

Performance Management Development System (PMDS) Perceptions and Challenges in the VUCA World with Reference to the KwaZulu-Natal Office of the Premier

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Abstract: Objectives: The study examines employees' perceptions and the challenges of the PMDS in the KwaZulu Natal Office of the Premier (OTP). **Prior Work:** A significant component that seems to be lacking in public services is the constant monitoring, as well as, evaluation and appraisal for employees' performance (Armstrong, 2019). The Goal setting theory highlights non-feedback without a goal has no effect on performance and there is a need for clear, measurable and specific objectives (Locke & Latham, 2012). Makamu, & Mello, (2014), Devine, Meyers & Houssemand, (2013). **Approach:** The mixed methods approach was used. **Results:** The study revealed managers' incompetencies, racism and unfairness, lack of knowledge of the moderating committees, reduced scores, favouritism, lack of transparency and inexperienced moderating committees. **Implications:** Managers training and the efficient use of the PMDS system and policy when designing a reward system, is advocated. Additional research should focus on perceptions such as racism in PMDS, and the incompetence of moderating committees. **Value:** The study cited issues of racism, lack of knowledge of moderating committees, reduced scores without communicating with the employees, favouritism and lack of transparency in the process. Distinctively, the study revealed occurrences of racism not evident in other research. The study demonstrated that during VUCA times, the performance management system should be approached innovatively, rather than conventionally.

Keywords: implementation; policy; VUCA; bias; racism

JEL Classification: The Journal of Economic Literature

1. Introduction

The PMDS ensures individual performances relate to the strategic goals of the institution, thereby guaranteeing improved public services with respect to administration conveyance, as well as, employees' performance (DPSA, 2016). Employees and bosses frequently despise the PMDS, as well as consider PMDS to be the control instrument or a superfluous managerial weight.

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1.1. Research Questions

- What are employees' perceptions of the PMDS in the KwaZulu-Natal Office of the Premier?
- What are the PMDS challenges encountered in the KwaZulu-Natal Office of the Premier?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To ascertain employees' perceptions of the PMDS in the KwaZulu-Natal Office of the Premier.
- To ascertain the PMDS challenges in the KwaZulu-Natal Office of the Premier.

1.3. Problem Statement

Globally the public service is under pressure to work on the nature of administrations with better quality and services. This requires the public service to be more responsible and accountable to the stakeholders and community needs. Subsequent to regulation that was in place in 1994, change in the public sector has always been a concern (DPSA, 2016).

2. Literature

VUCA environments are portrayed as rapidly changing and disruptive, necessitating unique approaches to strategy that require less control and planning, as well as learning, flexibility and improvisation (Rehman, Hawryszkiewicz, Sohaib, Namisango & Dahri, 2023; Ostrom, Field, Fotheringham, Subramony, Gustafsson, Lemon & McColl-Kennedy, 2021). Armstrong (2019) asserts that VUCA is not a set of situations that can be analysed and addressed within a specific period of time, but rather a set of timeless events that occur in a continually changing environment.

Lalwani (2020) and Clear Review (2020) elaborate that the elements of PMDS include activity connection of employees to the institution's strategies, conveying expectations of the institution, assessing progress made by employees, decision making, acknowledging best performers in terms of rewards, repaying performers, and development for underperforming employees.

According to the CFI Team (2023), all stakeholders, that is, all employees, managers, supervisors, executive authority and department heads should be included and emphasises the importance of connecting individual workers to the overall objective of the work unit. PMDS is based on evidence from workers and administrators on outcomes, and if expectations are not met, management may provide guidance on areas for development. Pumane (2020) emphasises the importance of the PMDS in public services, recognising that a department's progress is determined by how individuals are perceived and handled. Marhayani and Ibrahim (2019: 20) argue that departments require extraordinary features, qualities, and responsibilities of workers, and better-quality work should be achievable sooner than expected for departments to survive in an undeniably competitive economic climate.

Employees are the cornerstone of each department and should be considered the bloodstream of any department (Thusi, 2023). Employees should understand how the PMDS affects behaviour (inputs and outputs), how they contribute to the department's goals, and how they will be reimbursed (Musaigwa,

2023). According to OECD (2022), many ways for monitoring, overseeing, and further improving workers' execution have evolved, but it is still a test that is approved.

One of the most important aspects of employee performance is meeting target goals, which must be observable when employing a performance management development system (Vulpen, 2019). The system itself should be simple, clear, and understood (Madlabana & Petersen, 2020). OECD (2022) contends that employee performance is determined by the achievement of the major result areas outlined in the job description. According to Madlabana and Petersen (2020), organisations, institutions, and government agencies were mandated with the purpose of achieving general government programmes, targets, and objectives, ensuring service delivery. As a result, representatives' responsibilities and performance have been the primary focus in public services (Maganoe, 2023). Vulpen (2019) advocate that employees who are satisfied with their jobs perform better at work, and the opposite is also true.

Government departments should not only focus on executing and developing projects and programmes to improve service delivery, but also on developing personnel performance (DPSA, 2016). A crucial component that appears to be absent in public services is continuous monitoring, evaluation, and appraisal of personnel performance (Mahlala, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

10 percent of employees using the mixed methods approach were selected from 591 employees, including deployees and fixed contractual employees. 70 questionnaires were disseminated, yielding 70 responses using non-probability sampling due to the office location, availability of officials, the geographical proximity of the office's five sites, and the specialist knowledge of the people. 20 participants were selected for interviews using Purposive sampling. According to Fox (2022), the maximum number of participants in a study larger than 100, should be 10% of the total population, but no more than 1,000. Participants were officials from senior management (levels 13 and 16); middle management (levels 11 and 12), junior management (levels 9 and 10), and junior staff (levels 3 and 8).

For the quantitative component, the researcher used SPSS version 28 to analyse the data. The researcher used Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha to assess the internal consistency and factor analysis to determine the validity of the study's instruments. For the qualitative component, the researcher used NVivo Level 5. The reliability scores for all sections exceeded the recommended Cronbach's alpha value. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research.

4. Perceptions of Employees Regarding PMDS in the Kwazulu-Natal Office of the Premier

The table below tabulates responses from the respondents in terms of employees' perceptions regarding the PMDS.

Table 1. Perceptions of employees regarding PMDS scoring patterns

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Chi Square
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		Count	Row N %	p-value								
Assessments of my performance are fair and unbiased	D39	18	25.7 %	14	20.0%	13	18.6 %	10	14.3 %	15	21.4 %	0.657
I fully understand my organisation's goals and objectives	D36	2	2.9 %	5	7.1%	13	18.6 %	22	31.4 %	28	40.0 %	< 0.001

Table 1 reflects 71,4 percent (D36) shows a full understanding of the organisation's goals and objectives, with 10 percent disagreeing and 18,6 being neutral. 45,7% (D39) of employees believe that performance is not fair and biased and 18,6 percent (D39) of the employees were neutral. In D36 & D39 (Mean = 3.42) shows moderate to strong performance, implying effective implementation practices. The negative skewness suggests a left-tailed distribution, further confirming the positive perception.

Findings show a number of respondents are of the view that the current PMDS did not favour promotions nor pay progressions due to positions being advertised, and earmarked for certain individuals. Promotions are also based on qualifications and not the PMDS and friends of supervisors are favoured for promotions. This is attested by 21.29% of the respondents. *With the issue of promotions, they really do not see it as a tool to that may assist as it favours certain individuals who are close to supervisors (Respondent 1). A post has got a name of a person before it is even advertised (Respondent 11).*

However, rank promotions were abolished which actually granted an extra motivation, since you will get a bonus and rank promotion. Today, you can spend 10 years and more if you don't get promoted though an advertised post (Respondent 16). There are no promotions in the OTP – especially internally. No impact on promotions (Respondent 20). The promotion in terms of performance depends on whether you qualify for the position or not. It is not based on PMS. Instead, when the official performed over and above for 12 consecutive years qualify to accelerated grade for an example salary level 9 to 10 (Respondent 3).

Findings revealed respondents were unhappy due to prolonged pay progression. Respondents reported a duration of up to 15 years. As such, the PMDS has no effect on pay progression. *Pay progression is after you have completed 15 years yet by that time if you have kids, you will realise that they are completing high school so it does not help in any way (Respondent 11). Promotions every after 15 years within the same post (Respondent 17). The pay progression when the official performs average or perform according to what is expected to do however pay progression can be paid after 15 years of the employee being in the same salary level (Respondent 3).*

Finding from one (1) respondent also revealed that, ultimately, it also comes down to employer discretion to provide bonuses, promotions and progression. This can be based on numerous factors including funding. Hence the PMDS does not guarantee such progression and rewards per se. *Employees tend to think a bonus, pay progression and promotion is their compulsory or their right, the policy states clearly that it is an employer's discretion to give or not to give provided there are*

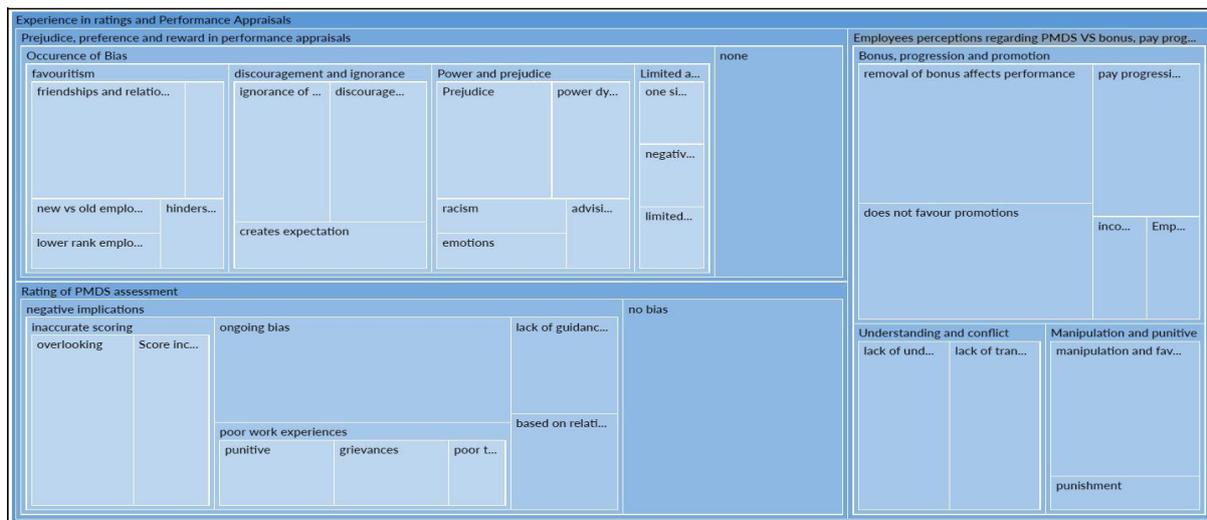


Figure 2. Hierarchy chart

Source: Keswa & Ramsaroop, 2024

Figure 2 provides an understanding as to how the occurrence of bias, favouritism and prejudice occurs. One respondent indicated that lower-level employees experience more unfairness as their supervisors have their select favourites. *Employees at lower ranks are mostly experiencing all the above because supervisors have their favourites (Respondent 14)*. One respondent is of the view that favouritism leads to demotivation and this hinders performance. This concurs with the Public Service Commission (2018) that, preference, social relations or affiliations, favouritism, and bias were exhibited as problems. *Yes, the favouritism is a challenge in the whole public service, yet it kills the performance of the employee (Respondent 3)*. A new finding was also discovered in this study whereby 3.76 % of the participants believed that in the implementation and appraisal some managers wish for staff to be ‘puppets’ and if they do not, then they are not appraised. *If you are not willing to bend until you are facing physiological attendance, then you will not get appraised (Respondent 12)*.

Findings also display a huge coverage of employees indicating that, there was also a high degree of discouragement by staff and ignorance of managers. When employees do not receive the scores they deserve, this leads to them becoming discouraged. This lowers their motivation and hence employees lose interest in PMS. This was covered by a huge percentage of respondents which was 12,97%. *I have, and even if you report them to the unions, your complaint gets swept under the carpet, and all you are left with is facing personal biasness and prejudice daily until you die or retire (Respondent 17)*. *By me not getting the reward I get discouraged because reward encourages the employee to perform above expectation (Respondent 3)* *Yes, my supervisor does not want anyone scoring above 3 because he avoids explanations. My supervisor says we cannot score ourselves more than him (Respondent 7)*.

About 15,95% felt the moderating committees themselves seem ignorant whereby they do not have any knowledge of the work staff do but will drop their scores even if the scores were approved by the supervisor. They also provide no reasoning or feedback on why the scores were decreased. *It disturbs more when the moderating committee will drop the scores and you will not be informed and leaves a question as to how a person who has absolutely no clue for your work can drop the score that you have agreed with your supervisor who directly supervises you (Respondent 14)*. *Yes, in many instances my score is dropped with no valid reason or explanation not to explain the circumstances*

whereby the score is being dropped by the moderating committees who does not even understand my scope of work (**Respondent 18**). Others are marked down by the committees (**Respondent 9**).

Staff get prejudiced from a personal bias perspective as well as by being given tasks unrelated to their JDs. This prevents them from adequately achieving what is in their JDs. *I have been prejudiced several times by performing duties that are not in my job description (**Respondent 11**). I have been prejudiced several times by the way in the OTP that part of life to experience personal biases (**Respondent 12**). All the time I have experienced personal biases, prejudice and preference and ultimately reward in performance appraisals (**Respondent 13**).*

Findings in this study reveals that the ratings and scores are driven by emotions. Hence if a manager has negative emotions towards you then you will not progress nor be recognised. *I personally experienced unfairness and prejudice and there is a lot involved in this instance which do not permit an employee to be honest, fair and so forth due to the fact that also feelings, emotions, love amongst others are involved (**Respondent 16**).*

Four respondents are having perceptions that the PMS process remains subject to ongoing bias. The system is vulnerable to ongoing bias and thus employees lose faith in the system. *Some officials are awarded a bonus because they are in good books with supervisors and because they are able to write a motivation (**Respondent 1**). Hard workers are normally not able to write and those who do not work are good writers (**Respondent 1**). The system is bias and will never be fully effective (**Respondent 1**). I do however know that most employees within the department experience biasness or unfair ratings for numerous reasons, which is unfair. PMS rating should be specifically based on work done, fairness, quality, rationale, and so forth (**Respondent 10**). Biasness is high in this organisation. I am actually used to it (**Respondent 13**). Biasness is what we breathe and live in this organisation (**Respondent 17**).*

Another finding not found in other literature pertaining to the perceptions of employees indicated there are also reported occurrences of racism. *It is further difficult if the supervisor will portray racism and hate toward the supervisee and the judgment will be unfair (**Respondent 16**).*

5. PMDS Challenges Encountered in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Office of the Premier

Table 2. PMDS challenges encountered in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Office of the Premier

		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Chi Square p-value
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	
I participate in the PMS on an annual basis as per stipulated periods	C 2 0	2	2.9%	11	15.7%	6	8.6%	21	30.0%	30	42.9%	< 0.001
The changes made through the PMS are constantly communicated to me	C 2 1	6	8.6%	13	18.6%	14	20.0%	21	30.0%	16	22.9%	0.077
My organisation is	C 1	1	15.7	6	8.6%	14	20.0%	18	25.7%	21	30.0	0.043

using the correct and updated PMS tools	18	1	%								%	
I fully understand the purpose of PMS in my organisation	C19	3	4.3%	7	10.0%	10	14.3%	21	30.0%	29	41.4%	< 0.001
I am always assessed based on what was planned and on what is on my job description	C22	4	5.7%	10	14.3%	14	20.0%	23	32.9%	19	27.1%	0.003

In Table 2, employees agreed their department used the correct tools (55.7 percent) (C18), while 24,3 percent disagreed. Respondents agreed (71,4 percent) (C19) they have a full understanding of the PMDS. This table displays high satisfaction (72,9 percent) of employees (C20) who participate in the PMDS on an annual basis as per stipulated periods with only 18,6 percent who disagreed. 52,9 percent (C21) of respondents believed that changes made through the PMS were constantly communicated to them and 60 percent (C22) believe that they are assessed on what was planned and on their job descriptions.

This informs the researcher that at least more than half of the employees are happy with the implementation of PMDS in their departments. According to OECD (2022), if performance management is successfully managed, it could result in successful personnel management for institutions to accomplish their stated goals. Furthermore, Madlabana and Petersen (2020) emphasised that PM is meant to assist individuals to comprehend and acknowledge their role in contribution to the overall goal. C18, C19, C20, C21 & C22 posts a strong mean score of 3.67, indicative of either strong performance or a positive perception. However, the high variance points to variability in responses, and the negative skewness reveals a left-tailed distribution with most ratings being high.

For the above dimensions a number of respondents indicated they understood the purpose of PMDS because they participated in the PMDS, and their department was using the correct tools to assess PMDS. The problem however seemed to be an issue with the implementation. This was informed by the following:

Participants confirmed the PMDS was not aligned to the Directorate's annual performance plan. *Not really my JD does not talk to what I am actually doing daily (Respondent 13). This is a grey area across all sections, for the most part job descriptions are not aligned to what one does (Respondent 14). No, my job description and other job descriptions for certain employees are all not updated (Respondent 12).* Some respondents indicated that their JD did not relate to daily tasks and this affected them and other employees. According to Harris (2022), the PMDS should give trustworthy information that may be used for decision-Making. The above contradicts with the study that was conducted by Lalwani (2020), whereby Lalwani (2020) is of the view that the performance of employees has to do with the achievement of the key result areas as set in the job description.

Staff are often tasked to attend to other urgent work-related matters as well as new cabinet priorities which takes their attention away from planned goals. This information was highlighted by two participants. *It is not achieving the organisational goals as set in the annual performance plans of the department. There is always a new priority which disturbs the employees from performing what they are employed for and planned for (Respondent 7). In my department it is a matter of cabinet priorities which end up destroying everything that was planned (Respondent 8).*

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the results are aligned to the research objectives.

6.1. Objective 1: To Determine the Perceptions of Public Servants with Respect to the PMDS in the Kwazulu-Natal Office of the Premier

The majority of respondents reflected on unfairness in the process; issues of racism, lack of knowledge of the moderating committees, dropping of scores, favouritism and lack of transparency in the process. Section 195(1) of RSA Constitution establishes a number of guidelines that could clarify the delivery of public services. At large, services ought to be provided impartially, sensibly, decently, and without preference, that meet people's needs. Society as a whole should be encouraged to participate in policymaking, that transparency be fostered by providing the community with beneficial, accessible, and accurate data, and that public institutions be held accountable for their actions (RSA, 1996).

6.2. Objective 2: To Ascertain the PMDS Challenges in the Kwazulu-Natal Office of the Premier

Respondents' difficulties need to be addressed in order to enhance the PMDS in the department. Ashdown (2014) confirms that performance reviews fill two primary needs, specifically: development and counselling, as well as, discussion of decisions that are administrative, for instance, compensation increments and advancements. Empirically, participants expressed doubts and dissatisfaction with the PMDS implementation. The study revealed despite a PMDS policy, hurdles were evident in its implementation.

7. Future Work

Recommendations include enhancing knowledge to line managers to efficiently implement PMDS in their departments; the usage of the PMDS policy and tool to effectively reward staff; improving the PMDS process in order to grow and encourage workers; focus on future research should determine regular change of leadership which in turn leads to job descriptions and workplans changing based on the new leadership needs and its effect on PMDS. Additionally, a comparative study should also be undertaken in the private and public sector in order to ascertain whether challenges in the PMDS are similar.

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