



An analysis of government policy consistencies in relation to the performance of public sector institutions in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

The aim of the study was to examine how consistencies in policies pertaining to civil and voter registration in Zimbabwe affect the performance and reputation of the relevant institutions. Existing literature has focused on policies pertaining to health, education and climate change among others. Moreover, the majority of existing theories on institutional performance have focused on stakeholder concerns mainly from the private sector perspective and less on the public sector. The current study, therefore, sought to close this gap by examining policies pertaining to civil and voter registration and their impact on the performance and reputation of selected public institutions.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Public sector refer to institutions whose functions and responsibilities are expressed through the administration and implementation of public policies (Couch, 2018; Casimiro et al., 2017; Signé, 2017; Shearer, 2016; Olsen, 2015). The institutions offer services that are essential to the livelihoods of citizens such as health, education, civil registration, infrastructure and social services (Kim, 2016; Shearer, 2016; Agarwal, 2017; Canaway et al., 2017). Politics and policy consistencies characterise the functioning of these institutions (Andrews, 2017; Reid, 2017; Litman, 2018; Weel et al., 2018). Public sector performance refer to the conduct of personnel in the execution of their mandate in state controlled agencies (Apadore & Zainol, 2014; Luomaho, 2014; McHugh, 2014; Wæraas & Maor, 2014; Agarwal et al., 2015; Weel et al., 2018).

In line with the objective of the current study, the Complexity Theory and Performance Management was selected. The theory stipulates that organisations have to adapt to both the internal and external environments through a web of nonlinear feedback loops that operate in the dynamic process between stable and unstable situations thereby putting organisations at the edge of chaos (Lin & Lee, 2011; Kim, 2016). The edge of chaos renders organisations in difficult situations where they have to decide whether to operate in stable or unstable zones. Unstable zones present innovation opportunities which gives an organisation a competitive edge while the predictable environment associated with the stable zones usually result in the gradual collapse of an organisation (Lin & Lee, 2011; Kraaij-Dirkzwager et al., 2017; Sridhar & Mehta, 2018). The theory provide a basis for analysing the performance of public sector institutions against a background where they are expected to adhere to government policies while at the same time embracing new public management initiatives. While the stable zone allow governments to implement policies using traditional methods, the unstable zones have

forced the same institutions to engage stakeholders in the implementation and evaluation of policies (Diefenbach, 2016; De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016; Tsun Hoe et al., 2018). Public sector managers try to employ creative thinking so as to explore the interaction between their institutions and their environments (Lin & Lee, 2011; Wæraas & Maor, 2014; Shearer, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed in order to assist in explaining the relationships between the study constructs. It was constructed in line with the study objective which sought to establish how policy consistencies (PC) in policy implementation (PI) affect the performance (PERF) and reputation (REP) of public sector institutions. The framework is illustrated in Fig 1.1.

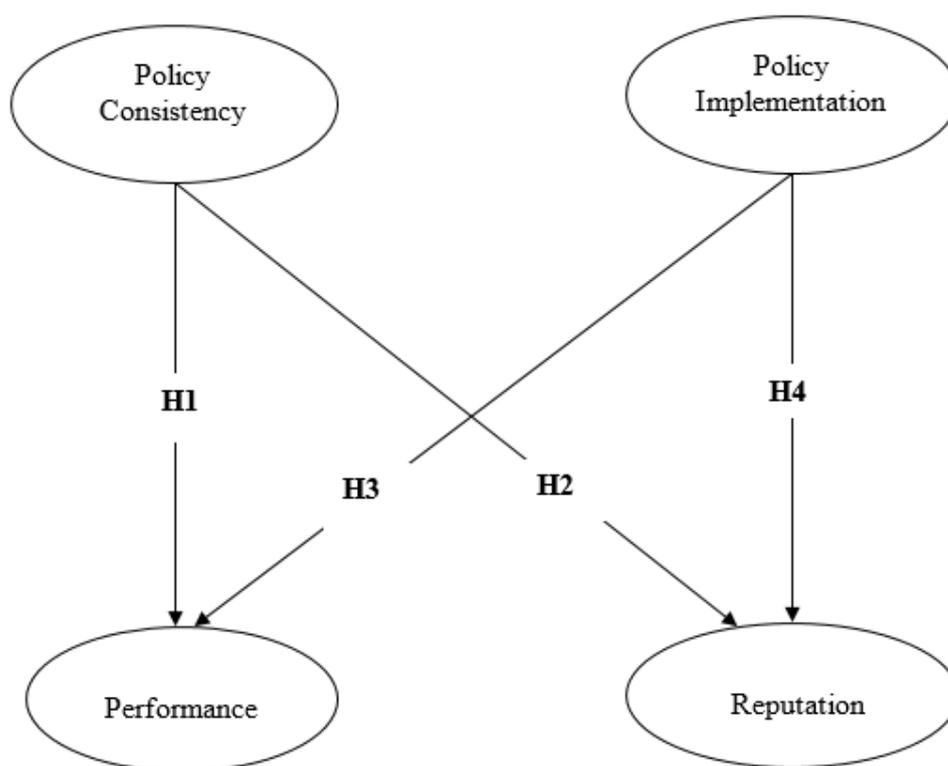


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework

Source: Derived from study literature

The study identified four study constructs namely policy consistency (PC); policy implementation (PI), factors influencing policy implementation (FI) and stakeholder

perceptions (SP). Policy consistency (PC) and policy implementation (PI) were the independent variables while reputation (REP) and performance (PERF) were the dependant variables. Deriving from the existing body of knowledge, the study assumed that policy consistencies and policy implementation have a strong impact on both the performance and reputation of public sector institutions.

Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the research hypotheses for this study were as follows:

H₁: Policy consistencies affect the performance of public sector institutions.

H₂: Policy consistencies affect the reputation of public sector institutions.

H₃: Policy implementation affect the performance of public sector institutions

H₄: Policy implementation affect the reputation of public sector institutions

Methodology

The research site for this study was Makombe Government Complex in Zimbabwe's Harare Metropolitan province and Murehwa District in Mashonaland East province. Harare is an urban setting and the capital city of Zimbabwe while Murehwa is a rural setting. The current study adopted pragmatism as its underlying epistemology on the basis of trying to establish the truth regarding the research topic under investigation. The QUAL-quan strategy was selected on the basis that the leadership is largely qualitative in nature hence qualitative data are collected first and are more heavily weighted (Canaway et al., 2017; Archer, 2018). The cross-sectional descriptive survey was adopted in the current scholarship. The population size consisted of 454 000 public sector employees according to the Zimbabwean Salaries Services Bureau (SSB, 2018). Using 95% level of confidence, 5% margin of error and assumed 50% response rate, a sample of 266 respondents was selected. The sample was however, increased 280 so as to cover up for non-response or spoilt questionnaires. Statistical data collected during the study were validated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability analysis, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Quantitative reliability was done using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. The respondents' actual verbatim responses were quoted during the discussion of results and record keeping of these responses was done through transcribing the data in Microsoft Word (2010) and importing into Nvivo 11 Plus.

Findings and discussion

The Cronbach Alpha(α) for the policy implementation (PI) construct was 0.768 and it fell within the fair range (Deat, 2016; Pallant, 2016;Tsun Hoe et al., 2018). Policy consistency of the PC construct had six items with a Cronbach's Alpha (α) value of 0.727. To attain a comprehensive analysis of the construct, a semi-structured questionnaire was also used. The instrument was administered to twenty respondents. This is illustrated in Fig 1.1.



Figure 1.1: Word cloud for most frequently mentioned words

The policies that were frequently mentioned by respondents were related to issues of citizenship, births and deaths registration, national identity registration as well as voter registration. The word '*changing*' had the highest frequency rating. It was mentioned by four out of the five key respondents and had a weighted percentage of 10.81%. The words '*department, offices, processes, result, good and ever*' were each mentioned by two out of the five interviewed respondents while '*amendments, affected and affairs*' were each mentioned by one key respondent.

In line with the findings of the current study, a structural equation (SEM) model was developed as a strategy for improving reputation management in the public sector. Table 1.1 presents standardised factor loadings (λ), critical ratios (CRs), used to determine convergent validity. Convergent validity was adopted in the study to establish correlation of the constructs used to test the research hypotheses namely policy consistency (PC); policy implementation (PI); performance (PERF) and reputation (REP). Measurement model fit indices considered comprise CMIN/DF (χ^2/DF), Goodness of fit index (GFI), Adjusted GFI (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square

of Approximation (RMSEA). The measurement model exhibited suitable model fit indices ($\chi^2/DF=3.055$; $GFI=.849$; $AGFI=.799$; $NFI=.895$; $TLI=.911$; $CFI=.926$ and $RMSEA=.089$).

Table 1.1: Constructs, Items, λ , CR and α reliability.

Constructs	Items	λ	CR
PC	PC3	0.439	1.183
	PC4	0.625	1.191
	PC5	0.998	1.197
	PC6	0.929	1.196
	PC7	0.754	1.194
PI	PI2	0.913	14.125***
	PI3	1.014	13.402***
	PI4	0.956	14.313***
PERF	PERF3	0.955	3.243
	PERF2	0.144	1.893
	PERF1	0.918	3.237
	PERF5	0.232	2.470
REP	REP3	0.576	6.993***
	REP2	0.714	7.936***
	REP1	0.330	4.407***
	REP5	0.617	7.327***

Notes: -CR is fixed, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Survey Data 2019

Results from Table 1.1 indicate that all the standardised factor loadings for the items were higher than the required minimum cut-off point of 0.6. The discriminant validity of the constructs for this study was tested by comparing Average Variance Extracted (AVE) against Squared Inter-Construct Correlations (SICCs). The results reflect that conditions for discriminant validity were satisfied since all the AVEs were greater than 0.5 and higher than the corresponding SICCs. The data was therefore validated.

Research hypotheses for the current study were H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄. These were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS. The structural model displayed suitable model fit indices ($\chi^2/Df=3.213$; GFI=0.894; AGFI=0.799; NFI=0.730; TLI=0.811; CFI=0.856 and RMSEA=0.089). The results are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Results of Hypotheses testing (H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄).

Hypothesis	Hypothesized Relationship	SRW	CR	Remark
H ₁	PC → Performance	0.429	2.998**	Supported
H ₂	PC → Reputation	0.978	3.365***	Supported
H ₃	PI → Performance	0.055	0.929 ^{ns}	Not supported
H ₄	PI → Reputation	0.142	3.167**	Supported

Notes: SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, ** significant at p<0.05, *** significant at p<0.001, ns not significant.

Source: Survey Data 2019

Results in Table 1.2 indicate that H₁, H₂ and H₄ were supported. The implication of these findings is that Policy Consistencies (PC) positively influenced the performance (PERF) of public sector institutions. Furthermore, the same Policy Consistencies (PC) had a positive influence on the reputation (REP) of public institutions. The results also revealed that Policy Implementation (PI) positively affected the reputation (REP) of public institutions. On the contrary, H₃ was not supported. As such, Policy Implementation (PI) reflected a negative relationship towards the performance (PERF) of public sector institutions. In line with the conceptual framework, the model supported the main objective of examining how consistencies in policy implementation affect the performance and reputation of public sector institutions. The model revealed the relationship between two of the study constructs policy consistency (PC), policy implementation (PI) and the dependent variables performance (PERF) and reputation (REP).

Conclusion

The study concluded that new or amended policies result in adjustments to the processes and requirements of both the selected public institutions. Conclusions drawn from the structural equation model (SEM) reflected that policy consistencies (PC) in the implementation of government policies affect the performance (PERF) of the institutions responsible for the implemented policy's administration. Policy consistencies resulted in affected citizens seeking

justice from the judiciary, which in all the cases highlighted in this study ruled in their favour. Moreover, attending to these lawsuits derailed performance since some of the personnel would spend several days and long hours at the courts representing their respective institutions. The study also concluded that the management in these institutions were disadvantaged by the fact that they work with pre-determined policies which give little or no consideration to the actual situation in their organisations.

The study recommends continuous research aimed at improving the performance and reputation of public sector institutions particularly in third world countries. It also recommends further development of reputation models aimed at improving the performance of public sector institutions.

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