A Framework For Linking Process Factors To Organisational Performance In A Government Department

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ABSTRACT

Organisational performance in the public sector in South Africa remains an issue of concern, due to the fact that most government departments continue to perform below the expected standard. This presented an impetus to conduct research on organisational performance in the sector on a continuous basis, in order to find current solutions. In this study, the relationship between organisational performance and four organisational process factors; namely, organisational structure, change, teamwork, and leadership in a South African government department was examined. A conceptual framework and four hypotheses which linked these four process factors and organisational performance were proposed. A six-section survey questionnaire was administered to 272 randomly selected members of a government department who were based in Gauteng Province. The proposed relationships were tested using a combination of Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. Positive and statistically significant relationships were observed between organisational performance and the four process factors, leading to the acceptance of all hypotheses. The framework proposed in the study may be used in the diagnosis of performance problems in the public sector.

Keywords: Organisational Performance; Organisational Structure; Organisational Change; Organisational Leadership; Organisational Teamwork; Public Sector Organisation; South Africa

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the world has been transformed into a global village which is characterised by numerous risks, uncertainties, and volatilities that compel organisations to seek for innovative strategies in order to ensure optimum performance (Flint & Van Fleet, 2005). On one hand, numerous public sector organisations the world over suffer because their performance is so depressed that they cannot withstand the pressure (Acquaah & Yasai-Adekani, 2008). On the other hand, through the generation and implementation of innovative strategies, many public sector organisations have managed to achieve satisfactory performance, which has enabled them to sustain their competitiveness and to survive during times of economic turbulence (Zane, Kane, & Marcus, 2004). Underperforming public organisations are therefore compelled to develop strategies that could enable them to transform into high performance organisations with the view to survive and deliver high quality goods and services to their customers and clients (Molefe, Roodt, & Schurink, 2011).

It may be argued that the public sector in South Africa is struggling to overcome the challenge of underperformance. It has also been suggested that outstanding organisational performance signifies that a public sector organisation is both effective and efficient in supplying public goods and services (Putu, Mimba, Van-Heden, & Tillema, 2007). However, organisational performance as measured through service delivery has emerged as a source of frustration within the public sector in South Africa despite extensive initiatives to address it (Nilsson, 2010). Since public organisations generate most of their income from the fiscus, they are accountable to stakeholders such as the taxpayer and government (Fryer, Antony, & Ogden, 2009). Consequently, immense pressure is placed on public organisations to positively transition their performance (Halachmi, 2011). In view of this, it may be useful to approach the challenge with a mind that is completely open to any possibilities.

Against the above-discussed backdrop, this study examined the relationship between organisational performance and four organisational processes factors; namely, organisational structure, organisational change, organisational teamwork, and organisational leadership. There are a number of reasons why this combination of factors was selected for use in this study. Foremost, there is a need to consistently seek out ways of improving organisational performance in the public sector. Part of best practice in solving performance problems involves assessing the influence of the input resources, systems and/or the processes used to transform these resources into outputs (Gerhart, 2005). This implies that solving the performance problem may entail implementing substantive and appropriate modifications to the identified problematic inputs, systems or processes and ensuring that there exists an appropriate internal fit or alignment between them (Janssen, 2000). Furthermore, it was observed that there is a gap in the literature that addresses the combined influence of process factors on organisational performance within the specific context of the South African public sector, since the proposed conceptual framework is yet to be tested in this sector. For these reasons, the purpose of this study was to examine the interplay between organisational performance and four input process factors (organisational structure, organisational change, organisational teamwork, & organisational leadership) in a South African public sector organisation. The study proposes a conceptual model that can be used in the diagnosis of performance problems in public organisations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational Performance

It is important to define organisational performance because failure to do so may result in the inability to measure or manage it (Artkinson & Mcrindell, 1997). Scores of researchers and management practitioners have defined the concept of organisational performance using different viewpoints (Tait & Nienaber, 2010). However, a common conceptualisation is that organisational performance comprises the actual output or results of an organisation as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives) (Short, Ketchen, Palmer, & Hult, 2007). A notable trend is that many public organisations in developing and emerging economies do not perform to the expected standard (Mankins & Steele, 2005).

Organisational performance is a multi-dimensional construct that may be influenced by various factors (Wery & Waco, 2004). A number of scholars (Ericksen & Dyer, 2005; Katou & Budhwar, 2007; Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007) attribute organisational performance to the quality or level of competency of human input. The Sactual volvesud

accepted in this study. In line with these findings, Griffin, Patterson, and West (2001) stress that effective organisational teamwork contributes to improved performance of the organisation through enhanced employee satisfaction. Furthermore, organisational teamwork leads to greater cohesion between organisational members, which according to Turman (2003), acts as a catalyst in developing a sense of belonging. Organisational team-working also has a positive impact on all four dimensions of performance namely, attitudinal, behavioural, operational, and financial (Delarue, Van Hootegem, Procter, & Burridhe, 2008). When organisational teamwork is combined with structural change, performance can be further enhanced, as shown in a study conducted by Manzoor, Ullah, Hussain, and Ahmad (2011). It can therefore be suggested that organisational teamwork is an indispensible tool in cultivating high levels of organisational performance in any public organisation.

A strong positive correlation (r = .519; p < 0, 01) was observed between organisational leadership and organisational performance. In the regression analysis, or J D Q L V D W L R Q D O O H D G H U V K L S Z D V D O V R = 0.139; t = 1.706; p < 0.009). This result suggests that organisational performance increases or decreases according to the leadership processes within the organisation. *Hypothesis H_4 was supported and is therefore accepted* in this study. The fact that leadership has a significant impact on organisational performance is difficult to dispute. It has been observed that leadership directly influences individual employee performance (Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Workman, & Christensen, 2011). This is important, since overall organisational performance is a summation of the performance of individuals within an organisation. Berson and Avolio (2004) found positive associations between leadership and the attainment of organisational goals. O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatmanc, Lapiz, and Self (2010) linked organisational leadership to the effectiveness of overall strategy implementation. Organisational leadership is also an antecedent to organisational learning and innovation (Garcia-Morales et al., 2012). It thus becomes clear that organisational leadership and organisational performance cannot be disentangled from each other as there is an intense relationship between them.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between organisational performance and four organisational process factors namely, organisational structure, organisational change, team processes, and leadership. Correlation and regression analyses conducted revealed that there were positive and predictive relationships between all four process factors and organisational performance, leading to the acceptance of all hypotheses that were suggested for the study. The positive and predictive relationship implies that the level of organisational performance in government departments either increases or decreases in line with, or is dependent upon the levels as well as the effectiveness of organisational structure, organisational change, team processes, and leadership. This study further extends the findings of previous studies conducted by Janssen (2000), Langley and Tsoukas (2010), and Gruchman (2009), which in varied contexts recognise the existence of a positive and significant relationships between similar organisational process factors and organisational performance.

The findings of this study are not without managerial implications for managers in the public sector. The study suggests that the four process factors examined are among key drivers of organisational performance in a public sector organisation. As such, the study provides a framework for diagnosis of performance problems in the public sector. As suggested by the widely acclaimed 0 D F N L Q V H \ ¶ V (Michalski, 2012), the solution to performance problems in organisations is to find the most important drivers of performance, followed by making strategic improvements on them on a continuous basis. In the context of this study, improvement of organisational performance therefore hinges, in part, on the alignment of organisational structure and leadership to the goals of the public sector organisation. Well-planned and effectively implemented organisational change processes are also bound to improve performance. In the same vein, optimisation of teamwork processes is likely to yield a pertinent payback in terms of performance. Therefore, the conceptual framework suggested in this study may be adopted in efforts to improve organisational performance in the public sector.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings should be interpreted in line with the limitations associated with the study. One limitation pertains to the demographics of respondents. The restricted sample size (N = 272) as well as the fact that respondents were based in one geo-spatial context attracts a limitation in terms of generalisation of the findings to

the entire universe of work environments. A second limitation could be that the findings of the study were susceptible to common method bias, since a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents in the same period of time. However, to limit common method variance, the researchers systematically examined the construction of items in order to ensure that ambiguous, vague and unfamiliar terms were not included, and that the questionnaire as a whole and the individual items were formulated as concisely as possible (Chang, Van-Wittleloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). Third, the general limitations associated with the quantitative approaches used in this study are acknowledged. Fourth, there are limitations associated with the questionnaire used in this study, since it was adapted from several questionnaires which were intended for purposes that differ from that of this study.

Similar to other research studies, this study has implications for further research. Similar studies using an amplified sample size or in other different geographic locations could be conducted in the future. Additionally, future research endeavours could examine the same topic using private sector organisations, which could facilitate comparisons of findings. The findings of the study may also be refined by using more robust statistical tools such as structural equation modelling. Additionally, since organisational structure and organisational leadership can be broken down into smaller sub-elements, future studies could also be conducted on the relationship between these sub-elements and organisational performance.

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