

Performance management system in the mauritius civil service



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In an increasingly technology-oriented, wired and fast-moving world, people want easy access to public services together with a greater focus on customer service as well as higher levels of accountability with regard to use of public funds. The convergence between their private and public sector service experience has created a modernization agenda for governments around the world. According to Hood (1995, 1991) many governments have focused on performance management practices in an effort to reinvent the government and to increase the efficiency of the performance in public sector organizations.

The Mauritian government has also endeavoured to adopt a new public management. According to the Pay Research Bureau (PRB) which undertakes a general pay review for the public sector (the civil service constitutes the largest part of the Public service) once every five years, has laid emphasis on the need to improve public services; and to enhance accountability with respect to the resources used and results obtained (PRB, 2008).

Consequently, performance-based budgeting (PBB) together with key performance indicators and performance management system (PMS) in the public sector were introduced.

The Civil service (CS) is one of the largest employers of the country. It has a great variety of functions and operates in a large array of domains, from the collection of taxes to the production and delivery of energy to private households and enterprises, to the delivery of compulsory education to children in a given age group. No country can exist without a Civil service.

This research will investigate a set of research questions at the heart of the performance management system (PMS) and efficiency and accountability relationships in the context of the Mauritian Civil service. The first thematic priority is to find out the level of understanding of performance management (PM) among civil servants. Is performance management applicable to the civil service? The second thematic priority is to find out to what extent the PMS, which is based on private sector experience, has really helped to enhance performance. Is the huge investment, in terms of money and time, in the development and implementation of the PMS worth it? The third priority is to gauge the intention of the employees to use PMS in the future to manage their performance. It is important to unpack assumptions about productivity and performance within governmental organisations, and the proposed research would provide an investigation that would contribute to this.

This proposal provides a concise explanation of the nature of the research; its objectives; why it is needed; how it will be carried out; and, the likely outcomes.

Research Objectives

Research objectives

This research will focus on performance management in the Mauritian civil service and will attempt to gauge the extent to which it has been successful. The study of the processes associated with the PM will help to enhance employees' understanding and the impact of the PMS. The three specific objectives of this research are:

To examine the extent to which the processes and objectives of the PMS are understood by the civil servants.

To evaluate the perception of usefulness of PMS to enhance performance at work among employees in the CS.

To evaluate the employees' intention to use PMS to manage their performance.

Research questions

To what extent employees understand what their organization wants?

To what extent employees understand the processes and objectives of the PMS? Do they believe that PMS is simply replacing the previous confidential reporting system? Do employees believe that the PMS is a judgment and blaming tool? Do they see the PMS difficult to use? Is there a difference among male and female employees in understanding and in ease of use of the PMS? Is there a difference among junior and senior employees in understanding and in ease of use of the PMS? To what extent the PMS is realistic, measures and reinforces the appropriate targets that induce the right behaviour?

Is the PMS interactive or diagnostic? Do the civil servants consider PMS as having a pivotal role in their performance management or as a futile act of data collecting and reporting exercise? To what degree the user believes that using PMS would enhance his or her job performance? Is PMS simply about measurement and evaluation or about management?

How many employees intend to use PMS to manage their performance? How will they respond to PMS in future? Does the response depend on gender of the employee? Does it depend on length of service?

Research Hypotheses

Examples of research hypotheses to be tested in this study are:

H0: There is no relationship between length of service and understanding of processes and objectives of PMS.

H1: There is a relationship between length of service and understanding of processes and objectives of PMS.

H0: There are no differences in the usefulness of the PMS as perceived by managers and other employees.

H1: There are differences in the usefulness of the PMS as perceived by managers and other employees.

H0: There are no differences between male and female employees in the intention to use PMS to manage their performance.

H1: There are differences between male and female employees in the intention to use PMS to manage their performance.

Literature Review

Public Service

According to the World Public Sector Report (United Nations, 2008) the aim of public service is to maximise welfare not profit. It also advocates that

good governance, rule of law and an accountable and transparent public administration play a pivotal role in the realization of sustained economic growth, equity and social justice. The World Bank report on public sector reforms (World Bank, 2008) indicates that the public sector in nearly all developing countries like Mauritius is the largest spender and employer and is responsible for all national policy decisions. It also notes that, in the recent years, one out of every six World Bank projects aimed at improving the public sector as the quality (efficiency, effectiveness and accountability) of the public sector contributes to development of the country and poverty reduction. This report identifies effective PM of public servants as vital for a better delivery of the public service.

The Mauritian Civil service started in the French Colonial rule (1715 -1810), by establishing a Provincial Council (HRDC, 2009). 54342 persons (37367 males and 16975 females) were employed in the CS in March 2007 (CSO, 2008).

In 2001, the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms (MCSAAR, 2001) in Mauritius developed a three-year (2001-2003) strategy to modernise the Public service. The action plan formulated aimed at introducing results-oriented performance management system. Five task forces were created one of which was responsible to develop a PMS. A further two-year (2004-2005) action plan was developed in 2004 (MCSAAR, 2004). However, it is only in 2006 that the PMS was implemented with renewed energy. It is expected that all the public organisations will utilise the PMS by December 2009. Definitely the challenge will be to ensure that the public servants adopt the PMS together with a performance culture.

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Performance Management

Performance appraisal systems started as early as 221-265 AD to develop into proper performance management systems currently in use (Goel, 2008). According to Wilcox and Bourne (2002) PM went through three stages in its development. From 1850 to 1925, PM developed from cost and management accounting. 1974 to 1992 was the era of multi-dimensional performance measurement frameworks. During the last decade performance indicators were used and the links between them was established using strategy maps.

A performance management system (PMS) plays a pivotal role in achieving organisational aims and objectives. According to CIPD (2008) a PMS must be strategic and integrated. However, a PMS is just a means to end and there is no single PMS practice that can transform an ineffective system into a good one. PMS require the coordination of multiple key practices related to the business, people management, and individuals and teams. Muller-Camen, Croucher and Leigh (2008, p. 227) proposed a performance management system cycle model shown in Figure 1.

Pickett (2000) presented an integrated performance management model placing strong emphasis on linking clearly stated company's objectives and business strategies with key objectives of specific position. In any case performance measurement should not be reduced to mere data collection. According to Hernandez (2002) performance measurements can lead to improvement of the public service only if there is there is thorough analysis of the data.

Integrative literature

For centuries, governmental organisations have been applying rules and procedures to control performance. However, during the last two decades, such organisations have started using PM (Moriarty and Kennedy, 2002). There has been a shift towards controlling the output (Ter Bogt, 2003). According to Neely (1998) the main reasons for the use of performance management systems in the public sector are the same as in the private sector. Moriarty and Kennedy (2002) suggest that the role of PMS in governmental organisations is same as that of the market pressure which creates a competitive advantage in the private sector. Therefore nearly all developed countries have encouraged the use of PM in governmental organisations (Van Helden, 2005). The use of PMS in CS helps to set clear mission statements, objectives and targets that would provide clear focus to the employees (Rangan, 2004). Secondly, by measuring performance in line with set objectives and targets, those in charge of the public service would be able to provide evidence to the public regarding the management of public funds (Verbeeten, 2006). Third, ministries and other governmental departments may use PM to learn and enhance performance. This definitely brings transparency in the governmental transactions. Fourth, the outcomes of performance measurement exercises can be used to reward and compensate the public servants.

The public sector has its own unique attributes and challenges. This may include political interference, unclear outcomes, having to work with multiple stakeholders with diverse expectations, being dependent on many other governmental organisations, and working in a culture of consensus. The

gains from investments are not always visible in the short term. This may lead to unintended managerial side effects of PM-practices like additional internal bureaucracy, a decrease in responsibility, lower commitment to innovate (Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). Consequently, the organisational performance may decrease rather than increase due to the use of a PMS. Radnor and McGuire (2004) argue that most managers in the CS tend to administer the PMS rather than use it manage performance of their staff. Much time is spent in filling forms and chasing information rather than changing or managing the process. Thus they conclude that PMS in CS is hardly achieving its objectives.

Operational Definitions

Performance Management

Civil Service

Research Design

Research Approach

This research will use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge the extent to which civil servants understand the PMS and find it useful and easy to use. As suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003, p. 88), a combination of the inductive and deductive research approach will be used. An inductive approach will be used initially to explore the variables and possible relationships. This will be followed by a deductive approach to collect data and test the hypotheses.

Research Methods and Techniques. Instruments. Data Collection

The research study will use the following research methods and techniques, instruments and data collection methods.

Research Methods

Research Techniques

Instruments

Data Collection

Exploratory. This will help to identify key variables, their relationships, and their (potential) causal linkages.

A representative sample of 15 employees will be used at this stage.

Reflective journals (RJs) will be used to record uncensored thoughts, emotions and behavior of employees.

This will provide themes to prepare the semi-structured interviews.

RJs.

A questionnaire with open-ended questions based on themes from the RJs.

RJs will be completed at employees convenience. This may take up to 30 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted nearly one month after completion of the RJs.

A structured questionnaire will be developed. It will include multiple item scales to measure the dependent variables (1) the knowledge and understanding of the PMS among employees, (2) the perceived usefulness of the PMS, (3) the perceived ease of use of the PMS, and (4) the employees' intention to use PMS to manage their performance. Likert scales will be used. It will also have an enlistment statement, and a classification part to collect data about the independent variables gender, length of service, age and position in the hierarchy.

A Pilot Study will be conducted with a representative sample of 15 employees. The results will be used to test the questionnaire for reliability and validity. Cronbach alpha will be used to test reliability. The questionnaire will be amended accordingly.

Survey.

Surveys allow contact with otherwise

inaccessible respondents at relatively low costs (Saunders et al., 2003)

A random sample of 600 employees will be involved.

Structured questionnaire.

A structured questionnaire will be used.

Questionnaires will be administered through structured interviews. Additional trained interviewers will also be hired.

Sample

A two-stage stratified sampling will be used as stratification assures that the profile of the sample matches the profile of the population (Jankowicz, 2000). Saunders et al. (2003) also suggest a sample size of 383 for a population of 100000 at 95 percent level of certainty. A sample of size 600 will be drawn using the sampling frame based on data available from the Central Statistical Office (CSO, 2008). The first level of stratification will be done so that the 20 Ministries and 50 Departments are represented in the sample. The second stage of stratification will be carried out using the independent variables identified. As I work in the public service, access will not be difficult.

The advantages of the stratified random sampling technique include: there is an increased statistical efficiency; the researcher has the control of sample size in strata, and data is available to represent and analyse sub-groups. Its disadvantage includes increase in error when sub-groups are selected at different rates (Jankowicz, 2000).

Analysis

The RJs will be examined for themes that reflect attitudes and beliefs. They will also be compared to identify similarities among civil servants. Results from semi-structured interviews will be used to clarify the themes from the reflective journals into statements. This will also be used to amend the questionnaire. Data collected will be cleaned. Diagrams, charts, scatter plots and graphs will be used to present data. Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) will be used. Measures of central tendency (mean, median,..), measures of dispersion (variance, range,..), skewness and kurtosis will be used to

describe the dependent variables. Bivariate analyses (correlation, chi-square
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test, t-test, Mann-Whitney U,...) will be used to explore relationships and associations between pairs of variables. Factor and regression analyses would also be used to explore relationships between three or more variables.

Time Scale

Month1: Literature review, collection of secondary data, research planning, and administering reflective journals.

Month2: Conducting semi-structured interviews and development of structured interviews. Sampling. Preparation for the pilot study and structured interviews.

Month3: Carry out pilot study. Amend questionnaire. Data collection through structured interviews.

Month4: Data collection through structured interviews.

Month5: Data analysis and report writing.

Limitations

The limitations of survey research would also apply here. As this research is based on civil service organizations in Mauritius its findings may not be transferable to other countries.

Ethics

Civil servants will be assured of confidentiality and of the purpose of this study which is to have an efficient PMS. Recorded data necessary for reports will be given anonymity.

Budget

Due to limited budget only 600 employees will be involved in the final data collection.

Usefulness of the Research and user groups

The modern CS should not only meet the fundamental needs of the citizens but it must also strive to deliver the highest standards of service to everyone. This research would help to gauge the strength and weaknesses of the PMS and thus provide an indication of the improvement in the system. This research will help to understand the PM processes and systems within the CS and define them clearly. Thus it will help to collect meaningful feedback so that targets and performance can be measured and rewarded. Therefore, the research would be useful to the civil servants, policy makers and to those managing the PMS.