

“Employee performance management and development within the regional hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health”

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SECTION 2. Management in firms and organizations

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Employee performance management and development within the regional hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health

Abstract

The paper looks at a study conducted within the regional hospitals of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health in South Africa. The study was motivated by the fact that Regional hospitals provide specialized public health services and yet are perceived by the general public to be struggling in the area of service delivery, staff motivation and staff performance management. The study had a total of 439 respondents from 8 of the 14 Regional hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal province. A self-administered questionnaire comprising of 35 questions arranged in the form of a Likert scale was used as the research instrument. The study revealed that while, in the main, it seemed like management had conducted the performance management and development of their subordinates correctly, there is still room for improvement in all the variables that were posed during this study. It is, therefore, recommended that a Competency Centre in which supervisors and managers are trained in the process of performance management and development be established within the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health.

Keywords: employee performance, hospitals, service delivery.

JEL Classification: I115.

Introduction

The study was based on the concepts of performance management and development. Performance management is important to employees in a variety of ways. It enables the employer to have an idea of the value and contribution of each employee within the business entity. It can also be an indicator as to how far the organization is in terms of meeting its set targets and it prepares the organization for the future. Performance management and development is equally important to employees in that it gives them an opportunity to assess their value to the business entity. If conducted fairly and embraced by the employees it is a great tool which they can use to advance their individual careers. Performance management and development is not only important to the Private Sector whose main aim is to make profit, but it is also important to the Public Sector whose main aim is to provide services to the general public. There is a great consensus among scholars that for the Public Sector to succeed it has to employ the management principles employed by the Private Sector. Performance management and development is one such management principle which is widely used by the

Private Sector but which is now implemented by the Public Sector as well. Great work has been done in researching how this concept has been or is being implemented in the Public Sector. This study looked at how the South African Public Sector (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health) implements its performance management and development.

Objectives and aims of the study. The overall objective of the study is to establish the extent to which the regional hospitals of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health comply with the regulatory framework that governs performance management at all levels in the public service. Through this study, the researchers aim to:

- ◆ Investigate whether there is documented evidence of signed performance agreements and work plans.
- ◆ Assess whether management knows how to implement the system and ensure that employees receive adequate training and possess sufficient information to be able to participate fully in the processes.
- ◆ Explore and determine whether the regional hospitals of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health manage performance in a consultative, supportive and non-discriminatory manner to enhance organizational efficiency and effectiveness, accountability for the use of resources and the achievement of results.
- ◆ Investigate whether all four integrated phases of the performance cycle are implemented.

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Literature review. There are various definitions that will be put forward to understand the concept of performance management in the context of this study. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA, 2005), through the Employee Performance Management and Development System (EPMDS) governing public servants, defines performance management as “a purposeful continuous process aimed at positively influencing employee behavior for the achievement of the organization’s goals; the determination of correct activities as well as the evaluation and recognition of the execution of tasks/duties with the aim of enhancing their efficiency and effectiveness; and a means of improving results from the Department, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, objectives, standards and support incentives,” (GPMICS, 2007).

Performance management is also defined as a comprehensive term describing a process in which employees participate with their supervisors in setting their own performance targets. These targets are directly aligned with the stated goals of their departments (Cowling and Mailer, 1998, p. 201).

Armstrong defined performance management as “a systematic process for improving organizational performance by developing the performance of individuals and teams. It is a means of getting better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 1). Combining the meaning of the terms performance and management, one could argue that performance management is the process that manages how people carry out their tasks in the workplace. This is but one way of looking at performance management, however, different authors came up with interesting definitions of performance management.

Within the organization, performance management has an important role to play and it brings with it an accrued benefit. Lawson (1995, pp. 12-13) argues that the aim of an effective performance management is, firstly, to articulate the organization’s vision, secondly, to establish key results, objectives and measures at the key business unit level, thirdly, to control quality, delivery, cycle time, and, fourthly, to manage the continuous improvement of performance in those areas.

A number of authors have identified components of the performance management process. According to authors like Armstrong (2006), Aguinis (2009) and Spangenberg (1994), the performance management

and development process involves performance planning, performance monitoring, development and control, performance review and management of the outcomes of the review. The performance management process is continuous and, therefore, needs to be carried out over and over again which suggests that it is a cycle.

The components of performance management as identified by a number of authors, such as Armstrong (2006), Spangenberg (1994), Bacal (2004), and Aguinis (2009) suggest that performance management as a process is a cycle. According to Williams (1998), there are three main perspectives and they view performance management as a system for:

- ◆ Managing organizational performance,
- ◆ Managing employee performance and,
- ◆ Integrating the management of organizational and employee performance (Williams, 1998, p. 9).

In large organizations, it is customary to have the line manager or supervisor conducting the appraisals. In such cases, the appraisal process tends to be more effective because the line manager or supervisor works with the employee being appraised on a daily basis. The line manager knows the tasks that the employee has to perform and also knows the environment in which these tasks are being performed. In such cases, it is common to find a situation where the employee and the employer do not have a good relationship. Hunt (2005) argues that if that is the case, the appraisal process is a platform to address that bad relationship. If there is a good relationship between the employee and the line manager or supervisor, bias could set in, and the employee could be given a higher score that perhaps he/she does not deserve.

Conducting an appraisal process is a very delicate task. In view of this, some organizations rely on specially trained individuals from their Human Resource department, for example, the Human Resource manager could conduct the appraisals himself. Reliance on specially trained people is good, but such people have limited knowledge of the tasks that employees perform.

Kellogg (1975) identifies 10 important factors in the management of employee which are listed as follows:

- ◆ *Differences in age and experience:* If the employee happens to be older and more experienced than the manager, the level of his receptivity to his manager’s suggestion is likely to be low. The opposite is likely to be true as well. The more experienced the manager is and the extent to which he is older than his employee, the more likely his suggestion will be accepted.

- ◆ *Rivalry*: In some cases, the manager occupies a position that the employee had applied for but did not get. Such an employee is less likely to be receptive to what is suggested by the manager since he (the manager) is viewed by the employee as a rival.
- ◆ *Unusual work pressures*: Sometimes employees are faced with unusual work pressures that require them to be more productive or work longer hours than usual. Employees could also be faced with technical problems that require solution. During such times the employee's level of receptivity to the manager's suggestions is likely to be low. When the employee is not under such pressures and everything is in good shape, his level of receptivity to the manager's suggestions is likely to be high.
- ◆ *Health*: An employee who is not in good shape, either emotionally or physically, is less likely to be receptive to the manager's suggestion regarding how to improve his performance.
- ◆ *Off-the-job pressures*: Employees are sometimes subject to pressures that have nothing to do with their jobs. For example, the employee's wife or child could be seriously ill. The discussion about how he should improve his performance is the last thing on his mind, and, therefore, he is not likely to be receptive to the manager's suggestion on how to improve his performance.
- ◆ *Length of time on the job*: If the employee is new to his job he is more receptive to the manager's suggestion regarding how he can improve his performance. If he has been in the job for a long time, he tends to feel that he knows it all and can, therefore, not be lectured on how to improve his performance.
- ◆ *Desire of advancement*: The employee that is hoping to be promoted is likely to be receptive to suggestions about how to improve his performance. The employee who has no hope of being promoted pays little attention to the suggestion about how to improve his performance.
- ◆ *Recency of salary increase or recognition*: If the employee has just received a salary raise or has just been recognized for work well done, he is more likely to be receptive to suggestions by his manager on how to improve his performance.
- ◆ *Change in managerial attitude*: If the employee has been of the view that his manager's attitude is bad, and all of a sudden he sees a change in the manner in which the manager communicates, the employee is more likely to be receptive to the suggestion by the now changed manager.
- ◆ *Historical managerial actions*: If employees are of the view that the manager comes up with suggestions and they as employees work hard

towards implementing those suggestions, but do not get any recognition for it, the chances are that they are less likely to be receptive to other suggestions.

More on performance management can be obtained from Goh (2012), Pekkanen and Niemi (2013), Sujova et al. (2014) or Blanchi et al. (2015).

1. Research methodology

1.1. Population and location of the study. The study was conducted within the regional hospitals of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health. There are 14 Regional hospitals within the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, namely, Addington Hospital in Durban, Edendale Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, Madadeni Hospital in Newcastle, Mahatma Gandhi Hospital in Phoenix, Newcastle Hospital in Newcastle, Ngwelezane Hospital in Empangeni, Port Shepstone Hospital in Port Shepstone, Prince Mshiyeni Hospital in Umlazi, R.K. Khan Hospital in Chatsworth, St Aiden's Hospital in Durban, Stanger Hospital in Stanger, King Edward Hospital in Durban, Ladysmith Hospital in Ladysmith and Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg, (KZN, 2001a-k).

1.2. Sample respondents of the study. There were 439 respondents from 8 of the 14 Regional hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. Respondents in the study comprised all employees that worked in the Regional Hospitals of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health who were on salary Level 4 up to salary Level 12. The employees had Matriculation as their minimum academic qualification, and have access to the use of a computer at work. These two qualities of the participants were very important, since the questionnaire was to be written in English and distributed mainly by electronic means.

1.2.1. Sampling technique. Probability sampling technique was used and we had to make sure that the sample was representative of the entire population being studied. We divided the population into strata. The strata were according to the salary level each member of the population fell under. The sample was then obtained in accordance with the proportion of each salary level relative to the whole population.

1.2.2. Questionnaire. A quantitative approach was recommended since the study involved a large number of participants. The questionnaire for the study comprised of 35 open-ended questions. These questions were arranged in the form of a Likert scale and the respondents had to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one of the statements.

1.3. Pre-testing/validity of research instrument.

In this study, pre-testing was used to identify any weaknesses in the questionnaire. We had to establish whether all the instructions and questions in the questionnaire were understood. The pilot study was carried out on people in the same population but they were not members of the sample used for the full study. The necessary changes were done after the pilot study.

1.4. Reliability. For the purposes of this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Jackson, 2008) was used to determine reliability of the research instrument and was found to be 0.847, which showed a very good rate of internal reliability for the questionnaire.

2. Data analysis

Data were captured and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were presented in the form of frequency tables, as well as pie charts and bar graphs.

3. Discussion of the research findings

Areas that are important if the regional hospitals are to deliver the services were identified. These areas also happen to form a crucial part of the performance management and development process.

3.1. The drafting and signing of the work plan.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they had signed their work plans. If the Regional hospitals are to deliver on their mandate they need to accept that not even a single employee should be without a work plan. There has to be an understanding that the work plan is an opportunity for the employee to be told first-hand what is expected of him or her and why. It is an opportunity for the employer, through the manager, to spell out the aim of the organization and its targets. This then gives both the employee and the employer (manager) the opportunity to look at the resources available and come up with an agreement so that what has been agreed upon can indeed be achieved within the given timeframes using the given resources, and so forth. The data from the study suggest that while the majority of the respondents said that they had work plans in place, the fact that some of the respondents do not is a cause for concern.

3.2. Consultation prior to the signing of performance agreements. Signing a performance agreement has serious implications. It is important, therefore, for management to consult with their subordinates prior to the signing of the performance agreement. Consultation involves discussing the work plan that has been drafted and agreed upon, and then setting down what would be called key performance

areas. This agreement is a contract in which the employees understand the implication of under-performing and over-performing. It is in this agreement that different scores for different levels of performance are allocated. Consultation should then leave no illusions as to what has been agreed upon. Looking at the results of this study, it is sad to mention that there are employees within the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health who said they had not been consulted prior to signing their performance agreements. This is not the correct practice and it needs to be rectified.

3.3. Official orientation on the existing performance management and development system.

While the majority of the respondents said that they had been formally oriented on the existing performance management and development system (PMDS) that the Department is currently using, 17.1% of them disagreed. The KwaZulu-Natal Regional hospitals employ more than 5000 workers, therefore, if 17% of them (over 855) say they have not been oriented on PMDS then it is, indeed, a cause for concern. The Department has to ensure that staff is constantly reminded of PMDS because this determines their destiny in terms of career progression and personal development in general. It is pleasing to note now that the majority of employees within the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals have not only been oriented on PDMS, but have also been formally trained on it. This is, perhaps, why the majority of them believe that they have sufficient information to fully participate in their performance management and development. While this is good, there is still a problem in that 19% of the respondents said that they do not have sufficient information to fully participate in their performance management and development.

3.4. Training of staff within the KZN regional hospitals.

It is important that employees are encouraged to attend courses that enable them to improve their performance. The results of this study showed that the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals still have a huge task ahead of them on this one, because only 8% of the respondents strongly agreed and 44.9% mildly agreed, while, on the other hand, 29% strongly disagreed and 11% mildly disagreed. This suggests that a huge number of employees within these regional hospitals are saying they have not been given a chance to give their input. If employees are involved in deciding which courses to attend and the reasons why, then this may create a psychological acceptance of the need for such a course.

3.5. Availability of equipment. Once the work plan has been put in place and the performance agreement has been signed clearly identifying key performance

areas, the workers then have to get down to work. First of all, the workers need to have the necessary tools to perform their tasks. It was important, therefore, for this study to find out if workers within the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals actually feel that they have the necessary tools and equipment to perform their tasks. The research indicated that 28% disagreed and 9.8% strongly disagreed while only a very small percentage of 3.9% were unsure. This means that the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals have a problem in this regard. These hospitals cannot be expected to perform at the level that has been set for them when the equipment necessary to enable them to perform at these levels is not there or is sub-standard. Government should ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to these hospitals so that they are fully equipped to perform their duties.

3.6. Performance monitoring. The services that the Regional hospitals provide are of a specialist nature and are, therefore, unique. It is expected that the performance of employees is constantly and consistently controlled. It was on that basis that the respondents in this study were asked to indicate whether or not they believed that their work was being controlled. Monitoring staff performance should not be aimed at catching staff doing the wrong things. Its purpose ought not to be punitive. It is a tool that should be used to guide the employee towards achieving what they are set to achieve and also helps the manager to measure the extent to which employees have been able to meet organizational goals. In this study, 82.8% of the respondents said that their progress was being monitored by their immediate superiors. That is very encouraging, especially when one takes into account that only 4.3% held the opposite view.

3.7. Performance evaluation. It is good to monitor staff performance, but without evaluations, this is a futile exercise. Performance evaluation is important in that the employee's performance is judged against the performance agreement and key performance areas agreed upon. While it was encouraging to find out that more than 80% of the respondents said that their performance was being evaluated on a constant basis by their superiors, it was a cause for concern, since there were some respondents who said their performance was not being evaluated, although it was only a very small percentage. It could be concluded that the regional hospitals are doing well regarding the evaluation of their staff performance. Not only was it important to know that the performance of staff is being monitored in the Regional hospitals, it was equally important to take note that the staff are given feedback on how they performed. It is important to note, though, that some respondents said that they were not satisfied with the manner in

which feedback was given to them. The Department of Health will have to promote empathy on the part of management when issues around performance are discussed.

3.8. Performance rewards. The reward system that the government is using generally is not entirely linked to performance. The salary increases are negotiated at union level and then passed over to the employees as if their performance levels are the same. There is a small portion of the salary increase that is performance-based, but it is negligible. In this study, the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they were satisfied with this type of reward system. Some 63% of the respondents said that the current reward system used by the government does not motivate them, and only 5.7% held the opposite view. What is confusing, though, is the fact that, when the same respondents were asked whether or not the inflation-linked salary increase must be scrapped and replaced by a performance-based one, there wasn't unanimous support for that view. In fact, 49% supported that view and 35.7% did not. The researchers are mindful of the fact that the reward system does not only involve an employee's salary increase but involves other benefits as well. It would be interesting to know what the outcome would be if this topic is to be researched further.

3.9. Establishment of the Competency Centre. It is a well-known fact that not all supervisors and managers are Human Resource specialists, and yet now and then they are expected to implement Human Resource principles. The subject of performance management and development is broad and complex. It cannot be expected that supervisors and managers who are not specialists in the management of Human Resources can adequately perform this function without having a dedicated team or unit to assist them. There has to be a unit that will focus specifically on performance management and development. This unit could be called the "Competency Centre" simply because its aim would be to encourage workers to be competent. It would be at this Centre that the strategy to constantly inform workers about PMD means would be crafted. It would be at this Centre that managers would be taught how to conduct performance monitoring and evaluation. At this Centre, workers could learn more about PMD. This would create consistency in terms of how PMD is interpreted and implemented. The notion of using different consultants creates inconsistencies.

3.10. Gender equity. Generally speaking, women have empathy and are highly appreciated in the Health profession. It must, however, be borne in mind that the Government of South Africa encourages

gender equity in all Government Departments. This study revealed that women still form the majority of the work force in the regional hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal. This is something that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health needs to work on.

3.11. Change of the old culture. The Regional hospitals need to change the way they do things. The culture of the Department includes a lot of factors, for example, the norm of doing things within the Department, the way staff relates to each other and the way they relate to the general public. This study revealed that the majority of the respondents believed that there must be a change in the culture of the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals. There is a trend in developing countries to model the Public Sector in a manner that resembles the Private Sector. If that is to happen, a lot of things need to change: the mind-set of the staff, the general upkeep of the hospitals and so forth.

3.12. Changes in the implementation of Batho Pele principles. There has to be a unique way in which Batho Pele principles (DPSA, 2005) are practiced within the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals. This should reflect the unique nature of the regional hospitals. Currently, the general public cannot even tell which hospital is a District and which is a regional, simply because in the eyes of the public the two distinct hospitals are the same.

4. Recommendations

Performance agreements spell out what is expected of the employee. They set parameters within which the employees must operate. They are a tool that helps managers to realize whether their subordinates achieved the target outcomes within the prescribed timeframes. This, therefore, suggests that performance agreements are not a luxury but a necessity.

- ◆ The research showed that the support that the respondents received from their superiors was not dependent on their salary level. In other words, across all grades or salary levels, the general feeling was that management was supportive and non-discriminatory.
- ◆ In conducting a successful performance management process the manager or supervisor needs to understand that it is a two-way process where the employee also needs to be given a chance to make suggestions, not only about his or her personal development, but also about how he/she thinks work can be improved.
- ◆ From the data collected one can conclude that the Regional hospitals in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health implement the four integrated phases of the performance cycle, however, they need to work harder to reduce the

weaknesses reflected by the answers to the various questions posed to the respondents.

- ◆ Generally, management allocates tasks with set deadlines.

The majority of the respondents indicated the following:

- ◆ They believed that they had signed their performance agreement and work plans having familiarized themselves with the potential implications of overperforming and underperforming.
- ◆ There was consultation between themselves and their supervisors prior to the signing of the performance agreements.
- ◆ They had been formally oriented about the performance management and development system of the Department.
- ◆ They received official training on procedures pertaining to performance management and development.
- ◆ They are asked to give input before a decision is made as to what training programs they must attend.
- ◆ They believe that their superiors are concerned about their personal development as evidenced by frequent discussions.
- ◆ They believe that their progress at work is being monitored by their supervisors.
- ◆ Their performance is regularly evaluated by their respective supervisors.
- ◆ They are satisfied with the manner in which feedback regarding their performance is given to them.
- ◆ They also gave responses regarding the reward system that is currently being used by the Government.

All the above are hallmarks of the proper implementation of the performance management and development system. It must, however, be said that the research instrument could not gather information on all the variables that collectively form part of a proper implementation of a performance management system. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that not all the respondents felt this way. Nevertheless, it can be said that the KZN Department of Health performs in an above average manner regarding the implementation of the system. This suggests that there is still room for improvement. We recommend that:

- ◆ a dedicated Competency Centre for performance management and development be set up within the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health.
- ◆ a step-by-step approach on how to conduct performance management and development should be developed so that this function is carried out in the same way across the board.

- ◆ performance management and development must be conducted with the help of the new Competency Centre to ensure that there is a Human Resource specialist whenever main factors of performance management and development are implemented.
- ◆ the Research Committee of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health come up with a strategy to improve the participation of their staff in research that involves their performance management and development.
- ◆ the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health come up with a drive to change the culture within the KwaZulu-Natal regional hospitals so that they reflect the fact that they are specialists in the provision of their services. They must not appear like ordinary District hospitals as is currently the case.
- ◆ with the implementation of the Batho Pele principles, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health come up with specific recommendations as to how these principles should be implemented within its regional hospitals. This should be done in a manner which indicates the distinct nature of the regional hospitals, not in the generic manner as suggested in the Batho Pele Change Management Booklet.
- ◆ the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health align its operations so that there is co-ordination in the provision of services.
- ◆ all staff who work for the regional hospitals be experienced staff who have worked for several years within a District hospital.
- ◆ the public must be informed of the challenges and successes of the regional and other hospitals as a whole. This will ensure that the challenges that Public Health workers are faced with are appreciated by the general public.
- ◆ the Department of Health plays a pivotal role in recommending to the National government that the salary increase must be performance-based just as in the private sector.
- ◆ research be conducted to obtain suggestions from public sector employees on how the current reward system can be reviewed.

Conclusions

The above recommendations stress the importance of structuring and managing the regional hospitals in a unique manner that validates the fact that they are distinct from ordinary District hospitals. What is currently happening is that the general public does not even know that the hospitals are categorized as they are. To the general public all the hospitals are the same when in fact they are not. There is a feeling among staff within the KZN regional hospitals that the general public is not aware of the challenges that they are facing as public servants. The 'fit one-fit all' approach in applying the Batho Pele principles must be stopped. Regional hospitals are unique, therefore their Batho Pele strategy must be unique to suit the environment and the challenges they deal with.

It is clear that the implementation of performance management and development is bound to face difficulties in that, while it is being implemented, the public sector is not static but is undergoing a cultural change. The political landscape is also undergoing its own transformation. This has resulted in a change in the manner in which communities live and act. The societal culture has, therefore, evolved. It does not come as a surprise then that it has been difficult to implement performance management and development as a process. It further suggests that it is not going to get any easier, since society, organizations, politics and other factors will continue to evolve.

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