In pursuit of performance-oriented civil service reforms (CSRs): a Kenyan perspective

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Summary

Purpose – The paper aims to explore the implementation of performance-oriented civil service reforms (CSRs) in Kenya, noting hurdles and opportunities for improvement and to suggest a robust model to imbed a performance-oriented reforms culture.

Design/methodology/approach – The article is informed by a review of the literature on civil service reforms and applications of performance measurements in civil service reforms in Africa in general and specifically in Kenya. Current performance-oriented reforms/practices and challenges are documented, obstacles/gaps to effective implementation identified, opportunities for improvement isolated and a robust model to inculcate a performance-oriented culture suggested for application.

Findings – While noticeable progress has been made in implementation of CSRs in Kenya, there evidently remain obstacles in the implementation of performance-oriented civil service reforms. Civil service reforms ought to revolve around performance measurements; rewarding good performance and realigning resources to support desired changes, while simultaneously stimulating competition amongst public entities so as to support superior public service delivery.

Originality/value – The paper provides a succinct account of the state of civil service reforms in Kenya and particularly the drive towards performance-oriented reforms. It suggests a holistic approach to engraining a performance-oriented culture.

Keywords Performance measures, Measurement, Civil service, Sub Saharan Africa, Kenya

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The subject of civil service reforms (CSRs) in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) evokes emotions and continues to be controversial amongst academics, African governments, Western governments and donor agencies. A plethora of arguments and counter-arguments exists, which explain causes for such failures and/or success (Ayee, 2005; Olowu, 1999; AEGM, 2003; CODESRIA, 2005; DPMN, 2003; Mhone, 2003; Owusu, 2005). In this article we delve into literature to explore the state of CSRs reforms in Africa in general and specifically use Kenya as a frame of reference to understand the state of performance-oriented reforms in Africa. We establish impediments and challenges to successful performance-oriented civil service reforms implementation and ingredients for success. Reforms in Kenya are then discussed and a model suggested for imbedding a performance-oriented reforms culture so as to meet the growing aspirations of Kenyans.

Performance measurement

The continuous need to improve both efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector in light of scarce resources and rising public expectations remains a major challenge to the public sector worldwide, hence the need for performance measures (Ancarani and Capaldo, 2001; Hoque, 2008). Thus performance measures in the public sector have become important because of the need to improve public service, particularly from the ''citizen'' perspective

(Black *et al.*, 2001). Performance measures are vital since ''one cannot manage that which cannot be measured'' (Zairi, 2003). Equally, Bruijn (2002) suggests that performance measurements in the public sector promote: transparency, learning, appraising, and sanctioning. So in the context of public sector, performance measurements are credited with: modernizing public budgets, boosting obligatory/voluntary reporting, stimulating contract management, enabling inter-administrative comparisons/benchmarking, promoting internal system diagnosis and creating a strategic management system (Greiling, 2005). Since public sector management has become increasingly result and customer-focused, there is growing unwillingness among communities and governments to accept the continuation of historical commitments simply because they are historic (Jarrar and Schiuma, 2007). In sum, the emphasis in performance measurement today, explain why managing and measuring performance has become a key driver in public sector reform agenda in recent years. Given the diminishing differences between private and public sector, there is therefore a push today for the public sector to embrace customer-centric approach so as to justify its existence. Performance measures should therefore provide organizations with means for planning and implementing strategies.

The aforementioned advantages as summarized (Table I), underscores the essence of performance-oriented civil service reforms in Africa. In fact ECA (2003), recommends application of total quality management principles by African governments so as to deliver superior public service via performance-oriented and customer-driven civil reforms. Similarly, NPR (2007) and Leong (2002) suggest that if public services are to be customer-driven they must be judged based on public's expectations and best practice principles. Easing information flow, accessibility of services, complaint systems, inquiries handling and efficiency in service delivery should be prioritized. Moreover, redress for poor services and pleasant surroundings for customers are essential in nurturing a culture of excellence in the civil service, which is what reforms are all about.

Benefits aside, specific concerns have been raised regarding usage of performance information. Conceptual underdevelopment, limited or no recognition of stakeholder needs and data shortages technical/analytical usually compromise the establishment of robust measurement systems (Black *et al.*, 2001). Cornell University (2006), similarly cite David and Gaebler (1992) who contend that as society becomes more complex and diverse, the needs and preferences of customers are no longer homogeneous, yet governments still provide standardized services as though all their citizens are or will be equally satisfied. Ironically, while a majority of public sector reforms place strong emphasis on performance measurement and management systems (PMMS) reality suggests otherwise. PMMS do not in all cases appear to be the key driver of public sector modernization (OECD, 1997; Sanderson, 2001). Sotirakou and Zeppou (2006) assert that many public organizations have not developed PMMS and even fewer use them as instruments of performance. Hence, Wilson (2000) warns that although there is a positive linkage between objectives, drivers and

Table I Advantages of performance measurements		
Benefits	*Attributes*	*Author*
Efficiency and effectiveness	Means for planning and implementing strategy	Ancarani and Capaldo, Hoque
Improved public service	Transparency, means to influence behavior, focus, compel and monitoring people, learning, appraising, rewarding and sanctioning	Black *et al.*, Ancara and Capaldo
Management	Measuring and managing, modernizing, reporting, contract management, benchmarking, monitoring performance, cost of poor quality, internal diagnosis, creation of management systems	Zairi, Greiling
Citizen centricity	Result and customer focused, value driven	Jarrar and Schuma ECA
Communicating with stakeholders	Performance tells it all	Brujin, Zairi

key performance measures, the challenge lies in moving performance measures from being something that keeps scores to something that helps people and teams improve their performance. Similarly, Pidd (2005) cautions that over-reliance on performance measures may encourage performativity (i.e. people whose performance is being measured inflates scores without corresponding rise in performance, or subtle change through which performance as measured, comes to define reality). Bruijn (2002) also cautions that performance measurements can have a number of negative consequences: promoting game playing, adding to internal bureaucracy, blocking innovation, blocking ambitions and killing systems responsibility. Likewise, Hammer (2007) admonishes against what he calls ''seven sins'' associated with performance measurements: vanity, provincialism, narcissism, laziness, pettiness, inanity (and frivolity. The ''sins'' are indeed the sort of challenges that today's public sectors in Africa are grappling with necessitating prudence and firm commitment on the part of leaders to entrench performance oriented reforms.

So pursuance of performance-oriented reforms; where performance measures are objectively and aggressively deployed to tackle performance flaws must remain a priority. It is a delicate balance, particularly considering that performance-oriented reforms require radical mind-shift towards proper usage and accuracy of performance measures. Inevitably though this is a deficiency the public sector cannot afford to condone if reforms currently being pursued are to realize the sought after results.

Civil service reforms in Kenya

The civil service reform program (CSR) was first launched in Kenya in 1993 (Sawe, 1997; Obongo, 2007) to improve efficiency and productivity. Following the launch, the government created a steering committee on the Civil Service Reform Program (CSRP) at the national, provincial and district levels and in each ministry with a national secretariat as its operational arm. The government then conducted sensitization seminars to ensure that all actors in the reform process were properly and adequately sensitized (Nzioka, 1998). The reform programs were designed to be implemented in three phases:

1. Phase I (1993-1998), which focused on containment.

2. Phase II (1998-2001), which focused on performance improvement.

3. Phase III (2003-to date), whose focus will be refinement, consolidation and sustenance of reforms.

Policy issues dealt with under phase I included: staffing, civil service organization, training and capacity building, financial management, performance management, pay and benefits. Reflecting on his experience, Nzioka (1998) argued that were CSRs to herald the emergence of a civil service that is efficient, productive and result-oriented in consonance to the then prevailing Kenya's vision of being ''newly industrialized country'' (NIC) by 2020, then they should be geared towards: debureaucratisation, decentralization, forge strategic alliances, develop a quality culture, be global and information technology driven. These are the same sentiments expressed by KCG (2003).

Phase I reforms program ushered in phase II reforms towards mid-1998. However, phase II reforms only gained momentum following National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in 2003 (Obongo, 2007). Phase II reform witnessed a series of ministerial and sectoral initiatives. The launch of governance reforms; justice, law and order sector reforms; judicial reforms; capacity building and training; e-governance; results based management (RBM); participation in quality awards and reintroduction of performance contracts were witnessed (Nyamweya, 2007; Government of Kenya, 2007; Kombo, 2007; World Bank, 2007; Obongo, 2007; Kenya Institute of Administration, 2008; Kobia and Mohammed, 2006).

Thus, while remarkable progress in entrenching a performance-oriented civil service reforms agenda has gained momentum, there still remains room for improvement and much more remains to be done.

Towards performance-oriented CSRs

While few African nations have recorded major strides towards the realization of performance-oriented CSRs objectives such as Botswana and Ethiopia, several others including Kenya were struggling and had only recorded modest success (Kiragu, 2002). Several impediments still stood on the way of successful performance-oriented reforms. To establish a pro-performance-reform culture, a model that encapsulates the essential reform agenda (Figure 1) is hereby suggested for application so as to improve public offerings.

The suggested model envisions on a robust performance measurement system for each ministry, departments and parastatals within the public sector. The model revolves around six core ingredients that influences and impacts on the respective performance measurement and management systems (PMMS). The PMMS (Halachmi, 2002), should therefore be customized to suit each ministry/department stakeholder base besides affording cross-ministry/department collaborations. Importantly, performance measures should not be viewed as something that keeps scores, but rather something that helps people and teams to improve their performance (Wilson, 2000). PMMS should support clear communication of performance results and be public needs-driven rather than technology-driven (Hoque, 2008). So the type of performance measurements used, when and for what purposes they are used should be issues entirely dealt with at delivery (department/parastatal) level without losing sight of the need for continuous improvement. Moreover, the model is cyclical; reflecting continuous improvement (Neely *et al.*, 2001). Indeed the model is a hybrid between the PDCA cycle – continuous improvement (Deming, 1982), performance prism – stakeholder approach (Neely *et al.*, 2001) and the balanced scorecard – internal processes, learning and growth, and customer focus (Kaplan and Norton, 1992).

Leadership

That leadership is central to successful implementation of CSRs is not in dispute given the plethora of arguments in its support (Olowu, 1999; Wescott, 1999; Palidano, 2001, Kiragu, 2002; Shepherd, 2003; Lodge and Kalitowski, 2007). Kenya's CSRs should thus be focused on both management and leadership; cultivating talents through effective mentoring programs to create capacity. A revolutionary breed of leadership that consistently promotes

Figure 1 A performance measurement-oriented CSR model for Kenya
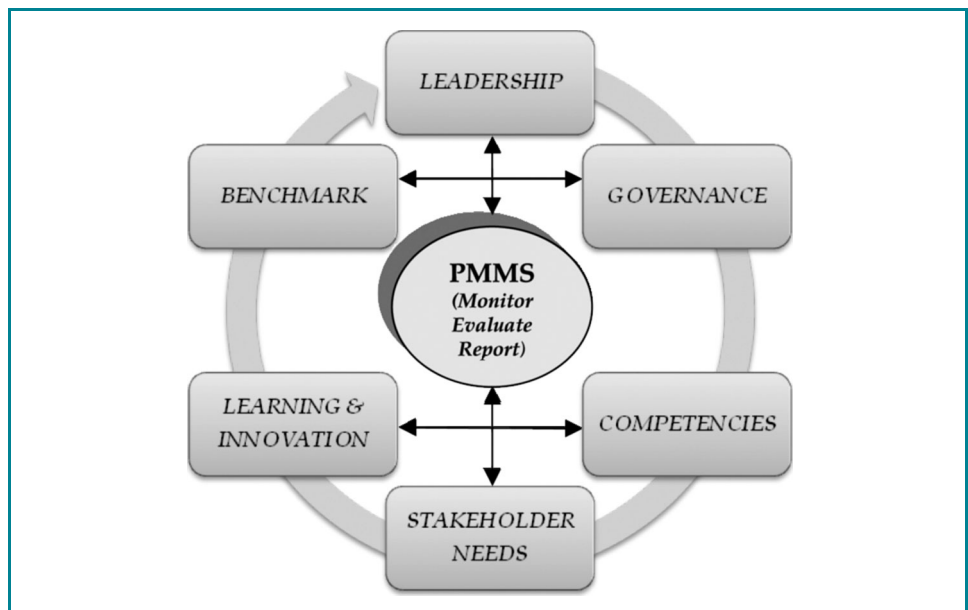
efficiency, honesty, productivity and public offerings while fiercely standing against illegitimate political forces is critical. Meritocracy rather than ethnicity/tribalism or indeed political party patronage must continue to reign supreme in civil service appointments.

The public sector should speedily correct inherent skills deficits using a combination of approaches. Changing recruitment criteria to focus on leadership and management qualities, perfecting open recruitment process, reinforcing performance contracts, developing head-hunting capabilities and reforming pay system to favor performance-related system should entrenched. Training programs should be implemented according to the national human resource needs (Mhone, 2003). Leaders ought to anticipate must carefully drive change programs in line with changing missions, new requirements and competitiveness while embracing innovations and technology to bolster public offerings (CIPS, 2007). Acceptance of reforms should be built amongst top-level managers so reforms can succeed (Nzioka, 1998).

Governance

Overhaul of governance systems to encourage competitiveness, democracy and collaboration with external partners should be prioritized (Olowu, 1999). Tailoring reforms to specific organizations' needs and making them home-grown with national teams' involvement requires priority (Ayee, 2005). Focusing sharply on financial/human resources; particularly efficient performance by departments and reduction of overlap/duplications within and between ministries is critical (Obongo, 2007). Importantly government's ''Kenya Bribery Index'', which gauges corruption and governance abuse in ministries/departments, should be deployed throughout the civil service (Chene, 2008).

Painful cultural changes should be driven to include rooting out tolerance for corruption and the ''big man's'' syndrome (Ayee, 2005; Therkildsen, 2001; Mhone, 2003). Encouragingly in 2008; four parastatals emerged winners of the Company of the Year Award (Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA), 2008); a premier quality award in Kenya, namely: Kenya Wildlife Services (leadership and corporate governance practices), Kenya Commercial Bank (corporate citizenship practices), Mumias Sugar (environmental improvement practices), and Kenya Airways (strategic planning practices).

Likewise, redesigning public sector to suit the needs of the nation and its people and the glowing aspirations of its people must be prioritized (PSI, 2001). Wide usage of ICTs must be promoted to enhance delivery of public service (Sexana, 2005) and the e-governance strategy should be premised on three key principles: citizen ownership, private sector partnership and regular evaluation (Coleman, 2005).

The archaic public sector fashion on ''departmental silos'' with its inherent bottlenecks even in the face of local/national/international challenges, which inhibit a unified government response should not be tolerated. Therefore seamlessness or joined-up civil service must be built and Lodge and Kalitowski (2007) suggests: developing horizontal liaisons with cross-cutting coordinating policy and delivery units with clear targets, pooled budgets and horizontal ministerial portfolios similar to what the current Prime Minister's Office provides; coordinating and supervising all government ministries (GOK, 2008). Performance management processes should be integrated with budget processes so as resource allocations correspond and are informed by ministry/departments' performance against agreed objectives, as is the case in Sweden. Funding should be focused in support of departments/ministries, with improved performance to stimulate further performance, and competition (Kobia and Mohammed, 2006).

Competence development

Reforms must recognize the centrality of human resource management and particularly, skills management through creation competencies (Kamonche, 1997). Focusing on improving the quality and timeliness of delivery of public service through civil servants competence improvement must be emphasized (Obongo, 2007). Thus, training should

target development of leadership and management capabilities and capacity (Lodge and Kalitowski, 2007). The Kenya Institute of Administration should understand what skills and competencies Kenya's civil servants want and tailor training programs to meet them (KIA, 2008). KIA should design specialized training programs in tandem with those championed by the Parliamentary Service Commission and the Speaker of the national assembly's training regime (PSC, 2008) to induct parliamentarians and promote democracy.

Stakeholder involvement

The twenty-first century citizens and stakeholders are demanding to be heard with frequency (ECA, 2003) so development of partnerships with these stakeholders is therefore paramount in effective formulation and implementation of CSRs. African governments must therefore understand assumptions underlying public sector management such as right of citizens as owners and customers (AEGM, 2003) so as to set correct priorities, politicize change and accountability. Public sector must therefore work in tandem with civic society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to deliver public goods and jointly work towards improving relations and competencies (Leong, 2002). Public departments/agencies should: identify who their customers are, what their needs are and how such needs can be met and work towards meeting them (NPR, 2007).

Effective management of service delivery surveys as a means of improving public service delivery should be encouraged (Langseth, 1999). Such surveys should provide critical information with which to promote reforms, provide the public with a voice and allow Kenyans to exert pressure on service providers so as to deliver superior public goods besides creating a pool of data for future use. There is need to balance between customer perceptions and expectations in order to clearly ascertain the gaps between perceptions and expectations (Wisniewski, 2001). Nonetheless, to increase transparency, performance measurements requires improved external reporting systems and must avoid overloading Kenyans with so many indicators most of which may be difficult to comprehend (Greiling, 2005; Rantanen et al., 2007; Black et al., 2001).

Learning and innovation

Since most of the public operation processes are based on capabilities and competences, which are rooted in the intellectual capital of public stakeholders (Jarrar and Schiuma, 2007) it is important that these are effectively managed. Application of tools like the balanced scorecard to cultivate and grow a pro-innovation culture should be encouraged. Embracing effective knowledge management strategies that copes with the ever-increasing staff mobility while preventing lose of corporate memory should be supported. Given the relatively high staff mobility on account of retrenchments (Obongo, 2007) the civil service needs to ensure preservation of institutional memory. There must be deliberate attempts to capture and systematically analyze the innovation that is out there by picking from the best. The civil service needs to act as a ''talent spotter'', absorbing ideas and spreading knowledge about what works and what drives change (Lodge and Kalitowski, 2007). Within ministries and departments, specific staff should be assigned to collate and coordinate innovations and channel them through the innovation pipeline safely, while soliciting funding for such initiatives on a routine basis.

Benchmark

Kenya's public sector should purposefully capture and apply best practices from within and without to improve its service and delivery. World Bank (2001) calls public sector organizations to set minimum standards ''floors'', whose performance should not be permitted to fall below and then benchmark performance within/without with best practice, whose performance exceeds such floors. The civil service should benchmark performance against the best in class to provide choice in both sources of service and delivery means (NPR, 2007). Were benchmarking to be implemented this may foster competition, attract

potential private investors and raise the cost of harboring poor performance to the delight and benefit of Kenyans.

Conclusion

It is encouraging to note that ingredients of a performance-oriented civil service reform culture are sprouting in Kenya, if the various civil service reform initiatives are anything to go by. Nonetheless, there still remains considerable scope for improvement. Kenya's civil service should work towards an integrated holistic overhaul of governance structures and systems so as to embrace curative approaches rather than partial (quick fixes) that have the potential to stifle pro performance-oriented reform culture. Gains made in executing existing reform initiatives should be used as platforms to launch further aggressive reforms. There is no turning back; the civil service should create an amenable environment that allows development of capabilities and competencies. Only by continuously improving its processes, civil service deliverables and people will Kenya's civil service meet the growing aspirations of its citizens. Towards embracing a performance-oriented civil service reform, Kenya's civil service must create communities of shared success where stakeholder relationships are nurtured, collaborations cultivated, processes refined and visions; policies and practices reflect a holistic approach to creating excellence. Superior public service should not be viewed as ''add-on'' piece-meal initiative, but rather part and parcel of a purposeful developmental culture, where performance-oriented reforms are engrained in all aspects of public service processes, performances and deliverables.

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