

CHAPTER SEVEN

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OF ZIMBABWE: QUO VADIS?

Noah A. Mutongoreni, Donovan R. Thakathi and Wiseman Mupindu

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Zimbabwe has since attainment of independence in 1980 pursued people-centred policies. The implementation of these policies required a dedicated, loyal, competent and socialist ideologically oriented public service (Makumbe, 2009). As the pre-independent public service was white in terms of orientation, the government devised strategies for its transformation through widening of access to the black majority of the population. Consequently, a Prime Minister's Directive of 1981 was issued as a strategy to widen and deepen access of blacks into the employ of the public service (Chiwere & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). As the performance of the public service pursued a downward slope, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted the performance management system in 1995 (Chipangura & Musekiwa, 1998). This was in line with the recommendations of the Public Service Review Commission (also known as Karvan Commission) of 1986 (Mutongoreni, Thakathi & Mupindu, 2024). The Government of Zimbabwe further adopted the Integrated Results Based Management system in 2005 as its performance management system (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). The performance of the public service, however, continued to be depressed as evidenced by the negative feedback received from stakeholders (Mutongoreni, 2015; Mundondo, Chikoko & Chindanya, 2019). With the advent of the Second Republic, which emerged after the November 2017 coup, there has been a renewed call by government for a robust performance management system across the public service spectrum. The question that arises relates to whether or not this development marks the birth of a new dawn, or a new performance culture in Zimbabwe capable of turning the fortunes of the nation towards attainment of Vision 2030. Performance management in the public service of Zimbabwe – quo vadis?

BACKGROUND

At independence in 1980, the country being driven by the socialist ideology of the time, launched equity-based economic policies to redress the imbalances of the past (Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Chirisa, 2024; Chiware & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). The rationale was to improve *inter alia* the socio-economic situations related to poverty, migration, refugees, unemployment and illiteracy, all born of the separate development strategy adopted by the colonial government (Makumbe, 2009). Cognisant of the fact that all the great human events in history were probably achieved through a robust public administration (Frederickson, Smith, Larimer & Licari, 2018), the government turned to human capital as the engine driving the nation from the capitalist socio-economic system it inherited under the white minority rule, to a socialist order, better able to redress the extreme racial and class inequities that were born under the Rhodesia government (Sylvester, 1985). Pursuant to this, the government embarked on what Adedeji (1981) opined as indigenisation of manpower, which is also known as Africanisation of personnel. This form of indigenisation, albeit the earliest in Africa, sought to push indigenes up the occupational ladder and cause them to replace expatriate personnel, especially in the civil service (Zvoushe, Uwizeyimana & Auriacombe, 2017). This was done through the Prime Minister's Directive of 1981 (Chiware, 2021). This directive also addressed unemployment and underemployment challenges that faced the black majority. The tragedy however, was that as a result of this noble policy in Zimbabwe, many black people became holders of high-level posts for which they had little or no credentials (Chiware & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). The deep and widening of access of blacks into the public service was also a new milestone in the history of the country. This culminated in the massive recruitment of black people to fill posts formerly occupied by the minority white population, the motive of which was also to augment compatibility between the inherited colonially configured systems and the new socialist oriented socio-economic dispensation.

Towards the end of the first decade of independence, cracks began to emerge that indicted public service employees for failure to discharge their mandate. This was aptly laid bare through the findings of the Public Service Review Commission of 1986 (Chipangura & Musekiwa, 1998). As the reconfigured bureaucracy (Chigudu, 2014) began exhibiting serious signs of debility and incompatibility with national and citizenry aspirations, service delivery too was equally affected. The economy, which had started on a positive trajectory during the first four years of independence, also started to move on a downward trajectory. It thus became evident that government did not have adequate local resources in the form of skilled human capital, among others, during the post-independence period (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022) to 'steer the ship' of the nation into the desired future. In the wake of these negative trends and as part of an introspection, the Government of Zimbabwean commissioned the Public Service Review Commission in 1986 to examine the public service's performance. The Commission, in its report, revealed a public sector with a lack of a performance management culture, arrogance and poor work attitudes, significant worker turnover, and a bloated, centralised and secretive bureaucracy that was not transparent, among other things (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). The government of Zimbabwe and the citizenry, according to the Commission's Report, were undoubtedly dissatisfied with the public sector's performance. This called for a paradigm shift in terms of the public sector's approach to service delivery and management of public institutions (Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024). Apart from disenchantment owing to poor service delivery, there was also an unprecedented uptick in petty and systemic corruption. Public employees were caught participating in illicit private operations to supplement their modest salaries (Plangemann et al., 2012). Officials sold products such as vegetables, meat, bread and trinkets, and services such as providing licences, passports, placements for nurse or teacher training, and admission to tertiary institutions, to individuals with insufficient qualifications. Pursuant to the foregoing, four major key conclusions were presented from the Commission's report. First, it was opined that senior management must play a larger role in promoting public service ideals such as honesty, impartiality, high performance standards, outcomes orientation, and responsiveness. Second, all government employees should be imbued with a stronger dedication to

achieving the government's development goals. Third, corruption and dishonesty in the public sector must be deterred by an ethos of integrity, which must be led by the top. Finally, it was determined that the ability to change and respond to change, the so-called driver of a future public service, is limited (Plangemann et al., 2012). On the basis of the Public Service Review Commission, the GoZ implemented a performance management regime in 1995 as part of the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) (Chipangura & Musekiwa, 1998) when they do not control the resource inputs. Indeed, the civil service top managers, the permanent secretaries, rejected the concept of their being put on a contract by government because of the uncertainty in resource mobilisation and control; (4. However, a Customer Service Survey, undertaken by the Public Service Commission in 1996 a year after the introduction of performance management, divulged that there was no change in terms of public service performance (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). The performance appraisal system deployed as the performance management tool, it was argued, failed due to lack of connection between individual performance and the organisation's results (Chiwere & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022; Mutongoreni, Thakhathi & Mupindu, 2024). Aside from this, the performance management system was detested by public sector employees and their representatives even questioned the rationale of performance management, especially in a virtually service-oriented civil service (Chipangura & Musekiwa, 1998).

Realising the inadequacy of the then performance management system, the GoZ adopted the RBM system in 2005. The system was touted as a proven and accepted approach for improved public sector accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. Its adoption also followed recommendations emanating from the Public Service Reform Programme of 2002. As part of the broad roll out of the programme, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) released the RBM policy guidance circular (Office of the President – General Letter No. 6 of 2005), advising stakeholders that RBM had been adopted in the Public Service (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). Despite this, the nation did not fare any better in terms of service delivery. It became apparent to the public that the curse of cluelessness was not limited to private corporations but that government and its agencies had its fair share of examples (Peter & Hull, 1969). In fact, poor service delivery in Zimbabwe was and is to date still linked to civil service competency deficiencies (Kwandayi, 2021; Chiwere & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). A study by Kwandayi (2021) pointed out that the majority of senior public sector leaders and managers lacked the leadership and management skills required for efficient service delivery, modernisation, and national development.

The advent of the New Dispensation through the November 2017 military coup ushered in a new era that called for a new performance culture. Cabinet Ministers and senior government officials were made to sign performance contracts commencing on January 2021. In addition, those perceived to have fared well were equally rewarded. The call for a new performance paradigm comes against a background of disasters such as the March 2019 Cyclone Idai and the Covid-19 pandemic. The cyclone was a natural disaster (Chatiza, 2019). However, how government departments and its agencies responded before and after the disaster, depicted the serious shortcomings or debilitation of the Public Service of Zimbabwe. The nation woke up to news of civil servants being swept away by the raging floods in government houses built along river banks, as if government did not have qualified engineers to give prior warnings and possible deterrence. Bridges were destroyed, buildings, human life and livelihoods were ruined and there was an absence of army commandoes displaying their much-touted skills, rescuing the marooned populace, among others. This brought to the fore the apparent debilitation of the public sector in Zimbabwe.

The question that arises relates to whether the current drive for performance management would translate to a positive performance in the public sector of Zimbabwe or whether it is just another "application of mascara on a frog". In other words, ordinary Zimbabweans, development partners and other stakeholders in and outside Zimbabwe need signs to enable them to identify this new dispensation in terms of its genuineness and capacity to break with the past and to bring in genuine development driven by a high performing public service.

CONCEPT OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The concept of performance management, first coined by Beer and Ruh in 1976, is one of the most important and positive developments in the sphere of human resource management (Armstrong, 2006). As a relatively modern concept, its roots may be traced back to Anglo-Saxon management (Mutongoreni, 2015). It is said to have evolved from the management by objectives (MBO) approach, first popularised by Peter Drucker in 1954 (Mutongoreni, 2015). Performance management, it has been argued, is referred to as the “Achilles’ heel” of human capital management, the most difficult HR system to implement in organisations (Pulakos, 2009). It is defined as a systematic process for improving organisational performance by developing the performance of individuals and teams (Armstrong, 2024). In other words, it is a means of achieving better results from the organisation, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements. In addition, performance management may also be regarded as a deliberate holistic process for generating long-term success in organisations through improving staff performance and team and individual contribution capabilities. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that performance management is a purposeful and comprehensive strategy for attaining long-term organizational success through continual employee and team performance improvement.

The rationale for performance management relates to the need to establish a high-performance culture in which individuals and teams take responsibility for the continuous improvement of business processes and for their own skills and contributions within a framework provided by effective leadership (Pulakos, 2014). Taken in the context of the public sector, the concept of performance management is closely linked to the New Public Management (NPM) discourse. The NPM calls for public sector organisations to mimic private sector management strategies in running their day-to-day businesses. The fundamental tenets of NPM include the use of professional managers, explicit performance standards and measures, increased emphasis on service consistency, decentralisation, increased competition between organisations and subunits, emphasis on private-sector management styles, increased accountability, and frugal resource use (Hood, 1991; Basheka, 2017).

The Public Service Commission of Zimbabwe (1997) stated that performance management was implemented in all government ministries, departments, and agencies to address the public’s unfavourable perceptions of how the government provides services through its public employees in Zimbabwe (Zvoushe, Uwizeyimana & Auriacombe, 2017). In essence, whether in private or public sector organisations, performance management is intended to ensure that staff members execute the organisation’s strategy. In countries where donor agencies play an important role, donors are demanding accountability in the use of their funds and often demand that recipient countries subscribe to the performance management systems that they are advocating (Thomas, 2007).

Results-based management

As performance management has been defined in the foregoing, it would be prudent to define results-based management (RBM). RBM is a performance management strategy that has increasingly been adopted by institutional donors and countries over the past decade. RBM places the measurement of results at the heart of management (INTRAC, 2017). Through RBM all actors contribute directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, and ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results, that is outputs, outcomes and higher level goals or impact (UNDG, 2011). It can be defined as a broad management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way government agencies operate, with improving performance (achieving better results) as the central orientation (Binnendijk, 2000). Mayne (2007) argues that RBM is sometimes referred to as managing for results, managing for outcomes, performance management and results management. Mackay (2007) points out that governments have embraced results-based management as a strategy to improve their performance.