

Original Research Article

Nurturing a Culture of Results for the effective implementation of Results Based Management (RBM) in the Zimbabwe Public Service

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Abstract

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Economic, social and political environmental factors have compelled governments and other public organizations to transform themselves in order to facilitate improved responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders. Such pressure led to the implementation of wide-ranging reform programmes, including the New Public Management (NPM) system, over the past three decades. Results Based Management (RBM), adopted by the Zimbabwe Public Service in 2005, is a part of this system which is aimed at improving service delivery and accountability. This research is motivated by the apparent limited impact of the implementation of the RBM strategy in Zimbabwe, sought to highlight the relevance of a culture of results in supporting effective implementation. The qualitative study used the interviews and document review methods for gathering data which were subsequently analysed for content. Analysis of the data showed the absence of a culture of results in the Zimbabwe Public Service which contributed to inadequate implementation of the RBM strategy. Recommendations are provided for improving the culture to enable it to effectively support the implementation of RBM.

Keywords: Culture, implementation, management culture, public service, results, public service.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, governments and other public organisations have undertaken reforms in response to economic, social and political environmental factors. Such factors include globalization, escalating competition, budget deficits, and lack of public confidence in government, growing demands for improved services as well as increased accountability (Mayne, 2008). One of such initiative was the adoption of Results Based Management (RBM) by the Zimbabwe Public Service in 2005. The strategy is part of the New Public Management (NPM) system, which refers to a management culture, which emerged in the 1980s, and emphasizes strategic planning, accountability for results and centrality of the citizen or customer (Osborne and Plastrik, 1998).

According to the United Nations Development Group,

UNDG (2011:10) RBM is:

“A management strategy by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, and ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and higher level goals or impact). A result can be defined as a measurable change in state that is derived from a cause and effect relationship. The actors within the RBM system, in turn, use the information and evidence on actual results to inform decision-making on the design, resourcing and delivery of programmes and activities as well as for accountability and reporting.”

Planning and performance measurement are the main functions in the implementation of RBM (UNESCO,

Implementation (Results Based M and E)

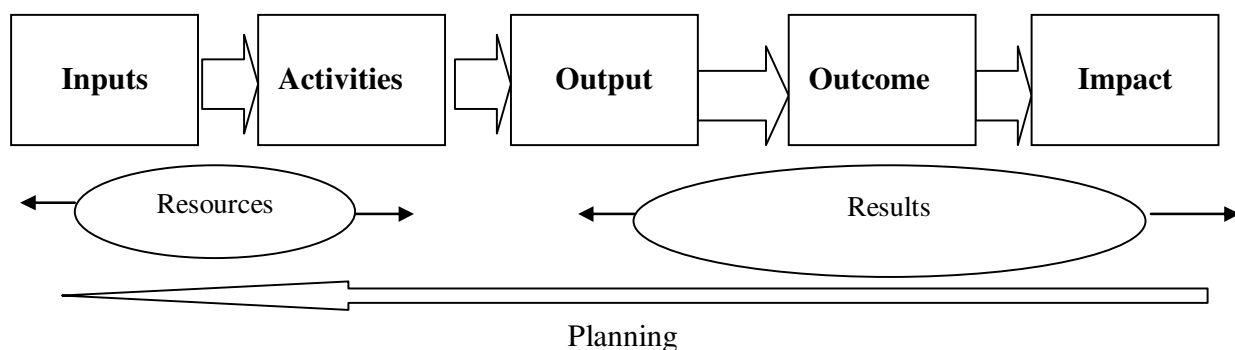


Figure 1. RBM Results chain
Source: UNDP (2009:55)

2008). In the same context, the elements in the programming process namely inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts and their logical links are portrayed in a results chain shown in Figure 1 above. Inputs are the resources used in a programme to achieve the objectives of the organisation while activities are the actions taken to produce outputs, which are the products, goods and services which result from a programme (UNDP, 2009). Outcomes and impacts are the achieved short to medium term and long term effects, respectively, of the programme (Ibid). Monitoring and evaluation, the main element of performance measurement, forms an integral part of the implementation of RBM (Farrell, 2009)

Organizational Culture and RBM

RBM represents a significant shift from the traditional course of public organisations, which focused primarily on implementation concerns, to the improved performance results (outcomes and impacts) that meet the needs of customers (Binnendijk, 2001). The same author maintains that the implementation concerns course requires public managers to be familiar with and apply the appropriate laws, regulations and procedures, while the performance results one requires managers to diagnose problems, design solutions and develop adaptive implementation approaches. Also, the introduction of an RBM strategy entails changes such as the introduction of new mechanisms for accountability for results for both managers and staff while imminent client focus calls for the active participation of a wide range of key stakeholders (Binnendijk, 2001). Other necessary changes include the delegation of appropriate levels of authority and accountability for results assigned as well as the empowerment of managers to adjust the allocation of resources within units (Bester, 2012).

A pre-requisite for the effective implementation of RBM is transformation of the organizational culture (values, attitudes and behaviours of members) to a culture of results that focuses on managing for the achievement of results (outcomes and impact) (Binnendijk, 2001; Meier, 2003). Kim (2002: 3) defines an organizational culture as a notion that "...conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and, often, unspoken guidelines on how to get along in an organization. It is reflected by what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the procedures, routines, and the definition of success that make an organization unique. Regarding a culture of results Mayne (2007) asserts that an organisation that has such a culture is characterised by demand for results information, a results oriented accountability system, capacity to learn and adapt, supportive organizational systems including incentives, procedures, and practices, as well as clear roles and responsibilities for RBM. The information on results is used to challenge and support activities, record best practices and is also applied in structured learning (Mayne, 2008). Mayne goes on to argue that strong senior management leadership and commitment to results, appropriate Organizational structures, and systems (including incentives), as well as a focus on learning, are essential elements for promoting a culture of results. Leadership and commitment entail the demonstration by senior management, of behaviour that strongly supports RBM, such as allocation of adequate resources, regular demand for results, as well as active participation in the development of results frameworks. This paper started with the assumption that prevailing organizational culture in the Zimbabwe Public Service may not have been supporting adequately the effective implementation of RBM. An earlier study, by the researchers, on of factors impacting on the implementation of RBM in the Zimbabwe Public Service concluded that the lack of capacity was the most

significant factor. The study, which comprised semi-structured in-depth interviews of 32 Public Service managers and document review strategies for gathering data, also identified culture as one of the factors that impacted on the implementation process. That study could not deal with the culture factor in great depth. The current research is therefore an essential follow-up aiming to place more emphasis on in-depth consideration of culture in the implementation of RBM in the Zimbabwe Public Service.

Mayne, (2008) found that reviews of RBM systems in bi- and multilateral donor organizations concluded that, although RBM systems for planning measuring, evaluating, and reporting on results had been introduced, they were rarely used due to the absence of the necessary culture. Consequent to this, management regarded the systems as a distraction from performing their core functions. A 2008 review of evaluations conducted on organisations in the United Nations (UN) system, for example, concluded that there had been no significant shift to an outcomes focus in the organisations, because the introduction of RBM, as management and staff continued to concentrate on tracking inputs, activities and outputs with compliance-driven rather than a results-driven culture (Office of Internal Oversight Services, 2008: 2). The reviews were conducted in Non-Governmental Organisations using the document review strategy which may not have captured all the issues regarding the culture of results within these organisations. The researchers were of the contention that there existed a gap of knowledge relating to the issue of culture in the Public Service and according to the perspective of individual managers. This research was an attempt to contribute towards closing this gap.

Purpose of the research

The research sought to describe identify the nature of the culture that prevailed in the Zimbabwe Public Service while it was implementing the RBM strategy and determine the extent to which such a culture supported the implementation process. It also aimed at sought to recommending strategies to improve the nature of the culture to facilitate enhanced implementation of the RBM strategy.

Research Questions

The following research questions were considered crucial:

1. How far did the prevailing culture support the implementation of RBM?
2. Which strategies were used to inculcate a culture of results?

3. How can the culture of results be improved and sustained?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature and employed the document review as well as in-depth interviews design. The documents reviewed included an earlier study conducted by the researchers to identify factors that affected impacted on the implementation of RBM in the Zimbabwe Public Service as well as reports, journals, magazines and newspapers. The interviews were conducted on 32 Public Service Managers, responsible for the implementation of RBM, who were selected using the purposive sampling method based on their willingness to participate in the study. The managers were selected from a group of 990 who, according to key informants, were perceived to be knowledgeable about RBM because they had participated in the training workshops at the introduction of the strategy in the country. The presentation and discussion of the findings is enriched by including inserting the responses and comments made by the respondents. The responses are italicized and punctuated by an identification code number in parenthesis. Additional interviews of 3 managers, focussing on the issue of culture, were conducted to obtain additional data. The data were analysed for content and grouped into categories and subsequently, themes based on research concerns and the theoretical framework. The triangulation method was used for data validation.

Limitations of the study

The usual limitations inherent in research methods, particularly the need to de-limit the area of research as well as the use of a sample entails the exclusion of some elements whose inclusion may have led to different findings. Also, the sample of managers may not necessarily reflect the views of all the managers. As with all research works, the generalization of findings is made with caution (Yin, 2003) bearing in mind that the methodology is qualitative. Regarding the interview strategy, the dependence on the willingness of the interviewee to provide quality data may have had an effect on the findings. These is debilitating challenges can be mitigated through further research taking over from where this study ends.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data showed that a culture of results did not exist in the Zimbabwe Public Service as most characteristics of such a culture, identified in literature,

were evidently missing. Also, RBM was poorly implemented leading to compromised effectiveness of the strategy.

There was lack of feedback on performance where reports were not submitted by the organizational units and sections. Therefore, so much so that the managers could not assess the quality of their performance. Also, the units did not seek such information from the coordinating ministry. *There is no feedback to the ministries on the quality of the RBM reports submitted. So the Ministries don't know whether what they submitted is good enough (P1). There is nothing that comes back (P18). No feedback. (P24).*

This finding gives an indication of the existence of a weak culture of results because according to literature, a culture of results exists where an organization places importance on experiential evidence on the results (outputs and outcomes) that it seeks to achieve (Mayne, 2008). The author goes on to suggest that members of the organisation deliberately seek information on performance to learn how to improve performance in the implementation of programmes and such information is ordinarily supplied. Bester (2012) adds that the lack of feedback on reports is a major disincentive to the implementation of RBM and also to building a culture of results.

Performance measurement

The majority of managers have a tendency of focusing on the completion of tasks (outputs) in performance measurement rather than outcomes and impact as per the underlying principle of RBM. *...the major thing in RBM is your output. When you submit reports you are actually focusing on output completion (P1). So we look mainly at the outputs because outputs are the tangible things for which we give them the money to produce. And we can pinpoint that we gave you money to do 1,2 3 - where is that output? (P16). Yet, if you look at the appraisal system, it's supposed to appraise me on the basis of how much I have used the budget (P28).* This finding is supported by literature. Experience of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that problems in transforming traditional systems, which focus on inputs and outputs, to results based systems are common in both developed and developing countries (Downey, 1998).

A culture of results exists where there is regular demand and supply for results information so that the functions of planning, budgeting and reporting became results-based with managers' focus going beyond planned outputs to foster a culture of inquiry about progress towards targeted results achieved through the delivery of such outputs (Mayne, 2008). That is, RBM compels individuals and units to consciously plan for

results, monitor and evaluate progress towards the targeted results, make the necessary adjustments to facilitate improvement in performance (Ibid). It can be argued that the traditional administrative culture in the public sector which emphasizes the management and measurement of inputs, activities and outputs (Meier, 2003) still prevailed in the Zimbabwe Public Service while at the same time implementing the RBM strategy.

The civil servants often abhor the demand for evidence on performance which is one of the pre-requisites for building and sustaining a culture of results. This shows clear absence of the culture. *The RBM performance report has become an irritating paper which I am supposed to fill, because it is being assessed whether to give you a performance rating of 4 or 5. If you get a 5 you are called at the Commission, to find out how they got a 5. If you get a 2, you are called at the Commission why you got a 2. And people to avoid going to the Commission, all they do is they just give average of 4 so that everyone is happy. Usually people are given a rating of 3.5-3.8 so it rounds up to a 4 (P2).* Mayne, (2008) posits that a culture of results and learning are not supported when performance measurement is regarded as a measure to scrutinise staff performance. Staffs needs to be willing and able to provide evaluative evidence if a culture of results is to be developed and sustained.

In the same context, there was reluctance by civil servants to adopt the RBM strategy, a shortcoming which contributed to the perpetuation of the traditional culture. *The main challenge in implementing the RBM strategy is the reluctance by the civil servants to adopt change or depart from the norm (P15). So I am saying there are still some people who still want to be associated with the activity based programming rather than RBM...(P9). Ethos, values and the mindset should change (P7).* Such views are symptomatic of a culture that does not support the effective implementation of RBM. According to literature, organisations need to develop and implement sound change management initiatives to transform the existing culture into a learning organisation that uses performance information for management decision-making (Meier, 2003). Also, fostering a new culture entails the establishment of a set of desired values and behaviours as well as making the necessary effort to institutionalize these values and behaviours while precluding those determined to be undesirable (Ibid). It can be argued that the lack of such change initiatives inhibited the development of a culture of results in the Zimbabwe Public Service.

Absence of leadership and commitment

There was also a clear absence of leadership, commitment and support qualities normally the bedrock

for fostering a culture of results. *The directors, the technical directors don't take RBM seriously. So I think that it needs full uptake by all the leadership to be fully behind it. I think that is the reason it's not fully accepted (P28). RBM should start from the top but now the problem is at the higher level. If the people at the top will appreciate it and then that way it can work. This thing is just being given to the lower levels to start doing the things (P14). To me, RBM is like an overall of the performance appraisal system, overall. If it's overall, the leadership should be there. It's very necessary but it's not there (P23).*

Similarly, the information on performance was not used by management in the decision-making processes. Also, resources provided for implementing RBM were inadequate or nil. *But the other problem is even if I say I have failed, I want to do this Key Result Area but I don't have any money, I am not given the money. So what is the point of wasting my time to fill in the form? RBM also requires resources and we are lacking (P2). But at the moment if you have got plans, it has to be supported by resources. But one challenge that we are facing is inadequate resources even if there is a plan in place, the resources are quite a challenge. (P9).* There was also a lack of balance in the levels of responsibility and accountability. *It doesn't make sense to me to pretend that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing because you cannot hold me accountable when I am not fully responsible for the resources also. I am not fully responsible for the resources (P28).* This finding points to an anomaly in the implementation of RBM as well as fostering a culture of results because the learning and using of performance for decision-making are key objectives of the strategy (Mayne, 2008). Bester, (2012) suggests that results information should be used as a basis for performance appraisals with learning reported on, and evidence of its achievement rewarded, whether or not targets are realised. The writer goes on to note that leadership, commitment, and support are regarded as some of the most important characteristics of an organizational culture of results. Such elements need to be demonstrated through active participation in the implementation process. The same author contends that this includes the effective use of performance information for decision-making and consistent emphasis on the benefits of using the system, while providing support, maintaining communication on RBM, balancing levels of responsibility and accountability, as well providing adequate resources. Bass, (1985) argues that transformational leadership, which portrays clear understanding and commitment to the vision, providing a role model, valuing motivation and endeavouring to change existing culture, is vital for the implementation of RBM. It can be argued that senior management leadership was inadequate for building and supporting a culture of results in the organisation.

Alignment of Organizational structures and systems to RBM

Organizational systems and structures in the Zimbabwe Public Service were not supportive in the implementation of RBM as well as the development of a culture of results. *But also on the whole area of reward, right, how do you make RBM a living tissue in the career prospects of the assessed, right? You assess me first year, I respond with enthusiasm because I expect that the grade I score, has a bearing, a direct bearing on my prospects as a civil servant, right? That doesn't happen first year, you do it for the second year, again the motions repeated since still to no prospects. The poor ones are not punished, the good performers are not promoted, the middle performers are not threatened. So, it's an assessment process that leads to nowhere. (P32). RBM is not practical to our environment because people have not been rewarded accordingly (P5). The structural requirements of RBM are not available in the country.....It's to do with the structure (P28).*

In the same context, some managers were of the opinion that RBM was not integrated into the Organizational processes. *It's a standalone. Why can't we integrate it into the whole system? (P23). Let's integrate our systems, right? If I want money, I must know that my RBM must be right. If I want promotion, I must make sure that my RBM is right (P32).* This finding points to a situation which is at tangent with fostering the necessary culture for the effective implementation of RBM. According to literature, where a culture of results exists, RBM systems are closely linked to all other initiatives in the organisation rather than to appear as a standalone agenda (Mayne, 2008). Such systems include training, technical assistance, guidelines and management information systems (Binnendijk, 2001). To facilitate the building of a culture of results, RBM systems need to be supplemented by supportive organizational systems, practices, procedures, incentives as well as accountability systems which are consistent with the culture of results to be nurtured (Mayne, 2008). The author believes that roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders need to be clearly defined and communicated while appropriate incentives for individuals and units are provided. It can be argued that the structural features and systems of the organisation did not adequately support the implementation of RBM as well as the nurturing of a culture of results.

According to the managers interviewed, the absence of change factors likely to encourage the managers to embrace the new system and change their culture contributes significantly to the absence of a culture of results hence bringing least impact on the RBM strategy. *According to change management principles, there should be certain things that act as reminders every day. Those things are not there. If there is no training, there is no reminder, if you are not filling in the forms, there is no*

reminder. So there must be change favours that you move with. The way you do your work every day, they have never been attached for people to internalize RBM. We should have something that keeps engaging your mind until the mindset changes. Such a message is not coming (P23). There is need to include RBM in all processes of the organisation to help inculcate a culture of results (Cherrington, 1995). The limited communication on RBM issues may have had a negative impact on the building of a culture of results in the organisation.

Quality of implementation of RBM

RBM was poorly implemented leading to reduced effectiveness of the strategy. *Its deficiency is based on practice because we are implementing it in a very wrong way. That answers why RBM is not functioning (P28). You then wonder, we have invested so many resources, but how come things are not moving (P5). I am aware there are concerted efforts to make RBM work but that's not very visible or very encouraging. Those that I have talked to simply say it doesn't work (P29). RBM doesn't seem to be working (P29).* The transformation of the Organizational culture (values, attitudes and behaviours) of members is a pre-requisite for the effective implementation of RBM (Binnendijk, 2001). Mayne (2008) affirms by confirming that a culture of results is vital for enabling the organisation to exploit the value of RBM systems. It can, therefore, be argued that the absence of some pre-requisites for the effective implementation of RBM, including a culture of results, contributed to the lack of impact of the RBM strategy.

CONCLUSION

There was a weak culture of results in the Zimbabwe Public Service which negatively impacted on the building of an effective RBM system and thus reduced the effectiveness of the strategy. The main characteristics of such a culture as well as measures to foster it were missing as there were gaps and disincentives that inhibited the development of a culture of results. The shortcomings included the absence of effective leadership and support, an appropriate balance in the levels of responsibility, authority and accountability, as well as Organizational structures and systems supportive of a culture of results. The analysis of data and literature also showed that a culture of results is essential to enable the organisation to benefit from the implementation of RBM while the consistent use of results information for learning and informing decision-making was a pre-requisite for nurturing such a culture. That is, building capacity, performance measurement, and reporting systems, without a culture of results, will

always be inadequate for the effective implementation of RBM.

Implications

There was, therefore, need to identify and implement strategies for purposefully developing and sustaining a culture of results in the Zimbabwe Public Service. Such strategies can include the following:

- Demonstrating senior management commitment and support
- Placing more emphasis on continuously seeking evidence on performance rather than on adherence to systems and procedures
- Consistently spelling out the benefits of RBM as well as providing training to key stakeholders
- Identifying and supporting RBM champions at various levels in the organisation,
- Integrating RBM issues into all processes of the organisation
- Providing appropriate incentives (both formal and informal) for individuals and units
- Introducing and sustaining learning initiatives that include promoting structures for information and knowledge sharing, encouraging management and staff to identify and communicate good practices on the job, creating time for learning as well as effectively supporting the learning processes
- Providing clear and effective guidance on RBM (Mayne, 2008)
- Identifying and removing disincentives that inhibit the implementation of RBM as well as the building a culture of results (Bester, 2012)
- Balancing levels of accountability with responsibility and authority (Bester, 2012)

Building a culture of results, including fully institutionalizing the RBM strategy, is often difficult and time consuming but necessary to create an environment in which RBM can be effectively implemented (Meier, 2003). Implementing the process gradually with the relevant incentives for RBM provided can prove to be effective in addressing the difficulties (Ibid; Bester, 2012). The ability to transform cultures and long-term focus are key aspects of transformational leadership Bass (1985). Therefore, transformational leadership can help to nurture a culture of results in the Zimbabwe Public Service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the limitations of this research mentioned in section 5 of this research, similar studies in other units and including more groups of stakeholders within the Zimbabwe Public Service are recommended. Also, since RBM is a relatively new concept, there is need for more

research on factors that impact on its implementation.

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