Performance Management through Technology– The Case of a Public Entity in Kenya

Rose W. Kianduma
MBA Student, Regenesys Business School
4 Pybus Street, Sandton, Johannesburg, 2146, South Africa
E-mail: kiandumarw@yahoo.com

Krishna K. Govender
(Corresponding Author)
Regenesys Business School, 4 Pybus Street
Sandton, Johannesburg, 2146, South Africa
E-mail: krishnag@regenesys.co.za

Abstract

The adoption of results-based management (RBM) and the introduction of performance contracts in public service institutions in Kenya in 2004 have put government departments under increasing pressure and scrutiny to improve their performance and operate more efficiently and effectively. Government departments have therefore directed increased resources to performance management, which led to among others, automation of business processes leading to increased reliance on information technology (IT).However, despite the increased investment in, and use of IT, its role in performance management has not been fully explored. This paper therefore explores the role ofIT in performance management at the Capital Markets Authority (CMA), a government agencyin Kenya, usinga quantitative research design, whereby data was collected by means of a survey using a questionnaire. The sample wasdrawn using a combination of probability and non-probability methods, from a population of internal stakeholders who have an interest in the optimal performance of the CMA. It became evident that the CMA relies on its IT systems to inform the strategic planning process, and to identify and prioritize performance targets, and employees are also able to access the information they need to identify, prioritize and set performance targets with ease and speed. Although it became evident that there is less usage of IT in the performance monitoring and reporting, the majority (70%) of the respondents agree that there is use of a specialized system for measuring performance, and 56% agree that implementation of the performance plans is monitored using IT. Since results also show that the potential of IT is not fully utilized in performance appraisal, there is therefore need for the CMA to ensure that IT is used to ensure the integrity of performance plans is maintained once they are agreed on.

Keywords: Government Sector, Performance Management, Information Technology, Innovation.

1. Introduction

In pursuit of the goal of performance improvement within the public sector, New Public Management (NPM) emphasizes the adoption of private sector practices in public institutions. According to Balogun (2003), performance measurement is often regarded as fundamental to the delivery of improved services as part of NPM, and newNPM models have invariably been seen through the public service reform initiatives in many developing countries, as the solution to reversing falling public service delivery. For example, Kenya introduced performance contracting, not only to improve service delivery, but also to refocus the mind-set of public service away from an inward-looking culture towardsa business culture, focusing on the customer and results (Obongo, 2009).

A change of regime in Kenya in 2002 ushered in a wave of public sector reforms that sought to among other things support both effective and efficient public sector performance and service delivery (Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND), 2003). The Kenyan government outlined its commitment to improve performance, corporate governance and management in the public service by anchoring performance management in its national economic blue prints. Some commitments included the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS), and Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007).

After launching the ERS in 2004, the government introduced Results Based Management (RBM) in the public service as a deliberate policy in order to improve performance, service delivery and governance (MPND, 2003). RBM is a participatory and team-based management approach designed to achieve defined results by improving planning, programming, management efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency (Obongo, 2009). The introduction and institutionalization of the RBM concept in the public service was aimed at refocusing the public servants mind-set on the results of service delivery to citizens. It was expected that the adoption of RBM within the public service would enable each ministry/department and public service organizations to come up with clear performance objectives in line with the ERS targets, delineate the activities to help in the achievement of such objectives, and determine the roles to be played by each staff member in the service delivery process. The shift to results orientation entailed a transformation of current procedures and practices focused on processes, to those focused on achieving results. The key elements of RBM were identified as performance target setting, performance planning, which required establishing a shared understanding of what is to be achieved, performance monitoring and reporting, and performance appraisal. Performance contracts were introduced as a management tool for measuring performance against negotiated performance targets (Kobia & Mohammed, 2006).

The reforms in Kenya came with increased investment in and use of IT by the government and public institutions (Obongo, 2009), which is in line with the Economic Commission of Africa's (ECA) assertion that application of the NPM tools cannot be possible without the information and communication technologies (Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), 2003). Sohaland and Lionel (1998) argue that although organizations make significant investment in IT, there is a danger of not harnessing its full potential through inter-alia, a lack of understanding of the potential of IT, lack of CEO and senior management support and awareness of IT's potential, and impediments to IT development and implementation.

Despite the heavy investment in and use of IT in the Kenyan public sector, its contribution to performance management has not been fully explored. Previous studies on performance contracting in the Kenyan public sector have concentrated on implementation and the impact of performance contracting in state agencies. There is therefore need to study the role that IT has played in performance management in the public sector in Kenya, since failure to do so

will mean that state agencies risk failing to unleash IT's full potential in managing performance. Thismay in turn negatively affect the achievement of the Kenyan government's goal of spurring economic growth and improving the living standards of citizens as outlined in its ERC and Vision 2030 economic blue prints (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007).

In light of the above, this paper reports on a study conducted to determine the role of IT in performance target setting, performance planning, performance monitoring and reporting, and performance appraisal.

2. Literature Review

Various researchers, inter-alia, Lubale (2012) concur that the purpose of performance management is to obtain better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competency requirements. According to Petrie (2002), many countries have pursued a strategy of developing a more performance oriented culture in the public sector, which involved two closely related elements, namely, an increased focus on results, in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and quality of service, and a move from centralized bureaucratic structures to more decentralized managerial environments. Supporters of NPM hold the view that market oriented management of the public sector will lead to greater cost-efficiency for governments (Kalimullah *et al.*, 2012). NPM advocates de-bureaucratization, decentralization, public participation, citizen empowerment, innovation and use of modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and e-Government (Hughes 2003, as cited in Dzimbiri 2008).

The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) defines Results Based Management as a management strategy by which an organization ensures that its processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and impacts), through monitoring and self-assessment of progress towards results, and reporting on performance (United Nations Development Group (UNDG), 2010). The key elements of RBM are performance target setting, performance planning, performance monitoring and reporting, and performance Appraisal (Kobia & Mohammed, 2006).

Somewhat akin to performance management is performance contracting, which provides greater clarity over what public agencies will achieve, while at the same time providing agency managers with greater flexibility to deploy resources to better achieve those goals, emerged as a tool for public sector reform (Petrie 2002). Many countries (New Zealand, France, Botswana) have implemented performance contracting as a means of improving public sector performance. In New Zealand, Easterbrook-Smith (1999) found that through performance contracting, chief executives had better clarity on the strategic areas that the institutions will contribute to, and the priority areas for its work. France had recognized performance contracting as an extremely positive breakthrough in participatory management (Grapinet, 1999), and in Botswana it was found that service delivery had improved since the introduction of a performance management system (Dzimbiri, 2008).

Performance contracting was first introduced in Kenya through the Para-statal Reform Strategy Paper in 1991, which paper saw the introduction of performance contracting on a pilot basis at two agencies, namely, Kenya Railways Corporation and the National Cereals and Produce Board (Kenya, 2010). This initiative failed because of inter-alia, thelack of political will to drive the process, since it was perceived as donor-driven (Kobia& Mohammed, 2006).

Performance contracting was re-introduced into the Kenyan public service in 2004 as part of the civil service reform instituted under its economic blueprint. The Kenyan performance contracting is a hybrid system that has borrowed from international best practices and the Balanced Score Card. The Performance Contracting and Evaluation system best practices were drawn from South Korea, India, China, USA, United Kingdom, China, Malaysia and Morocco but domesticated to suit the local context (Kenya, 2010). All state agencies are required to develop a strategic plan and an annual work plan, which form a basis for the performance contract, which is then implemented.

From a fully manual system during inception, performance contracting has evolved to the extent that it is almost wholly web based, and following automation of the evaluation and moderation process, public institutions are now able to access an automated processing platform and to carry out in-house evaluation using the system (Office of the Prime Minister, 2012). The DPC is in the process of installing a web based real time monitoring and reporting system that will replace the current manual system of quarterly reporting (MDP, 2013).

The fundamental role of IT is to enable businesses to find new ways to drive down the costs of products, processes, and improve performance, and Alkadi, Alkadi and Totaro (2003) concluded that IT is increasingly playing a crucial role in the success of organizations in the information age. Mithas, Ramasubbu and Sambamurthy (2011) found that information management capability plays an important role in developing other organizational capabilities for customer management, process management, and performance management, which in turn, favorably influence organizational performance. Sanders and Premus (2005) showed that a firm's IT capability impacts performance directly and indirectly, by having a positive impact on internal and external collaboration. Their study concluded that advancements in IT capabilities have significantly improved the extent of internal and external organizational information sharing and IT capability can be positively linked to a firm's performance.

According to Obongo (2009), the performance contracting process has compelled government agencies to restructure extensively and to reengineer their operations in order to turn around and operate profitably or to more efficiently and effectively perform their mandates. These restructuring efforts include heavy investment in IT by the government, and public institutions have enhanced their IT capacity and systems. For example, by 2009, the Kenyan Ministry of Lands had put in place plans to fully computerize the Land Rent system to replace the manual system (Ministry of Lands, 2009), and by 2011, the judiciary had completed digitizing 60 million pages of cases for the High Court across Kenya. The CMA has automated its internal processes through an imaging and workflow system to ensure that it operates in a paperless environment, and launched an improved interactive website (CMA, 2008).

In light of the above, and considering that studies on performance management in the Kenyan public sector have mainly focused on its implementation and impact, there is need to investigate the role of IT in the performance management process. This will ensure that the potential of IT in performance management is better understood, and that organizations get value from their IT investments.

3. Research Methodology

Data was collected by means of a survey, from a random sample of employees drawn from all strategic business units and job grades at the CMA using a questionnaire that sought primarily to establish how the respondents use IT in the performance management process. To take into account the non-homogenous population due to different job levels and functions, stratified sampling employed to identify a representative sample using the employee list comprising 82 employees as the sampling frame.

The data was organized and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. The results are presented in tables, graphs, and statistical summaries.

The questionnaire contained questions which were accompanied by a list of possible alternatives from which respondents had toselect one which best described their situation. A five point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' use, and the impact of IT in the performance management process. The 17 item questionnaire (Table 1) comprised 2 questions (1-2) on performance targeting, 10 (3-12) questions on performance planning, 2 (13-14) questions on performance monitoring and evaluation, 3 (9; 15-16) questions on performance appraisal, and 1 (17) question overall performance management.

The questionnaires were hand delivered to the sample, as this was a cost efficient and convenient method since the respondents were in one centralized office. It also allowed the respondents to complete the questionnaire at a convenient time, at their own pace and without influence from researcher. To mitigate against the risk of low response rates, the respondents were phoned in advance to make them aware of the survey, as well as a week after the questionnaires had been delivered, to remind them of their importance in participating in the study.

4. Findings

Figure 1 which reflects the distribution of respondents according to their job grades, reveals that the majority of respondent were Officers (53%), followed by assistant Managers (20%).

Figure 1: Distribution of Sample by Job Grade
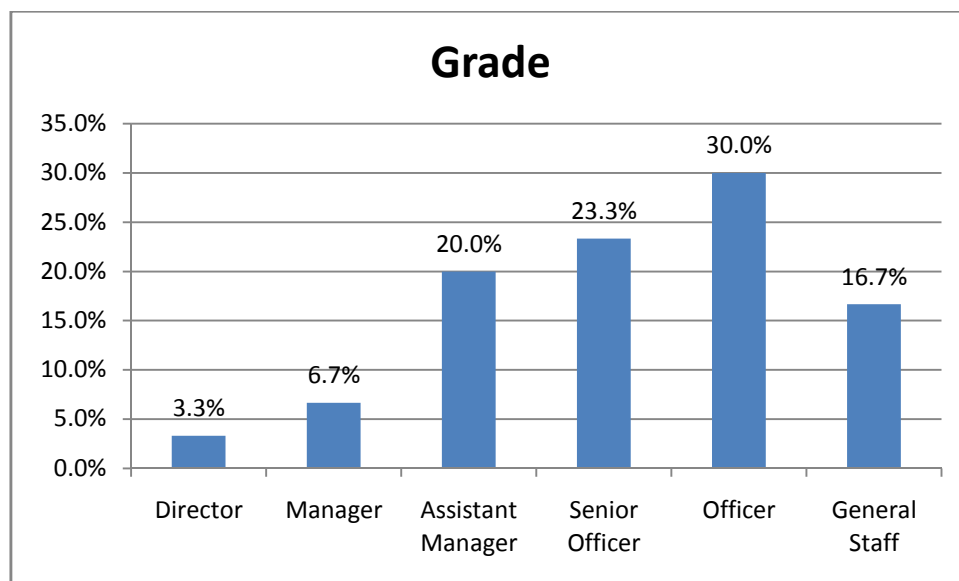
It was ascertained that the majority (43%) of the respondents worked at the CMA between 3-5 years, 27% for less than 3 years, 27% for between 6-10 years, while the minority (3%) were employed at the CMA for more than 10 years.

Table 1 represents a summary of the responses to the various items (1-17) comprising the questions exploring performance targeting, performance planning, performance monitoring and evaluation, performance appraisal and overall performance management. With reference to table 1, if the categories "Strongly Agree and Agree" are collapsed, it would become evident that the scores will range from 43% to 90%, implying that the majority of respondents

agreed that the questions pertaining to the various aspects of performance management applied in their organization.

Table 1: Summary of Research Findings

	1 = SA	2 = A	3 = N	4 = D	5 = SD[1]
1. My organization relies on IT systems to inform the strategic planning process, and to identify and prioritize performance targets	20%	50%	20%	3%	7%
2. I am able to easily and speedily access the information I need to develop my performance targets a	50%	40%	3%	3%	3%
3. Performance plans are stored electronically in the organization	30%	47%	17%	3%	3%
4. Performance targets and work plans are communicated using IT	40%	47%	10%	0%	3%
5. I am able to change my performance plan once it has been set	17%	30%	23%	20%	10%
6. I rely heavily on IT to perform my duties	70%	20%	3%	3%	3%
7. My organization has a centralized repository for all organizational data	53%	27%	7%	10%	3%
8. My organization uses IT to facilitate information sharing and interaction within the organization	40%	53%	3%	0%	3%
9. I am able to easily and speedily access my performance plan and appraisal results when I need to	27%	40%	23%	7%	3%
10. IT is used to share information and improve relations with the public	33%	60%	7%	0%	0%
11. My organization uses IT to manage its financial, physical, human, and other resources	43%	50%	7%	0%	0%
12. Information from the IT systems is actively used to improve the quality of decision making in the organization	30%	47%	23%	0%	0%
13. My organization has a specialized system(s) for measuring performance	23%	47%	17%	13%	0%

[1]SA= Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neither Agree or Disagree; D = Disagree; Strongly Disagree

14. My organization uses IT to monitor the implementation of performance plans	13%	43%	27%	13%	3%
15. My performance appraisal is carried out using IT	10%	60%	10%	13%	7%
16. Feedback on performance is communicated using IT	10%	33%	30%	23%	3%
17. IT helps in managing performance and performance goals	20%	50%	17%	3%	10%

Common measures of central tendency, namely the mean, median and mode were calculated for each question and presented in Table 2 below. It became evident that the mean for performance target setting is around 2, which is equivalent to agreeing on the use of IT in performance management. The mean for performance monitoring, reporting and appraisal are between 2.3 and 2.5, and lean more towards a neutral position. Furthermore, the mean for the overall use of IT in performance management is 2.33, which can be interpreted as being the same as for performance monitoring and evaluation.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Reliance on IT to inform the strategic planning process	2.27	2.00	2	1.048	1.099	1.508	1.508
2. Speedy and easy access to information needed to develop performance targets	1.70	1.50	1	.952	.907	4.561	4.561
3. Electronic storage of performance plans	2.03	2.00	2	.964	.930	1.914	1.914
4. Communication of performance targets and work plans using IT	1.80	2.00	2	.887	.786	4.624	4.624
5. Ability to change performance plan once set	2.77	3.00	2	1.251	1.564	-.904	-.904
6. Heavy reliance on IT to perform duties	1.50	1.00	1	.974	.948	5.903	5.903
7. Centralised repository for all organizational data	1.83	1.00	1	1.147	1.316	1.024	1.024
8. Use of IT to facilitate information sharing and interaction	1.73	2.00	2	.828	.685	7.509	7.509

9. Speedy and easy access to performance plan and appraisal results	2.20	2.00	2	1.031	1.062	.496	.496
10. Use of IT to share information and improve relations with the public	1.73	2.00	2	.583	.340	-.357	-.357
11. Use of IT to manage organizational resources	1.63	2.00	2	.615	.378	-.567	-.567
12. Use of IT systems to improve the quality of decision making	1.93	2.00	2	.740	.547	-1.085	-1.085
13. Use of specialized system(s) for measuring performance	2.20	2.00	2	.961	.924	-.428	-.428
14. Use of IT to monitor implementation of performance plans	2.50	2.00	2	1.009	1.017	-.022	-.022
15. Communication of performance feedback using IT	2.47	2.00	2	1.074	1.154	.468	.468
16. Performance appraisal using IT	2.77	3.00	2	1.040	1.082	-.662	-.662
17. Use of IT to manage performance and achieve performance goals	2.33	2.00	2	1.155	1.333	.947	.947

More specifically with respect to performance target setting, planning, monitoring and reporting, and appraisal, the mean and mode are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Mode for key elements of performance management

Key Performance Management Elements	Mean	Median
Performance target setting	1.985	1 & 2
performance planning	1.895	2
Performance monitoring and reporting	2.35	2
Performance appraisal	2.48	2
Overall use of IT in performance management	2.33	2

The median for most of the questions falls between 1 and 2, showing that the 50th percentile of the respondents were in agreement on the use of IT in performance management. The median for the 'ability to change performance plans once set and carrying out of appraisal using IT' was 3, implying that for these two questions the 50th percentile was around the neutral position on the use of IT.

The variance is a measure that quantifies the amount of spread of the data values around their mean value. It is calculated as the average of the squared deviations of all values from their mean. A large value implies the data is more spread out, while a small value implies the data is more clustered around a single point (Maree, 2007). As reflected in table 2, the variance for the performance target setting element of performance management show that the opinion of respondents on reliance on IT to inform the strategic planning process is more spread out, while there is more consensus on the ability to speedily and easily access information needed to develop performance targets.

Furthermore, the results for the 'performance planning' element of performance management show relatively small values for the majority of the questions, which indicates, that the responses are more clustered around a single point. The variables with the lowest variance are use of IT in sharing information with and improving relations with the public and use of IT in managing organizational resources. The questions on the ability to change performance plans and use of a centralized repository for organizational data have the highest variance, indicating a greater lack of consensus among respondents on these areas.

Skewness is a measure of horizontal departure from normal distribution (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A measure of the skewness of all the questions shows that they are positively skewed. Kurtosis which is a measure the vertical departure from normal distribution (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) describes the amount of peak or trough of a distribution. A positive value of the kurtosis measure indicate that the distribution is abnormally peaked, or leptokurtic, negative values indicate abnormally flat, or platykurtic distributions, and values close to or equal to zero indicate normal kurtosis (Maree, 2007). A measure of the kurtosis of all the questions shows that a majority of the questions have a positive value and therefore are abnormally peaked. A few of the questions have an abnormally flat distribution.

The results are further discussed under specific headings which comprise the realm of performance management, namely, target setting, planning, performance, monitoring and reporting and performance appraisal.

4.1 Performance Target Setting

The results reveal that the CMA relies on information from its IT systems to inform the strategic planning process, and to identify and prioritize performance targets. Employees are also able to access the information they need to identify, prioritize and set performance targets with ease and speed. This is line with empirical studies that have found that although managers have vast amounts of operational data available, it can still be difficult for decision makers to incorporate this information into strategy. Such studies have shown that IT provides a crucial strategic link by linking available data with top-level planning, monitoring and reporting. Through use of IT, CMA employees are able to feed operational information into the strategic planning process.

A cross tabulation of the 'job grades and reliance on IT to inform the strategic planning process' reveals that, of the 20% of respondents who were neutral or disagreed that they rely on IT, all were Assistant Managers or in lower job grades. As expected, this indicates that there is reliance on IT in the strategic planning process in the higher job grades (director and

manager).A cross tabulation of the 'job grade and the ability to speedily and easily access information needed to develop performance targets,' also reveals a similar trend.

4.2 Performance Planning

The findings indicate that the CMA has a centralized repository for all organizational information, which also reveals that employees are able to access the information they need to carry out their functions with ease and speed. The findings also show that the organization uses collaboration tools and workflows to facilitate information sharing and interaction within the organization, and to improve relations with the public. Work plans and targets are also communicated using IT.

It became evident that the employees at the CMA employees rely heavily on IT to carry out their functions, especially to manage its financial and human resources. Employees are also of the view that information from IT systems is actively used to improve the quality of decision making. With a variance of 1.564 and a standard deviation of 1.251, the question on ability to change performance plans has the largest variance and standard deviation values. This meant that the opinions of the respondents are more spread out on the Likert scale of 1 to 5 than in all other questions. This divergence of view may imply a lack of consistency in the control on ability to change performance plans. The use of a centralized repository for organizational data, with a variance of 1.316, also indicates a greater lack of consensus among respondents.

4.3 Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Although it became evident that there is less usage of IT in the performance monitoring and reporting, the majority (70%) of the respondents agree that there is use of a specialized system for measuring performance, and only 56% agree that implementation of the performance plans is monitored using IT. The results seem to indicate inconsistency in the use of IT in these areas. While there is agreement that there is use of a specialized system for measuring performance, there is much lower agreement that IT is used to monitor the implementation of performance plans. This may mean that although there is an IT system is in place, it is not put to adequate use.

4.4 Performance Appraisal

The study results show that the potential of IT is not fully utilized in the performance appraisal element of performance management. While 70% of the respondents agree that appraisal is carried out using IT, only 43% agree that feedback on performance is communicated using IT. Like in performance monitoring and reporting, the divergence of views seems to be an indication of inconsistent application in this area, with only some staff members using it. Overall, the overall results are positively skewed towards the use of IT to manage performance and achieve performance goals. The variance and standard deviation values indicate that the responses are spread out rather than clustered around a particular point on the Likert scale. The abovementioned confirms the concerns of Sohal and Lionel (1998) who argued that although organizations make significant investment in IT, there is a danger of not harnessing its full potential.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results show that the CMA has invested heavily invested on IT and it has permeated every aspect of its business operations, and the organization also uses IT to inform its strategic planning process, and to identify and prioritize targets. In the performance planning area, IT plays a major role by helping to communicate the performance goals and explain how they are to be achieved. IT provides a storage medium for data and information, and aids in

consolidating disparate sources of data to provide one central place to access information. IT also plays a key role in sharing information with and improving relations with the public.

However, the results show that there is lower utilization of IT in performance monitoring and reporting, and performance appraisal. Thus, although the CMA has made significant investments in IT as an enabler and strategic asset, there is a danger of it not harnessing its full potential. Furthermore, although the role of IT had become strategic and it has permeated all its business operations, the CMA has still not utilized IT's full potential. The under usage of IT in some of performance management key elements impacts negatively on the contribution of IT to the performance management process, and therefore negatively affects the organization's performance.

The study results revealed that a significant number of staff members are able to change their performance plans after they are agreed on. There is therefore need for the CMA to ensure that IT is used to ensure the integrity of performance plans is maintained once they are agreed on. The results also revealed that although there is a specialized system for measuring performance, it is not fully utilized to monitor implementation of performance plans. The CMA should therefore establish why there is this under-utilization and put in place measure to reverse it.

Although the CMA has automated its internal processes through an imaging and workflow system to ensure that it operates in a paperless environment, and launched an improved interactive website to share information with and improve relations with public, this study did not seek to establish whether it offers on-line services to the public, in line with the goals of e-government. There is need for further investigation to establish this and ensure fully utilization of IT in this area.

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