Management Fibrillation and its Influence on Results-Based Management in Kenya's Public Sector

Prof. David Minja
Department of Public Policy & Administration, Kenyatta University,P.O. 184-00200, City Square, Nairobi Kenya
EMAIL: minjad11@gmail.com

Abstract
Fibrillation is a medical term that describes a condition in the heart where the muscle fibers contract rapidly at their own pace and not in coordination with other muscle fibers. As a result, the amount of blood pumped to the body is reduced. The body experiences a lot of heart activity but reduced heart output. This paper borrows this medical term to describe a phenomenon that exists in many organizations which inhibits superior performance. Many organizations are in the same state as the heart with respect to the practice of results-based management. There are lots of activities going on in the organization but minimal results by way of outputs, outcomes and impact. The best of such organizations only come up with outputs- the results of an activity. These outputs are not the end products for the user but simply a step along the results chain. The underlying theory in this research was Public Value theory developed by Prof. Mark Moore of Kennedy School of Government.The researcher conducted a survey of over one hundred middle-level managers working in public sector agencies. The responses were analyzed using percentages and thematic analysis. The findings were classified into ten thematic areas which had a score of over 50%. These areas were seen to be causing management and organizational fibrillation. On the basis of issues identified, several strategies have been proposed to help organizations deal with management and organizational fibrillation.
Keywords: Management fibrillation, Results-based Management, Leadership

1.0 Introduction

Good management is a balancing act. The challenge for managers is to maintain a dual focus on people and results (Philips Ann 2014).Fibrillation is a medical term that describes a condition in the heart where the muscle fibers contract rapidly at their own pace and not in coordination with other muscle fibers. As a result, the amount of blood pumped to the body is reduced. The body experiences a lot of heart activity but reduced heart output.

Many organizations are in a weak position with respect to the practice of results-based management. There are many activities going on in an organization but minimal results by way of outputs, outcomes and impact. The best of such organizations only come up with outputs- the results of an activity. These outputs are not the end products for the user but simply a step along the results chain.

Organizations experience a high level of employee dissatisfaction and turnover. However, this state of affairs never bothers management. To management, employees may leave the organization whenever they feel uncomfortable working in those organizations. Leadership is also tempted to spend huge sums of money training the staff on the 'new' ways of doing things but the outcome of the training programs does not register any significant improvement in organizational performance.

During the 1990s, the United Nations embarked on a programme to introduce results-based management systems in the governments of member countries of the Organization for Economic Development (RSA, 2005). The United Nation's 2004 report on the results of this initiative noted that, "the changeover to a results-based culture has been lengthy and difficult, with organizations struggling to ……… empower managers and staff alike in the setting and accomplishing of the goals (Ortiz, F.E. et al, 2004). Many public sector entities have goals and plans, but most of them never realize their goals due to several reasons. This research embarked on establishing the reasons behind many organizations being 'active' yet the results culture is not evident in those organizations.

The theory guiding this study was Public Value theory developed by Prof. Mark Moore at the Kennedy School of Government. The overarching objective of public value is to offer public managers guidance on how to articulate goals of their organization (Moore, M, 1995). In a sense, public value resembles private sector's goal of maximizing shareholder value (Coats, Passmore, 2008). This theory provokes managers into thinking about what is most valuable in the service that they run and to consider how effective management can make the service the best that it can be.

Public Value as a theory of public management enables public managers to consider three fundamental questions:

- What is this service for? The purpose the organization is supposed to serve
- To whom are we accountable?

- How do we know if we have been successful?

The answers to these questions form the heart of results-based management practice. Results-based management is also hinged on strategic planning framework where goals, objectives, targets and activities are formulated and strategies developed to achieve them. These goals, objectives and targets are assumed to reflect the national priority which presumably is an outcome that the public value. However, many targets are more focused on activities and outputs than outcomes and are rarely the consequence of an exercise in deliberative governance. Moreover, targets are subject to Goodhart's law "that any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for control purposes"(Coats, Passmore, 2008). Public managers may therefore, be tempted to sacrifice valuable outcomes but achieve a certain level of output. In other words, they may hit the target but miss the point. It is because of this common phenomenon that this study embarked on investigating its existence in Kenya's public sector, its causes and remedies. This phenomenon led to the researcher coining the phrase 'management fibrillation'.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To establish the management/leadership styles and how they influence results-based management practice in the organizations under study
- To establish whether the organizations from where the respondents were drawn experienced management fibrillation;
- To identify the causes of management fibrillation in the organizations studied
- To propose some strategies that organizations could adopt to deal with the challenge of management fibrillation

2.0 Research Methodology

The research adopted a survey design to assess the attitudes, views and opinions of middle-level managers in public sector with regard to the ability of senior executives to apply results-based management approach in their organizations.

The target population comprised of middle-level managers in public sector who had undergone Senior Management Training and Strategic Leadership Development programs at Kenya School of Government in the year 2013. The total trained was slightly over one thousand. The study was longitudinal because the responses sought by the study covered the entire period that the respondents had been with their employers. This population was seen to have good representative characteristics of middle managers from public sector agencies.

2.1 The population sample

The study identified purposively, a sample of 120 respondents who had just completed the above mentioned training programs. The inclusion criteria for respondents were: a) being a middle-level manager in a public sector agency and, b) having undergone senior management training and strategic leadership development training at Kenya School of Government.

2.2 Limitations of the Study

Participants in the study were drawn from middle management level. Employees from lower level management were not represented which may have skewed the results.

2.3 Research instrument

The research used a questionnaire with open-ended questions to capture perceptions, views and opinions of respondents regarding the subject of the study. The respondents were required to give the rationale for the responses they gave in assessing their leaders and managers.

2.4 Data Analysis

The research adopted the thematic analysis technique which analyzed information given and grouped it into common themes. Themes that had a frequency of over 50% were considered by this study as the key findings.

3.0 Findings

This survey revealed that most public sector agencies regardless of their mandate, size or the sector they serve exhibited symptoms of management and organizational fibrillation as seen in the following thematic areas.

Leadership/Management Styles

All the respondents (100%), indicated that majority of leaders in public service apply several styles to coerce employees to follow instructions without questioning. The styles range from application of sanctions to manipulation, intimidation and handsomely rewarding those seen to be loyal regardless of their management effectiveness. Those who question issues or try to correct things are sidelined regardless of their good intentions. Because leadership pursues superior performance using disempowered employees, the temptation is high for leadership to always initiate more performance improvement projects and other projects borrowed from the best performers in the sector without due regard to the styles of leadership and culture of those organizations being benchmarked against. Such organizations exist in a state of management and organizational fibrillation.

Management and organizational Fibrillation and their Causes

Majority of the employees are disempowered by management and to say the least, they are mentally disengaged from the organization. This is according to 80% of those surveyed. Employees work for pay, are detached from management, they are least concerned whether the organization will achieve its mission and vision. Their objective is to provide the bare minimum required by management so as to justify their continuous engagement by the organization. Majority of the employees are not creative and even where they seem to be, they do not use their creativity to promote their organization's mission and vision. To those employees, what matters is the performance of tasks assigned by management regardless of the tasks' outcomes.

Top leadership on the other hand is obsessed with projects being implemented regardless of the level of buy-in by the employees who are supposed to implement those projects. Employees are least involved in contributing to the vision and the goals of the organization. In the minds of the leaders, employees are supposed to implement strategies and programs that have been crafted by management whether they are feasible or not. Leadership thinks for the organization and employees do the implementation.

The survey identified ten most common practices seen to be the causes of management and organizational fibrillation. This is according to the responses given by the respondents.

1. Corporate Culture

Leadership creates an atmosphere and a culture of fear so that even the top management cannot challenge the decisions of the chief executive when those decisions are not in the best interest of the organization. Employees and managers with alternative solutions are fought and/or sidelined as a strategy of keeping them 'contained'. The CEO makes all the decisions including those that should be made by the factory floor employees. The executives may even at times overrule a policy and substitute it with an individual decision that has not been arrived at in a rational way. The top leadership does not trust managers and they have to keep on referring to the CEO for minor operational issues. The level of micromanagement is very high which creates a gridlock in many instances.

2. Management Paralysis

Managers with paralysis work their way up within an organization where they have little or no management experience but due to their history of association with top leadership and their length of stay in the organization. These managers are chosen to succeed their leaders or appointed to senior executive positions. This is according to 70% of those surveyed. The tragic result is the creation of mediocre managers due to high levels of inbreeding from other mediocre and ineffective managers. A notable phenomenon also is an attempt to reward those perceived to be loyal to the system regardless of their management experience. Such crop of managers is not so much loyal to the vision and mission of the organization as they are to the leader.

3. Accountability Practice

Myers and Lacy (1996) defines accountability as the "responsibility of government and its agents towards the public to achieve previously set objectives and to account for them in public". It is also regarded as a commitment required from public officials individually and collectively to accept public responsibility for their own actions or inactions. In this case, the burden of accountability rests on each public functionary to act in the public

Interest and according to his/her conscience, with solutions for every matter based on professionalism and participation.

According to 100% of those surveyed, many governmental institutions fail to observe the basic tenets of accountability practice. Accountability is closely linked with the exercise of power and the legitimacy of policies, and goes beyond technical practices. Issues of accountability involve ethical choices of values and actions that managers take that either promote or impinge upon the trust needed in effective and successful organizations.

It has been observed that the need to reform African administrative structures to ensure efficiency and reduce the likelihood of corruption in public service is obvious (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999).So is the need to increase democratic accountability(Ole Therkildsen, 2001).Improved accountability in the conduct of public affairs is a reform agenda of many countries in and outside Africa(Batley, 1999, Olowu, 1998, Wright, 1997). Accountability is fundamental as a means of improving the quality of public services. Lack of accountability has seen many governments being toppled or citizens losing trust in their government. At the heart of the practice of accountability lies the way in which public bodies are directed and managed- their corporate governance. According to Day and Klein, (1987), accountability involves both the political justification of decisions and actions and managerial answerability for implementation of those decisions and agreed tasks according to agreed criteria of performance.

Accountability is one of those words more often used than understood. The political reality is that accountability means that the government of the day must justify and explain its actions to the public, in the hope of maintaining trust and being re-elected. Accountability is a relationship based on obligations to demonstrate, review, and take responsibility for performance, in light of agreed expectations and the means used (Auditor

General Report-Canada, 2002). This emphasizes the importance of accountability for results and for the means used. It underlines that effective accountability is not just about reporting performance; it also requires review, including appropriate corrective actions and consequences for individuals.

Traditional accountability practices are under pressure by growing trends in public management practice that focuses on getting results, using partnering arrangements, and developing a flexible and innovative public service. Public officials can reasonably be held accountable for demonstrating the extent to which the results they expect are being accomplished, the contribution their activities have made to the actual outcomes, the lessons that have been learned, and the soundness and propriety of their actions.

Theory and practice suggest that accountability practice in public sector is weak due to several reasons: governments ignoring or transgressing social ethics and constitutional and legal provisions in the conduct of public affairs; systems of checks and balances are weak, activities are hidden and those involved are encouraged to be secretive or are prohibited from informing about them, corrupt practices are widespread; special interests and bureaucratic power often dominate; political and personal loyalty are rewarded more than merit; public participation in running public affairs is low and the opportunities for legal redress against wrongdoing are low(Caiden, 1991, DeLeon, 1997, Olowu, 1999).

4. Leader's insatiable desire to take all credit

All the respondents agreed that many managers yield to the temptation of taking the whole credit for a job well done even when it is clear to all that the job was done by the subordinates. Whenever a project fails, senior managers do not consider their role in the failure. Consequently, they are quick to reprimand the subordinates or even sacrifice them at the altar of their bloated ego. This happens even when it is clear that management was the cause of the failure. This also happens when managers craft inappropriate strategies to address a situation without involving the subordinates only later to blame the implementation team for having failed to achieve the desired results.

5. Failure to confront underperforming members of the management team

Majority of the respondents (85%) indicated that there are instances when some members fail to deliver results. Instead of confronting mediocre performance, the leader smoothes the situation reasoning that 'it is improper to reign hard on a colleague'. This is a misapplied form of promoting harmony and it demoralizes the rest of the managers who are solid performers and could trickle down to the rest of the employees.

6. Organizational Politics

About 73% of the respondents said that organizational politics is a key contributor to management fibrillation. In such organizations, organizational politics could be described as self serving and manipulative behavior of individuals and groups to promote their self interests at the expense of others and even organizational goals. This phenomenon may manifest itself through struggle for resources, personal conflicts, competition for power and leadership positions etc in order to build personal stature, occupy a key position in the organization, remain in the seat of power etc (Alagse, 2014). According to the survey, most top level public officials are engaged in politics both to rise to the top and remain at the top. This was seen especially in cases of CEOs and top management in public sector agencies.

Organizational politics is so intricately woven with management systems that relationships, norms, processes, performance and outcomes are hugely influenced and affected by it. This makes it a major contributor to management fibrillation.

7. Boss Barrier Syndrome

This happens when the leader assumes the position of an autocratic leader and refuses to mentor others for fear of being replaced. Such managers do not develop others to take after them, nor do they develop a succession plan. Their desire is to leave a leadership vacuum when they exit the organization so that they can be retained by the organization as an external resource person. These managers love to give instructions and hate any subordinate who proposes a better strategy than the manager's in achieving organizational goals. They are poor in interpersonal relations and implementation of projects. They are mediocre in thinking and do not hold themselves accountable to any one even though the organization could be having an accountability framework.

8. Indecisiveness and Fear of Failure by Managers

Procrastination in decision making is common in these organizations. Managers in these organizations are slow or even in certain circumstances, unwilling to make crucial decisions. The manager may have all the facts concerning a situation but he or she will still be hesitant to make decisions for fear of failure or aggrieving someone inside or outside of the organization. They are very poor in managing crisis and may cause an organization to go through huge losses. They never develop competence in decision making.

9. Resistance to change

Organizations high in management fibrillation are not receptive to change unless the proposals have come from top management. They argue that change proposals from lower level managers and employees should not be entertained because strategic decisions and change initiatives should come from the top management. They ignore the fact that frontline managers and employees have firsthand information on customers and stakeholders needs and the changing environmental trends. Due this weakness with management team, the organization losses many opportunities and may also fail to counter threats on time.

10. Organizational structures and systems misaligned with organization's strategy and current realities

It is common for organizations to visit an organization perceived to be performing better than the organization suffering from management fibrillation to learn their systems and processes. The unfortunate thing is that these managers borrow a system wholesomely, in total disregard of the performer's structures, culture and the level of people development. Upon implementation of the new system, employees are driven to adopt it after a short period of training. The training programme focuses on how to use the system and does not consider the people side of things- attitudes, skills levels, adaptability to change and the entire organizational culture. Should the employees raise genuine concerns about the system, they are seen to be saboteurs to the implementation of the system.

3.1 Addressing Management and Organizational Fibrillation

The researcher proposes several remedies to the problem of management fibrillation as discussed below:

1. Leadership development for the top management
   Organizational leadership should make a commitment to develop all leaders and managers in the area of leadership. This should range from leadership styles to emotional intelligence and personal leadership.
2. Valuing Employees
   Management should regard employees as a form of capital –intellectual capital- as opposed to regarding them as labor and an item to be expensed in the books of accounts. It is the responsibility of management to build the intellectual capital (skills, cognitive abilities, judgments, perception and intuition).
3. Creation of cultural Capital
   This refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Management should develop the courage to build a culture that promotes openness and tolerates divergent views. Managers should use any available means to unlock the creative abilities of employees and to establish a culture that empowers everyone to make a meaningful contribution to the organization without the leaders feeling intimidated by creative and innovative employees. The culture developed should promote shared values that focus on important concerns and goals that are shared by most of the people in the organization. These values tend to shape the behavior of the people and often persist over time even with changes in organizational membership (Kotter, Heskett, 1992).
4. Removing Empowerment Barriers
   Leadership should identify and deal with all barriers that inhibit employee performance. Some of the barriers that disempower employees include:
   - Structural barrier. An organization may be having a structure that is too bureaucratic and practices top – down decision making process all the time. It may also be misaligned with organizational strategies and practices for superior performance.
   - Systems barrier. Sometimes, the way the organization does its things may be the very thing that hinder employee empowerment. The policies, procedures, rules and information management systems may create employees that wholly rely on top management for direction even in areas that they may be required to make decisions. Many respondents in the survey lamented that 'nobody wanted to make any decision lest it backfires and management's wrath falls on you.'
   - Boss barrier. There are instances and regrettably happen to be many where the bosses are the real cause of employee disempowerment and management fibrillation. The main challenge is that employees cannot fire their bosses even when they see them messing. This issue is aggravated when the bosses ingratiate themselves with the appointing authorities to the extent that their loyalty goes to the appointing authority instead of the organizational vision and goals. They argue that for as long as you are able to keep the appointing authority satisfied, the rest does not matter a lot. Such a boss becomes difficult to replace and remains in office until the expiry of the contract regardless of organizational performance and the level of people development.
5. Promoting Accountability

Accountability practice should start with top leadership in the organization. It should focus on more than just resources accountability practice. Managers should also be accountable to employees, customers and other key stakeholders.

6. Developing High Performance Teams
   Such teams are characterized by boundless enthusiasm, energy and action that focus on results. Team members see themselves creating work that is worthwhile. This comes about when the following conditions hold:
   i).Work, targets and expected outcomes have to be understood by employees/ team members as important. They must see their contribution in making the world a better place.
   ii). Managers must lead people to a shared goal.

iii). Values should guide all plans, decisions and actions (all that is done must be value-driven). Values should be the real Boss in an organization. Values help build mutual trust among members and as mutual trust rises, support for goals will increase.

7. Management must make a commitment to consult widely or involve the employees in the formulation of policies, plans and targets. To create ownership, all employees should be engaged to capture their minds, hearts and hands.

4.0 Contribution to Knowledge and Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of fibrillation in organizations- a phenomenon that is rarely discussed in management literature, yet it impacts on organizational results if not well managed. Management fibrillation has several causes and it is upon organizational leaders and managers to identify the causal factors and deal with them to avoid creation of busy but ineffective organizations. There are several ways to address this phenomenon and managers should adopt strategies that best suit their organizational situation and context.

In order for an organization to survive and achieve success, it must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Beliefs must always come before policies, practices and goals. Faithfully adhering to those beliefs is critical to successful leadership and management.

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