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Employee Attitudes and Comprehension on the functionality of the Performance Management System (PMS) in the Ministry of Education

Botswiri T. Martin

The University of Namibia

Abstract

This research sought to assess the effects of employee attitudes and perceptions on the functionality of the Performance Management System (PMS) in the Ministry of Education. It also aimed to achieve the following research objectives: to determine whether employee attitudes and perceptions influenced the PMS. To that end, concerns on whether employee attitudes and perceptions affected PMS functionality had not been answered. Therefore, this narration prompted the study. Quantitative research methods were utilised to gain in-depth knowledge on the topic. A triangulation paradigm was utilised wherein the quantitative research validated the qualitative research findings. A sample size of 80 respondents was statistically determined and targeted out of the workforce of 300 employees at the Ministry. Stratified random sampling technique was utilised to select the sample size. The research aimed for a sample of 16 respondents in management positions and 64 in non-management positions. Primary data was collected through an expert reviewed structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions. The data collected was analysed using SPSS Statistical Software program version 25.0, to categorise the collected data into meaningful information that involved cross-tabulations and bar graphs. The study revealed that attitudes of non-compliance to set standards do affect the PMS. The study concluded that PMS principles were inadequately enforced, by part because of poor comprehension of the system. It was recommended that the scheme should be treated with the seriousness it required for it to operate with excellence. Understanding the system's policies and procedures should, therefore, be prioritised.

Keywords: attitude, comprehension, performance, management, sytem

Introduction

In the aftermath of Namibia's independence in 1990, work performance in Government was measured using the Merit Assessment and the Efficiency rating system. The system operated on the basis of rewarding employee attributes with promotion. As such, performance was measured based on incidents that occurred during the reporting period. In the end, the system did not meet its delivery objectives. This was because, the scheme focused more on rewarding employee qualities rather than assessing the impact of those attributes. Therefore, a need to realign the system to one that would better manage work performance in the public sector emerged.

The Wages and Salary Commission (WASCOM) recommended an alternative system termed the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) in 1996. PAS was considered as an incentive based system that would motivate employees by means of monetary reward. Following a lack of sufficient training prior to implementation and a supporting organisational culture, WASCOM suspended PAS in 1998 (Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Namibia, 2011). To that end, the onus to introduce a workable solution to better evaluate work performance in the public service remained wanting. Subsequently, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) with the assistance of the Centre for Public Service Training (CPST), conducted a training needs assessment among senior management across the public service of Namibia (Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Namibia, 2011). The Performance Management System (PMS) was, therefore, identified and implemented as the correct measure and tool to improve and manage work performance in the public service of Namibia.

Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Namibia (2011) underlined the PMS as a systematic approach that aimed to translate organisational intent into team objectives and individual result to improve performance. Furthermore, PMS intends to achieve organisational objectives through a

shared understanding of results, values and priorities. PMS manages performance through contract rather than demand in a manner that focuses on strategic competency development and the processes between teams and individuals.

The Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Namibia (2011) outlined the purpose and use of the Performance Management System to: Provide a framework for strategic planning and management; Develop, improve and articulate a shared understanding of organisational objectives, priorities and values; Join the organisation together through the integration of organisational objectives, and individual results; Provide processes to improve work planning and channels of communication; Ensure understanding, empower staff and improve team and individual performance through clarification of roles, accountabilities, responsibilities, and expectations; Provide for the identification, prioritising, development and coaching of competencies and individual potential; Create a performance oriented culture and sustain motivation; Underpin a culture that supports achievement and calculated risk taking, rather than one that seeks to blame or find fault; Encourage the early identification and turnaround of unsatisfactory performance through coaching and support; Serve as input for recognising and rewarding of above solid performance; and Attract and retain skilled staff.

The people of Namibia overwhelmingly and willingly gave the Government the mandate to consolidate past reforms and pursue the lofty ideals set out in Vision 2030. The Performance Management System (PMS) is one such reform that was identified and implemented with the aim to transform Namibia's public service into a performance driven organisation. The main idea of PMS stands to change employee attitudes and behaviour towards service delivery in the public service of Namibia.

Several activities fall within the performance management process, this include: objective setting, feedback, performance review /appraisal and employee development (Ashdown, 2014). The performance management process (PMC) quintessentially begins with translating institutional aims into clear-cut individual goals. These goals would then be realized through following set quarterly or annual targets. This mandates employee at all levels to be aware of how their role fits in the overall organisations' objectives. Pulakos, (2009) suggested that performance management systems should give supervisors and employees the opportunity to dialogue. This dialogue would primarily entail setting acceptable and unacceptable work parameters, which include setting targets to be achieved and factors to mitigating undesired performance. Because standard setting forms the basis on which acceptable performance is measured and developmental needs are identified, it requires the greatest attention in employee engagement.

PMS is a valuable and necessary tool in the workplace. However, (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014) argued that as a human resource strategy, performance management promised more than it achieved. This was because badly designed or poorly implemented performance management schemes typically communicates entirely different message from what is expected. Fundamentally, it is not only badly designed or poorly implemented tools that pose a challenge, but how these tools are utilised, managed and the commitment towards the scheme.

Attaining the aims of the PMS reform require a shared vision of Government's objectives, priorities and values. That way, clarified roles, accountability, responsibility and expectations would empower employees to deliver tangible results. Therefore, modelling an effective performance management system centres on top management's ability to establish clear-cut expectations that guides employee commitment. That said, PMS success greatly depends on top

management commitment and the ability with which the system is used effectively. Therefore, getting employees on-board, should be key in achieving excellent system functionality.

The Performance Management System (PMS) stands as a work performance tool applicable to all civil servants appointed under the public service Act, Act no. 13 of 1995. Given the above narrative, it was of great significance for the researchers to determine the effects of employee attitudes and perceptions on the functionality of the PMS. This is because, the mentioned attitudes and perceptions could potentially influence the system's effectiveness. Through determining employee attitudes and perceptions, the research aimed to help us understand whether the Performance Management System (PMS) improved service delivery in Namibia's public service, particularly in the Ministry of Education.

Armstrong and Taylor (2014) argue that, the introduction of performance management systems was predominantly focused on implementation rather than how employees perceived the system. This was because of the excessive attention placed on the design of the system, rather than how employee attitudes influenced the system once implemented. The assumption that employees are likely to respond positively to a newly implemented performance management system, justifies the excessive attention mentioned (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Predominantly performance management is assumed to mean the same thing as performance appraisal (Armstrong, 2016). However, significant differences exist between the two concepts. A closer examination of the two reveals that performance management involves a much wider, continuous and, more comprehensive process that clarifies mutual expectations, emphasizing on the support role of supervisors (Armstrong, 2016). Performance appraisal provides a focal point for the consideration of key performance and development issues (Armstrong, 2016). This include performance review meetings which is the means through which performance management

elements of agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue are put to good use. Performance appraisal (PA) therefore, forms part of the formal assessment and rating of individuals, usually at an annual review meeting (Armstrong, 2016). Quintessentially, the common misconceptions that exists in the interpretation of the two concepts is that one stands as a process whilst the other, a function that falls within the overall process.

Over the years, performance management has received its fair share of criticism. Armstrong (2016) argued that many a time performance management was discredited because it was run predominantly as a top down and largely bureaucratic system owned by the human resource department. However, recent studies have shown that the criticism levelled against performance management occasionally emanates from poor management rather than the system itself. This was well articulated by (Armstrong, 2016) who argued in support of using performance management as an instrument that systematically influenced change by analysing and measuring worker performance over time (including communicating that assessment to individual employees).

Performance management work best when built on excellent leadership and high quality relationships between supervisors and employees (Bluen, 2013). This argument was reinforced by (Baird, Schoch, & Chen, 2012) in their study on performance management system effectiveness in Australian local government. The scholars found that teamwork was associated with greater employee empowerment and delegation of decision-making power. This included autonomy in performing tasks that led to greater commitment amongst employees. Armstrong (2016), however, emphasised on the design of performance management systems to have a lasting influence on the scheme's effectiveness. He argued that, the systems' design ought to be guided by cooperate values and culture. Therefore, performance management should be an instrumental reform that drives efforts from corporate values in obtaining solutions that works.

Studies show that performance management is a mainstream tool that supports supervisors to manage, motivate and monitor employee performance. Baird, et al. (2012) explains that a relationship exists between multidimensional performance measures and reward (team work/respect for people influence input/outcome). Despite these findings, many organisations still find it difficult to effectively implement performance management systems that works. Baird, et al. (2012) stressed the need for PMS to enable organisations to plan, measure and control performance in order to achieve desired results.

Government institutions have on occasion received criticism for poor services rendered. To that end, the PMS was implemented with the aim to develop and create a performance oriented culture, and sustain motivation among employees. However, concerns about whether employee attitudes and perceptions of non-compliance to PMS policies and procedures, affected the system, had not been answered. Thus, there was a need to examine the system to determine whether employee attitudes and perceptions influenced the system and whether the system remained consistent with its objectives.

The success of a performance management system relies on how it is used and the attitudes and perceptions towards it. Therefore, employee receptiveness and supportiveness of a given PMS depend on various factors. By and large, if presented and viewed as a path for personal development and an opportunity for career growth, a PMS is inclined to succeed. However, should employees respond negatively or not appreciate the value of a performance management system, this could adversely influence the systems' effectiveness.

Methodology

Quantitative research strategy was also utilised in this research study. The population for the study involved the entire workforce of the Ministry of Education. The sampling strategy selected for this study was stratified random sampling, a type of probability sampling wherein the researcher targeted a two-level strata hierarchy, those in management and non-management positions. A sample size of 80 respondents from the entire workforce of 300 employees of the Ministry were selected. The main instruments utilised in the research was an expert reviewed, structured closed-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was carefully developed, eliminating ambiguity in the questions. A five (5) point-level rating scale/ likert scale of measurement was utilised to validate the participants' responses. The questionnaire was administered via electronic mail. Data collected was imported into SPSS Statistical Software program version 25.0. The responses to the questions were analysed using descriptive statistics in cross-tabulations and bar graphs. Chi – square test were done to measure levels of significance and confidence between the variables, making use of Phi and Cramer's V and Gamma.

Result

Research question 1: Are you interested in the Performance Management System process?

Table 1: Analysis of interest in PMS

Cross-tabulation

	Are you interested in the Performance Management System process?					Total
	Most Interested	Interested	Neither	Not Interested	Not Interested at all	

		Count	1	1	2	6	1	11
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Job level?	Manageme nt	% PMS interest within Job level?	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	100.0 %
	Nonmanagemen t	Count	1	2	8	20	12	43
		% PMS interest within Job level?	2.3%	4.7%	18.6%	46.5%	27.9%	100.0 %
Total	Count		2	3	10	26	13	54
	% PMS interest within Job level?		3.7%	5.6%	18.5%	48.1%	24.1%	100.0 %

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
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Pearson Chi-Square	2.800 ^a	4	.592
Likelihood Ratio	2.852	4	.583
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.040	1	.153
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 6 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .41.

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.354	.230	1.385	.166
N of Valid Cases		54			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Pearson Chi-Square statistics, $X^2 = 2.800$, and $P > 0.05$

There is *no relationship between job level and interest in PMS*

Conclusion: with a significant P value of 59.2% using the standard alpha level of 0.05 we reject null hypothesis, which means that there is sufficient evidence to suggest a relationship exists between job level and interest in PMS at the Ministry.

Research question 2: How do you rate employee comprehension of the PMS at the Ministry of International Relations?

Table 2: Analysis on PMS Comprehension

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Job level? * How do you rate employee comprehension of the Performance Management System at the Ministry of International Relations?	54	100.0 %	0	0.0 %	54	100.0 %

Cross-tabulation

			How do you rate employee comprehension of the Performance Management System at the Ministry of International Relations?					Total
			Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Poor	Very Poor	
Job level?	Management	Count	1	1	2	6	1	11
		% within Job level?	9.1%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%	9.1%	100.0%
	Non-management	Count	1	2	8	20	12	43
		% within Job level?	2.3%	4.7%	18.6%	46.5%	27.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	2	3	10	26	13	54
		% within Job level?	3.7%	5.6%	18.5%	48.1%	24.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.800 ^a	4	.592

Likelihood Ratio	2.852	4	.583
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.040	1	.153
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 6 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .41.

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.228	.592
	Cramer's V	.228	.592
N of Valid Cases		54	

Chi-Square Hypothesis test:

Pearson Chi-Square statistics, $X^2 = 2.800$, and $P > 0.05$

There is no *relationship exists between job level and PMS comprehension*

Conclusion: with a significant P value of 59.2% using the standard alpha level of 0.05 we reject null hypothesis, which means that there is sufficient evidence to suggest a relation exists between job level and PMS comprehension at the Ministry.

Discussion of Findings

The research sought to establish whether the workforce at the Ministry of International Relations had interest in the Performance Management System and if that interest correlates with job level. The result showed that, of those in management 54.5% had no interest in the system, while 46.5% in non-management corresponded similarly. A significant P value of 59.2% using the standard alpha level of 0.05 indicated sufficient evidence to suggest a relation between job level and interest in PMS at the Ministry. A positive conclusion from the finding was that, those at the most senior levels were most likely to support the system. This is a good indication of system success, as highlighted by (Pulakos, 2009) who stressed that modelling an effective performance management system centres on top management commitment and their ability to establish clear expectations. A strong management commitment therefore, would yield a better chance of system success. By and large the huge lack of interest in PMS reflected in the findings is alarming because effective system functionality heavily depends on user commitment.

One of the questions was intended to establish whether the workforce in the Ministry of International Relations generally understand performance management. The findings indicated varied responses. 6 in 11, about 54.5% of the respondents in management positions thought

individuals had poor comprehension of performance management. At least, 20 in 43, about 46.5% of the sample in non-management were of the opinion that individuals had poor comprehension of performance management. However, those in management positions suggested that their understanding of the systems emanated from their experience.

Baird, et al. (2012) stressed that an effective PMS should enable organisations to plan, measure and control their performance, so that decisions, resources and activities could be properly aligned with strategies to achieve desired results. Therefore, top management should ensure that employees understand expectation from both dimension of input/ outcome and behavioural aspects in relation to system effectiveness. The case in point here is that, despite the experiences claim, respondents' still lack complete comprehension of the system. Respondents in nonmanagement positions felt that the way the system was implemented rendered it ineffective with no serious impact on performance.

Conclusions

The evidence collected was analysed with the aim of answering the statement of the problem, namely, to assess the effects of employee perceptions on the functionality of the Performance Management System (PMS) at the Ministry of International Relations and Corporation (MIRCO). The study also sought to determine whether the system enhanced service delivery in the Ministry and indeed in the Public Service of Namibia. Even though empirical evidence highlights the inherent value of the PMS, often times there remains a persisting and troubling gap between implementation and getting the system to work effectively. In fact, after careful consideration of all the collected evidence, it was determined that attitudes of non-compliance to set standards do affect the PMS. The PMS at the Ministry require a degree of commitment and seriousness for it to function with excellence.

Based on the study findings, the conclusions drawn were that the workforce in the Ministry have little confidence in the PMS. This lack of confidence portrayed could potentially lead to system failure if not addressed. This is because the systems' application was not treated with the seriousness it required. It was determined that the PMS principles that were inadequately enforced rendered the scheme less effective.

This was evident in the study findings, which revealed inadequate supervision and a lack of visible commitment towards the PMS's bottom-line objectives. Therefore, if the PMS is to work effectively, the workforce require motivation with sureness of the scheme's significance in performance improvement. Certainly, more should be done to enhance integration of the systems' application. Facilitators of the scheme should, therefore, re-enforce training and feedback mechanisms that incorporates motivational factors to help build employees confidence in the scheme.

Some officials in the Ministry demonstrated a better understanding of the PMS. However, most employees are still to acquire sufficient understanding of the PMS. The system's success, therefore, greatly depends on top management commitment and the ability with which individuals will utilise it. Top management should, therefore, strive to get everyone on-board as a critical step towards system success.

Recommendations

1. PMS should be treated with the seriousness it requires. Therefore, for desired results, a clear understanding of the system's policies and procedures should be encouraged by considering effective monitoring, training and feedback. Management should, therefore, make it a priority to reinforce corrective measures that supports a strong organizational culture that helps employees internalize cooperate values;

2. Facilitators of the PMS should focus on what really matters, which is how effective the system is utilized and how serious employees consider the scheme. Administrators of the PMS should, thus, ensure that compliance to set standards is enforced through sufficient supervision. In addition, clear measurable objectives that commands adherence should be in place;
3. PMS training should be at the forefront in providing practical guidance on how the scheme operates. PMS training should not only be confined to administrators or supervisors, rather the entire workforce should be on-board to gain confidence in the system

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