

An Analysis of the Hurdles Underpinning Employees' Performance in Utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in a Few Selected Municipalities in the Eastern Cape of South Africa

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is, through a review of literature, to investigate the extent to which the employees' performance could be enhanced by utilizing ICT in providing qualitative service delivery within the municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The paper aims to summarize the recent trends with regards to the underpinning hurdles influencing employees' performance in utilizing ICT within the municipalities in the Eastern Cape. The paper identified and explains some of the snags affecting the employees within these municipalities in order to effectively and efficiently utilize ICT to optimum capacity. It goes on to look into the other factors that weigh down achievement towards ensuring better utilization of ICT within the municipalities. The findings shows that the hurdles include budget constraints, inappropriate application and insufficient capacity, while other glitches include poor document management, lack of adopted Information Technology (IT) project management methodology, and non-availability of a test centre. Analyzing existing data on snags status so as to provide information on the panacea and to identify areas and capacity gaps that need to be addressed by various stakeholders such as the government and policymakers is also highlighted in this paper. Last but not least, the paper has highlighted and suggested various ways on how progress could be made in order to improve employees' job performance within the municipalities.

INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes the hurdles affecting employees' performance in utilizing ICT in a few selected municipalities in South Africa. However, the fact that internet first came into existence in 1963 brought about several innovations and creativities into different organizations among which are the municipalities in South Africa and as such, it has transformed the accessibility to information (Richardson 1996). ICTs are known to have the capacity and ability to cut cross-ways communities and geographical areas, assisting individuals as well as the employees to find new ways of assisting and supporting the flow of information and knowledge (Negropon-te 1995). Duncombe and Heeks (1999) pointed out that ICT is an "electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and disseminating information". They further stressed that anyone or anybody with fundamental computer equipment and a phone line and mobile phones can be an information creator or manufacturer and knowledge distributor (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 1996a). The internet can

therefore empower and enhance the employees and as well as assist them to develop qualitative skills and potentials in order to deliver an effective and efficient service delivery. In fact, it must be emphasized at this point that existence of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), predominantly the Internet, has vividly augmented the potential to access, gather, process, input, store, share and disseminate information (United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2001).

According to Amathole District Municipality's (ADM) Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2013-2014) cited in Oyelana (2015), strategic challenges such as budget constraints contribute immensely to the hurdles underpinning the utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in most of the municipalities in the Eastern Cape. In addition to this phenomenon, IDP (2013-2014:120) also reveals that the hitches facing the utilization of ICT within the municipalities include, application and capacity, while other glitches include poor document management, lack of adopted IT project management methodology, and non-availability of a test cen-

tre. The discussed impediments undoubtedly give rise to the high ineffectiveness and inefficiency of ICT utilization in the municipalities in South Africa. However, previous studies conducted by different scholars on ICT also reveal that, these factors can be categorized as technological, external and organizational factors.

Many studies conducted by different scholars reveal that an analysis of the municipalities' failures, most especially in the area of employing an efficient ICT uphold that the executives often have ideas but they do not have apparent understanding on the utmost effective and efficient utilization of ICT in delivering qualitative services, hence, this has mired their operational achievement and improvement, as Chang and Victor (2002) cited in Dlamini (2009). Consequently, this study focuses on the analysis of the impediments underpinning utilization of ICT in enhancing effective employees' job performance in Nkonkobe Local Municipality. It also identifies hurdles faced by the employees on the effective and efficient utilization of ICT. The periphery influence created by the focus of ICT relevance on service delivery and the impact of the ICT policy network in underpinning them. Suggestions to solve these identified hurdles would be made with references to the documentary analysis and experiential study as well as to propose policies to address the sluggish introduction of ICT to improve service delivery by the government in the province.

Problem Statement

Observably, it is very glaring that the role of ICT in enhancing, improving, developing, and promoting employees' performance within the municipalities' in South Africa is still below expectation. Despite the fact that ICT brings about good opportunities to the municipalities such as employment, quick service delivery, efficiency in enhancing or improving employees' performance and promoting effective service delivery within the municipalities in South Africa, yet there are some setbacks to this phenomenon. However, some of the identified glitches include budget constraints, application, capacity, poor document management, lack of adopted Information Technology (IT) project management methodology, and non-availability of a test centre. To this end, the ineffectiveness and inefficiency in utilizing ICT in order to enhance em-

ployees' performance has drastically resulted in many service delivery protests and demonstrations. There is a need to analyze the issues and reasons underpinning the snags in ICT utilization in enhancing employees' performance within the municipalities. What are the impediments affecting the employees' performance in utilizing ICT? What possible strategies could be provided to underpin the utilization of ICT efficiency and effectiveness to enhance the employees' job performance by the government? This paper provides a critical discussion on the analysis of the hurdles underpinning employees' performance in utilizing ICT in enhancing, improving, developing and promoting employees in order to deliver qualitative services and other responsibilities electronically that would be useful within the municipalities.

Study Rationale

The aim of this paper is to debate, discuss the place, contribute and analyze the hurdles affecting employees' performance within a few selected municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province of 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 objectives of the study was to analyze the snags underpinning employees' poor performance in utilizing ICT in the Local Government Administration (LGA) for the purpose of improving and promoting service delivery in the Nkonkobe Municipality, and intended to provide recommendations to enhance solutions to some of these mentioned impediments effectively and efficiently.

Research Questions

- ♦ What are the challenges 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, criticize and assess the hurdles affecting employees' performance in uti-

lizing ICT in a few selected municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The paper has assessed and reviewed different data sources to arrive at the prevalent situations with the hope of adding a perception to the already found situation. The paper has immensely used various journals, IDP and books, conference reports, dissertations and Internet sources, and also these researchers' intuitive experience and knowledge in public administration.

Scope of the Study

In this study, ICT refers to the introduction of electronic medium, human resources, and purchasing system to fulfill organizational functions of the target government sectors such as Nkonkobe Local Municipality. The government sectors that have partially or fully introduced ICT have advantages with references to quick service delivery and effective job performance enhancement, time savings as well as job accuracy.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Overview of the Current Barriers to ICT Development and Utilization among Municipalities in South Africa

Despite the fact that the municipalities provide many opportunities both, within and outside their organizations, such as organizing training for the serving volunteers and ensures that they secured permanent posts, building both internal and external capacity through training. Internal capacity include (empowering employees' and strengthening the employees' skills with new knowledge through training) while external capacity, when there is availability of funds tends to embark on some crucial community projects, such as learnership program in which in 2012-2014, Amathole District Municipality (ADM) employed at least nine fire fighters to foster service delivery among various municipalities in which Nkonkobe Municipality was not excluded (IDP 2013-2014). Yet, to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in the service delivery from the employees all above benefits are still not enough. This means that some government organizations such as municipalities are still facing some challenges in an attempt to improve, promote and

enhanced their employees' poor performance within and outside their organizations. It is also glaring that government efforts in the improvement of resources like equipment, computers, office furniture, and procurement of vehicles in order to enhance employees' performance within the municipalities have not been met yet.

Institutional Enhancement

Strategic Defies – Budget Constraints

Observably, a review of the Amathole District Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP 2013-2014) reveals that the budgets allocated for the purchasing of some government capital projects such as computers in order to ensure smooth communication processes and enhance employees' performances within the government institutions most especially within the municipalities' has posed many challenges in attempting to speed the rate of progress, improve employees' performance, and to ensure effectiveness as well as efficiency in the service delivery within and outside the organizations. This is to indicate that many government institutions or organizations among which are the municipalities in South African failed in discharging qualitative service delivery within and outside their organizations due to few or non-availability of computers to perform their functions. In addition, this review also shows that government budget constraints have hindered the growth and development of many municipalities among which is the Nkonkobe Municipality in which the majority of employees in Alice and Fort Beaufort are greatly affected. For example, the capital expenditures on fire services allocated by the government for purchasing new computers in year 2013-2014 is R16, 543, this is the original and actual budget without any indication values for adjustment budget. In addition to this, the review of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) also indicates that R7500 represents the original replacement value in which there is no specific indication for actual budget in the same year (IDP 2013-2014). According to this reviewed report, these inadequate budget constraints have therefore reduced the power and extend the inability and incapability of the local government to improve and enhance their employees' service delivery most especially within and outside the municipalities.

Factors Affecting the Utilization of ICT in Amathole District Municipality (ADM): Nkonkobe Municipality

Arguably, many evidences from the literature or studies conducted by various researchers investigating various issues related to ICT in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, show that there is little or no research that has been conducted on the factors influencing the utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in the Nkonkobe Local Municipality by specifically taking into the consideration the utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in Alice and Fort Beaufort. It is therefore, evidenced from the above that Nkonkobe Local Municipality does not operate in vacuum but it was emancipated or emerged or created to be part of the seven municipalities operating under Amathole District Municipality (ADM). According to IDP (2013-2014, 2014-2015), the "ADM area of jurisdiction is made of seven local municipalities, which include Amahlathi Municipality, Nxuba Municipality, Nkonkobe Municipality, Ngqushwa Municipality, Great Kei Municipality, Mnquma Municipality, and Mbashe Municipality". For the purpose of clarity, "Nkonkobe Municipality comprises the towns of Alice, Fort Beaufort and Middle-drift, the smaller towns of Hogsback and Seymour, numerous peri-urban and rural settlements".

Therefore, for the purpose of clarity, it is on this note that the researchers of this study focused on those factors affecting the successful utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in Nkonkobe Municipality, which operate under Amathole District Municipality (ADM) reviewed various cankerworms underpinning those variables affecting ICT from ADM Integrated Development Plan (IDP 2013-2014).

Impediments

ADM Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2013-2014) pointed out that barriers facing Information Management Units (IMU) in facilitating effective Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in order to enhance efficient employees' performance within the municipality are mostly found to be categorized as applications and capacity.

Application

The actual impediments that the Information Management Unit (IMU) is confronting include "the lack of integration of ADM applications, which is immensely due to the lack of an integrated approach in systems acquisition. Therefore, the lack of systems integration can easily lead to systems not being utilized maximally, as the potential of the systems can go unnoticed. In addition, systems integration will assist the municipality in ensuring that the evidence used in audit submissions by departments is system-generated. It has been noted that the use of system-generated reports in performance reviews is a generally accepted practice by auditors".

Other Impediments Facing the Information Management Unit

Evidently, IDP (2013-2014) also stressed that the Information Management Unit therefore faced some other barriers in an attempt to perform and operates effectively and efficiently. The IDP reviewed hence, highlighted the following factors:

- ♦ "Poor document management, which has led to audit queries for the past two financial years.
- ♦ No IT service performance reporting to management. The unit is currently procuring tools that can generate automated reports, which will assist in providing reports on system performance. The AG's office requires IT units to report on systems performance and monitoring to management in order to ensure that IT governance principles are adopted. The reporting to management will be done through the IT Steering Committee.
- ♦ Lack of adopted IT project management methodology has led to poor project management.
- ♦ The non-availability of a test centre. The test centre will ensure that all back up tests are tested for recoverability in order to ensure continuity of systems in case of disruptions".

Capacity

"It has been discovered that the absence of a Business Systems Analyst (BSA) is affecting the alignment of business strategies to Informa-

tion Technology (IT) strategies. ADM has information systems for its key functional areas. However, it has been noted that the systems are not fully utilized, and this is due to the non-definition of the business processes that have to be automated. Thus, the systems analyst will ensure that there is a constant alignment of strategic issues to the IT strategies. This alignment, is not done once, but is supposed to be a continuous exercise which leads to maximization of the use of information systems. When analyzing the system, other factors such as infrastructure, capacity, readiness and maturity of the organization are considered so that feasible steps are taken in increasing system usage" (IPD 2013-2014).

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the snags responsible for the poor utilization of ICT in enhancing employees' performance in a few selected municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Literature was reviewed tremendously. The findings show that a lack of commitment by institutional management, lack of ICT strategy, lack of qualified employees to manage the ICTs, and inadequate ICT infrastructures such as Internet facilities were the major challenges confronting the Nkonkobe Local Municipality employees' in utilizing ICT effectively and efficiently. Most importantly, other notable factors contributing to inefficiency in utilization of ICTs in enhancing employees' performance within the municipalities is inadequate budget.

In addition, the findings show that the majority of the employees in these municipalities have not been able to access effective utilization of ICT. Some of the obstacles confronting the employees include lack of information training skills, ICT illiteracy or lack of IT knowledge, lack of ICT accessibility, and lack of Internet facilities. Accordingly, the findings show that the most significant variables in the Nkonkobe Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province are the need to serve the niche or actual employees, training and government support.

Conclusively, it was also highlighted from some reviewed documents that the variables which actually serve as hurdles to ICT in Nkonkobe Local Municipality include lack of government support, and inappropriate policies.

WAY FORWARD

This study therefore, recommends that the South African government should provide sufficient strategies to improve the utilization of ICT infrastructures to a maximum level in order to enhance employees' job performance within the municipalities. This is pivotal in ensuring that employees have enough skills to utilize ICT. The government should also endeavor to organize ICT training, workshops and seminars for all the municipalities' employees in order to enhance their performance and improve their skills in rendering qualitative service delivery within their municipalities.

The study is therefore advocating for strong cohesiveness or interconnectivity between the government and municipalities' managers by ensuring that the employees' performance management in relation to ICT utilization within the municipalities are effectively and efficiently enhanced in order to continue strengthening their skills and as well as ensure proper employees' performance evaluation and monitoring. In addition, the South African government should provide computer training centers closely and purposely for the municipalities' employees within their vicinity so that employees can learn and know how to operate computers effectively and efficiently in order to improve their skills and enhance their performance within the municipalities. The researchers of this study perhaps also suggests that the government should make a policy that all municipalities' employees should at least acquire a diploma certificate in computer science, by so doing, apart from the fact that the government is making an immense effort by contributing heavily to improve all municipalities' employees' performance in utilizing ICT, then, this also calls for all the employees to wake up and prepare themselves in acquiring the knowledge without waiting for the government to provide the basic training skills for them.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generally speaking, the implications of this study are mostly relevant to the municipalities' executives and government as well as the policymakers in order to provide an effective and efficient utilization of ICT infrastructures or facilities that would improve and enhance employ-

ees' performance within the municipalities. The government and the policymakers would see the need to ensure that the areas of problem for both the municipalities' employees and their managers would be handled. The researchers have also located gaps for research based on the suggestions for further studies.

LIMITATIONS AND AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study specifically focused on the municipalities' employees in Nkonkobe Municipality, covering the Alice Satellite office and Fort Beaufort head office only, which were established under the umbrella of the Amathole District Municipality (ADM) and did not cover the remaining municipalities in the Nkonkobe Municipality area. This study was limited to the qualitative research where desktop research approach or documentary research or analysis method was used and cannot be generalized to include the whole of municipalities in South Africa.

Future researcher may repeat this study by using a larger population covering the whole province or nation. Also, future researchers should focus on the qualitative research design different entirely from documentary analysis, which may include personal interviews and focus group interviews. In addition to this, further study should focus on the quantitative research technique or better still, use triangulation research designs, which include both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research problems.

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