ANALYSIS OF SUPERVISOR AND SUPERVISEE COOPERATION IN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN A PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT IN KWAZULU-NATAL

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－**Abstract**－

Studies have shown that employees and their supervisors rarely cooperate in the various stages of performance planning including the setting of their performance targets. This study has sought to explore the cooperation of supervisors and supervisees in the implementation of performance management, commonly known as the *Employee Performance Management and Development System* (EPMDS), in a provincial government department in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Drawing on the pragmatist philosophy, the study employed a mixed-method approach which involved in-depth interviews (six), documentary analysis and survey methods (83 questionnaires) to elicit the views of workers on the implementation of EPMDS in a provincial government department in KZN. Through documentary analysis, this study established that there are proper and systematic procedures for EPMDS. A further analysis has revealed that the central tendency is evident when supervisors give performance scores, with most workers being given average scores and only a few scores being above the average, which adversely affects their motivation. These findings have critical implications for human resources managers in the public sector. The consequence of this is that there is a need to balance the tensions between time constraints and proper Performance Management by involving workers in the whole cycle of Performance Management. Without such involvement, workers will continue to be suspicious of the EPMDS which may defeat its purpose.

Key words: Public sector, performance management, performance review, personal development plan

JEL Classification: M12

1. INTRODUCTION

The pincer movement of managerialism and marketization resulted in significant public sector reforms, inspired by the New Public Management (NPM). One significant off shot of such reforms was the pervasive implementation of hitherto private sector management techniques into the public sector. One such technique is performance management. Research has shown that in recent years there has been an increased interest in implementing systems which seek to improve the performance of employees in the public-sector departments in delivering services promptly to the public (Mosoge & Pilane, 2014). The narrative and the arguments for performance management are compelling and irresistible. Performance management is afforded a high priority in both the private and public sector. A case is often made that performance management should be implemented in order to contribute to the productivity of employees. Faced with service delivery backlog and the austerity measures in the public sector, the post-apartheid democratic government of South Africa embraced most of the tenets of the NPM, including performance management (*Administration, Public Service Regulations,* 2016). According to Mosoge & Pilane (2014), the underlying rationale for introducing such mechanisms was that employees would deliver services effectively and efficiently.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the EPMDS is not as developmental and consultative as is prescribed by the relevant legislation because there is little evidence to show that supervisors and employees hold consultation meetings to discuss and agree on the objectives and goals to be achieved (Van Dooren, Bouckaert et al., 2015). The requirement regarding communication between supervisors and employees is not well understood, as there is limited interaction to provide ongoing feedback about the attainment, non-attainment, and achievement of goals. Furthermore, there is little training on the EPMDS, so there is always tension between the employees and their supervisor. This is particularly so when it is time for measuring the attainment of their objectives by the employees. there is tension between the measurement of performance and commitment to developing human capacity and skill Often, employees complain that they are not acknowledged for work well done either formally or informally, and this discourages them from performing well (*Human Capital Institute*, 2009). The implementation of the process in municipalities is compromised by the lack of political will, leadership, and human power to implement the Performance Management system.

Although there has been increased scholarly attention given to EPMDS in particular and performance management in general, there has been a frustrating dearth of literature based on studies that sought to elicit the understanding of workers who are at the coal face of service delivery and who bear the brunt of any inadequacy of the performance management system. Without such an understanding, it would be difficult to determine the success or failure of these NPM inspired reforms. Consequently, the decisions to improve productivity and impact of public services are based on mere speculation and conjecture.

Drawing on a case study of a provincial government department in KwaZulu-Natal (hereafter called the Department) and using the theoretical bases of Michel Foucault's Panopticon and John Locke's Goal Setting Theory (GST), this paper demonstrates that workers' and supervisors' views on the purpose and processes are not always the same. Such conflicting views on the key instrument that is designed to improve productivity could affect the implementation of EPMDS. Unsurprisingly, the implementation of EPMDS has been mired in challenges such proper planning of performance; proper performance monitoring and development; performance review; and improved management of rewards and incentives to be employed in the Department.

This paper is divided into five sections. The next section explores the NPM in order to provide a backdrop of the performance management in the public sector. In part two of this section we explore the panopticon concept and the goal setting theory as theoretical baces by means of which the implementation of the EPDS is deconstructed. The fourth section explains the approach that was employed to glean the perceptions and understandings of Departmental employees of the implementation of the EPMDS. Lastly, the final two sections present findings of empirical research and discussions on the implementation of EPMDS before drawing conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Panopticon and the EPMDS

This study draws on Foucault's elaboration of Bentham's Panopticon metaphor (opticon - that which sees; pan – everything) to make the argument that knowledge is always a form of power, that it can be gained from power, and that it is forever connected to power (Foucault, 1977) and such power can be used to control the behaviour of the less powerful. The Panopticon was an architectural figure designed by Jeremy Bentham (Foucault, 1977). In the design of the panoptic prison, the building allows the inmates to be watched by a supervisor

who stays at the centre of the tower. His positioning in the centre allows him to see what the inmates are doing in their single cells, but they cannot see him. The knowledge that they are being watched at all times make them regulate their behaviour and comply with the rules (Foucault, 1977). Some parallels can drawn between Foucault's panopticon metaphor and the implementation of EPMDS in the South African public sector. Foucault's emphasis on knowledge and resources as powerful tools to modify one's behaviour is especially useful to this paper's analysis, as it allows one to reason how thorough knowledge of the EPMDS by supervisors they can assist in changing the attitudes of employees towards their jobs, and therefore their behaviour. Drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of the panopticon, one can infer that EPMDs are not neutral or apolitical, but that they are an expression of power and dominance. Foucault (1977) claims that power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. The EPMDS as a tool can act as a watchdog over employees by clearly articulating what employees need to do and instilling in them a sense that their actions are always monitored by a panoptic supervisor whom they cannot see and interact with on daily basis. They sense that they must always show good behaviour because the supervisor is always watching over them. The lack of training on the use of the EPMDS and regular meetings with employees can make employees fear the use of the EPMDS as a punitive tool if they fail to act as expected. The EPMDS can be punitive in the sense that during summative assessment there will be no financial rewards for or recognition of workers whose performance scores are below the minimum thresholds. The employees do not see the EPMDS as a developmental tool to nurture and develop their abilities and talents *(Department of Public Service and Administration*, 2007). To this end, Foucault's conceptualization of power explains how power can be utilized to alter the operations in the organization, modify employees' behaviour and mindset, and instill a sense of responsibility and accountability in them. Foucault describes panopticism as a 'powerful and sophisticated internalized coercion, which is achieved through constant observation of prisoners, in a single cell, where there is no interaction and communication … panopticism can act as a control mechanism' (Foucault, 1977).

There are many studies that refer to schools and other public organizations as panoptic and substantiate their claims by providing a number of observations (Perryman, 2006).   The theory is more of an ideal model of power than about how organizations function in the daily execution of their work. It models one possibility for the power relations between supervisors and subordinates. The

supervisors set clear rules and codes of behaviour for the subordinates in the organization and the subordinates are expected to comply with the rules and behave accordingly. The supervisors know what the subordinates are doing and what they should be doing because they are strategically placed in the central tower, but the subordinates are not aware of what the supervisors are doing because the supervisors are invisible to the inmates in the cells (Foucault, 1977).

The ultimate objective of the panopticon in the case of the prison is to prevent the captives from committing crimes or, in society at large, to dissuade members of the community from doing things which might lead to their imprisonment. Goyer (2005) asserts, in a business context, that monitoring enables employers to observe employees' behaviour. The use of monitoring as a panopticon or a panoptic device is to instill a sense of self-discipline into people in order to increase their productivity. It permits organizations to observe their employees' work routines (Miliken, 2012). Goyer (2005) claims that many employers argue that workplace monitoring, such as video surveillance and electronic entry systems, enables them to safeguard their employees not only from intruders but also from themselves, to protect their assets, and to improve the quantity and quality of their products and services. Roseblant, Kneese & Boyd (2014) maintain that the cameras can also act as safeguards against burglary; locate customer movements for analytics purposes; watch employee behaviour, and pinpoint an area in the store that needs to be tidied up.

Unfortunately, the application of the panoptic theory has been challenged vigorously by scholars who argue that parallels between the panoptic and public sector organisations are overemphasised, unfair and provocative. For instance, Ndahinda & Bosman (2014) argue that the panopticon represents an institution which monitors people, and controls and disciplines them, and its intended outcome is to make individuals obey and comply. Similarly, Reeves (2003) asserts that such surveillance of individuals reduces their privacy and integrity. Another criticism is enunciated by Miliken (2012), who holds the view that surveillance and monitoring compromise one's privacy, stress people, make them sick and increases absenteeism and that monitored individuals display low morale and that such surveillance has a negative effect on productivity. The use of Panoptic surveilance can be seen as equating employees with prisoners who are always visible and are subjected to the observation of the supervisor.

In spite of these criticisms, this paper still argues that the behaviour and attitudes of employees in the Department should be closely monitored and observed by supervisors. The supervisor keeps a record of performance of all supervisees.

The supervisees are expected to comply with, to exhibit good behaviour, to perform as dictated in the job descriptions, to observe protocol, and to conform to the work ethic of the Department. Although these criticisms are significant, the application of the panopticon theory as a heuristic tool for public sector human resources has persisted (Goyer, 2005; Ndahinda & Bosmans, 2014; Roseblant, Kneese & Boyd, 2014).

2.2 The goal-setting theory

The goal-setting theory will be used as an analytic lens in this study. This study draws on the work of Locke & Latham (2002) to make the argument that there is an important relationship between goals and performance (Lunenburg, 2011). Locke & Latham's (2002) emphasis on the relationship between goals and performance is particularly useful in this study's analysis, as it provides the employees and supervisors of the department with an opportunity to set challenging yet attainable goals during the planning performance phase. To this end, Locke & Latham's (2002) conceptualization of a goal is productive for grasping how, under the right conditions, goal setting can be a powerful technique for motivating the employees of the organization (Lunenburg, 2011). Locke & Latham's (2002) work in connection with task performance is also of value for showing that goals direct attention and action, and that challenging goal mobilize energy and lead to the exertion of greater and more persistent effort (Lunenburg, 2011).

Setting goals has become such a common practice that the majority of human beings have come to accept it. Goal-setting is about a willingness to improve an existing situation. It is about doing things differently. Goal-setting influences behaviour in four different ways: goals direct attention to what is most important, they prompt us into action, they increase our persistence, and they direct strategies and action plans. Goal-setting has many benefits in life because goals motivate people to complete tasks and to improve aspects of their lives (Polson, 2013). Goals drive human beings' actions, and without a goal, it is argued, an individual can become directionless and clueless. Locke & Latham (2002) argue that goals refer to future valued outcomes. A goal is an objective, a standard, an aim of some action, or a level of performance or proficiency (Polson, 2013). Lunenburg (2011) believes that a goal may be defined simply as what the individual is consciously trying to do and that there is a strong relationship between goals and performance.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses the mixed methods approach which draws on different traditions with different underlying conventions. It offers the possibility of combining strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research and compensating for the weaknesses of each method. Drawing on Creswell's (2003) work, a concurrent mixed method design where qualitative and quantitative data were collected and used concurrently.

3.1 Participants

The study drew on multiple sources for data, that is to say, from documents, interviews and questionnaires. The official documents used in this study include those from the government, the Department of Public Service and Administration and the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation. However, much of the data were elicited through interviews and surveys. Six interviews were conducted with purposefully selected participants; two unskilled & skilled (Levels 4-6), two highly skilled production (Levels 7-8), one highly skilled supervision (Levels 9-10) and one middle and Senior management (Levels 11-16). Eighty-three (83) questionnaires were distributed and filled in by 34 unskilled & skilled (Levels 4-6), 26 highly skilled production(Levels 7-8), 15 highly skilled supervision (Levels 9-10) and 8 middle and Senior management (Levels 11-16) who were also purposefully selected.

A high percentage of the respondents (28.9%) had experience of working in the Department ranging from 6 to 10 years. The percentage of respondents who had less than 1 year of experience was 4.8%. The percentage of respondents who had 1 to 2 years' experience in the Department was 15.7%., while the percentage of respondents who had 3 to 5 years' experience in the Department was 26.5%. The percentage of respondents who had more than 10 years' experience was 22.9%. Over a quarter of the respondents (28.9%) were well experienced in their work, a fact which might suggest that they require little supervision.

3.2 Instrumentation

An interview guide based on the broad themes of the study was designed to elicit a deep understandings of the employees regarding the implementation of EMPDS through in-depth interviews. Notes were taken during interviews and a digital audio recorder was also used to capture the summary of the interviews accurately. Based on four broad themes of the study, a questionnaire was designed to solicit the employees' insights into how EPMDS are implemented in the Department.

The first theme sought to understand the respondents' general views on the implementation of the EPMDS particularly during the planning phase, while the second theme sought to understand how performance reviews were carried out. The last theme in the questionnaire was designed to glean from employees how performance rewards are used as a power tool to modify workers' behaviour and attitudes. The data collection measurement instrument was a five-step Likert scale where respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement in response to different statements regarding the implementation of EPMDS in the Department where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was 0.73. The questionnaire also contained open-ended questions where respondents could add any views regarding the implementation of the EPMDS.

3.3 Data collection procedures

Following the permission from Department to conduct the study, the researcher went on to do interviews and surveys concurrently. Questionnaires were hand-delivered to purposefully selected participants and collected later which yielded a 100 percent response rate. This was done concurrently with interviews that sought to understand to understand how the EPMDS was implemented and ways in which to might reflect the panopticon metaphor in altering the behaviour of workers in favour of the employers. Days before these interviews, appointments with the selected participants were made telephonically. The face-to-face interviews took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. These interviews were insightful in capturing the non-verbal responses and body language from the participants and were also audio recorded.

3.4 Data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed concurrently. Quantitive data analysis was done based on responses from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire for employee using SPSS Windows version 21 based on the employee . Crosstabs were used to illuminate the similarities and differences in perceptions of respondents based on biographical variables. The Chi-Square tests were used to compare the views of respondents based on their experience, qualifications and other biographical attributes. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the in-depth interviews. Data from such interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analysed through pattern matching logic, which 'compares an empirically-based pattern with a predicted one' (Yin, 2003:116). Then data were analysed on the basis of the theoretical assumptions of the goal

setting theory and the panopticon theory. The purpose was to grasp the nuances of the data by identifying manifest and latent themes and patterns emerging from it. This was done repeatedly and each identified unit was labelled with a code.

4. FINDINGS

The broad aim of the paper is to explore the involvement of workers in the implementation of EPMDS in the Department. The findings in this section are presented in accordance with the EPMDS cycle which starts with performance planning and ends with performance review. The first objective sought to understand the involvement of workers in the planning phase.

4.1 Performance planning at the KZN provincial Department

Broadly, performance planning includes various tasks such as formulating performance expectations and goals, discussing the objectives and targets of the unit and the criteria to be utilized during the assessment of performance. The formulation of goals is a key stage in the performance management cycle. The respondents were asked if they had formulated performance expectations and goals with their supervisors. Approximately half of those who responded (49.4%) disagreed with the statement that they formulated their performance goals and expectation jointly with their supervisors, and (14.5%) strongly disagreed. 18.0% of the respondents 'somewhat agreed' that their supervisors formulated performance goals and expectations with them. A small proportion (13.3%) 'agreed'; while other respondents (4.8%) 'strongly agreed'. These perceptions are barely distinguishable from findings that emerged from the interviews. In one of the interviews a respondent remarked:

No, I do not sit down together with my supervisor to discuss Performance Agreements (PA) and Job Description (JD) and agree on what should be done throughout the performance cycle. I usually do it on my own and submit it to the supervisor. She would sometimes engage me, but only when there is a problem. It might be a good thing to have a discussion of what to do beforehand. (Participant 2)

Data are sufficient to suggest that supervisors do not organize performance meetings to make sure that employees are clear on what is expected of them during the performance cycle. Overall, the findings indicate that the employees complete the performance agreement forms by themselves without the guidance and coaching of their supervisors. The supervisor becomes involved only when there is a crisis.

A further analysis of the data revealed that a high proportion of the respondents (34.9%) felt that the supervisors were not discussing the objectives and targets of the unit with them. A minority of the respondents (9.7%) 'strongly disagreed', while 23 percent of the respondents agreed and 16.9% strongly agreed that their supervisors discussed the objectives and targets of the unit with them. Just below a quarter (15.7%) of those who responded to the question reported that they 'somewhat agreed' that their supervisors discussed the objectives and targets of the unit with them. These results indicate that there is a gap in the performance planning of the Department, as the results record a high proportion of employees (34.9%) who contradicted the statement. This implies that the majority of the employees were not well-versed in the strategic goals of the Department, as the objectives and targets of the unit are meant to be aligned with the strategic goals of the Department. Furthermore, respondents revealed that they were not informed of the expectations as shown by one participant in this statement:

There is limited information about what to expect during performance review because for the past three years I cannot recall having a meeting to discuss performance expectations except to fill out the EPMDS forms. Filling out EPMDS forms is what we are good at. (Participant3).

These two data items, taken together, suggest that meetings to discuss expectations and standards to be evaluated during performance reviews are exceptions to the rule in the unit, which results in the employees not knowing what to expect during performance reviews. Having limited knowledge of what to discuss in performance reviews limit the interactions that are meant to take place during the meetings.

4.2 Performance monitoring and development

Following a successful performance planning in the EPMDS, there should be a systematic monitoring of the implementation of the agreed upon work plan. This should involve meeting with supervisors to discuss work progress, identifying shortcomings and providing coaching and mentoring, providing feedback on a regular basis, providing constructive feedback, and convening sharing sessions, which motivate the employee to excel. Unfortunately, most respondents (58%) thought that this was not happening in their department. About 48.2 percent of those who responded to this statement disagreed with it, while some respondents (9.6%) strongly disagreed. Other responses (19.3%) to this statement included those who 'somewhat agreed'. Less than a quarter of the respondents (18.1%)

agreed. A minority of the respondents (4.8%) indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement. Data from interviews affirmed this as interviewees stated that:

> *I have never sat down with my supervisor to get a report on what I have performed. It is a trend in the public service that you rarely have time to discuss performance. … As a result, they have limited information about my performance and they are not in a position to recommend workshops that would help advance my career. (Participant 1)*

> *I cannot recall an occasion where we formally discussed performance and highlighted some blemishes [mistakes] that have been committed. (Participant 5)*

Taken together, these responses indicate that some supervisors had not internalized their responsibilities of coaching and guiding subordinates under their supervision so that they would develop in their careers. This denotes that there is a gap in terms of providing coaching and mentoring to employees. The coaching and mentoring would be significant in developing the careers of the employees and would assist the Department to deliver on its core functions. Visual analysis of the crosstabs shows that there seems to be a relationship between the respondents and their perceptions but a chi-square test ($\chi2 = 23.554$, df = 16, p = 0.1) showed that there was an insignificant association.

4.3 Performance review and development

The final stage in the EPMDS cycle is the performance review and development. One of the research questions sought to determine the extent to which performance development review achieves its objectives. Ironically, most respondents confirmed that this is the stage they get involved the most. But, how effective is this if employees have not been involved properly in the preceding stages? For instance, respondents were asked if the EPMDS were effective in identifying employees training needs or weaknesses in the light of its developmental purpose. Figure 3 displays their perceptions. Most respondents (52%) did not think that the performance review helped them or the supervisors understand their weaknesses and developmental needs. This is also confirmed by the trendline, which rises steeply towards the negative responses.   A further analysis reveals that 42.2 percent of the respondents 'disagreed'. The highest percentage (15.7%) of those who disagreed were at levels 4 to 6. A small proportion (10.8%) 'strongly disagreed' and the highest percentage (4.8%) of those who strongly disagreed were at levels 7 to 8. Less than a quarter (20.5%) of the respondents 'somewhat agreed'. The highest proportion (6.0%) of those who

'somewhat agreed' were at levels 4 to 6, 7 to 8 and 9 to 10. Some respondents (13.3%) 'agreed' and the highest proportion (9.6%) of those who agreed were at levels 7 and 8. Some respondents (13.3%) 'strongly agreed' and the highest percentage (6.0%) were at levels 7 and 8. However, their views were not significantly associated with their positions in the Department, as shown by the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 13.625$, df $= 16$, p $= 0.627$).

In some cases, the study reveals that even in the final review, there are few or no meetings between the supervisors. During an interview, one participant explained:

> *For the past 6 years, it has never happened, I do not remember a meeting with my supervisor to scrutinize my work identify strengths and weaknesses and provide necessary feedback. (Participant 4).*

Taken all together, it is clear that the supervisors have not been conducting appraisal meetings where the work of the employee is assessed against expectations; where the supervisor acknowledges the employee's achievement and shortcomings and recommends how the shortcomings can be corrected moving forward. The upshot of this lack of proper involvement of workers could be the ineffectiveness of the EPMDS.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Performance planning in the Department

The first question in this study sought to determine the involvement of employees in the performance planning in the Department. Surprisingly, the findings of the study indicate that workers are barely involved in the performance planning. Another observation that emerged from this study is that the whole process is poorly conducted. Supervisors were not involving employees in the formulation of goals and expectations, employees were not informed about the criteria to be used during the assessment, and supervisors did not assist employees to develop performance development plans.   If the argument that EPMDS improves productivity (Mbhanyele 2015) is accurate, poor performance and failure to achieve a unit's objectives is squarely placed on the shoulders of supervisors to discuss expectations and goals with their subordinates. It has been suggested that supervisors should discuss and involve employees at the critical stage of performance planning (Ammons & Roenigk, 2015).   Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case in this Department in KZN. However, these results are barely distinguishable from Mpanga's (2009) findings in the Ugandan Public Service who found that the majority of employees were not provided with

opportunities to participate and to agree on their performance plans and that the majority of the employees also did not understand the goals of their jobs. The lack of employee involvement in the planning phase of EPMDs is contrary to what is envisaged in the goal-setting theory. Consequently, this could fuel the panopticon metaphor mentality of the EPMDS as employees become suspicious of its real purpose.

5.2 Performance monitoring and development

Regarding the second question that sought to establish the perceptions of workers regarding the Performance monitoring and development, the findings of the current study reveal that there is poor monitoring and employee development in the Department. The results of this study reveal that feedback is not offered on a regular basis and meetings are not frequently convened to discuss performance as required by theoretical arguments upon which EPMDS is based. More than half of the supervisors in this Department are not coaching and mentoring their subordinates. Failure to provide constructive and continuous feedback and a lack of employees participation in this process could perpetuate the disconnect between the planned EPMDS policy and its outcomes. These findings do not seem to support Pulakos' (2004) and Taylor's recommendations that employees should be provided with constructive and regular feedback and that they should be encouraged to participate in discussions as approximately half of the respondents disputed that supervisors had offered constructive and regular feedback. However, some respondents seemed to agree that the supervisor did offer constructive feedback on a regular basis. A possible explanation for this variation could be different units within which respondents worked. Another possible explanation for this inconsistency may be due to experience and qualifications of the supervisors in different units of the Department.

5.3 Performance review and development

The third research question sought to determine the effectiveness of the different elements of the EPMDS in view of the reported poor implementation. Unsurprisingly, the findings suggest that the EPMDS in the Department did not accomplish much in terms of its developmental aspect. Because of a lack of employee involvement in the planning phase and infrequent or lack of performance monitoring. meetings between the supervisor and employees, the EPMDS fail to highlight the shortcomings and strengths of employees, as the scores recorded in the review forms are not a true reflection of their work performance. Although EPMDS is meant to help identify weaknesses and to aid in

addressing those identified weaknesses (Balcioglu & Nihinlola, 2014) this study has been unable to find that this is taking place in the Department. Although this study did not measure the effect of EPMDS on productivity, recent scholarship argues that measuring performance increases productivity and efficiency in an organization but this is difficult to infer how such improvement could take place in the face of poor implementation as reported by respondents of this Department.

6. CONCLUSION

The argument presented in this paper is not so much about the effectiveness of EPMDS in particular or performance management in general. Important as these may be, this paper established the lack of participation of employees in the planning and monitoring stages of the EPMDS illustrated how this may affect its usefulness in identifying training or developmental needs of employees. The parallels between the panopticon and EPMDS could be an exaggeration but this study did establish that a lack of adequate understanding of its purpose leads to unfounded suspicions, particularly at the performance reward stage. Although this paper does not pretend to provide a solution to the issues of poor implementation of EPMDS, it has raised critical questions on its implementation in the Department. This paper challenges the assertion that EPMDS is a neutral tool that seeks to improve performance through, among other things, identifying training needs, which could be the reason for its poor implementation. Not only did this paper offer profound insights into the implementation EPMDS but also provides initial tools for asking more precise questions on its implementation in the South African public sector institutions in general.

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