

# The New Performance Management System in the Civil Service of Uganda: A Decade of the Unpopular System!

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## Abstract

*In the year 2002, the Government of Uganda instituted a new system of performance management (PM) as part of the public service reform programmes. The system encouraged participatory approaches; results oriented management; and systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation of performance. It replaced the old system that was 'closed' in nature as it never provided for dialogue in its execution. The new system has been in operation since 2002. While it is widely implemented in both the central and local government civil services of Uganda, its popularity has remained questionable. Even though some civil servants implement it fully, the majority violate its canons. Focusing on a ten-year period (2010 – 2019) and using data from 13 entities, I collected data through document review and analysed them both quantitatively and qualitatively. Using that data, I argue that most civil servants in Uganda have been reluctant to embrace the new PM system primarily because, to them, it is cumbersome; its significance is obscure; and it is simply an obligatory burden. This thinking has made the system unpopular. The most disliked areas of practice in the PM system in the civil service are: monitoring of performance on the side of managers and performance evaluation on the side of subordinates. I recommend that the managers in the civil service create increased awareness among staff to ensure that PM system is well managed, adds value to the civil service and avoids becoming a mere ritual to be fulfilled.*

Key words: **Performance management; performance management system; civil service; Uganda**

## Introduction

There is a plethora of literature explaining the significance of performance management (PM) in organisation success. PM is crucial both in service delivery and individual motivation (Armstrong, 2016; DeCenzo, Robbins & Verhulst, 2013; Faisal, 2015) and organisations need performing employees in order to realise their objectives and achieve competitive advantage. Performance is also important for an individual because accomplishing assigned tasks and performing at an acceptable level can be a source of satisfaction. On the other hand, low performance and not realising the goals can transform into a personal failure (Ojeleye, 2017). Hence, PM is fundamental in the running of an organisation more so the civil service.

The key argument in this article is that the centrality of PM system is not fully internalised and appreciated by the bulk of civil servants and this has culminated into an ambivalent response towards the system thus negatively impacting its goals. The system is apparently disliked by individuals, although it is still being implemented as a civil service requirement. And, as Pollitt and Bouckaert (as cited in Oguta, 2015) argue, the objective of PM systems is to make the governments and its civil servants accountable for their work outcomes. This objective may be achieved inter alia when the PM system is cherished and well implemented

by the civil servants.

In this article, I discuss the new PM system introduced in 2002 that replaced the old one which had been implemented for decades earlier in the civil service of Uganda. I explain how the new system is facing challenges of negative staff attitude, poor monitoring and evaluation by managers. Using the document review method, I explore the weaknesses in the new system that have made it unpopular among the civil servants. I conclude that there was limited interest in the system caused by low staff involvement in performance planning, monitoring, and irregular evaluations. Essentially, the low interest and involvement has meant unpopularity of the system. I recommend increased sensitisation and support for staff in order to implement the system effectively.

## **Performance management systems in the civil service of Uganda**

### *The old system*

Before the year 2002, the civil service of Uganda had an archaic PM system whose major visible component was the annual performance appraisal form, usually kept in an annual confidential report folder. Every end of the calendar year or performance period, staff would complete the performance appraisal forms and hand the forms over to their immediate supervisors who would do a closed appraisal. Thereafter, the forms would be forwarded to the head of department and later to the chief executive officer for endorsement. They would then be kept away on a personal folder in the security registry. Essentially, as the Ministry of Public Service (2004) reveals, appraisal was a one-way event and did not promote dialogue between appraiser and appraisee. In addition, the system lacked standard measures and indicators of performance. Unlike in the new system, the information on the appraisal form was rarely analysed and did not provide for immediate feedback.

### *The new system*

In 2002, the public service of Uganda launched a new PM system as part of the public service reform programme. The new system *inter alia* aimed at enhancing the performance and accountability of government ministries, departments, agencies and local authorities. The system was introduced to improve the old staff performance appraisal scheme (Emolu, 2019). It aimed at increasing employee motivation, identifying employee potentials and improving employee levels of performance. In practice, the system is open, objective and has a direct link with promotions, career planning, and reward (PSRP a cited in Ojok 2010), which are essentially motivational programmes. In addition, the civil service entities set individual targets to be achieved in a given performance period and there are indicators for measuring performance using agreed targets (Ojok, 2010). Moreover, the system provides for further monitoring and reviews of performance and allows mediation in case of disagreement and dialogue between the appraiser and appraisee.

## The performance management challenge

Although staff performance is a key requirement in the civil service of Uganda, the new PM system has apparently been unpopular among most civil servants in both central and local governments in the last one decade. While a few civil servants consider new PM system as essential (Kunya 2014), the majority perceive it to be a routine and an unavoidable burden. For instance, in Busia District Local Government (DLG), Wafula (2014) found that, there was lack of ownership of the performance management system by line managers; employees were not motivated by the system and actually treated it as a compliance process rather than a partnership to improve performance. Besides, Asiimwe (2016) established that in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), many employees were filling forms retrospectively which in any case did not serve the purpose of performance appraisal. Other researchers found that, at national level, public sector performance agreements were quite often reluctantly signed by the officers who considered them a bother (Kyohairwe & Bigabwenkya, 2017). One would have expected the civil servants to wholeheartedly embrace the new PM system because of its strategic importance, but this appears not to be the case. Yet, as confirmed by scholars, improvements in PM initiatives increase performance of an organisation, teams and individuals (Armstrong, 2016; Cole, 2002; Kunya, 2014) and such improvements create the groundwork for excellence in performance by linking individual employee objectives with the organisation's mission and strategic plans (Oguta, 2015). These benefits notwithstanding, the civil servants have continued to have reservations about the implementation of the new PM system in its orthodox form. Therefore, this article seeks to answer two major questions:

- a) Why are most civil servants in Uganda reluctant to embrace the new PM system in spite of its articulated benefits?
- b) What are the specific areas of the new PM system, in the civil service of Uganda, that staff find detestable?

## The goal setting theory

The goal setting theory was propounded by Edwin Locke in 1962 and later refined in 1990 by Locke and Latham. The assertion under this theory is that giving workers clear and specific goals or standards to attain generates high levels of performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). Performance of staff entirely depends on the objectives which serve to provide direction to the effort of staff with the aim of undertaking the activities considered pertinent in the achievement of those goals (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2009). Therefore, goals influence motivation and performance (Locke & Latham, 1990; Mullins 2007). By implication, "when employees set goals, they feel as if their contributions are important in the organisation, and are thus more likely to strive to meet those goals" (Knoop as cited in Asiimwe, 2016, p. 19). However, as Locke and Latham (1990) further explain, for goals to be motivating employees to perform, they have to meet four important criteria: i) *Clarity*: be stated in very specific terms with concrete targets against which a person can measure and evaluate how well he is doing; ii) *Challenge*: be set at levels sufficiently difficult (but realistic) to be challenging to the individual; iii) *Commitment*: be internalised and agreed upon if they are to be effective; and iv) *Feedback*: should include feedback.

The goal setting theory was deemed suitable to guide this study in answering the two major questions posed under the PM challenge subsection. The theory presupposes that setting performance goals enhances staff performance in an organisation. For example, when civil servants know that high performance levels are expected of them, they will tend to perform highly. It also teaches the managers in charge of the PM system in the civil service that: First, subordinates can be helped to set goals that are specific and reasonably difficult. Second, setting goals facilitates the identification of objective measures of subordinates' performance that serves as indicators of performance. Third, goal acceptance can be stimulated through involving subordinates in goal-setting processes, and giving feedback on the levels of goal attainment. However, goal setting may result into a rigid framework, if the goals are not provided with some reasonable flexibility. This rigidity can frustrate goal attainment when conditions change with no goal adjustment.

## **Perspectives from literature**

### *Performance management*

Performance is a sum total of both behaviours and results. Behaviours originate from the employee and transform performance from abstraction to action. Behaviours are also outcomes in their own right and can be evaluated apart from results (Brumbach, 1988). Staff performance refers to how a person is executing key responsibilities and tasks relative to the standards set for those responsibilities and tasks (Sabbag, 2009). Actually, performance is the emblem of organisations and the contribution of staff defines the organisation's effectiveness (Lavelle, 2015). Meanwhile, performance management refers to, "a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning performance with the strategic goals of the organisation" (Aguinis, 2013, p. 2). It also involves giving support to employees to help them identify and overcome performance barriers, giving feedback on performance against objectives and encouragement of superior performance.

PM system aims at increasing the effectiveness of organisations by improving the performance of people who work in them and by developing their capabilities as individuals and within teams (Armstrong, 2016; Price, 2004). The purpose of PM in an organisation is to inspire each employee to perform optimally in his/her position by ensuring that each employee understands his/her role in the PM system (Asiimwe, 2016). Hence, the performance of an employee contributes to the quantity and quality of output. Then, understanding the individual outputs is actualised through performance reviews and evaluations.

### *Components of the performance management system*

PM system entails several activities within which the employee agrees with the supervisor on the expected performance of tasks, evaluation standards, required tools, important dates when performance will be formally discussed and development actions to improve performance (Asiimwe, 2016). In fact, performance management system follows a cycle (Armstrong, 2016). The cycle or system embodies: performance planning; implementing the planned performance; monitoring performance throughout the year; and reviewing performance.

Performance planning or formulating performance agreements is about getting individual employees in the planning process to help them understand the goals of an organisation. It involves the supervisor and subordinate reviewing the subordinate's job duties and responsibilities and determining the key expectations and standards such as results, goals and objectives to be reached during an upcoming performance period (Armstrong, 2016; Armstrong & Baron, 2010). Performance planning is the foundation upon which all aspects of performance are built and hence, how it is conducted can greatly affect all other performance activities such as monitoring and evaluation. As well, involvement of all key actors right at the planning stage can help to ensure effective performance outcomes (Oguta, 2015). Hence, refining the planning phase is vital in the success of the subsequent PM activities such as implementation.

Performance implementation can go hand in hand with monitoring performance that is about PM throughout the year. Implementation means acting on the planned performance activities (Armstrong, 2016). As Wafula (2014) observes, implementing performance provides an excellent opportunity to for supervisors and subordinates to identify development needs. Besides, areas for improving good performance stand out and action can be taken to help employees improve further through performance monitoring and guidance processes.

On the other hand, performance monitoring is a deliberate process of giving feedback on performance through guiding informal progress reviews and where obligatory dealing with performance difficulties to achieve organisational targets (Armstrong, 2016). Monitoring involves observing the work operations, reading the written reports, scrutinising performance data, inspecting the quality of samples of the work, holding progress review meetings with an individual, and providing feedback (Williams, 2002). During monitoring, a supervisor is able to steer progress and make reviews with workers where their performance is linked to employee output, key performance indicators and standards. Then, monitoring provides the opportunity to check how well employees are meeting pre-determined objectives, standards and to make changes to unrealistic objectives and standards (Dean & Kiu as cited in Oguta, 2015; Wafula, 2014). The frequency with which a manager monitors staff performance may help shape a subordinate's beliefs about the relative importance of his or her various work activities (Larson & Callahan, 1990). In effect, staff performance monitoring is one of the critical functions of human resource management and it helps in the effective management of individuals and teams in order to realize the stated organisational performance goals.

The last stage in the system is the review or appraisal of performance which covers joint analysis of performance (Armstrong 2016). Performance review or evaluation is a systematic process for determining the extent to which results have been achieved and analyse the reasons for any discrepancy. It also covers assessment of an employee's performance on achievement against given criteria (Oguta, 2015; Weihrich & Koontz, 2005). It involves dialogues and feedback, performance assessment, agreeing on employee strengths and correcting any weaknesses. Performance reviews enable supervisors and individuals to take an evaluation of how performance can improve in the future and how any problem in the meeting of performance standards and achieving objectives can be resolved (Wafula, 2014). And, as Williamson (as cited in Munduru, 2013) states, the overall purposes of performance review are to: assess progress made towards achievement of goals; assess performance on continuous

basis in order to provide feedback; take necessary action; discuss challenges; and make plans for performance improvement

## **The Methods**

Document review was used to collect data for this article. The source documents were 13 unpublished master's degree dissertations with primary data on PM systems and practices in the civil service of Uganda (2010 – 2019). The data in the dissertations had been collected by practitioners who at that time were also students of a master's degree course in management at Uganda Management Institute (UMI), Kampala. As at 30 April 2020, the 13 different dissertations were the accessible sources at National Documentation Centre that sufficiently addressed PM in the civil service as a primary variable.

Furthermore, the documents selected focused on central government ministries and district local governments (DLGs) excluding semi-autonomous bodies of government. The criterion for selection of a dissertations was relevance to PM in the traditional civil service of Uganda. The 13 entities analysed by this article were: Lira DLG; Bushenyi DLG; Yumbe DLG; Abim DLG; Kasese DLG; Ministry of Education and Sports; Busia DLG; Office of Prime Minister (OPM); Soroti DLG; Ministry of Local Government (MOLG); Ministry of Public Service (MPS); Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; and Apac DLG. The dissertations concerning these entities were reviewed and only those key issues relating to PM system were extracted. Data were analysed mainly qualitatively and to a minor extent quantitatively. First, the information from dissertations was categorised and reduced. After that, they were re-categorised and patterns observed. The findings were interpreted and documented into this article.

Ethical considerations were seriously observed in this study. The data used were from the already publicly available documents namely the 13 dissertations submitted in a credible institution (UMI). A lot of care was taken to avoid misrepresentation and falsification of the data. The ideas obtained from dissertations and even other literature were treated with due diligence and all sources were duly acknowledged. The citations and messages were kept in their right context.

## **Findings on performance management system in the government entities**

The findings are from eight district local governments (DLGs) and five central government ministries in Uganda. The results are presented in line with the PM system and as already discussed in literature review, categorised as i) performance planning; ii) implementing, monitoring and guiding performance; and iii) performance evaluation.

### **Performance planning in the civil service of Uganda**

There were clear performance objectives set for six out of the 13 government entities studied for the period 2010 - 2019. For example, in 2014 up to 21 of the 33 staff in Busia DLG had their work goals done on time; and 27 out of 33 staff said their work objectives were always

clear and specific (Wafula, 2014). In Apac DLG, in 2015, Oguta (2015) found that majority of the schools had clear performance objectives. These two examples suggest that there was performance planning taking place in some government entities.

The performance goals were also known by individual staff in some entities. For instance, at the Ministry of Public Service, it was revealed that performance goals are known and they are the basis of performance planning (Kunya, 2014). Kunya further reported that the results oriented management (ROM) system had created impact on the way people plan and implement their work activities. And, there was a shift from focusing on activities to results although this was not properly cascaded to the lowest level in the civil service. Even then, the civil servants at the grass roots level appreciated the value of ROM. This example of the MPS indicates implementation of PM system in the service.

Similarly, the importance of performance planning was appreciated in some government entities. For instance, in 2016 it was reported, “performance planning had made employees realise the connection that their individual job outputs have with the activities of others within their teams or other departments in the OPM” (Asiimwe, 2016, p. 41). This extract affirms that staff in some entities practised PM system and understood its importance.

However, there were unclear staff performance standards in five out of 13 entities analysed. Staff simply went about their work with no clear expected standards of output. For example, in 2012 in the Ministry of Education and Sports, only 47 per cent of 105 staff studied had performance targets set by their supervisors (Nakatudde, 2012). Besides, in Bushenyi DLG, 19 per cent of the 135 staff analysed did not understand the level of performance standards expected of them (Tumwebaze, 2015). Such findings reveal the absence of standards and therefore failure to measure up to the performance levels expected of such entities.

Furthermore, there were entities where staff had limited interest in the PM system and its objectives. Even, some civil servants exhibited limited care about PM system. As Wafula (2014, p. 63) reports, in Busia DLG there was, “lack of ownership of the performance management system by line managers and employees. The net effect was that employees were not motivated by PM system and treated as a compliance report”. This apathy was a sign that some civil servants were psychologically disengaged from the PM system.

In some institutions there was low involvement of staff in the performance planning processes. Most of the staff in such entities just implemented what their supervisors had planned for them without their input. As the case of Bushenyi DLG reveals, eight per cent of the 135 staff did not participate in setting goals and performance expectations (Tumwebaze, 2015). In 2016, only 32 per cent of 114 staff at the OPM were involved in setting their individual performance objectives (Asiimwe, 2016). Similarly, in Soroti DLG in 2019, up to 17 per cent of 118 staff did not set performance targets with their supervisors (Emolu, 2019). These figures suggest that a portion of staff were not involved in performance planning that is supposed to embrace everyone.

It was also established that disagreements and misunderstandings in objective setting processes were a common feature in the civil service. For instance, at Soroti DLG in 2019, up to 21 per cent of 118 staff did not have an agreed position with their supervisors on how

well they should do their job; and 27 per cent did not agree with their supervisors on how their performance is measured (Emolu, 2019). Similarly, in the Ministry of Local Government (MOLG) up to 40 per cent of 127 staff did not understand the objectives of their jobs for the performance year 2014/2015 (Kizito, 2016). All these scenarios under planning are indicative of a low uptake of the PM system in its orthodox form that calls for joint planning, implementation and evaluation.

### **Implementing, monitoring and guiding performance throughout the year**

In civil service of Uganda, monitoring of performance took place in some entities albeit at an average scale. For instance, in 2012 in the Ministry of Education and Sports, 50 per cent of 105 staff had their performance monitored frequently (Nakatudde, 2012). In the MOLG, 71 per cent of 127 staff did not have their supervisors regularly monitoring their performance against set objectives; and 72 per cent did not have their supervisors conducting quarterly reviews of their performance Kizito (2016). These two cases reveal a fairly positive response to performance monitoring in those entities but also suggest that a lot of improvement is needed to strengthen the system.

In general, monitoring and guiding of performance has been irregular in both the local and central governments. Limited effort is made to follow up on how individual staff are performing. For instance, in 2015 in Apac DLG, monitoring of performance was irregular and none at all in some cases (Oguta, 2015). And, in 2019, regarding Soroti DLG, continuous feedback was significantly ignored during the implementation phase [and] reports were at times not collected from departments to compare performance against key performance indicators (Emolu, 2019, p. 72). These findings reveal a disregard for the monitoring and guidance component of PM.

In some cases, even when monitoring and guiding performance was done, not all staff in an entity were covered. Being reached depended on the individual supervisor's ingenuity and expediency as opposed to a systemic approach to monitoring performance. For instance, in 2015, up to 33 per cent of 135 civil servants in Bushenyi DLG, were not monitored in their performance (Tumwebaze, 2015). Similarly, in 2014, training of managers and employees in PM system to entrench performance monitoring in the culture of Busia DLG never occurred (Wafula (2014, p. 63). These two district cases further illustrate the low attention paid to performance monitoring processes in some entities. It is possible that such lack of monitoring complicated performance evaluation activities in the later stages of the PM cycle.

### **Performance evaluation in the civil service**

Apparently, performance evaluation is unpopular though widely practised in the civil service of Uganda. It was treated like an inevitable demand that had been imposed inconsistently by the civil service. Only a few entities demonstrated interest in it while the vast majority exhibited discomfort about it but compliance was for all civil servants. For example, in 2016 a study conducted in the OPM indicated that sometimes performance appraisal is more of a ritual to be performed at a certain time of the year. So, employees are given appraisal forms which they

fill casually...What is written in those forms is never followed up” (Asiimwe, 2016, p. 47). This example suggests that, performance evaluation is sometimes simply a procedural activity, some staff dislike it and given a chance, most staff would avoid it.

Further, there was limited understanding of the performance evaluation exercise and even its purpose in the civil service. Some staff were doubtful on what needed to be done in the evaluation exercise. For instance, in Lira DLG in 2010, it was noted that the level of understanding of the appraisal system by the respondents was moderate (Ojok, 2010, p. 57). According to Ojok (2010), the staff lacked theoretical and conceptual knowledge in identifying key outputs, setting performance targets, developing indicators, conducting performance appraisal interviews, giving/receiving feedback and drawing performance improvement plans. Probably, to them, the new PM system was a highly technical process to be undertaken.

The inconsistent practice in the occurrence of performance evaluation exercise in the public sector was equally prevalent. Different entities handled the evaluation exercise at different times of the year, depending on the clout and vigilance of the head of human resource department. For instance, in Soroti DLG, only 36 per cent of supervisors conducted progress reviews of subordinates’ performance (Emolu, 2019). All these data suggest that at times performance evaluation was haphazardly done and did not encompass all staff in predictable manner.

Limited Feedback on staff performance was widespread. While performance appraisals would happen, some subordinates received very little or no feedback. For instance, in Bushenyi DLG, 47 per cent of 135 civil servants were not getting feedback on their performance after their appraisals (Tumwebaze, 2015). Equally, in the MOLG in 2016, a total of 72 per cent of staff, did not receive feedback on how they were performing in relation to their set objectives (Kizito, 2016). These cases reveal defiance in the new PM system in the civil service. By implication, with limited feedback, staff could not know where and what to improve in their work.

Basically, the findings from the foregoing analysis reveal that; firstly, although in some cases performance planning was done, the goals are known and the system was appreciated, in most entities planning was neglected, staff had limited interest and staff involvement was low. Secondly, while performance monitoring was averagely done, where it took place, for the majority of entities, monitoring was irregular and haphazard. Thirdly, performance evaluation was widely disliked and inconsistent. In general, there were some flaws in the PM system which meant that PM system was not implemented as well as expected. Table 1 below, summarises some PM issues in the 13 entities.

**Table 1: Issues in performance management system in government entities (2010-19)**

Entity	Key issue in the performance management system	Source & sample size
Lira DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff had moderate knowledge in PM</li> <li>• PM conducted in a way that flouted the public service standards</li> </ul>	Ojok (2010) N = 162
Kasese DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of skills to carry out staff PM activities</li> <li>• Performance plans were rarely achieved</li> </ul>	Murongo (2011) N = 143
Yumbe DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training was disconnected from the performance system</li> <li>• Staff were reluctant to participate in PM processes</li> </ul>	Asiki (2011) N = 179
Abim DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotions not were based on performance</li> <li>• Performance was being considered as a ritual</li> </ul>	Olwit (2012) N = 75
Ministry of Education & Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 47% staff had performance targets</li> <li>• Only 50% of managers monitored staff performance</li> <li>• Only 29% managers appraised staff based on results</li> </ul>	Nakatudde (2012) S = 105
Ministry of Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal dev plans were not developed with supervisors</li> <li>• Supervisors rarely held meetings to do with performance</li> </ul>	Munduru (2013) N = 111
Ministry of Public Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 27% of staff were happy with performance agreement schemes</li> <li>• Up to 33% of staff did not receive feedback about performance</li> <li>• Only 58% of staff clearly knew what was expected of them</li> </ul>	Kunya (2014) N = 75
Busia DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 50% of supervisors did not give feedback about performance</li> <li>• Up to 40% of staff not involved in setting performance objectives</li> </ul>	Wafula (2014) N = 33
Bushenyi DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 19% of staff didn't know performance level expected of them</li> <li>• Up to 15% staff, their performance appraisal was not measured</li> <li>• Up to 47% of staff were not getting feedback on performance</li> </ul>	Tumwebaze (2015) N = 135
Apac DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irregular or no monitoring of staff performance (e.g. in schools)</li> <li>• Performance plans were rarely achieved</li> </ul>	Oguta (2015) N = 91
Office of the Prime Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 68% of staff not involved in setting performance objectives</li> <li>• Up to 31% did not find their objectives to be relevant to their jobs.</li> </ul>	Asiimwe (2016) N = 114
Ministry of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 72% of staff did not receive feedback on performance</li> <li>• Up to 71% of staff did not receive monitoring of their performance</li> <li>• Up to 40% of staff did not understand the objectives of their jobs</li> </ul>	Kizito (2016) N = 127
Soroti DLG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 17% of staff did not set performance targets with supervisors</li> <li>• Up to 32% of staff had no personal dev. plan made with supervisors</li> <li>• Up to 25% of supervisors did not provide feedback to subordinates</li> </ul>	Emolu (2019) N = 118

Key: DLG = District Local Government N = Population UCI = Uganda Cancer Institute

Source: Author's own construct

As data in Table 1 shows, there are signs of limited success in PM system in the civil service of Uganda. Actually, these data typify the unpopularity of the system. Below, I discuss further these challenges, their causes and implications.

### **Discussion of results: The popular and unpopular areas of the PM system**

The importance of performance planning was appreciated in most government entities analysed. As already indicated, performance planning made employees realise the connection that their individual job outputs have with the activities of others within their entities. Similarly, Armstrong (2016) advocates for a joint exploration of what individuals are expected to do and how they are expected to behave to meet the requirements of their roles and develop their skills for performance.

Signs of system unpopularity were evidenced among civil servants having a low opinion of the PM system due to ambiguous work objectives together with unclear staff performance standards. Yet, clarity is one of the criteria for goals under the goal setting theory. Actually, for goals to be achieved they should be stated explicitly with concrete targets against which a person can measure and evaluate how well he is doing (Locke & Latham, 1990). In the civil service of Uganda, this criterion is not fulfilled: the goals are vague. The equivocal goals have disoriented some staff who have found the PM system unappealing.

Low involvement of staff in the performance planning processes curtailed the adoption of a PM system in the civil service of Uganda and caused limited interest and understanding of the system by staff. Hence, some staff were detached from the goals. And, as Locke and Latham (1990) argued, goals need to be internalised and agreed upon and individuals need to feel some personal investment and ownership of the goals, if goals are to be effective. So, by not involving subordinate staff fully in the performance planning processes led such staff to detest the goals and the entire PM system.

Further, there were low levels of emphasis on implementing, monitoring and guiding performance throughout the year causing the civil servants to dislike of the system. Monitoring and guiding performance was majorly patchy and even not widespread. This way of doing things equally made the system unpopular. Actually, as Armstrong (2016) advises, implementing and monitoring performance are some of the key activities in the PM system that should not be avoided. And, according to Dean and Kiu (as cited in Oguta, 2015, p. 31), continuous monitoring provides the opportunity to check how well employees are meeting pre-determined standards and to make changes to unrealistic or problematic standards. By implication, when staff are monitored they tend to keep focused in their activities but when they are not, their focus and interest wanes.

As already indicated, performance evaluation was largely unpopular in most entities. It was considered a procedure to be fulfilled during a given season and most staff detested it. Staff were reluctant to embrace it fully because its significance was blurred. Sometimes, the exercise was highly casual during the distribution of evaluation forms and its importance diminished due to continued postponement of the evaluation meetings by both the supervisors and subordinates. In the process, the evaluation exercise became cumbersome as pending

evaluations piled up. This staff procrastination spiralled into reluctance to embrace the entire PM system in the civil service.

Other civil servants disliked the system because they found it to be mentally taxing and cumbersome since they did not know how performance is evaluated. The limited understanding created a psychological block that led to staff shunning the system. As they kept struggling with the technicalities of setting objectives that are SMART (simple, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound); separating the indicators from activities and outputs among others, their frustrations increased. And, as Murongo (2011) asserts, lack of skills required for a job that could affect staff performance because individuals simply do not know what to do. When staff are less informed about a system and how it is operationalised then it becomes difficult to appreciate it.

In some entities, staff reluctance to embrace the PM system was due to limited feedback on performance. In some instances, staff did not receive feedback from their supervisors after performance reviews. Some staff did not know how well they were performing in relation to their set objectives and therefore the benefits of feedback were lost. Specifically, feedback is critical because as Locke and Latham (2006) hold, employees can use the appraisal feedback information to set goals to improve performance. Hence, by skipping to give feedback to staff, managers were disenfranchising them and such a lapse in the system affected its overall popularity.

## Conclusions

Even when it is known that civil servants are involved in the PM system, one cannot guarantee that they are on course until one has analysed how well they are handling it. The limited staff interest in the performance planning exhibited by some staff points to the unpopularity of the PM system whose framers had productive intentions but whose implementers kept losing step after step. Moreover, the limited involvement of the subordinates in the performance planning undermines the goals of the whole PM system. Hence, when performance planning is not well handled and appreciated by staff and may become unpopular and detested.

Managers in both the central and local governments have had different levels of emphasis on implementing, monitoring, guiding and evaluating performance throughout the year. While some managers took interest in performance monitoring and guidance, more than half of them lost touch with subordinates during the implementation phase. And, while some managers and subordinates had limited understanding of the performance evaluation technicalities, others blatantly kept postponing the exercise until it was inevitable. In addition, others did not give continuous feedback leading to staff discontent. Hence, overlooking monitoring and evaluation of performance plus giving no feedback can lead to low levels of acceptance of a PM system in an organisation.

Although the new PM system is about 18 years old since its inception in 2002, to date it is still riddled with problems. Civil servants find it cumbersome because of the rigours expected of them during planning, monitoring and evaluation of performance. Considering the period 2010 - 2019 of system implementation, one still finds certain basics like systematic

monitoring and performance guidance, missing. Basically, the PM system in the civil service of Uganda has been erratically implemented, leading to staff aversion and diminishing its strategic importance.

## Recommendations

The exclusion of subordinates as was the case in Soroti, Busia, Ministry of Finance among others, detached staff from the system and contributed to its unpopularity. Staff needed to participate in the system right from the performance planning through the monitoring and evaluation stages, to performance improvement stages. And, as Mobley (2009) explains, participatory approaches lead to great successes through involving stakeholders in setting goals for organisations' work. To this end, civil service entities need to enhance staff inclusion in the relevant activities to ensure that the PM system becomes a culture, adds value to the civil service and individual employees and avoids becoming a mere compliance activity. The managers in the civil service should ensure that their subordinates are fully involved in the PM system activities.

Staff competences in PM were low in Lira, Kasese and many other DLGs, indicating a need for supporting civil servants to improve their competences in PM. Effective performance support could encompass helping staff find better ways to reach organisation goals, focusing on enhancing employees' abilities and moving them systematically towards goal attainment. In the civil service, support can also be through training, motivation, monitoring and continuous enforcement of PM systems. Such support might reduce staff reluctance to engage in the PM activities.

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