

HOW DID I PERFORM? IMPROVING STRATEGY EXECUTION SUCCESS THROUGH PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**Mapetere Denver**mapetered@staff.msu.ac.zw

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Abstract

The study was aimed at establishing the influence of performance evaluation on strategy execution success. A total of 478 respondents drawn from 3 commercialised state enterprises in the Postal and Telecommunication Services Sector of Zimbabwe participated in the study. A 5 point level of agreement closed likert scale questionnaire was administered to collect respondent views on the subject matter. The study results indicated that state enterprises failed to carryout execution effective employee performance evaluations leading to substandard employee contribution to strategy execution. Basing on the study results, the research recommended the use of fair and accurate performance evaluation and counseling systems as well as participation of direct managers and supervisors in employee target setting and evaluations.

Keywords:

Performance evaluation, strategy execution, fairness, state enterprises, performance targets, accuracy of evaluations

Introduction

Even though there are many variables that influence an organisation's strategy performance, the ability for management/supervisors to effectively monitor and evaluate employee contribution to objective achievement is a constantly critical factor at each stage of the implementation process. There is an old adage that says 'management is the art of getting things done through other people'. High employee performance is a key facet for effective strategy execution and as such it is imperative that organisations are able to monitor and evaluate their employees' to strategy implementation. Sambedna and Chandan (2014) competent employees are not only linked to enriched work environment but also help in improving the organization's performance as a whole. Employee performance evaluation enables strategy directly linked personnel and supervisors to identify human related performance gaps and opportunities pertaining to strategy implementation.

Objectives of study

- To established the level of strategy implementation performance targets awareness by implementation employees
- To established the perceived fairness of performance evaluations during strategy implementation.
- To established the perceived accuracy of strategy implementation related performance evaluations

Literature review**Performance evaluation**

Globally competitive organisations depend on the uniqueness of their human resources and the systems for managing human resources effectively to gain competitive advantage (Imtiaz, Ineen, Sanjoy and Abdullahil 2013) and to that extent performance evaluation of employees helps to identify employee based performance threats and performance opportunities that will face the organisation in the present and future. The concept of performance appraisals and relating individual performance to their salaries is still and always be a sound principle that is required for any organisation to excel (Harrington 2000). Woodford and Maes (2002) indicates that employee evaluations are designed to support and advance the goals set for the organisation as a whole. Harrington (2000) further reiterates the importance of performance evaluation by asserting that, measuring and rewarding people for team performance helps poor performing organisations (losers) to move up to the survivor

category (average-level performance), whilst winning organisations (world-class) need to focus on individual excellence and reward individuals for their accomplishments and risks that they are willing to take. **Burke (1996)** also explains in favour of performance evaluation by noting that economic recession has made North America organisations realize that their performance evaluations are flawed, even managers and professionals who were judged as performing at very high level, such performance was released to be inflated. A critical decision area of managers is the performance evaluation of personnel, whether individually or as a member of a team (**Beheshti and Lollar 2008**). The current study assumes that strategy implementation in CSOEZ may be improved through adoption of appropriate strategy sensitive performance evaluation systems. Further the study denotes that employee performance evaluation should be regarded differently from strategy evaluation as it may have subjective elements to it as opposed to objective and quantifiable strategy success measurements. Strategy implementation success is regarded as an end product of employee performance.

The important role of performance of evaluation in strategy implementation cannot be under stated. **Harrington (2000)**, explains that to meet current and future business needs, we have to help each employee to excel, minute by minute, task by task. As much as organisations differentiate employees through grades and departments, strategy implementation relies on the individual contribution of each employee. **Woodford and Maes (2000)** furthers this view by noting that good evaluation systems empower employees by giving them specific roles in the organisation, thereby alleviating feeling of being only “numbers”. **Applebaum, Nadeau and Cyr (2008)** also notes that if employees are not being adequately appraised, there will be a negative result with respect to their contribution to the organisation. Thus put this way performance evaluation also has the potential to improve organisation performance through intrinsic employee motivation not just the need to performance based pay. **Harrington (2000)** poor performance measurement is leading to lack of appreciation is the basic cause of poor attitude amongst employees resulting in cost overruns and schedule delays in major projects throughout the world.

As much as performance evaluation has been well documented to positively influence strategy execution it is without its changes that managers are constantly grappling with in order to design the best evaluation systems capable of delivering best results. The problems of most performance evaluation systems that may cause strategy implementation failure and thus need addressing can be drawn from **Harrington (2000)**. **Harrington** identified the following problems that encompass most performance evaluation:

- Too many people need to be evaluated by a single manager at the same time.
- Performance counseling sessions are too far apart.
- Management is not honest with average or below average performers, rating them higher than they would deserve. This is not fair to the poor performers and the outstanding performers and mostly to organisational performance.
- Average and outstanding performers are financially rewarded the same
- Average people are promoted over higher performing employees.

Failure to accordingly carry out performance evaluation may lead to poor strategy implementation as it demotivates the workforce due to the interconnection between performance evaluation, careers progression, recognition and on the job performance. **Imtiaz, Ineen, Sanjoy and Abdullahil (2013)** a properly designed system can help achieve organisational objectives and enhance employee performance as it is used to track individual contribution and performance against organisational goals and to identify individual strengths and opportunities for future improvements and assess whether organisational goals are achieved or serve as basis for the company’s future planning and development. **Woodford and Maes (2002)** notes that in most organisations, compensation, rewards and recognition are linked to performance, which in turn, is measured and managed through the evaluation process. In addition **Harrington (2000)** promotes that, pay should be tied directly to personal performance. This thus makes employee evaluations essential in ensuring that each employee understand his or her role within the organisation and is acting in inline with the entity’s overall strategies and objectives (**Woodford and Maes 2002**).

When designing performance evaluation systems it is important to know that employees are not rewarded for putting out extra effort, two out of three employees would like better connection between pay and performance, a total of 70% feel that their effort has been degraded because pay and performance are not related (**Public Agenda Foundation in Harrington 1998**). Further when creating and implementing an appraisal system, management must determine what the performance appraisal system will be used for and then decide on the process to implement the system (**Imtiaz, Ineen, Sanjoy and Abdullahil 2013**). This study assumes that the views by **Imtiaz, et al (2013)** allows strategy implementation to take center stage in determining the purpose of performance measurement as it ensures alignment of corporate objectives, strategic objectives and individual

objectives. Imtiaz, et al (2013) further indicate that the chosen methods and the instruments used to implement these methods are crucial in determining whether the organisation manages its performance successfully. Soltani, Gennard, Van der Meer and Williams (2004) elucidates that difficulties with traditional performance evaluation systems include, focus on the past, use of quantifiable measures, pay awards not related to performance evaluation, being limited to only 2 performance evaluation reviews. In order to influence strategy implementation positively, performance appraisal systems should ensure that they focus on measuring and improving employee performance rather than seek to control employee behaviour. Consequently it is vital that those managers/supervisors that are directly involved in strategy implementation with the employee participate in the evaluation as they presumably are aware of the strategy related expected behaviour(s). Applebaum et al (2008) furthers that it must be difficult to ensure than an employee understands his or her value with the organisation if the person who is reviewing their performance is not the person whom they actually work for on a day to day basis, especially if the evaluation is at all negative. A leader or manager should evaluate individual contribution (Imtiaz, et al (2013)).

Davila and Elvira (2007) corroborates this view by asserting that for performance evaluation to be effective the evaluator/manager or organisation has to ensure that they also take part in improving employee performance as they are most responsible for managing work operations as well as employment relationship with their subordinates. For instance management should be able to deliver on promises made in planning stage or during performance review session in order to facilitate performance (Davila and Elvira 2007). Imtiaz, et al (2013) addresses in literature a problem identified by Harrington (2000) which had earlier been indicated as that performance evaluation counselling sessions are too far apart. Imtiaz, et al (2013) explains that many organisations need to deploy systematic approach to performance evaluation after having noticed that many organisations do not use the systematic way to evaluate the performance of their employees that often makes their evaluation method vague and inefficient.

Apart from directly linked manager/supervisor (appraiser)-employee performance evaluation, it is also notably very important that the organisation takes necessary measures to ensure that the employee performs as per agreement. **For instance, Soltani (2005) laments that a variety of performance evaluation systems are in contemporary use and although application of performance evaluation practices in most organisations is high, the average level of its impact is low.** Davila and Elvira (2007) may have explained the lack of impact by mentioning that human resource managers rarely frame human resource practices in terms of psychological contract (managing promises and commitments). The study puts that the existence of a psychological contract makes it apparent that frontline managers/supervisors have the necessary capabilities and authority to make decisions such as input resources and time allocations effectively during strategy implementation as a way of facilitating employee performance. Soltani et al (2004) and Cardy (1998) identified the following psychological contract system factors that could influence performance:

- Poor coordination of work activities with others
- Inadequate information, instructions, specifications etc.
- Lack of needed equipment
- Inability to obtain raw materials, parts, supplies etc.
- Inadequate financial resources
- Uncooperative co-workers or poor interpersonal relations
- Inadequate training
- Insufficient time to produce the quantity of quality of work required of the job
- Poor environment conditions (for example too cold, hot, noisy or full of interruptions)
- Unexpected equipment breakdown

For performance evaluation to be effective in driving strategy implementation, the individual employee or group should from the onset be aware, be clear and be in agreement on what the job entails as well as the desired expectations for performance evaluation purposes. Davila and Elvira (2007) indicates that performance appraisal is considered a contract because employees are aware that their work will be evaluated and outcomes rewarded. Thus promises of work and rewards enhancements arise during the appraisal system design and employees are usually promised that positive reviews will be followed by proportional rewards as well as by feedback for improving job performance (Davila and Elvira 2007).

In summary the above discussion has explained the importance of and challenges of performance evaluation in influencing organisation performance through successful strategy execution. The study posits that performance evaluation is central in addressing the human problems that may bedevil effective strategy execution in organisations and thus it has to be a key pillar in human capital management.

Methodology**Findings****STRATEGY LINKED HUMAN RESOURCE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Strategy linked human resource managed is a key facet of effective strategy implementation. The current study claims that each separate strategy should be buttressed by its own human resource performance evaluation system in order to understand how strategy direct personnel have performed. Also the study separates human resource evaluation systems from strategy evaluation systems. This section the study interrogates human resource performance evaluations in order to establish its adequacy in driving personnel performance towards desired goals and objectives. In doing so the study made use of 3 likert scale constructs; Performance targets, Accuracy of evaluation and Fairness of evaluation/counseling.

Table 1. Strategy linked human resource performance evaluation

| Likert scale item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | TOTAL | Mean | Mode | SD |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Performance targets = 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| I am always aware of my performance targets | 51% | 13% | 3% | 15% | 18% | 100% | 2.360 | 1 | 1.624 |
| I actively participate in setting of my own performance targets | 58% | 3% | 2% | 20% | 17% | 100% | 2.351 | 1 | 1.677 |
| I have received a written performance evaluation from my supervisor | 30% | 38% | 5% | 17% | 10% | 100% | 2.383 | 2 | 1.330 |
| I have been adequately trained to carry out my own performance evaluation | 24% | 41% | 10% | 15% | 10% | 100% | 2.456 | 2 | 1.274 |
| Total | | | | | | | 2.388 | | 1.476 |
| Accuracy of evaluation = 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| The evaluation process accurately reflect my overall contribution to the firm strategies | 53% | 16% | 3% | 16% | 12% | 100% | 2.188 | 1 | 1.508 |
| The evaluation process accurately reflect my contribution to each assignment | 49% | 28% | 3% | 13% | 7% | 100% | 2.004 | 1 | 1.290 |
| Total | | | | | | | 2.096 | | 1.399 |
| Fairness of evaluation/counseling= 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| The formal evaluations carried out in our organisation are fair | 34% | 38% | 5% | 10% | 13% | 100% | 2.293 | 2 | 1.364 |
| My performance evaluation was carried out by people who had direct input into my work | 21% | 6% | 2% | 30% | 41% | 100% | 3.640 | 5 | 1.560 |
| Performance evaluation in my organisation identifies my strengths and weaknesses for future improvement | 35% | 28% | 6% | 21% | 10% | 100% | 2.431 | 1 | 1.403 |
| My supervisor is capable of giving me all the support I need to improve my job performance | 24% | 51% | 3% | 14% | 8% | 100% | 2.301 | 2 | 1.195 |
| My supervisor always leads by example in helping me achieve my performance targets | 41% | 32% | 5% | 18% | 4% | 100% | 2.119 | 1 | 1.236 |
| My team members always prevent me from meeting my performance targets | 37% | 22% | 7% | 19% | 15% | 100% | 2.531 | 1 | 1.510 |
| Total | | | | | | | 2.553 | | 1.378 |
| Grand total | | | | | | | 2.346 | | 1.418 |

The study made an enquiry as to whether strategy directly linked personnel are always aware of their expected performance targets. Results from the study expressed by 64% (51% strongly disagree and 13% disagree) demonstrates that the majority of directly linked strategy implementation personnel are not aware of their individual performance targets during strategy implementation. Only 3% of the population were unsure whilst 33% (18% strongly agree and 15% agree) expressed that they were aware of their performance targets. Computed descriptive statistics retained a low mean score of 2.360, mode of 1 and standard deviation of 1.624. Basing on the mean score the study draws that little effort has been placed in communicating performance targets to direct employees and thus may affect strategy implementation performance. The large number of employees in the organisation may make it difficult for managers to divide strategy outcomes per each employee in the transformation process. Due to potential strategy indivisibility, and nature of work and job sharing arrangements more frequently performance targets are set per department or division.

The current study apart from investigating on personnel knowledge and awareness of own performance targets enquired as to whether strategy directly linked personnel are involved in setting their own performance targets. At total of 61% (58% strongly disagree and 3% disagree) of the respondents voiced that they were not actively participating in setting of their own performance targets. The employees who expressed that they were actively participating in the setting of their own performance targets constituted 37% (17% strongly agree and 20% agree) of the respondents. Only 2% of the respondents were undecided to the statement. Further review of the study results through descriptive statistics obtained a mean score 2.351 (low), mode of 1 (strongly disagree and a standard deviation of 1.677. Study results of a low mean score of 2.351 entails that less effort has been placed in engaging strategy directly linked personnel in the formulation of their own performance target. These challenges may lead to possible mismatch between job requirements and individual ability to perform the task and achieve set target.

Furthermore, the study investigated if strategy implementation personnel received written performance evaluations from their supervisor pertaining to a specific strategy in their organisation. Study results shows that CSOEZ directly linked personnel do not receive written performance evaluations from their supervisors at any stage of the implementation process. This view was communicated by 68% (30% strongly disagree and 38% disagree) of the study respondents. A total of 27% (10% strongly agree and 17% agree) of the respondents communicated that they received written performance evaluations from their supervisors whilst 5% were neutral. These study results were analysed through computation of mean, mode and standard deviation and the following scores were obtained respectively, 2.383 (low); 2 and 1.330. Written performance evaluation systems are regarded as formal expectations communication systems and therefore a lack of formalisation of performance evaluation systems may lead to agreeing parties renege upon their agreements during strategy execution as it becomes difficult to fix strategy implementation responsibilities. Further to that formal (written down) performance evaluation systems enable personnel to constantly refer to for clarification during strategy implementation, thus the absence of written performance evaluation from supervisor may negatively affect strategy implementation.

Lastly the study established if personnel involved in strategy implementation had been adequately trained to carry out their own performance evaluation during strategy implementation. A total of 65% (24% strongly disagree and 41% disagree) of the primary data collection participants voiced that they had not been adequately trained to carry out their own performance evaluation during strategy implementation. In contrast 25% (15% strongly agree and 10% agree) communicated that they had been adequately trained to carry out my own performance evaluation, whereas as the remaining 10% of the participants indicated that they were not sure. Descriptive analysis of the likert scale item found a low mean score of 2.456, mode of 2 and a standard deviation of 1.274. Effective strategy implementation draws from provision of concurrent feedback to directly linked personnel. However, due to the hefty work schedules of low level managers and their own immediate schedules such feedback may not be readily accessible, therefore it is important that personnel be equipped with self-appraisal skills and knowledge so that they take corrective action timeously.

The average descriptive mean score and standard deviation for the Performance targets study construct were 2.553 and 1.378. According to Moidunny (2009) a mean score in the range 1.81-2.60 is classified as a low rating. Thus the study draws that there is inadequate effort that is placed on setting of performance targets for the purpose of strategy implementation in CSOEZ that may negatively affect strategy success. Individual performance appraisal is often regarded as a coercive instrument rather than a procedure meant to foster the employee's performance which, in turn, should contribute to enhancing the organization's overall performance Tatar (2011). In all organizations, an employee knows that there are activities that are very important for the management team (Velimirović, Velimirović and Stanković 2011). However this is made possible if employees

are aware of management performance expectations on them. Mauya (2015) involving staff in setting targets can ensure that they are more motivated to meet them and they identify better ways of carrying out the tasks. Tatar (2011) individual performance appraisal can be performed in an objective and constructive manner which enhances the employee's feeling of contributing effectively and efficiently, to the organisation's overall wellbeing. Performance targets have a very great impact on enhancing performance (Mauya 2015).

The study further sort to evaluate the ability of CSOEZ to maintain accuracy of evaluation. The study firstly interrogated if the evaluation process accurately reflected on strategy implementer's overall contribution to the strategy. A total of 69% (53% strongly disagree and 16% disagree) of the respondents expressed that the evaluation process in their organisation did not accurately reflect their contribution to the firm. Only 3% of the respondents were undecided whereas, 20% (7% strongly agree and 13% agree) were of the view that their performance contribution were correctly reflected in performance evaluations. Computed descriptive statistics of mean, mode and standard deviation were, 2.188 (low); 1 and 1.508 respectively.

Additionally the study examined the ability of CSOEZ performance evaluation systems to accurately capture employee direct performance in specific strategies under execution. Study results indicates that evaluation processes do not accurately reflect strategy execution player' direct contribution to each assignment as supported by 77% (49% strongly disagree and 28% disagree) of the respondents. A total of 20% (7% strongly agree and 13% agree) were of the view that their contributions to each assignment were accurately captured. Only 3% of the study participants were undecided. Descriptive statistics computations obtained a low mean score = 2.004, mode = 1 and standard deviation = 1.290. Grounding on the average descriptive statistics for the two likert scale items, a low mean score of 2.096 reflects that strategy implementation maybe failing due to poor evaluation systems that fail to capture employee direct contribution to the organisation as well as to each assignment allocated during strategy implementation.

An enquiry on the fairness of formal evaluations during strategy implementation was carried. Results from the study indicates that 72% (34% strongly disagree and 38% disagree) of the respondents were unhappy with fairness of evaluations in their organisations. A total of 23% (13% strongly agree and 10% agree) were of the opinion that formal evaluations were fairly conducted in their organisations. Only 5% of the respondents were undecided. Computed descriptive mean score, mode and standard deviation were, 2.293 (low); 2 and 1.364 respectively.

Further to that the study investigated on the awarding of performance evaluation responsibilities. Ideally it is prudent that performance evaluations are carried out by people who had direct input into employee work. The study results indicates that performance evaluation is carried out by employee directly linked supervisors as sounded by 71% (41% strongly agree and 30% agree) of the respondents. Only 2% of the respondents were undecided where as 27% (21% strongly disagree and 6% disagree) expressed that their performance was evaluated by individual who did not have direct input into their work. Study descriptive computation retained a positively high mean score of 3.640, supported by a mode 5 (strongly agree) and standard deviation of 1.560.

The current study also sort to establish the ability of performance evaluation systems in CSOEZ to identify strategy implementing workforce's strengths and weaknesses for future improvement. A total of 63% (35% strongly disagree and 28% disagree) of respondents were of the view that their strengths and weaknesses were not being fully identified through performance evaluations systems. Only 6% of the respondents were indifferent whilst 31% (10% strongly agree and 21% agree) of the expression that performance evaluation identified their strengths and weaknesses for future improvement. The study using descriptive statistics obtained a low mean score of 2.431, mode 1 (strongly disagree) and standard deviation of 1.403. If performance evaluation fails to identify employee strengths and weaknesses for future improvement it then entails that future training programmes may not be able to address knowledge and skills gaps in the organisation. There will be high chances that employees will not be motivated and happy with the training programmes they will participate in.

Performance evaluation fairness is enhanced by ability of direct supervisors' ability to provide on the job support to strategy execution employees so that they perform as per performance agreement. A total of 75% (24% strongly disagree and 51% disagree) of the survey participants voiced that they did not receive adequate support they need to improve their job performance. A total of 22% (8% strongly agree and 14% agree) of the study respondents expressed that they had gotten adequate support from their supervisors whilst 3% of the respondents were neutral. Computed descriptive statistics of mean, mode and standard deviation were, 2.301 (low); 2 and 1.195 respectively. Supervisor support for strategy execution employee is important as they decide on the acquisition and allocation of material as well as non material resources as well able to decode relevant

strategy information for use by supervisors. Thus failure to render necessary support may affect employee performance and motivation as they may fear receiving negative performance reviews.

Employee on and off the job performance is closely influenced by the behaviour of direct supervisors. Thus it becomes imperative that direct supervisors effectively play their managerial and well leadership roles effective. The study established that most direct survivors are failing to lead by example in helping employees achieve their performance targets as communicated by 73% (41% strongly disagree and 32% disagree) of the respondents. In contrast 22% (4% strongly agree and 18% agree) of the respondents were of the impression that their direct supervisors led by example in improving their performance to attain targeted results. Only 5% of the respondents were unsure of their opinions. The study test results retained a low mean score = 2.119, mode = 1 and standard deviation = 1.236.

The study investigated on individual opinion regarding team members' impact on their performance evaluation scores. A total of 59% (37% strongly disagree and 22% disagree) of the study members were of the view that their team members did not prevent them from achieving their performance targets. Opposing views were expressed by 34% (15% strongly agree and 19% agree) who indicated that their team members always prevented them from meeting performance targets. A total of 7% of the respondents were undecided. Computed mean, mode and standard deviation scores were, 2.531(low), 1 and 1.510 respectively. The study results also showing a low mean score express that there is positive team work during strategy implementation that helps colleagues to achieve their performance targets.

Conclusion and recommendations

The low grand mean score of 2.346 and standard deviation of 1.418 on the performance evaluation construct denotes that lack of accuracy in projecting and presenting personnel's performance may result in incorrect evaluation that demotivates strategy execution personnel leading to substandard execution efforts. Setting appropriate objectives and making effective use of appraisals can improve organizational performance and also facilitate assessment of how well the employees are performing (Mauya 2015). Mauya (2015) to monitor and assess how employees are performing, it is useful to set clear objectives with quantifiable performance. Generally the debate for performance evaluation is not departed from employee incentive systems and thus failure to clearly and objectively capture employee performance would also entail that affected employees may not be effectively rewarded leading to high stress and demotivation levels. Majority of the organizations follow performance appraisal process to evaluate employee performance, and results of performance appraisals are used for a number of purposes such as administrative uses, rewarding, and identifying training needs (Ahamed, Niyas and Rifky 2018). Cappelli and Canyon (2017) appraisals are informative and directly influence many dimensions of employee outcomes, including employee bonuses, merit pay, employee promotions, and decisions to exit the firm. Given the strategic importance of performance evaluation, Strategy implementation managers and supervisors should involve strategy direct employees in objective and target setting as well as effectively communicate performance targets prior to, concurrently and post strategy implementation effort. Further to that, for effective human contribution to strategy implementation, organisations should strive to develop fair and accurate performance evaluation systems that assess and take corrective action to performance deviations during strategy implementation and in preparation for future strategies.

Area for further study

The study covered important role played by performance evaluation in strategy implementation. Future studies should interrogate on the designing of effective performance evaluation systems that drives successful strategy implementation.

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