PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT: AFRICA’S SEARCH FOR COMMON CAUSE ON EXCELLENCE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

by

M J Balogun
Principal Regional Adviser
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
e-mail: jbalogun@uneca.org

Abstract

Performance management is based on the premise that the clarification of corporate objectives and the institution of measures in pursuit of the objectives are all it takes to energize organizations and orient them towards incremental productivity, cost reduction and “customer” satisfaction. However, regardless of the attention given to performance management in formal bureaucratic and in latter-day matrix organization structures, diversity in the stakeholders’ world-view constitutes a major stumbling block to performance improvement. With particular reference to the African public service, whatever new performance management initiatives are contemplated should not only capitalize on the continent’s diversity but deflect the threats that this diversity poses to organizational momentum and to the attainment of the goals of good governance and development.

Introduction

The essence of performance management lies in its professed ability to focus the attention of organization members on a common objective and galvanize them towards the attainment of this objective. This presupposes that the internal and the external stakeholders, at the minimum, share a vision of the greater good that demands the energies and commitment of all. This romantic view of performance management needs to be critically examined against the background of the diversity prevailing in Africa. For a start, performance management is yet to be precisely defined and there is no consensus on an appropriate strategy for initiating and sustaining it. The lack of focus is further confounded by the high degree of heterogeneity prevailing in Africa – a factor that sometimes militates against the unity of purpose required to make performance management initiatives work in the public service.

In assessing the prospects for the successful inauguration of performance management initiatives in the African public service, this paper begins by raising major conceptual issues. It then goes on in the second section to identify areas in which performance management – howsoever defined – could prove most beneficial to the African public service. The third section recalls previous efforts at ‘turbo-charging’ the African public service, and wonders whether these efforts qualified as
“performance management” or succeeded in transforming the service into a powerful agent of development. The impact of Africa’s diversity on performance management is another subject discussed in the section. The fourth and concluding section looks into the future and suggests measures aimed at plugging performance deficits in the African public service while at the same time reckoning with the miscellaneous obstacles.

I. Performance Management: essence, meaning and basic thrusts

Performance management cannot escape the consequences of the identity crisis confronting the field of which it is a part - that is the field loosely referred to as “administration” or “management”. Whereas engineers, accountants, statisticians, surgeons, and astronomers have little difficulty delineating the boundaries of their disciplines, administration (alias management) has been struggling since the dawn of history to define itself. While ‘to administer’ is sometimes equated with to ‘govern’, ‘rule’, ‘control’, or ‘direct’, it should not come as a surprise if the same term surfaces in another time and place as ‘operate’, ‘make something/someone work’, ‘relate means to ends’, ‘dispense’ (drugs) or ‘resort to trickery and deceitful contrivance’.

A definition that promises to get us quickly out of the quagmire and take us close to ‘performance management’ is that provided by Vieg - i.e., “the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making those things happen which we want to happen and simultaneously preventing the developments that fail to square with our intentions” (Vieg, ). This would appear to approximate the goal and essence of performance management. As a concept, performance management takes ‘management’ to a higher plane by viewing the latter, not as a routine activity, but as a dynamic, momentum-gearied and impact-oriented process. In essence, therefore, performance management has to do with focusing the attention of an organisation and its constituent parts on the attainment of specified objectives (corporate strategy) and on the application of constantly changing processes, techniques and technologies (tactics).

Where an organization is faced with competing demands and shrinking resources, productivity is most likely to be what it “wants to see happen”. In any case, the dominant concern of performance management in recent years is productivity improvement, or “the production of more and/or better services for each tax dollar and staff hour invested” (Halachmi and Holzer, 1986; and Greiner, 1986). Hence, the attention accorded to factors such as top management support (or what is often termed ‘political will’ and commitment), application of performance standards and indicators, installation of a performance measurement system, supervision and motivation of staff, staff training, performance budgeting and accounting, and community involvement (Lee, 2000:423). A commentator conceives of productivity-oriented management as an open system (Lee 2000:423). The system is made up of three domains, i.e., the environmental domain (public/private partnership, marketing of public service delivery), the organizational domain (structural changes, labour-management relations, information and communications technology), and the
If focusing on “what we want to see happen” is the defining attribute of performance management, we are still far from reaching a consensus on the concept’s real meaning. For one thing, the “we” in an organization stands for different entities and individuals whose world-views are rarely in harmony. First, where the stress of performance management is on measurement of achievements, the monitors will be hard put to find an indicator that is valid for all times and places. What passes for excellent performance one day may in fact belong to the mediocre category at a latter date when a new, and more rigorous performance standard is applied. However, managers being adept at what van Thiel and Leeuw term “positive learning” (van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002:268-9) will always stick to the old standard so as to look good each time their performance is evaluated. Where managers submit themselves to a new standard, they are not unknown to resort to another trick. Specifically, knowing that their performance is under surveillance and their jobs are on the line, they are wont to shift resources to ‘high profile’ projects and activities – those that are of interest to performance auditors. The name given to this trick is negative learning (van Thiel and Leeuw, 2002:268-9).

Positive and negative learning are measures of differences in managerial perspectives. Both, at best, reflect the managers’ conflicting notions of their role, and at worst, stand for cynical interpretations of “management” and “performance”. Inconsistent as they both are with the real essence of performance management, the managers’ positive and negative learning inclinations have lesser devastating impact on performance and productivity than another type of conflict in perspective. This is the diversity triggered by the multiple and competing identities in the work place. In the classical scientific management literature, the conflict that receives a lot of attention is that between ‘management’ and the workers. In today’s world of work, diversity or discord knows no hierarchical or socio-economic boundaries. It intervenes between or among races, ethnic nationalities, regions, cultures, religious beliefs, and, increasingly, sexes.

The individuals and the groups operating in, or benefiting from the services rendered by, organizations bring to the three (environmental, organizational and individual) domains mentioned earlier prejudices, fears, insecurities and other attitudes that are capable of taking performance in unintended directions. As far as performance and its management is concerned, it is not the difference in the range of probable ‘identities’ an individual brings to the work place that matters, but the interpretation that the individual gives to the various identities as well as the values s/he places on the identities vis-à-vis identification with a larger entity such as the state, the civil service, or the corporation, together with the ‘price’ s/he is prepared to pay to retain the cherished identities (Balogun, 2001, and 2002).

Diversity brings conflict and tension, both of which may, in fact, help rather than hinder the cause of performance management. As noted by Lewin (1935) human
beings do not live in a tensionless world. In fact, a minimum degree of tension is what human beings need to excel in their chosen fields and to find creative solutions to contemporary problems. At times, however, conflict becomes so mis-managed that the tension accompanying it ceases to be edifying and, instead, generates a lot of animus between or among individuals and groups. Rather than promote healthy competition, conflicts mismanaged divert the attention of actors away from corporate objectives and productivity, engender hate and distrust, and expose productive forces to “friendly fires”. Evasion of responsibility, desertion of posts, offer and/or acceptance of bribes – these and other performance-inhibiting attitudes - are all symptoms of mismanaged conflict.

The underlying thesis of this paper is that successful management of performance hinges on the extent to which the formulaters and the implementers of corporate strategies in word and in deed align these strategies with the needs and aspirations of all the stakeholders. Specifically, whether or not conflict (and, in the final analysis, performance) will be properly managed is a function of how an organization’s internal and external stakeholders identify with behaviour at three levels – political choice and empowerment, formal and discretionary authority, and rules interpretation and application levels.

Politics, Power, and Performance Management

As noted earlier, whether diversity and tension will be properly managed or allowed to spin out of control depends on the behaviour of at least three interrelated variables – power, authority, and the prevailing rule regime. The first, power, is essentially political and is frequently equated with the ability to choose from a range of goals. It is weapon that the powerful deploys to make those things happen which s/he wants to see happen regardless of what the powerless may feel on the subject. In much the same way as energy propels objects into action and sustains momentum in the physical world, power in the political arena enables those entrusted with it to translate their dreams into concrete achievements. It enables taxes to be collected, dams and bridges to be constructed, factories and residential units to be connected to the national grid, and national airlines to fly to distant destinations laden with passengers and cargo.

If this is all there is to power – making good things happen – many of those struggling to acquire it would be glad to leave it in other hands. However, power serves objectives other than the noble ones. With it, dissidents are kept in preventive detention, the mint is placed on overtime saturating the economy with valueless currencies, favours are sold or purchased under the counter, and grand corruption is permitted to thrive along with its petty counterpart. It is this potential of power to make the good as well as the bad to happen, that turns the struggle for it into a do-or-die affair for politicians. The fierce and intense competition for power has been known to degenerate into bloody confrontations, and into full-scale civil or military conflict.
Where political differences assume ethnic, racial, regional, or religious character, the key actors are likely to be more interested in bringing the crown home than in promoting qualitative change in governance, stemming economic decline, or alleviating poverty. Indeed, instead of seeking common cause on national development, ethnic advocacy groups may not be averse to throwing spanners in the opponents’ works. Ake (1994) puts all this down to “political anxiety”, the fear of the consequences of power gravitating towards, and remaining with, “outsiders” and “enemies”. Elsewhere, the author also wonders whether the clamour for “power shift” or “rotational presidency” in Nigeria would not lead to the “rotation” of clientelism and corruption (Balogun, 1997).

If the aim is to improve the lot of the ordinary citizen, politics would have to show increasing interest in policy – specifically, in the cost, benefits, and long-term developmental implications, of intended courses of action. This is where it (politics) sorely needs analytic inputs and research support – resources that are only available in institutions of higher learning, within think-tanks, and in the career civil service. However, because of the unstructured nature of political competitions, serious intellectuals are more likely to stick to what they know best than show the slightest interest in “mundane” matters. For their own part, career civil servants generally find the political terrain too rough and too hazardous, and would in all probability perish the thought of “dirtying” their hands working with political activists.

If career officials do not think highly of partisan politics, the feeling among politicians tends to be mutual. The latter cannot understand how anyone can be trusted with power (or even authority) who has taken no risk seeking grass root support, and who, for that very reason, is out of touch with the “reality” on the ground. From the point of performance management, the two sides need each other more than they realize.

**Authority, Corporate Governance and Performance Improvement**

Whereas power is most often associated with the ‘lawless’ world of politics, authority would, at least, on the surface, appear to be meant for the cultured and the rule-abiding public service environment. Legal-rational authority, after all, prides itself on the interposition of order in the place of chaos, and of reason where whims, caprices, and emotions might have once reigned unchallenged. While “power” may be conscripted into the service of the good or the bad – depending on the prevailing circumstances – authority is, theoretically, meant to serve only worthy causes. If power does not care about performance improvement, productivity is supposed to be the legal-rational bureaucracy’s middle name. In place of the shocks, surprises and upsets encountered in the political arena, established rules and procedures intervene to render behaviour predictable in the bureaucracy. The formal authority of the career bureaucracy thus makes those things happen which every reasonable person would like to see happen - notwithstanding the interference of a major stumbling block, “politics”.

In theory, therefore, career officials not only find politics distasteful but operate in a setting that frowns on capricious and arbitrary behaviour. This is not to say that there is no room for “politics” in administration (Lungu, 1998:3; and Mainzer (1973). While their oath of office forbids them to participate in partisan politics or to canvass for votes, career civil servants participate in another kind of politics with the passion, energy, and belligerence normally associated with the real thing. Within their own space and in their own time, civil servants can be as political as, if not more so than, the politicians that they seek so much to distance themselves from. First, career officials are not beyond passing on to their political masters a few rule-bending tricks, if only to gain the latter’s confidence.

Secondly, the “authority” that the career officials exercise in their own right – but which springs from the power or “mandate” of the government of the day – offers the career officials a wide “political” latitude. The authority (say, that of a police commissioner, a customs officer, factory and trade premises inspector, personnel officer, or executive assistant to the boss), is, after all, not only of the formal and statutorily defined type, but can also take the discretionary form. Executive or administrative discretion may be all that is needed to move staff from one office to another, to promote (presumably loyal and dedicated) staff, to award contracts to one firm rather than another, to demolish “illegal” structures, and to apprehend and detain a suspect. Like power, authority may serve good or evil ends. It is under the shadow of discretionary darkness that the official most frequently unleashes his/her frustrations on real and imaginary enemies and bestows favours on clients and trusted lieutenants. Naturally, those in the official’s favour would always band together to retain their privileges, and the “outsiders” will gravitate towards “opposition” or adversarial roles. How performance could, under such an environment – one characterised by mutual suspicion and distrust - be “managed” to achieve enhanced productivity, and guarantee “customer” satisfaction, is any one’s guess.

The rules regime

Depending on the degree of consistency and transparency with which they are applied, the rules may serve as an arbiter in conflict situations. As a trust-engendering mechanism, the rules enables all parties to a compact to fulfil their obligations confident that no party would exit without paying a price (Rowthorn, 1999:661-691).

It may be argued that by “tying the hands” of officials, the rules only make the organization lose the momentum needed to manage performance and record productivity increases. The manager knows what s/he wants, and the rules merely intervene to slow him down and to prevent him from taking precisely the action that is necessary to beat the competition. Where nothing gets done until the rules are consulted, authority will reside, not in the producers of goods and services but in rules interpreters and enforcers. These guardians of the rules will not be interested in performance or productivity, but in making the underclass bow and cringe to have every little case dealt with. Rather than confine themselves to substantive legislation, the new de facto bosses will upgrade every inconsequential procedure or work flow
arrangement into “rules” so as to justify their own existence, inflate their importance, and expand their scope of influence – most often, beyond the statutory limits.

Some of the conclusions on the performance-inhibiting effects of rules are valid. As a matter of fact, unless decisive action is taken, the rules may offer precisely the excuse the indolent official needs to refrain from tackling a problem, or a pretext for arbitrary action. However, to argue that the cause of performance management dictates total dismantling of the rules may be pushing the argument to extreme limits. To begin with, the assumption of an all-knowing manager will not stand close scrutiny. Modern organizations are too complex to be successfully run as personal fiefdoms. They require a whole range of knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are clearly beyond the reach of a single individual or a narrow circle of officials. Needless to add that a system whose fate hangs on personalities rather than on institutions and rules is bound to disintegrate on the exit of its “strong man” (Balogun, 2003). In any case, it is not unlikely that the authority given to a manager to override the rules may in fact be applied towards unwholesome ends. To allow individuals the freedom to decide when to comply with the rules is to confer unlimited licence on buccaneers without a prior guarantee of successful or beneficial innovation (Balogun and Mutahaba, 1999). Besides, the conflict that a despotic exercise of power frequently triggers cannot be successfully contained no matter what performance management miracles are tried.

Managing Performance and Conflict

The upshot of the preceding analysis is that performance management must go hand in hand with conflict anticipation and management. While focusing on pure managerial variables (i.e., the environmental, organizational and individual variables), particular attention should be given to the analysis of the impact of political and corporate governance practices, and of the prevailing rules regime on conflict, and therefore, on performance.

II. Performance Management and the Challenges of Governance and Development in Africa

Despite the risks attendant on performance management, it constitutes one single most important item on the public sector management reform agenda today. The momentous changes taking place in recent years in Africa and in other parts of the globe dictate the need to revitalize public service institutions and enhance their capacities to collaborate with the civil society and the private sector on value-adding ventures. No matter under what label the revitalization process is launched, the accent will have to be on performance improvement and on the elimination of barriers to productivity.
The challenges facing the Africa region on the socio-economic and political fronts clearly point to the need for sustained effort in the area of performance management. In subsequent paragraphs, attention will focus on the efforts made to reform governance institutions. The conclusion emerging from the analysis of these efforts is that while much has been achieved to promote the cause of democracy and representative government, Africa cannot afford to relent on the democratisation efforts, or to ignore the socio-economic consequences of the change.

**Governance reform: a balance sheet**

Since the 1990s, a number of countries have implemented far-reaching governance reform programmes. The core elements of these programmes are:

(a) the legalisation of multi-party competition in place of the erstwhile one-party or military rule (as a result, 42 out of 48 Sub-Saharan African countries organized multi-party elections since the early 1990s);

(b) the gradual expansion of the political space to accommodate civil society participation in the governance and development process;

(c) the apportionment of power among the three state institutions - i.e., the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary – and strengthening of checks and balances;

(d) substantive devolution of power (and resources?) by the central government to provinces, districts, and local communities;

(e) creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation in the economy and protection of individual property rights;

(f) enhancement of the capacity of the judiciary to act independently of the executive, and to promote the rule of law;

(g) enactment of anti-corruption laws, establishment of watch-dog bodies, and enforcement of ethical and accountability codes;

(h) reactivation of the civil service’s professional values, and inculcation of the ethos of responsiveness, transparency, and accountability in service-delivery agents.

Overall, therefore, a lot of progress has been recorded in efforts at reactivating the institutions that had earlier succumbed to decades to one-party rule and/or military dictatorship. In fact, it is safe to conclude that things are beginning to work again in Africa. A few years ago, only Botswana and Mauritius were frequently touted as success cases. Today, an increasing number of African countries are leaving behind
relics of bad governance and bracing themselves for the challenges of development and technological transformation.

However, the governance reform task is far from completed. While the conduct of elections is a plus for representative government, much more needs to be done to ensure that the emerging civic culture takes root. Besides, as efforts are made to sustain the on-going reform momentum and to consolidate the gains, due attention should be paid to diversity and its impact on peace and security.

It is gratifying to note that countries emerging from conflict (among them, Somalia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone) are taking the measures necessary to rebuild their economies, rehabilitate the damaged infrastructures, and reconcile the erstwhile warring parties. Developments in a few other countries need to be kept under observation to ensure that threats to peace and stability are contained. Above all, and as the subsequent paragraphs on the economy indicate, the capacity of the revitalised governance institutions to respond meaningfully to the growing clamour for the “democratic dividends” is a topic that cannot be put off indefinitely.

Turning the economy around: a major priority

The public sector has rightly or wrongly been held responsible for Africa’s economic woes. It has specifically been accused of over-extending itself in the three to four decades after independence, frittering away precious resources, crowding out the private sector, and accelerating the continent’s slide to economic collapse and social distress. Mazrui’s observation captures the gravity of Africa’s socio-economic crisis. In his view (Mazrui, 1986),

“Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar-es-Salaam, from Marrakech to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away.”

While the decaying structures and institutions are gradually being rehabilitated, the challenge ahead remains daunting. In terms of total income, the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are at about the same level as a single European economy, Belgium. The region’s median income of approximately $2 billion puts a whole country’s output at par with that of a rich north American town of 60,000 inhabitants. Between 1960 and 1990, whatever was left of the minuscule output shrank by as much as 50 per cent (World Bank, 2000:7).

Despite the modest gains recorded between 1990 and 2000, SSA’s economy has not bounced from stagnation to accelerated growth (See Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Africa: Macroeconomic indicators, 1990-2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Except where indicated, amounts in millions of UA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real GDP Growth rate (%)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (US$)</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation (%)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal balance (% of GDP)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-2.7</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Domestic Investment (% of GDP)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Savings (% GDP)</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Export Growth (%)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Balance (% GDP)</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-11.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Account (% of GDP)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Trade</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total External Debt (% GDP)</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt Service (% of Exports)</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Africa’s share of world trade accounts for less than 2 percent. The region has over the past forty years lost opportunities for industrial expansion, and now risks being totally excluded from the global information revolution. It is still highly dependent on the export of primary products. With a few exceptions, the SSA economies are “aid dependent and deeply indebted” (World Bank, 2000:9). By the end of 1997, foreign debt stood at $315.2 billion and represented a burden of over 80 percent of GDP in net present value terms. Africa has the lowest savings rate in the world. Rapid population growth and environmental degradation have further depressed the savings rate.

The SSA economy’s free fall has brought in its wake untold human suffering and triggered a large-scale social crisis. While the UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) provides a fair measure of human welfare across countries, one should, for
reasons stated elsewhere, be wary of reading too much into it (Balogun, 2002a). Still, and in the absence of a more reliable cross-cultural comparison of human welfare, the scores provide a fair indication of the gravity of Africa’s social situation. Poverty, for instance, appears to be the region’s lot – after more than four decades of independence and the implementation of countless development plans and projects. More than 40 percent of the continent’s 600 million people live below the internationally recognised poverty line of $1 a day, with incomes averaging just $0.65 a day in purchasing power parity terms. The number of poor people has risen rapidly, causing Africa’s share of the world’s absolute poor to jump from 25 to 30 percent in the 1990s. In the 25 years between 1975 and 1999, 22 countries have suffered setbacks in the human development index. Of this number, 13 (i.e., 59 percent) are in Africa (See Table 2)

Table 2: Countries suffering setbacks in the human development index, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HDI lower than in 1975</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1980</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1985</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1990</th>
<th>HDI lower than in 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zambia*</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Botswana*</td>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Malawi*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria*</td>
<td>Russian Fed.</td>
<td>Bulgaria*</td>
<td>Cameroon*</td>
<td>Namibia*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe*</td>
<td>Burundi*</td>
<td>Kenya*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congo*</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>Rep. of South Africa*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: * = Sub-Saharan African countries


In the past 30 years, all the world’s regions (with the exception of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) have made progress in “human development” (measured in terms of access to material resources). South Asia and SSA lag far behind other regions “with human and income poverty still high” (UNDP, 2001:10). The adult literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is 60 percent, well below the developing country average of 73 percent. Life expectancy at birth in SSA is pegged at 48.8 years, compared to over 60 in all other regions. The share of people living on less than $1 a day is as high as 46 percent in SSA, compared with a mere 15 percent in East Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America. Access to electric power supply, internal telephone and external telecommunications services, potable water, and basic sanitation remains highly restricted.

At a time when the health sector has not been adequately funded, the Africa region is confronted with the AIDS pandemic. Of the approximately 36 million people living
with HIV/AIDS world-wide at the end of 2000, 95 percent were in developing countries, and 70 percent in SSA. In six countries – Botswana, Burundi, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe – HIV/AIDS accounted for significant drops (up to 7 years) in life expectancy (UNDP, 2001:13).

With widespread poverty have come disparities in income distribution. In 16 of the 22 SSA countries with data for the 1990s, the poorest 10 percent of the population had less than 10 percent of the income of the richest 10 percent, and in 9, less than 5 percent. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to leave poverty behind and move on to affluence. Let us take for instance South Africa. Up to 63 percent of households in poverty in the country in 1993 were still there five years later (i.e., 1998), while 60 percent of households in the highest income category in 1993 were still there in 1998, indicating limited income mobility (UNDP, 2001:18). The majority of households in other African countries have given up hope of moving out of poverty having been trapped there for generations.

A “development” that is threatening the social fabric of SSA countries is unemployment. With the rate of unemployment standing at between 30 and 55 percent, and within the global environment of “downsizing”, the region cannot escape the pathologies frequently associated with this socio-economic malaise – high divorce rates, high suicide rates, and high incidence of alcoholism (Stiglitz, 2001). The increasing crime wave in many SSA countries is itself a symptom of a deeper malaise, i.e., loss of hope on the part of many able-bodied men and women with plenty of time on their hands but without the slightest clue as to what to do with it. Still, if the formal or informal sector of the economy appears too saturated with skills, school graduates are not unwilling to take their skills elsewhere – mostly to underworld “recruiting agencies”. Among the potential “recruiters” are masterminds of ethnic and religious riots, drug barons, leaders of armed robbery gangs, con-artists and go-betweens in bureaucratic scams. Even in countries not at war, crime and violence can be a serious drain on the economy. In South Africa, the cost of both (crime and violence) equals an estimated 6 per cent of GDP. In other countries, crime and violence stand as clear obstacles to domestic and foreign investment.

Economic depression and social distress have stirred pent-up grievances and threatened peace and stability in a number of countries. In the first quarter of 1996, 50 percent of SSA countries enjoyed stable political conditions and good governance, while the remaining 50 percent were embroiled in prolonged political crises or armed conflict. By the end of 1998, the situation had taken a turn for the worse, with only 39 percent (i.e., 19 countries) enjoying stable political conditions, 23 percent (11 countries) facing political crises and turbulence, and 38 percent (18 countries) engaging in armed conflict (Adedeji, 2000:3). Armed conflict has impacted negatively on human capital development in different parts of the continent, claiming over 2 million lives between 1992 and 1997. Africa’s refugee population is currently estimated at more than 12 million people – putting it at well over 40 percent of the world total. The continent further holds the dubious record of recruiting a disproportionately high number of child-soldiers – children who have been abducted
by military gangs, and under the influence of drugs and *voodoo*, assigned
direct combat roles or posted as sentries and spies. The child-soldiers are not only
exposed to unspeakable traumas, but also deprived of opportunities to grow under
normal conditions.

**Governance and economic restructuring: performance management
implications**

A carefully articulated performance management strategy is indispensable to the
success of efforts at sustaining the on-going democratisation process and turning the
economy around. At the very least, the political class and the Higher Civil Service
should reach an understanding with other stakeholders on the objectives to be
pursued, and on *what it takes* (that is the discipline required) to realize these
objectives. The services of strategic planning experts and professional policy analysts
should be retained to bring focus, clarity, and internal consistency to the strategic
visioning process. The alternative is to try and stitch together a motley collection of
wish-lists which are long on dreams but short on implementation ideas. Fortunately,
many African countries (among them, Botswana, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and
Uganda) are no strangers to strategic visioning. The challenge ahead is to link these
visions to the work of public administration.

What happens when the visions land on the desk of career officials is another matter.
One thing is clear: to make the right things happen, the public service has to come up
with a carefully thought out performance management strategy the elements of which
are discussed in the conclusion part of this paper.

**III. The African Public Service and Performance Management: the Search for
Excellence, Impact and Results**

Since the 1960s when many African countries attained independence, the
preoccupation of governments has been the reform and revitalization of the public
service. At least three broad reform tendencies are discernible. The first is
represented by the comprehensive review undertaken between the 60s and 70s of
organization structures, management practices, and incentive systems. The second
wave of reform began in the late 1970s up to the 80s with the implementation of belt-
tightening structural adjustment measures. The disappointing performance
accompanying the implementation of structural adjustment reforms led in the 1990s
to the adoption of a variety of “home-grown” institutional reform strategies. While
performance improvement was the underlying objectives of the various reform
programmes undertaken from the earliest period to date, there is no concrete evidence
that the efforts had any significant impact on performance or yielded substantive
productivity gains.

**First-generation reforms and performance management**
Let us start with the administrative reform measures instituted in the early post-independence period. The declared objective of the first-generation reform was to equip the public service institutions inherited from the colonial administration for the post-independence challenges of nation building and economic modernization. The real aim was to refocus the loyalty of the civil service and ensure that the service fully acknowledged the leadership of the elected representatives of the people. As noted by Wamalwa and Balogun (1992:29-30)

“For many years, (the) bureaucracy had served as the main instrument which the colonial authorities utilized to coerce and regulate the society, and in a few cases, to victimize the nationalist leaders. The new rulers were not about to forget their experience under colonial rule, and were highly unlikely to acquiesce in the continued hegemony of the civil service.”

To be sure, the various review bodies (the Ndegwa, the Udoji, the Mills-Odoi, and Wamalwa Commissions in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Swaziland respectively) were given broad mandates to examine the organization structure of, and management processes in, the entire public service. Job evaluation and grading, salaries and conditions of service, staff training, accounting and budgeting systems, plan formulation and implementation machinery – these and other issues were part of the terms of reference of the public service review commissions.

All the review commissions without exception found the civil service organization wanting in terms of performance and productivity. The Ndegwa Commission for instance noted that the structure of the Kenya civil service constituted a serious barrier to efficient performance (Republic of Kenya, 1971). By failing to focus on objectives and results, the structure encouraged the following negative tendencies, among others:

(a) Defective utilization of human resources;
(b) Little or no delegation of operational responsibilities;
(c) Misunderstanding by some junior officers of their job purpose;
(d) Poor communication and lack of coordination; and
(e) Over-centralization of authority at the Ministry headquarters in Nairobi.

All these pathologies were discovered over thirty years ago - in 1971. The chances are that they are still very much around today. Whether or not it was pure coincidence, the Udoji Commission too spotted weaknesses in the structure of the Nigerian civil service and in performance management practices. As will soon become clear, these weaknesses have rather been compounded by latter-day developments rather than rectified. According to Udoji Review Commission, the ‘sterile’ debate on the relative importance of generalists and specialists
“Illustrates the fact that the (civil) Service is at present organized to suit an outdated concept of class and educational qualifications, whereas it should be organized around the achievement of objectives.”

To focus the attention of all cadres on objectives and performance, the Commission proposed the introduction of a “unified” grading and salary system in place of the multiple grades. It further advocated the adoption of a “business model” of departmental organization, meaning, the abolition of the post of ‘permanent secretary’ and its replacement with that of ‘director-general’ or ‘general manager’.

Above all, the Commission recommended the installation of the following management programmes:

- Programme and Performance Budgeting (PPB);
- Management-by-Objectives;
- Management Survey;
- Organization Development (OD);
- Matrix/Project Management; and
- Planned and Preventive Management (PPM).

It goes without saying that all the “latest and best” management practices proposed by Udoji in 1971-2 have since joined their ancestors in the graveyard of imported techniques. The abortion of the Commission’s (and similar) reform plans could be attributed to the following factors, among others:

(a) dependence of reform on external push and inspiration;
(b) the disconnect between the reform programmes’ performance, productivity, and efficiency thrusts, on the one hand, and the indigenous leaders’ preoccupation with the acquisition and retention of power and authority, on the other;
(c) failure to construct a performance and productivity management infrastructure to support and sustain reform efforts.

According to Adedeji (1972), the decision by a number of African countries to institute administrative reform measures in the 1970s was not locally inspired but was very much a function of the “international demonstration effect” of the Fulton Report. The British having embarked on a comprehensive reform of its civil service was in effect sending signals to its erstwhile colonies that the administrative systems the inherited was not perfect, after all. While the then newly independent African countries might have felt the urge to shake up their public services and prepare these public services for the post-independence challenge, it was the wish to be seen as copying the “best practices” from the former colonial masters that was behind the movement in the direction of administrative reform in the 1970s.

If this assumption is valid, it should not come as a surprise that regardless of pronouncements to the contrary, the hearts and minds of the domestic sponsors of the
first generation of civil service reform programmes were not in these programmes. At best, the commitment to change was half-hearted, at worst, non-existent. In any case, the reform programmes dominant concerns (for organizational tidiness, mission objectives, and performance) rarely squared with the conflict management, damage control, and survival preoccupations of the indigenous political and administrative leaders. Needless to add that until the mainstream political parties are sufficiently convinced about the importance of public service productivity to incorporate it in their manifestos and to engage one another in a serious debate on the subject, the time and effort invested on “turbo-charging” the civil service will not be fully rewarded.

The reform measures might still have a chance of succeeding if a performance infrastructure had been in place to sustain the momentum and provide a basis for latter-day incremental gains. An observer of the reform scene could not but marvel at the amount of attention given to issues of “restructuring” relative to the utter neglect of substantive issues of performance and productivity target setting, ethics and accountability, and “customer” service. In theory, there is nothing wrong with “organization engineering”. The danger is reading too much into organigrams, procedure manuals and formal behavioural guidelines when politics, administrative discretion, and mischievous rules interpretation could, in their own ways, substantially change the nature and direction of organizational performance. As one of the Commissions (Ndegwa, 1971) noted,

“Reshuffling of boxes and lines on charts, or transferring functions from one part of the organization to another can be mere exercises in paper work, and too often politics.”

**SAP and public service performance**

The structural adjustment reforms undertaken in the 1960s and 70s at the instance of the World Bank and the IMF were strictly speaking – and at least, at the initial stages - not geared towards performance improvement in the civil service. As a matter of fact, the reforms would seem to have given up on the possibility of the civil service taking, or supporting, the initiative in the direction of performance and productivity improvement. The civil service was, in the view of the SAP advocates, far more keen on expanding its empire than providing quality, cost-effective service. It was busy acquiring and wasting productive assets – assets which the private sector could have put to good use. This would not have been too much of a disaster if resources were inexhaustible and the economy could absorb the effects of extravagance. Unfortunately, the resources were in limited supply, and the economy needed every bit of these resources to get out of the quick sand into which years of prodigality and productivity losses had dumped it.

What choice did Africa have? None, argue the SAP advocates. The external and the internal accounts were in the red, external debt was growing and the overhang had
dire consequences for short-term economic recovery and long-term growth. Therefore, bitter as the pill might have tasted, the continent had to swallow it. With immediate effect, the civil service had to be “downsized” – with agencies without clear objectives being shut down, unproductive personnel being retrenched, and needless expenses being slashed. That was not all. State-owned enterprises were to be privatised, price subsidies and controls were to be eliminated, and the “over-valued” currencies had to be devalued.

This (SAP era) was clearly not a good time to be a civil servant. For one thing, the take-home pay did not take the average civil servant home. Still, one who retained his/her job must count him/herself among the fortunate. An increasing number of government officials were either retrenched or sent into premature retirement. The private sector that could have provided alternative sources of employment was itself reeling from SAP-related ailments – notably, capacity under-utilization, production cutbacks and plant shutdowns.

If SAP accomplished anything, it is to shake the public service to its foundation. It, at the very least, moved the latter from the secure fortress of government monopoly to the competitive setting of the market (Wamalwa, 1989). Of course, it also had a devastating, some will argue, negative) impact on public service performance. First, by starving essential public services (health, education, and employment generation) of resources, SAP made it difficult to maintain tolerable standards in the delivery of the services. Secondly, besides destroying the incentives and motivation structure, the cost-cutting aspects of SAP aggravated the ethics and accountability crisis confronting the African public service. It was at the height of SAP reform that the service witnessed increasing cases of moonlighting, inflation of contract prices, bribery and corruption (Nti, 1989; Shellukindo, et al, 1989). SAP has also been accused on dismantling public service institutions without leaving behind any viable alternatives (Adedeji, 1992).
Internally driven reform programmes

It was as a reaction to what was perceived as SAP’s inadequacies that a number of African countries (e.g., Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Namibia, and Zambia) embarked as from the 1990s on inward-oriented strategies of public service reform (Dodoo, 1996; Ntukamazina, 1996; Kyarimpa, 1996). The core elements of the third wave of reform are:

- resuscitation of the basic ethos of professionalism, loyalty, dedication, accountability, and transparency;
- restructuring and streamlining of central government agencies (to ensure that they are well-focused, customer-oriented, as well as cost- and time-conscious);
- review of personnel policy and practices (with emphasis on the introduction of new performance appraisal systems, review of personnel rules and regulations, application of ICT to personnel management functions, and in the case of Zambia, appointment of permanent secretaries on fixed-term contracts);
- rationalization of pay and grading structures, and the introduction of performance- and productivity-related pay (including the conduct of organization and efficiency reviews);
- labour redeployment and redundancy management;
- improvement of records and information management systems;
- launching of comprehensive decentralization programmes.

In effect, therefore, signs are beginning to appear the performance management is becoming an issue of interest in the African public service. The question is whether the momentum can be sustained, and if the prevailing political atmosphere in some countries will help or hinder the cause of excellence in public sector management.

The Diversity Factor in Performance Management

Africa’s diversity in particular poses a tremendous challenge to the unity of purpose required in embarking on, and sustaining, a comprehensive and impact-oriented programme of reform. As noted elsewhere, the problem is not with diversity as such, but with what the various actors make of it in the public realm (Balogun, 2002).
Individuals with their own private agendas have capitalized on ethnic, religious, linguistic, cadre, and other differences (as well as differences in professional exposure) to promote intra-organization tension. Consequently, in place of the cooperative action frequently associated with getting things done, there is mutual resistance and resentment. It does not matter whether it is termed “friendly fire” or “own goal”, but the reality remains the same: public officials can do with a more pronounced will to work in harmony. Until the political and the administrative leadership group finding a way of stitching organizations together, troops that should be out there fighting poverty, ignorance and disease, will probably refuse to advance - for fear of being fired on from the rear and/or on the flanks by one of their own.

One way to begin is by rewarding achievers and imposing stiff sanctions on ineptitude and the managerial practices that condone it. Perhaps the word “productivity” has been over used. The time has come to try “building” and “constructing.” If performance is to be radically improved, and if the efforts of the hard-working and dedicated officials are to show, it is absolutely essential that the public service and society at large begin to place higher premium on creation of wealth, and to discourage destructive tendencies. By the same token, a consensus needs to be reached on how to combat ethical violations and ensure they no longer pose a threat to corporate and individual performance, and, in the final analysis, to national security.

IV. Managing Performance for Good Governance and Development: a Summation and a Proposal

The way forward lies in reconstituting public service agencies into learning organizations – those which store and use information on all the key indicators of performance, and on the factors accounting for performance variations over time (Gavin, 1993). As a learning entity, the new-style public service will, at the minimum:

(a) know its “customer” or the “consumer” of its products and services, and acknowledge of his/her right to choose;

(b) accommodate customer/consumer preferences in its Mission Statements;

(c) establish and constantly review corporate and individual performance standards;

(d) draft and prominently display Customer Service Pledges (together with information on fault-reporting procedures);
(f) base recruitment and promotion practices on the objectives to be accomplished, and on the “customer” to be served;

(g) align training and retraining programmes to corporate objectives, and to changing customer tastes;

(h) institute measures aimed at the introduction of financial incentives and creating an environment conducive to performance and productivity (the measures should, of necessity include the training of managers and supervisors in the art and science of motivation, as well as the evaluation of their staff relations record);

(i) establish high-speed, and effective grievance handling conflict resolution systems;

(j) inculcate a work ethic that nurtures industrial discipline and organizational alertness, establish order in the work place, eliminates chaotic work flow arrangements, and places high premium on cost- as well as time-consciousness.

Making all these happen requires an innovative strategy. At the very least, it entails involving other stakeholders (besides the executive branch of government) in the inauguration and monitoring of a comprehensive performance management programme. This has immediate implications for AAPAM. It should find ways of bringing to the attention of African legislative bodies, political parties, and interest groups, the conclusions and recommendations of this Roundtable. Subject to the availability of resources, it should also sponsor studies and produce project proposals on the design and implementation of an inward-driven programme of performance management for the African public service.
References


Greiner, J.M. (1986). “Motivational programs and productivity improvement in times of limited resources.” *Public Productivity and Management Review*, 10. (pp. 81-101)


Vieg, John A. ( ) “Administration – Public and Private”, in Marx, F.M., (Ed.), *Elements of Public Administration*

