An evaluation of RBM implementation in the civil service sector in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
This study evaluates the reasons for failure to implement the Results Based Management (RBM) system in the public service ministries in Zimbabwe. This is against the implementation of the RBM in 2004 by the government of Zimbabwe in pursuit to improve its public performance. The new approach to management, RBM was believed to be a panacea to the challenges being faced in public sector ministries in Zimbabwe. However the RBM has been a controversial area since its inception in the public sector, with public servants not keen to implement the system. The findings indicated incentives, skills, culture, resources and performance indicators as challenges to implementation of RBM in Zimbabwean public service ministries.
Key words: Results based management, Public Service, Public Servants, Implementation, Performance.

1.0 Introduction
The Zimbabwean public service delivery has been under scrutiny, and dominated headlines with the public complaining of embezzlement of funds, moonlighting, underhand dealings and corruption which have all weakened the efficiency of the government. Such complaints made the government to respond to the crises through numerous policy interventions such as ZIMPREST and Performance Management but these failed to improve public sector performance while service delivery deteriorated rapidly. There was need for an effective management tool to address these challenges and RBM was seen as a panacea to improving accountability and transparency of government operations (Bester, 2007). RBM provided the hope and conviction of reversing the deteriorating service delivery to many governments and has been widely accepted and believed to be a panacea to the problems being encountered in public sectors worldwide (Osborne & Gabbler, 1996).

Despite having the system becoming the buzz word in public service ministries in Zimbabwe, Madhekeni (2012) reveals that RBM has been a controversial topic with public servants, who have shown little interest in the reform. He further argues that since the outset of the implementation of the performance appraisal system, no changes were recorded in ministries where it was still business as usual. Policy reformers in Zimbabwe acknowledge that the much needed policy is dying at an early stage as documents (performance agreements) needed for the system to work had not been forthcoming from ministries since 2010. OPC (2012) report shows that only nine out of 32 ministries had submitted key reference documents in 2012 but the documents were not results compliant.

The move by ministries is negating government efforts to resuscitate service delivery in the public sector is a cause for concern. The study seeks to reveal the issues blocking the public service ministries from complying with the RBM policy and the objectives of the study are to:
a) Assess the views of public service ministries regarding application of RBM.
b) Determine why ministries are not committed to implementing RBM system.
c) Assess the challenges being faced in implementing RBM and proffer solutions.

2.0 Literature review
Empirical researches by various scholars have explored the factors affecting RBM implementation across nations (Mayne, 2007; Bester, 2007; Schacter, 2004 & Perrin, 2002). Reports from the UNDP (2002) and the World Bank (2011) have presented specific country evaluations on RBM implementation. The increase in attention given to factors affecting RBM implementation by literature indicates the need for countries to take note of such for effective implementation of the policy.

However, Sohail (2007), highlighted that though factors affecting RBM have been explored and strategies for addressing them have been suggested, it is imperative to note that each country is unique and since countries differ in political ideology, economic, social and cultural status, it is vital to come up with home grown strategies from the experience gained through implementation of RBM in each jurisdiction. What is an effective strategy in one jurisdiction maybe a disaster in another and countries should "take their own pills" when it comes to implementation of RBM (World Bank, 2011).

Stakeholders have questioned whether RBM is a friend or a foe (Hatton & Schroder, 2007). Public employees as well as donor agencies have shown mixed views on the RBM system as panacea to development problems faced by nations. Clark and Swan in Schacter (2006) referred RBM as "surreal and unhelpful". In developing countries where the system has been imported from the west, public service employees have shown resentment to the system, viewing it as inapplicable (Common, 2011 & Siddique, 2006). Implementation of RBM in various

jurisdictions has been challenged by issues such as lack of leadership commitment, incentives, culture, structure, to mention but a few (Schacter, 2004; Siddique, 2010; Marie et al, 2006 & Perrin, 2002).

Incentive driven resistance emerged to be one of the top reasons why public service organisations shun the contemporary management approach of RBM in many jurisdictions. The World Bank (2011), Desautels (1996) and Meier (2003) signify that incentives slowed down implementation of RBM, as public servants were keen to know the value attached to them through implementation of RBM. Incentives were introduced in nations to enable smooth implementation of RBM and the incentives came in various forms which included performance related pay (Siddique, 2010), to performance bonuses (Marie et al., 2006). Zimbabwe, unlike other nations has a unique situation as the country is currently in financial paralysis, which may make the issue of incentivising the system difficult to translate into reality. There is need to assess if lack of buy in of the system had been caused by lack of incentives in the sector as the successor performance management was allegedly thought to have failed due to rewards.

Another barrier to the implantation of RBM is culture driven resistance. Experiences of governments such as Canada, Georgia, Thailand, and Malaysia showed that changing the culture of public servants has been difficult in order to accommodate the RBM philosophy (Siddique, 2010; Common, 2011; Try & Radnor, 2007). The Zimbabwean civil service culture has been described as "business as usual" (Madhekeni, 2012) where employees are not moved by any sense of urgency, neither are they willing to change their way of operation to suit the new system. Such a culture will definitely stand in the way of RBM.

Implementation failure has also been blamed on leadership commitment and Mayne (2007) acknowledges the importance of leadership in implementing RBM. Leaders have a crucial role of crafting key reference documents which are also used as referral points for performance by lower level employees (UNDP, 2004). Schacter (2004) acknowledges that in Canada, public servants indicated the need for leadership to implement RBM. Performance agreements in Zimbabwean government ministries have not been forthcoming (OPC 2012) and it is not clear whether this is to do with leadership commitment or not.

Equally skills to reflect on and to use in implementing the RBM system have been noted to be one of the challenges to RBM implementation. Thomas (2011) reveals that insufficient professional skills to develop and use performance management system dragged implementation in nations. Without requisite skills, users failed to interpret and craft relevant documents. To address the issue of skis, capacity building was considered by nations across the globe (Desautels, 1996 & Perrin, 2002). Zimbabwe had a brain drain from 2000 due to the hyperinflationary environment and it is not clear if implementation has been stalled by the availability of skills.

Other scholars have cited structure as a potential impediment to the smooth implementation of the system and that bureaucratic structures undermine the effective implementation of RBM (Try & Radnor, 2007; Derik et al., 2007 & Thomas, 2011). The structure of the government has been described as bloated and hierarchical. The top down approach has been cited in Malaysia and Thailand (Siddique, 2010 & Perrin, 2002) as causing challenges in implementation as departments were not comfortable with the centralised nature of planning. Zimbabwe also use the top down approach to implementation though suggestions for using the bottom up approach by Perrin (2002) have been cited.

Empirical evidence show that the struggle to come up with performance indicators also affected implementation of RBM in nations. Marie et al. (2006) argued that despite the fact that implementation of RBM had been around for 10 years in Thailand, the struggle for performance indicators has continued. According to Fryer et al. (2009), measurement of performance in the health and education sectors in the U.K has not yielded meaningful results due to performance indicators problems. Therefore it is generally difficult to measure the progress that has been made in implementing such programmes.

For successful implementation of any programme, resources are critical. However, r have negatively affected RBM implementation and critics of the RBM have pointed out the high costs associated with implementation as burdening governments. Experiences of many jurisdictions have shown that vast resources are required if implementation is to be successful. Ole (2001) admits that policy reforms are crippled by resource shortages. Funding for implementation of RBM has been done through donor agencies in partnership with local governments (World Bank, 2011) and what needs to be established is whether the funding is partly or wholly and if the implementation challenges in Zimbabwe is due to such.

3.0 Methodology

Semi structured interviews were used to explain the reasons for the failure of the RBM in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted in five ministries in the public sector which were chosen as per sector grouping, enabling diverse views of the system from unrelated ministries. Data was collected from 16 semi structured to gain in- depth information on how the system has been proceeding from the drivers of RBM implementation and implementers of the system who constitute directors and sectional heads of the respective ministries. Convenience sampling was used to select directors and sectional heads in ministries.

4.0 Findings and discussions

There are mixed feelings on RBM which is viewed both in the negative and positive by stakeholders. It has been established that the RBM system has been labelled to be an "animal" by those who resent the system particularly

at lower organisational levels. Such views have been caused by the complexity of the system and also the fact that RBM has been imported from the west. Responses also revealed that public workers such as teachers who are in the implementation groups attribute the poverty they are under today to such foreign driven policies. These policies include ESAP hence the viewing of RBM in the negative light. On the other hand, the RBM system have been welcomed in the public service as a system that will promote transparency, fairness in performance measurement resulting in members viewing it as a good management system compared to previous management system. Having desire to save depleting resources and promote good governance focused on results, RBM has also been viewed in the positive light and this has left members caught in the middle of the road on whether to implement the system or not.

Both drivers and implementers have indicated that Implementation has been affected by incentives. Responses confirmed that public servants have lost faith in the government pay system. The government is blamed for failing to live to its promises of improving conditions of service. Salaries of public servants have remained below the poverty datum line, regardless of the promises of rewards promised. Information gathered indicated that the performance related pay has not been operational as an automatic pay rise of 5% was given to the rest of the service without paying attention to the demands of RBM system. Drivers of the system also indicated that though incentives have been promised the country is without the budget to support such due to financial constraints, and yet government still promise to avail incentives when the fiscal has improved.

It was also found out that work culture has affected buy in of RBM in the public sector. Work habits have been labelled as negating government efforts in implementing RBM. Government workers are not keen to account for their work. The issue of dislike to work itself among the workers has led to much criticism of the RBM making it difficult to transform the culture. The information sought revealed that with such habits as moonlighting, absenteeism and also spoils taking precedence over production, the culture of the public sector has been a great challenge to RBM as it emphasise accountability, transparency and demonstration of results. As such, the Zimbabwean public service has remained with "the business as usual approach" to work.

Respondents strongly agreed that RBM implementation has been affected by skill shortages in the public sector. Brain drain has left the public service with unskilled and semi- skilled personnel. The training received for implementing the system was deemed inadequate by the respondents. The respondents argued that apart from the days for training being few, the trainers were labelled to be causing havoc in the training sessions as they were failing to demystify the concept itself. Trainers rejected such assertions of lack of knowledge in their work, they however pointed out attitude, as affecting training as they indicated that most training sessions held were not out of members will but the Commission compelled them to attend. To the trainers the days offered were sufficient if participants were willing and that the workshops were poorly funded which affected the effectiveness of the training sessions.

RBM implementation has been confirmed to have been affected by commitment of senior leaders in the sector. Interviews indicated that senior leaders lack enthusiasms for the system and these have failed to avail the key reference documents to ministries and departments in time. At the time within which the interviews were held, the documents for 2013 were not available in ministries, despite the first quota for the performance appraisal having lapsed. This was indicative of lack of support by leaders as per the views of the respondents, causing implementation failure.

The survey could not agree on the issue of top down approach to RBM implementation as a cause for lack of buy in the public sector. Public servants in Zimbabwe have welcomed the approach to implementation as it had made leaders to be involved hence all levels have been made accountable for the results achieved as opposed to the previous system were leaders were excluded from the appraisal system. The sentiments echoed by respondents showed that they were in favour of the approach as they view it as enabling good working relationships and team work since the leaders' performance is dependent on how well they also perform at grass roots.

The issue of performance indicators has been noted as challenging implementation of RBM in ministries. The performance indicators had not been understood causing quarrels in such ministries as the education where teachers contested using pass rate as a performance measure for their work. Passing of pupils is definitely beyond definitely beyond the control of the teachers as it is influenced by several other variables. The difficulties to come out with outputs, outcomes and impacts has also followed the challenge of establishing pointers to performance for departments and certain job categories.

Responses of the interviews could not agree that the structure was causing implementation challenges. Interviewees agreed that the structure of the government is bloated and that red tape is still hampering government efficiency. However they established that there had not been a challenge directed to structure as slowing RBM implementation in the public sector.

Resources were pointed as highly challenging RBM implementation. It was cited that it was impossible for ministries to implement RBM without resources. According to the respondents, though RBM is premised on yielding results from the little resources at disposal, this has been theoretical, as on the ground they are no resource to start with. Respondents indicated that ministries do not have adequate resources, be it finance, human and physical. Funds released by the ministry of finance were reported to be weak and dispatched towards year end, leaving ministries to engage in "late night shopping". There was an indication that without budgetary support, RBM could not translate into reality. Further information obtained showed that the partner in support of RBM implementation, UNDP, withdrew its funding of the system due to reasons not identified causing more resource shortages to fully implement the RBM system. According to trainers UNDP funded part of the training programmes of directors and trainers and later withdrew funding of the cascading programme that targeted the ministry of education after funding only one province in the country. The shortage of resources had also an effect on the training programme as well to the driving ministry to fully impart the skills needed.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Various reasons have been cited by the respondents as causing implementation failure in Zimbabwe public sector. Though most reasons were in confirmation with the literature, the top down approach to implementation as well as the structure challenge emerged not to have an effect on the implementation of RBM in Zimbabwe. Public servants indicated that lack of buy in of the RBM had been caused by lack of incentives. Lack of leadership commitment, difficulties in coming up with performance indicators, culture and lack of skills due to inadequate training has emerged to be the reasons why implementation of RBM has been affected in ministries. In- depth information also pointed to resources as hindrances to the implementation of RBM as well as the challenges of appraisal using the RBM mode in most job categories.

For smooth implementation of the policy, the study therefore recommends the government of Zimbabwe to mobilise resources if implementation of RBM is to be fruitful. It has been shown that without the much needed resources, translating RBM from theory to practice is not likely to succeed. Resources are needed to avail incentives to the poorly paid public workers for them to instil motivation. A cultural change may not succeed using force or commands such as "RBM is here to stay", but strategies of incentivising and performance related reward may be useful in changing attitudes of people towards work as done by other jurisdictions.

In order for the implementation to be successful, there is need to intensify the training of RBM to all levels of staff in ministries to enable better understanding of the system and the training programme should be ongoing, with refresher courses being offered to revive the knowledge and support implementation of RBM. Further pilot testing of the RBM appraisal form in all ministries is crucial to enable re-modification of the form to suit the various categories in the public sector. The researchers also suggest that the appraisal form be tailor made to suit departments and job categories as opposed to the one size fit all category based form.

To address the issue of the system being cumbersome and complexity, user friendly terms for RBM should be developed and the size of the appraisal form to be reduced. It is also proposed that situational analysis by the policy implementers be done before adopting any system. There is need by policy makers to analyse the operating environment and recommend policies accordingly. Though recognition is given by the researcher that Zimbabwe is desperate to improve service delivery, adoption of the whole package of RBM had not been helpful but burdening the little resources as the little resources which are to be shared on implementing various components. Zimbabwe should adopt a selective approach to implementation of RBM to ease the cost of implementation.

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