

Disablers in the Implementation of Performance Management System in the Zambian Public sector

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Abstract: In this study we explored the disablers in Management System in Zambia's public service. The study applied qualitative research methodology with a Case study design. The study comprised of 30 purposively selected Zambia public service workers as participants. The study used semi-structured interviews to generate evidence. The study findings revealed that the implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS) had a number of disablers that greatly affected the quality of service delivery in the public service. The most common barriers included low level of feedback rate, lack of commitment from top management, lack of adequate funding, lack of time, leadership style, constant change of leader, lack of trust, unfairness in the performance managements system, lack of reward system, lack of training in performance management system, lack of effective coordination, ineffective supervision and cultural beliefs. Thus, if the Public service is to improve on its performance, there is need to combine available resources and competencies to overcome disablers consistent with the theory of Resource-Based View. Unless managers of public service realize the importance of understanding and applying the resource based view theory in order to mobilize and deploy available resources, performance management practices will remain inappropriately implemented.

Key Words: Performance Management systems, Human resources management, Strategic plan, Zambia

I. INTRODUCTION

This is an extract from the Thesis of the Principal researcher on Management System in Zambia's public service. As a requirement for the award of a PhD in Performance Management System at the University of Zambia (UNZA) in partnership with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), students are required to conduct a research study that culminates into a Thesis (Simui, Kasonde-Ngandu, Cheyeka and Kakana, 2018). The UNZA-ZOU partnership has been running since 2014 via the distance learning mode. The University of Zambia is configured in a dual mode (regular and distance education modes), (Simui, Thompson, Mwewa, Mundende, Kakana, Chishiba and Namangala, 2017 and Mundende, Simui, Chishiba, Mwewa and Namangala, 2016).

In Zambia, there has been an outcry from the general public over the poor working culture and performance of workers employed in the public service despite the improved condition of services (Times of Zambia News Paper January 13, 2016; Waal and Mulimbika, 2017; Mulenga, 2013). For example, on 13th January 2016, His Excellency the President of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu emphasized on the need to improve

the service deliverables in the public sector. Speaking at the launch held of Performance Based Contract System (PBCS), Mr. Lungu said despite improved conditions of service for civil servants the public has continued to bemoan the poor working culture and performance exhibited by the public service.

Other studies do confirm that public service in Zambia is ineffective and inefficient due to in part the poor working culture and performance of the public servants. In addition, Waal and Mulimbika (2017) explains that the performance of the Zambian governmental sectors has continued to fail in terms of both quantity and quality of services that taxpayers expect from them. To improve the poor working culture and performance of the public workers, the government of the Republic of Zambia since 1977 implementing a number of performance management systems. Among these performance management systems was the Annual Confidential Reports that was used to appraise individual performance (Kanchebele 2012). Kamfwa (2016) indicated that the Annual Confidential Report was passed to the Zambian government by the British Colonial Government and had been using it as the only tool for assessing performance in the public service.

It is important to note however that the Annual Confidential Report was not objective as it was based on the supervisors' personal observations and perceptions about an individual and the appraisee did not have access and input in the process. This made it to be one sided. Kamfwa (2016) further explains that the Annual Confidential Report was not based on work planning and targets setting and, therefore, it had no baselines for performance delivery. This study therefore attempted to contribute to the global body of knowledge on the factors affecting the implementation of performance management system in the selected ministries in the Zambian public sectors. The main objective that motivated this study was to explore the Disablers in the implementation of Performance Management System in the Zambia Public sector.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The resource-based view (RBV) theory informed this study. The theory provides the description of how organisations are actually operated (Lockett et al., 2009). The theory was first presented by Penrose (1959); set forth by Wernerfelt (1984), and later made popular by Barney (1991). The main focus of the resource based view theory is that resources could be

tangible and intangible (Wernerfelt, 1984). According to Barney (1991), in an organization there are a number of resources, which are “valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. These resources found in an organization are the major conditions that would lead to an organization’s sustainable competitive edge. Different authors (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; and Wernerfelt, 1984) have stated that the resources that organizations possess have substantial influence on the goals and strategies of the operations.

Additionally, Newbert (2007) found a positive relationship between resources and the performance of an organization. He states that when resources and competencies are combined in an organization, this could be an explanation of any performance differences noted in organizations rather than just resources. The resource based view perspective builds on the premise that superior profitability stems from inside the organization. This follows the argument of Combs and Ketchen (1999) that the key requirements of the resource based view theory are that the relevant resources, regardless of their nature (i.e. resources, skills or dynamic capabilities), are specific to the service and are not capable of easy rival imitation (Barney 1991). These services are the building stone of the preservation of the strategic edge realized from the organization’s package of resources. These services must satisfy the requirements of valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitute and not from the supplies of resources that are external to the company (Barney, 1991; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984).

A resource is only useful if it creates income that can be used by the company, according to Bowman and Ambrossini (2003). This can be achieved by taking into account considerations such as fluctuations in demand for goods and services, imitation or replacement of rivals to ensure consistent sales production (Peteraf, 1993). A rare resource owned by a company that produces superior income must not be widespread to rivals otherwise it would become an entrance advantage and an asset generating non-profit (Bowman & Ambrossini, 2000). The durability of a resource's benefit depends on how hard it is for other companies to reproduce it (Bowman & Ambrossini, 2003).

A resource that could not be interchanged by another resource that could deliver the similar result is said to be non-substitutable (Bowman & Ambrossini, 2000). Thereafter, it is possible for competitors to establish how a resource could easily be imitated and come up with mitigation strategies. Bowman and Ambrosini (2003) asserted that resources, which prove to be “valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable” contribute to competitive advantage of the organization by delivering products and/services perceived as being of good quality by customers. Thus, in this study, the RBV theory was applied to illuminate understanding on the nature of disablers inherent within public service management services and how the status quo could be improved upon.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research approach to explore the implementation of Performance Management System in Zambia’s Public Service from a constructivist (interpretivist) world view to make sense of the meanings the participants had about the Performance Management System based on their lived experiences. An interpretivist paradigm espouses “relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent concrete understandings), and a naturalistic (in a natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:32). Primarily this study was concerned with the understanding of how individuals attribute interpreted meaning to their environment. Interpretivism counters the application of the scientific model in studying the social world (Bryman, 2012), by arguing that human behaviour is not governed by universal laws as espoused in quantitative approaches. While a positivist paradigm would be ideal in guiding a quantitative study on this topic that would allow generalising the findings, they are inadequate for gaining an in-depth understanding due to their emphasis on quantification in the collection and analysis of data, instead of an emphasis on fine grained subjective reflections on the issue.

Case study research design

A case study research design was used in this study because it involves the careful and thorough observation of a social unit such an organization, community, individual, event, programme or policy (Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2012, 2014). In this case, the focus was on the implementation of Performance Management System in the Zambian Public Service. A case study is “useful to address descriptive questions such as ‘what is happening or has happened?’ or an explanatory question [like] ‘How or why did something happen?’”(Yin, 2012, p. 5).

Sample Size

In making a decision on the number of participants to be included in the sample, several factors as proposed by Morse (2000) were considered in this study. The factors included the scope of the study, the quality of the data that is to be gathered and the design of the study. The sample included 30 participants selected from top management of the Ministry of Finance, Health and Energy headquarters in Lusaka. The sample was distributed as 10 from the ministry of Finance, 10 from Ministry of Health and 10 from Ministry of Energy. Silverman (2005) indicated that in qualitative research designs the sample has small numbers. This is because the researcher is interested in discovering, understanding and gaining insights about the phenomenon under investigation. However it should be noted that in qualitative research numbers are not as important as the criteria used to come up with the sample (Creswell, 2012).

Sampling procedure

Purposive sampling technique was applied as it enabled the researchers to draw a sample with rich and varied insights into the phenomenon that is being studied.

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

The criteria for the selection of the participants for this study included:

- i. Civil servants currently working under the ministry of Health, Energy and Finance at headquarters in Lusaka
- ii. Civil servants who should have worked for the period of more than five years.
- iii. Civil servants interested to be part of the study.

Data Generation Procedure

A triangulated approach was used to generate data through: semi-structured interviews and Focus Groups Discussions. The interviews took place within the work premises to give participants some level of empowerment and control of the research process. All the interviews were conducted in the English language and lasted for approximately 60 minutes, which was within the 90 minutes recommended duration for a qualitative interview (Seidman, 2006). For recording purposes, two methods were used. Firstly, the researcher took up both roles of the recorder and interviewer by recording the responses in a field notebook. Secondly, the researcher made use of a voice recorder to record the interviews with permission and consent from the interviewees.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study findings revealed that the implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS) had a number of barriers that greatly affected the quality of service delivery in the public service.

Low of Feedback rate

The research findings revealed that the level of feedback posed a challenge on the implementation of the performance management system among the public service workers. This was on the account that the subordinates did not receive any feedback from their supervisors. According to the participants' view, most of them demonstrated that they had been appraised but have never received any feedback. The actual views of participants were as follows:

This performance management system is just for formality. I say so because, ever since I was appraised, I have never received any feedback on my strengths and weaknesses (Pt.01)

Similarly, it was indicated by another participant that:

Feedback in any given situation is important in that it prevents the loss of confidence in the system. In this case we are not given any feedback with regard to PMS therefore we have lost confidence. (pt.09)

These research findings are in agreement with the study done by Ramataboe (2015) whose purpose was to establish the effectiveness of service delivery in the Ministry of Social Development in Lesotho through the implementation of the performance management system. In this study it was revealed that among the challenges in the implementation of the PMS included lack of feedback. In addition, the research findings are also in agreement with the study done by Kuhlil and Michael (2018) whose research study aim was assessing the practices and challenges of employee performance management system (EPMS) at Commercial bank of Ethiopia. Among the results was lack of regular feedback. In Zambia, Kafwa's (2016) study that was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the Annual Performance Appraisal System (APAS) in improving performance in selected Ministries of the Zambian Civil Service revealed that there were inconsistencies in feedback provision in the concerned Ministries.

Feedback in any given situation is important as it leads to the effective implementation of the performance management system. The presence and type of feedback usually has an influence on the attitudes, happiness and job satisfaction of the public service workers. Lack of feedback has an impact on the employees' self-confidence and motivation. Feedback usually motivates employees to work extra hard especially when they have learnt something new about their strength and weaknesses. As the supervisor provides feedback, they make their subordinates to move from uncomfortable to comfortable. This in return increases the self-confidence of the subordinates and in return the performance of the subordinates improves. However, it is important to note that only positive feedback or constructive criticism has the power to increase the self-confidence and motivation of the subordinates. In Amanda's (2013) study that was conducted to identify the challenges impacting performance management implementation (PMI) in public universities in Uganda, it was revealed that limited motivation and staff morale led to the non-implementation of the performance management systems.

Lack of commitment from top management and junior officers

The findings of the study affirmed that lack of commitment from top management and leadership and from junior officer was a challenge in the implementation of the performance management system. The reasons that were advanced pertained to top management's lack of commitment on the implementation of the performance management system and lack of meetings aimed at discussing PMS. Other reasons included lack of clear and reliable gains in the implementation of the performance management system.

Comments on the state of commitment by participants included the following:

You know that top management is the vision carrier of the Ministry's goals and aspiration but there is total lack of commitment on the part of top management on the

implementation of the Performance Management System and this is why it is failing in this ministry. (Pt. 02)

Equally, another participant felt that lack of commitment from top management on the implementation of Performance Management System was a challenge. The actual views of the participant were as follow;

As long as top management is unwillingly and uncommitted on the implementation of the performance management system then anything can happen (Pt.30)

The above views were also indicated by another participant when he said:

We do not have meetings with top management where we can discuss PMS. This shows how uncommitted management is towards PMS (Pt. 40)

In addition, on the part of junior staff, it was observed by one participant that

Junior officers are sometimes problematic in that as long as they do not see any clear and reliable gains in the implementation of the performance management system they will always oppose it and be uncooperative (Pt.59)

The above views were made much stronger when another participant expressed her thoughts in the following way;

To tell you the truth, the idea of performance management system is a bad one and I cannot be committed to such a bad thing. It is there just to frustrate us as junior officers (Pt. 60)

The above findings are in line with the study by Jurnal and Siti-Nabiha (2015) which aimed at investigating the implementation of performance management systems in Indonesia's local government. The findings revealed that the Mayor (a senior manager) played a major role in institutionalizing the PMS, especially in integrating the outcome-based measures into the planning, reporting, monitoring and evaluation and reward systems. In addition, the findings of this study are also in agreement with Sefali (2010)'s study aimed at investigating the impact of the Performance Management System on accountability in the Public Service of Lesotho. It was revealed that there was no evident commitment by the Government of Lesotho to properly implement the PMS.

High-level commitment from the top management and junior government officers can contribute to the improvement and usage of the performance management system in the public service. What is worth noting is that almost all heads of departments in the ministries visited did not seem to understand what their responsibilities and roles were in as far as performance management, improvement and appraisal were concerned. Hence, majority of the participants considered all matters concerning the PMP and APAS as solely the responsibility of the human resource departments. In fact, it is now generally agreed that performance management and appraisal should be the concern and responsibility of every

manager in an organization as they have a direct impact on the overall performance of the same organizations.

Lack of Resources

In addition to the above finding it was revealed that the lack of resources posed a challenge on the implementation of the performance management system among the public service workers. This was on the account that there was inadequate funding and time to implement the performance management system.

This theme was emphasized by almost every participant. As indicated below:

The implementation of the performance management system need money and as you may be aware that government is not providing adequate finding to these ministry as such programmes usually suffer as they are not printer (Pt. 56)

The above finding is in agreement with Okech's (2017) study who conducted a study whose purpose was to examine the influence of performance contracting on efficiency in the provision of service delivery in the public sector. Top of his findings were inadequate resources. Adequate resources are a prerequisite for the success of any major programme of change. However, in the implementation of the PMP, as well as other reform efforts, financial and physical resources have not been readily available. In fact, a large number of civil servants (i.e. 69.9 percent) argued that they were often given jobs without the necessary (physical and financial) resources to carry them out. Contributing to this was the continued poor performance of the Zambian economy presenting a major threat to the operations of the civil service. For a long time now the operations of the civil service has been severely affected by untimely and inadequate funding due to the weak government resource base resulting from the poor economic performance (MAFF, 2001; MLGH, 2000).

Lack of Time

Another prominent challenge that was identified by public service workers in this study was time. All the public service workers that were involved in this study mentioned that time could not allow them to implement the performance management system.

This theme was emphasized by almost every participant. As indicated below;

It requires a lot of time to undertake regular appraisal processes (Pt.29)

This finding is in line with the White's (2015) study in which the participants indicated that they were so busy with their work that they could not find time for regular or consistent reflection. This issue of lack of time was more pronounced in the study conducted by Khan (2012). In Khan (2012) the majority of the respondents regarded lack of time as the major barrier to their engagement in reflective practice. The lack of time for the implementation of the performance management

system could be attributed to many factors. These would be the rigidity of the work environment and workload experienced by public service workers. The working time is allocated in such a way that it does not allow time for the implementation of the performance management system.

Lack of Training

Public service workers were asked to identify the challenges to the implementation of the performance management system. All the participants involved in the study indicated that lack of training was the major challenges that disabled the implementation of the work performance of staff. Public service workers indicated in this study that they had not received any training in performance management system. For instance, the following interview indicated the views of one participant:

Lack of training on how to implement performance management is a major challenge that usually prevent us from implementing the performance management system (Pt.33)

In the focus group discussion, it was noted as follows;

If we were trained on the performance management system I think we could be implementing it with easy (FG, 07: Pt, 05)

Similarly, it was observed by one participant that:

We did not have any formal training on the conditionalities of performance management system (FG, 07: Pt, 01)

This finding is similar to the finding of Kuhil and Michael (2018). In Kuhil and Michael's (2018) study it was revealed that there was limited trainings concerning the purpose, requirements and implications of PM among employees. This was also observed by Ramataboe (2015) that lack of training on performance management i.e. lack of orientation on PM, posed a challenge on the implementation of the performance management system. In addition to the above, Sefali's (2010) study aimed at investigating the impact of the Performance Management System on accountability in the Public Service of Lesotho. The civil service also lacks comprehensive induction, orientation and re-orientation programmes for officers appointed in the new structures (PSMD, 2001). As a result, no significant changes have taken place in terms of the civil service work culture after restructuring and the introduction of the PMP and APAS. New employee's induction is thus, left to the informal channels within organizations thereby creating the risk of them being taught ineffective work processes and attitudes. As Fitzpatrick (2003) put it, any new entrant to an organization should undergo induction training; ideally at an early stage and before some "disgruntled old hand" tells them the "real story" around the organization. 'There is no real expense involved in delivering such training in-house, and the bad effects of "negative socialisation" can be avoided' (Fitzpatrick, 2003:23). Formal induction ensures that individuals are clear about their jobs and about the aims, objectives and working practices of the organization they have joined. Formal induction therefore, cannot be overlooked,

especially when the government is trying to change to the more efficient and effective work processes such as strategic and work planning, target setting, activity based budgeting and the use of a more objective and open annual performance appraisal system.

Lack of effective reward system

Respondents further revealed during the semi-structured interview and focus group discussion that lack of an effective reward system posed a challenge on the implementation of the Performance Management System. Two sub-themes emerged from this main theme namely: non-financial rewards and financial rewards.

It was revealed that's lack of an affective reward system was a challenge that impeded on the implementation of the performance management system as indicated by one of the participant as follows;

The idea of the performance management system is excellent and constructive. The only issue I have with this system is the lack of a reward system. Yeah you can be appraised by your supervisor but what do you get out of that? Nothing (Pt.46).

Additionally, during the focus group discussion, the above idea was expressed by another participant. The actual views by the participant were as follows;

I started work a long time ago and I have gone through a number of performance systems but up to now, I have not seen any value in these performance management system and am about to retire (FG, 06: Pt.3)

The above study finding are in line with the study done in Brazil by Pacheco, Portulhak and Espejo (2017) that aimed at the analysis of how performance management was implemented in a teaching hospital located in the south of Brazil. The study revealed that there were inadequacies of the artifact and the reward system. In addition to the above, the findings are in line with the study done by Sefali (2010) that aimed at investigating the impact of the Performance Management System on accountability in the Public Service of Lesotho. The results of the study indicated that lack of incentives and the majority of the public officials were not motivated enough to correctly implement the PMS.

The public service lacks a clearly defined wage policy upon which salary and wage administration could be based. Currently, salary administration is being done arbitrarily whereby certain categories of public workers, due to their ability to bargain, earn more ad hoc salary increases that have brought about distortions in the salary structure of the civil service (PSMD, 2001). Such distortions in salary awards usually affect the motivation and morale of civil servants, and in turn the overall performance of both institutions and individuals. Policy is meant to guide practice (Simui, Namangala, Tambulukani and Ndhlovu, 2018).

Lack of Trust

The research findings of the study affirmed that lack of trust was among the challenges that led to the non-implementation of the performance management system. The reasons that were advanced pertained to junior officers not trusting top management.

One of the participants observed that,

I just do not trust the whole programme on performance management system, it is like you are championing a system that will work against you (Pt.16).

The above findings are in line with Kuhl and Michael's (2018) study that was conducted in Ethiopia aimed at assessing the practices and challenges of employee performance management system. Among the findings of the study was lack of trust. It is important to note that trust is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Trust in an organization is an important part of professional relationships between co-workers, between managers and employees, or between employees and managers. Trust is a key element of effective implementation of the performance management system as it requires effective communication and team-work between co-workers, between managers and employees, and between employees and managers. Trust depends on the integrity, strength, ability and surety of a person. The implementation of the performance management system is dependent on trust. Trust and the implementation of the performance management system are both emotional and a rational act. This is because they are associated with affection, gratitude, security, confidence, acceptance, interest, admiration, respect, liking, appreciation, contentment, and satisfaction. These are important aspects that can lead to building of trust and the implementation of the performance management system.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the implementation of the PMS had a number of challenges that greatly affected the quality of service delivery in the public service. The most common challenges brought out by the participants included low of feedback rate, lack of commitment from top management, lack of commitment from top management and leadership and lack of commitment from junior officers. In addition, lack of resources, lack of adequate funding, lack of time, unresponsive leadership styles, constant change of managers/ transfers of managers, lack of trust, fear of the unknown, unfairness in the performance management system, lack of training in performance management system, lack of effective coordination, ineffective supervision and cultural beliefs were noted to be disablers in the implementation of the PMS. Thus, if the Public service is to improve on its performance, there is need to combine available resources and competencies to overcome disablers consistent with the theory of Resource-Based View. Unless managers of public service realize the importance of

understanding and applying the resource based view to mobilize and deploy available resources, performance management practices will remain inappropriately implemented.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers provide five recommendations.

- i. Top management should engage junior officers in discussing the issues affecting the effective implementation of performance management system and on ways to improve quality service delivery in the public service.
- ii. The government should increase funds in form of grants to support the implementation of the performance management system.
- iii. Public service workers need to be trained in pedagogical knowledge and skills to spur motivation and confidence among staff.
- iv. Clearly defined wage policy upon which salary and wage administration could be based. Distortions in salary awards affect the motivation and morale of civil servants, and in turn the overall performance of both institutions and individuals.
- v. Top management need to build trust among staff with regard to performance management system so that implementation of the PMS is not viewed as a trap or a punishment tool thus improving employee's commitment and productivity.

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