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Managerial Challenges during the Implementation of Performance Contracting in Public Primary Schools in Nandi–North Sub–County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The need to realize improvements in the delivery of public services through results-based approach took the form of performance contracting as an initiative by the Kenyan Government. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) introduced performance contracting to the public schools as a monitoring and supervisory tool. The study explored the managerial challenges facing headteachers in the implementation of performance contracting in public primary schools in Nandi North Sub-County, Kenya. The study adopted an exploratory design and sampled 123 respondents through stratified sampling. The results showed that headteachers are facing challenges ranging from long technical processes and procedures, insufficient training, lack of qualified staff and resistance to change. The study concluded that these managerial concerns have impeded the implementation process and recommends the following measures; the headteachers seek collaboration from the various stakeholders in the education sector and provide leadership during the process.

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Introduction

The proponents of the new public management (NPM) have advocated for the prioritization of the measurement of output and outcomes based on new policies and managerial activities in order to inform policy implementation (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). The NPM is not only about new strategic orientations and objectives of public sector organizations but also about changes of their internal structures and processes and the accompanying by some kind of performance management and measurement system (Diefenbach, 2009). Noteworthy, the approach by the NPM has seen the introduction of performance contracting which encompasses the setting of performance expectations with accompanying goals and objectives (Jiang & Seidmann, 2014).

The performance contracting initiatives have been adopted in several contexts because it contains an array of performance metrics coupled with the in-built mechanism for the attainment of the operational success while allowing organizations to implements activities and processes that utilize the resources efficiently (Mbua & Sarisar, 2014). For instance, the Performance contracting among public sector institutions in Kenya has received accolades for achieving effectiveness and improvements in the performance of public enterprises as well as government departments (Nderi, 2013). In particular, the performance contracting processes in the public universities in Kenya has been realigned the planning, training and development of manpower, research and innovation and are geared towards the attainment of the organizational goals and by extent support larger national goals (Nganyi, Shigogodi & Owano, 2014). Kipkenei, Ndiku, & Cherui(2016) observed that performance contracting has been introduced to teacher training colleges have instituted accountability and enhance service delivery, while Mose(2017) observed that performance contracting was introduced in TVET institutions with the efforts being directed towards accountability and service delivery.

The extant literature suggests that the use of performance contracting information for target-setting, accountability and incentives have two-pronged outcomes. Either the positive effects of increasing result orientation as well as the negative effects of gaming and sup-optimization behaviour (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015). In a study done in Kenyan Public sector, Korir, Rotich & Bengat(2015) observed that the implementation of the performance contracting initiatives is facing headwinds which include lack of uniformity in approach by the different government ministries, departments and agencies, inconsistencies in the application of the performance contracts. This is exemplified by the fact that the heads of the government ministries, departments and agencies sign the contracts which are then cascaded down to the grassroots level for implementation.

Other challenges include resistance to the contracting initiatives by some Government institutions in Kenya. There is also a lack of universality acceptability in the implementation process (Mbua & Sarisar, 2014). Further, the employees in the public sector have not been sufficiently trained on the procedures of the contracting, this is in addition to the increased workload at the implementation stage (Ssengooba, McPake & Palmer, 2012). In a study on a government department, Waithaka and Ngugi(2012) observed that organizational commitment to seeing through the implementation of the performance contracting was lacking leading to abject outcomes of the process. In other instances, the increased workload for the implementers in extracting data for the impact evaluation over-shadows the focus of the audit team contract (Ssengooba etal.,

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Awino & Saoli(2014) studied the performance contracting initiatives at the Nairobi City County and found that the managerial perception tends to strongly influence the implementation process by interfering with the levels of employee engagement and work environment. Kurui(2010) studied a university in Kenya and indicated that employer support for the performance contracting initiatives was lacking. These studies highlight the fact that performance contracting initiatives in Kenya is faces significant challenges.

Problem Statement

The efforts by the government of Kenya in implementing performance contracting was uniquely done in improving the quality of service delivered by the public institutions (Mbua & Sarisar, 2014), but the existing literature on performance contracting initiatives in the developing countries is relatively silent on the mechanisms of effect underlying the successful case studies. It demonstrates the possibility of achieving the desired outcomes through performance-based contracting but does not establish what features of design and context were supportive of those outcomes; or what were the effects of the process (Ssengooba, McPake & Palmer, 2012). For instance, the TSC reports of improved services provisions without detailing how the targets were achieved by these interventions.

Sophie (2006) observed that the implementation of the performance contracting in Kenya is hindered by governmental pressure to undertake performance contracting, ambiguity in targets set by the MDAs, low managerial autonomy, multiplicity and conflicting goals and low levels of institutionalism, non-competitive incentive systems and non-independent evaluation systems among others. The need to realize improvements in service delivery through resultsbased approach instead of process-based approaches has affected headteachers' performance because of the inherent organizational factors that tend to hinder the implementation efforts. Whereas the TSC has instituted performance contracting as a mechanism for improving service delivery in schools, most headteachers are facing challenges that are related to the nature of the performance contracting efforts (Mutea, 2007). The introduction of performance contracting has, therefore, come with immense challenges which this study sought to explore in order to make it effective and hence serve the purpose in which it was started.

Methodology

The choice of the design was largely informed by the need to develop a rich narrative on the mentioned problem on the managerial challenges facing implementation in public primary schools. Therefore, the study adopted an explorative research design because the researcher sought to understand the problem bedevilling the implementation of the performance contracting phenomena without the imposition of preconceived notions, constructs and concepts. The study was exploratory in that it was conducted in a natural setting and sought to collect qualitative data on the managerial challenges facing the respondents in implementing the performance contracting in public schools.

The study area consisted of six educational zones in Nandi North Sub-County in Nandi County, Kenya which has a total of 202 public primary schools. The target population for the study consisted of 202 head teachers, 202 deputy headteachers of all primary schools in Nandi North Subcounty and one TSC Sub-County. The study used 30% criteria to arrive at a sample size of 122 respondents. As

suggested by Cooper and Schindler (2006) the range from 10%-30% is considered sufficient enough to be a representative sample depending on the target population. Further, 30 % was used because it gave enough sample size from which the study derived the findings. The study used a stratified sampling technique to select the study participants. First, the study classified the population into six 6 strata based on the number of zones in the sub-county. Thereafter, a simple random sampling method was applied in the selection of the respondents in each educational zones.

Two research instruments which included questionnaire and interviews were mainly used to collect the primary data. The questionnaire was preferred because the researcher was able to obtain responses from a large cohort within a short period. Further, this form of the instrument allowed for statistical analysis to be carried describing the phenomena of interest. Interviews were carried out on key informants because it gave liberty to the researcher to ask specific questions depending on the theme and further allowed additional questions that explore research questions and objectives given the nature of events within that particular context.

The study obtained content validity was obtained by the specification of the domain of a concept through a literature search and the adequate representations of the constructs through the construction of indicator items (Depoy & Gitlin, 2011). Further, the researcher used an expert in the Faculty of Education in consultation with the university supervisors in the construction of the questionnaire items and the interview schedule based on the operational variables, thereafter their inputs were incorporated in the refined instruments in the final data collection.

The data that was generated from the interview schedules was qualitative in nature in the form of interview transcriptions and thematic analysis. Summarization, categorization and structuring were mainly used to analyses the qualitative data. Once the data has been transcribed, summarized, categorized and structured, qualitative data were analysed using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Saunders *et al.*, 2007)

The data generated from the questionnaire was sorted and organized before being coded and entered into statistical software (SPSS) for analysis. The nominal and ordinal scaled data were analysed by the use of frequency table proportion (percentages) mode or frequency distribution. Once the descriptive analysis had been done, the information was presented through various ways such as bar charts, pie charts and frequency distribution.

Results

The study collected data from 102 respondent headteachers and this figure represented 82.93 per cent response rate and these respondents were split into 73 headteachers (71.6%) and 29 deputy headteachers (28.4%). This distribution was considered to be sufficient for the preceding analysis.

Managerial Challenges facing performance contracting

The study sought to understand the view of the headteachers on the concerns relating to the performance contracting process. The views of the headteachers were collated and the distribution in Figure 1.1 highlights the managerial challenges faced by the headteachers in the implementation of performance contracting in the schools. As indicated by the distribution, 31.8% of the respondents enumerated the long technical processes and procedures

involved, 26.1% attributed it to insufficient training, 20.9% listed lack of qualified staff while 15.6% saw resistance to change as a real impediment to performance contracting.



Figure 1.1. Challenges facing performance contracting Source: Researcher's Data(2018)

Further, when the respondents were asked to detail how the challenges listed above affected the implementation of performance contracting, the headteachers listed several ways which included; underperformance which is as a result of the untrained staff, unfavourable work targets and condition brought by the implementation of performance contracting, failure of the staff and the school management to achieve the goals set in the performance contract and ambiguity in the performance contracts hinders or inhibits personal work targets. One of the respondents asserted that

"most headteachers don't understand the implementation of the performance contract, in particular, the procedures followed when filling and submitting data"

While another one said that

"so much time is wasted on filing as opposed to actual teaching".

The results show that the respondents are facing several managerial challenges which include work targets, and work conditions which inhibit the implementation process. Importantly the performance appraisal processes and guidelines are drafted by the Teacher's Service Commission (TSC) but the performance targets are set as per the guidelines. The contracting process is relatively new and requires combined efforts from the actors and thus the teachers are constrained by both managerial factors such as resistance to change, training, and commitment from the school boards of management to procedural factors such as technical procedures.

In another context, Adcroft and Willis (2005) noted that the use of performance contracting in the public sector is fraught with a series of technical and managerial issues that may render the assessment systems to be unfit for the purpose. Secondly, importation of the management practices from the private to the public sector possesses a significant challenge because of the organizational objectives. Further, as per the TSC, all the teachers have been qualified and registered by them and therefore they can be said to have the crucial training in teaching, however, according to the Mbua Sarisar, (2014), significant challenges implementation processes is the managerial challenges faced by the implementors. Most have not been trained on the implementation process and sometimes organizations lack qualified and competent individual to implement the performance contracting (Ochoti et al., 2012). Lack of training for the lower cadre staff on performance contracting initiatives (Korir, Rotich & Bengat, 2015)

Secondly, the headteachers have been given additional workload from the performance contracting procedures. The normal workload for the headteachers ranges from teacher supervisions, student management, managerial responsibilities to the education officials and TSC and other responsibilities. The performance contracting process can be considered to be a form of teacher supervision by the TSC in that it is used as a reporting mechanism from which the TSC can obtain information on curricular and co-curricular activities undertaken by each teacher. Whereas the contracting processes seek to take the overall load of teacher supervision from the headteachers by reducing their levels bureaucracy, it increases the same by introducing monitoring costs through the introduction of the performance parameters through the use of ICT. Work overload is common on the part of the evaluators and implementers (Korir, Rotich & Bengat, 2015). Communication and especially feedback to the service areas were cited as difficult because they did not know how they had fared in meeting their targets(Nyaga, 2013).

Leadership was critical to the success of the implementation of performance contracting (Wambua, 2011). Excellent leaders steer the implementation process by building working teams and crafting a clear vision and strategies on how to achieve the set targets. It was established that the top management paid little attention to performance contracting and reactive leadership obstructs the implementation process.

This is in tandem with Van Thiel and Leeuw(2002) who indicated that the proliferation of regulators and auditors increased the monitoring costs for the organization and state, created dysfunctional effects such as ossification, tunnel vision, and sub0optimization all of which lead to symbolic behaviour. In this manner performance contracting, performance contracting bring to the fore the various aspects of an organization such as the performance measurement and review, change management and many other critical managerial processes (Obong'o, 2009). Therefore, if at any moment, the institutions lack managerial talent and leadership, the implementation process will face a significant challenge in achieving the objectives set in the performance contract.

Employer's Expectations/Perceptions on performance contracting process

The instrument required that the respondents indicate their perception concerning the expectation of the employer, TSC towards the performance contracting process and the distribution in Figure 1.2 show that more than half (50.7%) felt that TSC employed performance contracting in order to

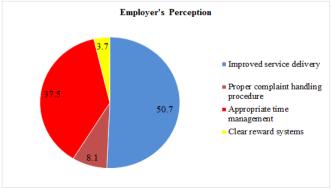


Figure 1.2 Employer's perceptions of performance contracting.

Source: Researcher's Data(2018)

improve service delivery, 37.5% avowed that performance contracting was used for managing time for learning with a further 8.1% viewing PC as a tool for handling complaints.

When the respondents were asked how the performance contacting in important, one respondent that;

"Performance contracting is a crucial tool for improving performance. If the headteachers utilize it properly and follow the laid down procedures, the performance of the school can be significantly improved"

While the TSC official was interviewed, he said that "the main goal of the performance contracting is to enhance performance in the public sector, especially in public school. This is achieved through proper utilization of resources especially human capital. Most teachers were reported to be either absent from schools or not attending to lessons and through performance contracting, absenteeism has been reduced and so is lesson attendance. This has further aided the headteachers in effectively manage and supervise their school."

As elicited from these responses, performance contracting is geared towards the improvements in the delivery of public sector services as opposed to the time management or criteria for rewards systems. Several authors including Mbua & Sarisar, (2014) indicate that performance contracting aims at attaining operational effectiveness, while Cheche & Muathe(2014) alluded to the fact that performance contracting is part of the ongoing public sector reforms which are geared towards the efficiency in the provision of goods and services to the public.

Further, the performance contracting process also aids in the determination of the criteria on the performance measurement and thus the respondents view it as a tool for rewarding the performance and thus it is an effective performance management tool more than being an administrative tool. It is also seen as an approach to instil efficiency on the resource utilization while Petrie, (2012) observed that performance contracting increases focus on the focus on results through efficiency, effectiveness and quality of service.

Headteachers' perceptions on performance contracting process

The instrument sought to understand the headteachers' perception towards the performance contracting process and the distribution in Figure 1.3 indicates that 43.8% of the headteachers felt that performance contracting was too demanding, 41.1% felt that the demands were unreasonable with a smaller percentage of 15.1% feel that the demands were reasonable.

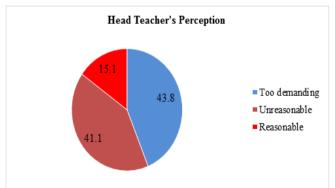


Figure 1.3 Headteachers' perceptions of performance contracting.

Source: Research Data (2018)

As highlighted, most of the headteachers perceived that process to be demanding and thus put undue pressure into the headteachers and teachers alike. Several studies including Simpson (2013) have shown that the general perception that performance contracting targets are not challenging enough, but many at times, the implementation process poses a significant challenge concerning performance targets. However, performance contracting in many public sector institutions can be improved if the targets are sensible enough not to overload the staff and give them too much ease in accomplishing targets (Simpson, 2013).

Further, respondents adduce to the fact that they play their role in facilitating the implementation process for the government agency involved, that is the TSC. Implicitly is the fact, they are not owners of the overall process and thus are just the cogs in the wheel of the performance contracting process. As long as the public officials feel that the process is to be done as a matter of duty and responsibility, the task then lacks the critical human attachment to it and thus lack of ownership is critical in achieving desired successful outcomes. Based on this observation, Okoth-Yogo & Charagu, (2014) noted that the biggest challenge in the implementation process is the lack of ownership of the whole process such that the junior public officials are part of the implementors who are disconnected from their managers and supervisors who do not provide leadership and ownership of the whole process.

Influence of Institutional factors

The instrument sought to understand how headteachers' perception towards the influence of the institutional factors and the distribution in Figure 1.4 shows that more than three fourth (76.5%) affirmed that institutional factors such as culture and structure impacted on performance contracting.

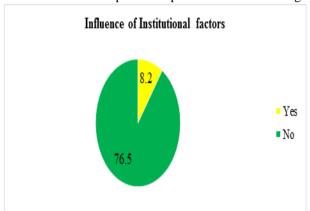


Figure 1.4 Influence of Institutional factors.

Source: Researcher's Data (2018)

Studies have shown that institutional factors have a big impact on the introduction of initiatives which tend to alter the status quo of the organizational members. For instance, culture has been identified as major components which reverse the initiatives which have been when the members are not comfortable with such initiatives. Performance contracting is introducing changes which affect the status quo by target setting, new monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and many other change management initiatives geared towards work productivity. As noted by the respondents there has to be a cultural shift among the public officers for any meaningful gains to be realized from the installed performance management system (Korir, Rotich & Bengat, 2015). Though, the institutionalization of a performance-

oriented culture, the public sector organizations will be able to embrace the culture of hard work, proactive culture, integrity and accountability in the use of resources. Further, a culture which develops a culture of trust and rewards is important in determining performance contracting in the organization (Petrie, 2012).

Discussion

The managerial perception relating to procedures used in the implementation of the performance contracting process is strongly influenced by the level of employee engagement, work environment and managerial commitment to the process (Awino & Saoli, 2014). First, leadership is a critical aspect in the championing the implementation of performance contracting in that effective leadership ensures the success of the implementation process (Mbua & Sarisar, 2014). The impact of the leadership is felt through the co-ordinational capacity of the departments and its ensuing influence on the organizational staff members(Simiyu, 2015). Leadership is also associated with planning and the analysis of annual work plans, that are adequately supported by budgetary allocation and managerial responsibility for performances (Obong'o, 2009). Employee transfers significantly affect and frustrate the development of learning, institutionalization and growth of the performance contracting initiatives (Korir, Rotich & Bengat, 2015)

Secondly, the organizational culture is an important determinant of success in any change management processes. On one end, the culture influences employee attitudes and behaviours while providing a platform for discussion on organizational issues and concerns. On the other, employees and corporate culture in public sector organizations have a negative connotation that it has a whole range of negative psycho-sociological and organizational effects that may increase occupational stress, illness, lower employee morale, reduce job satisfaction and motivation, alienate employees, distort intellectual capabilities, introduce competitive, adversarial and punitive ethos, a rougher working climate, an invisible net of managerial power and domination (Diefenbach, 2009). In those instances where culture is retrogressive, staff are more likely to adopt behaviours that may delay or weaken, all of which contaminates the relation between reported and actual performance(Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002).

Thirdly, Diefenbach (2009) noted that in practice, any adopted performance management systems would simply add to an increase in workload and psychological pressures, thus, the majority of employees would suffer because of greater workload and stress, declining motivation and work satisfaction, tighter regimes of management, advice, measurement, control, and supervision.

Lastly, corporate standards and models of management drawn from the private sector and an applied in the public sector(Nazarko & Šaparauskas, 2014) is sometimes bound to introduce excessive fixation with performance measurement when the implementing agents focus their attention on monitoring efforts as opposed to facilitation. This situation would reduce the relevance of all the whole activity to just the appearance of it(Van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002).

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the study makes the following recommendations: First, the headteachers should strive to embrace and ensure full implementation of the performance contracting process by engaging all the stakeholders from the management of the schools, the

administration, the parents, teachers, the ministry and TSC. By enabling this process, they stand to benefit from improvement in the administrative and supervisory processes with the resultant improvements in the performance outcomes. Second, the TSC as an employer should improve the administrative, leadership and managerial capacities of the headteachers to enable them to perform their administrative and supervisory duties and responsibilities and ensure the success of the implementation process. This can be achieved through training, workshops and seminars or any capacity building initiatives which are interactive – oriented.

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