

The effect of merging of government ministries in Zimbabwe

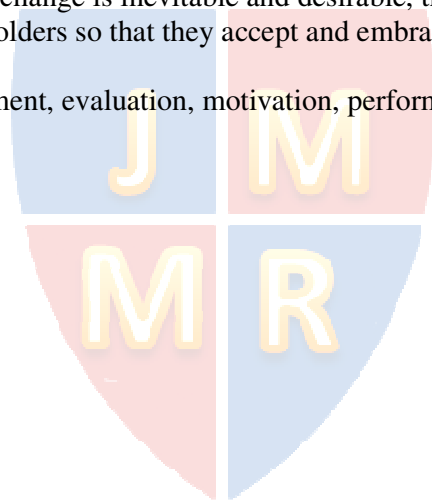
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to evaluate the impact of merging of government ministries on service delivery in the Zimbabwean Civil Service. A case study approach was taken involving the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate. Face to face interviews were done with eleven Directors and Deputy Directors in the Ministry and questionnaires were administered to 70 Officers and 19 Cleaners who were randomly selected. The study found that merging was implemented in a haphazard manner without consultation with employees and other stakeholders. Non-involvement of employees led to demotivation and this affected the employees' performance levels leading to poor service delivery. It was observed that change was not regarded as an integral part of strategic planning in the civil service. The merging has not translated to improved working conditions and improved salaries. The study concluded that even though change is inevitable and desirable, the employer should involve employees and other stakeholders so that they accept and embrace the change.

Keywords: change management, evaluation, motivation, performance, processes



INTRODUCTION

Upon his re-election in July 2013, His Excellency, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe merged a number of Ministries/Departments with the view of reducing employment costs, improving conditions of service and salaries in the civil service which would then translate to improved service delivery. The former Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources Management, Water Resources Development and Management and the Department of Meteorological Services were merged to form the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate. This exercise left the Ministry with excess staff which needed to be dealt with. The Government of Zimbabwe has initiated a number of initiatives in order to improve economic performance and service delivery to the general public (Zvavahera, 2014; Musingafi, 2013). It has always been the norm that various forms of organisations regularly reform, reorganize, expand or retract, or even build a new organisation all together in order to meet their stakeholders' expectations. The idea is to come up with the desired state of an organisation which is likely to achieve the desired results. The reforms which have been undertaken by the Government of Zimbabwe since independence include the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, Client Charters, Job Evaluation, Control and Computerised Systems, Professionalisation of the Civil Service, Merging and Demerging of government ministries and departments, transformation of some government departments into Parastatals and State enterprises (Zimbabwe UN Common Country Assessment Report, undated). For Government institutions to remain relevant, they need to change the way they deliver and take a business approach which is customer and results-oriented (of Ministry of Public Administration, 2012). All the above reforms have not yielded the desired results. It is perceived that the civil service is lacking innovativeness and that it is too large to be efficient with too many job duplications and some departments overlapping with what others do. This study wishes to evaluate the effect of merging on service delivery and employee motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Merging can be regarded as a form of change which is meant to come up with a strategic position for the organisation. Mergers are undertaken as a form of government intervention to reduce costs and improve on service delivery (Bryer, 2002). Mergers are also meant to increase stakeholder value and be prepared to deal with competition decisively. Merging is the combination of two or more entities so that there are no longer two distinct elements. Merging is when two different companies join together to become one big company. The thrust of organisations can change due to mergers.

Merging can be regarded as a form of change which is systematic in nature and allows a smooth change over in the way business is done (Prosci, 1994). Change management can be defined as the fundamental changes in the mission or purpose of the organisation and in activities or tasks that are undertaken to the extent that the organisation changes identity and becomes something totally different (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992). Change management emphasizes the involvement of all levels of employees in the organisation. Top management is the driver of the programme. When there is inclusiveness in planning and implementation the organisation is likely to achieve the set targets. Change can take place at any level of the economy and can affect organisations differently. Change is inherent in all forms of organisations in order to remain relevant in the ever changing global economy.

It can be as a result of advancements in technology and increasing socio-economic pressures (Bennet, 1997). Organisations are exposed to changes in markets, technology, regulatory framework, social environment, competitors which require organisations to respond timeously (Armstrong, 1999). Poor performance by the organisations and high

employment costs can lead to change or restructuring. The organisations have to be prepared through the change process.

Merging has serious negative implications on how employees feel and view the organisation. This move leaves many employees contemplating leaving since they will not be sure about their future with the organisation. It has also been found that change lessens satisfaction levels while the negative impact on turnover is likely to increase (Siegel and Simons, 2008). Mergers create vulnerability to talent loss through layoffs or voluntary departures. They further indicated that mergers could also lead to substantial downsizing.

Organisations have to make sure that they have the confidence of employees and also must make sure that they remain engaged. Productivity can also be affected since employees will not be sure about their future with the organisation. During the transition period, problems can start to manifest and these include resistance, low morale, stress, poor planning and low performance by employees (Armstrong, 2003). Change is not a smooth process but an exercise full of positive and negative surprises. Strategic change deals with long term and organisation wide issues. This type of change is necessitated by external pressures which the organisation might not have control over. Unfreezing, changing and freezing are a proposed model of change (Lewin, 1951).

On a positive note, mergers can stimulate additional investment in human capital and promoting 'skills upgrading' of the workforce through the application of new technology, promotion of individual employees, improving working conditions and salaries (Siegel and Simons, 2008). Change management enables organisations to adapt and implement change to meet customer needs.

How to overcome resistance to change

It is recommended that for successful change to take place, management should ensure that there is need for change, and come up with a plan for the change programme. Furthermore, management should build internal support systems so as to overcome resistance, ensure top management commitment and build external support from the stakeholders (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). People may resist change when there is non-involvement of employees, when employees feel that senior management are more important than anyone else and when top management perceives that non-performance of the organisation is a result of mediocre staff (Bennet, 1992). Communication from the beginning with all employees is at the core of the change process. Employees need to be told why the change is necessary and what their stake in the organisation is. It is also desirable to give the affected employees alternative jobs when available.

It is critical that a change agent be deployed in the organisation in order to spearhead the smooth changeover. A change agent is an individual or group of people who have expertise in change management processes. A change agent is preferred because he/she is not a fulltime employee of the organisation and therefore, is not an interested part. The change agent has the role of encouraging employees to accept and embrace the change. It is not always the best approach to force employees accept the change as this is likely to affect their motivational levels and performance which will result in poor service delivery.

Before an organisation thinks of any change, management should understand what it wants to achieve and communicate its position to the rest of the employees so that they get their support (Fombrun, 1994). It is also critical that necessary planning, implementation, consultation and involvement at all level are observed. Managing change which affects the status-quo and welfare of employees is highly sensitive. Employees who are affected by change must not feel as if they are being manipulated but should feel to be part of the whole process. People who are affected by the change must at least agree to it otherwise it fails. The

responsibility of change lies with top management. The following change model has been proposed(Kotter, 1995).

- Employees have to be part of the change process from the beginning
- A change agent has to be deployed
- The purpose and benefits of the change have to be clearly mentioned to the parties concerned
- Management should drive the process
- The results of the process have to be measurable.

Table1: Staff strength in the two Ministries and the Meteorological Services Department before merging.

Ministry/Department	Establishment	Total
Environment and Natural Resources Management	57	57
Water Resources Development and Management	103	103
Meteorological Service Department (Former Department in the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development)	254	254
Total	414	414

When the two Ministries and the Department merged, the establishment stood at 353 leaving the Ministry with 61 excess staff. The Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate is responsible for all environmental issues, provision of adequate clean water and provision of weather information to the Nation. This means that the thrust of the Ministry has changed.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of merging of government ministries /departments on service delivery and staff motivation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and sample

The study took a case study approach involving the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate with a total workforce of 353 employees. This Ministry was chosen because it merged and demerged several times. Eleven (11) Directors and Deputy Directors in the Ministry became part of the sample. Seventy(70) officers and nineteen (19) general hands were selected randomly. The sample of this study was therefore, one hundred (100) employees.

Data gathering instruments

Questionnaires were administered to eight nine (89) respondents and face to face interviews were conducted with eleven (11) Directors and Deputy Directors over a period of five months.

FINDINGS

Documentary evidence showed that the Ministry had sixty one excess staff including two Directors. Ten employees had requested for transfers to other Ministries and four of these were successful at the time of the study. One Director was retired by the Civil Service Commission against his wish. Interviews revealed that the majority the employees (89%) showed high levels of uncertainties about their future. A few (9%) of the respondents who were confirmed were Directors, Deputy Directors and equivalent grades and rest of the staff were awaiting Civil Service Commission approval. The rest of the employees were not aware of their fate since this was highly confidential. Interviews with the Directorate also showed that they were also out of picture on what was happening and the fate of the excess staff. The researcher noted that it was now ten months after this exercise started yet almost everyone was in darkness about what will happen to them. Most of the respondents eighty three (83%) indicated that the merging of the two Ministries was not improving service delivery as there was dependency and uncertainty in the organisation. Sixteen seven percent (67%) respondents felt that the merging of the two Ministries could lead to loss of jobs. Ninety one percent (91%) of respondents indicated that the change was not done systematically, since it led to uncertainty in employees, which could affect employees' motivation and performance levels leading to poor service delivery. The majority of the respondents eighty eight percent (88%) felt that reporting structures and the chain of command were distorted and chaotic due to the manner in which change was undertaken.

The majority of the respondents (93%) indicated that some of the affected members could be forced to go on early retirement which will be unplanned for. Seventy one percent (71%) respondents indicated that some employees can decide to leave when they are not offered better jobs and improved working conditions. The majority of the respondents (89%) indicated that most change processes in the civil service were characterised by poor planning, resignations, employees' resentment and poor service delivery.

A few (20%) of the respondents indicated that change can lead to improved service delivery through new effective systems brought in by new management. Interviews revealed that change is good when it brings something positive such as reducing costs, increasing effectiveness and efficiency and offering better placement opportunities for employees. Most of the respondents revealed that the merging did not cut on Ministry's expenditure since everyone was on the payroll and some employees were being paid for coming to do nothing. Salaries and conditions of service remained poor.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The fact of losing a job is difficulty for anyone. Retrenchments are traumatic to everyone; those who are laid-off, managers who decide who stays and who goes, the victims' families, the survivors and society at large. Organisations that view employees as a commodity to be hired and fired at are criticised for being short-sighted and unethical. The fact that CSC is taking for ever to solve this problem is worrisome.

The 55 employees who were not yet transferred or retired were still on the payroll and this meant that the notion of reducing employment costs and improving service delivery were being defeated. The bottom line was that the change was undertaken without proper planning. The duplication of duties and responsibilities meant that some employees were being paid for doing nothing. The Civil Service Commission seemed undecided on the excess staff. This means that the change programme was not done in a transparent and proper manner whereby all employees and other stakeholders were supposed to be informed and advised about their future with the organisation. The fact that top management of the Ministry was not aware of

how the change was being undertaken is a weakness which is likely to lead to resentment which is not good for the organisation. When employees are left for too long in suspense, they are likely to work against the organisation since their sources of livelihoods will be at stake. When employees feel that they are not part of the process productivity is affected. Employees can also go slow and even go to the extent of stealing, vandalising property and destroying the customer base for the organisation. What is evident from the findings of this study is that it is not possible to achieve positive change without changing the supporting structures and statutes. It is also critical to make sure that top management is committed to the whole process, otherwise there will be resistance from the employees. The findings are in agreement with Fombrun(1994) who indicated that change can become difficult when employees are not involved. It is true that if change is not planned well, resistance and disruption of work will affect productivity. Researchers such as (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006) admit that change can be very difficult to implement and achieve the desired results. It is critical for the organisation to have a systematic approach in doing things. The assertion has been supported by (Bennet, 1997) who averred that all organisations should embrace change to remain relevant in this competitive global environment. This means that both the employer and the employee should have discussed about the change and agreed on modalities and its effect on employees before implementation. Counselling is also a critical element of the whole process if employees are going to be negatively affected. Change or restructuring can go to the extent of leaving some employees jobless. Whilst it is agreed that change is inevitable in today's dynamic operating environment which is calling for lean organisations, it is critical to follow a well-planned programme of action. What was evident from the study was that employees were never consulted and the process was in shambles. Employees were not even aware why the change was being undertaken in the first place.

Most respondents (89) indicated that change can lead to stress, loss of jobs and respect and self-esteem and loss of productivity. Since much of the change in the civil service is not planned, resistance is very high. This is in agreement with Bennell (1997) who felt that resistance to change could be as a result of failure to involve employees and feel that senior management is more important and indispensable. From the findings of this study it is clear that there is high likelihood of loss of production since the chain of command will be ineffective and employees demotivated. Under such circumstances, supervision and allocation of duties is difficult as employees will be pondering about their future. As long as employees are not sure about their future, quality of service delivered is affected. Government ministries/departments have always merged and demerged with the aim of improving the quality of service delivery. Another aim is to reduce the employment costs and Operating expenses. Mergers can harm the entire organisation if they are not properly handled since they impact directly on the employees. When employees are not certain about their future, the chances of employees leaving that organisation are very high. In the current vibrant work environment, there is no longer such a thing as life-time employment.

Employees want to be associated with organisations which are forward-looking and open about any changes to their employees. The research findings also revealed that if change does not offer better opportunities and working conditions, employees will look for alternative employment elsewhere. In the current Zimbabwean civil service environment, change is proposed and implemented by the Civil Service Commission which is the employer of all government employees in the country. No input is requested from Ministries. In this view it is critical that the affected employees need to be involved/ consulted before any change can be implemented. As long as employees are not involved, the Government will never achieve its intended goal of improved service delivery to the general public.

If change is well planned and implemented, it should improve on the viability of the organisation, conditions of employment and salaries of employees. Even though it is anticipated that change can bring new systems and better working conditions, this study found that the merging of the two Ministries was not leading to the provision of quality service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that change can bring positive or negative results to both the employer and the employee depending on the approach taken by management in its application. The government must make sure that the administrative systems in the civil service are efficient, effective, transparent and accountable and produces the required results. The proper management of change is critical, capacity building, ethics and integrity are integral to the whole process. Involvement of employees/ministries is very critical for the programme to be successful. Any change which is taken should benefit customers, shareholders and the general public. If the civil service is considered the key driving force in accelerating services to the citizens, then the capacity of the civil service requires enhancement to carry forward changes. Against this background, the Zimbabwean civil service should take change which is beneficial to its citizens. Change for the sake of it does not bring the desired results to the organisation. Whilst governments undertake such huge restructuring exercises, employees are not consulted, let alone counselling them to accept the position taken by the employer. Before an organisation thinks of laying off staff, it should consider natural wastage, recruitment freeze, overtime ban, redeployment and relocation. The employer can also consider short-working time and ban temporary staff. Since the government is the major employer and the custodian of the labour laws, it is prudent to exhibit best labour practices.

CONCLUSION

Even though change is invertible in organisations, involvement of employees from the start is critical. Lessons learnt are that, if change is not planned for, the organisation is likely to head for a downfall. Change leads to discomfort and stress in employees. It would be critical to involve all Ministries and the Civil Service Commission. This study concludes that the Civil Service Commission should involve Ministries/ departments in its future change management programmes so as to achieve the desired results.

Limitations and Areas for further research

This study focused on only one Ministry, out of twenty four Ministries and generalisations of the findings have to be made with caution. Circumstances and approaches may be different in different Ministries. Further research needs to be carried on the implications of change on employment costs and conditions of service.

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