



**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS
EMPLOYED BY RURAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ZIMBABWE: THE CASE OF
MARONDERA RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Dedication

To my wife, Amelia, and daughters Chipu, Alice and Tadiwanashe with love.

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration - I, **ALEX MAGURA**, do hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation and research, except to the extent indicated in the acknowledgements, references, and by comments included in the body of the report, and that this dissertation is therefore my original work and has not been presented in part or in full for any other degree in any other University.

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Abstract

Rural local authorities in Zimbabwe play a critical role in national development through the provision of services to the people within their areas of jurisdiction yet they have continued to face criticism from various quarters for failure to adequately provide the required services. In line with international trends, local authorities in Zimbabwe have introduced performance management as a way of enhancing service delivery and holding the local authorities to account for the public resources they use. However, little is known about the effectiveness of the performance management systems that have been implemented by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe. Using a qualitative methodology and a case study strategy the study set out to examine the effectiveness of the performance management systems implemented by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe based on the case of Marondera Rural District council. Fifteen participants took part in the study. The study was premised on the proposition that rural local authorities fail to meet their service delivery objectives due in part to a lack of well crafted and implemented performance management systems. The objectives of the study were met. The study found that the case organisation had no strategic plan to guide its operations and processes including the performance management system in use. It had no formally defined service delivery and performance management objectives making it difficult to see any link between the two. While performance agreements were in place there was no evidence that there was regular performance evaluation or that there was any information generated from the performance management system that was used to influence other human resource processes. The case organisation treated the performance management system as an isolated system that was not linked to other human resource processes in the organisation such as the reward management system. The performance management system did not have much influence on performance. Implementation of the performance management system could be improved through the development of a strategic plan that would provide guidance to the organisation. There must be regular performance evaluation and the performance management system should be linked to other human resource processes. The case organisation needs to have a rethink of its performance management system with a view to integrating it with the rest of the human resources management processes. A performance management system in which employees do not see any benefit for themselves is not likely to succeed in raising levels and standards of service delivery in the local authorities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Local authorities, which are commonly referred to as councils, are the lower tier of government and were created through legislation. Rural local authorities in Zimbabwe were created through the Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*]. They may be viewed as largely autonomous entities that, however, have to follow the policies and directives of the government of the day. They complement the development efforts of central government within their areas of jurisdiction. From this perspective the performance of local authorities assumes a critical role for the success of government's development efforts.

Rural local authorities took their current form in 1995 through the promulgation of the Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*]. The Act had the effect of abolishing the colonially inherited rural local governance structures which were defined along racial lines. The old rural councils which catered largely for the interests of the white farming community were combined with the old district councils which catered for the interests of the black population. This amalgamation resulted in the creation of the rural district councils (<http://www.mlqurd.gov.zw/about-the-ministry>. Accessed on 23 March 2014).

With amalgamation came new responsibilities; the rural district councils are no longer mere "road councils," a label that described their main function in the past. Besides road maintenance the rural district councils are also charged with the responsibility of providing social amenities such as health, educational and recreational facilities. They are also charged with the responsibility for spatial planning and development control and the protection of the environment (Olowu, 2009: www.tsime.uz.ac.zw. Accessed on 23 March 2014). These are among the sixty four powers bestowed on rural district councils by the First Schedule of the Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*].

Rural district councils enable grassroots participation by rural communities in matters that affect them. This participation takes place through involvement in council

elections which enables democratic representation at local level and through continuous dialogue with the council by which the views and aspirations of the community are or should be captured into the plans and work programmes of council. Thus being closer to the grassroots councils can be more accountable to the people they serve than central government (Olowu, 2009: www.tsime.uz.ac.zw. Accessed on 23 March 2014).

It is apparent that local authorities play a critical role in the “development of basic services that are essential to economic and political development” (Olowu, 2009: www.tsime.uz.ac.zw. Accessed on 23 March 2014). They are critical cogs in the country’s socio-economic and political development efforts. Their performance is, therefore, of great importance. This is particularly so given that 67% of the Zimbabwean population lives in rural areas (Zimstat National Census Report, 2012:25).

Local authorities in general have, however, been criticized for poor service delivery that has been perceived as falling short of the needs and expectations of their residents. Rural local authorities have been seen as inefficient entities that have little or nothing to show in terms of performance. There is always criticism or complaints by rate payers that the local authorities are not doing enough to provide the services they are mandated to provide. Central government through the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing has also expressed displeasure at the failure of local authorities in general to discharge their service delivery mandate satisfactorily (The Herald, 20 August 2013).

General observation indicates that this criticism is not without merit. Rural local authorities have not always been able to provide services at the levels expected by the ratepayers. Many roads have continued in a state of disrepair for many years and council clinics and schools have gone for long periods without adequate provisions. This is against a background where the local authorities have continued to collect rates from the public. Many of them have also made much talk about the strategic plans that they have been able to come up with to improve service delivery. There has, however, been not much outstanding performance in terms of service delivery.

In recent years rural local authorities have come up with performance management systems of one kind or another in an attempt to improve the performance of their workforces and thereby enhance service delivery. This has been either at the initiative of the local authorities themselves or as a result of directives from the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. The practice of performance management at local government level can be seen as an extension of the practice from central government. At central government level the performance management system was introduced in the early 1990s (Musingafi et al, 2013:23). Poor service delivery has, however, continued and has been exacerbated by the declining national economic situation in recent years.

1.3 The Operational Environment

An understanding of the environment in which rural local authorities operate will assist to place their performance in the proper context. Like any other entity, the councils are influenced by their operational environment and their behaviour and performance can best be understood within that context.

1.3.1 Political Factors

The Zimbabwean local government system is very much a part of the country's political processes. Councils are put in place through the political process of elections in which most of the candidates are sponsored by political parties. This makes the local authorities subject to political pressures as the political parties seek to further their own interests through the activities of the local authorities. Very often the local authorities become chessboards on which the political parties seek to manoeuvre for political advantage. The polarised political environment that has characterised Zimbabwe in recent years has not spared the local authorities. Council officials have sometimes been caught between competing political interests which has had the effect of compromising their performance.

Local authorities are also subject to control and supervision by central government through the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. The Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*] gives the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing considerable powers to direct and influence the affairs of rural district councils. As Madhekeni and Zhou (2012) put it "central

government purports to promote the principles of decentralization by transferring tasks and responsibilities to local authorities whilst retaining decision making power and authority.”

These political influences shape the landscape within which rural councils have to operate. Such influence can be either positive or negative.

1.3.2 Economic Factors

Rural district councils are also influenced by the economic environment obtaining in the country. In the last few years Zimbabwe has experienced a very volatile economic situation characterised by hyperinflation which culminated in the abandonment of the national currency and the adoption of a multi-currency system in 2009. Although this brought a measure of stability to the economy it was not a panacea for the country’s economic challenges. More than five years on the country continues to face economic challenges one of whose symptoms is the liquidity crunch that has stifled economic activity (Mambondiani, 2013).

It is within this economic environment that rural district councils are expected to deliver the services expected by their residents. The ratepayers themselves are facing economic challenges whose spill over effects affect the local authorities and manifest themselves as constrained revenue inflows for the councils. Nevertheless, the ratepayers still expect the local authorities to deliver on their mandate. Performance management assumes, perhaps, greater significance under such circumstances. It is expected that the local authorities use whatever scarce resources (resources are always scarce anywhere) they are able to muster effectively and efficiently.

1.3.3 Social Factors

Demographic trends have a great bearing on the work of rural local authorities. In some districts there has been much movement by the population in recent years into former white commercial areas as a result of the land reform programme. Most of the former white commercial farming areas did not have enough social amenities to meet the needs of a larger population. The burden of providing the social amenities such as schools, clinics and sources of clean water fell on the local authorities. This

is against a background where the population is becoming more youthful with those under the age of 15% now constituting 41% of the population (Census 2012 National Report, 14).

The ratepayers are increasingly becoming more informed, more organised and more vocal about their rights. With a national literacy rate of 96% (Census 2012 National Report, 67) local authorities cannot take their ratepayers for granted. They have to do more to justify their existence and to satisfy the ever increasing demands of the ratepayers.

1.3.4 Technological Factors

There has been tremendous technological advancement in the last twenty years. Different types of organisations have adopted various technologies especially information communication technologies to enhance and speed up both intra- and inter-organisational processes. The public sector in Zimbabwe has been slow in adopting these new technologies. Some local authorities have, however, taken to the use of information communication technologies to enhance their service delivery systems.

An important factor that has a bearing on the capacity of rural local authorities to deliver services has to do with the state of their equipment. Many still rely on old road maintenance equipment whose operational costs are high. The challenge is to recapitalise and be able to obtain modern road maintenance equipment if this service aspect is to be improved. Government has taken the first steps in this direction through the Road Authorities Recapitalisation Programme that was launched in 2013 (The Chronicle, 22 June 2013).

1.3.5 Legal Factors

Rural local authorities were created through an Act of parliament, the Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*]. They are essentially statutory bodies that derive their powers from the said Act of parliament. It had been hoped that the new Constitution would make local authorities constitutional bodies. Although the new Constitution has sections relating to local authorities, these do nothing much except to affirm the pre-existing position whereby “an Act of parliament must provide for the

establishment of rural local authorities” (Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 275 (2) (a)).

Legislation thus sets the legal parameters within which rural local authorities are expected to operate. The Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*] makes the councils largely autonomous. The same legislation, however, gives the Minister of Local Government extensive powers to intervene in the affairs of the councils. The Minister plays an oversight and supervisory role and is empowered to discipline councillors, approve or disapprove some council resolutions, approve or disapprove senior management appointments and generally to give directives to council (Madhekeni and Zhou 2012:22).

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Rural local authorities in Zimbabwe are failing to deliver the services they are mandated to deliver to their ratepayers. This is evidenced by failure to adequately maintain roads and other critical infrastructure, maintain quality health and educational services and carry out meaningful developmental activities for the benefit of the ratepayers (Mushuku *et al*, 2012:17). One of the major contributory factors to the poor performance could be poorly designed and/or poorly implemented performance management systems. This study examines the extent to which the performance management systems being used in the rural councils of Zimbabwe are assisting the councils to meet their service delivery objectives.

1.5 Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate the extent to which the performance management systems used by Marondera Rural District Council have assisted the local authority to meet its service delivery objectives. Specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To identify the service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council.
- b. To identify the objectives Marondera Rural District Council seeks to achieve by using the performance management system(s) that it uses.
- c. To establish whether there is a link or not between the service delivery objectives of rural district councils and the objectives of their performance management systems.

- d. To identify the factors associated with either success or failure in the implementation of performance management systems by rural local authorities.
- e. To recommend how best rural local authorities may use their performance management systems to meet their service delivery objectives.

1.6 Major Research Question

The main research question that this study seeks to answer is: How effective are the performance management systems employed by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe in assisting the local authorities to meet their service delivery objectives? More specifically the research seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council?
- b. What are the objectives of the performance management system(s) implemented by Marondera Rural District Council?
- c. To what extent is there a linkage between the service delivery objectives of the rural councils and the objectives of their performance management systems?
- d. Which factors determine the success or failure of the implementation of performance management systems by rural councils?
- e. How best can rural councils use their performance management systems to meet their service delivery objectives?

1.7 Research Proposition

It is proposed that rural local authorities fail to meet their service delivery objectives due in part to a lack of well crafted and implemented performance management systems.

1.8 Justification of the Study

There has not been much research focusing on performance management in rural local authorities in Zimbabwe regardless of the fact that local authorities play a critical role in national development. While many works have been published dealing with performance management in the private sector, there are very few publications that deal with the subject in the public sector at the level of rural local authorities particularly in Zimbabwe. Nyagwande (Unpublished, 1990) in one of the few studies on local authorities in Zimbabwe examined the extent to which performance appraisals were being used for their stated objectives. He hypothesized that

performance appraisal was not being used for its stated objectives of probation, annual increment, promotion and annual assessment of performance. Besides focusing on an urban local authority, Nyagwande appeared to have been interested only in the administrative objectives of performance appraisal without linking them to the wider strategic objectives of the local authority. This study is an attempt to fill, at least in part, that gap. It will draw from the ideas on performance management systems that have been published in general management books and other publications on performance management in the public sector from other countries and attempt to assess the success with which such ideas have been applied in rural local authorities in Zimbabwe.

Writing about the United States of America, Nytes et al (2010:vii) observe that “at no time in modern history have state, local, and provincial governments been under greater pressure to provide results that matter to the public, often within severe resource constraints. At the same time, government officials and managers are challenged to overcome the public’s lack of trust in government at all levels.” These comments may be equally relevant to Zimbabwe. Government’s emphasis on the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Social Transformation (Zim Asset) policy blueprint in which local authorities are supposed to play a prominent role is testimony to this.

The benefits that will accrue from the study are as follows:

- a. The researcher is employed in the local government sector. The study will, therefore, provide a guideline to finding solutions to a practical work related problem.
- b. All rural councils that are failing to meet their service delivery objectives may benefit from this study as it would suggest ways by which they may more effectively link their performance management systems to their service delivery objectives. The research would facilitate a paradigm shift and open a new chapter for councils to view formal performance management systems as necessary tools to enhance workforce and therefore council performance in pursuit of their service delivery objectives.

- c. Central government would also benefit as the study will suggest ways by which central government may relate to and assist rural local authorities in ways that enhance the local authorities' performance.
- d. This study will go a long way in attempting to fill a gap that exists in terms of research into rural local authorities' systems.

1.9 Scope of the Study

The research is confined to the rural local government sector of Zimbabwe. It takes a case study approach and focuses specifically on Marondera Rural District Council. Its findings may not be generalised to other types of local authorities or other organisations. Generalisation to other rural local authorities can only be done with due regard to their unique circumstances.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters the first of which is the current chapter whose objective is to set the tone for the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to performance management and concludes with an analytical framework for the study. Chapter 3 looks at the methodology employed for the study and describes how the study was carried out and how the analysis was performed. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the results of the study. Chapter 5 gives the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

1.11 Summary

The chapter has shown that rural local authorities play a critical role in supporting government's developmental efforts. Their performance is thus of critical importance. Rural local authorities operate in a dynamic environment that is characterised by particular political, economic, social, technological and legal factors. These set the background against which the local authorities have to operate and the context within which their performance management systems have to be understood. The study seeks to establish the extent to which the performance management systems used by rural local authorities assist them in meeting their service delivery objectives. It does this through the case study approach. The next chapter explores the literature on performance management with emphasis on the public sector.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Most of the literature available discusses performance management in the context of the private sector. It is indeed in the context of private sector for profit organisations that the concept and various systems of performance management were developed and first applied. Recent years have witnessed the importation of the concept and practices of performance management into the public sector. There is, however, debate on the extent to which concepts developed in the private sector can be transported successfully into the public sector (McAdam, Hazlet and Casey 2005; Radnor and McGuire 2004). There has also been an importation of the concepts from the public sector in one country to the public sector in another country (Adcroft and Willies 2005). Efforts to improve performance in the public sector have tended to focus on performance management practices (Hood 1995 cited in Verbeeten 2008:427-8). The motives for introducing performance management systems into the public sector have tended to vary in range and emphasis. Brown (2005) quoted in Fryer, Antony and Ogden (2009:480) notes at least seventeen reasons for introducing performance management in the public sector.

In the context of Zimbabwe, it is only in the 1990s that serious attempts were made to introduce a performance management system into the public sector (Musingafi et al 2013). The movement towards embracing performance management in the public sector resulted from the realization that the public sector was performing poorly and that something needed to be done to improve performance. The public expected public entities to operate efficiently and to provide the services they were mandated to provide. Reporting for the American National Performance Management Advisory Commission, Nytes *et al* (2010:vii) comment:

At no time in modern history have state, local, and provincial governments been under greater pressure to provide results that matter to the public, often within severe resource constraints. At the same time, government officials and managers are challenged to overcome the public's lack of trust in government at all levels.

The comments may apply equally to the Zimbabwean situation; hence the efforts to introduce performance management systems at both central and local government levels.

2.2 Definition of Terms

2.2.1 Performance

The meaning of performance has generated a lot of debate in the literature and produced different views on what constitutes performance. What is clear from this debate is the importance of clarity on the meaning of performance if it is to be possible to measure it. The understanding is that “if you cannot define performance you cannot measure or manage it” (Armstrong 2009:30).

Performance can be understood as behaviour or outcomes or both (Kane 1996; Guest 1996; Bernadin *et al* 1995 all quoted in Armstrong 2009). A more comprehensive view of performance sees performance as embracing behaviours or processes, outputs and outcomes (Mwita 2000). This view is more encompassing of the elements that make up performance and which must be considered in any performance management system. Behaviours or processes that are work related are the means by which outcomes are produced. They are very often the focus of any training and development efforts that are meant to improve performance. The outputs are the final products or services that the organisation aims to produce while outcomes are the impact of the products or services on those that use them (Sonnentag and Frese 2002).

2.2.2 Performance Management

The concept of performance management has also been defined in various ways by different authors. Summarising the ideas of several authors Verbeeten (2008:428) state that “performance management practices include specifying which goals to achieve, allocating decision rights, and measuring and evaluating performance.”

Performance management may also be viewed as a means by which improved results may be obtained from individuals, teams and organisations through “understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements” (Armstrong 2009:9). It is “the

system through which organizations set work goals, determine performance standards, assign and evaluate work, provide performance feedback, determine training and development needs and distribute rewards” (Briscoe and Claus (2008) quoted in Armstrong 2009:10).

“Performance management in the public sector is an ongoing, systematic approach to improving results through evidence-based decision making, continuous organizational learning, and a focus on accountability for performance. (It) is integrated into all aspects of an organization’s management and policy-making processes, transforming an organization’s practices so it is focused on achieving improved results for the public” (Nytes et al 2010:3). It has also been viewed as the activities of a public entity in “planning, implementing, reviewing, evaluating and reporting the effectiveness of its policies, programmes and projects” (Mackie 2008:3). Following from the above definitions, a performance management system may thus be regarded as a system that is designed to focus the workforce of an organisation on tasks that are critical for meeting the organisation’s objectives. It aims to identify and communicate to all employees the organisation’s objectives and its expectations from all employees in terms of each employee’s expected role. A performance management system also defines and communicates in clear terms the expected standards of performance for each employee. It then measures performance against these set standards and predefined outcomes. It should also seek to improve the knowledge and skills of employees so that they are better placed to meet their objectives and thereby improve the performance of the organisation as a whole.

The above definitions have certain elements in common which can be regarded as the underpinning principles of performance management. They emphasize the aspects of agreement between the manager and the managed, goal setting and the setting of performance standards as well as employee training and development. It is these elements among others that build performance management into a system.

2.3 Objectives and Importance of Performance Management

The overall objective of any performance management system is to develop and improve the performance of individuals and teams as a means of enhancing organisational performance. Performance management aims to develop the capacity of employees to meet and exceed expectations. From this perspective it provides the basis for employee development (Armstrong 2009). Performance management should thus aim to create a supportive environment that promotes the culture of good performance (Molofa 2012). Lee (2005) quoted in Armstrong (2009) explains that performance management has three objectives, namely “to correct poor performance, to sustain good performance and to improve performance...” He further says that performance management systems should generate information and data exchange to enable the individuals involved examine performance, “discuss it, understand it, and agree on its character and quality.”

The challenge is to be able to clearly define and integrate individual, team and organisational objectives in a meaningful way. The information generated by the performance management system should also be meaningful and capable of being used in the attempt to improve performance (Radnor and McGuire 2004). It has been observed that there is often information overload and as a result “managers often ignore the output of performance management systems regardless of the quality of information they are producing” (Radnor and McGuire 2004:247).

Performance management in the public sector has generated a lot of interest. A theme that emerges from the literature on performance management is the importance of performance management in the public sector, a theme which ties up with the objectives of performance management. Performance management is seen as a means by which public sector organisations achieve transparency and accountability to their stakeholders which include the government and the public; they have to be held accountable for the resources that they use and the results that they achieve (Radnor and McGuire 2004; Mackie 2008). It also enables the organisations to set up internal controls to monitor the extent to which their objectives are being met and to take appropriate corrective action (ibid.). Performance management is a vehicle through which public sector organisations seek to realise both strategic and operational goals (Ammons and Roenigk 2013). It

enables them to demonstrate that they are delivering effective and efficient services to their communities and making the best use of resources (Audit Scotland 2012). Performance management systems assist in solving the principal-agent problem by allowing the principal to define its goals (Barnow and Smith 2004).

As can be seen from the above synopsis of the literature, there are various objectives that organisations may seek to fulfil through performance management some of which may even be conflicting. What is important is for the organisation to clearly define the objectives that it seeks to attain (Pulakos 2004).

2.4 Principles and Characteristics of Performance Management

While “performance management practices must derive from and be tailored to fit each organization’s changing requirements ... (which suggests) “... a wide diversity of practices” (Mohrman and Mohrman (1995) quoted in Armstrong 2009), the literature on performance management suggests that performance management systems have certain common underlying principles and characteristics.

Performance management proceeds from organisational planning and priority setting. It is therefore important that clear goals and objectives are set to guide members of the organisation. Performance measurement then involves comparing actual performance against expected performance using agreed indicators (Armstrong 2009; Mwita 2000; Ammons and Roenigk 2013).

Performance management is a continuous and flexible process that should take place throughout the year; it should not be reduced to an annual (or other period) ritual (Armstrong 2009; McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005). Very often the implementation of performance management flounders because the system seems to be forgotten about only to be revived at performance appraisal times.

Performance management is a collaborative process between managers and their employees working together as partners. It works best when the principle of mutual respect is observed. There should be no imposition by one side on the other; performance management is based on the idea of management by contract rather than management by command (Armstrong 2009). This is crucial for the creation of

ownership of the whole process by those involved in it. Lack of process ownership has been found to be one of the reasons why performance management fails (Radnor and McGuire 2004).

Performance management is futuristic in nature. It focuses on future performance planning and improvement and personal development. Performance improvement is viewed as continuous and evolutionary. Emphasis is placed on individual development and performance improvement through feedback and reinforcement (Armstrong 2009).

2.5 Other Dimensions of Performance Management in the Public Sector

In addition to the above additional features of performance management systems that are peculiar to public sector organisations may be distilled from the literature. Elected officials should be engaged in planning and priority setting, attention to performance reporting and data-based decision making (Ammons and Roenigk 2013). Elected officials such as councillors in a local authority environment represent the electorate and as such should be involved in matters that affect their constituency.

Another dimension has to do with devolution of authority from the centre to the departmental bodies or local authorities. Operating decisions should be made at the departmental or unit level rather than by the centre or top management (Ammons and Roenigk 2013). This underlines the fact that each level should be allowed sufficient leeway and authority for appropriate decision making so as to allow the performance management system to operate smoothly. In the context of the present study this principle means that local authorities should have sufficient autonomy from central government to choose and run their performance management systems.

Public organisations have to contend with multiple stakeholders whose demands might be conflicting. Trade-offs may have to be made in service delivery in an attempt to satisfy conflicting demands. Attention to stakeholders is crucial for the perceived success of service delivery for this depends a great deal upon satisfying stakeholders according to their own definition of what is valuable (McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005). Very often public organisations end up using parallel performance

management systems in an attempt to satisfy these competing demands. The result is that performance management is reduced to “a form filling and box ticking exercise” which detracts from the value of the performance management process (Radnor and McGuire 2004). Another view is that a single system of performance measurement cannot cover the entire organisation; there is need to develop separate approaches for each stakeholder category and then seek to integrate these approaches to address issues of synergy and dichotomies (McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005). It thus appears that any system(s) of performance management that may be used by a public organisation should not be unduly tedious in design and operation while at the same time making it possible for the organisation to address the interests of multiple stakeholders.

2.6 Effectiveness of Performance Management Systems

The effectiveness of performance management systems is defined in terms of the ability of the system in use to meet the organisation’s stated objectives. Effective performance management systems are based on the organisation’s strategy and goals. Goal-setting is an important element of any performance management system. This is followed by regular performance reviews which should be buttressed by reward and recognition practices. “Effective performance management systems have a well-articulated process for accomplishing evaluation activities, with defined roles and timelines for both managers and employees” (Pulakos 2014). The developmental needs of employees should also be identified in the process. (Pulakos 2004 and Oberoi and Rajgarhia 2014). The system “should encourage collaboration, teamwork, and communication” (Oberoi and Rajgarhia 2014).

An effective performance management system helps in “clarifying job responsibilities and expectations” and in “enhancing individual and group productivity” (Pulakos 2004). It assists in “developing employee capabilities to their fullest extent through effective feedback and coaching” and also drives “behaviour to align with the organization’s core values, goals and strategy” (Pulakos 2004). An effective performance management system provides “a basis for making operational human capital decisions” such as rewarding employees and “improves communication between employees and managers” (Pulakos 2004).

2.7 Underpinning Theory

Buchner (2007) as quoted by Armstrong (2009) identifies three theories that form the basis of performance management. One of the theories is goal theory propounded by Locke and Latham (2002) which emphasises four mechanisms by which goals are connected to performance outcomes. Goals direct attention to priorities and thus aid the planning process. They also stimulate effort by specifying what the individual is expected to achieve. They challenge people to bring their knowledge and skills to bear to enhance their chances of success. The more challenging the goal the more people will use their full knowledge and skills. Goal theory informs the practice in performance management of setting and agreeing objectives against which performance can be measured and managed (Armstrong 2009). The different models of performance management recognise the need to set and agree work objectives which individual employees are required to work towards to contribute towards overall organisational performance. Performance evaluation, feedback and review only make sense if the performance goals have been set and agreed.

The second theory is control theory which emphasises feedback as a means of shaping behaviour. When people receive feedback on their performance they realise the difference between what they are doing and what they are expected to do. This provides the basis of control action to align actual performance to expected performance (Armstrong 2009). Feedback and control are again part of all performance management systems. It allows employees to understand how far their performance meets expectations and what they are expected to do to excel.

Social cognitive theory is identified as the third theory that underpins performance management practice (Bandura, 1986 quoted in Armstrong 2009). Central to social cognitive theory is the concept of self-efficacy which suggests that people's performance is influenced by what they believe they can or cannot do. In performance management it is important to develop and strengthen employees' self-belief as a way of improving their performance (Armstrong 2009).

The theories described above incorporate elements of motivation theory. Indeed at the root of performance management is motivation theory. People have to be motivated to improve their performance and seek to exceed expectations. Motivation

theory has implications for the design and implementation of performance management systems (Atkinson and Shaw 2006).

2.8 Models of Performance Management in the Public Sector

The literature describes various models of performance management in general and models that have been developed specifically for use in public sector settings. Apparent from the literature is the fact that models that have been used with different degrees of success in the private sector cannot be simply transported into the public sector (Radnor and McGuire 2004). It has been seen as necessary to modify the models in use in the private sector or to develop new models in order to take into account the peculiar nature of public sector organisations. A few of the models that have been used in the public sector will be considered.

2.8.1 Balanced Scorecard

The balanced scorecard was originally developed for and applied in private sector organisations. With increasing demand for public sector organisations to be transparent and accountable, the balanced scorecard has been adopted by the public sector as a tool that can assist them to improve their performance, transparency and accountability (Northcourt and Taulapapa 2012; Chan 2004). The balanced scorecard provides a means by which organisations can implement their strategies. It allows organisations to take a multi-dimensional perspective of performance across different objectives and stakeholders (Northcourt and Taulapapa 2012). The traditional financial measures of performance are complemented by non-financial performance measures such as customer satisfaction, internal business process and learning and growth (Chan 2004).

The balanced scorecard has been adapted for use in the public sector. The result was the public sector scorecard illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page.

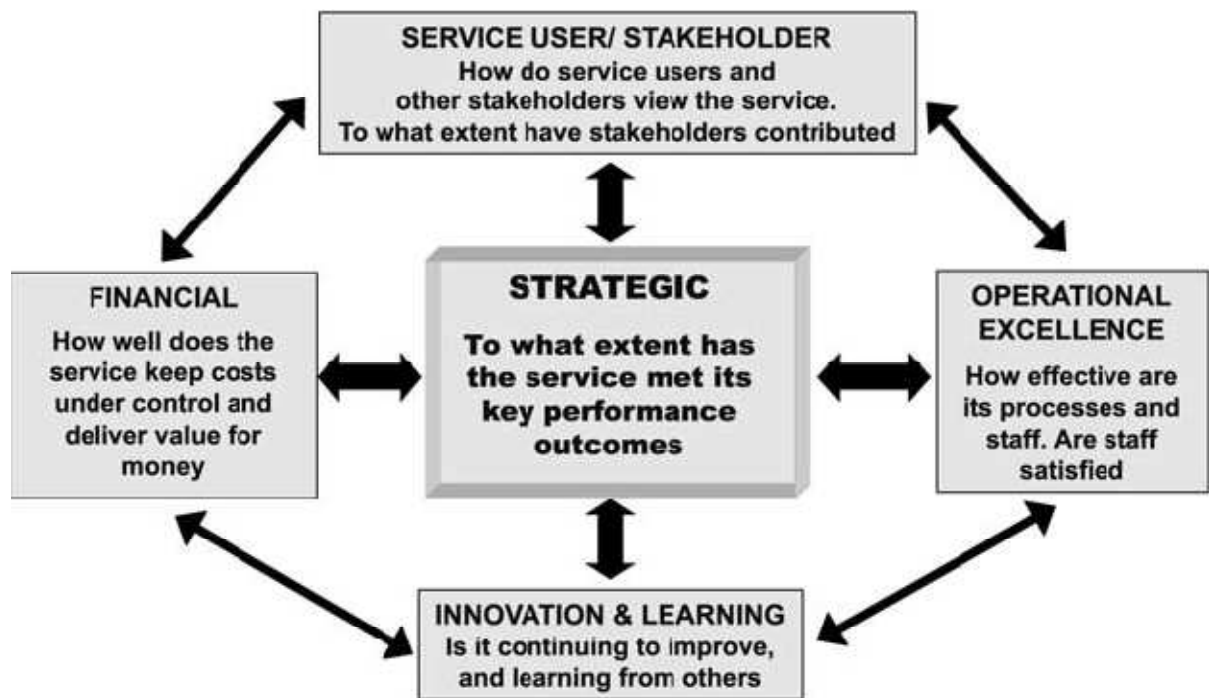


Figure 1: Public Sector Scorecard. Source: Moullin et al 2007.

The public sector scorecard has five dimensions. The strategic dimension captures the key performance outcomes reflecting why the service exists and what it hopes to achieve. It helps the organisation to track its performance against its main objectives and key performance targets. It also makes specific mention of service users and stakeholders (Moullin et al 2007 and McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005).

The service perspective looks at how the organisation intends to provide services to the users of its services and stakeholders. It alerts the organisation to the need for user and stakeholder involvement in the service provision activities and the need to find out their opinion on the services offered (Moullin et al and McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005).

Operational excellence denotes the effectiveness of organisational processes and of staff. It encompasses measures of staff satisfaction. Organisational processes have to be examined to clarify their purpose and to improve them while at the same time eliminating those that are identified to be unnecessary (Moullin et al and McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005).

The financial perspective is concerned with how effectively and efficiently an organisation uses its financial resources. It is about how well the organisation manages its finances and keeps its costs down (Moullin *et al* and McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005).

The fifth dimension – innovation and learning – looks at whether or not the organisation continues to learn and to improve its performance (McAdam, Hazlett and Casey 2005).

Empirical studies have found that there is a low rate of adoption of the balanced scorecard in the public sector in spite of the identified potential of the system to improve the performance of public sector organisations (Northcourt and Taulapapa 2012). Where the balanced scorecard has been used reported problems with its implementation include the lack of linkages with the remuneration system and inadequate management support (Chan 2004). Adaptation of the balanced scorecard for public sector organisations has to take into account the differences between the two sectors. Thus instead of emphasising the financial factor as what happens in the private sector, public sector organisations have to put the customer or client at the centre (Murby and Gould, 2005:21).

2.8.2 Five Factor Model

The five factor model of performance management has five dimensions that need to be taken into consideration. Mission statement refers to an expression of the purpose for which the organisation exists. In the context of the public sector the mission statement is expected to capture the aspirations of the community for whose benefit the services are to be provided. It should also express the organisation's values (Mwita 2000). In this respect, the five factor model is similar to the balanced scorecard. Both models stress the need for the organisation to be clear on its strategic intent which then becomes the basis of subsequent elements in the performance management system.

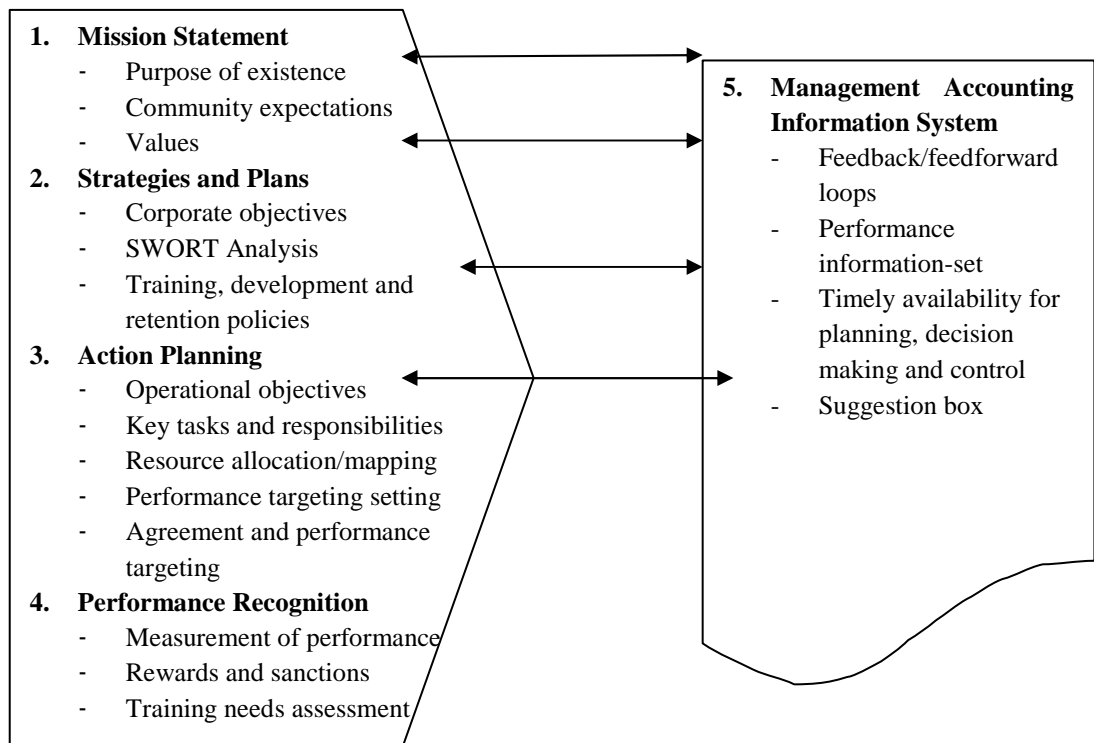


Figure 2: The Five Factor Performance Management Model. Source: Mwita, J.I. 2000

The second element of the model refers to strategies and plans. This element emphasises the need for the organisation to develop plans that give expression to the strategy. Corporate objectives have to be spelt out; supportive policies such as training and retention policies have to be put in place (Mwita 2000).

Action planning comes next. At this stage operational objectives and key tasks and responsibilities are spelt out. This leads to the development of measurable targets and the crafting of performance agreements (Mwita 2000).

Next comes performance recognition which is essentially a performance evaluation exercise. Performance evaluation entails measurement of performance using pre-determined performance measures. It forms the basis of performance based reward systems that are meant to motivate employees to a sustained performance effort. Training and development needs are also assessed leading to the development of performance improvement plans (Mwita 2000).

The management accounting information system aspect is essentially an information collection and analysis process that supports the first four steps. It is both a feedback and feed-forward process that helps to reinforce the performance management system and informs any corrective action that may be necessary. It also informs further system improvement as the organisation looks to the future (Mwita 2000).

2.8.3 Results Based Management

Another performance management model that has been widely adopted in the public sector is the results-based management (RBM) approach. RBM is defined as “a strategic management approach aimed at ensuring that all activities are structured around achieving desired results” (UNDP 2011).

RBM starts with planning which involves activities such as setting the vision of the organisation and defining the results framework. Once it is agreed to pursue a set of results implementation begins. Monitoring of the implementation process is then carried out on a continuous basis to ensure that results are being achieved. Monitoring and evaluation provide invaluable information for decision-making and lessons learned for the future (UNGP 2010).

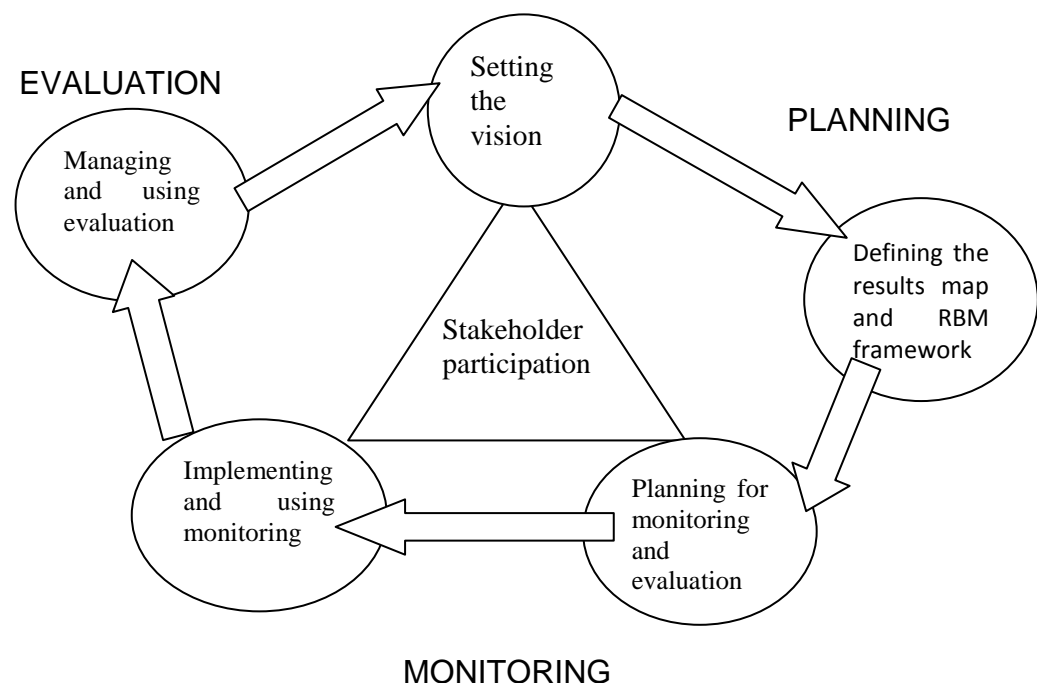


Figure 3: The RBM Life-cycle Approach. Source: UNDP 2010

2.9 Conceptual Framework

2.9.1 Strategy Formulation and Stakeholder Participation

From the literature review it is possible to build a conceptual framework for a performance management framework that can be used to analyse performance management in the public sector. The conceptual framework proceeds from the premises that local authorities should allow citizen participation in the formulation and revision of their strategies. Strategic planning forms the basis of any subsequent performance management systems that may be adopted. It is, therefore, important that the expectations and aspirations of the citizenry are captured at this stage. Without citizen participation any alignment between the council's goals and the expectations of the public will be a matter of pure coincidence. Granted that public expectations and priorities may be numerous and even conflicting, it is nevertheless worthwhile to allow people to participate in matters affecting them. This will eventually influence their perception of the work done by council. If performance management is seen as "the process of managing the execution of an organization's strategy ... (and) how plans are translated into results" (support.sas.com/publishing/pubcat/chaps/59791.pdf) then such a process can only be effective if those for whom the plans are made and executed make an input into the planning process.

Another dimension of stakeholder participation is employee participation in the strategy formulation process and in the performance management process itself. This is critical if employees are to own and identify with the strategy and the process of its implementation. It is also critical for employee motivation. Management imposition often results in employee alienation if not sabotage of the process.

2.9.2 Departmental Strategy and Work Plans

The next element in the model is the departmental strategy and work plans. As the first stage in the implementation of the organisational strategy, the strategy must be distilled into departmental strategies and operational plans. Employee participation continues to be important at this level. Employees in each department should participate in the formulation of departmental strategies and plans. This will motivate them and induce a sense of ownership and create conditions for the successful implementation of the strategy and plans.

2.9.3 Individual Employee Work Plan

The performance management process commences with the development of individual employee work plans. Through this process the departmental work plans are further broken down into specific work tasks and activities to be carried out by individual employees. Measurements, work standards, performance targets and deadlines are discussed and agreed upon. The employee's job expectations are recognised and an attempt is made to align them with job requirements. Resources are allocated to enable successful performance.

2.9.4 Monitoring

During implementation performance should be monitored. This is basically an information gathering exercise; information about performance is gathered and analysed and decisions made about how performance can be improved. Management should take responsibility to coach employees and provide them with the necessary support. Training and development should be provided where shortcomings are realised. Monitoring is an ongoing process throughout the performance management cycle.

2.9.5 Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation should be carried out at regular intervals. It is meant to determine the degree to which employees are meeting the agreed performance targets and standards. It forms the basis upon which certain decisions can be made. Good performance can be rewarded while poor performance is sanctioned. Tying performance to the reward system helps to motivate employees. It must be clear that poor performance is not acceptable and that it has consequences. Training needs are identified and training programmes are subsequently formulated and administered to support employee performance.

An important element of the evaluation process is a consideration of the impact of the service delivery effort on the citizenry. Service delivery is not just about employees meeting performance targets. The performance must have the intended impact on the beneficiaries of the service. This is one way by which public organisations become accountable to their stakeholders (UNDG, 2010:26)

2.9.6 Review of Performance Management System

The whole performance management system needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. Such reviews should consider all aspects of the system to ensure that there is integration among all elements of the system.

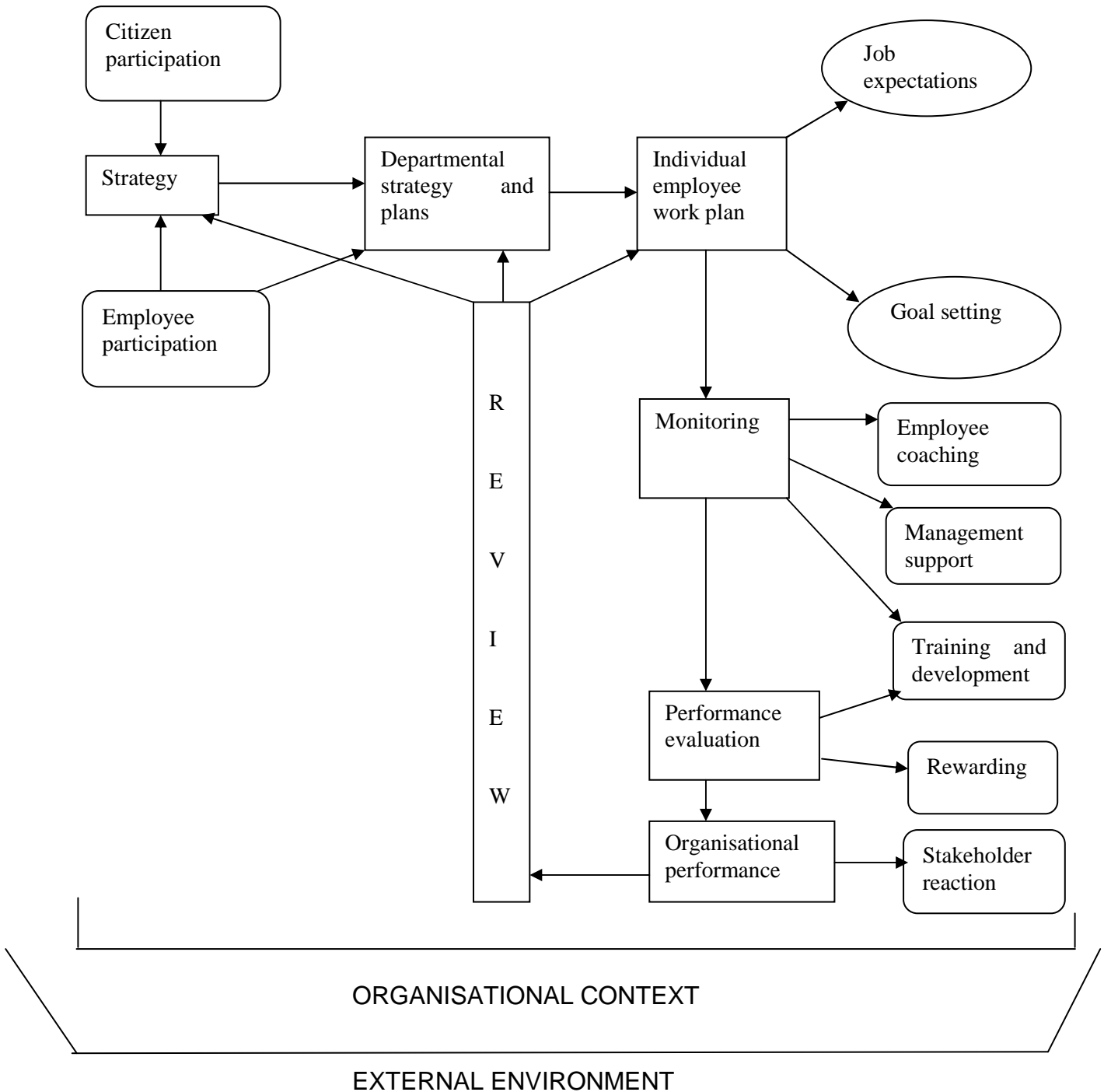


Figure 4: Performance Management Framework. Adapted from Government of Mauritius (<http://civilservice.gov.mu>) and Armstrong (2009)

2.9.7 Organisational Performance

Improved organisational performance is the main objective of performance management. Individual performance contributes to organisational performance and it is hoped that there would be synergist effects. It is essential that organisational performance is regularly reviewed to determine if it is in line with expectations. It is also important to measure stakeholder reaction or feedback to organisational performance. Success in service delivery is very much linked to stakeholder perception of the service. Local authorities thus need a mechanism by which they can gauge public perception of the services they provide.

2.9.8 Organisational Context

Organisational context is another important element in any performance management system. It is made up of such aspects as organisational culture, employee relations climate, the people who make up the organisation, organisational structure, size of the organisation and technology and working practices. A mix of these elements produces a unique context for each organisation and it is within this unique context that performance management systems are introduced and implemented (Armstrong, 2009:35-37). As Nytes *et al* (2010:2) put it, "because each government has its own unique characteristics and history, approaches that work well for one may not be appropriate for another (and) simply superimposing a performance management process onto a traditionally managed organization may sound good, but in practice, it is not likely to make any difference. To make real improvements, organizational culture must also be addressed."

2.9.9 External Environment

Organisations operate within and interact with their external environments. The external environment is dynamic and ever changing. This calls for organisations to adapt their systems to the changing environment if they are to remain relevant (Armstrong 2009).

The above outlined conceptual framework was used for this research project. It was adapted to make it more comprehensive and to capture elements that are deemed to be specific to public organisations such as rural local authorities which are the subject of the study. The performance management system of the case organisation was assessed against each element of the model. Success or failure of the

performance management system was determined by how far the performance management practices of the local authority match the model.

2.10 Summary

The literature on the implementation of performance management in the public sector has been explored. Several themes that emerge from the existing body of literature have been examined. It has emerged that performance management as a concept originated in private sector practice and was later introduced to the public sector as a means of improving the performance, accountability and transparency of public sector organisations. Although the concept has been adapted to suit the reality of the public sector environment it has maintained its essential characteristics. Various models have been implemented with varying degrees of success. A conceptual framework to assess the implementation of performance management in the public sector, particularly in local authorities, has been developed. The next chapter explains and justifies the methodological approach that was used for the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodological approach employed in this research study. The problem statement, the research objectives, research questions and research proposition are briefly restated. The rest of the chapter discusses the research philosophy followed by the research approach, research strategy, research choice and research procedures and techniques. Ethical issues are also discussed with a view to explaining how they were handled. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the data was collected and analysed and the measures taken to improve the validity and reliability of the study. The study used a case study to assess the effectiveness of the performance management systems used by Zimbabwean rural local authorities in assisting them to meet their service delivery objectives. The case study approach was deemed to be effective for its ability to examine issues in depth from different perspectives.

3.2 Methodological Framework

3.2.1 Recapitulation

As already discussed in some detail in Chapter 1, the study was motivated by the observed and reported failure of rural local authorities in Zimbabwe to provide services to the satisfaction of their ratepayers and other important stakeholders in spite of employing different models of performance management. One of the major contributory factors to the poor performance could be poorly designed and/or poorly implemented performance management systems. This study, therefore, examines the extent to which the performance management systems being used in the rural councils of Zimbabwe are assisting the councils to meet their service delivery objectives. The literature available does not dwell much on the situation in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. Although there is much research on the applicability of performance management in the public sector focusing on particular models, there is little research that attempts to link performance management to strategic or operational objectives in local authorities.

The main objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which the performance management systems used by Marondera Rural District Council, an example of a rural local authority, have assisted the local authority to meet its service delivery objectives.

The main research question formulated to guide this study was: How effective are the performance management systems employed by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe in assisting the local authorities to meet their service delivery objectives?

It is the proposition of this study that rural local authorities fail to meet their service delivery objectives due in part to a lack of well crafted and implemented performance management systems. It is the contention of the study that with well crafted and implemented performance management systems rural local authorities should be able to meet their service delivery objectives.

3.2.2 Research Philosophy

The research was carried out using predominantly the interpretivist philosophy which is a qualitative approach. According to this approach social phenomena are too complex to be interpreted on the basis of pre-defined principles. Human beings “interpret ... everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning (they) give to these roles. (They) interpret the social roles of others in accordance with (their) own set of meanings” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009:116). The challenge of the researcher is seen as one of trying to understand the world from the point of view of the research subjects. Business situations are not only complex and unique; they are also “a function of a particular set of circumstances and individuals coming together at specific times” (ibid.). Qualitative research involves the “subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour” (ibid.). Research becomes a function of the researcher’s insights and impressions. The qualitative approach generates results in non-quantitative form or in a form which is not amenable to rigorous quantitative analysis (Kothari 2004).

This is in contrast to the positivist philosophy according to which only objectively verifiable and observable facts (observable social reality) are the only acceptable subject of study. The result of such study is the generation of law-like generalisations

that are applicable in similar circumstances. Research work is said to take place in a value free way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).

Quantitative and qualitative research methods differ in a number of ways. They differ in their analytical objectives and the types of questions they pose. They also differ in the types of data collection instruments they use, the forms of data they produce and the degree of flexibility built into study design (Mack *et al* 2005).

According to Snape and Spencer (2003), qualitative research is a naturalistic/interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meaning people give to the phenomena within their social setting. They explain that it provides a deeper understanding of the social world; it is based on a small scale sample; it uses interactive data collection methods, i.e. interviews; it allows new issues and concepts to be explored.

The concept of performance management lends itself to qualitative research. Any type of performance management that is implemented has to deal with the subjective interpretation of the people involved. The way in which it eventually operates will reflect the reaction and subjective understanding of the people involved and the social setting in which it is supposed to operate. This, however, does not discount the usefulness of a quantitative approach to the study. Elements of the positivist philosophy have been used where they were deemed necessary to illustrate and enhance the qualitative analysis that dominates this study.

3.2.3 Research Approach

The study used predominantly the inductive approach. This is an approach whereby the study proceeds by way of collecting data which is then analysed for emerging themes. It proceeds from specific observations to broader generalisations and allows the phenomena under study to be examined and explained (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). The study is however premised on a theoretical framework as explained in Chapter 2 that is meant to guide the enquiry. It proceeds from that theoretical framework to explore issues that emerged during the course of collecting the data as a result of which the theoretical framework was modified.

3.2.4 Research Strategies

This research is in the form of a holistic case study. It looks at Marondera Rural District Council in depth as an example of a rural local authority in Zimbabwe. Robson (2002) quoted in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:145-6) defines case study as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.” The case study has much to recommend it as a research strategy. It generates a “rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009:146). Issues can be examined in greater depth since only one organisation will be the focus of the study. The case study can provide answers to the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ questions (ibid.). Though the findings of the study cannot be generalised to all other rural local authorities, they may still be relevant to some of them. The rural local authorities were all created through an Act of parliament, the Rural District Councils Act [*Chapter 29:13*], and have basically the same powers and service delivery mandate conferred upon them by the Act. They also have basically the same organisational structures.

The organisation selected for the case study was selected because the researcher is employed by the organisation. It, therefore, became inevitable to adopt the role of practitioner-researcher. While this has much to recommend it, it has its own disadvantages. It has the advantage that the researcher was already seized with the issues under investigation and would be able to improve work practice as a result of the study. It was not necessary to spend time learning the context in the same manner that an outsider would. Access to sources of data was also easy; there was no difficulty of having to negotiate research access (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). The approach, however, raises certain ethical questions particularly to do with the researcher’s objectivity in dealing with issues and people that he is involved with as part of his work. Consciousness of the assumptions and preconceptions that have developed through working for the organisation overtime could have prevented exploration of issues that could have enriched the research (ibid.). Another challenge that had to be overcome had to do with inhibited interactions especially with junior employees (ibid.). To reduce the impact of these challenges the purpose of the research was explained to the participants; it was explained that besides being

necessary for work related improvement, the research was also for academic interest.

3.2.5 Research Choice

The main method that was employed for this study is in-depth interviews. Given the qualitative thrust of the study this was deemed to be the most appropriate method by which relevant data could be obtained. Issues could be interrogated thoroughly in ways that assisted to answer the research question more completely. Archival research was also employed to support the in-depth interviews. Information obtained from this source was used to illuminate the issues raised in the interviews and vice versa. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:150) explain, “an archival strategy allows research questions which focus upon the past and changes over time to be answered...” It also fed into the interviews where the points raised in the interviews appeared to contradict what the records showed. The research choice can, therefore, be best described as multi-method qualitative approach.

3.2.6 Time Horizons

The study took a longitudinal perspective covering the period 2010 to 2014. Data from this period were obtained through archival research and interviews with long serving employees who have been with the organisational since 2010 or before. A longitudinal perspective was found to be more suitable for the study since it would allow trends to emerge in the administration of performance management systems and the service delivery outcomes. This made for a more informed analysis than would have been the case if a cross-sectional perspective had been used.

3.2.7 Research Procedures and Techniques

3.2.7.1 Participants

At the time of the study Marondera Rural District Council was made up of forty employees distributed across eleven grades with grade eleven being the highest grade. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select participants in the study. Also called judgmental sampling, this sampling method enables the researcher to choose cases that can best assist in answering the research question and meeting the research objectives. The researcher is able to select participants who are knowledgeable about the issues under research, are willing to talk and representative of a range of points of view. The sampling method is often used when

working with small samples such as in a case study where the researcher wants to select cases that are particularly informative. However, purposive sampling cannot produce samples that are statistically representative of the population (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).

A total of fifteen council employees were selected to participate in the study. These included the chief executive officer, four heads of department, two sectional heads, three clerical employees, two tractor drivers and two general hands. The chief executive officer was selected for participation because of his position in the organisation. It would be possible to get the strategic thrust of the organisation from the chief executive officer. He was best placed to provide an overview of the organisation and of the performance management system.

The heads of department were chosen so as to get a feel of how the performance management system was viewed at that level and how the organisational strategy translated into departmental strategies and operational plans that are supposed to deliver the services expected by the stakeholders and rate payers. Sectional heads were selected so as to track the translation of the organisational strategy as it became further refined into actual activities. The idea was to be able to assess how the performance management system was understood at the different levels of the organisation down to the lowest level. It was necessary to assess if a line of sight could be established between the highest and lowest levels of the organisation. Differences of view between the different levels could also be examined and explained.

3.2.7.2 Data Collection Procedures

3.2.7.2.1 Archival Research

One of the data collection procedures that were employed for this study is document study or archival research. As Corbetta (2003) explains, a document study yields information about the phenomenon being investigated. The documents exist independently of the researcher's actions and are produced for purposes different from those of the researcher. Document study is a non-reactive technique; the information given in the document is not subject to distortion as a result of interaction

between the researcher and the respondent. It also makes it possible to study the past (ibid.).

An archival research was conducted first to get a picture of the organisation's strategic objectives and to examine what had already taken place with respect to the implementation of performance management over the period covered by the study. Various documents such as the strategic plan, operational plan, annual budgets and performance management records were perused. Some tentative relationships and patterns began to emerge from this study of secondary data. This was used to improve the interview guide so as to be able to pursue issues emerging from the archival research and get participants' view of the outcome of performance management processes conducted in the past.

3.2.7.2.2 Semi Structured and In-depth Interviews

Qualitative interviews are effective in getting deep insights about how people experience, feel and interpret social phenomena around them (Mack *et al* 2005). The researcher draws up a set of questions to guide inquiry into specific issues regarding the question of interest but can identify and pursue new issues that were not originally part of the interview. The interviewer can add or remove questions from the schedule depending on how each interview proceeds and is not obliged to ask the questions in any specific order (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). Semi-structured and in-depth interviews allow the interviewer to probe for more detailed information since it is important to understand the specific meanings that interviewees ascribe to particular phenomena (ibid.).

In-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted so as to obtain data from selected internal sources. This approach made it possible for the researcher to explain any questions that may have been unclear to the interviewees and to get clarification on any responses. Emerging issues could also be pursued to a greater depth. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide. This data collection instrument allowed for flexibility during the interview process but also gave some identifiable structure to the interviews that enabled comparable data to be collected and emerging themes to be identified. The interviews were audio-recorded to

minimise the danger of failing to capture some data and to allow for later analysis. Written notes were also made at the same time.

3.2.6 Data Analysis

The interviews conducted were all audio-recorded and notes were also made during the interview process. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim. Responses were then summarized and categorized using the interview guide whose development was guided by the research questions and objectives. Data gathered through archival research were merged with data collected through interviews in the relevant categories. These categorizations were then compared to the conceptual framework that was developed in Chapter 2. This process enabled trends to emerge and to be identified. Relationships between different elements of performance management practices in the case organisation began to emerge and explanations of the effectiveness or otherwise of the performance management system could be deduced.

3.3 Ethical Issues

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) “ethical concerns will emerge as you plan your research, seek access to organisations and to individuals, collect, analyse and report your data.” They define research ethics as “the appropriateness of (the researcher’s) behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of (his/her) work, or are affected by it” (ibid., 183-4). Ethical issues inevitably arise from the topic that the researcher seeks to investigate and the methods s/he uses to obtain valid and reliable data (Nachmias and Nachmias 2008). It is important to address matters of research ethics to ensure that the way the research is conducted, not only produces valid and reliable data, but also observes the rights and interests of research participants and protects them from deceit, harm and embarrassment (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).

In the context of the current study, permission to conduct the research for primarily academic purposes was sought from the chief executive officer. The purpose of the research and how it was to be conducted were explained. Permission to conduct research on the topic and access to secondary records and intended participants was granted. The research was conducted with minimal disturbances to participants’ work programmes.

It was also important to disclose the primary purpose of the research to the participants themselves without making it appear as though the participants were obliged to take part in the study. Participants' were informed of their right to refuse to take part in the study. This was important given the researcher's senior position in the organisation. This could, however, have complicated the matter for there was a possibility of participants fearing assumed victimisation in the future for refusal to participate.

The way in which the data was to be collected was also explained to participants. Permission to audio-record was first sought from the participants and participants were assured that whatever they said during the course of the interviews would not be used against them in any way and would be deleted soon after the completion of the research. Participants were also assured that the data they provided would be treated with strict confidentiality and that their right to anonymity would be respected.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

The concepts of reliability and validity have relevance for research since they help to define the strength of the data. "This is of particular concern in the context of generalisation where the ability to transfer findings to other contexts or wider theory will be circumscribed by the soundness of the evidence" (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

3.4.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the data collection techniques or analysis procedures used by the researcher will yield consistent findings. Reliability can be assessed by determining if the measures used by the researcher will yield the same results on other occasions, whether other researchers can reach the same conclusions and the degree of transparency in how the raw data was interpreted (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). It generally concerns the replicability of research findings and whether the findings could be repeated if another study using the same or similar methods was done (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

The issue of replicability of findings in qualitative research has been the subject of much debate. Some authorities (Hughes and Sharrock 1997; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Holstein and Gubrium 1997 all quoted in Ritchie and Lewis 2003) argue that replicability of findings is not possible in qualitative research given the dynamism of

the context of the research. They argue that the replication of qualitative studies is difficult to achieve since the findings reflect the reality of the situation at the time of the study (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

3.4.2 Validation

Validity is a measure of the degree to which the research findings are really about what they appear to be about. It refers to the 'correctness' or 'precision' of a research reading (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Validity has two dimensions, namely, internal validity which is concerned with whether the researcher is actually investigating what s/he claims to be investigating, and external validity which is concerned with the extent to which the research findings are applicable to other groups within the population or to other contexts or settings (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

In the context of the current study validity was increased through the use of different methods to investigate the problem from different angles. Interviews were used to solicit data from the participants. Such data was compared with and checked against secondary records and vice versa. The interview guide itself was linked to the research questions and thus to the research objectives. Participants' responses were audio-recorded, transcribed and carefully analysed.

While it is recognised that the context of the research was unique and thus making it difficult to replicate the study, to increase the validity of the research the different decisions, methods and procedures followed have been set out and justified.

3.2 Limitations

The case study strategy was used for this study. Although the strategy allows for an in-depth exploration of issues, the findings most definitely apply to the case organisation and cannot be generalized to other organisations of a like or different nature. Such generalization can only be done with great caution. Thus the findings of this study apply to Marondera Rural District Council, the case organisation, and cannot be applied to other rural local authorities or any other organisation without modification.

3.3 Summary

The chapter has discussed and justified the study's philosophical approach and rationalized the different decisions and processes undertaken throughout the study. A predominantly interpretivist approach was adopted as it was deemed to be better able to explain issues to do with people's views and attitudes as they relate to the topic under investigation. The different methods that were used to collect data were described and justified. The way in which the data was analysed was also explained. Ethical issues were addressed in the context of the current study. The chapter finally looked at issues of validity and reliability and discussed the measures taken to improve the validity and reliability of the study. The next chapter presents and discusses the results obtained from the case study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find out the effectiveness of the performance management systems used by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe in assisting the local authorities to realise their service delivery objectives. The study was carried out using an interpretivist qualitative approach and a case study strategy to explore the topic in greater depth. This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. The study was conducted using in-depth interviews combined with archival or documentary research. The interview questions were organised around four main areas which corresponded to the research questions and the objectives of the study. These are (i) the service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council, (ii) the objectives of the performance management system(s) implemented by Marondera Rural District Council, (iii) linkages between the service delivery objectives of the rural councils and the objectives of their performance management systems and (iv) the factors that determine the success or failure of the implementation of performance management systems by rural district councils. The findings are discussed around these areas and are also related to the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 4 and to the literature on performance management in the public sector.

4.2 Sample Description

For the purposes of this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews carried out with a purposive sample of fifteen employees of Marondera Rural District Council. The employees were spread out through all the eleven employee grades in the organisation with a bias towards members of the management team. These included the chief executive officer, four heads of department, two sectional heads, two clerks, one senior clerk, two tractor drivers, one security guard and two general hands.

The sample consisted of three female employees and twelve male employees. The ages of the employees in the sample ranged from 27 years to 49 years. They had served the organisation for periods ranging from one year to 25 years. Their

educational level ranged from primary level up to post graduate degree level. All Participants were married.

4.3 Findings of the Research

The interviews conducted were based on an interview guide which was designed to solicit responses around defined themes that corresponded to the research questions and the objectives of the study. An assortment of questions was asked under each theme and where necessary explanations were sought for archival research evidence especially where such evidence appeared to vary from the oral evidence.

4.3.1 Service Delivery Objectives of Marondera Rural District Council

One of the key findings was that there is a general awareness of council's service delivery objectives across the cross-section of council employees in the sample. Knowledge of council's service delivery objectives appears to be deduced from everyday practice rather than any systematic and deliberate attempt by management to inform the employees. One of the participants (P8TD) put it thus: "I have never been told by anyone what council's service delivery objectives are; I know them from what I see happening every day."

There was a remarkable commonality of what participants thought constituted service delivery by council. Both management and non-managerial employees mentioned road maintenance, the provision of health facilities and the provision of educational facilities (for example, P1SM, P2JM, P3SM, P4SM, P5SM, P8TD, P6GH). It was easy to see where council's emphasis in terms of service delivery lies.

There was a variety of responses to the question of what council seeks to achieve through its service delivery activities. Management Participants framed their responses in terms of the impact they hoped they would make on the lives of the people. According to Participant P3SM:

Our broad objective is simply to improve the livelihoods of the people that live within our district. All our activities tend towards that objective. As a local authority we carry out a delegated

mandate, you know, to contribute towards national development in all its facets...social, economic and even political.

These same ideas were echoed by other managerial Participants (P1SM, P2JM, P5SM, P7JM). Non managerial participants tended to frame their responses in terms of activity objectives or outcomes of the work that is done by council. "Council's objective is to make sure that roads are well maintained and that people have clinics and schools" (P10TD) or "council provides educational and health services to the people" (P14CL).

The differences in perspective can be explained by the relative positions and roles of the participants in the organisation. Managerial employees by virtue of their positions and roles are concerned with the impact of council's work in the lives of the people served by council whereas non-managerial employees look at the activities that they do and their outcomes. Non-managerial employees carry out the activities that constitute service delivery and are measured on the outcomes.

It was, however, notable that there is no formal written statement of council's service delivery objective. This was confirmed through oral evidence particularly by managerial participants. Archival research did not reveal any written statement of council's service delivery objectives either.

The case organisation undertakes public consultation on an annual basis. Consultation meetings are held with the public in the preparation of the budget. This activity is carried out by managers and councillors (P1SM, P3SM, P5SM, P6GH). Lower level employees do not have a role to play in this process. While some see the consultation process as an important process that allows the public to make an input to council's service delivery activities (P3SM) others see it as a necessary ritual that has to be carried out to legitimise the budgeting process (P5SM). According to Participant P3SM:

As council we have fully embraced the concept of participatory budgeting which is informed by the fact that the people must have a say in issues that affect them. We hold consultative meetings

with our ratepayers in preparation for our budget every year. These meetings provide an opportunity for the public to ... er ...have their say in council plans, to say what they expect council to do for them and to also express their views about council's activities. This is the approach we have used for the last five years or so.

Most management employees tended to agree with this position. They saw the consultation process as playing a critical role in allowing the public to have a say in council activities. In contrast others saw the process as a mere ritual that had to be carried out to satisfy the demands of central government. According to Participant P5SM:

It seems to me that the process does not influence council's plans very much. Nothing seems to change in what council does ... we keep doing the same things year after year. There are many things that people would like council to do but which it cannot do or is not doing. We do certain things which council is supposed to do even if people do not say that they want those things. Sometimes people want council to do what it is not empowered, mandated to do. In my view the whole consultation process is more about complying with ministerial requirements ... because the Ministry of Local Government would like the consultation minutes to be submitted ... it is not much about consulting people. I guess our main aim in carrying out the process is to facilitate the approval of our budget more than anything else.

There is some truth in both views. While members of the public get an opportunity to make an input to council's planning processes, it might not be possible to incorporate all their diverse expectations into the organisation's plans. The consultation process has to be carried out all the same. In the context of a public organisation like council it is also obvious that the consultation process gives rise to competing political interests which continue to be played out in council when the final decisions come to be made. As Participant P3SM put it: "Councillors themselves compete for service delivery. As political animals they always have an eye on the next election and think in terms of what brings them the popular vote; it is a delicate balancing act." This is

one of the issues that McAdam, Hazlett and Casey (2005) address in their research on the development and application of performance management approaches in the public sector in the UK. They acknowledge the need for the public entity to identify its stakeholders and develop approaches and processes by which the interests of the different stakeholders can be addressed.

Archival research confirmed that consultation of the public had taken place over the period covered by the research. The minutes of the consultation process revealed certain recurrent demands by the residents which did not seem to find expression in council's annual budgets. For, example, residents of newly resettled areas indicated that among their priorities were water supply points and clinics. These demands did not find expression in most of the budgets or if they did, were not attended to.

Participants reflected different levels of involvement in setting council's service delivery objectives. The general picture that emerged from this study was that setting the service delivery objectives of council was very much the function of management. Lower level employees had little role to play. Participant P12GH put it very bluntly: "I have no role to play in setting the service delivery objective of council; I just do what I am told to do." At the same time the participant felt that council needed to pay more attention to the development of schools than it was doing. The claims by some management participants of involvement in setting the service delivery objectives of council were, however, not backed up by any written statement of the objectives.

It was also a finding of this study that the case organisation had no current strategic plan in place. Archival research showed that the last strategic plan was put in place in 2005 and covered the period up to 2010. Participant R3SM explained that this particular document was crafted for the purposes of trying to access funding from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. It was, therefore, not surprising that the expression of council's strategic objectives tended to vary from one participant to another while some participants said they did not know what council's strategic objectives were.

The conceptual framework in Figure 4 places emphasis on the development of a strategic plan for the organisation which then becomes the basis of any performance

management system the organisation may adopt. The organisation's strategic plan is distilled down to the departmental strategic plans and to individual work objectives. Without it there is no systematic way of focusing the organisation's efforts and to communicate to individuals whether employees or other stakeholders about the organisation's intentions going into the future. It also provides the framework within which citizen and employee participation in the organisation's planning and decision making processes can take place. Through the departmental strategic plan the individual employee's work plan becomes an expression of the organisation's strategic plan.

In summary, it was found that the case organisation has no strategic plan or formally defined and communicated service delivery objectives. Employees have had to deduce these objectives from their day to day activities and hence the different ways in which they expressed what they thought to be the service delivery objectives. Citizen participation takes place in council's planning processes although it may not be possible to include everything that is suggested. Employee participation is restricted to management with lower level employees not playing any role at all. The implication for performance management is that it may well lack focus on the critical service delivery objectives that the case organisation is mandated to discharge. Lack of employee participation in setting the service delivery objectives may mean the case organisation is missing out on an opportunity to create employee commitment which is an important element in the performance management system.

4.3.2 Objectives of the Performance Management System(s) Implemented by Marondera Rural District Council

Participants in this study were aware of the performance management system being used by council which they all correctly named as the results based management system or RBM for short. Participants were also aware of the performance management system that council was using in the past which they variously named as performance appraisal (P3SM), management by objectives (P1SM, P5SM) or key result areas (P7JM, P13SC, P15SG). These different expressions pick on some of the key elements of the performance appraisal system that was used by council before the introduction of RBM. An awareness of the performance system is the beginning of understanding how the system operates.

All participants said that they played little or no role in the choice or introduction of performance management system to use in the case organisation. One participant, P3SM put it across this way:

Well, if you look at it, councils have little role to play in the choice of performance management system that they use... at least that is the current position. Councils have simply been directed by the Ministry of Local Government to introduce RBM. All we have to do is ensure that the system is implemented given our circumstances. As a management team our duty is to ensure that the system is up and running.

The literature available suggests the need to take into consideration the organisational context which can be encapsulated as the organisational culture in the introduction and implementation of performance management (Armstrong 2009). The practice in Zimbabwe's local government sector appears to be at variance with this.

There were mixed responses on the question of training in the use of the performance management system and the level of confidence in its use. Among management participants (n=6) there was agreement that some training was conducted although there were different views on the quality and effectiveness of the training. According to Participant P1SM, "the training was done by people who lacked in depth knowledge of the performance management system" and this left the participant without enough confidence in the use of the system. The same views were echoed by participant P5SM who said:

When I joined council I was trained in the use of the performance appraisal system and as I became more used to it I became more comfortable in its use. It is with RBM that problems started. We were required to start using RBM without any training with indications that training was to come later. More than half a year later no training has been given and we are still blundering through. From a manager's point of view this has created despondency among those that are supposed to use the system.

In contrast, other management participants said that they had confidence in the use of the system. Participant P4SM had this to say: “Yes, we underwent an in-house training ... (and) I am confident with the performance management system in use at council because I have a thorough understanding of it obtained through training.” Participant P2JM echoed the same views and said: “We had a workshop at management level in the council’s boardroom where we were trained how the RBM system works ... I am confident because I have thorough knowledge of how the system works.”

Non-management participants (n=9) indicated that they had not been trained but had been told what to do by their supervisors. The response by Participant P6GH was typical of the responses by non-managerial participants: “No, I have not been trained. All that has happened is for my head of department to explain to me how I should draw up my work plans. I do not know if that is training.” At the same time the participants expressed confidence in the use of the system: “I can say I am confident. I have never been told that I am failing in my work so I suppose I am doing well” (P6GH).

As far as the performance appraisal system was concerned all respondents indicated that they were comfortable with its use since they had used it for a number of years before it was replaced by the results based management system. Nevertheless what appeared to come through was that training needs to be timely and comprehensive. It should precede the implementation of any performance management system that may be introduced. The introduction of any new performance management system needs to be viewed as a change management process whereby employees should be assisted to make the transition from the old to the new system. The impression was created in some instances that some employees still held on to the performance appraisal system which they had used for some time before it was replaced by RBM.

Participants felt that the performance management system was working well even though it needed to be improved. Two main issues that stood out and were mentioned as requiring attention were the need to link the performance management system to a reward system and the need to ensure that there is regular performance

evaluation. Participants felt that the system was working well but there was need to support it with a reward system that differentiated between the good and the poor performers (n=8). The response of Participant P3SM just sums it up:

I will focus on the performance appraisal system that we were using until last year; RBM is a recent development. The performance appraisal system worked well for us save for the few challenges ... At least it enabled us to focus employees' attention on their work. What it lacked was perhaps distinguishing between outstanding performers and others in terms of rewards. We did not adequately send the message that performance matters or that poor performance attracts sanctions. You will realise that this would discourage good performers while it does nothing to encourage the poor performers. This is something that we are working on.

The performance management records show that there seems to be no regular performance monitoring and evaluation. This was confirmed by some participants (n=5) who felt that this was a major weakness of the performance management systems in council. Commenting on this Participant P5SM said, "Perhaps we have not always implemented or managed the system in a good way. It is something that we should improve upon."

Monitoring and evaluation are essential elements of any performance management system. The conceptual framework used in this study places much importance on this aspect. It is from monitoring and evaluation activities that the organisation can assess whether or not the system is working effectively in terms of achieving its performance and ultimately strategic objectives. It is from monitoring and evaluation that training and development needs are identified which if satisfied lead to improved employee and, ultimately, organisational performance. Without this process it is difficult to come up with any meaningful training and development interventions. It is also easy to see why no reward system has been linked to the performance management system in the case organisation. This can only be justified if there is a

robust monitoring and evaluation system in place as part of the performance management cycle.

Most participants (n=12) were able to describe the link between their work and the performance management system. Participants showed awareness that the performance management system was meant to regulate and direct their work. There was however another view that there was little relationship between the performance management system and the work being done. Participants (n=3) stated that the work plans they prepared as part of the performance management system were of little relevance for their day to day operations. They said that no one ever goes back to peruse the work plans once they have been prepared and filed away and that many of the work activities they carried out were not reflected in the work plans. This view is best captured in Participant P6GH's response.

I do not see any link between the two. I do my work; there seems to be nothing that comes out of the performance management system. Sometimes everything ends with the drawing up of the work plans. No one asks you about them throughout the year. You get the feeling that they do not matter at all. I know what I am supposed to and I do not even revisit the work plans once I have written them.

This view is supported by evidence from archival research which shows no regular record of performance evaluation or revision of work plans. The work plans are done at the beginning of the year and there is no evidence of any regular evaluation. The view that there is a relationship between the performance management system and the work done appears to be informed by the fact that what is recorded in the work plans is extracted from the job descriptions of the employees.

A key finding of this study was that the objectives of the performance management system of the case organisation were not formally defined or communicated to the employees. Participants were able to state what they thought were the objectives of the performance management system based on their observation of what happens in the organisation but some pointed out that these objectives were never

communicated to them in any way. For Participant P2JM “the objectives of the performance management system are to enhance service delivery, to enhance accountability and to reduce public complaints.” For Participant P5SM:

The performance management system is meant to assist us to manage employee performance more effectively. I see it as a way of increasing employees’ productivity by identifying any performance problems and taking measures to reduce or eliminate them. It also aims to assist in developing employees by enabling them to acquire new skills that help to improve their performance.

According to Participant P6GH:

It seems to me that council is trying to make people work hard, to put more effort in their work.... I get this from observation of what goes on. I have never been told what council is trying to achieve through the performance management system.

In summary, it was a key finding of the study that the objectives of the performance management system used by the case organisation were not formally defined and communicated to employees. Participants’ statement of the objectives was based on their own observations or on their own knowledge of what a performance management system is supposed to achieve. The implication for the performance management system is that without any formal definition and communication of the objectives of the performance management system the possibility of employees having different views of the objectives is very real (P5SM). It also means that it is difficult to review the system. Any meaningful review can only be done against clearly defined objectives.

4.3.3 Linkages between Service Delivery Objectives and Performance Management Objectives

Following from the non-definition of the objectives of the performance management system and of service delivery, it was difficult to draw any relationship between the two. While participants made an attempt to do so, this was done from their own personal perspective which could not be taken as the official position of the case

organisation. There was no documentary evidence found to suggest that what they said was the official position of the organisation.

The views of participants P5SM and P13SC were closer to the truth than those of any other participant. When asked to explain the relationship between the performance management system and service delivery, Participant P5SM stated:

That is pretty difficult to do since the objectives are not clearly explained and shared. Like I said I have had to guess or assume some of these things ... the objectives of the performance management system. I can only assume that we are looking at things from the same perspective.

Participant P13SC stated:

I do not know the objectives of the performance management system. These were never explained to me. Even the objectives of service delivery; they have also not been explained to me. I just make assumptions about what council is trying to do from the activities that we carry out.

The responses of those participants who tried to show the relationship were varied. One participant (P4SM) said that “there is a direct relationship as the objectives of council's performance management system are derived from the service delivery system. Improving or managing performance is about improving service delivery.” Another participant (P2JM) thought that “council’s service delivery objectives seek to improve the livelihood of communities under its area of jurisdiction while the performance management system also seeks to achieve the same objective.” While there is nothing fundamentally amiss with these responses, they do not seem to reflect any officially defined position; they are the views of individuals independently trying to make sense out of their situation. What was clear was that given the opportunity the employees have good ideas that the case organisation can tap from.

From a performance management perspective it is important to have such elements of the system officially defined and communicated. Such communication helps

individuals to have a shared view of what they are expected to do. It also focuses effort on those activities that the organisation deems to be important.

There were also mixed views on the benefits of the performance management system. Some management participants (n=3) felt the system had benefited the organisation by providing an effective management tool (P1SM, P3SM, P4SM). Those that expressed the view that they had not benefited from the performance management system considered the question from a personal point of view. The dominant view was that there were no benefits because no rewards had been enjoyed by individual employees as a result of the performance management system. Participant P5SM put it this way:

There are a few benefits that we can say we have enjoyed as council. Besides assisting us in better defining the work that has to be done and in managing performance there is little else that we seem to be gaining from the system. There is nothing in it for employees and even for us as managers. Without a linked reward system the performance management system becomes a lot of bother. Resource constraints have made the system into a mere management system from which employees realise no benefit. We are not even able to provide training and development interventions to remedy some of the performance problems that we see. And there is no demonstrable evidence that the system is actually producing the desired results in terms of assisting employees to improve their performance.

Echoing the same views, Participant P12GH said: "Benefits? What benefits? I have never been given any performance bonus for my work. No one else has been given any performance bonus. There is no benefit for employees in the system."

In terms of the conceptual framework used for this study a reward system is one of the critical elements for the success of a performance management system. Employees should be able to see what they stand to gain from the system if they are to be motivated to reach the agreed targets. It would appear that the lack of a reward

system is one of the major weaknesses of the implementation of the performance management system in the case organisation.

Participants suggested two broad ways by which the performance management system could have benefited them more. The most widely mentioned response (n=12) was that there has to be a reward system to support the performance management system. It was suggested that there was need to distinguish between the outstanding performers and the poor performers if the system was to work well. One participant (P9CL) stated that “if council paid employees a performance bonus they could benefit from the system. I think that is the most important thing in performance management ... to motivate employees to do better by giving them performance bonuses. Without that the system is dead; it will not work.” Another (P4SM) said: “I think I could have benefited from bonuses which are performance based. There are no rewards associated with the performance management system.”

Another area stated by two management participants (P3SM, P5SM) has to do with the use of the data generated through the performance management system. The participants observed that the organisation was not making enough use of the data generated by the performance management system to inform other management processes such as training and development. According to Participant P3SM:

I should admit that we have not done a good job of running, er, administering the performance management system. It is possible to improve in a lot of ways the way in which we have handled the system. With proper administration it is possible to generate a lot of data that we can use in our training and development function. Resource constraints have also meant that we have made little use of the performance management system to administer our reward systems. These are some of the more crucial areas which we feel we could reap more benefits from the performance management system.

Participant P5SM echoed the same views:

Any performance management system is as good as the way in which it is implemented. We have not done a good job in that respect if the truth is to be told. Like I said before we need to reward good performance and that way we can be assured that performance will improve. We should also be able to use the information generated from the system to improve our work, our ... er ... performance as an organisation.

The main interest of the study in this section was to establish the link between the service delivery objectives and the performance management objectives of the case organisation. The key finding was that both sets of objectives were not formally defined and communicated to employees. Any linkages that participants made between the two were a result of their own personal effort. The implication for performance management is that it may be difficult to ensure that there is a link between the service delivery mandate of council and the objectives of the performance management system. If the effectiveness of the performance management system is measured in terms of its ability to enable council to meet its service delivery objectives, then a formal statement of the two sets of objectives needs to be developed and communicated to all employees.

4.3.4 Factors which Determine the Success or Failure of the Implementation of the Performance Management Systems by Rural District Councils

Answers to the question on the factors that have supported the performance management system demonstrated some consistency in participants' responses with responses given earlier on to other questions. Participants who felt that they had not benefited from the performance management system also felt that there was nothing to recommend the performance management system. For Participant P5SM "we have always ensured that the necessary paperwork is completed at the beginning of the year. That initiates the process and we need to follow through to make it really work. There is not much to be said on the positive side." Participant P12GH stated: "I do not see much that has happened over the years to support the performance management system. We have continued to do the same things over and over again."

Those that felt that there were positive practices from the performance management system mentioned such aspects as the timely drawing up of performance agreements. Such ideas came exclusively from management participants. They stated sentiments such as:

We have always tried to ensure that the performance agreements are drawn up when they are needed, at the beginning of the year. These draw largely from the budget so that the service delivery activities are captured. We make an effort to ensure that the key result areas for each position contribute to the attainment of our service delivery activities (P3SM).

Participants felt that there were a number of factors and practices that detracted from the success of the performance management system. Two participants (P2JM, P5SM) suggested that the lack of a strategic plan was a weakness that reduced the effectiveness of the performance management system.

Four participants (P1SM, P2JM, P4SM, P10SM) felt that there were resource constraints that limited what could be achieved through the performance management system. Financial resources in particular were seen as being critical if the performance management system was to be successful. The work programmes needed funding if they were to be carried out successfully.

A majority of the participants (n=9) mentioned the absence of a reward system as being detrimental to the success of the performance management system. It was felt that a reward system that distinguishes between the outstanding performers and the poor performers would provide motivation for employees to do their best; its absence was seen as having a negative effect on the outstanding performers.

Five participants thought that there were issues to do with the implementation of the performance management system that were not being properly handled. The issue of non-evaluation of performance was identified as one that particularly detracted from the success of the performance management system.

One management participant felt that there was inadequate baseline data to support the development of meaningful performance indicators. The participant felt that there was need to develop council's capacity to collect the necessary baseline data to support the performance management system. The participant (P3SM) summed up most of the above factors thus:

Hmm, there are a number of things which we realise we have not done at all or have not done very well...which we think have contributed to the ... er ... have reduced the effectiveness of our performance management system. Like you have observed from the records some of our work plans have not been completed in terms of doing the evaluation. That also means we may not been learning much from the whole process or that the process is not working at all ... we may not be drawing any lessons from the system. It is also possible that we may be encouraging the view that the performance management system does not matter, that it is all about writing up documents that no one cares to look at afterwards. We have also not moved to a stage where we can link the results of the performance management system to the reward system ... there is still no relationship between the two say in the form of performance bonuses or any other form of recognition, you know. I have also said already that we do not have any reliable baseline information on which to build our performance management system. The measures and indicators tend to be based on guesswork, just thumb sucking approach.

A number of suggestions were made for improving the performance management system. Two participants (P2JM, P10SM) suggested that council should have a strategic plan to guide its operation and facilitate the creation of a common vision. It was felt that the strategic plan would assist in improving the performance management system by providing a basis for the system.

A suggestion made exclusively by management participants (P1SM, P3SM, P5SM, P10SM) was the need to improve the implementation of the performance

management system by ensuring that all aspects of the system were attended to. The need to carry out performance evaluation was seen as critical for the success of the performance management system. According to Participant P3SM, “perhaps the most important thing is to ensure that we go the full cycle of performance management by completing the performance evaluation process... ensuring that evaluation is an ongoing process and that at the end of a cycle we have a formal report on performance.” This view was also echoed by participant P4SM who said: “There has to be timely and continuous performance reviews and provision of resources.”

A majority of the participants (n=9) mentioned the need to have a reward system in place to support the performance management system. It was felt that a reward system would encourage performance by recognising good performers and encouraging the poor performers. According to participant P9CL, improving the performance management system was “simple; just give good performers a reward. They will continue working hard and it will also encourage the bad performers to do well.”

Another suggestion made by three participants was that training and development programmes had to be put in place to assist in improving performance. There was awareness that the current practice did not systematically analyse performance problems as a means of developing effective training and development interventions.

Participant P3SM summed up most of these suggestions as follows:

There is a lot that we can do to improve our performance management system regardless of whichever system is in use. ... Perhaps the most important thing is to ensure that we go the full cycle of performance management by completing the performance evaluation process... ensuring that evaluation is an ongoing process and that at the end of a cycle we have a formal report on performance. Another thing is to recognise and reward good performance and to punish poor performance accordingly. Performance can improve if we were to tie our training and

development to performance management. The performance management system should enable us to identify training needs which should then help us to design training programmes. We have not looked at our ... er ... systems as being integrated.

The key finding in this section was that there are some current performance management practices that support the system. There is, however, a perception that the system is not working as well as it should. The performance management system can be improved upon to make it more effective.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the study have been framed. It has been found that the case organisation has no formally defined and communicated service delivery objectives and performance management objectives. Following from this the link between the two sets of objectives could not be established. The case organisation, however, has a fairly functional performance management system which needs improvement in the way in which it is implemented. Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions of the study and makes some recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study set out to examine the effectiveness of the performance management systems employed by rural local authorities in Zimbabwe in assisting them to achieve their service delivery objectives. A case study approach was used to examine the issues involved. Rural local authorities in Zimbabwe are often criticised for failure to satisfy the service delivery demands of their ratepayers. As a way of trying to improve on service delivery the concept of performance management was introduced into the local government sector. The general literature on the introduction and use of performance management systems particularly from abroad suggests that this is a recent development and that the practice of performance management was borrowed from the private sector. Several studies have been carried out abroad on the success of public sector organisations in implementing different models of performance management. While these studies are illuminating, they were carried out under very different conditions from those that obtain in Zimbabwe. The study was intended to examine the situation on the local scene. It sought to answer the questions: What are the service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council? What are the objectives of the performance management systems implemented by Marondera Rural District Council? To what extent is there a linkage between the service delivery objectives of the rural councils and the objectives of their performance management systems? Which factors determine the success or failure of the implementation of performance management systems by rural councils? This chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations based on the research findings. The conclusions are based on the objectives of the study. It is hoped that the recommendations from this study will help Marondera Rural District Council in particular and rural local authorities in Zimbabwe in general to design and implement effective performance management systems that increase their ability to meet their service delivery objectives. The chapter will also suggest areas for further study identified by this research.

5.2 Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this study are based on the objectives set out in Chapter 1. Each conclusion is related to a specific objective and is an attempt to answer the specific research question related to that objective.

5.2.1 Service Delivery Objectives

One of the objectives of this study was to establish the service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council. The idea was to find out what the case organisation viewed as its service delivery objectives. The case organisation has no formally defined service delivery objectives and relies on “common sense” about what rural councils are supposed to do. This has left employees to make their own assumptions about what the organisation’s service delivery objectives are. There is danger that left to their own imagination employees may have divergent assumptions which can make it difficult to have a shared view of what the organisation is trying to do. Rural local authorities by their nature have to serve diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. Without a clear statement of service delivery objectives these diverse interests may be difficult to manage with the result that public perception will be that the organisation is failing in its service delivery mandate.

5.2.2 Objectives of Marondera Rural District Council’s Performance Management System(s)

Performance management systems are designed and implemented to achieve specific objectives. “Performance management practices include specifying which goals to achieve, allocating decision rights, and measuring and evaluating performance” (Verbeeten 2008:428). The case organisation did not have any defined objectives for its performance management system. This makes it difficult to communicate the performance management system to the employees who are supposed to implement the system. It also becomes difficult to assess the success or otherwise of the performance management system if its objectives are not defined. The lack of clear objectives detracts from the successful implementation of the performance management system. It creates the impression that the system is of no consequence.

5.2.3 Link Between Service Delivery Objectives and Performance Management Objectives

In the context of a local authority it is expected that there would be a clear link between the service delivery objectives of the organisation and those of the performance management system. There must be a clear integration between the two. Performance management practices were introduced into the public sector to improve service delivery. Performance management systems are seen as vehicles through which public sector organisations can better realise both strategic and operational goals (Ammons and Roenigk 2013). Through performance management systems public sector organisations can demonstrate that they are delivering effective and efficient services to their communities and making the best use of resources (Audit Scotland 2012). This can only be possible if the performance management system is integrated into the other systems in the organisation. For the case organisation both sets of objectives were not formally defined. It was thus not possible to see any linkages between the two sub-systems. This also detracts from the success of the performance management system in assisting the organisation to realise its service delivery objectives. Employees should be able to share a common view of the link between the two sub-systems.

5.2.4 Factors Associated with Success or Failure in the Implementation of Performance Management Systems by Rural Local Authorities

The case organisation has a performance management system that can be described as fairly functional. There are factors and practices that support the performance management system that can be regarded as success factors. There are also other things that detract from the success of the performance management system and need to be attended to in order to strengthen the system.

The need for a performance management system is appreciated by employees in the case organisation. Employees are aware that the system has the potential of increasing organisational performance even though they feel that they are gaining very little from it. The lack of a strategic plan for the case organisation is a major weakness which adversely affects the performance management system. The conceptual model used for this study shows that the strategic plan leads down to the

departmental strategic plans and eventually to individual employee work plans. Where there is no strategic plan this relationship is lost. While employees might be aware of the activities they are expected to carry out on a daily basis, they may not be conscious of the ultimate end of such activities.

The performance management system also suffers from a lack of thorough implementation. Important aspects of the system such as monitoring and evaluation are left undone. In such a scenario there is no knowing whether the organisation is succeeding or failing or the causes of either of these developments. Performance management should be treated as a continuous process that happens throughout the year (Armstrong 2009). Monitoring and evaluation enables the organisation to learn lessons from the system and to generate useful information that can be used to improve the system and to feed into other related systems such as training and development.

The performance management system in the case organisation was found to be operating as an independent system without any discernible integration with other human resource systems in the organisation. A major observation of the participants in this study was that the performance management system was not linked to the reward system. This created the impression that performance did not matter.

5.3 Proposition of the Study

The main proposition of this study was that rural local authorities fail to meet their service delivery objectives due in part to a lack of well crafted and implemented performance management systems. The findings of this study have confirmed this proposition. The case organisation has used two performance management systems over the period covered by the study. While the crafting of the two performance management systems may not be said to be bad, it is the implementation that was found to be an issue.

Local authorities have no choice in the performance management system to use; the current system in use was chosen by central government without regard to the circumstances or preparedness of each local authority. The conceptual model used for this study shows that there is need to consider both the internal and external environments of an organisation in introducing a performance management system.

Organisational culture issues are very much at the centre of the implementation of performance management.

Not enough training was given before the system was introduced. Perhaps the implementation challenges observed particularly with RBM are a result of this. Nevertheless, there appeared to be a consistent pattern over the period covered by the study of failure to fully implement the performance management system.

The performance management system in the case organisation was not integrated with the other human resource processes in the organisation particularly the reward management and training and development systems. All this impacts negatively on the organisation's attempt to implement performance management.

5.4 Contribution

The study extends an examination of how performance management systems have been implemented to Zimbabwean rural local authorities. It highlights the need to attend diligently to implementation issues if performance management is to be successful in rural local authorities in Zimbabwe and contributes to an understanding of the implementation of performance management systems in the Zimbabwean rural local government sector, an area where there is a dearth of research. The study raises fundamental issues in the practice of performance management by rural local authorities which can contribute to the improvement of the practice and thus of service delivery.

5.5 Recommendations

Following from the conclusions drawn from the study recommendations are made which are deemed to be crucial in improving the performance management system in the case organisation and in other organisations that may wish to draw lessons from the experience of the case organisation.

5.5.1 Policy Recommendations

The findings of the study suggest that prescribing a uniform performance management system on all local authorities without regard to their different circumstances may be counter-productive. The situation is worsened by the fact that the performance management systems in use were imported from abroad. It may be

good practice to allow each local authority to choose a performance management system best suited to its circumstances and apply it with the necessary modifications. Performance management systems would also work best where there is a productivity based wage system.

5.5.2 Managerial Recommendations

5.5.2.1 Importance of Public Consultation

Rural local authorities are public institutions mandated to serve the public. Performance management systems in this context are meant to ensure that the public is better served and that public demands for service delivery are more effectively satisfied. Performance management systems in the sector should ultimately derive from the expression of public demands on the local authorities. The case organisation would do well to have public consultation and feedback systems that are clearly linked to its performance management system. This will ensure that public expectations are captured and inform council plans and service delivery activities.

5.5.3 Importance of Strategic Planning

Rural local authorities should place importance on strategic planning. A strategic plan provides direction and a means through which to create a shared vision for the organisation. Its crafting provides an opportunity for stakeholder participation and for managing public expectations. Once in place the strategic plan informs the processes that take place in the organisation including the performance management system.

5.5.4 Clear Link Between Performance Management and Service Delivery

The performance management system should have a clear link to service delivery. The impact that the organisation hopes to make on the lives of the people within its jurisdiction should be clearly defined and where possible, quantified. Accountabilities can then be assigned for the tasks that need to be accomplished in order to realise the defined outcomes. The case organisation needs to formally define and communicate its service delivery and performance management objectives. Employees must be able to see the relationship between the two.

5.5.5 Purposeful Employee Involvement

Employees should be involved in meaningful ways in the drawing up of the organisation's service delivery plans and in the implementation of the performance management system.

5.5.6 Importance of Training and Development

One of the main objectives of performance management is to enhance employee performance. This happens mainly through training and development. Identified training and development needs should be addressed through training and development programmes. This should be seen as an integral part of the performance management system.

5.5.7 Integration of Performance Management with Other Human Resources Management Practices

Performance management systems should be integrated with other human resources management systems in operation rather than be viewed as isolated practices with little or no relationship with each other. Human resources management systems such as motivation and reward management should be integrated into the performance management system in ways that support performance management.

5.6 Research Limitations

The study employed the case study approach to gain a greater insight into the topic under study. While this approach has much to recommend it the results of the study cannot be generalised to other organisations. The findings of the study can only be applied with confidence to the case organisation. Other organisations can only apply the findings with great caution.

5.7 Areas for Further Study

At the time this study commenced the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing had just directed that all local authorities should introduce the results based management system as a means of enhancing their performance. The system has been used in the public service for more than ten years. Studies carried out in the public service have shown that the results based management system has met with many challenges. It would be interesting to find out how successful this

specific performance management system would be in the local government sector particularly in rural councils.

It also became apparent during the course of the study that the success or otherwise of any system of performance management depends a great deal on the management style adopted by the organisation's management team. It would appear that issues to do with management style need to be addressed in the implementation of any performance management system. An area of research that suggests itself is an assessment of the impact of management style on the operation of a performance management system.

This research study used a qualitative approach and adopted a single case study strategy. The same research could be carried out using a qualitative approach and several cases can be included. A quantitative approach can also be applied. This will produce results that can be generalised across different rural local authorities in Zimbabwe and even in other countries in a comparable situation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1.0 Preliminary

1.1 Biodata

- (a) Sex
- (b) Age
- (c) Marital status
- (d) Level of education
- (e) Length of service with the organisation
- (f) Length of service in current position

2.0 Service delivery objectives of Marondera Rural District Council

- 2.1 Councils are generally mandated to deliver services to residents within their areas of jurisdiction. Explain your understanding of this mandate of council.
- 2.2 What does council seek to achieve through its service delivery activities?
- 2.3 Describe your experiences, if any, of public involvement in setting council's service delivery objectives.
- 2.4 Describe your experiences, if any, in setting council's service delivery objectives.
- 2.5 Explain the link if any between your work and council's strategic objectives.

3.0 Objectives of the performance management system(s) implemented by Marondera Rural District Council

- 3.1 Which performance management system is currently being used by council? Which other performance management systems have been used by council in the past?
- 3.2 Describe your involvement, if any, in the introduction and implementation of the performance management systems in use in council?
- 3.3 Describe the objectives of council's performance management system.

3.4 Have you ever been trained in the use of the performance management system?

3.5 Are you confident in the use of the performance management system in use in council? Why? Why not?

3.6 What is your assessment of council's performance management system?

3.7 Explain the link if any between your work and council's performance management system.

4.0 Linkage between the service delivery objectives of the rural councils and the objectives of their performance management systems

4.1 Explain the relationship, if any, between council's service delivery objectives and the objectives of the performance management system.

4.2 Describe the benefits, if any, that you have obtained from the performance management systems implemented by council.

4.3 In what other ways do you think you could have benefited from the performance management systems?

5.0 Factors that determine the success or failure of the implementation of performance management systems by rural councils.

5.1 What factors and practices, if any, do you think have supported the performance management system?

5.2 What are the factors and practices, if any, that have detracted from the success of the performance management system?

5.3 What can be done to improve the performance management system?

APPENDIX 2: Key to Interviewee Coding

P1SM	Participant 1, Senior Manager
P2JM	Participant 2, Junior Manager
P3SM	Participant 3, Senior Manager
P4SM	Participant 4, Senior Manager
P5SM	Participant 5, Senior Manager
P6GH	Participant 6, General Hand
P7JM	Participant 7, Junior Manager
P8TD	Participant 8, Tractor Driver
P9CL	Participant 9, Clerk
P10TD	Participant 10, Tractor Driver
P11SM	Participant 11, Senior Manager
P12GH	Participant 12, General Hand
P13SC	Participant 13, Senior Clerk
P14CL	Participant 14, Clerk
P15SG	Participant 15, Security Guard