

# PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: A LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Performance management is increasingly gaining momentum in the public sector. It is a strategic approach to the management of public resources and involves the quest for efficiency, effectiveness and economy. This approach has become a statutory performance measure to deliver quality services in a dynamic and diverse public sector environment. The aim of the article is to provide a conceptual framework of performance management from a holistic perspective. In addition, this article seeks to conceptualise, contextualise and operationalise performance management within a local government perspective. Furthermore, several barriers to performance management are identified and some remedial action is highlighted.

## INTRODUCTION

Local government is at the forefront of basic services and attention is focused on municipalities to deliver quality services as part of their developmental mandate to the citizens. To this end, performance management is a strategic and integrated process in ensuring that outputs and outcomes are effectively achieved with efficient and economic use of resources. Performance management also refers to results and responsiveness to the needs, desires and resources of the community, client or user (Epstein, 1992: 168). It is an approach that requires public representatives and managers of each institution to manage in such a manner that all its components and individual employees are held accountable, thereby ensuring improved delivery and value-for-money to the public (Department of Provincial and Local Government, Introduction to Performance Management in South Africa, 2001: 3).

According to the KwaZulu-Natal Directorate for Human Resource Development Supervisors' Manual (1996: 60), performance management is a process whereby the manager and the employee both review the employee's performance on a periodic basis. If performance is lacking, the manager coaches the employee on improving trouble spots. Coaching on a timely basis eliminates the often unpleasant and unproductive "post mortem" aspects of the performance appraisal.

## DEFINITIONS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

There are several definitions relating to performance management. A few definitions are cited hereunder:

According to Armstrong (1994:23), performance management is defined as: "A method of establishing shared understanding about what is to be achieved, and an approach to managing and developing people in a way that increases the probability that defined outputs will be achieved in both the short and longer terms."

According to Bailey in Service Delivery Review (2003), performance management is viewed as: "...the systematic, data-oriented approach to managing people at work that relies on positive reinforcement as the major way to maximise performance."

The following three components in relation to the above definition are noted:

- systematic (clear processes and procedures);
- data-oriented (if you can't measure it, you can't manage it); and
- positive reinforcement (the system is used in a positive, non-threatening manner).

The overall goal of performance management is to establish an organisational culture in which individuals and teams take responsibility for the continuous improvement of the organisation, and of their own skills and contributions to desired results.

Williams in Cameron & Sewell (2003:244) states:

"The setting of objectives and measurements is the performance management activity which ensures that all employees know what results they need to achieve, to maximise their contribution to the overall business plan. In essence, it enables employees to know what is required of them and on what basis their performance contribution will be assessed."

Williams further emphasises that performance indicators should:

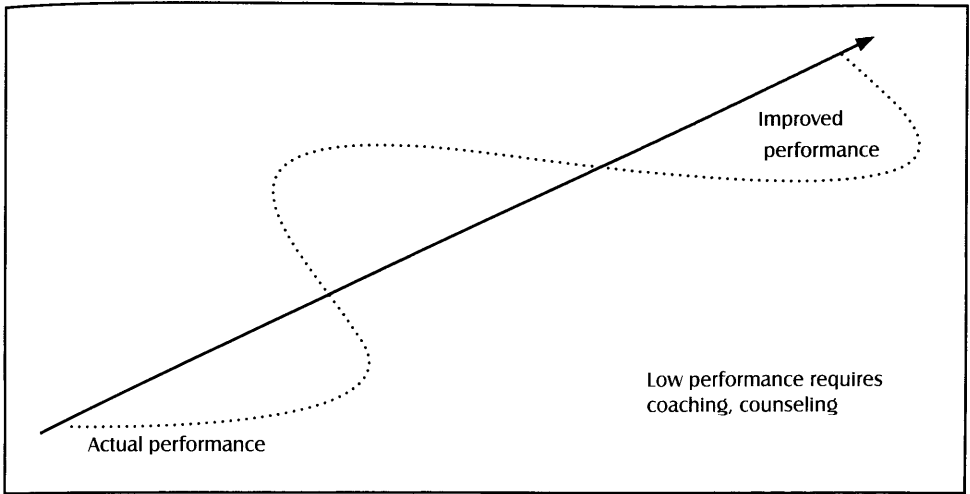
- be agreed jointly in advance between the manager and the individual as both realistic and challenging and are therefore jointly owned;
- measure the actual level of achievement so that the basis on which performance is assessed can be clearly understood in advance; and
- support the overall business strategies and values of the organisation so that the performance objectives taken together are mutually supportive and consistent throughout the organisation.

## THE ESSENCE AND SCOPE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Performance management is a shared process between managers and individuals and teams they manage. It rejects the assumption that only managers are accountable for the performance of their teams and replaces it with the belief that responsibility is shared between managers and team members. This system is based on the principle of management by contract rather than command, although this does not exclude the need to incorporate high performance expectations in such contracts. There must be an agreement of objectives, knowledge, skill and capability (competence) requirements, performance improvement and personal development plans.

The President, Thabo Mbeki, on 3 February 2006, in his State of the Nation address emphasised the dire importance of addressing the skills shortages, continuing efforts to strengthen local government and focusing on the dual needs of accelerated economic growth and social development in the country. President Mbeki reported that a recent domestic poll revealed that 71% of the South African population believed government was generally performing well, 72% approved of the government's efforts in various areas of social delivery, only 56% thought government was responding well to economic challenges and just 45% was in agreement that the sphere of local government was performing well. The President outlined the main challenges that needed to be addressed in order to improve the country's approval of government's performance, including the challenge of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation confronting those in the Second Economy – ultimately honouring the precepts of Batho Pele (Local Government Digest 2006: 8).

A diagrammatical representation of the various stages of performance management is illustrated in Figure 1 below (Armstrong, 1994: 4).



**Figure 4: Stages of the performance management system**

High performance:

- Reinforce through recognition (financial and non-financial, praise, additional responsibility)

Start year	During year	End year
Performance agreement	Monitoring and review against performance agreement	Main performance

The performance management system is not an isolated system run by the Human Resources Department alone, but it is a holistic approach that concerns the whole public sector organisation. Armstrong (1994: 5) correctly states that it is concerned with what people do (their work), how they do it (their behaviour) and what they achieve (their results). The combined impact of these aspects of performance management may be expected to achieve more to improve organisational effectiveness than the various parts if they function separately.

### THE PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management purports to get better results from the whole organisation, from the individual employees and from teams within it. As Minister Sydney Mufamadi posits in his foreword to the Department of Provincial and Local Government Guide on Performance Management (undated:2), this performance management framework was established to enable national and provincial governments to systematically detect:

- early warning signals of under-performance so as to enable proactive and timely interventions in municipalities experiencing difficulties;
- capacity limitations and thereby develop targeted capacity building and support programmes for local government; and
- weaknesses in the local government system for continued refinement and improvement.

In the same foreword, Minister Mufamadi further states that this framework also provides for municipalities to develop their own performance monitoring systems which will serve as strategic tools to enable municipalities to:

- monitor their own performance in the implementation of IDPs;
- improve efficiency, effectiveness, quality and accountability in service delivery while maximising the development impact; and
- empower communities and the public to hold municipalities accountable as true and real agents of service delivery and development.

The Department of Provincial and Local Government's Guide on Performance Management (undated:8), further states that the overall strategic objectives of the performance management system is to improve the performance of municipalities through:

- creating pressures for change at various levels;
- creating a culture of best practice and encouraging shared learning among municipalities;
- promoting accountability;
- contributing towards the overall development of the Local Government system in the country;
- helping to develop meaningful intervention mechanisms; and
- guiding the development of municipality building programmes.

Despite enthusiasm regarding performance management by various organisations, a comprehensive survey of nine leading South African organisations undertaken by the University of Stellenbosch Business School recently revealed a rather bleak picture of the way employee performance is managed and rewarded in South Africa (SDR 2003:21).

According to Joubert and Noah (in SDR 2003:21), major problems that were identified during the survey included: the existence of a rather negative working culture; changes in corporate strategy did not result in corresponding behaviour changes; and there was generally insufficient line management support for performance management.

This situation is not different in the Public Service, particularly in the performance management of senior managers. A study conducted by the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the management of performance agreements of senior managers in 2002 revealed that a number of senior managers had not signed performance agreements and that performance reviews are not conducted regularly as required. The study found that 12% of the respondents had not been told by their departments how the system of performance agreements worked.

## **OBJECTIVES OF A PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

According to SALGA (2003:72), the objectives of implementing a Performance Management System in municipalities are to:

- achieve sustainable improvements in service delivery to the community;
- develop constructive and open relationships between managers/supervisors and employees;
- encourage and reward good performance;
- link the IDP to team and individual performance;
- enable individuals to develop their abilities, increase their job satisfaction and achieve their full potential so that both the employee and the municipality benefit, and
- fulfill the requirements of the Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000.

## **PRINCIPLES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

Ideas on performance management are summarised in the following principles posited by the IRS (1996:21):

- it translates corporate goals into individual, team, departmental and divisional goals;
- it is a continuous and evolutionary process, in which performance improves over time;
- it relies on consensus and co-operation rather than control or coercion;
- it creates a shared understanding of what is required to improve performance and how this will be achieved;
- it requires a management style that is open and honest and encourages two-way communication between superiors and subordinates;
- it requires continuous feedback;
- feedback loops enable the experiences and knowledge gained on the job by individuals to modify corporate objectives;
- it measures and assesses all performance against jointly agreed goals; and
- it should apply to all staff and is not primarily concerned with linking performance to financial reward.

Within the context of local government, the principles that guided the Department of Provincial and Local Government in developing performance management as contained in the Department of Provincial and Local Government's Guide on Performance Management (undated: 8), were the following:

- the system must be owned by municipalities and supported by other spheres of government;
- the system must place communities at the centre of the local government processes;
- the system should be non-punitive;
- the system should be seen as a developing one;
- the system should be linked to the IDP framework;
- the development and implementation of the system needs to cater for capacity variations between and within municipalities; and
- the system needs to build on or at least be linked to existing initiatives.

The underlying rationale behind these principles is to review and remove blockages to service delivery.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY CONTEXT**

Chapter 7 of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996) sets out the objectives and developmental duties of local government. Section 152 deals with the objectives of local government, as follows.

### **Objectives of local government**

Section 152 (1) of the 1996 Constitution highlights the objectives of local government as follows:

- to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- to promote social and economic development;
- to promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government.

Section 152 (2) determines that a municipality must strive, within its financial and administrative capacity, to achieve the objectives set out in subsection (1).

## Developmental duties of local government

Section 153 of the 1996 Constitution states that a municipality must:

- structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community; and
- participate in national and provincial development programmes.

The White Paper on Local Government (Department of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, 1998) emphasises the impact which developmental local governments can have on the lives of typical South African communities such as:

- provision of housing infrastructure and services;
- creation of livable integrated cities, towns and rural areas;
- local economic development; and
- community empowerment and resource redistribution.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000, which specifically deals with the Local Government Performance Management Framework is contemplated in Chapter 7, section 154 (1) of the South African Constitution, 1996, which stipulates that:

“the national and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must support and strengthen the capacity of municipalities to manage their own affairs, to exercise their powers and perform their functions.”

Section 154 (2) further states:

“Draft national or provincial legislation that affects the status, institutions, powers or functions of local government must be published for public comment before it is introduced in Parliament or a provincial legislature, in a manner that allows organised local government, municipalities and other interested persons an opportunity to make representations with regard to the draft legislation.”

Chapter 6 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000, is entitled *Performance Management* and is divided into two parts. Part 1 emphasises the macro conditions for a performance management system, the need for economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the utilisation of municipal resources as part of integrated development. It outlines the structures and mechanisms pertaining to the establishment, approval, monitoring and review of the performance management system.

Part 2 of this chapter of the Act provides for the core principles, mechanisms and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economical upliftment of local communities and ensure universal access to affordable basic services. The Act also creates an enabling framework for the core processes of planning, performance management, resource mobilisation and organisational change. Part 2 also outlines the following five core functions of the performance management system:

- sets appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) as yardsticks for measuring performance, including outcomes and impact, with regard to the municipality’s development priorities and objectives set out in its integrated development plan;
- sets measurable performance targets;
- monitors performance;
- measures and reviews performance at least once a year;
- improves performance; and
- establishes a process of regular reporting.



Benjamin in Business Day cited in IMFO (2006:42), highlights the MEC's role in laying down the law on performance management to newly elected municipal office bearers. Municipalities are the keys to delivery and accelerated economic growth. The MEC for Gauteng challenged local government officials and members of SALGA to be accountable and effective in finding solutions to change the face of municipalities. He stressed that, those who do not perform or flout the system will have action taken against them. Employees found obstructing service delivery will face the full might of the law. The necessity for a culture of performance management to permeate all activities of municipalities is strongly advocated.

## **HUMAN ELEMENT**

People are the most important factor when it comes to management, it does not matter how technologically advanced your municipality is, or how much customer focus you have, how low your costs are or how high your quality is, the real difference is made by the human resources at your disposal (Ehlers & Lazenby 2007: 3). It is people who implement and drive strategies forward. Government's development agenda includes, inter alia, training and development of public officials to address the skills deficit in municipalities and at all other spheres.

Chapter 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, stipulates that public administration must be governed by democratic values and principles.

Section 195 (i) states: *"Good human resource management and career development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated."*

Chapter 7 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000, provides for local public administration and human resources. Part 4 of the Chapter deals with staff matters. Section 68 of the Act provides for capacity building.

In terms of Section 68 (1) *"A municipality must develop its human resource capacity to a level that enables it to perform its function and exercise its powers in an economical, effective, efficient and accountable way ..."*

A municipality's capacity and development strategies are driven by productive employees and the creation of a positive organisational climate. Another driving force is addressing the skills gap in the municipality and the economy.

In fact, the key performance indicators of strategic focus areas (human capital development) are the:

- number of interventions undertaken in respect of the Human Capital Development Strategy; and
- number of people employed who have gone through various training programmes in the municipality.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM**

The Public Service monitoring and evaluation system is intended to contribute to improved government and service delivery in South Africa. Problems are identified, priority areas are communicated, good practice is noted and departments are given an opportunity to reflect on their own performance. The Public Service Commission conducted monitoring and evaluation research in 2004 into several departments both nationally and provincially. Among those evaluated was the Limpopo Department of Local Government and Housing. The research was undertaken to ascertain the extent to which departments comply with the nine principles of Public Administration as prescribed in Chapter 10, Section 195 (1) of the South African Constitution.

## BARRIERS TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Barriers to the successful implementation of the performance management system manifest themselves in various ways. According to Ammons cited in Sing (2003:141), common barriers in the public sector can be grouped into three clusters, namely:

- Environmental barriers include absence of market pressures, lack of political appeal, short time horizon of politicians and managers and subordination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness to secondary status. These obstacles are part of the public sector environment.
- Organisational barriers include bureaucratic socialisation process, lack of accountability, union resistance, ambiguous objectives, absence of cost-accounting systems, inadequate performance information, inadequate research, experimentation, bureaucratic rigidities and fragmented authority.
- Personnel barriers include inadequate control of time or the workday, risk avoidance, conceptual confusion and managerial alibis (Ammons, cited in Sing, 2003: 142).

Swain and white cited in Sing (2003: 142) add technological barriers such as the quality of computer literacy, functional application, ignorance by computer systems specialists, hardware and software incompatibilities and reluctance to accept technological gains.

## OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

A suitable remedial action for each barrier depends on the nature of the barrier. Environmental barriers like the lack of political appeal and short time horizon of politicians require political and democratic motivators whereas subordination of the economy requires fiscal motivators. Organisational barriers like union resistance, ambiguous objectives, absence of cost-accounting systems, inadequate performance information, inadequate research, experimentation and technological barriers such as computer illiteracy necessitate capacity-building initiatives. According to the Department of Local Government Guide on the Introduction to Management for Local Government in South Africa (undated: 18), the province may:

- suggest capacity building initiatives;
- issue specific instructions;
- recommend a process of competitive tendering in case of service delivery problems;
- appoint a person/task teams to assist with specific functions for a defined period of time; and
- transfer the function to another body for a specified period of time.

The worst case scenario, if the degree of non-performance is high, is that the province may take over the function completely. As it has been mentioned previously, Section 139 of the Constitution allows the province to intervene in the affairs of the municipality as in case of the KwaZulu-Natal Government's intervention in the affairs of the Abaqulusi Municipality.

According to the Sowetan (Wednesday March 30 2005: 11), Local Government Minister, Mr Sydney Mufamadi has deployed experts to assist in the capacity building of municipalities. He said those deployed would work in municipalities where committees had not been established. He said this would "create a positive legacy of skills transfer which will allow municipalities to manage their own affairs in a professional way" Mercury (Wednesday, 3 March 2005: 3). Minister Mufamadi highlighted that the deployment of experts forms part of the Department of Local Government's Project Consolidate, which has identified 136 municipalities in need of help. He also said that government had budgeted R15,6 billion to build municipal infrastructure in weak municipalities.



Another important development is the establishment of ward committees, which were contemplated in the Municipal Structures Act, 1998, to pave the way for the implementation and review of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Sowetan (March 30 2005:11) reports that during Minister Mufamadi's address to 1000 delegates at the two-day Community Participation Conference in Midrand, he said ward committees would serve as "watchdogs over service delivery." He said that if a local councillor abused his or her position, the committees would act as the voice of the community. This further indicates Government's efforts towards assisting weaker municipalities to perform better.

## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

A municipality's performance management measurement system entails a framework that describes and presents how a municipality's cycle and process will be conducted, organised and managed with regard to performance planning, performance monitoring, performance measurements and review, performance reporting and performance improvement.

The Municipal Systems Act, 2000, inter alia, promotes the following aspects:

- establishing a framework for support, monitoring and standard setting;
- moving progressively towards social and economic upliftment of local communities; and
- ensuring universal access for all to essential services.

## **IMPLEMENTING A PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

According to the Service Delivery Review (2002:29), the following six-step process is a useful way of describing how a performance management system might best be introduced into a municipality.

Step 1: Define the organisation's mission and its strategic performance objectives

Step 2: Establish an integrated performance management system

Step 3: Establish accountability for performance

Step 4: Establish a process or system for collecting performance data

Step 5: Establish a process or system for analysing, reviewing and reporting performance data

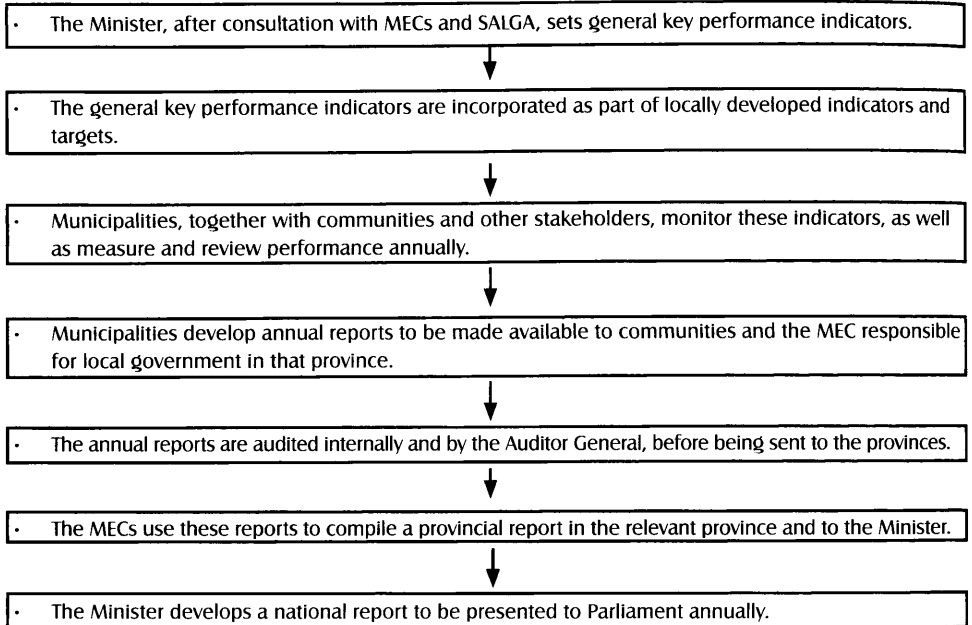
Step 6: Establish a process or system for using performance information to drive improvement

An integrated and balanced individual performance management system can become a "...systematic, data oriented approach to managing people at work that relies on positive reinforcement as the major way to maximise performance. "As such it is a powerful tool for improving both individual and organisational performance.

## **PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

The figure overleaf succinctly illustrates the process of performance reporting as a series of sequential steps.

## FIGURE 2: PERFORMANCE REPORTING OF MUNICIPALITIES



## PHASES RELATED TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

To achieve the ideals included in the Municipal Systems Act, the Act prescribes the implementation of core principles, mechanisms and processes.

The nine phases, as outlined in the Auditor-General's Training Manual on Auditing Performance Management within Local Government, and identified in terms of the legislation, regulations and guidelines issued, with regard to performance management, are summarised as follows:

- **Phase 1:** Development of an integrated development plan
- **Phase 2:** Development and implementation of a performance management system
- **Phase 3:** Development and improvement of key performance indicators
- **Phase 4:** Setting targets for key performance indicators
- **Phase 5:** Actual service delivery process
- **Phase 6:** Internal monitoring
- **Phase 7:** Internal control
- **Phase 8:** Performance measurement and reporting
- **Phase 9:** Revision of strategies and objectives

## MODELS FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

While there is no absolute blue-print for performance management, however, a simple performance management model is useful for analysing where the emphasis in particular performance initiatives has been placed.

## The balanced scorecard

The balanced scorecard is a performance measurement approach which enables organisations to define their strategic focus in terms of four key perspectives or strategic themes which need to be balanced for sustainable performance, namely: financial, customer, internal business processes and staff learning and growth perspectives. The alignment of organisational with individual scorecard objectives and identification of linkages between various functions or departments are essential for managing the conflicting strategies in a complex organisation. Initially designed for application to the for-profit (private) sector, where the emphasis on financial profitability objectives is paramount, the authors subsequently developed a modified version of the balanced scorecard tool for non-profit and public sector organisations, notably pioneered by the City of Charlotte, USA (Kaplan in SAJEMS 2003: 260).

## The workforce scorecard

The workforce scorecard lays out a cogent and clear approach on how to turn strategy into performance by focusing on elements of workforce success that can be tracked and monitored. Huselid, Becker & Beatty (2005: 10), dissect the success of performance into four categories.

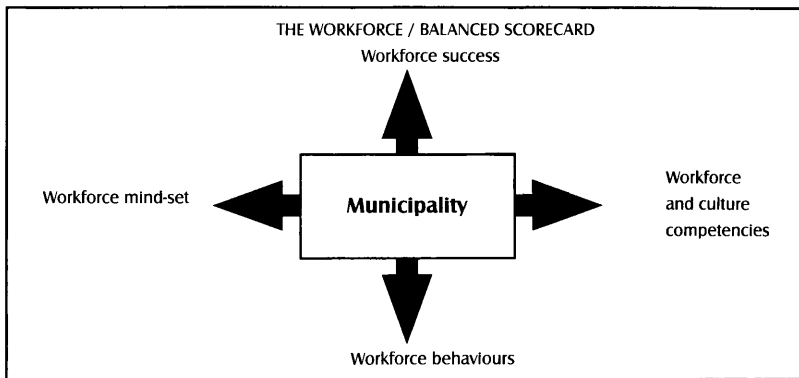


Figure 5: The workforce scorecard

## CHALLENGES CONFRONTING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Some of the pertinent challenges to be considered are cited in Sing & Subban (2006), as follows:

- choosing among the different methodologies that could be used in promoting performance and performance measurement;
- understanding the various components of the concept of value-for-money;
- understanding the various dimensions and meanings of quality associated with performance management;
- clarifying the difference between performance management and performance indicators;
- choosing criteria for judging the value of performance measures and performance indicators.;
- analysing the varied interdependent and interrelated benefits of and barriers to performance management;
- understanding the requirements of performance criteria and standards, performance targets and definitions of performance information; and
- establishing criteria for performance review, performance monitoring and performance evaluation.

According to Meyer & Theron in Van Der Waldt (2006: 139), further challenges may be cited as:

- difficulties in measuring performance;
- roles and responsibility clarification; and
- political factors that often outweigh management rationale in local government decision-making.

Van Der Waldt (2006:141) elaborates on other challenges to be overcome in local government as;

- organisational climate and culture – functioning with broad array of rules and procedures; and
- organisational factors – structures, practices, policies, political and managerial leadership style, unions and use of technology (Van der Waldt 2006:141).

## CONCLUSION

Performance management must be viewed as an ongoing series of models, frameworks, guidelines, tools and most importantly, the mindset or inculcating a culture for institutional and individual performance to be assessed. The identification of shortcomings is a significant milestone in the performance management agenda. However, the development of performance improvement plans to ensure that measurable targets are linked to delivery is equally important. Municipalities must be realistic about what is achievable over particular time frames, because the tendency may be to be tempted to take on a huge volume of tasks, which may, in the final analysis, become too onerous to ensure the successful review thereof. Ultimately, a holistic perspective to implementing and managing performance within local government is necessary to accelerate service delivery and community upliftment.

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