

Challenges to Strategic Planning in Public Institutions: A study of the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose

A strategic plan is a document used to communicate an organisation's goals and the actions needed to achieve those goals. Strategic planning in public organisations promotes timely decisions; enhances the management of limited resources in a more rational manner; improves service delivery and induces greater satisfaction of customers. The purpose of this article is, first, to critically examine the strategic planning challenges facing the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS), and how these impact organisational performance. Second, the article identifies strategies that can be implemented to enhance strategic planning and performance management in the DTPS.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This article used a qualitative case study design with the aid of document analysis to provide insight into the research questions.

Findings

The article concludes that the DTPS faces a plethora of challenges. A major challenge is resistance to change arising from a desire to maintain the status quo. The organisation has found it difficult to embrace the reforms reminiscent of the new public management (NPM) paradigm. This article argues that it is important to promote strategic planning, and aligning organisational objectives with performance in public institutions.

Originality/value

In many South African public institutions, strategic planning is viewed as the work of top management, a misconception which compromises service delivery. In addition, strategic planning has been implemented as a direct attempt to inhibit poor budgetary planning and corruption in procurement systems, and in order to effectively manage public resources. There is a need for the department to conduct regular skills development programmes, uproot top-level bureaucracy, and increase innovation, monitoring and evaluation of organisational activities.

Key Words: *Strategic Planning, Strategic Management, Public Organisational Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation, DTPS.*

Introduction

The survival of any organisation depends on its ability to improve its strategic planning. The South African public sector has been subjected to poor strategic planning, which has resulted in poor service delivery in various departments (Kanyane, 2006:112). Poor strategic planning and a lack of compliance with legislation have resulted in poor organisational performance and negative audit opinions from the Auditor-General (Van der Waldt, 2014:132). The South African government has undertaken various programmes, such as performance monitoring and evaluation, to enhance accountability and transparency and improve strategic planning in government departments. However, service efficiency remains difficult to attain, judging from incidents of community unrest. Moreover, a decline in quality service provision and several development projects in government departments, as evidenced by testimonials coming out of the Zondo commission of enquiry, has had a negative effect on organisational performance (Henri, 2004:34).

The Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS) was established to provide infrastructure for information and communications technology (ICT) applications and services, develop e-strategies in an effort to provide e-government and e-sectoral services, promote cybersecurity and the security of networks, and to roll out postal and banking services. The DTPS further facilitates the development of rural economies, and is in the process of licensing the Postbank. A full-service bank licence will allow traders in rural towns to access affordable credit, which will encourage the growth of their businesses. The Post Office also contributes towards this by developing its ecommerce platforms for the ICT sector, which focuses on email for utilisation by small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

Similar to all other government departments, the DTPS is required by law to engage in strategic planning. This is within the provisions of chapter 5 of the Treasury Regulations stipulated in the Public Financial Management Act no. 1 of 1999. According to the act, the accounting officer of the department is requested to submit measurable objectives for each main division in the particular department's vote (or programme) to the National Assembly each year during the period of the presentation of the budget.

Furthermore, section 27(4) and section 36(5) of the Public Financial Management Act make it mandatory for an accounting officer to establish procedures related to quarterly reporting to the executive authority, in an effort to facilitate effective performance monitoring, evaluation and corrective action.

The role of providing leadership in key positions requires strategic thinking. Correct decision-making, proper planning and the crucial implementation of systems could also add value in the advancement of various organisations. Strategic planning provides a frame of reference for implemented processes and directives. Innovative strategic plans intrinsically require that leaders think carefully and produce operational plans that concurrently achieve set targets. The strategic planning process is the culmination of various integrative and consultative processes that clearly define delivery agreements for tracking the performance of an organisation.

This article seeks to answer the following key questions;

- What is the importance of strategic planning in public institutions?
- What are the strategic planning challenges facing the DTPS, and how do they affect organisational performance?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance strategic planning and performance management in the DTPS?

This article is structured as follows; after the introduction, the second explains the research methodology that was applied. The third section conceptualises strategic planning. The fourth section gives an overview of strategic planning and process in the DTPS, followed in the fifth section by an analysis of the case study public institution, the DTPS. The final section provides a conclusion and proffers recommendations.

Research Methodology

The research utilised a qualitative research methodology, a case study design and document analysis. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:6), qualitative research is primarily research that is exploratory. It is used to acquire an understanding of the underlying factors, views and motivations that help to identify and clarify the essence of social phenomena with little interference to the natural environment.

A case study design was also adopted. A case study investigates current life events through the contextual assessment of occurrences and their relationships (Zaidah, 2007:2). Baxter and Jack (2008) state that case studies are characterised by an intensive investigation of a social unit (for example an individual, a family, a school, a department etc). In a typical case study, the researcher examines a unit in depth by gathering pertinent data about its present status, past experiences and other factors that contribute to the behaviour of the individual or social unit, and how these factors relate to one another. Hence the case study of the DTPS was used to gather data on strategic planning in public sector institutions in South Africa.

Documents allow the researcher to gather adequate information from various sources, thus saving on the resource and time constraints of primary data collection techniques, such as questionnaires and surveys (Doolan and Froelicher, 2009:13). Documents,

comprising institutional reports, surveys, public records, and books, were reviewed and analysed to interpret, derive meaning from, and obtain knowledge about the challenges encountered in strategic planning, and how these affect organisational performance in the DTPS. Moreover, recommend strategies that can be implemented to enhance strategic planning and performance management in the DTPS.

The documents were classified into three categories. First, policy documents to analyse the DTPS and South African strategic planning and performance management legislation and policies. Second, progress documents to gather information on execution within the DTPS. Third, DTPS assessment reports, books, journals and newspaper articles, to gather information on the successes and challenges facing the DTPS in strategic planning and performance management.

The document analysis process entailed gathering data from passages, quotations and extracts. The data was then organised into major themes related to the main questions of the research, using content analysis.

Conceptualising Strategic Planning

A classic definition of a strategy by Chandler, Jr. (1962:13), identifies it as “the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources for carrying out these goals.” In that regard, a strategic plan is a document that puts on paper the chosen direction of the public institution, that is, it spells out the organisation’s goals and the actions needed to achieve those goals as well as identify trends and issues against which to align organisational priorities (Cutting Edge Insights, 2019). It links purpose and action by communicating human goals and the organisation of human activity to achieve those goals.

In that context, strategic planning is a process that outlines an organisation's strategy choice. It reveals and clarifies what future opportunities and threats might be, and provides a context for decision-making throughout the organisation. Strategic planning is the means by which senior management set “the organisational vision, determine the strategies required to achieve that vision, make the resource deployment decisions

to achieve the selected strategies, and build alignment to the vision and strategic direction throughout all levels of the organisation” (Melaka, 2015).

Effective strategic planning not only gives the organisation its direction and the activities it needs to carry out to make progress, but prepares business processes to succeed. Strategy creativities and guidelines set up by an organisation in the form of mission and vision statements and objectives are the primary drivers of the focus of such strategy organisations. Wagner (2006:41) emphasises that “the importance of strategic planning can be explained from four points of view including environmental scanning, strategy formulation, and linking goals to budgets and strategic planning as a process”. Setting objectives will promote competent leadership in directing an organisation. Effective budgeting enables plans to be translated into projects and programmes to reach set strategy targets (Odongo and Datche, 2015:1).

According to Nickols (2016: 6-7), the techniques involved in strategic planning include some variation of the following:

- a strategic review or audit intended to clarify factors such as mission, strategy, driving forces, future vision of the enterprise, and the concept of the business.
- a stakeholders’ analysis to determine the interests and priorities of the major stakeholders in the enterprise (e.g., board of trustees, employees, suppliers, creditors, clients, and customers)
- an assessment of external threats and opportunities as well as internal weaknesses and strengths (known variously as SWOT or TOWS), leading to the identification and prioritisation of strategic issues
- either as part of the assessment above, or as a separate exercise, the identification of “core” or “distinctive competencies”
- also as part of the assessment above, or as separate exercises, the playing out of “scenarios” and even “war games” or simulations
- situational and ongoing “scans” and analyses of key sectors in the business environment, including industries, markets, customers, competitors, regulators, technology, demographics, and the economy, to name some of the more prominent sectors of the environment

- various kinds of financial and operational performance audits intended to flag areas where improvement might yield strategic advantage

Elbanna, Thanos and Colak (2014) posit that successful implementation of strategic plans is critical to the achievement of organisational aims and objectives. A strategic plan is implemented through “the realisation of tactical and operational plans, which include programs, projects and actions sequences” (Rojas-Arce, Gelman and Suárez-Rocha, 2012:248). The Business Development Bank of Canada (2019), identifies some of the steps that need to be taken to ensure successful implementation of strategic plans. In order for the implementation to be effective, first, management should allocate sufficient human, financial and other resources to each step of your action plan. Secondly, management should ensure clear regular communication of the requirements of the action plan throughout the organisation, especially regularly communicating with employees responsible for accomplishing specific tasks. Thirdly, management should continually monitor progress toward milestones and other performance measures set down in the action plan. Fourthly, adjust action plan as conditions change over the course of the year as well as updating the overall strategic plan at an annual review. Finally, management must hold employees responsible for accomplishing their assigned tasks on time. If they fail to do so, management must investigate why, especially with respect to timeline, resources and support. Closely related to this is the need to recognise and/or reward employees when they accomplish their tasks on time. This can be done at follow-up meetings, in internal communications and in performance reviews.

Maleka (2014) argues that sometimes strategic plans are not developed properly, or not implemented properly. The author notes that this is caused by a number of reasons. The first reason is that sometimes senior management does not follow a defined process to accomplish this task resulting in months of effort wasted in creating reams of paper that do not have strategic import. The second reason is that the strategic planning process may be delegated to a planning group, or assigned to the various functional leaders to complete for their respective areas. If completed in individual functional areas, the plan may work for individual departments, but is likely to sub-optimize the whole organisation. If assigned to a planning group, the result is often not truly embraced and endorsed by senior leadership. Third, failure may be

due to senior management failing to set aside the time to develop the strategic plan as a collective team work product. Fourth, strategic plans may not be developed properly, or not implemented properly because the organisation does not understand what a strategic plan is actually designed to provide. There would be very little about it that addresses actual strategic direction. Fifth, senior management may not follow a defined process or methodology that will result in a strategic plan in a timely and efficient yet comprehensive manner. The sixth reason could be that the strategic plan is developed but no process is followed to communicate it throughout the organisation and build organisation-wide alignment to its implementation. Finally sometimes strategic plans are not developed properly, or not implemented properly because the strategic plan has been developed with no implementation guidelines at all, is implemented in pieces or is unfunded and ignored.

A plethora of theories explain the performance management systems implemented in public-sector organisations to ensure the achievement of set strategic goals. Goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham, 1990) is necessary for the study as it links goal setting to task performance. In terms of this theory, individuals who set specific difficult goals perform better than those who set general easy goals.

Within the theory are five basic principles of goal-setting, namely clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity. These principles interact through the involvement of mediators and moderators, as shown in Figure 1.

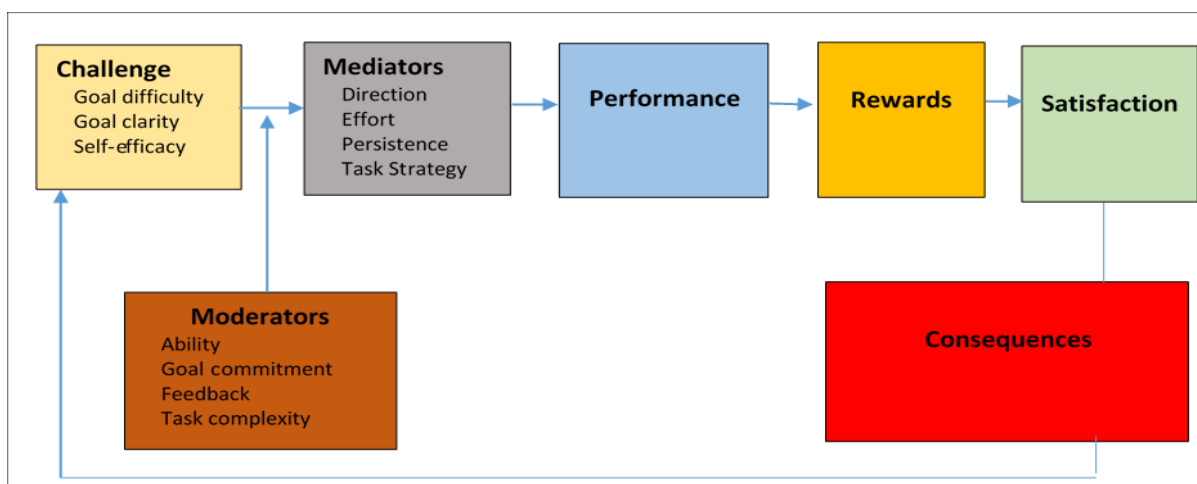


Figure 1: Goal Setting Theory
Source: Locke and Latham (1990)

According to the theory, specific and challenging goals, along with appropriate feedback, contribute to higher and better task performance. Enthusiasm in working towards the attainment of goals is the main source of job motivation. Moreover, employees are motivated by clear, well-defined goals and feedback, with allowance for a little challenge. This implies that difficult goals are greater motivating factors than easy, general and vague goals. Furthermore, explicit and clear goals lead to greater output and better performance. Explicit, measurable and clear goals accompanied by a deadline for completion avoids confusion.

Goals justify the performance of a task and the use of resources, give a feeling of self-actualisation and provide a challenge to attain the next goal. Goals should be realistic and challenging, they should guide and direct behaviour, and they should be benchmarked against organisational performance.

Feedback and incentives are also mechanisms for increasing performance, as they encourage employee involvement and greater job satisfaction. Conflicting organisational and managerial goals, and a lack of those skills and competencies needed to perform actions essential for goal attainment, are detrimental to organisational performance and are a problem for public organisations such as the DTPS.

The adoption of goal-setting theory is necessary to improve strategic planning and performance management in the DTPS through a focus on encouraging the use of a performance evaluation system, and the need for re-skilling in line with the technological changes embedded in the 4IR. Moreover, the theory is in line with the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) mandate for all public-sector organisations to follow the strategic management process, which comprises five steps, namely, goal setting, analysis, strategy formation, strategy implementation, and strategy monitoring. To ensure adherence to these processes, departments are required to submit quarterly performance plans and outcomes (DPME, 2015).

Strategic planning in the DTPS

The Department of Telecommunications was proclaimed by the President in Government Gazette No. 37839 dated 15 July 2014 and Government Gazette No.

38280 dated 02 December 2014. The transfer of administration, powers and functions entrusted by specific legislation to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Postal Services and the Ministry of Communications, was confirmed. In order to fulfil the mandate of the newly established Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, the following state-owned companies report to the ministry: The National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa, the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa, the Universal Service and Access Fund, the .za Domain Name Authority, the State Information and Technology Agency, Sentech, Broadband Infracore and the South African Post Office. The DTSPS was, therefore, established to focus on modernising the economy and economic infrastructure through the:

- roll-out of ICT infrastructure, applications and services;
- roll-out of postal and banking services; and
- development of e-strategies to roll-out e-government and e-sectoral services, and the promotion of cybersecurity, as well as the security of networks (DTSPS, 2018/2019).

The strategic planning of the DTSPS takes into consideration a combination of various integrative and consultative processes:

- the priorities of the ruling party;
- the Medium-Term Strategic Framework;
- the National Development Plan (NDP);
- the priorities set out by government in delivery agreements and government outcomes; and
- the detailed and specific strategic guidance and input provided by the executive committee (consisting of the DG, the directors and DDGs) of the DTSPS through the DTPA lekgotla.

Within the DTSPS mandate is the adoption of the integrated Strategic Management Policy framework, presented in Figure 2.

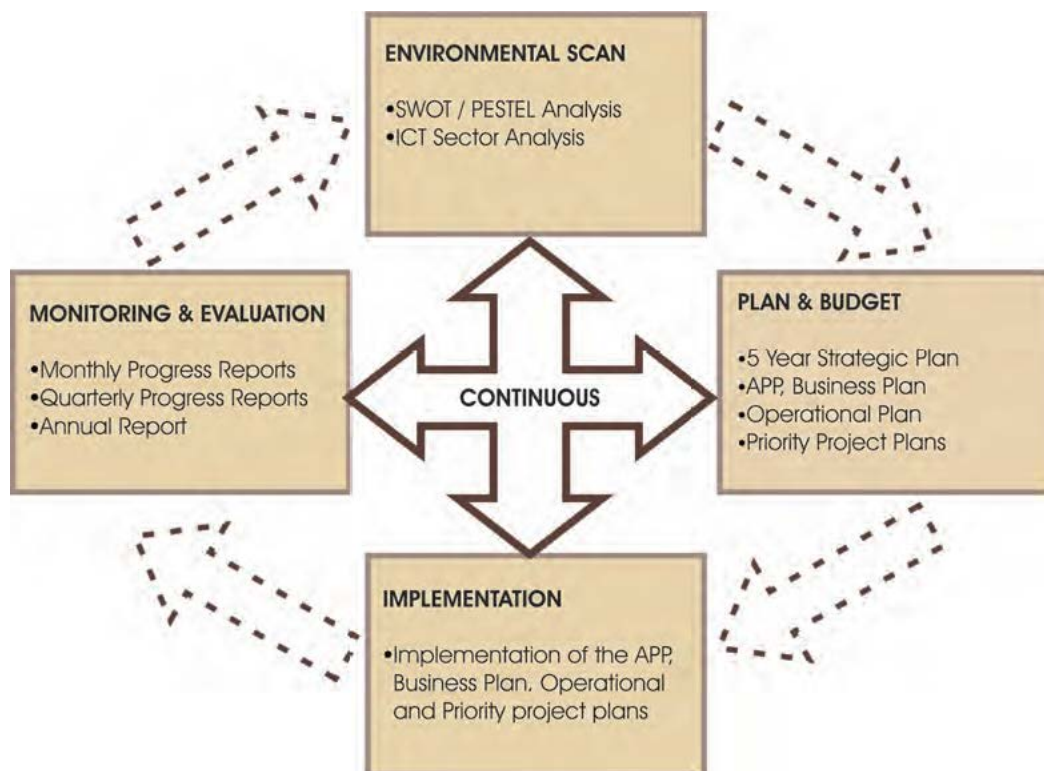


Figure 2: DTPS Integrated strategic management policy framework

Source: Integrated Strategic Management Policy (ISMP) (2010)

The implementation of the strategic plan takes place over a period of five years and is executed annually through the annual performance plan and the operational plans of individual branches. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are implemented concurrently through periodic reporting and the evaluation of achievements and non-achievements of set targets. The DTPS submits quarterly performance reports for consideration by the audit committee and the minister. Consolidated mid-term and annual organisational performance reports are also submitted to the minister (DTPS, 2017).

In terms of the planning cycle, the department undertakes environmental scanning, which provides the input required to develop an informed strategic plan taking into consideration all internal and external factors. The strategic plan is further cascaded in the annual performance plan which also allows for the cost of priorities to be set against allocated resources.

Implementation of the annual performance plan ensures the achievement of set objectives and targets. In order to ensure implementation and periodic reporting of performance, the annual performance plan sub-divides the one-year target into quarterly targets, which are implemented and monitored on a quarterly basis. Furthermore, the annual performance plan informs the development of business, as well as operational plans, which unpack quarterly targets into action steps and deliverables within the quarters. This detailed level of planning not only allows for proactive and continuous monitoring and evaluation, but also informs the contents of the individual performance agreements, thus ensuring alignment between all levels of planning (DTPS, 2017).

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of set targets provides information on progress or the lack thereof, as well as related challenges hindering performance, which directly feeds into the next planning cycle. To ensure optimal monitoring and evaluation, the department's executives present and interrogate the performance reports on a quarterly basis to evaluate departmental performance and implement immediate mitigating measures to ensure delivery of targets, especially in cases where progress has been delayed (DTPS, 2018).

In the DTPS, as is the case with all government institutions, the focus of the strategic plan must be aligned to the various plans developed within organisations to fulfil their various mandates. The plan must be linked to performance agreements between the president, ministers and service delivery agreements entered into in terms of the broad strategic outcomes. The public institution (DTPS) is required to develop the annual performance plans which cover specific targets that the institution aims to achieve in the budget year, as well as the following two years of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) in pursuit of the strategic outcomes orientated goals and objectives set out in its strategic plan. These plans are developed by the DPME and encompass delivery agreements for government's strategic cross-cutting priorities (or plans), monitor the implementation of these plans, and assess departmental strategic and annual performance plans to ensure alignment with national government's plans. In addition, the DPME monitors the performance of provincial government departments and municipalities, supervises frontline service delivery, executes

evaluations, and promotes sound planning and sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices (DPME, 2015:9).

Challenges to Strategic Planning in the DTPS

Strategic planning as an aspect of new public management has been used by various government departments as a primary tool to enhance organisational performance and service delivery. The aim of using strategic planning lies in its ability to create a management culture capable of governing public institutions strategically in an effective, efficient and accountable manner.

Table 1 presents the major themes resulting from the document analysis of the difficulties experienced in strategic planning and how they affect organisational performance in the DTPS.

Table 1: Main documents and themes

Selected document	Theme
DTPS Annual Report 2016/17	<p>Fraud and corruption impacts negatively on sound municipal management.</p> <p>Poor implementation of the strategic decision in the government department has an impact on project management.</p> <p>Skills shortage in strategic planning.</p>
Strategic documents for DTPS 2016/17	<p>There is lack of engagement of management and staff in the strategic planning and execution process.</p> <p>There is poor feedback and improper information dissemination impedes strategic planning.</p>
Auditor General Reports 2016/17	<p>Lack of compliance with legislation and poor strategic planning is a result of incompetent leadership that failed to exercise oversight responsibility to ensure that consequence management is actively implemented in the department.</p>

Corruption and fraud

The DTPS (2017) revealed massive fraud and corruption that affected the department. Corruption is one of the biggest challenges that rips the public sector institutions apart. It has had negative impact on the strategic planning of various government departments in South Africa. Basheka (2008:380) argues that corruption is catastrophic for the sound functioning of any government department. Corruption undermines sound decision-making and diverts the provision of services from those who need them to those who can afford them. It should be noted that fraud and corruption are disastrous for the sound functioning of any government; hence, officials need to account for every action they take. When fraud and corruption take place, the perpetrators of such conduct should be punished, since it impacts negatively on the sound management of the any public institution.

In view of the challenge of corruption and in order to mitigate the escalating corruption, the DTPS established a fraud prevention awareness programme to ensure that all its officials and external stakeholders were aware of prevention systems, as well as the protocols that must be adhered to when reporting any allegations of fraud or corruption.

The awareness strategy includes fraud prevention posters displayed at all the department's premises and the induction of new employees. In addition, the department utilises whistleblowing mechanisms such as the National Anti-Corruption Hotline that are managed by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The aim is to inhibit all corrupt, fraudulent or unethical practices that may be taking place in the DTPS.

Poor project management skills

The review of the DTPS (2017) revealed strategic execution gaps which led to poor organisational performance. The poor implementation of strategic decisions in government departments has an impact on project management. Childress (2013) argues that poor project/initiative management is considered a major gap in strategy execution, since strategy is essentially executed through projects. Her argument is premised on the fact that many initiatives are not directly linked to strategic objectives.

Studies by Muell and Cronje (2008) and Schreurs (2010) corroborate these findings, and argue that poorly managed staff are a consequence of poorly executed strategic objectives, which results in a lack of transparency and accountability. Evidence from the strategic documents of DTPS revealed that many of the initiatives not directly linked to key strategic objectives were “pet” projects that were often hidden in the overall strategy, thus wasting resources on “disconnected initiatives”.

Poor translation of strategy into manageable actions creates another major barrier (Sterling, 2003; Pedersen, 2008). Risk management is, ultimately, a fundamental part of project management, since it considers and manages unforeseen events or conditions from the internal or the external environment (PMI, 2013; Forbes Insights, 2009).

Skills shortage in strategic planning

The implementation of strategic planning in the DTPS is constrained by a skills shortage. According to the annual report of the DTPS (2017:76), it has faced several difficulties in attracting and retaining critical scarce skills with the required competencies, particularly in the broadband and spectrum environments. This report further revealed that the DTPS is unable to compete with market-related salaries for employees in these specific fields.

The department has an inadequate salary budget to compensate its employees. This results in capacity constraints at all its branches and has an effect on its service delivery capabilities. It was also evident from the report that the filling of posts has been impeded by external stakeholders, an example of this being SSA pre-screening processes that result in long turnaround times that also affect the recruitment drive and timeframes. Given these challenges, the DTPS experiences skills shortages, which explains its poor strategic planning. This in turn negatively affects their ability to improve their organisational performance.

The DTPS (2017) attributed poor strategic planning to leadership which had failed to exercise oversight responsibility in order to ensure that consequence management was actively implemented in the department. Its report showed that repeated findings of non-compliance with laws and regulations and internal control deficiencies, which

were identified in the previous year, were again prevalent. This was an indication that the action plan to address audit recommendations was not implemented timeously and monitored adequately. Therefore, sound leadership is needed to take strong strategic decisions that enable public officials to improve their performance, which will lead to improvements in service delivery.

Lack of strong organisational culture and strategic planning

The implementation of sound strategic management in government departments in South Africa is impeded by poor organisational culture. The reviewed literature (Kanyane and Mabelane, 2009) confirms this perspective, showing that a lack of organisational culture affects organisational performance. Many public officials tend to perform poorly because they lack the direction provided by the organisational philosophy and aims, which in turn impacts service delivery.

Sound strategic planning can translate into improved performance management. However, the DTSPS (2017) revealed that the department could not exercise its strategic mandate adequately to promote skills development, which is crucial for improving skills capacity. The AG recommendation focused on the need for the department to reconsider the strategic decision, which is imperative for effective service delivery. Public officials can perform better when they have strong roots entrenched in a strong organisational culture where employees are respected and valued.

Speroff *et al.* (2014) corroborate these findings when they argue that an organisational culture which enhances teamwork and innovation has been associated with quality improvements, which is in contrast to bureaucratic, hierarchical cultures which generally resist change and are less suited to improving quality. In many instances, committed employees create a positive atmosphere which can enhance performance. Improved organisational performance emanates from a sound organisational culture where officials are valued or motivated. Therefore, to achieve this, there is a need for the DTSPS to improve its organisational culture to improve service delivery.

Lack of internal control measures

The DTPS (2017) revealed a lack of internal control measures that could have been useful for enhancing service delivery. The report revealed that the DTPS does not have an internal control unit, which negatively affects decision-making, quality control and the supervision of public officials.

In public administration, strategic planning is critically important since it determines the effective delivery of services, hence government departments need to have strong internal control mechanisms that play an oversight role in monitoring the performance of public officials. Du Preez (2002:27) argues that the responsibility of the internal audit function in terms of the PFMA is the evaluation of all financial and risk management and internal control systems. It acts as an early warning system to detect aspects that go wrong. It further assists managers in identifying risks and monitoring the implementation of the PFMA. Therefore, internal control is a mechanism which provides checks and balances in an entity and establishes whether the correct procedures, rules and regulations are being implemented.

Furthermore, it should be noted that an effective administration plays a pivotal enabling role in ensuring that compliance with relevant processes and policies is achieved. Therefore, the DTPS has undertaken initiatives to ensure that monitoring and quality assurance assessments have been implemented and key processes are adhered to; management structures, such as the Operations Committee Meeting (OPSCOM). Such an organ provides oversight and manages the policy development process through a register of policies. It ensures that policies are vetted prior to being presented to the department's executive committee for final consideration and approval.

Poor alignment of objectives and performance

Public sector organisations in South Africa are failing to improve the performance management of their departments due to poor alignment of their objectives and performance. This was also identified as an obstacle in the DTPS, where the poor alignment of its strategy with its performance management was evident. Poor alignment leads to the inadequate implementation of strategies, which results in poor service provision.

Harbst (2008) argues that a strategy can only be implemented by supporting an organisational system that is aligned to its structure, people practices, business processes and technology. In addition, access to funding, as well as competent, motivated and dedicated people, is necessary to enhance organisational performance (Muell and Cronje, 2008; Schreurs, 2010). Based on these findings, it is clear that poor alignment can inhibit public sector organisations, including the DTSP, from improving their performance.

Poor strategy execution or performance management system

Government departments often fail to execute their strategic plans properly due to a lack of proper skills or any understanding of how they can implement strategic measures to improve organisational performance (Pedersen, 2008). This is prevalent in the DTSP, which was faced with poor strategic execution that impeded the performance of its public officials. The DTSP (2017) revealed a lack of direction and focus in the implementation of its strategies. This has been further exacerbated by its bureaucratic style of leadership, which prohibits junior management from proposing strategic measures to improve performance.

These findings were corroborated by On-Point Consulting (2011), which revealed that the lack of proper strategy execution or performance management systems inhibits an improvement in organisational performance. A department cannot function effectively when it does not have a strategy to guide the performance of employees. Sterling (2003) and Pedersen (2008) have argued that in such circumstances a model to execute the strategy is essential to ensuring the continual monitoring, tracking, and reviewing of performance, as well as clear accountability to hold teams responsible (Mueller, 2010).

Furthermore, a well-defined strategy with a strong framework helps to improve performance through continued and systematic monitoring which ensures that there are no flaws in the manner in which public officials execute their duties (Schreurs, 2010). McChesney *et al.* (2012) reiterate that such a strategy improves accountability because public officials are required to conform to the stipulated strategy, which is fundamental for improving organisational performance.

Lack of communication and motivation

Evidence from DTSPS strategic documents revealed that there is poor engagement in strategic planning and execution processes by management and staff. An extensive review of the literature also reveal that poor communications and feedback have been a challenge in government departments throughout South Africa (Kanyane and Mabelane, 2009). This primarily resulted in poor communication and coordination between leadership and staff as to how departmental strategy should be implemented.

Studies by Muell and Cronje (2008), Forbes (2009), Mueller (2010), Schreurs (2010), On-Point Consulting (2011) and Childress (2013) corroborate these findings, which show that poor strategy communication and a lack of engagement with staff have been obstacles because executives failed to establish an open communication (dialogue) climate, and did not involve staff from the planning stages. The failure by the DTSPS to involve staff in its strategic planning processes has impeded the effective delivery of services.

Mueller (2010) says that, if goals are not clearly communicated and understood, and if they do not resonate with staff, there is no connection between leaders, staff, and their purpose. Without engaging the hearts and minds of people, the hands will seldom execute the strategy successfully. Getz and Lee (2011) concur that the notion of communication plays a key role in strategy implementation. This will ensure a sustained commitment from all parties in the execution of strategy.

Recommendations

In order to enhance strategic planning for improved organisational performance, the following recommendations will need to be implemented by public institutions such as the DTSPS.

Learning organisations

The DTSPS and other similar public institutions are encouraged to become learning organisation. This will help the institutions to evaluate the performance of their public officials as they strive to achieve a high level of organisational performance on a regular basis. Learning can be about new systems and new technologies which could help to improve the level of service delivery. Learning can open doors to new,

innovative ideas that can be utilised to improve strategic planning and manage the performance of public officials.

The findings revealed a huge skills deficit in the DTPS. This shows that there is a need for public organisations to conduct regular skills development programmes to train public officials with regard to new issues. These newly acquired skills can help to increase the performance of public officials and the level of their general service provision to communities throughout South Africa. Skills development conforms to goal setting theory, where managers are required to set up achievable goals in order to improve performance.

Uprooting top-level bureaucracy

Top-heavy bureaucracy in public organisations as exemplified by the DTPS impedes proper communication and feedback. There is a need for a paradigm shift from traditional forms of governance towards the incorporation of new principles of management which are being ushered in by the new public management paradigm. Red tape and bureaucracy suppress the spirit of innovation, and discourages “think tanks” from providing meaningful suggestions to the institutions as to how they could improve their performance and service delivery. There is a need for flexibility so that the chain of command is followed such that sound strategic decisions are taken to benefit the organisation.

Increase innovation

Advances in global modern technology require the DTPS to incorporate new ideas and utilise technology to improve its decision-making. Meetings can be held, or orders issued to subordinates, by electronic means through websites and social media platforms, which can be instrumental in improving levels of service delivery. The use of technology can also help with project management and improve the competitiveness of the DTPS and other public organisations in South Africa.

Monitoring and evaluation

There is a need to establish strong monitoring and evaluation techniques that act as oversight mechanisms to ensure that the goals and objectives of the organisation are executed. Weaknesses should be rectified swiftly to enhance organisational

performance. This also conforms to goal setting theory, which requires that goals should be evaluated by leadership for better task performance. As shown in the study of the DTPS, lack of monitoring and evaluation of public officials negatively affects organisational performance and integrity.

Although these recommendations are made, there is still scope for further research in order to gain an even deeper understanding into the strategic planning processes and implementation challenges in public sector institutions such as the DPTS. In particular, given the interplay of actors such as citizens, bureaucrats and politicians, a further valuable study should look at the influence of these different actors on the planning-implementation success relationship. Second, future research could also carefully consider other determinants of strategy implementation success. This is because strategic planning is overly influenced by an array of other variables, some reasonably controllable by public sector institutions such as organisational, capabilities, systems and processes, and others mostly beyond the control of the public organisations such as economic conditions and national or intra-party political instability.

Conclusion

The DTPS faces a plethora of challenges since they find it difficult to embrace the reforms initiated by the new public management (NPM) paradigm. Strategic planning is viewed as the work of top management, a misconception compromising service delivery. In addition, strategic planning has been implemented as a direct attempt to inhibit poor budgetary planning and corruption in procurement systems, and in order to effectively manage public resources. Due to limited implementation of the strategic planning process, the DTPS has been affected by a plethora of challenges including Lack of strong organisational culture and strategic planning; Poor project management skills; Skills shortage in strategic planning; Corruption and fraud; Lack of internal control measures; Poor alignment of objectives and performance; Poor strategy execution or performance management system and Lack of communication and motivation. There is need for the DPTS to constantly evaluate the performance of its public officials, promote tenets of the new public management paradigm, as well as incorporate new ideas and utilise technology to improve its decision-making.

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