

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# The Advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 16: An analysis of Performance Management Systems in South African Local Government

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## Abstract

This research paper discusses the implementation of performance management in the South African local government, with a specific focus on the O.R. Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM). The aim of the study is to investigate the obstacles to effective performance management and determine the compliance of the local government with performance management as stated in the white paper in order to improve service delivery.

The research methodology used in the study is qualitative research, which involves collecting descriptive data through interviews and document analysis. The paper specifically focuses on the challenges faced by Section 57 employees (Municipal Manager, Directors, and Assistant Directors) in implementing the Performance Management System within the O.R. Tambo District Municipality.

The findings of the study highlight several challenges to effective performance management in ORTDM. One major obstacle identified is the lack of training and development opportunities for employees. The municipality lacks a proper training policy, resulting in employees not having the necessary skills and understanding of performance management. This issue is exacerbated by the changes in the local government system and the loss of valuable skills and institutional memory.

Overall, the research paper highlights the need for addressing these challenges in order to improve performance management and service delivery in the South African local government, particularly in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. It emphasizes the importance of training and development, overcoming resistance to change, establishing effective communication strategies, and promoting public participation and accountability.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Performance Management System, Municipal Systems, Municipality, Service Delivery.

## 1. Introduction

The O.R. Tambo District Municipality, located in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, faces significant challenges in terms of poverty, unemployment, and low literacy rates. These socioeconomic factors contribute to the overall difficulties in delivering quality services to the residents of the district (Dlatu, et. al, 2023).

The performance management system (PMS) is a long-term plan introduced by the South African government to improve the productivity and effectiveness of local government, aiming to address the issues of inefficiency, unproductiveness, and incompetency among public servants (Makhubela, et. al, 2016). The implementation of the PMS in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality is crucial to enhance

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service delivery and uplift the living conditions of its residents.

This paper focuses on evaluating the extent to which the performance management system is implemented at the local government level, particularly within the context of the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. It aims to determine the compliance of the municipality with the performance management policies outlined in the white paper, which serves as a guideline for effective implementation.

The significance of the study lies in the need to improve service delivery in the district, which is essential for sustainable development and the well-being of the local population. By establishing the compliance and effectiveness of the performance management system, the research aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing service delivery in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality.

Given the poor socioeconomic indicators of the district, it is crucial to address the legacy of apartheid and its impact on institutional capacity and public service efficiency. By focusing on strong, effective, transparent, and accountable institutions, the South African government aims to create an environment conducive to sustainable development, curbing violence, enhancing access to justice, and improving overall quality of life for all citizens, including those in disadvantaged areas like the O.R. Tambo District.

## 2. Contextual Background

The signing of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996 marked a significant shift in the role of local government as the key agent responsible for government service delivery and poverty eradication efforts. Subsequent local government elections in 2000 and 2006 further emphasized the importance of expediting service delivery, improving financial performance, strengthening human resource capacity, and consolidating institutional capacity in municipalities to enhance the state of service delivery in the country (Schoeman & Chakwizira, 2023).

The White Paper on local government, published in 1998, outlined a vision of developmental local government, calling on municipalities to address the challenges of underdevelopment and poverty within their local areas. The paper recognized integrated development planning, performance management, and community participation as crucial mechanisms for achieving this vision.

However, the performance of many municipalities in South Africa has exposed significant deficiencies in fulfilling their constitutional and legislative obligations. Various reports and studies, such as the one presented by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) to the portfolio committee on Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), have highlighted the persistent issues of poor service delivery and governance in most municipalities (Hutete & Sibanda, (2022). These issues include corruption, limited institutional capacity and skills among staff, lack of transparency, dysfunctional ward committees, lack of accountability by councillors and municipal officials, insufficient public participation in governance matters, non-compliance with municipal legislation and by-laws, failure to prioritize community needs, misalignment of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and budgeting processes, tensions between political and administrative sections of municipalities, and fragile financial viability (Hope Sr, 2021). These factors significantly impact the functioning of municipalities and have resulted in protests and discontent at the local government level.

The primary focus of this research paper is to investigate the obstacles hindering the effective implementation of performance management in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM). Performance management is viewed as a mechanism to address performance-related issues that impede service delivery and hinder the provision of quality services to South African citizens. By identifying and understanding these obstacles, the research aims to contribute to the improvement of performance management and ultimately enhance service delivery outcomes in ORTDM.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods to examine the patterns of Performance Management System (PMS) in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM). Qualitative research is deemed most suitable for this study, as it enables the researcher to observe and understand the unique socio-economic conditions and living conditions in the O.R. Tambo District (Forber-Pratt, 2015). Data collection for this study was carried out through interviews and document analysis. The interviews were conducted with employees referred to as Section 57 Employees, including directors, assistant directors, managers reporting directly to the

management. These interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives, experiences, and insights related to PMS in ORTDM.

In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted using relevant literature, online articles, legislation, council meeting minutes, Municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), and approved policies. This utilization of primary and secondary data sources provides a comprehensive understanding of the topic and allows for triangulation of information. Overall, the combination of qualitative methods, interviews, and document analysis in this paper enables the researcher to gain valuable insights into the implementation of performance management in ORTDM from the perspective of key employees involved in the process.

**Figure 1.** Biographical information

Interviewee alphabet	Gender	Qualification	Years of service to the municipality	Management level
A	Male	Grade 12	11	Executive
B	Male	National Diploma	9	Executive
C	Female	Bachelor's Degree	3	Executive
D	Male	Bachelor's Degree	7	Executive
E	Male	Grade 12	21	Executive

Municipal Manager, and employees responsible for implementing performance

Based on the results of the study, 7 critical themes emerged as obstacles to effective performance management in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality. These themes, as highlighted by the interviewees, will be discussed below:

**Theme 1: Lack of Clear Performance Targets and Indicators:** One major obstacle mentioned by the interviewees was the absence of clear performance targets and indicators. They pointed out that without well-defined targets and measurable indicators, it becomes challenging to assess and monitor progress towards achieving strategic objectives. The lack of clarity in setting performance targets hinders the effective implementation of performance management in the municipality.

**Theme 2: Inadequate Resources and Capacity:** Another theme that emerged was the insufficient allocation of resources and capacity constraints. Interviewees emphasized that a lack of financial resources, skilled personnel, and technological infrastructure negatively impacts the implementation of performance management. Insufficient resources limit the municipality's

#### 4. Research Results

The interviews were conducted among employees referred to in the Municipal Systems Act as Section 57 Employees i.e. (the directors, assistant directors and the managers reporting directly to the Municipal manager) and those employees responsible for implementing performance management.

Two executive directors were interviewed and three executive managers who are employees who in terms of the Municipal Systems Act: Act 32 of 2000 has a performance-based term contract and are directly accountable to the Municipal Manager.

ability to collect, analyze, and utilize performance data effectively, hindering the measurement and improvement of service delivery and governance.

**Theme 3: Limited Integration and Coordination:** Interviewees highlighted the need for better integration and coordination across departments and levels of the municipality. They mentioned that fragmented approaches and siloed operations within the municipality impede the effective implementation of performance management. The lack of coordination and integration hampers the alignment of strategies, goals, and actions, affecting the overall performance and service delivery outcomes.

**Theme 4: Resistance to Change and Lack of Accountability:** another theme that emerged was resistance to change and a lack of accountability. Interviewees mentioned that some employees and stakeholders within the municipality resist the implementation of performance management due to fear of accountability or change in established practices. This resistance creates a barrier to adopting new performance management practices and hinders the development of a performance-driven culture within the organization.

**Theme 5:** *The lack of training and development* emerged as a significant obstacle to effective performance management in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM). The results indicated that the municipality does not have a proper training policy in place, which hampers the employees' ability to meet the demands of new tasks and responsibilities. According to the interviewees, the lack of training, job understanding, skills, and development opportunities were cited as key reasons for the ineffective implementation of performance management at ORTDM. The transition of responsibilities from the national government to the provincial government and finally to the local government level has introduced numerous changes, including new functions and tasks for municipal employees. However, the lack of adequate training programs has made it difficult for staff to adapt to these changes and fulfill their roles effectively.

**Theme 6:** *The lack of an organizational communication strategy* emerged as another critical obstacle to effective performance management in the O.R. Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM). According to the interviews conducted, it was found that the municipality does not have a proper communication strategy in place. Some interviewees highlighted the absence of leadership structures or mechanisms for effectively disseminating and conveying information from high-level officials to subordinates within the organization.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the internal communication strategy has been under review since the adoption of the municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP). This suggests that there is a recognition of the need for an effective communication strategy but a delay or lack of progress in implementing it. Communication is widely regarded as a vital element that binds together various components of an organization, facilitating interaction with its agenda, clients, and the broader public.

Bui & Baruch (2010) emphasizes that the extent to which an organization can achieve its objectives is greatly influenced by its communication practices.

**Theme 7:** *Lack of public participation* was also seen as a stumbling block to the efficacy of PMS at ORTDM. Several acts and policies emphasize the need for municipalities to encourage citizen

involvement, decision-making, and public accountability. According to the White Paper (1998), municipalities have a responsibility to promote the active participation of communities. Municipal councilors are expected to facilitate the involvement of citizens and community groups in the design and delivery of municipal services. This demonstrates the intent to create a participatory and inclusive governance framework that engages citizens in decision-making processes and service delivery. These legislative and policy provisions reflect the recognition that effective governance and service delivery require the active involvement and participation of the public. By engaging citizens and community organizations, municipalities can tap into local knowledge, perspectives, and needs, leading to more responsive and accountable decision-making.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

Despite the adoption of performance management systems by numerous municipalities, ORTDM has not achieved a successful transition to such a system that fully integrates performance measurement into its ongoing management practices.

For PMS to be effective and well-implemented in ORTDM, it must be accompanied by the following elements. These aspects need to be reassessed and carefully considered as a remedial approach or procedure.

### 5.1 Dynamic Management and Support from Senior Management

Active leadership and support from top management are crucial for the successful implementation of a performance management system at ORTDM. Creating and communicating a vision, top managers, including elected officials and executive managers, need to establish a clear vision of how performance measures will be used and how they will benefit managers, employees, and stakeholders. This vision should be effectively communicated to all levels of the organization.

By actively demonstrating leadership, providing support, and addressing potential obstacles, top management can create an environment where performance management is embraced and effectively implemented throughout ORTDM. This, in turn, can contribute to improved organizational performance and service delivery outcomes (Holzer, et al., 2019).

## 5.2 Handling Resistance to Change

Managing resistance to change is an ongoing process. It requires patience, persistence, and open communication. By addressing concerns, involving employees, and providing the necessary support, organizations can effectively manage resistance and increase the chances of successful implementation of the performance management system. It is also important to recognize that resistance is a natural response to change and that managing it effectively requires a combination of communication, involvement, support, and continuous evaluation. Furthermore, managing resistance to change is an ongoing process. It requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to address concerns and adapt as needed.

By effectively managing resistance, you can minimize disruption, engage employees, and increase the likelihood of successful implementation of the performance management system. It therefore becomes imperative to involve employees and key stakeholders in the design and decision-making process of the performance management system. By including their input, concerns, and ideas, you can increase their sense of ownership and engagement, making them more likely to support and embrace the change.

In addition, it is important to address concerns and provide support. Actively listen to employees' concerns and address them empathetically. Provide support and resources to help employees adapt to the change, such as training programs, coaching, and mentoring. Offer guidance and assistance in understanding the new system and how it aligns with their roles and responsibilities.

## 5.3 Adequate Training and Capacity Development

The restructuring of the local government system in South Africa has presented additional challenges in terms of training needs. With the integration of budgets and the merging of municipal management, new training requirements have arisen to retain existing staff and develop their skills. However, the research suggests that the local government sphere has struggled to address these training needs adequately (Pieterse, 2019).

The impact of rapid transformation in municipal administration has been significant. Valuable skills and institutional memory have been lost, senior positions have often been filled based on political affiliations

rather than merit, and junior positions have been occupied by individuals with inadequate training and qualifications. These factors have contributed to the overall lack of capacity and competence within the municipality, hindering the effective implementation of performance management practices.

To address this obstacle, it is crucial for ORTDM to develop a comprehensive training policy that addresses the specific needs of its employees. This policy should include initiatives for job understanding, skills development, and continuous training opportunities. By investing in training and development programs, the municipality can enhance the capabilities of its workforce, improve performance management practices, and ultimately enhance service delivery to the local community.

## 5.4 Invest in Adequate Resources

Implementing and maintaining a performance management system require an investment of resources, including people, expertise, technology, and financial resources. It is important for organizations to recognize that the initial investment of resources in implementing a performance management system is often justified by the long-term benefits it can bring, such as improved performance, better decision-making, and resource optimization. Additionally, ongoing administration and maintenance of the system require ongoing resources to ensure its effectiveness and relevance over time.

Performance management systems have the potential to enhance resource utilization in the long term, but their implementation and continuous administration necessitate an initial allocation of resources. The establishment and upkeep of these systems rely on the availability of individuals, specialized knowledge, technology, and financial investment to develop metrics, gather and store data, analyse information, and generate reports (Hollands, 2020).

It is crucial to carefully plan for these systems and allocate sufficient resources, which may involve reallocating resources from less valuable tasks or securing additional resources. Effective resource allocation and planning are vital components of successful performance management initiatives.

## 5.5 Enhanced Human Resource Approach

The inadequate human resource management practices at ORTDM hinder the attraction and retention of

skilled and professional staff, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery. This issue is compounded by political interference in the hiring process, the appointment of individuals to non-existent positions, and discrepancies in salaries. It is crucial to foster better communication and relationships between employees and employers to address the deteriorating labor relations, which have resulted in conflicts (Satterthwaite & Mitlin, 2013).

Additionally, there is a pressing need to implement innovative strategies to combat corruption and other forms of misconduct within ORTDM's management. The transformation of local government in South Africa has placed significant pressure on municipalities to effectively and efficiently manage their financial resources in order to achieve their developmental objectives. To combat the issues of maladministration, unprofessional handling of municipal finances, fraud, and corruption, it is imperative for ORTDM to strengthen and evaluate their existing internal control system. This includes ensuring the quality and appropriateness of internal audit and audit committees, which requires vigilant oversight by administrative officials.

### 5.6 Organizational Communication Policy

In the context of performance management, effective communication is essential for conveying strategic goals, targets, and performance expectations to employees. It also plays a crucial role in fostering a shared understanding of organizational objectives, promoting transparency, and enabling collaboration and coordination among different departments and levels of the organization.

The absence of a well-defined communication strategy can lead to miscommunication, confusion, and a lack of alignment between organizational objectives and individual performance goals. It can also hinder the flow of vital information and feedback, impeding timely decision-making and problem-solving processes (Dainty, et.al,2007).

To address this obstacle, it is recommended that ORTDM develops and implements a comprehensive communication strategy that encompasses both internal communication within the organization and external communication with stakeholders and the public. This strategy should outline channels, processes, and tools for effective communication, establish clear lines of

communication and responsibilities, and promote a culture of open and transparent communication throughout the organization.

By improving organizational communication, the municipality can enhance its performance management efforts, ensure that employees are well-informed and engaged in the achievement of strategic objectives, and foster a culture of effective collaboration and information-sharing.

### 5.7 Retrieving External and Internal Expertise

Indeed, developing a successful performance management system requires more than just the technical aspects of creating forms and measures. It involves a significant change in organizational culture, which can be challenging and time-consuming. Seeking external expertise or leveraging internal individuals with knowledge and experience in performance management can greatly enhance the chances of success. Learning from others' experiences External experts or internal champions who have successfully implemented performance management systems in similar contexts can provide valuable insights and best practices. They can share lessons learned, identify potential pitfalls, and offer guidance on how to overcome challenges.

By accessing external expertise or leveraging internal individuals with knowledge and experience, organizations can benefit from the lessons learned by others and increase their chances of successfully implementing a performance management system. These individuals can provide guidance, support, and specialized skills that contribute to the development of a robust and effective system aligned with organizational goals and objectives.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the implementation of a performance management system is crucial for improving service delivery, it ensures that plans are effectively executed, development objectives are achieved, and resources are utilized efficiently. The objective of this research paper was to identify the factors that hinder the effective implementation of performance management systems in local government in South Africa. This paper identified several critical obstacles to the implementation of a performance management system at ORTDM. Lack of training and development negatively impacts the system's implementation, as does the absence of an organizational communication

strategy, which hinders the effective dissemination of the municipality's vision.

Resistance to change has also been observed among senior officials, despite the adoption and implementation of the system. Additionally, there is a lack of public participation in establishing performance agreements and involving citizens in the budgetary processes, indicating noncompliance with the legislative framework that prioritizes citizen engagement.

To address these hurdles, the paper recommends seven remedial procedures: managing resistance, improving the human resource strategy, accessing external or internal performance management experts, receiving active leadership and support from top management, enhancing communication strategies, allocating adequate resources, and ensuring sufficient staffing.

In conclusion, the provision of quality services is crucial for the well-being of the public, but it has been challenging in the South African public service due to inefficiency, unproductivity, and incompetence, partly resulting from the legacy of apartheid. The performance management system serves as an instrument for change and highlights the government's commitment to good governance and service delivery. It also emphasizes the importance of other government spheres supporting local government to improve their functions and enhance the quality of life for the people.

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