

The Impact of Effective Utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Enhancing and Improving Employees Performance in the Local Government Organizations in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Incontrovertibly, ICT plays an important role in developing and structuring an organization, improving and enhancing employees' performance, as well as ensuring qualitative service delivery within and outside an organization. Realistically, effective utilization of ICT in enhancing and improving employees' performance within the municipalities cannot be over-emphasized. However, its process and utilization are not well understood and have rarely been addressed nationally. The aim of this paper is, through a review of literature methodology, to explore the extent to which the employees' performance are enhanced by utilizing ICT in order to provide qualitative service delivery within the municipalities. The paper aims to summarize the recent development with regards to the underpinning dynamic and vibrant influence in utilizing ICT. The paper identified some of the underpinning facets that facilitate effective and efficient utilization of ICT. Findings indicate that persistence and perseverance, government orientation and operational models to the development of ICT contribute to the effective utilization of ICT. Analyzing existing data on effective utilization status so as to provide information on the panacea and to identify areas and perfidy that need to be addressed by various stakeholders such as the government and policymakers is also highlighted in this paper. The study realized that employees in Nkonkobe Municipality have unavailability of key Local Government representatives that are expected to prepare the schedule for the reviewer of the communication strategies. Thus, the paper has highlighted and suggested that the South African government should endeavor to organize adequate IT training and workshops that would facilitate effective employees' intuitive of ICT skills and utilization in order to provide qualitative service delivery within the municipality.

INTRODUCTION

The role of ICT in promoting and enhancing an organization as well as to deliver qualitative service delivery within and outside an organization cannot be over-emphasized as the "field of ICT application is wide, hence, more than ninety percent (90%) of developing countries unambiguously consider Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in their nationwide development plans, and more than forty percent (40%) concord that an essentially well-known role in their deficiency decrease strategies" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2003; United Nations Development

Program (UNDP) 2003:4). In many organizations, both nationally and internationally, the Internet has always been seen as a tool for supporting employees, enhancing their performance and ensuring adequate service delivery in order to promote social development and as well as improving skills. "ICTs are those technologies that interweave information technology strategy such as personal computers, with communication technologies like telephones and their telecommunication networks" (UNDP 2003:4).

An individual computer and laptop with email and Internet facilities exhibits the best example of ICT. ICTs can be defined as "a range of electronic technologies, which when converged in new configurations are flexible, adaptable, enabling and capable of transforming organizations and redefining social relations" (Michiels and Van Crowder 2001:8). UNDP (2003:4) and Michiels and Van Crowder (2001:8) stressed further, "devices such as digital cameras, digital video cameras and players, personal digital as-

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sistants, slide projectors and mobile telephones are also compatible with more traditional media such as radio (digital, satellite) and television (cable, digital, satellite). Thus, most non-ICT devices linked together share and exchange information that allows usage in such a way that they could be categorized as ICTs" (UNDP 2003:4; Michiels and Van Crowder 2001:8).

ICTs are often connected only with the most complicated and expensive computer-based technologies. However, many individuals such as government and private employees under-rate their ability to contribute to meeting development goals (United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2003:4). In fact, for the purpose of humanity, nevertheless ICTs embrace the "full range of electronic technologies and techniques utilized to manage data, information and knowledge". UNDP (2001: 2), points out that "ICTs are essentially information management tools, a varied set of goods, applications and services that are utilized to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information". In addition to this, ICTs also involve the use of "radio, television and telephone, and the "new" ICTs of computers, satellite and wireless technology and the Internet" (UNDP 2001: 1). These different tools are able to work together, and combine to form the "networked world", a huge infrastructure of integrated telephone services, standardized computing hardware and television, which reaches every corner of the globe" (UNDP 2001: 2). Furthermore, "ICTs are an expanding assembly of technologies used to collect, store and share information between people using multiple devices and multiple media". It is glaring that ICTs are essentially used for alleviating a wide range of obstacles to enhance, promote and improve employees job performance within the government and private organizations for the purpose of ensuring sustainable economic growth and "social development in the developing countries; this is particularly true of the Internet. As a global platform for accessing and disseminating information, the Internet presents distinctive opportunities to overcome a variety of informational shortfalls that affect people, business and communities in developing nations" (Castells 1999; Rodriguez and Wilson 2000). Swaminathan (1993:10) therefore reveals that it is very vital to note that Information and Communication Technologies are tools of attaining renovation to link "the digital divide". When used as a wide tool

for providing for enhancing employees job performance with scientific knowledge, ICT pointed out the formation of the specific knowledge that will be required by the employees in an organization.

According to the Amathole District Municipality (ADM), the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2013-2014:76) review report indicates that inadequate budget constraints have being one of the major impediments confronting the government to reduced power and broaden or lengthen the failure of the local government in improving, enhancing and providing qualitative service delivery to their employees' particularly to smooth the progress of utilizing ICT effectively and efficiently within and outside the municipalities. Notably, previous surveys conducted concerning the hitches confronting employees in enhancing their performance through the use of ICT within the municipalities confirmed that these factors could be classified as technological, external and organizational factors.

It is therefore pertinent to deeply look into the hurdles such as, communication strategy, human resource available to lead the communication activities, infrastructural resources available for communication activities which make ICT utilization vulnerable despite their apparent involvement in ensuring effectiveness, efficiency, enhancement, improvement, promotion and qualitative service delivery within the municipalities in South Africa (Nkonkobe Municipality Draft Annual Report 2009/2010:57-58). Perhaps, in South Africa, there could be a barrage of factors that inform the current utilization of ICT status within the municipalities.

It is also important to look into the communication strategy or policy between 2009 and 2010 by the Nkonkobe Municipality Draft Annual report that reveals reviewer processes, which result to a final document of a communication strategy, which could not materialize due to a myriad of defies. This paper, therefore, describes the effective utilization of ICT and hitches that are associated with the utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in the Local Government Organizations (LGA) in South Africa and proposes strategies to improve the situation.

Problem Statement

Realistically, successful utilization of ICT in enhancing and recuperating employees' perfor-

mance within the municipalities cannot be over-emphasized. Importantly, the utilization of ICT plays a crucial role in enhancing, improving, developing, and promoting employees' performance within the municipalities in South Africa. Despite all this goodwill about the effective utilization of ICT in enhancing and improving employees' performance and promoting effective service delivery within the municipalities in South Africa yet, there are still some gaps, which limit its operation. However, communication strategy, human resource available to lead the communication activities, infrastructural resources available for communication activities are identified as some of underpinning snags confronting the effective utilization of ICT. Therefore, these technical hitches have resulted to numerous service delivery protests and demonstrations among the municipalities' employees in the Eastern Cape. There is a need to explore the issues and reasons underpinning the snags of ICT utilization in enhancing employees' performance within the municipalities. This paper provides a critical discussion on the exploration of effective utilization of ICT and hurdles underpinning employees' enhancement, enrichment and recuperating job performance, as well as promoting qualitative services delivery electronically or automatically within the municipalities in order to hasten the rate of work activities or performance.

Study Rationale

The aim of this paper is to debate, discuss the place, contribute and explore the panacea and snags confronting employees' performance within the municipalities in South Africa especially in the unfolding scenario of ICT utilization. This is to possibly make recommendations as to whether such ICT utilization is necessary, and if so what should be done.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to explore the importance of ICT as a tool for improving employees' job performance for the purpose of enhancing and promoting qualitative service delivery within the municipalities in South Africa. In addition, it aimed to identify the snags underpinning employees' poor performance in utilizing ICT within the municipalities. Thus, the

study intended to provide recommendations to enhance solutions to some of these mentioned hitches effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

- ♦ To what extent could ICT be important in improving the employees' job performance within the municipalities?
- ♦ What are the barricades affecting employees' job performance in utilizing ICT?
- ♦ What are the remedies to overcome the identified snags influencing ICT utilization?

METHODOLOGY

The paper has used a desk review methodology to debate, reflect, critic, and explore the panacea and hurdles underpinning employees' performance in utilizing ICT. The study targeted the employees in Nkonkobe Local Municipality covering the Alice satellite office and Fort Beaufort head office in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa in order to identify the needs for the exploration of effective ICT utilization for the purpose of enhancing employees' performance within the municipality. The paper has reviewed different data sources to arrive at the prevalent situations with the hope of adding a perception to the already found state of affairs. The paper has incalculably used various journals, IDP and books, conference reports, dissertations and Internet sources, and also these researchers' intuitive experience and knowledge in Public Administration.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of Effective Utilization of ICT in Enhancing and Improving Employees Performance in the Local Government Organizations in South Africa

Persistence and Perseverance in Utilization of ICT

ICT has become a medium for facilitating a more successful government through better access to services and the autonomous process. Seeing that public interest in the Internet and ICT end results persist to develop, there is an increasing anticipation that they will be used in local and national governments for not only more

resourceful authority but also enlightening public right to use information and services (Asgarkhani 2005:157). The introduction of ICT can have a significant result in structuring and determining decision-making processes in the government and in providing foundational legacies, which guide or direct the day-to-day working of public organizations (Pratchett 1999:731). The government's authorization on national, provincial, and local government demands that its communication on issues of service delivery should enhance access to information that enables the personnel to be well equipped with ICT efficiency in enhancing employees' job performance within the Local Government Administration (LGA) in South Africa.

Government Orientation and Operational Models to the Development of ICT

In South Africa, the large organizations just like their counterparts in developed and similar developing countries are still inhibited, awkward and self-conscious of the observable fact about the effective utilization of ICT in improving employees' performance within the LGA. The South African government is trying immensely to improve the economic contribution of the municipalities in providing qualitative service delivery both internally and externally in order to enhance and improve employees' job performance. The government realizes that for the municipalities to operate successfully and efficiently internally and externally, as well as to make a meaningful contribution in improving the socio-economic growth and development in South Africa, they need to change their orientation and operational models to ICT. The introduction of "the age of network intelligence", individuals as well as government support have therefore enhanced ICT efficiency in improving employees' performance and also promoting service delivery (Tapscott 1995:xv). According to Ndou (2004:2), "the traditional bureaucratic paradigm, characterized by internal productive efficiency, functional rationality, departmentalization, hierarchical control and rule-based management is being replaced by competitive, knowledge-based requirements, such as, flexibility, network organization, vertical and horizontal integration, innovative entrepreneurship, organizational learning, speed up in service delivery, and a customer driven strategy, which emphasize coordinated network

building, external collaboration and customer services all of which are as well supported by ICT". In fact, effective ICT development "can reduce inequalities between rich and poor, urban and rural communities, if the country can provide sufficient access to these technologies and can empower the disadvantaged to exploit these technologies" (Chiliya 2011).

Underpinning Snags Confronting the Effective Utilization of ICT within the Municipalities' In South Africa

Communication Strategy

Evidently, the hurdles stated below, are the report from the survey conducted in terms of the communication strategy between 2009 and 2010 by Nkonkobe Municipality Draft Annual report (2009/2010:57-58).

Development Stage of the Communication Strategy

A draft communication strategy was developed with the assistance of the Councilors', Ward Committee members, officials, Community Development Workers (CDW), Office of the Premier, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs (DLGTA), Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS) together with Amatole District Municipality (ADM). Scheduled dates for the review, which will result to a final document of a communication strategy could not materialize due to a myriad of challenges such as clash with the Amatole District Municipality's calendar on proposed dates and unavailability of key representatives whose role is to assist in the development of such. Internal problems also hindered the crafting of this document and the tight municipal calendar had its own effect.

Human Resource Available to Lead the Communication Activities

The communication unit was operating with just one incumbent until February of the year under review. An additional staff member was recruited enabling communication activities to be well attended with limited concerns from both the external and internal public. Prior to the appointment of this individual, all communication related activities were a responsibility of one.

Infrastructural Resources Available for Communication Activities

Inadequate resources are a cause of concern; as a result the unit utilizes service providers. This is with specific reference to challenges experienced in updating the website, printing a municipal publication and any other material that requires printing. As a means to guard against reliance on service providers, the unit proposed for purchasing of equipment, as these tools will enable the unit to design and print its own material.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirmed that the employees in the Nkonkobe Municipality have unavailability of key Local Government representatives that are expected to prepare the schedule for the review of the communication strategies, lack of competent ICT or communication personnel, inadequate resources or lack of ICT infrastructure such as Internet facilities. In a nutshell, they are identified as the hurdles underpinning the employees in utilizing ICT effectively in order to enhance employees' job performance within the municipalities in South Africa.

Though, it was viewed from some of the documents reviewed that a number of motivations and hurdles were highlighted, the study realized that not all variables established in other previous studies done elsewhere were relevant to the obstacles faced by the employees in Nkonkobe Local Municipality. Variables like gender, post of the employees, years of employees experience and uncertainty about the job security within the municipalities were found to be irrelevant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government, Local Government (LG) and Performance Management System (PMS)

It is therefore glaring that ICT could play an important role in providing and enhancing effective and efficient employees' job performance within these municipalities if necessary measures to improve this ugly situation are put in place. This therefore, shows that employees in in Nkonkobe Municipality covering Alice and Fort Beaufort towns required assistance in ensuring that successful performances are adequately

enhanced. It is on this note that the study advocates for urgent support from the Performance Management System (PMS) whose aim is to develop a performance management system that would sustain effective utilization of ICT for the purpose of enhancing and improving employees' job performance. Hence, the South African government, Local Government Managers (LGM) should also be endeavor to organized adequate IT training and workshops that would facilitate and augment effective employees' intuitive of ICT skills and utilization in order to provide qualitative service delivery within the municipalities.

Municipalities Policies

The IDP (2013-2014:119) also reveals that for the municipalities to ensure proper IT governance, the 12 policies of the information management unit adopted by the council must be strictly adhere to in order to enhance employees' performance and ensure effective and efficient service delivery. "The implementation of the policies will ensure that queries raised by the Auditor General's office are resolved. The queries have been mainly the absence of documentation on procedures, which the unit follows in operational matters and the absence of approved policies, which govern the operations of the unit. Thus, the adopted policies will assist in this regard."

Theoretical Implications

In this study, the theoretical implications focused on both principle or theory development and policy formulated by the government, policymakers and municipality management. The main contribution to the principle or theory involves confirmation of the research questions concerning the variables, which caused the effective utilization and hurdles faced by the employees in enhancing their job performance in Nkonkobe Local Municipality in order to utilize ICT effectively and efficiently and in fact, to also provide qualitative service delivery within the municipalities.

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