



# Intergrating the performance management system of a university in South Africa with its strategic plan

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**Orientation:** South African history, among other things, demanded reforms in higher education institutions (HEIs), and the goal of transforming HEIs was to fulfil the demands of the new order brought about by democracy in the country.

**Research purpose:** The purpose of the study is to investigate how a strategic plan of a University in South Africa can be supported using a performance management system (PMS).

**Motivation for the study:** When examining the university's achievements, particularly the gains of the past strategic plans, the study found that there is no evidence of successes or failures, especially for Strategic Plans 2008–2017 and 2015–2019.

**Research approach/design and method:** To achieve the stated purpose, the study employed a document analysis approach.

**Main findings:** The study found that the merger of the university's legacy institutions was never fully realised, and the University has currently reimagined itself and developed the Strategic Plan 2020–2030; however, the delay of the PMS implementation is regarded as a weakness in this study.

**Practical/managerial implications:** The study recommends a conceptual framework that demonstrates how at the organisational level, academic PMS should be designed and implemented after discovered that a delay in PMS implementation can impair the achievement of the Strategic Plan.

**Contribution/value-add:** The study contributes by recommending that core university policies should serve as a basis for and be consistently applied as a component of an all-encompassing PMS policy. Meaning, a comprehensive PMS policy will help to link appropriate policies for the shared goal, which is to encourage excellent performance.

**Keywords:** conceptual framework; strategic plan; university; performance management system; Education White Paper 3.

## Introduction

South African history, among other things, demanded reforms in higher education institutions (HEIs). The goal of transforming HEIs was to fulfil the demands of the new order brought about by democracy in the country. In 1994, as it is well known, a new democratic South Africa emerged from a segregated or apartheid rule. Among other changes that occurred in the higher education (HE) space is that a number of universities were merged, including the university under study, which was formed by the merger of three institutions. This merger carried out in compliance with the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), which was introduced in March 2001 (Manona, 2015).

When examining the university's achievements, particularly the gains of the past strategic plans, there is no evidence of their successes or failures, especially Strategic Plans 2008–2017 and 2015–2019. Furthermore, there is a considerable evidence that the merger of the university's legacy institutions was never fully realised. This is evident in the University's Council of Higher Education (CHE) Audit Report, which reported, among other things, that the legacy campuses still run separate processes (CHE, 2023). However, it seems that this university is not the only one that has trouble realising merger aspirations. Chambers (2009), cited in Manona (2015), asserts that mergers have not produced the kinds of gains that were

anticipated. Based on Manona's (2015) assertion, the critical question of this study is 'What is preventing these institutions from reaching complete success under the merger?'

Be as it may, the university under study has currently reimagined itself and created the Strategic Plan 2020–2030, and divisions have prepared their operational and performance plans in this regard. In other words, the strategic objectives have been cascaded down to the divisions. The aim of this Strategic Plan is to create a new organisational culture based on a new ethos driven by human capital that is in pursuit of excellence. However, failure to implement a PMS concurrently with the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020–2030 at all levels is viewed as a disadvantage in this study, a situation that might potentially be addressing the concern that Manona asked before.

According to the CHE (2023), the university's PMS is still under development. Hence, the concern raised in this study is that because PMS implementation does not align with the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030, this could thus have a domino effect on the achievement of strategic goals.

According to Ngcamu (2013), failing to match an institution's priorities and performance management (PM) has a detrimental impact on the institution. The slow PMS implementation, according to Ferreira and Otley (2009), is a barrier to meeting strategic goals. PMS, according to these authors, must be cohesive. In fact, strategic planning and PM are, according to Biondi and Russo (2022), inextricably linked. Therefore, Ramulumisi et al. (2015) assert that a lack of PMS implementation is one of the reasons why organisational plans fail.

In view of the above, this study believes that in order for the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030 to be effective, it must be cascaded to the lowest level, alongside the implementation of PMS. The study's goal is to provide a more comprehensive conceptual framework, especially in respect to how PMS should be arranged or organised at the organisational level. In other words, the study does not discuss PMS components or stages such as planning, reviewing and rewarding, as they relate to each employee's performance, but rather how it should be organised and integrated with the broader policy framework.

Thus, it is essential for this study to investigate the following:

- Performance management system.
- Policy framework for planning in HEIs.
- Factors that force universities to strategise.
- University Strategic Plan 2020–2030; and
- Lessons from several universities implementing PMS in South Africa.

An overview of PMS is given attention in the following section.

## An overview of performance management system

Understanding pertinent PMS-related concepts is crucial before moving forward. Performance is an intentional action that can be categorised from two different angles. Firstly, performance concentrates on the tasks that an employee is performing. This suggests that performance encompasses every action that is carried out. Performance also includes a value determination. In other words, the quality of performance can be high or low. These viewpoints can be used to discuss how well both an organisation and a particular employee are performing. The effectiveness of an organisation can also be affected by how well or poorly employees do their tasks (Van Dooren et al., 2015). High-performing employees lead to high-performing organisations, and the opposite is true for low-performing employees and their organisations. In this way, PM is necessary to attain excellent organisational performance.

The concept of PM is rapidly gaining traction in public sector organisations. It has been defined by different authors in different sectors, and each sector provides a different meaning (Manyathi et al., 2021). Tanveer and Karim (2018) define PM as a method for generating a shared knowledge of what needs to be achieved and how it should be achieved, as well as a strategy to managing and developing people that improve individual, team and organisational performance. According to Chahar and Hatwal (2018), PM is a goal-oriented process targeted at organisational processes that have the potential to increase the productivity of individuals, teams and organisations.

When it comes to PMS, Aguinis (2013), cited in Maimela and Samuel (2016), reveals that it has been variously described by authors as a combination of a number of functions and processes that have been meticulously planned and executed with the intention of achieving predetermined organisational objectives through employee work performance. To this end, Manyathi et al. (2021) citing Richard and Van Helden (2015) assert that integration of effective and efficient PMS in further education and training institutions is crucial to human and organisational development.

Performance management system was developed based on the New Public Management (NPM) theory, which gained popularity worldwide in the 1980s. South Africa adopted NPM practices through the Constitution in 1996. Consequently, laws that devolved from the Constitution, such as the *Public Finance Management Act* (Act No. 29 of 1999), emphasise the need for mechanisms that manage public institutions' performance in order to achieve the organisational targets and achieve development (Gumede & Dipholo, 2014).

Therefore, PMS is regarded as providing means for public institutions to become more competitive, efficient, effective and accountable (Melo et al., 2010). According to Biondi and Russo (2022) citing Neely et al. (1994), PMS can be used to identify performance targets, assess staff members'

performance and inform managers when action is needed to prevent deterioration in performance or when targets fail to be achieved.

Chahar and Hatwal (2018) discovered that PMS literature emphasises, among other things, the following:

- Achievements of individuals.
- Employees and their management have a closer relationship.
- It has long-term and short-term objectives and goals.
- The value of performance is high.
- University PM methods include 360-degree evaluations, confidential reports, BARS, MBO, Balanced Scorecards and SMART performance pyramid.
- Rewards include both financial and nonfinancial rewards. Rewards are linked to merit pay or contingent pay, while nonfinancial rewards include recognition, challenging assignments, career guidance and quality of work life.

As described in Pillay and Subban (2007), these findings are fairly similar to the principles of PM espoused by IRS (1996). According to Pillay and Subban (2007):

- An effective PM translates corporate goals into individuals, teams, departments and divisions.
- Is a continuous process in which performance improves with time.
- It has a co-operative approach rather than a control-oriented approach.
- It fosters a shared understanding of what is needed to improve performance.
- It requires two-way communication and management style that is open and honest.
- It emphasises constant feedback.
- Performance is measured and assessed based on jointly agreed-upon objectives.
- All employees should be subjected to it, and it should not be primarily about financial rewards.

In light of all these PM principles, it is critical that PMS should be used to establish management functions.

Thus, PMS should underpin the functions of university management at all levels. Therefore, these principles are critical and need to be considered for the university's PMS framework if it is to meet the Strategic Plan's objectives and goals.

In the following section, the study considers the policy framework for planning in HEIs.

### Policy framework for planning in higher education institutions

Since 1994, as shown earlier, South Africa has been undergoing transformation, which has had an impact on these HEIs as new pieces of legislation were introduced to facilitate the transformation agenda following the promulgation of the Constitution in 1996. The legislative basis for change in HEIs, including a paradigm shift in the approach to quality assurance,

is provided by the South African Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) (CHE, 2004; Ulliyatt, 2004, cited in Seyama & Smith, 2015). These authors contend that in order to be effective, the transformation imperatives require accountability to the national government as it is a key stakeholder via the CHE.

The Education White Paper 3 was introduced in 1997 as a foundation for furthering the Constitution's and the South African Higher Education Act's (Act No. 101 of 1997) transformational aspirations. This White Paper laid the groundwork for South Africa's transformational agenda in HE. Principle 1.28 of Education White Paper 3 specifies six goals for HEIs to pursue. The following are the guiding goals:

- Transforming and democratising HE governance structures: As a result, these structures should foster collaborative decision-making among separate but functionally interdependent stakeholders who recognise their diverse identities, interests and freedoms, while working towards for a co-ordinated and participatory civil society and polity.
- Promoting interaction among HEIs and improving such institutions and all sectors of society through collaboration and partnerships.
- Developing human resources through programmes that are responsive to the social, political, economic and cultural needs of the country and that meet the highest standards of academic scholarship and professional training.
- Creating an academic climate in which free and open debate takes place, established orthodoxies are questioned critically and new ideas are experimented with.
- Providing expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes as a demonstration of institution's social responsibility.
- Building a culture of tolerance and respect within the institution.

Accordingly, based on these goals, Principle 1.28 of the Education White Paper 3 (1997), which is also emphasised in NPHE in South Africa (2001), provides the basis for planning in South African HEIs. Further support for this Principle can be found in the National Development Plan (NDP) (2013), Vision 2030, which recognises that universities should be guided by clear missions that, among other things, promote national development. Moreover, NDP empowers universities to identify areas of strength so that they can contribute to the development at local, national, continental and global levels.

A major reason for South African universities to set goals and develop strategic plans is also to promote good governance, which is the focus of many universities worldwide. As Biondi and Russo (2022) point out, public institutions, including universities, are increasingly looking for ways to strengthen good governance by introducing strategic tools to support decision-making processes, assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of services, and ensuring accountability.

In addition, these authors state that university reforms are focusing on the implementation of planning processes and also on introducing a PMS similar to other public institutions.

### Factors that force universities to strategise

Several authors, including Ofori and Atiogbe (2012), believe that strategic planning is an important function of university managers to align their resources with strategic goals and remain competitive. These authors argue that strategic planning involves setting visions and missions, goals and objectives, defining policies and principles and identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and potential threats (SWOT).

The necessity for SWOT analysis also results from the fact that organisation's internal and external contexts influence the success of the implementation of the strategy. For instance, internal factors such as a lack of qualified scientific and pedagogical staff (Parakhina et al., 2017), financial resources, new types of knowledge, skills and competencies (Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020), as well as infrastructure, particularly in the formerly underprivileged universities, are some of the major factors that have made change and continuous reinvention inevitable. Among the external factors facing the university in South Africa are student voices like #FeesMust Fall (#FMF) protest actions that took place during 2015–2016 in South Africa, decreasing state funding (in real terms), the Education White Paper, the National Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998), the NDP, 2030, and the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (Greeff et al., 2021; Wangenge-Ouma & Kupe, 2020). Given these internal and external factors, university leaders are left with no choice but to develop strategies and ensure that actions are taken to respond to these pressing matters.

Furthermore, the environmental changes are constantly taking place, and the significance of strategic planning cannot be overemphasised in South African HEIs and around the world. Today, globalisation is one of the critical factors influencing how universities operate. Hussein et al. (2021) see competitiveness as a critical aspect that has influenced strategic planning in a global world because of the fact that everyone is competing for business.

Additionally, Egginton (2010) and Molefe (2010) as cited in Seyama and Smith (2015) emphasise that economic challenges together with growing expectations of stakeholders have created a highly competitive HE environment. As a result, Usoh et al. (2018) demonstrate that strategic planning with a focus on competitive university status is one option that universities today cannot avoid if they are to survive and succeed in competition as HE providers.

However, as any other country in the continent, South Africa faces myriad challenges because of its fluid external environment. Taking Ghana, for instance, Ofori and Atiogbe (2012) point out that Ghana faces a number of challenges,

including the ability to survive in the 21st century and beyond; the ability to cope with new models of HE; dealing with competitive concerns spawned by the rise of private universities and providing quality human resources that can support national development.

In South Africa, Deloitte and Touché (2011), as cited in Singh (2015):

[I]dentify access, diversity, affordability, sustainability, ICT-enabled learning, online learning, regulations and reporting, employment linked and market-demand academic programmes, strategic priorities, constrained funding and financial sustainability, infrastructure provision and asset optimisation, and attracting best academic staff are some of the issues that universities need to negotiate in the current context. (p. 2)

Because of such challenges and demands, Sart (2014) argues that strategic planning is crucial for universities. In the light of these challenges, it is not surprising that the university under study has reimagined itself. This should result in a high-performing organisation, teams and individuals that have the essential competencies and abilities, understand what is expected of them and have the resources to carry out their responsibilities (Spangenberg & Theron, 2013).

### University Strategic Plan 2020–2030

According to the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030, academic excellence is the result of the dynamic interaction of talent, vision and creativity, which is the result of a new attitude and renewed commitment to the university's position as an institution of excellence, one that is marked by unprecedented growth and impact. It emphasises the necessity of driving change rather than just responding to it. Furthermore, it represents a commitment to harness technology rather than let it drive the institution. In addition, it aims to search for equitable and sustainable solutions to societal issues (the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030).

Consequently, according to the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030, academic excellence entails creating new spaces, developing cutting-edge methods for questioning the meaning of knowledge and establishing partnerships and collaborations in the pursuit of new knowledge. Furthermore, the Plan acknowledges that its existence is shaped by macroeconomic frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, Africa Agenda 2063, as well as changes and challenges within the South African HE system. Additionally, the Plan's trajectory is determined by the university's historical background as well as its geographical location within rural and socioeconomically deprived province. These factors contribute to the university's philosophy.

The university has developed a vision statement that states that it aspires to 'be an impactful, technology-infused African University', in accordance with the aforementioned imperatives. Its stated mission is to, 'through its core

business, respond to societal needs in ethical, scholarly, sustainable and entrepreneurial ways and deliver future-ready graduates' (University Strategic Plan, n.d.). In addition, the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030 aims to achieve the following goals:

[Q]uality, impactful teaching and learning; relevant and impactful research and innovation; transformative community engagement, internationalisation and partnerships; enriching student experience; empowered workforce; financial suitability; modern ICT; state-of-the-art infrastructure; and people-centred governance and administration. (CHE, 2023, Executive Summary, par.8)

To support the implementation of this Plan, the university has also formulated a variety of policies. Among the policies introduced by the university are academic staff workload policy, evaluation of teaching policy, research and innovation policy, community engagement policy, academic staff development policy, promotion policy and employee disciplinary code policy. These policies are meant to serve as roadmap for university employees, particularly academics as they carry out their duties and work towards excellence.

Research indicates, however, that a good policy does not guarantee that its goals will be met (Hudson et al., 2019). As such, while it is expected that this university will be able to achieve its goals by 2030, experiences from the African continent and elsewhere around the world reveal that a major challenge is the lack of tools or lack of their implementation to support the plans. There are a number of authors who agree with this view and emphasise that the challenge is with the implementation of strategies and policies; Mureithi et al. (2019) are among them. As stated by Afori and Atiogbe (2012), in Ghana, the following challenges were identified as hindering the universities' ability to achieve their strategic goals:

- Employees' poor work culture.
- Disregard for comments and suggestions by leaders.
- Lack of appreciation for good work; and
- Lack of appraisal systems.

Based on these considerations, Biondi and Russo (2022) argue that public universities should leverage PM to support and achieve strategic objectives and goals efficiently and effectively. On this point, Walwyn (2008) is of the view that PM should be closely linked to policy framework and resource allocation decisions. Moreover, Walwyn (2008, p. 709) points out that, although it is true that 'you cannot fatten a pig by weighing it more often', a well-designed system does not just measure but also reinforces those behaviours and outputs that enable an institution to accomplish its objectives or goals. As ingredients for a successful PMS, this author suggests the following:

- The performance indicators should be carefully selected (there should be a strong correlation between the indicators and the overall objectives).
- The system and process of evaluation should be transparent and inclusive.

- An environment that promotes creativity and independence should be fostered while ensuring quality.
- Performance should be linked to resource allocation (Walwyn, 2008).

Achieving high levels of performance is influenced by the working conditions, the employees' effort towards their work and the employee's skill levels (Spangenberg & Theron, 2013).

It is therefore vital at this point to explore some of the universities in South Africa that have implemented PMS.

### Lessons from several universities implementing performance management systems in South Africa

University of Venda, Vaal University of Technology (VUT), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and Stellenbosch University are among the universities in South Africa that use PMSs. In order to achieve their objectives and goals, these universities use PMSs to support their strategic plans. The use of PMSs in some of these universities has also been switched to automated or online mode. For instance, the plan to roll it out in an automated or online manner was announced on 28 January 2015 to all employees at VUT (VUT, 2015).

University of Venda's webpage also provides information about its PMS. It states that employees work towards achieving the university's strategic objectives and annual performance plans (APPs) using the PMS (University of Venda, n.d.). In the same way as VUT, the University of Venda also uses an automated PMS to manage employees' performance.

As for the UKZN, Mkhize (2019) reports that the College of Humanities was selected as a pilot site for the PMS in 2010. This author further indicates that since then, the system has been implemented throughout the university and is now fully functioning.

The Stellenbosch University Performance Management Policy and Strategy (online) states that the core of the policy is to achieve the university's performance objectives by raising the performance of individual employees to a higher level and to strengthen the university's capacity and ability to achieve sustained performance (Stellenbosch University, n.d.). In as far as the University of South Africa (UNISA) is concerned, Hülsmann et al. (2016) disclose that its PMS guarantees that strategic objectives are linked to university outputs.

However, Hülsmann et al. (2016) discovered that at UNISA, academic administration consumes 25% of academics' time on any given day and is not accounted for in the key performance areas (KPA's). They believe that academic administration is judged entirely on outcomes, such as research articles published and student success rate, rather than on actual everyday operations. Furthermore, they

discovered that vital operations such as research are increasingly being pushed into the evenings and weekends, while community participation is being put on the back burner owing to more pressing demands.

The aforementioned discussion points are crucial for the university under study's PMS implementation as well. The next section presents the study's literature findings.

## Research methodology

In order to investigate how the University Strategic Plan 2020–2030 can be supported using PMS, this study employs a document analysis approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a document as a term used to refer to a wide variety of material including visual sources, such as photographs, video and film. Morgan (2021) postulates that although document analysis is frequently used to complement other methods, some researchers use it as their sole method of research.

The use of document analysis takes into consideration the number of contexts. For example, this approach is required in this study because of the objectives of the investigation (Morgan, 2021) listed in the introduction (PM, policy framework for planning in HEIs, factors that force universities to strategise, University Strategic Plan 2020–2030 and lessons from several universities implementing PMSs in South Africa).

Stated differently, the study solely aims to analyse and comprehend: (1) PM through the use of preexisting textual sources, (2) the Strategic Plan 2020–2030 of the university under study, (3) the policy framework for planning in HEIs, (4) factors that compel universities to strategise and (5) lessons from several universities implementing PMSs in South Africa. Morgan (2021) provides support for this approach by highlighting the connection between document analysis and the requirement to finish investigations that are solely focused on the ways in which texts represent phenomena.

Considering the foregoing explanations, it is important to note that the aim of this study was to draw attention to the risk associated with the absence of pillars supporting the University Strategic Plan, based on the textual sources, not to interview participants to learn their opinions. Therefore, relevant documents were examined to discover how the introduction or delay of PMS may have a detrimental effect on the Strategic Plan 2020–2030. This was as a result of the prior strategic plans' inability, as previously mentioned, to fulfil this university's desire for a merger.

Regarding ethical implications while employing the document analysis approach, researchers should examine whether the authors of a document meant for it to be public or private (Hookway, 2008, cited in Morgan, 2021). Morgan goes on to say that when researchers are deliberating on how to use online content ethically, they should bear in mind that the more probable something to be seen as public, the less

need there is to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the people who developed it.

The aforementioned information leads to the conclusion that this study is ethical because it made use of easily accessible online text. In other words, the university materials included in this study are accessible to the public because they are also online. Therefore, they are seen in this study as documents containing relevant information (Mwaita, 2022).

## Findings of the study

According to the literature, the merger of the university's legacy institutions was never fully realised. As a result, the legacy campuses continue to follow separate processes (CHE, 2023). To that end, this study discovered that the university has developed the Strategic Plan 2020–2030, and divisions have established operational and performance plans in this regard.

Furthermore, according to the literature, failing to match an institution's priorities with PM has a detrimental impact on the institution (Ngcamu, 2013). The literature emphasises that delaying PMS implementation is a barrier to attain strategic objectives (Ferreira & Otley, 2009). Additionally, the literature demonstrated that the White Paper 3 established the framework for South Africa's transformational agenda in HE sector.

The findings show that public institutions, including universities, are increasingly looking for ways to strengthen good governance by implementing strategic tools to support decision-making processes, assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of services and ensuring accountability (Biondi & Russo, 2022). According to the literature, accountability of HEIs is critical to the national government because it is the major stakeholder through the CHE (Seyama & Smith, 2015).

Furthermore, the literature indicates that strategic planning with an emphasis on competitive university status is one choice that universities today cannot escape if they are to survive and prosper as HE providers (Usoh et al., 2018). The study discovered, through a document analysis approach, that the university has also implemented policies that support the Strategic Plan 2020–2030. However, studies show that a good policy does not guarantee that its objectives will be accomplished (Hudson et al., 2019). To this end, literature emphasises that the university should implement PMS in tandem with its Strategic Plan. This is because the literature emphasises the importance of PM being directly tied to policy framework and resource allocation decisions (Walwyn, 2008). As previously demonstrated in this study, the literature also identified PMS principles that should support PMS implementation (Pillay & Subban, 2007). Consequently, literature provides lessons from several universities that employ PMS.

## Recommendations

To start with, it is important to indicate that the recommendations that follow are concentrating at the organisational level. In other words, this article recommends

PMS arrangements that should be considered at an organisational level. Therefore, the recommendations are premised on the fact that the university has established the Strategic Plan 2020–2030 and strategic objectives with their key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets have been clearly outlined and cascaded down to divisions. Thus, it is recommended that the university should take the necessary steps to introduce PMS, as it is a weakness for the implementation of a Strategic Plan 2020–2030 without having pillars to support it, such as PMS. The delay or sluggish implementation of PMS is analogous to deliberate postponement of achieving the set strategic goals, a situation that is quite similar to strategic plans that came before Strategic Plan 2020–2030, as revealed earlier in this study. According to the literature, delaying PMS implementation is a barrier to achieving strategic goals and failing to match an institution's priorities with PM has a negative impact on the institution (Ngcamu, 2013; Ferriera & Otley, 2009).

The delayed implementation of PMS also causes policies created by the university to lack vigour in terms of implementation because they are not systematically driven for implementation. As evidenced by the literature reviewed in this study, effective policy does not guarantee that its objectives will be met (Hudson et al., 2019) if supporting pillars such as PMS are not in place. Furthermore, the literature emphasises the necessity of PM being directly linked to policy framework and resource allocation decisions (Walwyn, 2008).

The alignment of priorities, policies and systems to PMS is a vital measure of supporting university management functions at all levels. According to the literature, PMS can be used to identify performance targets, assess staff members' performance and notify managers when action is required to prevent deterioration in performance or when targets are not met (Neely et al., 1994, as cited in Biondi & Russo, 2022). Given these guidelines, it is vital for this university to comprehensively align the following policies to PMS:

- Academic Staff Workload Policy.
- Research and Innovation Policy.
- Community Engagement Policy.
- Academic Staff development Policy.

- Promotion Policy; and
- Employee Disciplinary Code Policy.

As can be seen, these policies play a critical role in PMS implementation; thus, they should be logically linked with a broader PMS policy framework, and some of them should be utilised to inform actions that should be undertaken to assess academic achievement. This is vital, especially in these times when quality education is everyone's concern. According to the literature, economic challenges, along with rising stakeholder expectations, have resulted in a highly competitive HE environment (Egginton, 2010; Molefe, 2010, as cited in Seyama & Smith, 2015).

As this study has previously demonstrated, policies should be supported by a system or pillar that guarantees the realisation of the strategic plan and policy objectives. Aligning policies with the goals and objectives of a strategic plan is crucial for the successful implementation of the plan. Table 1 demonstrates how alignment should be achieved.

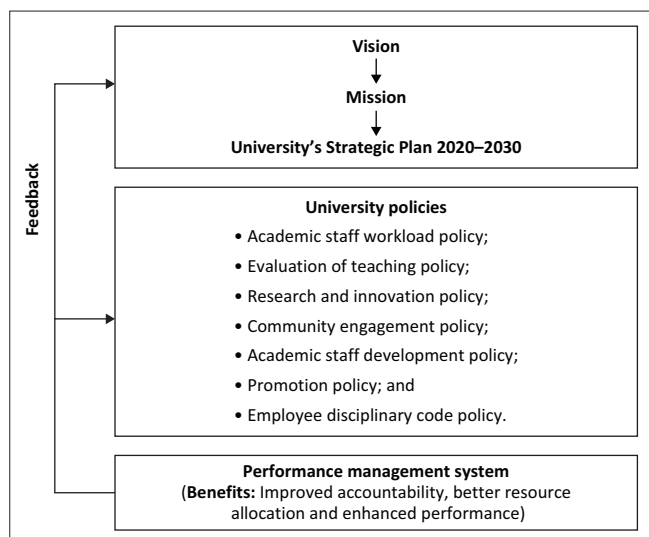
A strategic plan gains purpose when the university policies, as shown in Table 1, are in line with its aims and objectives. In this way, an overall university's PMS policy will aid in the execution of these policies by providing a thorough basis for performance assessments and rewards, as well as disciplinary procedures if academic performance is not satisfactory. As a result, the study recommends the academic PMS conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates how the different elements, such as the vision and mission of an organisation like a university, are interconnected. In other words, the vision and mission serve as a foundation for strategic planning. This implies that the university's vision and mission gave rise to the Strategic Plan 2020–2030. The figure further demonstrates that in order for strategic plan to succeed, it must be supported by policies that drive staff in that direction.

Therefore, in order to ensure the success of the strategic plan and policies, Figure 1 illustrates the foundational role and benefits of the PMS. The benefits of a PMS are depicted as increased performance, improved accountability and better resource allocation. Moreover, Figure 1 shows the need for PMS to offer input to the processes of strategic planning

**TABLE 1:** Alignment of policies with goals and objectives.

Strategic goal/objective	Policies to align	Rationale for alignment
Quality, impactful teaching and learning	Academic staff workload policy	By ensuring that workload is reasonable, providing opportunities for professional development and offering a clear path for promotion, the University can improve academic excellence.
	Academic staff development policy	By developing policies that invest in employee training, development and process improvement to enhance operational efficiency.
	Promotion policy	When promotion policy is aligned, it sets clear criteria and expectations for academic achievements, research contributions and teaching excellence required for promotions in line with the University's commitment to academic excellence.
	Employee disciplinary code policy	The disciplinary code, when aligned, helps in maintaining a positive work environment by addressing any conduct or behaviour issues promptly and fairly, ensuring a healthy workplace atmosphere.
Relevant and impactful research and innovation	Research and innovation policy	When research and innovation policy is aligned, it can encourage increased research output and impact, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, attract external funding, and enhance technology transfer and innovation.
Transformative community engagement, internationalisation and partnerships	Community engagement policy	By aligning community engagement policy, we can build a strong and engaged community, enhance student learning and civic responsibility, support regional development and collaboration, and foster a culture of social responsibility.



**FIGURE 1:** Recommended university's performance management system conceptual framework.

and policy formulation. Stated differently, the university's use of PMS would facilitate continuous improvement.

## Conclusion and limitations

The objective of this study was to investigate how the University Strategic plan 2020–2030 can be supported using PMS. The study employed a document analysis approach to meet this objective. Given the study's findings, it is concluded that the delay in PMS adoption at this university should be implemented swiftly and cascaded down to all employees. The study makes this recommendation as it has been revealed that a delay in implementation can impair the achievement of the Strategic Plan 2020–2030. To this end, the study furthermore recommends a conceptual framework that explains how academic PMS at organisational level should be created.

A limitation of this study could be the use of document analysis without empirical study, specifically the use of interview data to support the findings. However, it should be highlighted that document analysis is an independent method that, given the circumstances indicated previously in this study, might be employed on its own (Morgan, 2021).

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

M.A.M. and C.S.N. contributed equally to the research of this article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, M.A.M., upon reasonable request.

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