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Challenges of Implementing Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) in the Public Sector in Tanzania

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Abstract:

In Tanzania today there is an ongoing debate on how the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) should be implemented. The Open Performance Review and Appraisal System is an open, formal, and systematic procedure designed to assist both employers and employees in planning, managing, evaluating and realizing performance improvement. Implementing Open Performance Review and Appraisal System helps institutions and Human Resource Management in decision making related to promotions, and access to training. Reports show that not all the public agencies in Tanzania implement Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in the way expected and therefore their objectives have not been met. The Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in Tanzania aimed to improve the performance of the public sector in the delivery of its services effectively but did not succeed in the way expected. This study analyzes whether Open Performance Review and Appraisal System had solved the intended problems (inefficiency and poor performance) in Tanzania since its inception in 2004 or it had created problems? And Analysis of Steps/Procedures/Process used in the Implementation of Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. With the use of several literature sources of accessible data in various reports, the author has analyzed the problem and made recommendations in the last section of this manuscript for effective Open Performance Review and Appraisal System.

Keywords: Challenges, Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS), Public Sector, Tanzania

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Tanzania, the Public Sector Reform Programme (PSRP), when it was first introduced, aimed at improving the public sector service delivery through the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. It was introduced in 2004 to replace a former confidential performance appraisal. It stated that the introduction Open Performance Review and Appraisal System aimed at improving the quality of public services in Tanzania through setting individual goals, measuring the achievement of the goals and providing feedback by making up “an integrated system for building a shared vision, agreement about the results to be achieved, and the approach, deployment, assessment and review of activities for continuous improvement in standards of service delivery”. Its principle was an employee sets targets in consultation with the supervisor. After six months, the achievements are evaluated and after 12 months the achievements of the past year are evaluated.

The process to improve the provision of services in public sector took place in many developing countries for the past two decades, for example since the introduction Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in Tanzania in 2004. The reports indicated that Open Performance Review and Appraisal System was Adhoc restructuring although its major objective was effectiveness and efficiency in public (Minongue, 2001). According to Faizal (2005), the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System was introduced and adopted in the form of reforms but has created more problems due to number of challenges in improving services with fewer resources and so on.

Apart from the above audible range, Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in Tanzania was implemented at national level and later on at regional and local levels. It has been established in the public sector for 13years to date hence the intention of the study is to analyze whether or not Open Performance Review and Appraisal System has solved the intended problems in Tanzania since its inception in 2004 or created problems. Another task is to analyze the processes and procedures used to implement the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. This analysis is done through a review on the past studies as follows.

1.1 Whether Open Performance Review and Appraisal System has solved the intended problems (inefficiency and poor performance) in Tanzania since its implementation in 2004 or has it created more problems?

Findings by Mwanaamani (2013) show that there is uncertainty among the public servants regarding OPRAS due to the changes that had occurred as the result of the introduction of OPRAS. This uncertainty causes the public servants to be reluctant to apply the system as it was explained by the head of the department of administration and personnel in Arusha District Council, Tanzania. Mwanaamani (2013) in his study reported: “I think this system is a way towards well-structured goals and will enable effective attainment of organizational objectives,

but for now the way things are it does not seem to be succeeding it is just a big confusion”. In addition, the review has observed the statement of an official who is the head of finance and trade department (City Treasurer) at Arusha City Council Tanzania when asked about his opinion with regards to Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. He had the following response: “I think it’s a good way to increase competence but practically the system is not what was supposed to be neither; what was intended for. And this causes confusion and it is disappointing and a bit ambiguous to whether it is worth the time and money wasted in implementing it.”

Mwanaamani (2013) asserts that the Annual Assessment Report of 2010 for Arusha City Council confirms the reluctance of the management cadre, as it indicates that up until February 2010 (time of assessment) none of the heads of departments had filled the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System forms, and by that it marked the state of Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in Arusha City Council as “not improved” (URT, 2010). Mwanaamani (2013) further explained that Open Performance Review and Appraisal System activities were unplanned and tend to be more demanding and time-consuming to the extent that employees do not have time to work on the actual plan in which they will be evaluated from. Respondents in that study explained “The ad hoc activities tend to take up most of our time and at the end of the day we spend so much time executing activities that benefit politicians rather than activities that will attain organizational objectives which are more important I think. I say this with utmost concern because it is disturbing to know that with this kind of system of doing things Open Performance Review and Appraisal System will not work for us which means there is no point being committed to making it work”

Moreover the During Focus Group Discussions (FGD’s) as reported by Mwanaamani (2013) with the employees of the lower cadre at the Arusha City Council in Tanzania some of them seemed confused “We are told to create work plans and fill in the forms, but I don’t know why and what is the use of it. I have been filling those forms for 5 years now and I have never been promoted, demoted nor trained as I was told there should be feedbacks. I was told one thing, and what is happening is the opposite and who should I express my concern too and who is responsible I don’t know, it is really confusing and disappointing I thought things will be better with this new appraisal system”.

Poor setting of performance standards was the challenge identified in the study of Mwanaamani (2013) by more than 48 percent of the respondents who did not agree on the standards. Mwanaamani (2013) indicates the lack of assistance and employee participation while executing Open Performance Review and Appraisal System implementation has caused various challenges. Lushoto District council which is among the districts in Tanzania seems to fail in setting standards that lead to failure to reach the expected goals in implementing Open Performance Review and Appraisal System; as well as failure to communicate the purpose of the performance appraisal. According to Christensen et al (2007) and (Angela, 2008) sometimes solutions offered by reforms are often simple and when implemented to solve a complex organizational matter they tend to be inadequate to solve the intended problem. Furthermore, in some cases, they

create new problems. Christensen et al (2007) argue that employees and majority of employers were not included in structuring Open Performance Review and Appraisal System so neither employee no employer is aware how to implement the system. This implies that the system may be implemented differently. All these challenges, which have been pointed out by writers, minimize the characteristics and qualities of public service employees to be evaluated under the attributes of using Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. This implies Open Performance Review and Appraisal System has not solved the intended objectives in Tanzania since its implementation in 2004.

1.2 Analysis of Steps/Procedures/Process used in the Implementation of Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in Tanzania

According to Wigize (2013), who made a study at Kigoma Municipality in Tanzania, there are several methods used to conduct their performance appraisal but the following were the commonly applied methods, a) performance standards b) job expectations and c) measurement of performance. According to Gupta, (2008), the first step is the establishment of performance standards. The appraisal begins with the establishment of performance standards for appraising the performance of employees. This is specified with the help of job analysis, which reveals the contents of a job where the output can be measured, the criteria are clear. If work performance cannot be measured, the personal characteristics, which contribute to employee performance such as work quality, honesty and reliability, cooperation and teamwork, job knowledge, initiative, leadership, safety, consciousness, attendance, learning, ability, adaptability, judgments, sense of responsibility, healthy and physical condition, must be determined and indicated in Appraising form. Whereby in Open Performance Review and Appraisal System are not found.

According to Craig. et al, (1986), communication of job expectations is the second step. They state that in the performance appraisal process, the measures and standards are communicated to employees. Such communication should clarify expectations and so creating an employee feeling of involvement. Since there is existence in disagreement on the performance standards there cannot be a good feedback.

Measuring performance is again another step to follow during the performance appraisal. According to Gupta (2008), measuring performance requires choosing the right techniques of measurement, identifying the internal and external factors influencing performance and collecting information on results achieved. Personal observation, written reports, and face-to-face contacts are means of collecting data on performance. According to According Kwigize (2013), observing, recalling, for evaluating is the just personal judgment that involves bias, it implies that the objective set is not SMART (Specific, measurable, attainable and time bound). However, Ngirwa (2005) postulates that the nature of most of the public sector institutions in Tanzania does not allow the effective participation of the both employers and employees and other stakeholders in equal basis in planning, designing bargaining of what to be done and to what extent. This makes the public administrators themselves to set some unrealistic objectives

and performance that need to be achieved on behalf of employees. This makes the whole process invalid to measure employees' performance.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study reviewed various methods used by past researchers to study the Implementing Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in an attempt to solve the challenges that exist. The studies were qualitative and data was obtained through in-depth interview, focused group discussion, observation and documentary review. The analysis for the study is content analysis. Content analysis by Holst, (1969) entails open coding line by line examination and axial coding identification of emerging pattern of narrative data as delineated. Respondents were asked through in-depth interview, focused group discussion, observation and documentary review.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, it was found that there is a very low implementation of Open Performance Review and Appraisal System in LGA's due to some cultural, organizational and political factors and management errors. The findings have shown that the public servants lacked understanding on the purpose and processes of OPRAS, not only that but also performance measures were disregarded. The findings show a lack of commitment from the implementers and insufficient financial resources to facilitate the implementation of Open Performance Review and Appraisal System. Furthermore, the study identified power coldness and hesitation among employees and employers that prevent implementation in Tanzania. On these grounds, the conclusion is that there is a need to alter the adopted reforms to conform to Tanzanian organizational culture and its diversities.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The government needs to alter the adopted reforms to conform to Tanzanian culture in order to enable the public servants to identify with them. The government should define OPRAS with a clear knowledge of the purpose of existence and processes of implementation and use effective strategy to create clear direction. There should be daily and frequency of communication on Open Performance Review and Appraisal System implementation concept in order to enhance clear education, understanding, and purpose. For further research, this study recommends an examination into the mechanism to improve the distribution of fiscal resources towards the implementation of OPRAS as the area identified as the relating core challenges in public sector. The recommendation from this study is to conduct another study in other countries in order to analyze results with a different methodology.

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