

Assessing Performance Management System and Impact on Public Service Delivery in Lusaka's Public Hospitals: Challenges and Prospects

I. Bwalya¹ & K. Sichoongwe²

¹.Graduate of Business in Management Strategy, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zambia

².Lecturer of Business in Management Strategy, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zambia

ireenbwalya@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to assess Performance Management Systems and Service Delivery in Lusaka's Public Hospitals, challenges and prospects with a focus on employees' awareness in the implementation of Performance Management systems. The study used a mixed method approach on a sample of 95 selected through simple random and purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using a questionnaire and an interview guide. The findings revealed that employees understood performance management systems for purposes of annual performance review and identification of development needs and training, coupled with facilitation of promotion, although it was moderately implemented. However, challenges to Performance Management Systems included resistance of employees to be appraised, lack of staffs to perform appraisal on others, not knowledgeable on appraisal procedures and feedback. The implications of these findings are that the Ministry of Health through its Human Resource Management and Policymakers should prioritize addressing these challenges through targeted interventions to foster a cohesive PMS framework and performance outcomes that align with the expectations of the workforce. The study recommends that the Human Resource Department should not conduct appraisals for the sake of annual review but should take seriously the recommendations and outcomes of the process in order to improve service delivery.*

Keywords: performance management, service delivery, health facilities, employees' awareness

INTRODUCTION

Performance Management Systems (PMS) is a structured approach aimed at improving organizational performance by aligning individual employee objectives with the overall goals of the organization. This

involves continuous monitoring, assessment, and feedback processes designed to enhance productivity and development opportunities within the workforce (Aguinis, 2009). Performance management greatly influences the levels of productivity, service delivery and the image of an organisation. In a competitive business environment, Performance Management Systems (PMS) are an important component for all institutions. This is because it entails performance planning, performance monitoring and performance appraisal, which in turn ensures that employees are committed to organizational values and are contributing to the attainment of its business goals and objectives (Deanne et.al, 2004). The key elements of PMS include goal setting, performance appraisal, employee feedback, and the identification of training and professional development needs (Armstrong & Baron, 2005). According to Kaplan and Norton (1996), effective performance management integrates performance measurement with strategic objectives, ensuring that organizations not only track performance outcomes but also foster an environment of accountability and continuous improvement. Ultimately, a well-implemented PMS can lead to higher levels of engagement, better alignment of efforts, and increased organizational effectiveness (DeNisi & Williams, 2018).

In the context of Lusaka's public hospitals, the effectiveness of PMS is pivotal in ensuring that healthcare services meet the needs of the population. Research indicates that a robust PMS can lead to improved organizational performance, employee motivation, and accountability (Brewster, Chung & Sparrow, 2016; Kettunen, 2020). However, the implementation of these systems often encounters substantial challenges, especially in public sector environments where bureaucracy and resource constraints prevail (Mavrotas & Kelly, 2020; Namasasu, Kuula & Milgrom, 2019).

Performance Management System as a measuring tool was developed out of merit rating, which originated in the early 19th century and was influenced by the scientific management movement (Beer & Rush, 1976). This was followed by performance appraisal and management by objectives, then the 360-degree feedback, also known as multi-source feedback (Armstrong, 2010). The concept of performance management system has presented different meanings to different people overtime. While some scholars understood the concept as that of an appraisal process, others understood it as performance-related pay. Other scholars however understood the term as training and development (Armstrong & Baron 2005). Dessler (2015) argues that performance management system may be defined as the continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning their performance with the organization's goals. It thus entails the breaking down of the organization's vision, mission and goals to the departmental and individual levels; alignment or linking the individual and departmental goals to the organization's goals, providing on-going performance monitoring and feedback, coaching and development of staff and recognizing and rewarding employees based on performance outcomes (Armstrong & Baron, 2005).

In the Zambian public health institutions, performance management systems seem not to have been effectively implemented (GRZ, Cabinet Office, 2016). This on a large scale has often led to poor service delivery in many public sectors. Reasons leading to poor service delivery have not been adequately explored. However, challenges in performance management implementation partially contribute to the failure by these public service institutions to deliver services in a desired manner. In their assessment of service delivery in the public service and launch of the Performance Contracts, Cabinet Office (2016) revealed that despite improved conditions of service for civil servants, the public had continued to bemoan the poor service delivery by the public service. This was despite the improvement in the conditions of

service, high academic credentials possessed by most public service workers and other reform initiatives progressively implemented by previous administrations including the Annual Performance Appraisal System (APAS).

In addition, employee performance is politically motivated too. Namuyamba et al., (2018) found that well composed political music had a huge influence on the candidate people voted for as music helped to pull the crowd, sell candidates and their manifestos, empower and educated the learners and substituted public rallies in unbreakable to reach areas. This made government workers to choose between loyalty and professionalism. To solve this problem, Ndhlovu and Mwanza (2024) indicated that most of the clients reported progress and were helped to resolve their relationship challenges while a few showed difficulties in engaging with the technique. Phiri and Chileshe (2016) argued the strategic planning barriers can be mitigated by allocating enough resources towards implementing the Strategic Plan implementation. Lastly, Manchishi, Ndhlovu, Phiri, & Thomson (2018) also supported the fact that there should be more resource allocation for program implementation.

The report by Cabinet Office (2016) revealed that civil servants have been rude and aggressive to the customers in public institutions across the country. Also, the report by National Commission on the Public Service (2005) revealed that both public and private sectors have consistently tried to achieve effective performance systems, yet enduring challenges remain. National Commission on the Public Service (2005) revealed that poor service delivery in public sectors is due to political interference, corruption, lack of funds, rudeness, and lack of citizen participation.

The reports by Cabinet Office (2016) and National Commission on the Public Service (2005) shows that service delivery in public institutions has seemingly been below the expectation of many stakeholders including citizens and this calls for concern from every well-meaning Zambian and public hospitals are not exceptional. The management of public service employees' performance squarely falls on performance management system used and the Government Departments and human resource managers charged with the responsibility of implementing the performance management system (PMS) in Government Institutions especially public hospitals. Being the most important aspect of human resource management, performance management system is failing to deliver the expected result in the Zambian public service. This can be seen from the long queues of patients waiting to be attended to, prescribed drugs not found in hospitals, unsanitary environment, bad attitudes towards patients and absenteeism. Therefore, poor service delivery in public hospitals coerced the researcher to assess the Performance Management System and Service Delivery in Public Hospitals in Lusaka District, Lusaka province.

In Zambia, the intersection of public health and performance management is particularly significant as the country navigates issues related to healthcare delivery, quality, and patient satisfaction (Chanda, Nkhata & Hachidjuma, 2018). The existing literature reveals that while some public hospitals have adopted PMS, there is a notable lack of awareness and understanding among healthcare professionals regarding when and how these systems are most effectively employed (Musonda, 2020). For instance, a study revealed that a large percentage of healthcare workers linked the PMS primarily to the Annual Performance and Development Review, suggesting a need for comprehensive training and consistent communication regarding its application (Bwalya, Kayombo & Msoni, 2021).

Given these insights, understanding the challenges and prospects associated with PMS in Lusaka's public hospitals is essential for stakeholders, including hospital administrators, healthcare policymakers, and employees themselves. The implications of these findings can guide the development of tailored interventions aimed at improving PMS practices, thus enhancing overall service delivery in public healthcare. Moreover, effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for fostering a collective understanding of PMS, which could ultimately lead to better health outcomes and more efficient resource utilization (Salim, Awan & Qureshi, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the Performance Management System in Public Hospitals in Lusaka District, Lusaka Province.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

A mixed method approach was suitable for this study and the study adopted the embedded research design. Embedded Design is a mixed methods design in which one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type (Creswell, Piano Clark, 2003). The study population included nurses, doctors, administrative officers, human resource officers, and general workers from five public hospitals in Lusaka District, Lusaka province. The study total sample size of the study was 95. This comprised of 40 nurses, 25 Doctors, 10 administrative officers, 10 human resource officers and 10 general workers. This was a reasonable sample size for both quantitative and qualitative study because it provided the data needed as it fulfilled the requirements of efficiency, representativeness, reliability and flexibility (Creswell, 2014).

Therefore, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the two types of data collection instruments the researcher employed in the study. A questionnaire was used on nurses, doctors, human resource officers, and administrative officers to collect quantitative data on the extent to which the Performance Management System (PMS) have been implemented in Lusaka's Public Hospitals. Semi-structured interviews were used on general workers to collect data on the challenges affecting the implementation of Performance Management System, performance of the Performance Management System and ways in which management in Hospitals could improve service delivery through implementation of the Performance Management System in Lusaka's Public Hospitals. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected between July and August, 2024. As indicated by Merriam (1998) data collection procedure describes and justifies all data collection methods, tools, instruments, and procedures, including how, when, where and by whom data was collected with proof of facts. Since the researcher used questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedule as a method of collecting data, the data collection procedure was follows: the questionnaires were left with the nurses, doctors, administrative officers, human resource officers, and administrative officers to be filled in. The filled in questionnaires was collected after a period of four to five days in order to give the respondents enough time to respond to questions contained therein and not to lose them if it took too long. Thereafter, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the general workers in the space of five days where two participants were interviewed on each day.

Data collected using questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 26 while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Data recorded from interviews were transcribed, edited, coded, categorized and tabulated. After that, data was arranged into themes and presented according to the participants' responses. Emergent patterns, concepts, and participant explanations were compared to the theory chosen for the study. Ethical approval was sought from the University of Zambia's Ethical Committee.

Before commencement of the study, the researcher obtained clearance from the Ethics Committee of the school. In order to go into hospitals, permission was sought from the Provincial Health Director who contacted and informed the sampled hospitals in writing about the visit of the researcher and the purpose of study. In hospitals, the researchers availed the introductory letter to the Director who called upon targeted participants. The researchers introduced herself and asked for participants' consent. Informed consent was sought from the participants, and they were guaranteed that their responses would be anonymous and would be kept confidential. They were also informed that their participation would not affect their status in the institution in any way. Participants' right to privacy and confidentiality was respected. To guarantee the anonymity of participants, pseudo names were used instead of actual ones.

FINDINGS

Employee's Awareness of the implementation of Performance Management in Public Hospitals

The research question intended to ascertain employee's awareness of the implementation of Performance Management Systems in Public Hospitals of Lusaka District. The research question was answered by health staffs through questionnaire and interviews. These tools were used to ensure there was data triangulation in the study. Participants presented their own views on the topic and subsequent questions asked.

Findings from Questionnaire with Health Personnel

The participants were asked to state their awareness of the implementation of Performance Management Systems in Public Hospitals of Lusaka District. The findings established that 86.7% of participants understood the performance management system while 13.3% did not understand performance management system. The results mean that the participants understood what performance management system was in their line of duty, hence their contribution to this study was significant.

The participants were asked on their understanding of implementation of Performance Management System in the five (5) hospitals within Lusaka District. The study findings regarding the implementation of the Performance Management System (PMS) reveal a range of awareness and understanding among participants. 75.9% identified that the PMS was primarily conducted during the Annual Performance and Development Review. 7.1% noted that PMS was implemented during the hiring or transfer of employees while 4.8% indicated it occurred during the midyear review. Additionally, 2.4% reported that PMS was integrated into the annual development of new business plans. These results suggested that the Annual Performance and Development Review was the predominant context for PMS implementation in the sampled health facilities, highlighting a structured and consistent approach to performance management on a yearly basis across different sites in Lusaka. This annual cadence not only underscored the importance of regular evaluations but also reflected a commitment to integrating performance management into the strategic planning and development processes within the healthcare sector.

The participants were asked to highlight reasons for implementing a Performance Management System (PMS) in their institutions. The findings revealed that 28.9% of participants indicated that the PMS served the purposes of identifying training and development needs, as well as facilitating decisions regarding promotions, transfers, and terminations. Additionally, 14.5% of participants stated that the PMS was aimed at identifying barriers to performance management. However, 8.4% reported that the PMS was intended for retention purposes while 6% indicated that it was used for reward allocation. Furthermore, 2.4% noted that it was designed to clarify employees' job requirements and 1.2% mentioned that it was intended as part of a motivation strategy. These findings suggested that the primary rationale for implementing a Performance Management System within the health sector in Lusaka was to identify training and development needs and to facilitate promotion, transfer, and termination decisions. Other reasons listed were less significant and did not contribute substantially to the primary motivations for adopting the PMS in the health sector of the Lusaka district.

Furthermore, participants were asked about the extent to which the Performance Management System (PMS) was implemented in public hospitals. The findings established that 48.2% of participants reported that the PMS was implemented at a moderate level in public hospitals within the Lusaka district. 15.5% of participant indicated that the implementation of the PMS was very low, while 13.3% assessed it as low. Conversely, 10.8% believed that the PMS was highly implemented in these hospitals and 2.4% rated the implementation as very high. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the Performance Management System was generally perceived to be moderately implemented in public hospitals in the Lusaka district.

It was established that the majority number of participants understood the performance management system while the minority did not understand performance management system. The results mean that the participants understood what performance management system was in their line of duty hence their contribution to this study was significant. These findings are supported by Lutwama, Roos, and Dolamo (2013) who also found that understanding the context of performance management in the health sector, performance management planning, performance review, performance review, coaching, staff training and development, and rewards and recognition was important and can improve public service delivery in Public Hospitals.

The study found that participants understood the importance of implementation of Performance Management System in the five (5) hospitals as key to improving performance and service delivery. Chikumbi, and Simwinga (2018) support these findings by stating that PMS implementation made employees to work towards achievable goals in the organization and they know they have to be checked at the end of the year. From this, it can be seen that implementing PMS was important to the health sector and practitioners because they kept checking each other's performance index. As much as the employees are key in the evaluation process, the institution too is evaluated as to what extent it has helped the employees to achieve their targets. Therefore, implementing PMS in the health sector in Zambia was key and should be supported.

The findings established that the Performance Management System was conducted during the Annual Performance and Development review. However, the minority stated that it was conducted during the hiring or transferring of employees. Therefore, Performance Management System was mainly conducted during

the Annual Performance and Development review in the sampled research sites. Therefore, performance management system was conducted on a yearly basis in the different health facilities in Lusaka. The results of the study are in tandem with Makombo et al., (2024) who revealed that effective performance appraisal systems are found to significantly enhance employee motivation and job satisfaction, leading to improved teaching quality and student outcomes.

The findings established that Performance Management System was conducted during the midyear review while on the other hand others stated that it was carried out during the annual development of new business plans. This assertion was also supported Chirwa and Nkhoma (2019) who argued that performance management system should be routine and not yearly to ensure employees meet their monthly and quarterly targets. If the annual PMS was continued, it would mean that employees would only get serious with the targets towards the end of the month since they know that appraisal was near. If appraisals are to be quarterly, the employees would work hard every quarter thereby improving the overall performance of the organization.

The study findings established that the majority of the participants stated that performance management system was for purposes of identification of training and development needs together with facilitation of promotion, transfers and termination of decisions. The findings are supported by Bourne, et al. (2018) who stated that Performance management system is conducted because the stakeholders would like to know how employees are performing and their training needs in the organization. Therefore, performance management system calls for the subordinates to identify areas which needs to be improved, tightened and relaxed for better employee performance in the organization hence it should be conducted regularly.

The findings established that Performance Management System was an annual activity which did not yield positive results on the employee. In supporting the findings, Chikumbi and Simwinga (2018) contend that PMS should be relevantly conducted if the purpose is for promotion, retirement and training. From this, it can be agreed that PMS should not be conducted for the sake of conducting a yearly activity but to ensure the purpose is well defined since health facilities are busy place which should not be interrupted because of paper trail activities whose value on patients is not immediate.

The study further found that the other reason for performance management system was to identify barriers to performance management, for purposes of retention, for reward allocation, for purposes of clarifying an employee's job requirement and for purposes of motivation strategy. This shows that the main reasons for performance management system in the health sector in Lusaka district was for identification of training and development needs and facilitation of promotion, transfers and termination of decisions. The other factors were not contributing to the main reasons for performance management system in the health sector in Lusaka district. The findings are not supported by Chansa (2020) who established that performance-based contracts (PBC) was anchored by high-level political support, an overarching policy and legal framework, and collective planning and implementation with all key stakeholders. Decentralization of health service provision was also an enabling factor. ANC coverage increased in both the lower and upper wealth quintiles during the PBC era, followed by a declining trend after the PBC era in both quintiles. Further, the percentage of women delivering at health facilities increased during the PBC era, particularly in rural areas and among the poor. Therefore, PMS should be tied to employee performance if better results

can be achieved in the process. This would also enable the different stakeholders to appreciate its purpose and realistic reasons for appraisals in the public sector.

The study found that Performance Management Systems were moderately implemented in the public hospitals in Lusaka district. The percentage which was in favour of PMS being implemented was less than expected. The findings agree with Tyokwe and Naicker (2021) who found that the extent to which Performance Management Systems influence Employee Productivity at the hospital was low. The study also revealed that the PMS at the hospital was ineffective to enhance the performance of the employees and achieve organizational goals.

The study revealed that Performance Management System did not provide the aspect of performance and motivation of employees thereby rendering it irrelevant. These views are further supported by Chilufya and Kamanga (2018) who revealed that performance management system was implemented moderately because the health workers were busy with life serving tasks unlike sitting for long hours filling in paper work which does not bring about life serving in the Zambian community. This resulted into not considering PMS very serious as it did not provide the performance aspect and motivation to the employees in the health sector hence it was not highly treasured.

It was revealed that Performance Management system in public hospitals was very low. From the results, it can be deduced that Performance Management System was low to moderately implemented in the public hospitals of Lusaka district. These findings are in line with Madlabana and Petersen (2020) whose findings of the study confirmed that PM is implemented to some extent because performance management is inadequately applied in PHC facilities at district level and needs to be realigned to include the appraisal of key attributes required for the current health system's reforms towards comprehensive and integrated care, including the provision of person-centred care, which is central for responding adequately.

The findings highlighted that Performance Management System was highly implemented in the public hospitals. However, it did not determine salary, promotion and placement hence it was not considered serious. In support, Egbegi (2019) added that the extent to which PMS is implemented between low and moderate because it did not bring about an impact in the process. Therefore, most health workers find the implementation of PMS as a waste of time as they find it not working to their advantage.

The findings established that the lack of seriousness attached to the results of performance management system, where people have come to think that it is an activity which is not important as the results are not used for decision making. In support of the findings, Baron and Armstrong (1998) emphasize the strategic and integrated nature of performance management. They hold that performance management focused on increasing the effectiveness of organizations by improving the performance of employees who worked in them and by developing the capabilities of teams and individual contributors. It is in this line that the study presents that performance management was significant to the employees and their supervisors. The role of negotiating during the appraisal system was key as it brought about dialogue during the appraisal. This also made managers learn to negotiate meaning with the subordinates and strike a compromise where they failed to agree. As a result of this, performance was monitored between the supervisor and the subordinate, hence improving organizational effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The implication of the study findings highlight the critical role that understanding and proper implementation of Performance Management Systems (PMS) play in improving service delivery within the Zambian health sector. The majority of participants grasped the significance of PMS in identifying training needs, facilitating promotions and transfers, and enhancing overall organizational performance, which aligns with existing literature that highlighted the impact of performance management on employee motivation and job satisfaction. However, the study also revealed substantial gaps, including the infrequent implementation of PMS often limited to annual reviews which diminishes its effectiveness. The lack of perceived value and seriousness assigned to PMS results in a disconnection between the appraisal processes and meaningful employee performance improvements. This indicates a need for the Ministry of Health to refine its PMS to incorporate more frequent evaluations, facilitate regular dialogue between staff and management and ensure that the system is not merely administrative formality but a vital tool for organizational growth. By addressing these challenges, the ministry can enhance public service delivery and foster a culture of continuous performance improvement in public hospitals.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that;

- i. There was need for the ministry of health and its human resource directorate to ensure that PMS was used to fulfill human resource and management requirements on employees. This will enable the employees to attach importance to the process.
- ii. The health facilities should have enough staff to help conduct appraisals so that everyone can be part of the process. This will help employees not to stress before and during the process since time to conduct the appraisals will be reduced.
- iii. The Ministry of Health and Human Resource directorate should not conduct appraisals for the sake of annual review but should take seriously the recommendations and outcomes of the process. This will help employees to realise the significance of the appraisal process and PMS in the ministry.
- iv. There is need for the health facilities to also develop personal interest and improve their work culture so that work quality is not monitored through PMS only. This will enable employees to realise the need to work for the people instead of waiting to be monitored for perfection.
- v. The management of hospitals is supposed to be work with the stakeholders to provide guidance on how best PMS can be conducted in the health sector looking at how busy it becomes. This will enable owning the implementation of the appraisals.
- vi. The Ministry of Health should implement the decentralization policy in the Hospitals so as to build the confidence of staff running the institutions through decision making.

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