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**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICE OF RESULTS-BASED
MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE CASE OF
KENYA**

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRACTICE OF RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE CASE OF KENYA

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Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of the study was to assess the practice of resource based management in the public sector, a case of Kenya.

Methodology: The research adopted an exploratory-survey design.

Findings: Results revealed that leaders in public service adopted directive style of management. Results also found that majority of the employees are disempowered by management and to say the least, they are mentally disengaged from the organization. The survey identified ten most common practices seen to be inhibiting the practice of result based management which included organization culture, management paralysis, accountability practice, leader's insatiable desire to take all credit, failure to confront underperforming members of the management team, organizational politics, boss barrier syndrome, indecisiveness and fear of failure by managers, resistance to change and organizational structures and systems and developmental level of employees. Further, results revealed that the strategies for promoting result based management included leadership development for the top management, valuing employees, creation of cultural capital, removing empowerment barriers, promoting accountability, developing high performance teams and participative management.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: This research looks at RBM in public sector which has become a key area of focus in the twenty- first century public management practice. It has looked at the causes of failure to practice RBM in public sector and proposed several strategies to remedy the situation. If successfully adopted, RBM practice will avoid creation of busy but ineffective public sector organizations. There are several ways to address this phenomenon and managers should adopt strategies that best suit their organizational situation and context. In order for an organization to survive and achieve success, it must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Beliefs must always come before policies, practices and goals. Faithfully adhering to those beliefs is critical to successful leadership and management practice.

Keywords: *Resource Based Management, Public Sector, Managerial/Leadership Styles, Challenges and Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Good management is a balancing act. In the public sector, effective leadership and management is all about results which must either improve service delivery or citizen's quality of life. The challenge for managers is to maintain a dual focus on people and results (Philips, 2014).

Many organizations are in a weak position with respect to the practice of results-based management. There are many activities going on in an organization but minimal results by way of outputs, outcomes and impact. The best of such organizations only come up with outputs- the results of an activity. These outputs are not the end products for the user but simply a step along the results chain.

Organizations experience a high level of employee dissatisfaction and turnover. However, this state of affairs never bothers management. To management, employees may leave the organization whenever they feel uncomfortable working in those organizations. Leadership is also tempted to spend huge sums of money training the staff on the 'new' ways of doing things but the outcome of the training programs does not register any significant improvement in organizational performance.

In the 1990s, the United Nations embarked on a programme to introduce results-based management systems in the governments of member countries of the Organization for Economic Development (RSA, 2005). The United Nation's 2004 report on the results of this initiative noted that, "the changeover to a results-based culture has been lengthy and difficult, with organizations struggling to empower managers and staff alike in the setting and accomplishing of the goals (Ortiz et al., 2004).

Problem Statement

Many public sector entities have goals and plans, but most of them never realize their goals due to several reasons. This research embarked on establishing the reasons behind many organizations being 'active' yet the results culture is not evident in those organizations.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:-

- To establish the managerial/leadership styles in public sector agencies and institutions.
- To examine how managerial styles influence results-based management practice in the organizations under study.
- To establish the focus and level of results achieved with regard to results chain framework.
- To identify the challenges faced by public sector institutions in their effort to implement results-based management practice.
- To propose strategies those organizations could adopt to deal with such challenges.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theory guiding this study was Public Value Theory developed by Prof. Mark Moore at the Kennedy School of Government. The overarching objective of public value is to offer public managers guidance on how to articulate goals of their organization (Moore, 1995). In a sense, public value resembles private sector's goal of maximizing shareholder value (Coats and Passmore, 2008). This theory provokes managers into thinking about what is most valuable in the service that they run and to consider how effective management can make the service the best that it can be.

Public Value as a theory of public management enables public managers to consider three fundamental questions:

- What is this service for? The purpose the organization is supposed to serve
- To whom are we accountable?
- How do we know if we have been successful?

The answers to these questions lie at the heart of results-based management practice. Results-based management is also hinged on strategic planning framework where goals, objectives, targets and activities are formulated and strategies developed to achieve them. These goals, objectives and targets are assumed to reflect the national priority which presumably is an outcome that the public value. However, many targets are more focused on activities and outputs than outcomes and are rarely the consequence of an exercise in deliberative governance. Moreover, targets are subject to Goodhart's law "that any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for control purposes" (Coats and Passmore, 2008). Public managers may therefore, be tempted to sacrifice valuable outcomes but achieve a certain level of output. In other words, they may hit the target but miss the point. It is because of this common phenomenon that this study embarked on investigating its existence in Kenya's public sector, its causes and remedies. This phenomenon led to the researcher coining the phrase 'management fibrillation'.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research adopted an exploratory-survey design to assess the attitudes, views and opinions of middle-level managers in public sector with regard to the ability of senior executives to apply results-based management approach in their organizations. The study therefore, used the interpretivist epistemological approach.

Target Population

The target population comprised of more than 500 middle-level managers in public sector who had undergone Senior Management Training and Strategic Leadership Development programs in Kenya. The study was longitudinal because the responses sought by the study covered the entire period that the respondents had been with their supervisors. These respondents, because of their seniority, were seen to have good representative characteristics of public sector officers who were well grounded in new public sector management practices as a result of their training and practice.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used purposively to sample 120 respondents who had just completed the above mentioned training programs. The inclusion criteria for respondents were: a) being a middle-level manager in a public sector agency and, b) having undergone senior management training and strategic leadership development training in Kenya.

Limitations of the Study

Participants in the study were drawn from middle management level. Employees from lower level management were not represented which may have skewed the results.

Research Instrument

The research used a questionnaire with open-ended questions to capture perceptions, views and opinions of respondents regarding the subject of the study. The respondents were required to give the rationale for the responses they gave in assessing their leaders and managers.

Data Analysis

The research adopted the thematic analysis technique which analyzed information given and grouped it into common themes. Responses that had a frequency of over 50% were considered by this study as key findings.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This survey revealed that most public sector agencies regardless of their mandate, size or the sector they serve exhibited the following management practices:

Leadership/Managerial Styles

All the respondents, (100%), indicated that majority of the leaders in public service adopted directive style of management. They apply several styles to coerce employees to follow instructions without questioning. The styles range from application of sanctions to manipulation, intimidation and handsomely rewarding those seen to be loyal regardless of their management effectiveness. Those who question issues or try to correct things are sidelined regardless of their good intentions. Because leadership pursues superior performance using disempowered employees, the temptation is high for leadership to always initiate more performance improvement projects and other projects borrowed from the best performers in the sector without due regard to the styles of leadership and culture of those organizations being benchmarked against.

Managerial/ Leadership Styles and Results-Based Management

The study found that majority of the employees are disempowered by management and to say the least, they are mentally disengaged from the organization. This is according to 80% of those surveyed. Employees work for pay, are detached from management, they are least concerned whether the organization will achieve its mission and vision. Their objective is to provide the bare minimum required by management so as to justify their continuous engagement by the organization. Majority of the employees are not creative and even where they seem to be, they do not use their creativity to promote their organization's mission and vision. To those employees, what matters is the performance of tasks assigned by management regardless of the tasks' outcomes.

Top leadership on the other hand is obsessed with projects being implemented regardless of the level of buy-in by the employees who are supposed to implement those projects. Employees are least involved in contributing to the vision and the goals of the organization. In the minds of the leaders, employees are supposed to implement strategies and programs that have been crafted by management whether they are feasible or not. Leadership thinks for the organization and employees do the implementation.

The study further revealed that majority of the organizations focus on activities and outputs as their key success measures. Many do not take time to reflect on the need for outcomes and impacts, yet, these levels in the results chain are the ones that create change and improved service delivery.

Challenges Faced in Promoting RBM in Public Sector

The survey identified ten most common practices seen to be inhibiting the practice of RBM. This is according to the respondents' information.

Organizational Culture

Leadership creates an atmosphere and a culture of fear so that even the top management cannot challenge the decisions of the leaders and top executives, even when their decisions are not in the best interest of the organization. Employees and managers with alternative solutions are fought and/or sidelined as a strategy of keeping them 'contained'. The CEO makes all the decisions including those that should be made by the 'factory floor' employees. These executives at times overrule a policy and substitute it with an individual decision that has not been arrived at in a rational way. The top leadership does not trust managers and they have to keep on referring to the CEO for minor operational issues. The level of micromanagement is very high which creates a gridlock in many instances.

Management Paralysis

Managers with paralysis work their way up within an organization when they have little or no management experience; but due to their history of association with top leadership and their length of stay in the organization, they are appointed to senior positions. This is according to 70% of those surveyed. The tragic result is the creation of a group of mediocre managers due to high levels of inbreeding from other mediocre and ineffective managers. A notable phenomenon also is an attempt to reward those perceived to be loyal to the system regardless of their managerial experience. Such a crop of managers is not so much loyal to the vision and mission of the organization as they are to the leader.

Accountability Practice

Myers and Lacy (1996) defines accountability as the "responsibility of government and its agents towards the public to achieve previously set objectives and to account for them in public". It is also regarded as a commitment required from public officials individually and collectively to accept public responsibility for their own actions or inactions. In this case, the burden of accountability rests on each public functionary to act in the public interest and according to his/her conscience, with solutions for every matter based on professionalism and participation. This is not the case in the organizations studied.

According to 100% of those surveyed, many governmental institutions fail to observe the basic tenets of accountability practice. Accountability is closely linked with the exercise of power and the legitimacy of policies, and goes beyond technical practices. Issues of

accountability involve ethical choices of values and actions that managers take that either promote or impinge upon the trust needed in effective and successful organizations. The ultimate accountability for public officers is to the public. This is however, not the case as many public officers believe their ultimate accountability is to their seniors who have the power to reward or apply sanctions.

It has been observed that the need to reform African administrative structures to ensure efficiency and reduce the likelihood of corruption in public service is obvious (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999). So is the need to increase democratic accountability (Ole Therkildsen, 2001). Improved accountability in the conduct of public affairs is a reform agenda of many countries in and outside Africa (Batley, 1999; Olowu, 1998; Wright, 1997). Accountability is fundamental as a means of improving the quality of public services. Lack of accountability has seen many governments being toppled or citizens losing trust in their government. At the heart of the practice of accountability lies the way in which public bodies are directed and managed- their corporate governance. According to Day and Klein (1987), accountability involves both the political justification of decisions and actions and managerial answerability for implementation of those decisions and agreed tasks according to agreed criteria of performance.

Accountability is one of those words more often used than understood. The political reality is that accountability means that the government of the day must justify and explain its actions to the public, in the hope of maintaining trust and being re-elected. Accountability is a relationship based on obligations to demonstrate, review, and take responsibility for performance, in light of agreed expectations and the means used (Auditor General Report-Canada, 2002). This emphasizes the importance of accountability for results and for the means used. It underlines that effective accountability is not just about reporting performance; it also requires review, including appropriate corrective actions and consequences for individuals.

Traditional accountability practices are under pressure by growing trends in public management practice that focuses on getting results, using partnering arrangements, and developing a flexible and innovative public service. Public officials can reasonably be held accountable for demonstrating the extent to which the results they expect are being accomplished, the contribution their activities have made to the actual outcomes, the lessons that have been learned, and the soundness and propriety of their actions.

Theory and practice suggest that accountability practice in public sector is weak due to several reasons: governments ignoring or transgressing social ethics and constitutional and legal provisions in the conduct of public affairs; systems of checks and balances are weak, activities are hidden and those involved are encouraged to be secretive or are prohibited from informing about them, corrupt practices are widespread; special interests and bureaucratic power often dominate; political and personal loyalty are rewarded more than merit; public participation in running public affairs is low and the opportunities for legal redress against wrongdoing are low (Caiden, 1991; DeLeon, 1997; Olowu, 1999).

Leader's insatiable desire to take all credit

All the respondents agreed that many managers yield to the temptation of taking the whole credit for a job well done even when it is clear to all that the job was done by the subordinates. Whenever a project fails, senior managers do not consider their role in the

failure. Consequently, they are quick to reprimand the subordinates or even sacrifice them at the altar of their bloated ego. This happens even when it is clear that management was the cause of the failure. Failure may also occur when senior executives craft inappropriate strategies to address a situation without involving the subordinates only later to blame the implementation team for having failed to achieve the desired results.

Failure to confront underperforming members of the management team

Majority of the respondents (85%) indicated that there are instances when some top executives fail to deliver results. Instead of confronting mediocre performance, the leader smoothes the situation reasoning that ‘it is improper to reign hard on a colleague’. This is a misapplied form of promoting harmony and it demoralizes the rest of the managers who are solid performers.

Organizational Politics

About 73% of the respondents said that organizational politics is a key contributor to results being based on activities and outputs only. In such organizations, organizational politics could be described as self serving and manipulative behavior of individuals and groups to promote their self interests at the expense of others and even organizational goals. This phenomenon may manifest itself through struggle for resources, personal conflicts, competition for power and leadership positions etc, in order to build personal stature, occupy a key position in the organization, remain in the seat of power etc (Alagse, 2014). According to the survey, most top level public officials are engaged in politics both to rise to the top and remain at the top. This was seen especially in cases of CEOs and top management in public sector agencies.

Organizational politics is so intricately woven with management systems that relationships, norms, processes, performance and outcomes are hugely influenced and affected by it. This makes it a major contributor to poor RBM practice.

Boss Barrier Syndrome

This happens when the leader assumes the position of an autocratic leader and refuses to mentor others for fear of being replaced. Such managers do not develop others to take after them, nor do they develop a succession plan. Their desire is to leave a leadership vacuum when they exit the organization so that they can be retained by the organization as an external resource person. These managers love to give instructions and hate any subordinate who proposes a better strategy than that of the boss in achieving organizational goals. They are poor in interpersonal relations and implementation of projects. They are mediocre in thinking and do not hold themselves accountable to any one even though the organization could be having an accountability framework.

Indecisiveness and Fear of Failure by Managers

Procrastination in decision making is common in these organizations. Managers in these organizations are slow or even in certain circumstances, unwilling to make crucial decisions. The manager may have all the facts concerning a situation but he or she will still be hesitant to make decisions for fear of failure or aggrieving someone inside or outside of the organization. They are very poor in managing crisis and may cause an organization to go through huge losses. They never develop competence in leadership and decision making.

Resistance to change

Organizations poor in RBM practice are not receptive to change unless the proposals have come from themselves. They argue that change proposals from lower level managers and employees should not be entertained because strategic decisions and change initiatives should come from top management. They ignore the fact that frontline managers and employees have firsthand information on customers and stakeholders needs and the changing environmental trends. Due this weakness with the management team, the organization losses many opportunities and may also fail to counter threats on time.

Organizational structures and systems and developmental level of employees

It is common for public sector agencies to visit solid performers for benchmarking then return to implement wholesomely the systems borrowed, in total disregard of the performer's structures, culture and the level of people development. Upon implementation of the new system, employees are driven to adopt it after a short period of training. The training program focuses on how to use the system and does not consider the people side of things- attitudes, skills levels, adaptability to change and the entire organizational culture. Should the employees raise genuine concerns about the system, they are seen to be saboteurs to the implementation of the system and are dealt with harshly.

Strategies for Promoting RBM in Public Sector

Based on the findings the researcher proposes several strategies that can enhance the practice of RBM in Public Sector.

Leadership development for the top management

Organizational leadership should make a commitment to develop all leaders and managers in leadership practice. This should range from leadership styles to emotional intelligence and personal leadership.

Valuing Employees

Management should regard employees as a form of capital –intellectual capital- as opposed to regarding them as labor – a factor of production. It is the responsibility of executive leadership to build the intellectual capital (skills, cognitive abilities, judgments, perception and intuition) of managers and employees.

Creation of cultural Capital

This refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Management should develop the courage to build a culture that promotes openness and tolerates divergent views. Managers should use any available means to unlock the creative abilities of employees and to establish a culture that empowers everyone to make a meaningful contribution to the organization without leaders feeling intimidated by creative and innovative employees. The culture developed should promote shared values that focus on important concerns and goals of the people in the organization. These values tend to shape the behavior of the people and often persist over time even with changes in organizational membership (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Removing Empowerment Barriers

Leadership should identify and deal with all barriers that inhibit employee performance. Some of the barriers that disempower employees include:

- Structural barrier- An organization may be having a structure that is too bureaucratic and practices top – down decision making process all the time. It may also be misaligned with organizational strategies and practices for superior performance.
- Systems barrier- Sometimes, the way the organization does its things may be the very thing that hinders employee empowerment. The policies, procedures, rules and information management systems may create employees that wholly rely on top management for direction even in areas that they may be required to make decisions. Many respondents in the survey lamented that ‘nobody wanted to make any decision lest it backfires and management’s wrath falls on you.’
- Boss barrier- There are instances and regrettably happen to be many where the bosses are the real cause of employee disempowerment and poor management practice. The main challenge is that employees cannot fire their bosses even when they see them messing. This issue is aggravated when bosses ingratiate themselves with the appointing authorities to the extent that their loyalty goes to the appointing authority instead of the organizational vision and goals. They argue that for as long as you are able to keep the appointing authority satisfied, the rest does not matter a lot. Such a boss becomes difficult to replace and remains in office until the expiry of the contract or retirement regardless of organizational performance and the level of people development.

Promoting Accountability

Accountability practice should start with top leadership in the organization. It should focus on more than just resources accountability practice. Managers should also be accountable to employees, customers and other key stakeholders.

Developing High Performance Teams

Such teams are characterized by boundless enthusiasm, energy and action that focus on results. Team members see themselves creating work that is worthwhile. This comes about when the following conditions hold:

- i) Work, targets and expected outcomes have to be understood by employees/ team members as important. They must see their contribution in making the world a better place.
- ii) Managers must lead people to a shared goal.
- iii) Values should guide all plans, decisions and actions (all that is done must be value-driven). Values should be the real Boss in an organization. Values help build mutual trust among members and as mutual trust rises, support for goals will increase.

Participative management

Management must make a commitment to consult widely or involve the employees in the formulation of policies, plans and targets. To create ownership, all employees should be engaged in order to capture their minds, hearts and hands.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND CONCLUSION

This research looks at RBM in public sector which has become a key area of focus in the twenty- first century public management practice. It has looked at the causes of failure to practice RBM in public sector and proposed several strategies to remedy the situation. If successfully adopted, RBM practice will avoid creation of busy but ineffective public sector organizations. There are several ways to address this phenomenon and managers should adopt strategies that best suit their organizational situation and context.

In order for an organization to survive and achieve success, it must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Beliefs must always come before policies, practices and goals. Faithfully adhering to those beliefs is critical to successful leadership and management practice.

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