Hence, it helps with the training and development needs of an organization, when performance data are adequately utilized and communicated with high levels of emotional intelligence. These findings reveal that the absence of performance feedback leads to disintegration in employee attitudes towards organizational goals and objectives, which also lead to the inefficiency of the organization.

Poor communication of performance management policy framework within the organization leads to rejection by employees. The management teams in the public sector enterprises in Namibia should capitalize on information technology to improve employee engagement. For example, the performance management policy framework could be uploaded on the staff portal of the organization and refer employees to the document via email notification. This study concludes that effective communication is necessary at every stage of the performance management cycle within the public sector. At the performance planning stage, the line managers need to engage their subordinates in setting clear performance objectives. The performance objectives must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. Excellent communication is also vital during performance evaluation and in providing feedback to support subordinates in ensuring performance improvement, especially when the areas of weaknesses are identified. The support from management may include the provision of training and development opportunities to boost employees work outcomes.

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