



Assessing the Impact of Employee Performance Management System Documentation on Service Delivery Efficiency in Municipal Councils in Eswatini

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Abstract: *This study addresses the critical issue of service delivery efficiency in municipal councils in Eswatini, where effective performance management is essential for optimising resource allocation and enhancing accountability. The research examines the impact of Employee Performance Management System documentation (EPMSD) on service delivery efficiency within the Manzini and Mbabane municipal councils. A quantitative research approach was adopted, employing a survey research design to collect data from 159 employees across both municipalities. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, ensuring transparency and encouraging participation. Ultimately, 150 respondents completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 94.3%. The data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire, and the analysis revealed a positive relationship between well-documented EPMSD and service delivery effectiveness. Findings indicate that effective EPMSD fosters accountability, standardises performance evaluations, and enhances decision-making processes, ultimately leading to improved service delivery outcomes. However, the study also revealed that excessive bureaucracy in documentation could hinder flexibility. To optimise efficiency and accountability, the study recommends that municipal councils implement standardised EPMS documentation frameworks to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness in performance evaluations. Additionally, adopting standardised yet adaptable EPMS documentation practices will further enhance service delivery. Future research should explore the impact of digital documentation systems on performance management effectiveness, thereby deepening the understanding of how documentation influences service delivery in municipal settings.*

Keywords: *Appraisal, Deliver,; Documentation, Efficiency, Employees, Performance.*

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1. Introduction

According to Taylor (2014, p.2) “many public organisations are now collecting information about the performance of their operations, programs, and policies to

achieve various desired outcomes.” Effective service delivery within municipal councils is crucial for societal well-being and economic development (Kinicki et al., 2021). Employee Performance Management Systems (EPMS) play a vital role in ensuring that employees perform efficiently and effectively. However, the extent to

which the documentation of EPMS influences service delivery remains underexplored. Recent studies by Omer and Bhide (2003) and Maley (2021) have revealed that, well-documented performance management processes contribute to structured decision-making and enhanced accountability within organisations.

Globally, public service organisations continue to grapple with the challenge of enhancing service delivery efficiency while maintaining accountability and transparency in employee performance (Mbujanma & Kariena, 2022). Employee Performance Management Systems (EPMS) have emerged as a critical tool in this regard, with documentation playing a pivotal role in ensuring fairness, consistency, and clarity in performance evaluation (Omer & Bhide, 2003; Kinicki et al., 2021). According to Pulakos and O’Leary (2020), well-documented performance systems support data-driven decisions on promotions, training, and disciplinary actions, thereby contributing to organisational effectiveness. However, as Tarique et al. (2023) argue, the increasing complexity of administrative systems and rapid digital transformation demand more agile and integrated approaches to documentation challenges that affect both developed and developing contexts.

On the international and regional fronts, countries in the Global South, particularly within Africa, have adopted performance management systems as part of public sector reforms aimed at improving service delivery (Mbukanma & Kariena, 2022; Haines III & St-Onge, 2022). Maley et al. (2023, 3085) observe that, “performance management is not a flawless management tool, there is mounting evidence today suggesting that its role in developing employees and talent per se may have been undervalued in the past.” Performance management system is an important way for communication between employees and their supervisors. Municipal councils are mandated to deliver essential services efficiently and equitably (Shongwe & Meyer, 2023). In the South African context, Shongwe and Meyer (2023, p.137) established that “most local municipalities within the Republic of South Africa are tainted and perceived to be ineffective to enhance the quality-of-service delivery.”

In the context of Eswatini, the World Bank(2019, p.6) revealed that “there is growing pressure on local government structures to scale-up the delivery of basic services for both residents and businesses.” This finding calls for research on how the documentation of EPMS contributes to or hinders service delivery. Therefore, this study aims to assess the impact of EPMS documentation on service delivery efficiency in Eswatini’s municipal councils, addressing the pressing need for empirical evidence and context-specific strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Performance Management System

The most important purpose of performance management is firstly to establish a culture in which employees’ objectives are aligned with the organisational objectives and vision. Performance management therefore establishes the framework where individuals are encouraged, supported and guided to have a performance culture (Taylor, 2014).

From the argument, performance management aims to build relationships between managers and employees in order to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, the system by which an organisation sets work goals, determines performance standards, assigns and evaluates work, provides performance feedback, determines training and development requirements, and distributes rewards will be referred to as performance management in the context of this study (Armstrong, 2014). However, Taylor (2014, p.3) asserts that, “several empirical studies have shown instances in which the actual behavioral outcomes of performance management contradicted the desired behavioral outcomes.”

According to Spangeberg and Theron (2013) the process of performance management systems comprises of processes of clarifying goals and mission of the organisation, looking at outputs and linkages to other systems. Performance management is said to be a process or cycle, not an overnight event. Goal setting, performance evaluation, feedback, coaching, development training, encouraging participation, rewarding good performers, and dealing with poor performers are typically all part of the process (Aguinis 2014; Pulakos and O’Leary 2010; Haines III & St-Onge 2012; Kinicki et al. 2013).

O’Boyle and Cummins (2013, p. 225) state that “employees are better able to focus on achieving important goals, put in more effort, and overcome obstacles when measurable goals are set at the start of the performance period.” According to Mumford (2001) planning “Planning influences performance in five ways: (a) It contributes to more effective problem solving; (b) it promotes learning; (c) it enhances motivation; (d) it facilitates adaptation; and (e) it enhances coordination.” Although planning may directly contribute to problem solving by organising problem-solving activities in a flexible representational system, planning in performance system, planning may indirectly clarify paths to goal attainment. Maley (2017) emphasises that “planning should be executed with great care and it would help to encourage commitment and understanding of what the organisation was all about”.

It can be deduced that performance planning is the starting point in the performance management process, where agreements between manager and employee are reached from the beginning of the year. It sets the tone of what is to be achieved and what is required to achieve agreed organisation goals. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) advance the view that, the documentation process in performance management serves as a structured record-keeping system that supports transparency, accountability, and legal compliance. It involves recording key stages of the performance cycle, such as goal setting, mid-year reviews, feedback discussions, and final evaluations. Proper documentation ensures that expectations, achievements, and areas for improvement are clearly tracked over time. As noted by Pulakos et al. (2015), performance documentation is also essential for making informed decisions about promotions, compensation, and development needs. It supports consistency and fairness, especially in large organisations where subjective assessments can lead to bias.

However, recent research highlights challenges and evolving trends in performance documentation. According to Tarique et al. (2023), many organisations struggle with over-reliance on static documentation, which can become outdated in fast-paced work environments. As a result, there is a shift toward dynamic, cloud-based performance management systems that allow real-time updates and collaborative feedback. Moreover, DeNisi and Murphy (2022) caution that excessive documentation can lead to administrative burden and disengagement if not streamlined effectively. Therefore, while documentation remains a cornerstone of performance management, its effectiveness now depends on its integration with digital tools and its alignment with ongoing, conversational performance practices.

2.2 Employee Performance Management Systems Documentation and Effectiveness of Service Delivery within Organisations

Employee Performance Management System (EPMS) documentation plays a crucial role in ensuring that performance evaluation processes are transparent and consistently applied within organisations. Proper documentation facilitates the clear articulation of expectations, goals, and performance indicators, which enhances accountability among employees (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2020). When performance standards are well-documented, employees have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, leading to improved efficiency and service delivery (Kinicki et al., 2021). Moreover, documentation serves as a reference point for both employees and managers, reducing ambiguity in performance expectations

and assessments (Maley, 2022). In the absence of proper documentation, subjective judgments may dominate performance evaluations, leading to inconsistencies and potential employee dissatisfaction. Furthermore, documented performance management systems create an evidence-based approach to tracking progress and addressing performance gaps (Spangeberg & Theron, 2021).

Aguinis (2014, p.17) is of the view that “performance management systems allow organisations to collect useful information that can be used for several documentation purposes.” Documentation may include aspects such as memos, letters, handwritten notes, comments, or observations of an employee’s performance. Documenting performance related matters prevents memory loss errors (Aguinis, 2014).

Additionally, well-structured documentation enables municipal councils to align employee performance with strategic objectives, ensuring that service delivery goals are met (Armstrong, 2021). Organisations that lack formalised documentation often struggle with inefficiencies and miscommunication, ultimately affecting service delivery outcomes. Proper documentation also facilitates knowledge retention, particularly in organisations with high staff turnover rates (O'Boyle & Cummins, 2022). According to Aguinis (2021), a documented EPMS helps to standardise training and development efforts by identifying skill gaps and aligning learning programs with organisational needs. This leads to a more competent workforce that can efficiently execute municipal service delivery mandates. According to Awan et al. (202, p.2) there is “shift from technical to social mechanisms, where technicality of control and command is concerned with a structural and bureaucratic trend to cultural, and behavioural aspects leading to organisational outcomes”. This shift enables the organisation to achieve performance results. Another key benefit of EPMS documentation is that it facilitates performance-related decision-making, including promotions, rewards, and disciplinary actions (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2020). With clear records of performance evaluations, organisations can ensure that decisions are based on objective criteria rather than favoritism or bias. This enhances fairness and transparency, which in turn boosts employee morale and motivation (Kinicki et al., 2021).

Moreover, proper documentation strengthens performance feedback mechanisms by providing employees with constructive and data-driven insights into their work (Maley, 2022). Regular and well documented feedback sessions contribute to continuous improvement and encourage employees to take ownership of their roles within municipal councils (Armstrong, 2021).

Organisations that implement structured EPMS documentation are also better positioned to comply with laws and regulatory requirements (Spangeberg & Theron, 2021). In cases of disputes or grievances, documented performance records serve as legal evidence, protecting both employers and employees from unfair claims (O'Boyle & Cummins, 2022). This legal safeguard further enhances the credibility of the performance management process. Despite its numerous advantages, EPMS documentation must be handled with care to avoid excessive bureaucracy that could hinder flexibility in service delivery (Aguinis, 2021). Excessive paperwork and rigid performance criteria may stifle creativity and innovation within organisations, ultimately impacting service delivery (Haines III & St-Onge, 2022). Modika and Selepe(2023, p.450) opine that “performance management equips leaders, managers, workers, and stakeholders at different levels with a set of tools and techniques to regularly plan, continuously monitor, periodically measure, and review the performance of the institution in terms of indicators and targets for efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.” Therefore, for effective service delivery, an effective performance management system should empower employees to implement the strategies and objectives of the municipality. For effective service delivery. Modika and Selepe(2023) argue that:

The relevant policy documents should form the framework for the process and procedures that fine-tune who should be doing what and when in terms of planning and managing work performance. The actual performance appraisal forms are very important because they will form the basis for discussions as well as where we will be able to access relevant work performance related information.”(p.451)

In summary, the documentation of EPMS significantly influences service delivery effectiveness by fostering accountability, standardising evaluations, enhancing decision-making, and facilitating continuous improvement. Municipal councils that prioritise structured documentation can achieve higher levels of efficiency and transparency in their performance management systems (Kinicki et al., 2021). However, organisations must ensure that documentation processes remain adaptable to evolving service delivery needs and do not become an administrative burden (Maley, 2022).

3. Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative approach to collect data on the Performance Management System (PMS) documentation and service delivery effectiveness in municipalities in Eswatini. Questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale were employed to gather information from the target respondents. Simple random sampling was utilised to select employees from the Mbabane and Manzini municipal councils. The inclusion criteria comprised management and all employees who had completed a minimum of one performance management cycle culminating in the annual appraisal process. The employee types included full-time, part-time, interns, contractors, and managers. Through proportionate sampling, a total of 159 respondents were selected from both councils. Before administering the questionnaire, the participating respondents were informed of the aims and objectives of the study. This step was crucial to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the research and how their contributions would be utilised. By clearly communicating the study's objectives, the researchers aimed to foster transparency and encourage honest and thoughtful responses. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were computed, with values exceeding 0.5 indicating acceptable reliability. For data analysis, the study utilised SPSS version 20, primarily focusing on mean and standard deviation for descriptive outputs. Additionally, regression analysis was employed to draw inferences from the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This section presents the findings of the research, highlighting key results and their implications.

4.1.1 Descriptive

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of documenting employee performance management systems on service delivery. Effective documentation is essential for successful service delivery as it facilitates communication, ensures compliance, maintains consistency, promotes knowledge sharing, and enables continuous improvement. 150 respondents responded, resulting in a 94.3% response rate. Table 1 below presents employees' perspectives on the documentation of their performance management system.

Table 1: Respondents' perspectives on the documentation of performance management system

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The performance appraisal process is well documented	150	2.29	1.006
The documentation of the process allows employees to seek for the tools and processes which may be beneficial for the organisation performance and improving their own interest on the work	150	2.23	0.915
The documentation of the performance appraisal process allows for future reference by employees and is effective in motivating employees to get involved in workplace operations	150	2.22	0.881
The documentation of the performance appraisal process allows supervisors to understand the employees' current roles and responsibility to clarifying reporting lines	150	2.11	0.928
Average		2.21	0.93

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 1 presents respondents' perspectives on the documentation of performance management system. The results of the study as shown in Table 1. The data, derived from 150 participants, revealed a general sentiment of dissatisfaction regarding the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process. The statement "The performance appraisal process is well documented" received a mean score of 2.29, indicating that while some respondents acknowledge the existence of documentation, the overall perception is that it is inadequate. The standard deviation of 1.006 suggests a notable variability in responses, implying that opinions on this matter differ significantly among employees.

Similarly, the statement regarding the documentation allowing employees to seek tools and processes beneficial for organisational performance and their own interests garnered a mean score of 2.23. This score reflects a consensus that the documentation does not sufficiently empower employees to find resources that could enhance both their performance and that of the organisation. The standard deviation of 0.915 indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents. The third statement, which asserts that the documentation is effective in motivating employees to engage in workplace operations, received a mean score of 2.22. This suggests that respondents feel the documentation lacks motivational impact, with a standard

deviation of 0.881 indicating a relatively consistent view among participants.

Lastly, the statement concerning the documentation's role in helping supervisors understand employees' current roles and responsibilities scored the lowest, with a mean of 2.11. This finding highlights a significant concern that the documentation does not adequately clarify reporting lines or roles, as reflected in the standard deviation of 0.928. Overall, the average mean score of 2.21 reinforces the notion that respondents perceive the performance appraisal documentation as ineffective. The findings suggest a pressing need for the municipal councils to enhance their performance appraisal processes, focusing on improving documentation to better support employee engagement, clarity, and motivation. Addressing these issues could lead to a more effective performance management system that aligns with both employee and the goals of Mbabane and Manzini Municipal councils.

4.1.2 Inferential statistics

This section aims to provide quantitative analysis of how the employee performance management system documentation influences service delivery outcomes. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Regression model

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.886	.229	8.238	.000
	Documentation	.084	.059	.130	.160

a. Dependent Variable: Service delivery

The regression analysis results provide insightful information regarding the relationship between performance documentation and service delivery. The constant term, with a value of 1.886, indicates that when documentation is absent, the expected value of the documentation is approximately 1.886. This finding is statistically significant, as indicated by a p-value of 0.000, suggesting that there is a strong baseline level of dependent variable that exists independently of documentation.

In contrast, the coefficient for the "Documentation" variable is 0.084, implying that for each unit increase in the documentation score, the dependent variable is expected to increase by 0.084 units. However, this relationship is not statistically significant, as indicated by a p-value of 0.160, which exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.05. Consequently, while there is a positive association between documentation and the dependent variable, the evidence does not support a meaningful impact. The standardised coefficient (Beta) of 0.130 further illustrates the weak positive relationship between documentation and the dependent variable, suggesting that improvements in documentation may lead to a slight increase in the dependent variable. The T-value for the documentation variable is 1.412, which, along with the associated p-value, indicates that documentation does not significantly predict the dependent variable. In conclusion, the regression analysis reveals a positive but statistically insignificant relationship between documentation and the dependent variable. The constant term indicates a solid baseline level, while the documentation variable's coefficient suggests a minor influence that lacks robust evidence. Therefore, further exploration may be warranted to identify other factors that could more significantly affect the service delivery to improve effectiveness.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The descriptive statistics reveal that respondents generally perceive the performance appraisal documentation as inadequate. The mean scores for the statements regarding

documentation are all below the midpoint of a typical Likert scale, with the highest mean being 2.29 for the statement about the performance appraisal process being well documented. This suggests that while some employees acknowledge the existence of documentation, there is a prevailing sentiment of dissatisfaction. These results are in line with the inferential output, which suggests that the Documentation Coefficient (B = 0.084) indicates that for each unit increase in the performance management system documentation, service delivery effectiveness is expected to increase by 0.084 units. However, this effect is not statistically significant (p = 0.160), suggesting that documentation alone does not have a strong impact on service delivery effectiveness in this model. Nevertheless, performance documentation ensures transparency, consistency, and fairness in the appraisal process. Sabir (2017) also concluded that proper documentation ensures that the appraisal process is consistent and fair. This helps in building trust in the appraisal system and ensures that all employees are evaluated based on the same criteria.

Supporting this, Sabir (2017) underscores the significance of performance appraisals in organisations, emphasising that proper documentation and evaluation can effectively motivate employees by providing clear feedback and goals. A technical report prepared by Barends, et al. (2016) found similar outcomes with the findings revealing that well-documented appraisals help employees identify areas for improvement and seek relevant tools and processes, thereby enhancing both organisational performance and individual job satisfaction.

Lastly, Sabir (2017) highlights the importance of performance appraisals in organisations, emphasising that proper documentation helps supervisors understand employees' roles and responsibilities, which in turn clarifies reporting lines and improves organisational efficiency.

Overall, the documentation of an Employee Performance Management System plays a crucial role in improving service delivery by enhancing employee performance,

ensuring accountability and transparency, identifying areas for improvement, and clarifying reporting lines. Aktaruzzaman and Rahim (2024) established that that performance management systems enables employees to meet their targets and deadlines, thereby ensuring accountability, and identifying areas for improvement. Both studies emphasise that well-documented performance management processes are crucial for effective service delivery.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the study's results, it can be concluded that while there is a positive association between performance management system documentation and service delivery effectiveness, this relationship is not statistically significant. The Documentation Coefficient of 0.084 suggests a potential increase in service delivery effectiveness with improved documentation; however, the p-value of 0.160 indicates that this effect is not strong enough to be considered meaningful. Although the study finds no statistical significance between performance management system documentation and service delivery, the coefficient suggests that documentation may facilitate employee performance. Documentation provides a valuable resource for employees to reference in the future and is effective in motivating them to engage in workplace operations. Moreover, organisations that implement standardised documentation practices experience improved employee engagement, motivation, and overall performance. However, excessive bureaucracy in documentation can become counterproductive, necessitating a balanced approach.

5.2 Recommendations

1. **Standardised Documentation Practices:** Municipal councils should implement standardised EPMS documentation frameworks to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness in performance evaluations.
2. **Integration of Digital Documentation Systems:** The use of digital tools and automated performance tracking systems can enhance accessibility, efficiency, and accuracy in performance management documentation.
3. **Capacity Building and Training:** Regular training programs should be conducted for employees and supervisors to improve their understanding and utilization of documented performance management processes.

4. **Flexibility in Documentation Procedures :** While maintaining structure, municipal councils should ensure that documentation procedures remain adaptable to accommodate dynamic service delivery needs without creating excessive administrative burdens

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Data was collected from employees of Mbabane and Manzini municipalities. This may not be generalisable to other sectors. Additionally, data collection was constrained by access to performance records, which may have influenced results.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Managers at municipal councils should emphasise structured documentation of EPMS documentation to facilitate performance monitoring and enhance decision-making. They should also ensure that documentation processes remain flexible to adapt to changing service delivery needs and avoid excessive administrative burdens.

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