

An evaluation of the effectiveness of performance management systems on service delivery in the Zimbabwean civil service

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the Results Based Management system in improving service delivery in the Zimbabwean civil service. The study was carried out from January 2013 to April 2013, in four Ministries. The methodology employed document analysis, open-ended questions and face to face interviews. The study found that the performance management system was fraught with challenges due to its complexity and non-adherence to its tenets by the employer. Documentary evidence showed that performance related awards had not been effected since 2007 due to financial constraints and non-submission of employees' final ratings to the Civil Service Commission for payment purposes. For a few ministries which got performance related salary increases, it was found that these were applied arbitrarily. Advancements and promotions were not tied to performance. Most respondents indicated that performance appraisals were hurriedly done at the end of each year so as to fulfill the Civil Service Commission's performance requirements. It was therefore, concluded that the current performance management system was not enhancing the provision of quality service in the civil service because employees did not see any merit in its application. The recommendations were that the system needed to be simplified and employees needed to be thoroughly trained. It was concluded that the employer should adhere to the tenets of the performance management system so as to make it effective.

Keywords: self-assessment, individuals work problems, continuous process, specification, evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has been going through some reforms since independence in 1980, with the aim of improving service delivery in the civil service. Zimbabwe, like most developing countries, has been facing serious socio-economic challenges which led to the poor performance of the economy. The general public has been complaining about poor service delivery by government employees. Most African governments have been offering poor services to the general public (Binnendijk 2000). The Zimbabwean civil service is currently using the Results Based Management System (RBM) to measure the performance of both human and financial resources. Before the introduction of RBM, the government attempted various systems such as the Public Finance Management System, Mission Statements, Client Charters and the Performance Appraisal System. The former performance management systems failed to yield the desired results, which is delivery of quality service to the general public. The current performance management system was introduced in 2006, and was fully embraced by all government departments in 2012. Musingafi (2013) avers that this is the fourth attempt to bring some reforms to the Zimbabwean civil service since independence in 1980. He further found that the implementation of the current performance management system in Zimbabwe has been an area of controversy with regard to issues of applicability and benefits. The system is not understood and appreciated by most employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Performance management can be defined as a continuous process of improving individuals, team and organisational performance (Bussim 2012). Performance management has to be the core of all organisations since it gives strategic direction and how resources are going to be distributed towards the achievement of set goals and objectives. The aim of performance management is to improve service delivery through effective and efficient application of resources. The Malaysian Civil Service Guide (2006) regards performance management as a continuous process which is aimed at improving individual performance through consistent feedback. The general public is interested in better and more responsive services, which should translate to improved quality of life. Kiragu, (1998) found that poor service delivery in the civil service is caused by unskilled labour, poor compensation and poor working conditions. There has also been lack of evaluation and feedback from management. The study further cited lack of targeted training and corrupt tendencies by some senior government officials as major challenges. Patronage and corrupt tendencies were found to be some of the problems when it comes to salary increases and promotions.

The Zimbabwean Government chose RBM because it covers the following critical areas; Planning (which is done collectively with all parties concerned), Results Based Budgeting (RBB) looks at the financial aspect), Personnel Performance System (PPS) (evaluates the actual performance of all members in the organisation against set targets) and Monitoring and Evaluation is continuous and at looks at the performance of all the above aspects. Areas which need improvement during the performance cycle are also highlighted and action is taken accordingly. This approach helps the organisation with decision making. RBM integrates the human resource aspect with the financial aspect and link them to the outcomes with the aiming of improving lives of communities through provision of superior service.

Performance management emphasizes agreement of objectives and development needs and the importance of self-assessment and self-development. Performance management focuses on the evidence provided by the analysis of what individuals and their managers did or did not do as an explanation of the results achieved. Armstrong (1991) found that

performance management provides more opportunities for individuals to discuss their work with their managers in an attractive atmosphere. An important feature of performance management is its aspect of being a continuous process and a natural aspect of management. Performance management systems assess performance by reference to agreed objectives. The objectives may be expressed in terms of targets, standards of performance or tasks to targets to be accomplished within a period of time based on an agreed specification.

Performance management gives direction to the employees through guidance from management (Medlin 2013). Managing organisations is about managing performance of people who work in organisations. The South Australian Government Guide to Performance for the State indicates that governments require a result driven public sector where staff know what is expected of them and how they will be supported. This approach recognises that results are achieved through teams and there is need to have appropriate incentives in place. In spite of the assumptions from employees that performance management does not improve performance, research found that RBM if well implemented can improve government performance (Mahakani 2012). He further found that most government employees do not clearly understand Results Based Management System. The problems could be lack of training and feedback from management. Planning, communication and feedback are critical elements for the success of RBM in organisations.

It is believed that performance management is two-fold; firstly; organisations need to evaluate the performance of managers in achieving strategic goals and secondly, evaluate how employees through guidance from management help in achieving both organisational and individual needs. Establishment of clear links between organisational development, the delivery of quality services and the development of employees at work is important (Malaysian Civil Service Guide, 2006).

The Zimbabwean Public Service Regulations of 2000 as amended in 2001 specify that all employees shall be appraised annually so as to improve the provision of services to the general public. The regulations further state that the Commission or the head of Ministry or department, as the case maybe, shall decide on what action, if any to be taken on the basis of the appraisal, including-

- Advancement or promotion;
- Transfer to a post more in keeping with competence of the member concerned;
- Participation in skills development courses to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the member concerned;
- The granting or withholding of any performance award and;
- Demotion or discharge subject to and in accordance with disciplinary procedures provided in Part V111

Employees' perceptions about performance management

Buchner (2007) found that most employees have a negative feeling about performance management. Employees feel that the system manipulates employees without rewarding their efforts. However, research shows that if well implemented RBM can motivate employees to be more productivity. DeNisis and Pritchard (2006) aver that attitudes toward performance management affect the performance of employees in organisations.

Matiza (2001) submits that performance appraisal is viewed with mixed feelings in Zimbabwe, the majority of them negative. Mandishona (2003) indicates the survival of the organisation and good service delivery is dependent on how employees perceive the whole system. There should be a win-win situation between the employer and employees. Organisations are therefore, called upon to make sure that employees' benefits are tied to performance and the system has to be regarded as fair and just by the employees. It is also

critical for management to gauge the effectiveness of the system through analyzing the attitudes and behaviours of their employees. Benefits which can accrue from good performance could be either in the form of bonuses or salary raises (<http://www.wisegEEK.org/what-is-performance-management.htm>). Performance management allows continuous improvement, promotes learning and professional development and facilitates engagement and rewarding for employees (usfweb2.usf.edu).

The benefits of Results based management system

Results based management system has many benefits to the public service. The approach allows employees to come up with clear goals and objectives. When employees create their own work plans, they become responsible and committed to achieve them. Employees are also rewarded and recognised through superior performance. This approach focuses on results not the processes. Training and staff development are regarded as the integral part of RBM. RBM is the most reliable method of measuring performance since it focuses on results and is also concerned with improved employee motivation and retention. Performance management improves communication since there is constant interaction between the supervisor and the employee. This then implies that good performance has to be rewarded and bad performance improved through training or other means necessary. Salary reviews, promotions, training and transfers have to be effected after performance evaluation is done. Performance management should facilitate in the provision of quality service to all stakeholders.

Performance measurement

After all has been said and done, measurement of performance is critical for planning purposes. Performance measurement is concerned with how well the set goals and objectives are met against set standards. It is actual performance versus desired performance. The approach involves formulating and agreeing with the supervisor on objectives. The parties also need to agree on indicators, targets and how monitoring of performance is going to be done. Employees should be aware of what is expected from them by the employer. In the Zimbabwean civil service, for individuals to be said to have performed, they are usually measured against the following four indicators;

- The quantity measure- how much of what are going to be achieved
- Quality-quality standards are normally prescribed for instance adherence to the, Civil Service Commission standards or adherence to the provisions of the Public Finance Management Act and circulars. Quality is 100%.
- Timeliness- time taken to achieve a task.
- Cost- how much does it cost to get the output/desired results

Uses of performance information

Performance management information is used in decision making, planning and how the organisation can best improve on its performance. Performance information can be used to identify performance gaps and institute relevant training. Performance information can also be used for resources allocation.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Results Based Management system on service delivery in the Zimbabwean civil service

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and sampling

Government Ministries in Zimbabwe are divided into the following clusters; economic, social, security and service. Four Ministries representing the four clusters were purposively selected out of the 32 Ministries. The four Ministries had a total of 350 employees. The four Ministries had 30 directors and deputy directors and these became part of the sample. The other 70 participants, from officer level to cleaners were randomly selected to come up with a sample of 100 participants

Research instruments

The study used documents, interviews and questionnaires. The research questions and interviews included the following questions:

1. Do you understand the current performance management system? If your answer is Yes or No please explain
2. To what extent has the performance information assisted you in identifying your training needs?
3. To what extent is the performance information being used for financial rewards?
4. To what extent is the performance information being used for promotional purposes?
5. Do you feel the current performance management system is helping to improve the quality of service delivery?
6. What do think needs to be done to improve the current performance management system?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

It was established that 70% of the respondents did not understand the current performance management system. Interviews revealed that employees did not receive adequate training. The majority of the respondents (68%) felt that the system was complex and needed to be simplified. There was general agreement by the respondents that the process promoted engagement between employees and management when crafting their work plans. Ninety eight (98%) of the respondents indicated that there was engagement in developing work plans at the beginning of every year. Interviews revealed that the system lacked continuous feed as no meetings were conducted during the course of the year.

The employee and his supervisor would meet at the end of the year to decide on the final performance. The majority of the respondents (89%) indicated that the performance information was partially being used to identify performance gaps so that proper training programmes could be put in place. Interviews revealed that employees chose programmes they were interested in without necessarily linking them to performance gaps.

Most respondents (79%) indicated that the performance information was partially being used for financial rewards, advancements, and promotions. Salary advancements were not being systematically implemented. It was found that performance information was being

used when the Civil Service Commission wanted to promote an individual. On what needed to be done to improve the current performance management system, 80% of the respondents indicated that the process should produce information which is qualitative and easily understood and applied at the workplace. The majority of the (87%) respondents argued that it was important to attach meaningful rewards to performance and also the need to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation process. The forms needed to be simplified. Objectivity on the whole process is critical as this would allow good performance to be rewarded accordingly.

The majority of the respondents (78%) indicated that RBM was not helping to improve service delivery in the civil service. Documents observed showed that performance was not tied to performance. Members of the civil service last received their performance awards in 2008. Even though some members had received these, they felt that the amount was too little to make any difference. It was further observed that all members received bonuses regardless of their performance levels.

Seventy seven percent (77%) of the respondents indicated that RBM was complex to understand and implement. Twenty senior and middle level managers also indicated that the system was complex and time-consuming. Most respondents (69%) indicated that there was no constant monitoring and feedback from their supervisors during the year. It was observed that employees only met at the beginning of the year setting their targets and also at the end of the year when finalizing the process. The complexity of the document was leading to resentments by employees.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Performance management is a tool meant to improve performance and help in decision making in organisations. From the findings of this study, it was found that the RBM was not understood by the majority of the employees (78%). If such a system is not understood even by some of the senior managers it is an indication that it is weak in its application. From the findings of this study, it was clear that the current performance management system (RBM) was not helping to improve the quality of service in the civil service. Even though Bussim (2012) indicated that performance management was meant to improve individuals, teams and organisational performance, in this study it was observed that the current system was not understood by most employees even after having received training due to its complexity. This is in agreement with Matiza (2001) and Musingafi (2013) who found that RBM has been received with mixed feelings and controversy in Zimbabwe, concerning issues of applicability and benefits. It is also critical to separate performance evaluation and development feedback discussions. The findings of this study also concur with Buchner (2007), who indicated that the process should improve service delivery but RBM carries a negative perception about the whole process. As indicated by Mandishona (2003), for this process to be effective, employees have to view the whole process as fair and beneficial; otherwise service delivery will continue to be compromised. The process could be failing because employees are failing to appreciate the system as there are no tangible benefits attached to it.

Even though most of the employees were undertaking various courses, most of them were not linked to the performance gaps identified during the performance cycle. This is in agreement with Kiragu (1998) who indicates that organisations lack targeted training. Instead, employees requested to be financially assisted to undertake programmes of their choice which might not have direct link to their tasks. The findings of this study are not in agreement with the provisions of the SI of 2000 as amended in 2001 on performance appraisals. The current performance management system is not seeking to identify performance gaps engage in skills development courses so as to enhance efficiency and

effectiveness. Ministries have a human resources development plan developed every year where members advise human resources of the programmes that they wish to be considered for in the following year.

Literature indicates that salaries, advancements and promotions have to be tied to performance. In this study, it was observed that there was no meaningful relationship between performance and financial rewards between salary increments, promotions and advancements. These were done in a haphazard manner without considering performance. This has left many employees disgruntled and they felt that there was no need to work hard but should work so that they get paid. From the above discussions, it is very clear that the benefits of performance management were not being realized in the Zimbabwean civil service due to the weaknesses in the application of the system. Continuous and constant feedback is critical in improving performance of employees. The indication is that service delivery will remain poor as long as employees are not rewarded according to performance. Employees feel that the implementation of RBM is time consuming with no positive results for them and the organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was recommended that thorough training of all levels of employees was critical so that the system could be understood and appreciated by employees. Adherence to the tenets of the Results Based Management System could go a long way in addressing some of performance issues raised by employees.

LIMITATIONS

Some participants failed to give appropriate answers. Some questionnaires were returned incomplete and these were not considered for analysis.

CONCLUSION

It was observed that the current performance management system (RBM) was not helping to improve service delivery in the civil service. It was concluded that intensive training and workshops for all employees were critical so that employees could understand and appreciate the system. Ownership of the programme is needed to be inculcated in the employees so as to improve service delivery which would lead to a better society through the provision of quality service.

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