

Assessing the Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Enhancing Employees' Performance in a Selected Local Government Administration (LGA) in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The operations and utilization of ICT are not well understood and have rarely been addressed both, nationally and internationally. The aim of this research is therefore to establish a base level of understanding of the operational core values of ICT in developing countries. The study used a qualitative research design that involves a desktop research. Data was collected through the review and analysis of available published or existing documents. Data analysis included using the documentary analysis derived from the journals, and books as well as reviewing the various data analysis done in relation to the assessment of the role of ICT in enhancing employees' performance. Findings from previous literature revealed that there are constraints faced in the operations and utilization of ICT. The study confirmed some of the operational challenges to include lack of IT skills, and lack of clear understanding of ICT as well as training. This study provides an effective solution to identified challenges and impact as well as strategies to be adopted in order to reduce the failure rate of ICT. The implications of the findings are that unless the limitations named above are resolved, ICT in the developing nations will continue to experience poor service delivery, poor economic growth and development. Management of the municipality must ensure that adequate training in the use of ICTs is given to the employees in order to enhance performance.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a brief background of the study, defines the various forms of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and spells out the research problem and the research objectives. The importance of Information and Communication Technological (ICT) as well as the challenges and impact of ICT are also discussed. The literature review, research methodology, and limitations of the study are also discussed. Finally, the disposition of the paper is exposed.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have an important "role to play in the innovative system of local authority. Innovative ICT can provide the technological infrastruc-

ture on which complicated organizations can be sustained. They may also provide the capability to influence exterior generated information so that local agencies are enhanced in order to be able to understand the economic and social background and make balancing policies to react to them" (Pratchett 1999:736). According to Khali-fa et al. (2004) cited in Gichoya (2005:178), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Assessment can be defined as bringing in both, quantitative and qualitative methods and usefulness of the ICT to the organization. The management and employees' job performance cannot be concluded as good or bad without the valuable introduction of the ICT policies that enhanced the local government efficiency in South Africa. The scientific or equipped introduction of ICT infrastructure is of paramount importance to enhance the effective operation and administration of local government efficiency successfully. According to Fletcher et al. (2004:4), ICT is an application process within the firm, and could also be used as transactions with customers and suppliers. They further stressed, "It is important to note that ICT involves several stakeholders including the organization that concludes the transactions, its customers and suppliers".

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Study has indicated that surveys of the municipalities' failure especially in the area of utilizing an effective ICT efficiency maintain that the managers often have ideas but they do not have a clear understanding on the maximum effective and efficient utilization of ICT in delivering qualitative services to the communities and as a result, this has hindered their operations and improvement (Chang and Victor 2002) cited in (Dlamini 2009:1). Hence, this study focuses on the assessment of the role of ICT in enhancing employees' job performance effectively in Nkonkobe Local Municipality. It also identifies challenges faced by the employees on the effective and efficient utilization of ICT. Suggestions to solve these identified challenges would be made with references to the literature study and empirical research as well as to propose policies to address the sluggish introduction of ICT to promote and improve service delivery by the government in the province.

Statement of the Problem

Despite ICT bringing opportunities to the organizations to be more effective, Local Government Administration (LGA) in South Africa is still failing to perform well in servicing its citizens. This is seen from many service delivery protests and demonstrations. It is important for municipality employees to build their own capacity and competency in the field of ICT so that they can improve their performances and efficiency. Assessing the role of ICT efficiency in enhancing or improving employees' performance and promoting service delivery within the Municipality was investigated. The ICT needs of employees and their abilities to utilize this technology were also assessed. Given the scenario of assessment of the role of ICT efficiency in enhancing effective employees' performance within the local government and promoting service delivery by the government organizations in South Africa, there is a need to investigate the issues and reasons behind the impact of ICT utilization in Nkonkobe Local Municipality. To what extent could the ICT improve the employees' performance? What are the challenges affecting the employees performance in utilizing ICT? Do the employees have the necessary qualifications, skills and knowledge in utilizing the ICT? What possible guidelines could be provided to facilitate the utilization of ICT efficiency to enhance the employees' job performance by government?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study was to assess the role and importance of ICT in enhancing employees performance in the Local Government Administration (LGA) for the purpose of improving and promoting service delivering in Nkonkobe Municipality and to identify challenges affecting employees job performance in utilizing ICT.

Scope of the Study

In this study, ICT refers to the introduction of electronic medium, human resources, and purchasing system to fulfill organization functions of the target government sectors. The government sectors that have partially or fully introduce ICT have advantages in terms of quick service delivery and effective job performance enhancement, time saving as well as job accuracy.

Research Questions

The study is carried out to provide responses to the following questions:

- ♦ To what extent could the ICT be essential in improving employees' job performance within the Nkonkobe Local Municipality (NLM)?
- ♦ What are the challenges affecting the employees job performance in utilizing ICT?

An Overview of ICT Assessment

According to Sitta (2007:2), "the term Information and Technology Communication (ICT) refers to forms of technology that are used for communication and to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. This broad definition of ICT includes technologies such as, radio, television, video, telephone (both fixed line and mobile), computer and network hardware and software, as well as the equipment and services associated with these technologies, such as electronic mail, text messaging and radio broadcasts."

From some of the related literature review, issues discussed mostly are those issues related to the effective uses of ICT from the government sectors by looking at the external factors and the role performed by the use of ICT in de-

delivering services to the public. However, another research was also carried out investigating the uses of ICT effectiveness in the LGA by considering some major government departments namely, Department of Home Affairs and Department of Social Development as well as the department of Education, wherein both internal and external assessments were carried out. Similarly, related research topics to this scenario were that various studies have been conducted on the effective uses of ICT efficiency in the LGA but only focused on the service delivery to the public (communities), which is external service delivery and not internally directed to the employees who are expected to individually seize the opportunity to utilize the benefit of ICT efficiency in enhancing their daily activities, as well as ensuring good service delivery in their area of jurisdiction in the Province of South Africa.

"In the Global Information Society, there is a direct positive correlation between access to ICTs and socio-economic development, it is rather a necessary precondition", Jary Nadoo, Former Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting (Audenhove 1999:16). "Since 1994, the administration of the African National Congress (ANC) has been making several efforts to develop the country's economic improvement through promoting the socio-economic activities of government sectors" (Chiliya et al. 2011). "The study therefore complements the government's efforts by trying to elevate how government sectors can successfully introduce ICT to positively contribute to the economic development". The introduction of ICT in improving their employees' job performance and encouraging effective service delivery is no long an organization's or any government sector's choice but rather the new way of introducing ICT efficiency in enhancing employees job performance in the LGA. "It constitutes innovation as ICT are now becoming global and the introduction of this innovation is eliminating company and national boundaries, thereby acting as a strong competitive tool" (Chiliya et al. 2011). In fact, the paper intends to unavoidably generate consciousness and alertness of the significance of ICT among government sectors.

ICT efficiency in enhancing employees' performance in the LGA has become the focus of internal assessment in this study. The ultimate aims and objectives of this research is to find out why the majority of staff in the Nkonkobe

Local Municipality has not being able to effectively utilize the opportunity of ICT initiatives in ensuring good service delivery in their locality.

The study seeks to establish whether ICT efficiency play any role in terms of the noticeable challenges. The study will be conducted to assess the ICT efficiency in relation to:

- ♦ Level at which the Municipality's employees utilize ICT
- ♦ Management insight towards the introduction of ICT in the Municipality

An Administrative Behavior Theory and Decision-making Process

Various studies have examined reasons behind the introduction of ICT as a medium of disseminating information within and outside an organization notably, LGA. "The categorization of ICT introduction factors differs from one researcher to another" (Pratchett 1999; Chiliya et al. 2011). "Some researchers grouped the factors into technological, organizational as well as external factors, while others categorized them as benefits and drawbacks of ICT introduction" (Pratchett 1999; Chiliya et al. 2011). In addition, several scholars proposed a theoretical model of ICT introduction. The majority of the studies conducted on ICT introduction were focused on the Robert's (1947: 259) Administrative Behavior Theory and Decision-Making Process.

In the process of making an effective and efficient decision in an organization and for the organization to achieve its goal and objectives in Public Administration, Robert (1947:259) propounded an administrative behavior theory and decision-making process. An administrative theory in public administration can as well be referred to as the behavior of organizational man. These theories basically focus on two influences namely, internal and external influences. The internal influence comprises of habit, temperaments and attitudes, which could enable man to make good decisions. In addition, this internal factor also involves loyalty, which requires efficiency and training. Furthermore, external factors comprises of information services, which include programed and non-programed events in an organization, authority and advisory. Simon introduced electronic computers for the purpose of enhancing and promoting employees' performance, as well as to provide qualitative service delivery within and outside an orga-

nization. He makes a difference between programmed and non-programed decisions. The electronic computer is creative and innovative in nature and is available to people or personnel in order to embark on innovative decision creating techniques which will definitely create positive impact within their organizations. Simon believes that with the introduction of a computer into an organization, the decision-making process can be adequately, effectively, and efficiently transformed.

Finally, it could be concluded that the introduction of electronic computer in enhancing effectiveness in the employees' job performance in an organization according to Herbert Simon's Administrative theory and decision-making processes, there is direct correlation between this theory and the research topic. The application of the theory is necessary in this research study because for any organization like the Local Government to improve their service delivery and to take effective and efficient decision-making in their organizations, there is a need for the existence and introduction of ICT for their administrative work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative research design. The qualitative research design used in this study includes desktop research or documentary research method. Documentary research method simply referred to the reviewing and analysis of different documents that entail information about the situation of the present study. In addition, the documentary method or techniques used in this study was also used to categorize, interpret and investigate the corporal sources most especially published written documents instigating from both government and private sectors in the economy. Hence, some of the documents used for the purpose of this study include several publications, research literature, articles, books, conference reports, journals, dissertations and Internet sources as secondary sources of data. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:97) and Dlamini (2009) believe that every researcher should "use data collected by other investigators in connection with other problems or as part of the usual gathering of social data in the case of population census and such data is known as secondary data".

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to find out the extent to which ICT could be important in improving the employees' job performance, the technological challenges affecting the employees' performance, whether the employees have the necessary qualifications, skills and knowledge in utilizing ICT in Nkonkobe Municipality and how these challenges can be resolved. The study focuses on the Alice satellite office and Fort Beaufort head office. In this section, the findings are discussed in light of premise drawn from the study sub-questions that guided the study. The discussions focus on finding generated from qualitative data collected through the review of documents and published materials.

Awareness and Understanding of Information and Communication Technology

This study required bringing to light the level of ICT knowledge between Alice and Fort Beaufort' employees' in improving their job performance. Awareness of ICT and or lack of ICT affect the utilization of ICT in improving employees' jobs performance within the municipalities.

According to the in-depth interviews conducted by Kiula and Wafula (2010), it shows that most employees in local governments are aware of various ICT resources, but the knowledge of using them is limited in order to improve the employees' performance among the municipalities. The reviews also show that most of these municipalities' employees are basically from different departments and they mainly use the cell phone, which allows instant communication. Hence, it also found that not everybody owns a cell phone within their municipalities. Communication is usually about the employees' job performance. They however, cannot access the Internet, which is required to access market information for their external service delivery. Some of the employees from both municipalities lack ICT skills to search, select and process information, which was due to lack of basic literacy skills and the municipalities do not have training programs for them. They also lack strategic skills, that is, the ability to use the computer and network sources to improve their job performance effectively.

According to study carried out in Intsika-Yethu Municipality by Chisango (2014), the find-

ing shows that, *"Those who have access to these resources they do not know how to fully utilize these resources, they face a challenge of the background knowledge on how the ICT infrastructure can assist them"*. More so, *"Most women afford a cellphone for making calls and SMS, very few people are able to use the Internet"*.

According to the interviews conducted by Chisango (2014), the finding indicates that there were no ICT skills training offered in Emalahleni Municipality.

The review of documentary analysis of Nkonkobe Municipality shows that there are no programs that could assist the employees in obtaining ICT skills needed to provide qualitative service delivery within the municipalities. *"There is no strategic reporting tool to measure performance by employees in various departments and rewards for excellent performance has yet to be implemented due to teething problems with the management of Performance Management System (PMS)"* (Amathole District Municipality Integrated Development Plan Review 2013-2014).

Accessibility of Information and Communication Technology

Accessibility of ICTs within both, Alice and Fort Beaufort is a great challenge in enhancing employees' job performance and this study sought to find out the degree of ICT access in Alice and Fort Beaufort. Lesame et al. (2011) reveal that the government of the republic of South African implements the Telecommunications Policy in 1996 to achieve this goal, which *"promoted equal access to telecommunication services or universal service to these services, whether one resides in an urban or rural area."* From the analysis of documents reviewed, findings also show that an ICT physical access gap exists in both Alice and Fort Beaufort district due to different levels of education acquired and income earned. Some employees absolutely rely on government social support while very few are employed at government institutions. Those who are employed at government institutions easily have access to ICT compared to other employees in the community. Therefore, Fuchs and Horak (2008) argued in the digital divide theory that the income gap also creates a social divide, meaning that, there are some employees who can afford computer and Internet access while others cannot. Hence, these inequalities in education and income cre-

ate a lot of disparity among these municipalities' employees in delivering qualitative services within the municipalities.

From the reviewed of document analyzed, it was also found that physical access to ICT infrastructure in order to enhance employees performance in both Alice and Fort Beaufort Municipalities is limited. As observed within Alice environment, it was found that there is only one library center in the Alice municipality with very few computers. However, there is an ICT center in Alice town; the center is not a Multi-Purpose Community Centre. Previously, there were no ICT centers in Alice Municipality, making it difficult for both municipalities' employees to improve their job performance and the resident to access ICT services.

Therefore, accessibility to ICT is also a major concern within the municipalities in enhancing employees' performance in order to provide effective and efficient service delivery within the municipalities'. As observed in Harste (1994), Leu (2002), Moll (1994), Paris et al. (1994), Yopp and Singer (1994), and Cunningham (2000) literacy has brought about immense enlightenment and huge changes in the world of technology and hence, also extended to *"include literacy in information and communication technologies"*. In this context, literacy therefore does not necessarily mean the ability of any local government employee to read and write only but must also possess computer skills that could enhance their job performance in delivering qualitative services within the municipalities.

ICT Literacy Level among the Employees

The finding also reveals that the majority of employees in both Alice and Fort Beaufort Municipalities have low levels of ICT literacy. Hence, this has hindered them from performing their jobs effectively and efficiently. Utilization of ICT in order to enhance employees performance within the municipalities has been one of the major challenges because majority of employees do not want to be associated with ICT, which may be due to lack of motivation or low level of education. Therefore, for all the employees to improve their job performance within the municipalities, they must possess ICT literacy skills, which will enable them to have proper understanding of how to assess interment and acquire the required basic computer knowledge that will enhance their job performance within the municipalities. Quality education and employee

training encourages technology shifts and innovation that are necessary to solve the ICT illiteracy challenges and hence, higher education is the major driver to the information and knowledge system in order to improve employees performance in any organization (National Planning Commission: National Development Plan (2011).

According to Chisango (2014), *“With the ICT, the main language, that is, English, on the computer is not our language, remember our home language is Xhosa and a few Afrikaans and English, and so it does affect the employees in utilizing ICT effectively.”*

Possible Approaches to Overcome Technology Challenges Confronting Alice and Fort Beaufort in Nkonkobe Municipality

The review and analysis of some documents shows that possible approaches were derived in an attempt to overcome the challenges that are faced by employees in the Alice and Fort Beaufort municipality in enhancing the their employees job performance and utilization of ICT effectively and efficiently. The possible solutions were obtained from the review of published materials.

Support from the municipalities and the government, is another possible solution that was suggested according to the Municipal Systems Act 2000 (Nkonkobe Municipality Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Review (2008/2009), the “idea of a local government Performance Management System (PMS) enforces and requires all municipalities to develop a performance management system” that could enhance employees’ job performance, delivery qualitative services and “set targets, monitor and review performance based on indicators linked to their IDP”. All employees from both Alice satellite office and Fort Beaufort head office should be trained with the basic ICT skills, so that they would be able to assess the interment, search for information, collate and assess useful data that is necessary in executing their jobs.

CONCLUSION

The main significant findings of this study premise on the notion that ICT have an important role to play in the development of the South African economy, most especially in the Local Government Administration (LGA). This study

thus, provides an effective and efficient solution to identified challenges and impact as well as strategies to be adopted in order to reduce the failure rate of ICT utilization in the Local Government Administration (LGA) in South Africa. This in turn, implies that it is necessary to improve the levels of manpower or human skills and economic growth in the country. In addition, the study could also be seen as a valuable source of information to policymakers in the government sectors. This paper, therefore contributes to the empirical literature on the impact of ICT support in promoting the service delivery in LGA of South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The municipality management in Alice and Fort Beaufort should provide adequate funds for the acquisition of appropriate ICTs infrastructure.

Management of the municipality must ensure that adequate training in the use of ICTs is given to the employees in order to enhance job performance.

The Management of the municipality in Alice and Fort Beaufort must put an ICT strategy in place.

The municipality management in Alice and Fort Beaufort should assess their employees on a regular basis, not only for the purpose of improving the quality of job done or carried out within the municipality but also for the employees to receive feedback on the quality of work they do. Therefore, some of the important areas that should be covered in a thorough employees’ assessment are: work processes and results, communication skills, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, planning skills and program/project management as well as interacting with external environment.

The researchers of this paper also recommend that from both Alice and Fort Beaufort, the municipality employees who lack ICT skills should seek help from those who have the knowledge. Employees Forum Groups (EMG) should make the Special Programs Manager (SPM) of the Municipality aware of their problems regarding ICT utilization within the municipality. A project or program should be organized by the municipality to educate the employees about ICT issues, its effectiveness and efficiency in promoting and as well as improving qualitative service delivery within the municipalities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the qualitative research where desktop research approach or documentary research method was used and cannot be generalized to include the whole of South Africa.

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