



Performance Management Implementation Challenges in South African Local Government: Evidence from KwaDukuza Local Municipality

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ABSTRACT

South African municipalities are mandated to provide accountable governance, ensure sustainable service delivery, promote economic and social development, provide a healthy and safe environment, and include communities in the affairs of local government, as contained in the country's constitution. However, many municipalities are struggling to provide these services to their residents. Performance management is the tool that can contribute to solving service delivery challenges as the performance management contracts of all municipal employees are meant to be aligned to their Integrated Development Plans. This study investigates how performance management implementation challenges are negatively affecting the ability of KwaDukuza Local Municipality to deliver on their core mandate. The study uses a qualitative methodology with 14 semi-interviews of municipal managers and councillors. It finds that weak institutional capacity, low levels of accountability, poor implementation and poor communication of performance management practices are hindering the KwaDukuza Municipality. The authors recommend that the provincial government increases its support to the local municipality, increased managerial accountability and for managers to be capacitated to implement the performance management systems.

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1. Introduction

Performance management (PM) has been implemented by South African municipalities to raise local government's efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability to the people it serves (South African Local Government Association, SALGA, 2019). Human resource professionals developed the concept of performance management to evaluate an employee's impact on the organisation's success. Planning, controlling, assessing, and monitoring the employee's contribution to the organisation's goals are all part of this periodic performance measurement (Hasbolah et al., 2018).

There is a lack of current data on the development, rollout, and impact of performance management systems (PMS) in South African municipalities, as well as data on how these systems affect employee and political branch accountability for meeting municipal IDP service delivery goals. The existing literature on utilising New

Public Management for performance management is primarily focused on the developed world. Bjurström (2020) adds that research into the effectiveness of performance management is still in its infancy, especially in less developed nations.

KwaDukuza Local Municipality (KDM), located on the eastern coast of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, is a category B municipality and is one of the four local municipalities that make up the Ilembe district (KDM IDP, 2022:21). There are 58 council members and 30 wards in the municipality (KDM IDP 2022). There are high levels of income inequality in the municipality. The municipality's close proximity to the ports of Durban and Richards Bay has contributed to its rapid expansion (KDM IDP, 2022). As the local government sector works to realise its constitutional responsibility to offer service delivery to an expanding population with rising service expectations, the expansion of the municipality makes for an interesting case study in the implementation of performance management.

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According to Mthiyane, Wissink, and Chiwawa (2022), the population of the municipality has increased by 37%. The municipality is struggling to keep up with an enormous backlog in service delivery even as it expands its offerings to accommodate a growing population. Multicultural residents of varying socioeconomic status may be seen in the municipality (Mthiyane, Wissink, & Chiwawa, 2022), reflecting the country's rich cultural diversity and making for an interesting case study.

The purpose of this research is to explore the difficulties encountered by the KwaDukuza Local Municipality (KDM) during the PMS rollout. The main research question of this study is the following: what are the challenges with implementing the PMS at the municipality? This evidence-based study will contribute to enhancing the development and implementation of performance management across the local government sector in South Africa by investigating how the KwaDukuza Local Municipality implemented its performance management system, documenting the merits of this implementation and reflecting on the shortcomings.

Importantly, this research helps shape future performance management policy and practice in South African municipal administration. This paper makes a novel contribution to performance management practices in South African municipalities through its in-depth case study analysis of KDM. The findings of this research will aid local governments in streamlining their performance management policies so that they are in conformity with national legislation, local resources, and the local integrated development plan (IDP).

2. Theory

New Public Management, Institutional Theory, and Agency Theory were the theoretical underpinnings of this research. By applying these theories, we were given a framework through which to examine the role of the municipality. Institutional theory served as a framework for elucidating mechanics of how institutions are structured, and how they function (David, 2019). The semi-structured interview schedule was designed using Institutional and Agency Theory to elicit responses from participants about how performance management is implemented in the city and what factors affect its success or failure. The semi-structured interview schedule used to probe the principal-agent dynamic and its effects on performance management implementation were informed by agency theory (Panda, & Leepsa, 2017).

3. Research Method

The researchers decided to conduct a qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to get in-depth answers to the questions. Interpretivism would serve as the research's standard philosophical bedrock. The IDP

for 2020–2021 that was created by the city serves as the basis for this research (KDM, 2020). The IDP (2020) states that the municipality employed 1157 people. Council members, numbering 57 in all, are not included in this tally. The total number of employees, 1157, included 343 contract workers and 814 full-time workers. Employees at task grade five and higher were prioritised because of their importance to the municipality's long-term strategy for providing services.

To ensure that the research results were accurate and applicable to the full population of the municipality, a representative sample was employed. Purposive sampling was employed because the participants were selected based on their potential usefulness in addressing the study's research issues. Data was collected from several departments within the municipality and business units. In terms of the sample strategy, individuals were initially selected from the defined strata. Second, representatives from the strata's upper management were chosen for an interview.

Interviews using semi-structured questions were used to gather information for the study. We conducted 14 interviews total (8 with top executives and 6 with city council members) because it was important to sample individuals with a deep knowledge of the topic while collecting data. Due to the unavailability of most councillors, purposeful and snowball sampling was used to gain access to interviewees in October 2021, just days before the 2021 local government elections in South Africa, held on the 01 November 2021. This allowed us to get in touch with council members, and we ended up interviewing six of them. These council members were responsible for five of the six municipal portfolios (the Human Resources portfolio was left unrepresented, and two council members handled the municipal services portfolio).

The interview schedule comprised 12 questions which dealt with performance management implementation at KwaDukuza Local Municipality. While participants were asked questions from the interview schedule, they also felt free to bring up topics related to performance management that weren't included. Knowledge about the research objectives and the current state of PMS, service delivery, and accountability at KDM was better disseminated due to this method. Interviews were conducted with the councillors until a point of saturation was reached. The African National Congress, the Democratic Alliance, and the Economic Freedom Front were all represented by council members who were interviewed.

4. Results

4.1 *Biographical Data of Participants*

A summary of the participants who formed part of the qualitative data collection is presented below according to the dimensions of age, experience, and gender. The data was retrieved from councillors and

managers at the municipality. Information about councillors is presented independently of the managers of the municipality to provide an in-depth understanding of the institutional make-up of the municipality.

- **Age Analysis of Councillors**
A total of six councillors were interviewed and most were in the age group of 41-50 years.
- **Experience of Councillors**
Of the six councillors interviewed, four were serving their second term of office. A term of office lasts for five years and coincides with the local government elections. The remaining two councillors were in their first term of office. Interviewing the majority of councillors having experience of two terms indicates that the councillors had sufficient experience in local government to share their perceptions.
- **Gender of Councillors**
Of the six councillors interviewed, four were female and the remaining two were male.
- **Age Analysis of Municipal Employees**
Four of the six managers surveyed were between the ages of 41 and 50, and three were between 51 and 60 while one worker was between the ages of 31 and 40.
- **Municipal Employees Experience**
Six of the interviewed managers had been with KDM for more than two decades. This suggests that the majority of the managers surveyed had adequate experience to provide a detailed account of the implementation of performance management at the municipality. The manager's years of experience fell within the 11–20-year range, whereas the rest of the staff fell within the 5–10-year range.

4.2 Performance Management Challenges at KDM

The interviews helped clear things up and shed light on a variety of other problems facing the municipality. The difficulties have been reorganised according to common themes and addressed.

- **Poor Implementation of PMS**
The perception of poor implementation of the PMS has been discovered at KDM. Employees felt that performance management and the legislative prescripts guiding the implementation are important factors in governance and are essential for the functioning of the municipality as an institution. Participants have indicated that the municipality has great plans, but the challenge is the successful implementation of these plans. Participant 12 indicated the following about the municipality:

‘Well-placed policies and bylaws yes, it is like national the implementation is a problem, we do have policies and bylaws but when it comes to enforcement there is a challenge’.

The implementation of the PMS is no different to other municipal policies and plans and participants have highlighted the poor implementation of PMS as a challenge. Participant 4 supports that perception, although the concept itself is good:

‘The framework and the concept are right but it’s not being implemented correctly’,

Participant 7 further mentioned that the reason why there is poor implementation of the PMS is due to there being very little accountability and commitment by the administration to the implementation of the PMS. This view is also shared by Ahenkan, Tenakwah and Bawole (2018:528) who have found a similar challenge in the implementation of PM in the Ghanaian local government sector.

- **Poor Understanding of Performance Management**

Participant 14 supported the view that employees at the municipality do not understand PMS and regarded this as one of the biggest challenges at the municipality. This was the comment from the Participant:

‘So I will say the challenge is mostly the lack of information for levels going down’

Participant 14 further stated that there is insufficient communication relating to PMS implementation at the municipality, which leads to a poor understanding of PMS and its implementation:

‘So, it’s mainly communication, proper communication’

de Vries and Ile, (2021:104) have stated that the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) mandates municipalities to include communities in the development process of the PMS. The main findings of this section correlate to the status of performance management implementation in local government in SA, whereby Khunoethe, Reddy and Mthuli, (2021:169) have indicated that performance management is poorly understood by municipal employees and due to this, the PMS is poorly implemented.

- **Tug of War**

One of the reasons cited for the poor implementation of the PMS is the ‘tug-of-war’ that exists between the performance management and the human resources unit at KDM. There appears to be a difference in understanding in terms of whose responsibility individual performance management is, meaning the performance management of employees.

The PMS does not seem to have an institutional fit at the municipality, meaning that the HR department and the PMS department are failing to take responsibility for the implementation of the PMS, which requires the cascading of the PMS. The HR unit is of the opinion that while the business unit might be responsible for the cascading of the PMS, the unit does not have the capacity to do so. While the argument between the units progresses, other business units are left to their own devices to manage performance and ultimately service delivery. Participant 5 shared a view on this matter:

‘we don’t have relevant capacity, to implement and to direct the PMS function, throughout, there is a fight in inverted commas, between PMS unit and HR, PMS is saying I am responsible for section 56 and 57 and HR you are responsible, HR is saying ey I may be responsible but I don’t have capacity, so you rather spear head, so we that’s one of the challenges, there is no clear direction from that front and obviously owing to capacity constraints, from both units, unfortunately that leaves us in limbo, as business units’

Selepe (2018: 546) has also indicated that the reason why performance management does not yield positive results in the local government sector is due to the lack of internal controls at a municipality. This study confirms that that if there is no clear internal dialogue and ownership of the performance management process at a municipality, the tool can be rendered ineffective.

- Informal Processes

While the EDs of the municipality follow a formal process of performance management, business units at the municipality follow an informal process of setting out performance targets for the employees. These targets are however not measured or signed officially as part of a performance contract and employees cannot be held responsible for poor performance. Participant 5 indicated the following:

‘more of an informal kind of arrangement, then a formal and unfortunately, there is no follow up in terms of actual assessment and outcomes and

also one of those issues we don’t know we don’t have the format, if you assessing, performance, what kind of format do we use, point system, cos you need to have standard thing across the organisation, so that if I’m assessing performance, of my subordinate, it’s the same approach we using that the other guys are using in business units and in the absence of that unfortunately, we can’t move forward, I will assess my performance the way I know, I’ve formulated it, but someone else will it will become unfair, and there is no consistency and all those things,

Participant 12 shared the following sentiments:

‘We are of the view that the manager and the supervisor of department they are dealing with PMS daily it’s just that it is not formalised. It’s difficult to co-ordinate it, when you don’t have a personal responsible for that in terms of ensuring all departments have completed their PMS go check them and take copies come back and file we will find that some departments are still doing it,

- Capacity Constraints

There appears to be capacity constraints at the municipality to undertake service delivery as well as performance management. This implies that the current staff complement is undertaking more work. Participant 4 mentioned that KDM is one of the fastest growing municipalities and does not have the staff complement to match the growth. Participant 4 comments as follows:

‘we are one of the fastest growing municipalities, in the country, the pace of growth, and the building of capacity in the municipality, are not in tender, we seem to be trapped, in a small municipality mentality’

Participant 9 shared a similar view on the lack of capacity to undertake the PMS implementation:

‘I am always arguing, with the evaluation committee that, hm you can’t there should be some other way to evaluate me against my colleagues, some of my colleagues sit with about five directors, and they have staff capacity to about 30 people, so you have five directors managing 30 people, and I have one director managing 300 people, so it can be that you use the same, yardstick to evaluate all of us’

Studies have revealed that municipalities in South Africa have institutional capacity constraints to undertake service delivery and performance management (Ramodula and Govender, 2020:11;

Munzhedi and Phago, 2020:182; Khunoethe, Reddy and Mthuli, 2021: 165). This study supports the view brought by Christensen, Im and Porumbescu (2021) who have indicated that the context and the capacity of an institution has a direct bearing on the implementation of performance management.

- Subjectivity in the Performance Management Process

Employees have raised the issue of subjectivity in the performance management process. They feel that performance management implementation has an element of emotional bias in the process. Employees have shared perspectives on how emotions come into play in the PM process at the municipality and when this is entertained by the senior management, the performance management process is flawed. Participant 3 made the following statement:

‘the biggest issue I think is around transparency because sometimes you will feel that if a person is dealing with that process has an issue with me whatever that I might produce as evidence of my good work and hard work it will still not bear good fruits because we have this issues that we have sometimes you know it gets to be done it depends who you are let me just put it that way, it depends who you know people get to be implemented based on feelings, ya and based on relationships’

The employee in this case is stating that if a senior manager overlooking the performance management process is not objective and does not view the work from a neutral lens, the performance management implementation will be ineffectively carried out. The other challenge of a lack of objectivity is the ability of certain managers to be able to justify their scores. Thus, if one can argue and justify one’s performance scores as an employee, one is more likely to receive a higher score as compared to other employees who lack the ability to motivate for higher scores. This is captured by a statement made by Participant 2:

‘that’s the problem the scoring if it can be done I don’t know if we can use other ways to do scoring but this one allowing the person to argue you see sometimes other people who cannot speak for themselves, they are given lower scores only to find that the performance was the same for everybody’.

- Poor Oversight by Councillors

The issue has been raised that councillors at KDM are not capable of providing oversight over the administration of the municipality. The role of the councillor at the municipality is to provide oversight

for the work undertaken by the administration of the municipality, as outlined by Participant 13:

‘the other role we play is making sure the performance of the officials hm are then then dealt with not just in line with legislation and not just to comply, it’s to make sure they implement exactly what is expected of them, in terms of their key performance indicators and their targets.’

Participant 4 believes that despite the oversight that role councillors have, they are not capable of providing oversight of the work that is undertaken at the municipality. This is the view shared by Participant 4:

‘It goes back to those who are tasked with the responsibility of playing oversight this is weak,’

Participant 4 further explained the above statement:

‘Those that tasked with the responsibility to play oversight hmmm are, I’m not saying this in a condescending manner but they don’t have the necessary competency to play the part’.

Participant 4 mentioned that councillors have the opportunity through the performance management system implementation to check how service delivery will take place even at a ward level. However, councillors are not utilising PM as an accountability framework and a tool for service delivery. The following statement was made by Participant 4:

‘they be able to say that the problems that bothers me in a ward, as a ward councillor, I don’t see it in your scorecard as an ED, how do you make sure that the problems that I have at a ward level, I can be able to say that, that performance indicator takes care of that, and I will be able to play an oversight in terms of that, that is not happening.’

The Lack of Performance Management for Councillors

It has been noted that councillors are not performance managed at KDM, as stated by Participant 1:

‘There is no performance agreement which is signed by a councillor there isn’t, so whether a councillor performs or not there is no tool to measure that’.

However, there is consensus that councillors should sign a performance agreement and should be aware of their responsibilities and the role they play

in the functioning of the municipality. Instituting a performance management system for councillors would ensure that councillors are held accountable for service delivery. Participant 5 states that PM for councillors can be used to eradicate simple matters that sometimes lead to disruptions at the municipality. An example used to explain this phenomenon is the sitting of council. The employee stated that sometimes the council meeting does not take place due to political infighting or ward committee meetings that do not sit. This is the statement made by Participant 5:

'honestly speaking, u know why, cos it would also as a principle, make councillors to be aware, in terms of their own responsibilities, in terms of what they are there for, for example in instances in other municipalities, some cases it happens here on odd occasions, where council does not sit, because there is an infighting, between political parties or within, one political party that is ruling, and then things do not get done,

The lack of accountability by councillors has emerged in the literature review (Breakfast, Bradshaw and Nomarwayi, 2019: 3). Selepe (2018) indicates that cadres must undergo the same performance process as officials for there to be an impact on service delivery. The legislation however does allow municipalities to develop performance management policies that cater for the political arm, but KDM has not undertaken this, like other municipalities (Shava and Chamisa, 2019:12).

- Performance Management as a Compliance Exercise

It appears that performance management at the municipality is undertaken mostly for compliance purposes. While employees acknowledge the merits of the system to enhance productivity and induce accountability, the perception is that the PMS is not being used for the greater good. The greater good here refers to the overall productivity of employees towards achieving the service delivery imperatives of the municipality; rewarding the employees for exceptional performance; and lastly for enhancing the performance of employees. Participant 3 mentioned the following about the PMS implementation at KDM:

'It's there but it's not get implemented in the proper manner'.

Participant 3 further explained that in the absence of there being a reward system for performance at the municipality, the PMS is seen as an exercise of compliance.

While employees have suggested that the current form of PMS at the municipality is implemented in a

manner that suggests it is a compliance tool, employees have also indicated that the system brings value. Value in the sense that it assists business units to plan work that needs to be undertaken and if the system is cascaded throughout the organisation, this would assist in monitoring the performance of employees. However, the current practice of PMS implementation is not permitting this. Participant 5 provided a statement that indicates this:

'it's something that we need to make sure that we get, measured on, and then we indicate to the guys, guys you would be measured for example, number of inspections that we need to conduct, number of applications that we need to approve, within a specific time period, and all of those kind of things, so from that sense it assists but at the same time, it is more of a compliance exercise'

Councillors at the municipality supported the view that the PMS implementation is a compliance exercise. Participant 6 explained that the performance management system is part of a compliance exercise:

'From what I can see, is not taken terribly seriously it's another kind of tick box'

The South African perspective shares a similar experience whereby municipalities have been implementing performance management to comply with the legislative prescripts of the country (SACN, 2020; de Vries and Ile, 2021; Khunoethe, Reddy and Mthuli, 2021)

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the challenges affecting the implementation of performance management at KDM. The study found that the municipality is afflicted by a lack of cascading of performance management is a major challenge as employees are not formally committed to the service delivery ideals of the municipality. Additionally, the cadre deployment policy of the ANC has also been flagged as a challenge. This is due to senior managers and managers being unable to hold each other accountable due to their political ranks and affiliations in political party structures. While there is no implementation of the performance management framework/policy, lack of cascading, municipal employees must contend with the municipality not implementing a consequence management policy. Lack of capacity-building for performance management practices for both the administrative and political arms means that the administration is unable to thoroughly engage with the concept of performance management and utilise the tool to its maximum potential. Lack of

understanding of PM by the political arm means that councillors are not able to deliberate and interrogate the performance management contracts of employees, which implies poor oversight over the role of the councillor.

- Performance Management Capacity-Building

The initial step in the implementation process of performance management at the local government level would be to capacitate, workshop and invite comments from all actors of the institution. This includes the political arm, administration and communities who form part of the municipality on the technical, procedural and theoretical elements of performance management. This must include what performance management is; how it is used in local government; the conceptualisation of PM and the objectives.

Secondly, the capacity-building must indicate how performance management can be used to enhance service delivery by tracking community concerns in the strategic plan and the performance scorecards of senior managers. This process of capacity-building must have a feedback loop incorporated into it, which would allow for all actors in the space to provide their perceptions on performance management and how they envisage the performance management process at municipalities to unfold. Capacity-building must be ongoing and must be infused into the IDP process of municipalities.

- The Role of Provincial Government

Provincial government must ensure that they undertake their support role as outlined in Section 154 of the South African Constitution. Provincial government has a key role to play in the implementation of performance management in local government by providing for capacity-building and training of municipal officials, councillors, and communities. In addition, provincial government must support municipalities to infuse performance management into the daily activities of municipal officials and councillors, thus enabling a seamless process flow. This implies that performance management capturing, reporting and evidence collation should be automatic and should be managed by computer programmes that must be effortless in capturing the performance information. Once information is captured in this format, the information is easy to share with all actors in the space and inconsistencies can be alleviated. An online performance tool can also assist the municipality to easily share and disseminate performance

information to all stakeholders and enable a fluid participation process.

- Monitoring and Evaluation of PMS

If the PMS is meant to deliver on its prime objectives of enhanced service delivery and accountability, the process must be aligned to the strategic plan of the municipality. Employees and councillors must be able to consistently use the system as a yardstick to determine the extent of service delivery and have items adjusted after consultation with stakeholders to ensure that deliverables are achieved. The monitoring and evaluation component of the PMS has to be transparent and must invite comment from a range of stakeholders, which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to participate and take ownership of the service delivery process and hold municipal employees and councillors accountable. The monitoring and evaluation component of the PMS must have an analysis component infused with the M & E, which will allow the municipality to analyse performance data that will contribute to the annual review of the Performance Management policy.

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