CHALLENGES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES IN UGANDA

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Abstract

Purpose - This paper aims to identify the challenges faced by universities in Uganda while implementing performance management and the guidelines for effective performance management implementation (PMI).

Methodology - An exploratory qualitative research design was applied based on information gleaned from face-to-face interviews with administrators and heads of academic units on challenges of strategic PMI in public universities in Uganda while guidelines for effective PMI in an institution were identified from literature.

Originality: - The paper presents the challenges faced by universities in Uganda in implementing performance management and the guidelines for successful institutional PMI.

Findings - The literature review identified the following guidelines for PMI - Formulation of an institutional framework, a limited set of clear objectives, customer focus, leadership commitment, favorable management style, efficient and effective Information Communication system, strategic alignment, existence of a reward system, shared understanding, performance oriented culture, planning and review process, employee commitment, existence of both tangible and intangible measures, maturity alignment, effective budgeting, clear roles and responsibility. The empirical study elicited nine major challenges which seem to affect PMI in universities which include: Uneven and inadequate cash flow, poor infrastructure, staffing, strategy implementation, lack of motivation and low morale, resistance to change, leadership problems, a highly bureaucratic system and limited employee commitment.

Practical/theoretical implications - During implementation of performance management, universities should pay attention to the challenges and take precautionary measures on how to overcome them, while ensuring that the guidelines for effective performance management implementation are put in place.

Key words – performance management, challenges, public universities, Uganda

Paper type – research paper

Introduction

Following the liberalisation of most economies in the 1980s and early 1990s, most organisations in developing countries have experienced growing competition from multinationals. With this kind of trend, organisations must devise ways of becoming more responsive to customer expectations to compete favourably in the global village (Halachmi 2002: 64). Quality improvement is one way by which organisations can favourably compete in such a dynamic environment (Castka etal 2001: 123). Literature highlights the significance of performance management as one of the ways by which organisations can ensure quality to their stakeholders (Green 1994: 7). Hence, most economies are moving towards organisational improvement (Ohemeng 2009: 110) to compete favourably in the current dynamic environment by focusing on key elements of modern management such as 'decentralization, flexibility, quality service, customer responsiveness and efficiency' (De Waal 2007: 70). Much as there is limited research on PMI in developing countries with 95 percent of empirical research focused on "institutional theory" in the developed world compared to only 5 percent in the developing country in the past 2 decades (De Waal 2007: 69), the application of performance management in organisations in the developing countries is steadily increasing especially in Africa (Elzinga et al 2009: 509; De Waal 2007: 71).

De Waal (2007: 71) cites a number of studies, which show that of recent, there is an increasing interest in performance management in most organisations in Africa. He notes that in Burkina Faso, there is an increasing desire to apply the use of the Balanced Score Card (BSC) in public enterprises (De Waal and Augustin 2005). In Egypt, most manufacturing enterprises are turning to the use of both 'financial and non-financial' information to measure performance (Abdel Aziz et al 2005). The increasing competition in South Africa is driving most enterprises towards the adoption of 'strategic performance management' (Motswiane 2004). In Kenya, most companies have started adopting the use of the BSC as a way of improving their performance (Malinga 2004). In Ethiopia, there is growing interest in the use of the BSC in more firms with support from government (Tessema 2005). In Ghana, following the liberalisation of the economy, the public sector has implemented performance management as a way of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in organisations (Ohemeng 2009: 109). Despite such efforts, the consensus is that performance management has not made tremendous contribution to organisational efficiency and effectiveness in Ghana (Ohemeng 2009: 120). There are still grey areas in financial management and 'service delivery' in the public institutions.

Most developing countries which have tried to implement performance management have mainly focused on employee performance appraisals yet institutional performance stretches beyond employee performance (De Waal 2007: 71). In Africa, in a study carried out by De Waal (2007: 78) in Tanzania, in one College of Business Education focus was on establishing efforts made by the management of the college to improve their performance. In Uganda Kagaari et al (2010: 106-121)

conducted a study in four public universities focusing on the usefulness of management focus to performance management practices & information and communication technology in the enhancement of performance. Despite the increasing interest in performance management the failure rate of 56 percent (De Waal and Counet 2009: 380) in the implementation process is still relatively high. No study has been conducted to specifically establish the challenges of PMI in public universities in Uganda. It is therefore worth establishing the challenges faced during the PMI process. Hence, the main aim of this study is to (i) identify the challenges faced by universities in Uganda while implementing performance management and (ii) identify the guidelines for effective PMI.

Theoretical overview of challenges of institutional performance management

Performance management involves "the use of performance measurement information to effect positive change in organisational cultures, systems and processes, by helping to set agreed upon performance goals, allocating and prioritizing resources, informing managers to either confirm or change current policy or directions to meet those goals and sharing results of performance in pursuing goals" (Amaratunga et al 2001: 181). It refers to the use of financial and non-financial information by managers to make decisions pertaining to organisational activities with a focus on the pre-determined goals (De Waal 2003: 688). Therefore, performance management refers to the set of actions put in place to determine the extent to which an organisation is achieving its pre-determined targets (Amaratunga et al 2001: 181).

Performance management as a mechanism of fostering improvement in service delivery still presents many challenges in its implementation especially in most countries in Africa. A number of causes have been raised in the literature among which include; the lack of full commitment to the performance management processes by managers (De Waal 2007: 81), lack of rewards for good performance (De Waal 2007: 71; Ohemeng 2009: 110), low political commitment by the top officials, absence of training, cultural issues and international organisation interference (Ohemeng 2009: 110), weak, highly bureaucratic management systems (De Waal 2007: 72; Mendonca and Kanungo 1996: 65-66) and lack of expertise to design sophisticated performance management systems (Mendonca and Kanungo 1996: 67).

According to Kaplan's (2001: 358) experience, definition of the strategy is a cumbersome exercise. The mission and vision statements are usually too detailed and tend to focus on programs and activities rather than the outcomes the organisation is trying to achieve. Reflection of intangibles in the objectives set is a problem let alone the process of setting targets, which is always a daunting one. This has negative effects on motivation and business performance, Bourne et al (2003: 19). Verweire and Berghe (2003: 782) note that having a clear vision and a detailed strategy alone is not enough.

Kaplan and Norton (2001) cited in Verweire and Berghe (2003: 782) warn that the implementation process of the strategy is more challenging to management than simply defining the vision and strategy. This implies that university managers should be trained on how to identify an appropriate vision, mission and strategy. If possible the services of a consultant should be employed to guide employees and management through the performance management process.

Financial constraints (Shun et al 2006: 195), achievement of focus and alignment (Kaplan 2001: 358) and developing challenging performance management systems pose a challenge (De Waal, 2007: 72). In addition, Bourne et al (2000: 760) advance other obstacles to the full implementation of the performance measures to be; resistance to measurement, issues to do with computer systems and lack of focus by top leadership. Horine & Hailey (1995: 7) observe that organisational culture, senior leadership commitment, faculty support, implementation time and training may also be obstacles to full implementation of the performance measures. Top management's beliefs and corporate culture also impact the performance measurement systems (Hussain and Hoque 2002: 179). The over-bureaucratization of the performance management process, limited time accorded to the process and the limited importance accorded to it are some of the challenges noted by Winstanley and Kate (1996: 68). De Waal and Counet (2009: 377) identified the major problems academics face in implementation to be; ineffective ICT system, organisational instability, according a low priority to the PMS, lack of commitment from leadership, lack of a performance management culture, unclear strategy, lack of continuous update, resistance from within, failure to continuously use the PMS and lack of cause-effect relationship among the strategies. PMI therefore is a challenging exercise. Having briefly provided an insight into the challenges of performance management implementation in most organisations in Africa in general, the next section provides the findings from the interviews on challenges encountered by public universities in Uganda and guidelines identified from literature which facilitate successful performance management implementation.

Research design and methodology

The methodology consisted of an exploratory qualitative research design based on information gleaned from in depth face-to-face interviews with Top administrators and heads of academic units of Kyambogo University (KYU) in Uganda, using a guide consisting of open-ended questions to generate primary data from key informants. It also consisted of a literature review to identify any success factors for PMI. The purpose of the qualitative study was to identify the challenges faced by public universities in Uganda while implementing performance management to address the lack of research information available on institutional strategic performance management in public universities in the context of Uganda specifically. This provided in depth information about the context of universities in Uganda.

Purposive sampling of the target population for the study included top administrators who are responsible for spearheading institutional performance management practices in the universities and Heads of academic units, who are responsible for implementation of performance management practices at the unit level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen top administrators and Heads of academic units from KYU, during the period running from February 1st 2010 to 23rd March 2010. For purposes of anonymity, the respondents' names and positions of responsibility have been withheld.

The following section provides a summary of the responses received.

Findings

The research conducted with the respondents of KYU elicited the following challenges faced by the university in PMI:

Table 1

Challenge	Top administrators										Heads of academic units					Responses	% age
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5		
Formulating a performance management framework			*	*	*		*	*				*				6	40
Strategy implementation	*	*	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*		*		11	73.3
Limited employee commitment		*	*	*		*		*	*		*				*	8	53.3
A highly bureaucratic system	*	*	*	*	*		*	*			*	*				9	60
Uneven & inadequate cash flow	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	15	100
Staffing	*		*		*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*	11	73.3
Lack of motivation & low morale		*	*	*	*			*		*	*	*	*	*	*	11	73.3
Poor infrastructure	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	15	100
Resistance to change	*		*		*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*		*	11	73.3
Increasing demand	*		*								*	*				4	26.7
Leadership problems	*	*			*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*	11	73.3
Lack of teamwork	*							*	*		*	*				5	33.3
Time management		*			*	*		*								4	26.7
Cultural problems	*	*	*					*	*							5	33.3
Government regulations	*							*	*		*	*	*		*	7	46.7
Limited	*	*						*	*		*					5	33.3

transparency															

Source: Interviewees' responses February 1st 2010 to 23rd March 2010

From the above responses, nine challenges (in descending order) seem to greatly affect PMI in public universities in Uganda and these are:

Uneven and inadequate cash flow, poor infrastructure, staffing issues, strategy implementation, lack of motivation and low morale, resistance to change, leadership problems, a highly bureaucratic system and limited employee commitment.

The nine challenges are further explained below with selected quotes from the respondents:

Uneven and inadequate cash flow. All respondents cited this as a challenge. Government funding is inadequate and income from students trickles in slowly until towards the end of the semester when most students pay in preparation for the examination period. The uneven cash flow results in debt accumulation and 'paralyses university activities' (Shun et al 2006: 195). This effect trickles down to the payments given to employees and the 'take home' is too meager so lecturers end up working in more than one institution to make ends meet. Lack of adequate funding therefore constrains the implementation of performance management because individuals have work elsewhere. They therefore have limited time to focus on university activities[1].

Poor infrastructure. An efficient and effective Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system plays a great role in the communication and data collection processes (Bourne et al 2000: 762). ICT infrastructure in KYU is poor with no connectivity on the largest part of the university[2]. This has a negative effect on the PMI because communication is slow as some communication documents get lost or delayed as a result of using the manual communication system[3]. Ineffective communication channels therefore, affect performance management implementation. In addition, KYU has limited physical infrastructure, with poorly equipped offices, laboratories and garages as observed by the researcher during the study visit. Most of the existing equipment is obsolete. Staff and students have limited space. In some departments, staffs do not have workspace so some leave the university immediately after lecturing. This makes mobilisation and implementation a challenge.

Staffing issues. It was established that the staffing of the planning unit which is responsible for managing the strategic planning process is thin with a lot of workload. Not only the extent to which the staffs are motivated and facilitated but also the staffing levels affect the attainment of effective service delivery in a university. KYU is constrained by a limited number of staff, currently operating at a rate less than 40 percent of the establishment with a 'bottom heavy'[4] with the majority of the academic staff below the level of senior lecturer (see table 2). This results into a high

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[1] Interview, with a Head of academic unit 1, held on the 10th March 2010
[2] Interview, with a Head of academic unit 2, 25th February 2010
[3] Interview, with a Head of academic unit 3, 23rd March 2010
[4] Interview, top administrator 3, 15th February 2010

lecturer/students ratio of 1: 60 on average as opposed to the proposed lecturer students' ratio of the National Council for Higher Education of 1:15 for sciences and 1: 20 for humanities.

Table 2: Staffing of KYU as at 6 February 2010

Post	Number
Professor	6
Associate Professor	0
Senior lecturer	31
Lecturer	137
Assistant Lecturer	168
Teaching assistant	57
Total	**399**

Source: Planning Unit KYU

The academic staff is therefore engaged in more teaching than any other university activity. A limited staff constrains quality implementation (Materu 2007: 24). On the other hand, lecturers are usually involved in other university activities (like supervision of school practice exercise and industrial training exercise) outside the university. This reduces the level of concentration of staff to university activities. There is also a high rate of staff turnover leading to over reliance on part-time employees that are not fully committed to university activities because they are paid meager wages which are not timely.

Strategy implementation. The strategic plan is formulated but never implemented. Implementation of strategy is a daunting task (Kaplan's 2001: 358). Most of the employees are not aware of the major goals of the university and as such, this constrains implementation.   The administration is preoccupied with administrative work. There is no feedback on performance and there is no evaluation. The institutional goals sometimes conflict with personal goals and as such, there is a conflict of interests during implementation[5].

Lack of motivation and low morale. The majority of the respondents agreed that the majority of employees have a negative attitude towards work and some of the reasons they raised are that; *there are no rewards for good performance. The terms and conditions of service are not fair and have never been revised since the merger of the three institutions. Unfairness in salaries and allowances exists.* [6]Individual remuneration is not linked to performance but to seniority and job position. The consensus was that this can greatly affect implementation because, much as the person earning a lot can have the motivation to dedicate all his time to implementing university policies, the others whose income is far lower may feel unfairly treated and may be pre-occupied with making ends meet else where and hence, will not fully dedicate their time to university service. Besides, this kind of 'unfairness' discourages hard work.

Resistance to change. KYU is a result of a merger of three institutions with different cultures, traditions, structures and systems. Besides, the academic staff had different academic backgrounds.

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[5] Interview with Head of Academic unit on 23rd March 2010
[6] Interview, with top administrator 4, 17th March 2010

Integrating the three institutions rendered those with lower qualifications insecure. There was need for funding the retirement of the less skilled labour. However, government insisted that the less skilled labour must be absorbed in the new university system irrespective of their qualifications. This has resulted into resistance to change as members want to maintain the status quo. Lecturers are 'stressed out' as they struggle for 'self preservation' for fear of the unknown[7]. Resistance to change and unwillingness to take risks for fear of the unknown can undermine performance management implementation. Individuals who have a high level of 'uncertainty avoidance' are not innovative and creative because of fear to try out new things and such individuals will be hesitant to embrace a new system for fear of the unknown. A high uncertainty avoidance culture hinders successful PMI (Mendonca and Kanungo 1996: 69). Mendonca and Kanungo (1996: 72) suggest setting individual complex yet achievable goals and provision of a staff development programme.

Leadership problems. The consensus is that the leadership is 'authoritative' and is pre-occupied with managing internal conflicts with less focus on managing performance. Top leadership manages by 'intimidating staff' and this has greatly affected the willingness of the staff to implement policies spear headed by management. It became evident that the leadership style plays a great role in PMI (Hussain and Hoque 2002: 179). Statements about the leadership at KYU, made by some of the respondents who preferred anonymity included statements like:

> *People are human beings and they need appreciation. Leadership does not appreciate the good. The leadership style is more or less authoritative. There is a lot of insecurity and intimidation. The leadership that we need in an institution is the leadership that listens. A good leader uses diplomatic ways to help people improve their work style other than constant blaming. The top administration has a domineering character. There is a gap between the top management and the staff. Management approach is not the best.*

A non-committed (De Waal 2007: 81; Bourne et al (2000: 760) authoritative leadership acts as a disincentive to implementation of university policies because leadership style makes staff feel unappreciated[8].

A highly bureaucratic system. In their findings on the relationship between corporate culture and commitment, Rashid et al (2003: 722) established that a bureaucratic culture is a disincentive to employee commitment. A highly bureaucratic system slows down the rate at which implementation of policies is done (Winstanley and Kate 1996: 68). The issues pinpointed where implementation has been slow are; the procurement process, registration process, policy formulation, release of results and appointment processes, which are too lengthy[9]. Respondents feel that these lengthy processes affect the planning process, which eventually undermines performance. This then is a revelation to

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[7] Interview, with a Head of academic unit 4, 15th February 2010
[8] Interviews held with top administrators and heads of academic unit Kyambogo University, February – March 2010
[9] Interview, with top administrator 2, 10th February 2010

managers to discourage this type of culture from flourishing in an organisation as it may impede employee commitment, which will have a negative impact on organisational performance as a whole. If employees are not committed, implementation of any policies becomes a challenge because they do not have the organisation at 'heart'.

   Limited employee commitment. It was noted that employees lack a sense of belonging to the organisation and therefore their commitment to the organisation is minimal yet employee commitment is vital for successful implementation of the organisational strategies and plans of actions (Rashid et al 2003: 708). When individuals are committed to their organisation, they will do whatever it takes for their organisations' sake (Druckman et al 1997: 76; Horine & Hailey (1995: 7). During the interviews, there was a consensus that Human capital is a vital resource for an organisation because it manages all other resources (Mendonca and Kanungo 1996: 65-66). Employee attitude towards work greatly affects their level of performance and in turn affect the overall organisational performance. Hence, Management focus should be on how best they can manage the 'systems and the people' while adapting the organisational culture to the environment and identifying the cultural aspects which could enhance organisational performance because not all cultural values result in superior performance (Raduan et al 2008: 51).

Guidelines for successful institutional performance management

Despite the challenging process of implementing performance management exhibited by a relatively high failure rate of 56 percent (De Waal and Counet 2009: 380), there are proposed guidelines in literature for successful implementation. Implementation of performance management is vital because it is the implementation, which will enable the achievement of organizational goals. If organizational members do not use performance information, it will be of little value. Developing countries need to borrow a leaf from their counterparts in the developed world in the implementation of performance management while taking into consideration the contextual differences in which they operate. Different authors advance different factors which are important for successful performance management implementation. From the body of literature the following factors seem to facilitate performance management implementation:

Factor	Definition	Cited in
Objectives	Focus on key but limited objectives due to resource constraints. The goals should be clear. The objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and yet challenging.	**Kaplan 2001: 359; Ball & Halwachi 1987: 397; Otley 1999: 365 Halachmi 2002: 65** **Brown 2005: 481**
Customer focus	Focus should be on meeting customer expectations	**Verweire & Berghe 2003: 784**
Leadership commitment	Leadership should be fully committed and involved in the	**Verweire & Berghe 2003: 784; Bourne et al 2000: 761;**

	entire performance management process	**Halachmi 2002: 65; Ingram 1997: 297**
Management style	Should promote manager-subordinate relationship.	**Mendonca & Kanungo 1996: 74**
Efficient and effective Information/Communication system	There should be timely and clear communication not only internally, top-down and bottom-up within the entire organisation but also externally.	**Verweire & Berghe 2003: 784; Amaratunga & Baldry 2002: 221; Otley 1999: 365; Bourne et al 2000: 762; Kagaari et al 2010:**
Strategic alignment	Individual activities and all other functions of the organisation should be aligned to the strategic goals.	**Verweire &Berghe 2003: 784; Halachmi 2002: 65**
Conceptual framework	A framework for managing the implementation process must be in place	**Artley et al 2001: 3**
A reward system	A system should be in place to reward good performance; poor performance should be encouraged, and motivated to improve because the system is not a punishment tool but an improvement tool.	**Artley & Stroh 2001: 3; Amaratunga & Baldry 2002: 221; Otley 1999: 365; Werveire & Berghe 2003: 783; Ohemeng 1999: 112; Halachmi 2002: 65.**
Shared understanding of mission, vision & strategies, continuous learning and training	Should aim at creating awareness and promoting learning and a shared understanding of the vision, mission, values, strategic direction, key performance measures, meaning of Performance Management and its usefulness to the institution.	**Artley & Stroh 2001: 3; Otley 1999: 365; Ohemeng 2009: 112; Brown 2005: 481; Ohemeng 2009: 112; Amaratunga & Baldry 2002: 221.**
Performance standards	Should be set collectively	**Verweire & Berghe 2003: 783**
Review process & planning	There is need to continuously review the process	**Ohemeng 2009: 112**
Performance oriented culture	Develop a culture which promotes individual accountability, teamwork and responsibility	**Castka et al 2001: 123; Ingram 1997: 300; Chau 2008: 116 ; Brown 2005 : 481 ; Halachmi 2002 : 65 ; De waal 2004 : 308**
Intangible measures and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Identify the intangible measures of performance to supplement the financial measures and the KPIs	**Amaratunga, Baldry & Marjan 2001: 180; Brown 2005: 481 Kaplan and Norton 2000**
Employee commitment and buy in	A committed and supportive workforce is necessary for implementation	**Bourne et al 2000: 761; Halchmi 2002: 65**
Maturity alignment	Consideration of all components of the stage of development at which the organisation is, is vital in PMI.	**Verweire and Berghe 2003: 782; Verweire & Berghe 2003: 784**

Effective budget	Set priorities and adhere to the budget	**Halachmi**
Clear roles and responsibility	Individual roles and responsibilities should be clear	**Halachmi 2002: 65**
Cultural factors	Low power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, abstractive culture and high masculinity should be enhanced	**Mendonca and Kanungo 1996: 68-69**

Practical Implications and conclusion

PMI is necessary for the achievement of organisational goals. Simply designing strategies without implementation is meaningless. However, implementation is a daunting exercise which requires identification of the guidelines and the challenges of PMI. In conclusion, this study presents a number of factors which facilitate PMI and challenges which might be affecting PMI, which management should focus on to achieve success in the implementation. Management can then devise ways of controlling the challenges while ensuring that the suggested guidelines are put in place for successful PMI.

Limitations and future research

Only one public university was subject to investigation therefore the results of this research might not be conclusive in giving a general picture in all universities in Uganda. Further research is required to identify the extent of PMI in all public universities in Uganda and the challenges each of the universities face in implementing performance management. Secondly, the interviews are subject to subjectivity as individuals may not be fully open about some issues they feel are sensitive.

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