PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SERVICE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SOME AFRICAN COUNTRIES

ANDREW I. E. EWOH
Texas Southern University

ABSTRACT

Scholarly discourse on performance management in public service has been triumphed in the academic literature. This dialogue among scholars was prompted by the new public management movement that required governments everywhere to demonstrate their efficiency in spending taxpayers' resources and show that program results or outcomes are related to their effectiveness as generated by its activities. This article explores experiences of three African countries in their usage of performance management system as part of bureaucratic reform measures and offers recommendations on how to implement a successful performance management system (PMS). The analysis begins with a historical review of the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the applications and types of performance management tools, their limitations and benefits, and a comparative analysis of performance management efforts in three African countries (Kenya in the East African region; Nigeria in the West African region, South Africa in the Southern African region). In sum, on the basis of these selected nations' PMS implementation experiences, the article discusses their challenges as well as opportunities, and offers some recommendations in the form of solutions.

Keywords: performance management system, performance measure, bureaucratic reform, new public management

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly discourse on performance management in public service has been triumphed in the academic literature. This dialogue among scholars was prompted by the new public management (NPM) movement that required governments everywhere to demonstrate their efficiency in spending taxpayers' resources and show that program results or outcomes are related to their effectiveness as generated by its activities (Ewoh, 2011). The idea of reinventing government was explored by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) and pursued by President Bill Clinton in 1993 through the establishment of the National Performance Review, and the creation of United States' Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 that enhanced government attempt to improve policy and program outcomes through performance management mechanisms.

The push factor for the introduction of performance management initiatives in the United States informs African countries that various reform problems they encountered through the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s can be remedied through the adoption of the NPM models as solutions to increasing public productivity and improving service delivery (Hendricks & Matsiliza, 2015). From this perspective, the purpose of this analysis is to explore experiences of three African countries in their usage of performance management system as part of their bureaucratic reform measures and offer recommendations on how to implement a successful performance management system (PMS). The article begins with a historical review of the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the applications and types of performance management tools, their limitations and benefits, and a comparative analysis of performance management efforts in three African countries (Kenya in the East African region; Nigeria in the West African region, South Africa in the Southern African region). In sum, on the basis of these selected nations' PMS implementation experiences, the article discusses their challenges as well as opportunities, and offers some recommendations in the form of solutions.

HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The interest in measuring and improving public sector performance dates back to the twentieth century. For example, the International City/County Management

Association (ICMA) published *Measuring Municipal Activities: A Survey of Suggested Criteria for Appraising Administration* in 1938, which recommended various kinds of information that municipalities may deploy in monitoring and evaluating public service delivery (Fischer, 1994; Ewoh, 2011). In the United States, the Hover Commission in 1949 furnished the mechanism for performance monitoring by mandating that federal budgets should be restructured into activities rather than line items, and required government agencies to make performance reports available.

In partnership with the Urban Institute in the 1970s, the ICMA published *Measuring the Effectiveness of Basic Municipal Services: Initial Report* (1974) and *How Effective Are Your Community?* (1977), which provided assistance to local governments on how to collect and analyze data on local government performance. According to Fischer (1994), these two publications enabled readers to understand different types of municipal government effectiveness measurement, their criteria, and uses of such measures. In the 1980s, however, organizations in the private sector experimented with different productivity mechanisms like benchmarking and total quality management because the field of performance management expanded to include other aspects such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and managing results (Ewoh, 2011; Kopczynski & Lombardo, 1999). In 1990, the Government Accounting Standards Board issued a report entitled *Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting: Its Time Has Come* to help state governments deal with problems created by the Job Training Act programs in the 1980s, which required states and their localities to utilize clients outcome measures (Yates, 1997).

Despite the recommendations of professional organizations such as National Academy of Public Administration and American Society for Public Administration, among others, regarding the adoption of measures to monitor program quality and outcomes, the current attention towards performance measurement or management is associated with three compelling reasons: to provide an objective measure for evaluating an employee performance; to determine whether employees are effectively performing their assigned tasks; and to improve the political-administrative interface between policymakers and public administrators. Overall, performance management is a tool for improving public performance of employees and/or teams to achieve agency objectives and goals.

APPLICATIONS AND TYPES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (PMS)

The generalized categories of uses for performance management systems as provided by Behn (2003) are to: evaluate, control, budget, motivate, celebrate, learn, and improve. Specifically, other applications of PMS according to Ammons (2008, pp. 4-5) are:

- Performance reporting, both internal and external to local government, as a method of accountability for performance;
- Directing operations, making adjustments where measures indicate areas or patterns of deficiency;
- Testing new procedures or equipment, comparing new measures with prior results or comparing pilot project results to measures elsewhere;
- Contract monitoring to ensure that promises regarding service quantity and quality are being kept;
- Supporting planning and budgeting systems by providing objective information on the condition of programs and services;
- Program evaluation, which often begins with routinely collected performance measures and proceeds with compiling new measures specific to the needs of more detailed analysis; and
- Benchmarking, usually by comparing the performance measures of one's own organization to professional standards or the results achieved by respected counterparts, often as a catalyst for improving operations.

While there are substantial variations pertaining to government utilization of performance data, the major use of PMS is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services. Generally, governments deploy performance information or performance measures to support the use of goals and outcomes in the budgetary process, economic development as well as in setting targets and learning from others. (Ewoh, 2011; Ammons, 2013; Ammons, 2002; Ammons & Morgan, 2011; Lawson, 2006).

Regarding the logic of PMS, governments at all levels in United States and elsewhere (in Africa, for example) use performance information to revise existing measures and update their strategic plans. Normally, periodic surveys of citizens' priorities and satisfaction with existing services are part of the feedback mechanism. In view of this, performance information is very crucial in assisting agencies in making both program improvements and management decisions. For example, departments or organizations that are thinking about contracting out services may deploy quantifiable indicators in preparing preliminary cost-benefit analyses, comparing private sector performance, setting performance standards for a contractor, and assessing a contractor's performance (Ewoh, 2011).

Input measures are the resources used by an organization for goal accomplishments. The amount of money used, the number of employees required to provide services, and the number of hours worked are good examples. Output or workload measures deal with tangible indicators deployed to demonstrate how resources are being used. For instance, the amount of a service or program provided such as number of police or fire calls answered, and the number of lane-miles paved. Conversely, outcome or effectiveness measures are indicators that indicate how well a program or service is accomplishing its mission, including quality, cycle, and customer satisfaction. City councils, state legislators, and/or national legislatures select outcomes for government agencies or departments within their jurisdictions. This is why elected government officials appropriate funds for agencies with expectations that certain goals will be achieved (Ewoh, 2011).

Usually, efficiency measures are indicators of how well an agency uses its resources, expressed as a ratio between the amount of input and output or outcome. For outcome measurements, efficiency can be shown as the ratio of cost to the amount of outcome—such as cost per lane-mile with satisfactory rideability. It is important to note here that some units of governments have used the cost per unit of output due to unavailability of reliable data on the amount of outcome. However, cost per unit of outcome tends to provide a reliable indicator and eliminates the temptation to increase outputs at the expense of service quality (Ewoh, 2011; Hatry et al., 2006). Whereas efficiency measures enable the public administrator to determine whether resources are being appropriately deployed—not wasted, these measures do not measure program or service quality, however defined. Therefore, the apparent challenge for public administrators everywhere in the world is to determine which of these measures best helps them in delivering good quality services.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN KENYA, NIGERIA, AND SOUTH AFRICA

From the forgoing analysis, it is obvious that performance management system (PMS) is being used as a performance instrument by government agencies in most nations including those in Africa. In the case of the Kenyan government, it has been implementing different reform initiatives designed to improve public service delivery since its independence in 1963, the missing link lies on overall performance of the public sector due to inefficient service delivery. To remedy this problem, the government established the Results Based Management (RBM) in 2003, which focuses public service sector performance on outputs and outcomes rather than being overwhelmed with inputs and processes.

Under the RBM, the Kenyan government introduced very important programs that focus mainly on results. These programs include Performance Contracts, Citizens' Service Delivery Charters (CSDC) and Rapid Results Initiatives. A report by Commonwealth Secretariat (2009) show that these reform initiatives were complemented by intensive institutional capacity building for the public sector to support effective implementation of PMS in the country. Subsequently in 2005, the CSDC was introduced to hold government agencies accountable for high quality delivery of public services. To accomplish this, service delivery charters were embedded as a major performance indicator in all public sector performance contracts, which requires public agencies to administer independent annual surveys to determine as well as increase customer satisfaction levels with the collaboration of the private sector, civil society organizations and all citizens in tracking the implementation of the new service charters. In recognition of its performance contracting system, the Kenyan government received the United Nations Public Service Award in the first category of transparency, accountability and responsibility in 2007.

The 2009 Commonwealth report attributes the Kenyan success factors to outside stakeholders' involvement, public-private partnerships, e-government strategy, information communications technology, leadership, human resources development, and other institutional capacity initiatives. Other important success factors include having state and non- state actors who are passionate and committed to accomplishing the reform initiatives.

Some benefits that the Kenyan government obtained from the implementation of its PMS initiatives include, but are not limited to, increased transparency and accountability, enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in project management, increased work ethics in public agencies, restored confidence and trust in government, to mention but a few (Korir, Rotich, & Bengat, 2015). Despite these benefits, the resulting challenges include the transfer of employees in the half way during the implementation of the performance contract initiative, mergers and split of government departments coupled with lack of a legal framework to implement reform initiatives throughout the public sector and limited institutional capacity to assure smooth implementation strategies at all levels of government.

Turning to the Nigerian experience with PMS, the Nigerian government has enacted nine reform initiatives and is grappling with the tenth one (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2009). A key component of the Nigerian reform agenda centers on the need to transform its public service system into a performance and result-oriented system either similar or comparable to what is obtainable in Kenya or other similarly situated nations. Nonetheless, major aspects of the Nigerian PMS include periodic ministerial press briefings at stakeholders' forum to allow citizens to participate not only in evaluating the achievements of different ministries or departments, but in monitoring the implementation of projects and assessing annual institutional performance reports. One obvious limitation of the Nigerian PMS is that its individual performance appraisal is very subjective and it focuses on promotion instead of measuring outcomes because it excludes performance evaluation of directors and permanent secretaries—senior staff members of government agencies or ministries. Other limitations or key challenges include the following:

1. Current PMS, known as performance appraisal, is not adequate in instilling a culture of high performance in the public service;
2. Existing framework for evaluating and monitoring performance is neither comprehensive nor objective since it does not focus on performance planning and improvement;
3. Poor human resource management due to inadequate PMS; and
4. Poor integration of strategic national priorities of goals and objectives of organizations as well as individuals.

In view of these challenges, current reforms in the Nigerian public service should be geared towards an extensive institutionalization of a new PMS for achieving the nation's strategic goals designed to implement the new integrated PMS, as articulated by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2009) including:

- Developing a National Strategy for Public Service Reform;
- Enhancing the capacity of ministries, departments and agencies;
- Reforming the human resource management systems;
- Strengthening the institutional framework for driving the new performance management culture across the public service; and
- Integrating the African Public Service Charter's key provisions in the ongoing reform program, to mention but a few.

In the case of South Africa, the government sees PMS as a tool for accomplishing public service delivery and enhancing the achievement of the nation's development initiatives. At independence in 1994, the quest for change in South African Public Service was identified. In moving forward, increasing managerial authority and autonomy was guaranteed through the 1997 *White Paper on Human Resource Management*. Furthermore, a legal framework was implemented in 1999 that enabled each department and provincial government to have their own human resource policies and PMS with minimum requirements delineated in South African Public Service Regulations.

While all departments were expected to implement PMS by 2001, an examination of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) showed that only a few departments and provinces started the implementation of the new initiatives due to challenges associated with the implementation issues and other governmental logistical problems. In 2003, the DPSA introduced another initiative that encountered implementation problems, and it was adjusted and renamed Employee Performance Management Development System, modelled as Senior Management Service, and a number of departments were able to implement the new system without much difficulty. Nonetheless, major challenges experienced with the new PMS include perceptions among employees that they were entitled to performance bonus regardless of their performance levels; performance moderation issues, and limited trust issues among employees regarding the PMS. While other subsequent initiatives were introduced to redefine the existing PMS, major challenges confronting them include the need to enhance the evaluation of association between the performance of the departmental heads and other employees as they relate to the declining compliance to the current PMS, which has not been integrated into the existing human resource system.

According to the 2009 Commonwealth Secretariat report, the major lessons learned from the South African experience include:

1. Performance is linked to employees' behaviors and

attitudes and the focus of PMS is to change those attributes that do not enhance performance;

2. The dominance of the monetary issue in performance management is seen as one of the major contributing factors to strong performance culture.
3. The introduction of foreign and complex PMS and tools like Balanced Scorecard and other technology-driven systems have produced less significant outcomes in terms of outcome improvements. The development of country-specific methodologies may offer the designed solution.
4. Departments with strong leadership and management had stronger stability in employee retention and organizational culture as well as the tendency to do well in areas of PMS. As a result, it is not PMS that improves performance rather it is sound management practices and performance management that focuses on improving the application of skills and competencies that affected the organizational culture in a positive way.

In response to poor coordination among departments at the institutional level, the South African government developed a cabinet cluster system, which strengthened inter- departmental relations and enabled the presidency to conduct government-wide planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies for overall performance improvement. All government institutions are now required to formulate strategic plans and allocate resources for implementation of their plans for monitoring and reporting of performance. It is pertinent to note here that most PMS initiatives in African countries are designed to help them in achieving their millennium development goals (Okeke-Uzodike & Chitakunye, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has shown that governments everywhere including those in Africa have adopted performance management system as an instrument to assist them in controlling cost and improving public service delivery in their respective jurisdictions. Nonetheless, good performance management system requires all governments including those in Africa to align their strategic planning initiates with performance measures and objectives that are peculiar and adaptable to their jurisdictions. Since accountability requires transparency as a road map for navigating the challenges confronting performance management, government agencies in Africa—especially the ones reviewed in this analysis—are strongly encouraged to make their data available online. The expectation is that doing this may help them to reduce government cynicism as well as restore the trust between the citizens and their governments.

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Author's Biography

Andrew Ewoh is a Professor of Political Science and Public Administration in the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University. Before joining the faculty at TSU, he was the Director of the Master of Public Administration Program and Professor of Public Administration as well as the Co-Director of the MBA/MPA Dual Degree Program at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. Prior to KSU, he was the Political Science Program Coordinator and Professor at Prairie View A&M University in Texas. He has long- term research and teaching interests in public administration, public policy, economic development, governance, human resources management, public-private partnerships, political economy, and comparative public administration. He currently serves on the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation, an independent body of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration. Professor Ewoh is a past President of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators and served on the National Council of the American Society for Public Administration and on a public administration project in South Africa in 2012 as a Fulbright Specialist.