Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current performance management system of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly as well as the challenges faced by the Assembly in implementing its performance management system.

Design/methodology/approach – The specific design that was adopted is the case study approach. The primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews. In total, 20 heads of departments and employees were purposively sampled. The data gathered from the interviews were analysed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) approach to qualitative data analysis.

Findings – The paper reveals that the performance management system of the Assembly has not been effective. The study also reveals poor communication, poor integration, low commitment by the top officials, absence of training, inadequate capacity for setting clear targets and objectives, and measuring and evaluation criteria for performance assessment, cultural issues, absence of rewards for good performance, financial constraints, weak and highly bureaucratic management systems as challenges facing performance management system of the assembly.

Practical implications – This study indicates that the training of supervisors and the linking of performance management systems with reward and recognition are key to ensuring an effective implementation of the performance management system of the Assembly.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to literature by examining the performance management system of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly in the Western Region of Ghana by describing and drawing lessons from local government experiences in the implementation of performance management systems in developing countries.

Keywords Performance management, Implementation, Ghana, Challenges, Local government

Introduction

Local governments in Ghana play vital roles in development at the local level. The acknowledgement of local governance by the 1992 Constitution makes a structure for residents’ support in decision making and governance. The Decentralisation Policy of Ghana transfers power, capacities and obligation, and human and money-related assets, from the Central Government to the local level. Ghana’s decentralisation system, as enscribed in the Constitution, assigns District Assemblies as the most noteworthy political, legislating, budgeting and planning authority at the local level and all things considered much is expected of them. The Local government concept is gaining grounds in most developing countries and is increasingly required to play larger roles in the provision of services, alleviation of poverty and facilitation of development. The challenge facing local governments in Ghana and most developing countries is to emerge as a valuable force to enhance development so as to improve the living conditions of the people in their catchment areas or communities. The need for local governments to measure and improve their performance is therefore necessary for the survival and development of the local people.
Therefore, managing effectively the performance of employees is not a choice but a necessity if local governments are to achieve the purpose for which they were established. Performance management incorporates activities adopted by an organisation to enhance the performance of its employees (Aguinis, 2013). Performance management processes or systems are sometimes developed to motivate employees and this can be achieved by establishing expectations and providing feedback on an employee’s progress towards meeting those expectations. According to Selden and Sowa (2011), the emphasis of a performance management framework is ordinarily the performance appraisal, a formal and deliberate procedure for exploring performance and giving oral and composed input to staff about performance in any event yearly. This procedure is regularly intended to supplement the casual, continuous assessment forms that exist in an organisation.

Several papers have been published on performance management in the last decade even though most of them have focussed on performance appraisal (see Cascio and Aguinis, 2008; Gudyanga et al., 2014). Performance appraisal and feedback was found by Cascio and Aguinis (2008) to be the third most popular topic researched in the Journal of Applied Psychology from 2003 to 2007 and the second most popular in Personnel Psychology for the same time period Historically, when examining performance, scholars have largely focussed on its measurement, almost to the exclusion of any other issue (Aguinis, 2013; Budworth and Mann, 2011; Cascio and Aguinis, 2008). For instance, Budworth and Mann (2011) state that a significant part of the early research on performance management concentrated on performance management. Indeed industrial/organisational psychologists invested decades debating tools and techniques that would upgrade rating exactness (Budworth and Mann, 2011).

Research by Accenture (2010) found that public organisations, by and large, acknowledge the advantages of performance management. However, they encounter challenges in effectively aligning and embedding it within the culture of their organisation in order to enhance performance and responsibility. Performance management as a tool has been utilised extensively in the private sector and therefore most of the studies on performance management have, in one way or the other, focussed on the private sector (see Adler, 2011; Aguinis et al., 2011, 2012; Buchner, 2007; Budworth and Mann, 2011; Cascio and Aguinis, 2008) as compared to that of the public sector (see Pradhan and Chaudhury, 2012; Selden and Sowa, 2011; Soss et al., 2011). Again most of the studies on performance management have been conducted in developed countries (e.g. Adler, 2011; Aguinis et al., 2012; Baird et al., 2012; Moynihan and Pandey, 2010) compared to developing countries (de Waal, 2007; de Waal and Counet, 2009; Machingambi et al., 2013; Ohemeng, 2009, 2011) creating an imbalance.

There seems to be a growing bias towards the specific area in the public sector where performance management studies have been conducted. A review of literature reveals a wide variation in the specific areas in the public sector where studies have been conducted, particularly in Africa. Almost all the papers have focussed on areas such as education, health, housing and others (see Ohemeng, 2009, 2011; Lee Rhodes et al., 2012; Bawole et al., 2013; Nambi Karuhanga and Werner, 2013; Mosoge and Pilane, 2014; Ohemeng et al., 2015; Mafanya, and Matsiliza, 2016) with a few on local governance (Njeru and Nzuve, 2013; Munzhedzi and Phago, 2014; Radebe, 2015). Therefore, there is the need for contemporary research to focus on the implementation of an effective performance management system in local government to enhance our understanding. The few studies on performance management in local governance point to the fact that an effectively implemented performance management has a series of implications on the operations of the local government bodies even though the performance management systems have not been all that effective. For example, the study by Baird et al. (2012) revealed that the performance management systems of Australian local councils are only moderately effective in relation to performance-related outcomes, and less effective in relation to the achievement of staff-related outcomes which therefore implies that there is a need for the
managers of local government councils to improve the effectiveness of their performance management systems.

Despite the numerous benefits derived from an effectively implemented performance management system, it seems that most local government institutions in Ghana have not focussed on its implementation. Indeed, a well-implemented performance management presents numerous benefits to organisations. A study by Cascio in 2006 found that organisations with formal and deliberate performance management frameworks are 51 per cent more inclined to outflank others with regard to financial performance and 41 per cent more prone to beat others with respect to extra results including consumer loyalty, employee retention and other vital measurements (Cascio, 2006). This implies that if organisations such as District Assemblies implement an effective performance management system, there is the likelihood that their performance will improve considering the enormous developmental responsibilities placed on their shoulders. This study, therefore, seeks to fill the gaps in literature by examining the performance management system of local governments in Ghana. The study describes and draws lessons from local government experiences in the implementation of performance management systems. This research seeks to achieve its purpose by investigating the implementation of the current performance management system a Municipal Assembly and also identify the challenges faced by the Assembly in implementing performance management system.

Performance management in the public sector
Performance management has been touted as the most commonly chased public sector reform in modern times (see Moynihan, 2008; Heinrich, 2003; Radin, 2006). For example, Moynihan (2008) believes that performance management was followed as a portion of the wider bundle of reform commonly referred to as the new public management. Discussing the evolution of performance management in the public sector, an account by Williams (2003) shows that it is not a modern day invention as it existed even in the early 1900s. Williams (2003) argues that the New York Council in the early 1900s developed systems which sought to analyse data on past performance and also forecast future performance which is an indication that performance management systems were relevant then as they are today. Armstrong and Baron (2005) state that while the term “performance management” was not used until the 1970s, it is currently a key issue in public administration with journals delivering special editions on the subject (Ferlie and Steane, 2002). Lee Rhodes et al. (2012) note that performance management in the public sector is topical both for professionals and academics and that there are various publications and advisor driven projects on the topic.

Several studies have been conducted on performance management in the public sector (see Ferlie and Steane, 2002; Williams, 2003; Fryer et al., 2009; Lee Rhodes et al., 2012). For example, a study by Fryer et al. (2009) uncovers that the normal enhancements in performance, responsibility, transparency, quality of service and value for money have not yet materialised in public administration. To them, there are three classes of issues with performance management in the public sector – technical, systems and inclusion. Fryer et al. (2009) additionally argue that externally induced restructurings and redesigns impede the effective usage of performance management systems in the public sector. Another study by Lee Rhodes et al. (2012) found that administrative culture, which is a key element in impacting the pace of change and the mentality of elites (lawmakers and public administrators), is additionally a very important issue that must be addressed. Lee Rhodes et al. (2012) additionally agree that economic and political crises happening together accelerate the introduction of incorporated performance management systems. The study additionally indicates that in the absence of political crises/responsibility, governments will prioritise “external” performance measures, for example, client service, support and transparency objectives over “internal” performance measures, such as financial, employee management and government reporting.
Performance management implementation in Ghana

Performance management has been implemented in a number of countries including Ghana. It is argued that the implementation of the performance management system in the civil service has been undermined by a number of problems and challenges (see Issachar, 2009; Ohemeng, 2011). Ohemeng (2011), for example, identified the lack of political commitment, failure to move from workforce administration to human resource management, powerless linkage between performance management and the national spending plan, the absence of respect for change management and continuous change of civil service heads as some of the difficulties confronted by Ghana’s Public Sector in the usage of performance management. Ohemeng (2009) further uncovers that difficulties such as culture, institutional discontinuity, the absence of organised rewards and punishments, absence of commitment among key managers, and absence of political will have incredibly influenced the execution of PMS in Ghana’s public administration.

Issachar (2009) on his part presented a number of challenges including:

- the low level of official responsibility/contribution in and support for the framework;
- the poor capacity for setting clear targets and objectives, and measuring and assessment criteria for performance evaluation;
- the failure of the assessment system to differentiate between effective and ineffective performers;
- employees finding the process worthless because it did not contribute to career progress, advancement, and motivation in the organisation;
- the absence of a visibly defined, pronounced, and enforceable performance management policy; and
- the appraisal forms concentrating exclusively on promotion, and not on training and retention.

Despite the above challenges, Appiah-Adu and Aning (2012) note that another performance management framework was proposed in 2007 which looked to build up systems and procedures for adequately inspiring and evaluating employees in the public sector, particularly chief directors and directors, and also institutional performance in Ghana’s Public Administration set-up. According to Appiah-Adu and Aning (2012), the objective was to guarantee the full standardisation of the new framework in the public administration system and a strategy for compensating and endorsing performing employees and punishing non-performing ones amongst others. Despite its prospects, Cabinet failed to support the strategy for two reasons (Lee Rhodes et al., 2012; Ohemeng, 2011). According to Ohemeng (2011), the first reason was that the draft policy was finished close to the end of the last term of the president, considering that the attention of the president was more on the elections than improving upon the administrative system of the country (Ohemeng, 2011). The second reason discussed by Ohemeng (2011) is the rate of turnover among heads of the civil service. They believe that the frequent changes in the leadership of the service has in one way or the other contributed to Ghana’s inability to adopt a policy on performance management. Based on the challenges encountered previously, a new performance management system has been developed even though it is yet to undergo full implementation.

Tracking performance management implementation challenges

Despite the numerous advantages associated with performance management implementation, there are still a number of challenges to organisations. Challenges identified in literature include: low responsibility by the top authorities, lack of training, social issues and universal...
organisational obstruction (Ohemeng, 2009), absence of rewards for good performers (de Waal, 2007; Ohemeng 2009), the absence of full commitment to the performance management systems (de Waal, 2007), monetary limitations (Shun et al., 2006), frail and exceptionally bureaucratic systems (de Waal 2007; Mendonca and Kanungo, 1996), top management’s convictions and corporate culture (Hussain and Hoque, 2002), over-bureaucratisation of the performance management procedure, limited importance and time assigned the performance management system (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996) and absence of aptitude to plan and execute complex performance management systems (de Waal, 2007; Mendonca and Kanungo, 1996).

It has been argued that policy implementation in any context depends largely on a number of factors (Howlett et al., 2003; Rothstein, 1998; Thomas and Grindle, 1990; Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975). From the reviews, it was revealed that performance management implementation can be affected by factors such as standards and objectives, resources, processes and procedures, local factors as well as organisational culture (Guthrie et al., 2005; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Torres, 2004). The presence or absence of these factors will affect the implementation of any given project or programme. Standards and objectives are the core thrusts of every policy. To illustrate this, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) stated that all public policies have standards and objectives that elaborate the overall goals. It can be hypothesised that if a policy has no clear standards and objectives, it is bound to fail.

For programmes to be successful, resources need to be readily available. Therefore, if the required resources are not present, the probability of the programme failing is extremely high. Resources come in the form of financial and human which are all necessary conditions for programmes to survive. According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), for implementation to be effective, there is the need for policy implementers to make available resources which may include funds and other incentives to encourage or facilitate effective implementation. This view is supported by Howlett et al. (2003), who posit that for policies to be effectively implemented, financing should be provided, people assigned, and directions and actions developed.

An important variable that affects the implementation of programmes is the structure of the organisation. According to Rothstein (1998), the appropriateness or otherwise of the organisational structure tasked with the execution of policy will certainly impact on the success or otherwise of any given programme. To him, even though it is important to have appropriate policy design, it is equally central to successful policy implementation to have suitable implementation structure. In this study, the structure of the Assembly will be examined as it can affect the success or otherwise of the performance management programme. Schein (1985) contended that culture comprises three measurements – beliefs, qualities and relics. Culture has been described as vital to the implementation of locally based programmes due to its ability to facilitate or impede the process. Culture is an important determinant when it comes to the implementation of changes or reforms such as performance management systems (Guthrie et al., 2005; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Torres, 2004). For example, the study by Torres (2004) revealed that the Napoleonic society has been portrayed as having a starting suspicion towards administrative changes on account of its solid legitimate code introduction and its conventional state administrations. It is strongly believed that culture has a series of implications which can affect the success or otherwise of performance management systems.

A study by de Waal and Counet (2009) demonstrates that the disappointment rate of performance management systems has diminished in the previous decade from 70 to 56 per cent, and that the most extreme challenges faced by organisations are absence of top administration duty; not having a performance culture; performance management getting a low need or its utilisation being deserted after any significant change; management putting low need on the usage; and individuals not sufficiently seeing advantage from performance management. Behn (2003) also argues that some implementation challenges ensue because “managers implement a performance system with rules and regulations and then leave it to
run, rather than take a hands-on operational approach, and use leadership skills to motivate people to produce more, or better, or more consequential results that are valued by citizens” (p. 64). Again, Khan et al. (2013) identified a number of problems faced by Pakistani organisations while implementing PMS which can be likened to those of some other countries which include low priority on implementation by the management, insufficient resources, more effort and time required in implementation than expected, unstable phase, unclear goal for PMS implementation, negative attitudes towards PMS, PMS and information-communication technology, organisational strategy, definition of critical success factors and key performance indicators, goals for lower levels, linkage between KPI, individual employee, team and departments, change management process, reward system and PMS, updating PMS system and others. From the above, it is evident that performance management implementation comes with a number of challenges. This implies that both public and private sector organisations do face some challenges in the implementation of performance management systems. From the above, a summary of the key challenges identified have been presented in Table I.

Methodology
The study was undertaken from an interpretivist perspective as this offered explanations to the implementation of performance management systems in the Assembly from the perspective of both the heads/supervisors and their subordinates. This paradigm is relevant as it helped the researcher to pose the what, the why and how questions so as to probe the issue of performance management implementation in a local government set-up. The study adopted a qualitative approach. Despite the fact that several studies have been conducted in the performance management arena, little has been done on local governance and, therefore, approaching this study from a qualitative perspective offered the opportunity for the researchers to consider the experiences of the supervisors and employees as well. The specific design that was adopted is case study. The data for the study were obtained from two main sources, namely, primary and secondary data. The primary data for this study were gathered from observations and the in-depth interviews conducted.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Implementation challenges</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), Howlett et al. (2003), Shun et al. (2006), Khan et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Definition of strategy, mission and vision</td>
<td>Kaplan (2001), Khan et al. (2013)</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Processes and procedures</td>
<td>Guthrie et al. (2005)</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Local factors</td>
<td>Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), Van Meter and Van Horn (1975)</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Staff resistance</td>
<td>Bourne et al. (2000)</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Institutional discontinuity</td>
<td>Ohemeng (2009)</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Over-bureaucratisation of the performance management system</td>
<td>Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996)</td>
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Source: Summary from literature review
In total, 20 respondents participated in the study. Out of the 20 respondents, 9 were supervisors while 11 were subordinate employees. The interviewees were made up of the municipal coordinating director, human resource manager, municipal finance officer, municipal works engineer, head of planning, budget, internal audit, chief local government officer, town and country planning officer while the remaining were subordinate employees. The interviewees were all stationed at the Municipal Assembly. Most of the interviewees (50 per cent) held bachelor’s degrees, a few of them (15 per cent) had professional qualifications while the remaining (35 per cent) had Master’s degrees. It is clear from the responses that all the respondents were well educated and had the capacity to discuss the issue at hand. It was also important to find information on the duration of service the employees had been with the Assembly. The responses indicate that the majority of them had worked for less than five years in the Municipal Assembly even though they had been in the local government circle for more than 20 years. This is so because senior level employees in the local government set-up and of course most public institutions cannot stay at a particular station for more than four years. That notwithstanding, most of the interviewees exhibited a high level of maturity with respect to the issue at hand. The number of years an individual remains in employment enhances or attests to his/her level of experience. It can therefore be said that the majority of the employees are experienced.

A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the interviewees (principal officers/heads of department and some employees). The principal officers were chosen for the interview because they had first-hand experience, information and requisite knowledge on the subject matter. The data gathered from the interviews were analysed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) approach to qualitative data analysis. The data were coded to categorise and define patterns and themes from the viewpoint of the interviewees, so as to appreciate and describe these patterns and themes.

Findings
The findings are presented under the two key objectives of the study and touch on key issues such as the purpose of the Assembly’s performance management system, the process of implementation, the effectiveness of the current system and the implementation challenges.

Purpose and features of PMS
The purpose of an organisation’s performance management system has to be made known to all employees if it is to be achieved. Whatever the case may be, the reasons could range from financial to developmental. Therefore, interviewees were asked to indicate the purpose of the Assembly’s performance management system. An interviewee hinted that:

It is used for the purposes of promoting staff such that those who fall short will be given the necessary training. It is used to evaluate how individual employees are working and whether there is the need for improvement in terms of capacity building.

This view was supported by most of the interviewees with the exception of a few who believed that it goes beyond just the promotion of staff. They were of the view that the system focusses on the achievement of the goals of the Assembly which therefore calls for the active involvement of employees. In support of their argument, this is what an interviewee said:

The focus is to manage the performance of employees so that they will feel motivated and belonged which will then push them to improve the productivity levels. It also ensures that right salaries are paid while giving information on employee strengths and weaknesses.

From the responses, it is evidently clear that the current performance management system deals with a mixture of systems, procedures and actions undertaken by the Assembly to
assess the performance of employees. The performance management system involves components such as job descriptions, performance potentials, appraisals, corrective policies and recommendations. The respondents were quick to add that the Assembly did not practise all the above elements.

**Implementation of PMS**

Ideally, performance management systems span a year. In view of that, respondents were asked to indicate the duration of the implementation of the current PMS. While some were of the view that the current PMS was implemented throughout the year, others saw it as a half yearly activity with a few indicating that it was a one-time activity. To these employees, there is nothing like performance management, it is just a performance appraisal system. Those employees who see the current system as a year round activity indicated that the Assembly goes through series of activities from the beginning of the year to the end mostly crowning it with a performance appraisal meeting. This is what a respondent shared:

[…] as a head of department we meet at the beginning of the year to determine the goals of the Assembly for the year before I communicate it to my subordinates and ensure that it is achieved before the year ends. I have been doing this ever since I was posted here.

In addition to the above, some respondents lamented on the manner in which the assembly looks at performance issues. Most supervisors of the assembly focus narrowly on performance appraisal to the neglect of other important activities. An employee expressed his view on this issue:

[…] our supervisors don’t care about how we undertake our activities. They are only interested in filling our appraisal forms and giving us low marks.

Because most organisations and managers need to acquire the greatest returns on their investment and employees are undoubtedly the most costly and valued assets they have, it only makes sense that they would do everything humanly possible to get the best performance from them. But some respondents who felt the assembly had a performance appraisal and not a performance management system shared this:

[…] as employees we have to know what is expected of us, we also like to know how we are performing against the expectations of the Assembly and we want to develop ourselves to address the gaps in performance and to move toward greater responsibility so that we get rewarded. But we don’t see that over here. The only time we experience a bit of the so-called performance management system is the appraisal period.

The process of implementing performance management systems varies across organisations. Even though the majority of the respondents viewed the performance management system of the Assembly as a process, they were a bit divided as to the specific processes adopted by the Assembly. Some of the respondents hinted that it was a three-stage process which involved the planning of performance implementation and performance assessment and review.

This is what an interviewee had to say:

I can’t say it is a comprehensive or complete process, but to the best of my knowledge, we meet at the beginning of the year to plan what we want to achieve for the year in question after which our supervisors enforce performance standards require to achieve those objectives. When the year is coming to an end we review our performance with the help of the appraisal forms.

It appears that there are variations in the system of implementation across departments. For some departments such as accounts/finance and internal audit, the respondents were able to give responses regarding its implementation as compared to other respondents such as the typists.
Implementation challenges facing the assembly's performance management system

Performance management systems, which typically include performance appraisal and employee development, are the weak or vulnerable activities of human resource management which can potentially lead to an organisation's downfall. A lot of time and energy is spent in crafting the right vision, mission and goals of a performance management system. Yet, the success of the programme is not assured. In view of the above, respondents were asked to indicate whether the performance management system had been implemented successfully. Most of the respondents indicated that the system had not been successfully implemented looking at the challenges confronting the assembly. From the responses gathered, it becomes clear that managers have not been able to effectively plan and implement the performance management system of the Assembly. A respondent shared this:

[…] ooooooh I don’t think it has been successful. In fact, all of us don’t respect the implementation time frames, how can it be successful? All documentation and forms are not properly completed. We do it anyhow.

Commenting on the poor implementation of the system, an interviewee hinted that:

Mechanisms that must be put in place to ensure the objectivity of performance ratings and judgments, and to reduce favouritism and bias is [sic] not there so supervisors just give any mark and its worse when you and your supervisor are at war.

The responses above indicate that there is a problem with the current performance management system of the Assembly. In view of the above, there was the need for respondents to indicate the particular challenge facing the Assembly. Discussed below are some of the dominant challenges presented by the respondents. The performance management system and devices must be intended to address the specific needs of organisations. The design ought to include intensive discussions with all partners and particularly employees and supervisors who always utilise the framework. Individuals included in the outline of the framework must have aptitude in performance management and an understanding of the context in which the Assembly finds itself but this is not the case at the Municipal Assembly. Recounting how the issue had affected the implementation of the current system, an interviewee fumed:

I think the current system was wrongly designed. The performance management system and tools does not fit with the specific needs of the Assembly. The heads of department only see it as a requirement which needs to be fulfilled annually and not something to help improve the performance of the Assembly as well as its employees.

Some respondents, especially the supervisors, maintained that some of the employees were not supportive at all. They believed strongly that the system was not working to perfection because of the behaviour of some of these employees. Describing the situation, a supervisor shared his views:

[…] employees are supposed to cooperate with their supervisors always, unfortunately some employees don’t do that to the extent that they sometimes fight some of us. It is really an unpleasant experience and does not auger well for the Assembly.

The above remarks indicate the extent to which cooperation is important in the performance management system. The respondents also indicated that it is a two-way relationship and therefore both parties (employees and supervisors) must all play their role if it is to succeed. Interestingly, some employees also blamed their supervisors for the inability of the system to achieve its intended objectives:

[…] some of the supervisors don’t help at all, they just assess us anyhow without recourse to our actual performance. Some of us have not been promoted because our bosses do not like us and so we always don’t pass. I have been complaining about this thing for years but to no avail.
During implementation, good communication enables managers to effectively deal with resistance to change and build the confidence of stakeholders in the system. This implies that communication and training are inevitable if the performance management system is to succeed. Describing the relevance of communication and how it has negatively affected the Assembly, an interviewee revealed that:

Communication is one of the most critical success factors of the entire performance management system because it reduces resistance to change, and generates commitment to the system but the Assembly has failed to do that and employees are at a loss.

Performance management system needs to be fused with the strategic plans, culture, structure and other relevant components of the Assembly as well as the human resource management systems. The absence of integration can negatively affect the success of the system. In the opinion of an employee:

The current performance management system fails to link individual performance, departmental performance and service delivery and so things are done haphazardly.

The above remark on the lack of alignment is due to the fact that various programmes of the Assembly have been segregated. In other words, there is no link between the Assembly’s strategy, budgets and operational plans mainly due to the fact that it was undertaken by different people with varying objectives. For performance management to be successfully implemented, it has to be approached from a unified standpoint. Furthermore, cooperation must exist between the Assembly’s strategy, budgets and operational plans, its culture and structure and as well as human resources. In the absence of harmony, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for performance management system to be successful no matter how detailed the programme may be.

Commitment is a vital concern with respect to the success or otherwise of a programme. Managers must create a vision that is shared by all members of the organisation, motivate employees and build a performance management system that pushes the organisation towards the intended destination. An interviewee mentioned that:

There is total lack of commitment on the part of the Assembly’s top officials who are supposed to inspire us to give our all. Seriously speaking leadership commitment and support is a must for smooth implementation of the system. Top officials must drive the process and make performance management an integral part of the management of the Assembly. Leaders contribute not only in setting the strategic direction and performance measures but also in monitoring and reviewing performance across the Assembly. They also reinforce the performance cycle by recognizing and rewarding performance.

The leadership challenge has an enormous effect on coordinating and adjusting a system of management to convey an extensive performance. In addition to the above challenges, some of the respondents were also of the view that the Assembly did not have the required financial resources to effectively implement the system. To these respondents, even if the top officials were ready to fully implement the system, they were financially constrained and for that matter they have been struggling to fully implement any meaningful programme. An interviewee revealed that:

[…] the Assembly is seriously constrained. As you may be aware, we are yet to receive our share of last year’s common fund and we are also finding it difficult to raise money internally. You know that if there is no money, there is no way the system can be effective. So that is one of our numerous challenges.

Due to the financial constraints, some interviewees noted that there was a total absence of rewards for employees even if they performed well. Employees are sometimes motivated to perform if there are reward systems for them but this does not happen in the Assembly.
An employee bemoaned how this problem has affected the successful implementation of the current system:

I believe that a reward system that rewards high performance and discourages low and mediocre performance must be put in place because there is nothing of that sort over here. A comprehensive and holistic reward system which can motivate employees as done in the private sector is missing in the Assembly’s performance management system.

Employees normally expect their performance to be linked with pay. Ideally, performance management systems should be connected to reward, whether it is a certain percentage rise on the employee’s salary or a specified amount for good performance.

Discussion of findings
Performance management systems are composed of process and people components. The process component is made up of job descriptions, assessment standards, the assessment deliberations and reward systems. A key constituent of the people component is the supervisor who pushes the system by establishing the expectations, communicating plans, stimulating growth and giving and receiving feedback from subordinates. Even though the majority of the respondents viewed the performance management system of the Assembly as a process, they were a bit divided. Some of the interviewees felt it was just a two-stage activity or process of performance planning and performance evaluation. To these people, there is actually nothing like performance implementation because when the goals are formulated, hardly does someone ensure its implementation. The only thing supervisors do is to mark the appraisal forms filled by the employee just because it is an annual “ritual” or requirement.

The performance management framework requires the contribution of numerous players. The fruitful implementation of the framework obliges a definite appreciation of how the framework functions and a reasonable understanding of its advantages from the alternative points of view of all included. Fruitful execution requires wide authoritative backing and acknowledgement. Prior to its implementation, a fruitful correspondence arrangement must be actualised that will reduce resistance and galvanise support for the system. The system should also be pilot-tested, a view which is reinforced by scholars such as Pulakos (2009), Aguinis (2009) and Neely et al. (1996). Unfortunately, the case of the Municipal Assembly is a bit of deviation from the views held by some scholars as discussed above.

Challenges of the performance management system
The interviewees indicated that the Assembly had not been able to successfully implement its performance management system due to a number of challenges. Some of these challenges revealed by the respondents include the following: wrong design of the system, poor communication, poor integration, low commitment by the top officials, absence of training, inadequate ability for establishing clear goals and objectives, and assessing and evaluation standards for performance assessment, absence of rewards for good performance, financial constraints and the limited importance accorded to it. Most of the respondents felt that the system was imposed on them and for that matter they were not consulted at its inception. The revelation that employees of the Assembly were not contacted at the beginning of the system has vital consequences in relation to employees’ assurance and attitudes towards the system. Non-involvement of employees in the designing of performance management system creates the impression that employees are not significant role players in the policy-making process of the Assembly. Employees will normally reject the performance measurement systems that are imposed on them because such types of measurements are often misconstrued as devices to punish them. These revelations are in line with previous studies (Howlett et al., 2003; Shun et al., 2006; de Waal, 2007; Ohemeng, 2011; Ohemeng, 2009; de Waal and Counet, 2009; Mendonca and
Kanungo, 1996). The dominant factors indicated include wrong design, absence of employee support, resources, lack of alignment, lack of commitment, and poor communication. Based on the findings a framework has been developed. It is evident that these factors represent the challenges faced by a developing country in the implementation of performance management systems. Below is the framework (Figure 1).

Whereas most of the challenges revealed are not too different from other countries and sectors as indicated by previous studies (Kaplan, 2001; Howlett et al., 2003; Shun et al., 2006; de Waal, 2007; Ohemeng, 2011; Ohemeng, 2009; de Waal and Counet, 2009; Mendonca and Kanungo, 1996; Horine and Hailey, 1995; Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975), there are some challenges which are yet to catch the attention of researchers. These challenges are lack of alignment and poor communication which may be unique to local government institutions in developing countries particularly Ghana. The poor integration is due to the fact that various programmes of the Assembly have been segregated. To some extent there is no link between the Assembly’s strategy, budgets and operational plans mainly due to the fact that the performance management is not approached from a unified standpoint. It appears that each unit or directorate has its own strategy and goals which to some extent deviate from the general strategy adopted by the Assembly as a whole owing to the fact that these strategies are not effectively integrated. On the issue of communication, the responses point to the fact that supervisors have failed in communicating the rationale behind the current performance management system and this is a recipe for resistance among the subordinate employees because they are at a loss.

Conclusions
Implementing an effective performance management system is not an easy task. Therefore, the Assembly has to put in more effort than what it is doing at the moment. The basic principle underlying performance management is that if employees recognise what
is required of them, they are more probable to accomplish tasks effectually. This results in improved employee performance as well as better organisational performance. The responses gathered call for a complete performance management system which includes: clear vision/mission/values, strategic goals, job descriptions, clear accountabilities for delivering strategic and day to day tasks, consistent feedback, training and development, reward and recognition, and a more formal performance appraisal which will not only put fear in employees but will push them to think outside the box and deliver an exceptional performance. The study, therefore, concludes that though the Assembly has not been able to fully implement its performance management to the expectation of all stakeholders, it has the opportunity to turn its fortunes around by adopting a complete and an all-inclusive system which will not only serve the interest of the Assembly but also that of the employees as well.

**Recommendations**

From the findings and discussions made, the following are recommended.

The Assembly can achieve its objectives through the current performance management system by providing the needed financial resources to ensure smooth and full scale implementation. The provision of the required resources will ensure that the performance management system is linked to rewards and recognition. By so doing, the employees will appreciate the system better and do whatever they can to make it a success. If the resources needed are not provided, the probability of the programme failing is extremely high.

One of the challenges revealed by the respondents had to do with the design of the process. The performance management process should be value-added so as to reduce or possibly eliminate resistance. Resistance is a key challenge affecting policy implementation particularly in developing countries. Successful systems must not be cumbersome. Rather, they must be kept simple and realistic while addressing the expectations of both the Assembly and its employees. In order to successfully implement the system, there is the need to reduce or possibly eliminate employee resistance as supportive employees can contribute significantly to the success of the system.

Another important issue that was discussed by the respondents had to do with the commitment of top level officials. This commitment must not only be exhibited verbally but also through cooperation in the same performance management process for assessments. The present culture of the Assembly regarding performance appraisals and management is not welcoming and, therefore, does not encourage participation. There should be an open system of communication where employees can freely air their views regarding their performance issues. It should be possible for employees to reliably discuss their performance and identify ways of improving upon their performance into the foreseeable future. Such a culture will not only make the system participatory but will make it more accountable and successful.

**Future research directions**

First, future research can take a positivist approach where hypothesis can be formulated and tested on selected public sector organisations to confirm or disconfirm the findings of studies in this arena. Again, a multiple case studies can also be conducted where more than one district assembly will be selected and studied in detail so as to compare the implementation of performance management systems amongst these institutions. Little has also been done on the impact or effect of performance management on the financial performance of district assemblies or public sector institutions in general and therefore future research can consider that.
References


Further Reading

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