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Advancing SDGs and performance management strategies for security personnel in higher education

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Orientation: Performance management aligns individual and organisational goals, enhancing employee motivation, sustaining organisational success.

Research purpose: The study aimed to investigate challenges experienced by security managers with performance management systems in a tertiary institution in Durban, South Africa.

Motivation for the study: Understanding challenges delivers insights to advance organisational effectiveness, support sustainable development, and enhance human resources (HR) practices in the higher education security sector.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative approach was used. Twelve security managers were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and NVivo software.

Main findings: The study identified three challenges, namely inadequate training, education, development and communication, technological barriers and low computer literacy, limited resource allocation, inconsistent rewards, and a lack of transparency. These challenges were found to hinder performance management system application, reducing employee engagement and productivity.

Practical/managerial implications: The study recommends the institution increase adult basic education and training in technological skills and literacy. Enhancing feedback mechanisms, conducting performance needs assessments, and implementing fair reward strategies may improve sustainable development of performance management practices.

Contribution/value-add: The study advocates for practical strategies in response to the challenges faced by security managers to enhance performance aligned with sustainable development goals 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), contributing to sustainable HR, embracing contextualised performance management application in developing countries.

Keywords: performance management; tertiary institution; security managers; SDGs; HRM; technological barriers.

Introduction

Performance management plays a fundamental role in enhancing and aligning individual and organisational objectives in human resource (HR) practice. This article explores the interaction between strategic human resource management (SHRM) and performance management challenges experienced by security managers in the tertiary education sector. The integration of SHRM with sustainable development goals (SDGs) is essential in addressing economic, social, and contextual challenges in developing countries such as South Africa, as human resource management (HRM) is a fundamental driving force in the effective management of rapid organisational change (Jiang et al., 2023).

South Africa's diverse cultural landscape and historical transition from apartheid to democracy uniquely influence performance management as socio-economic inequalities, workforce diversity, and transformation policies shape these strategies. Challenges related to faculty development, resource allocation, and institutional accountability highlight the importance of sustainable HR performance management practice (Tyokwe & Naicker, 2021).

Note: Special Collection: HR Practices Aligned with SDGs.

Orientation

Understanding managers' perspectives regarding challenges of performance management within South African tertiary education institutions is vital for navigating the distinct challenges encountered in these settings. This study endeavours to explore the challenges experienced in the execution and management of performance management systems by managers within the tertiary education sector, thus enriching discussions on organisational effectiveness and advancement within higher education (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018).

Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2023) emphasise the importance of aligning performance management practices with the cultural and contextual distinctions of their application. They argue that understanding these dimensions can enhance communication, management, and feedback processes, leading to improved employee performance. However, despite theoretical assertions, practical application of performance management systems often deviates from these principles (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023).

The existing research on performance management adopts a quantitative approach, focusing on rating scales and organisational outcomes. Recognising this gap, this contextual study sought to qualitatively delve into the distinctive landscape of performance management applications with the aim of understanding how performance management systems are used, adapted, and perceived in diverse socio-cultural and economically developing countries such as South Africa (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023).

However, ensuring the effectiveness of performance management systems poses a significant challenge, in understanding employees' perceptions and understanding of their performance measures. Understanding employee perceptions and challenges experienced hence underscores the importance of designing and executing performance management systems that are not only well-designed but also applicable to the workforce (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018).

Despite the advancements in the field of performance management, there remains a notable gap in understanding how employees and line management interpret and engage with performance management and appraisal processes in real-world contexts, compared to traditional theoretical frameworks (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Addressing this gap is essential for developing more sustainable and culturally sensitive performance management practices that align with SDGs and sustainable HRM practice ensuring long-term organisational success, employee engagement, motivation and work commitment (Brewster & Brookes, 2024).

Research objectives

The primary purpose of this study was to conduct an interpretive qualitative analysis aimed at understanding how managers perceive and comprehend the performance management and appraisal process within a specific organisational context, offering applicable and practical insights to refine and implement performance management practices within the tertiary institution under investigation (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023).

To achieve this, the study adopted a phenomenological case study design, which delved into the lived experiences of security management personnel, exploring their understanding, perceptions, and challenges related to performance management (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The main objective of this study was to comprehend and identify concerns and challenges influencing managers' perceptions and attitudes towards the current performance management system exploring the various internal, external, and contextual factors that managers view as detrimental of their performance management system, specifically tailored within a South African context (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018).

Literature review

The literature review explores several key areas relevant to performance management examining the historical management practices in South Africa and its impact on current management practices in the security sector. The various performance management challenges, including the contextual application of performance management, are subsequently addressed. Emphasis is placed on the importance of cultural congruence and socio-economic considerations. To conclude, linking HRM and performance management to the United Nations' SDGs, and the potential to address socio-economic inequalities and promote sustainable development in South Africa will be discussed.

Historical management practice in a South African context

Nxumalo et al. (2018) argue that historical management practices in South Africa are deeply intertwined with the country's past, characterised by systemic discrimination rooted in racial and gender biases perpetuating societal divisions and socio-economic inequalities. The legacy of apartheid built upon the foundations of racial segregation, continues to exert a substantial influence on contemporary management applications and practices. These policies marginalised certain population groups, particularly black Africans, limiting their access to education, employment, and other essential resources (Nxumalo et al., 2018).

Despite efforts to transition South Africa into a democratic state, the remnants of apartheid persist, posing significant challenges, specifically for historically marginalised communities. Current legislative changes have facilitated a shift towards more equitable performance management practices. Affirmative action policies aimed at promoting employment equity have played a pivotal role in fostering non-discriminatory practices within South Africa. Consequently, an emphasis is positioned on diversity,

inclusivity, and talent development for historically disadvantaged groups in HRM and performance management initiatives (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016).

Performance management in the security sector

According to Vignieri (2018), traditional theory and application of performance management places emphasis on output, controls, measurement, rewards, and results. However, the dynamic nature of public and security management necessitates adapting performance management tools to address contextual and environmental complexities. The ability of managers to successfully manage operations and processes in the security sector is dependent on the socio-economic context of the environment and the ability to manage both people and employees successfully because both factors are a part of performance outcomes (Vignieri, 2018).

From a managerial perspective, South Africa, along with other developing countries faces challenges in the recruitment of line managers, especially in lower-level job posts, as managers possess low levels of education, inadequate language skills and have a limited understanding of the conceptual knowledge of performance management processes. Managers also lack the necessary resources to keep up with fast-paced performance measurement and technological advancements (George et al., 2016).

Vignieri (2018) further mentions that administrative values related to performance include economy and parsimony, honesty and fairness, security, and resilience, which implies that performance management is multifaceted in the security sector. It is therefore imperative that managers receive ongoing education, skills development, and training in order to promote managerial competency and fairness in performance management assessments (Radebe, 2015).

Additionally, existence of factors such as corruption, bureaucracy, bias, and organisational politics are causative elements that foster the inadequacies present in performance management practice. Another challenge is the lack of empirical and contextual research on security performance appraisal systems (Baloch et al., 2021). DeNisi and Murphy (2017) notice that the lack of broader contextual research warrants further research in order to comprehend performance management through understanding the wider organisational climate, culture, beliefs, norms, and social factors, which affect performance outcomes, with continued efforts towards contextualising management practices and addressing barriers imperative for fostering sustainable organisational development and social progress in South Africa (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Performance management challenges

This section uncovers key challenges for performance management systems such as unclear performance measures and inherent biases, a lack of training and resources, and the impact of management communication styles. Additionally, the difficulties and challenges posed by technological advancements in the contextual application of performance management are examined.

Unclear performance measures and inherent bias

The practical application of performance management systems, particularly during the appraisal and rating process, often faces challenges with bias, although objective performance measures are established. Employees view performance management negatively, which contributes to a lack of motivation and low employee engagement (Singh et al., 2015). Unclear performance measurements and design also pose challenges in performance management systems where unclear performance measurements make rating employees objectively difficult. Ambiguous, inapplicable measurements also pose a challenge for both managers and employees as they may not know how to align efforts with performance targets (Gabriel & Villaroman, 2019).

A lack of training, development and resources

Another challenge prevalent in performance management practice is the lack of training and development, particularly in lower-graded job levels. Both managers and employees may lack the necessary skills and training to conduct effective performance evaluations. Although training and development is an essential component of the performance management system, it is often overlooked because of the lack of resource allocation in certain sectors (Schleicher et al., 2018).

Management and leadership communication styles

When poorly developed and managed, performance management has an adverse impact on employee engagement, morale, and motivation. A firm focus on employee weaknesses, authoritative management styles and negative reinforcement also impact performance outcomes; hence, managers should be able to provide constructive criticism and foster effective social, communication and managerial skills (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that HR strategies and practices are designed to achieve and foster effective leadership and communication, while managing employee acquisition, training, appraisal, compensation, labour relations, health, safety, and fairness (Karlshaus, 2020).

Inapplicable contextual application

DeNisi et al. (2021) mention that an effective performance management system should be culturally congruent with a country's broader cultural context. Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2023) further state that, in modern implementation of performance management, objective and strategic outputs are emphasised, while in other contexts, cultural influences serve as more prominent performance measurements. This implies that subjective, contextual factors play a role in the success of performance management systems (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023; DeNisi et al., 2021).

Francis and Webster (2019) mention that from a South African perspective, socio-economic inequalities revolve around education, job opportunities and social challenges, and still continue to affect the South African population and workforce. In terms of performance management and HR practice, the above factors pose challenges to sustainable development as it hinders how employees understand, manage, and use these systems (Francis & Webster, 2019).

It is therefore important for HRM to integrate subjective, objective, and contextual performance standards when gathering data and defining key performance indicators (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). In this context, application, diversity, cultural differences, and communication barriers become challenging for both managers and organisations alike. Furthermore, older employees, specifically those with lower levels of education, tend to be resistant to change, which may undermine the acceptance of new performance management techniques and sustainable HRM initiatives (Teixeira et al., 2018).

Technological advancements

The administrative burden of performance management can also become a burden to managers, hence they should be given an opportunity by senior management to increase engagement and reduce employee reluctance associated with the performance management process. Strict adherence to objective performance measures, in turn, creates another challenge, as it ignores the human aspect of performance, when individuals are reduced to mere numbers on a rating scale (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Managers should therefore be equipped with both people and technological skills needed to manage their employees throughout the performance management process. Contextual significance hence becomes important in addressing socio-economic discrepancies in developing countries where there is a need for education, technology, and sustainable HRM development in order to maintain competitive advantage (Cappelli et al., 2018).

Linking human resource management and performance management to sustainable development goals

Brewster and Brookes (2024) mention that the United Nations' 2030 SDGs apply directly to HRM within organisations. However these goals risk failure because of the unnoticeable, indirect impact that sustainable HRM has on SDGs and the future of HR practice in organisational success (Brewster & Brookes, 2024).

In HRM practice, SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) are the most prominently hampered SDGs globally (Karlshaus, 2020). The integration of SHRM with performance management practices can drive sustainable development by addressing key economic, social, and environmental challenges. Hence, this study supports the arguments of these researchers in highlighting the need for sustainable performance management strategies that meet SDGs in culturally sensitive, developing countries such as South Africa (Karlshaus, 2020).

Current evaluation of SDG 8 indicates a decline in decent work and economic growth because of the lack of investment in education and training (SDG 4), rising unemployment rates because of technological developments, undermining the impact of various interrelated SDGs (Brewster & Brookes, 2024).

Implementing sustainable development goals to improve performance management challenges in South Africa

Effective HRM practices, such as equitable recruitment and fair compensation, directly contribute to reducing poverty by providing decent work and economic opportunities (SDG 8). Performance management ensures that employees' efforts are aligned with organisational goals, improving productivity and economic stability, which in turn supports poverty alleviation efforts (Navajas-Romero et al., 2022).

Social sustainability pertains to the quality of human systems, guided by ethical principles such as justice, fairness, and commitment, which reiterates the need to link HRM to SDGs (Malik et al., 2021). Performance management systems need to be sensitive to the socio-economic context of employees. This includes understanding the challenges faced by historically disadvantaged groups and creating opportunities for their development and advancement (Tyokwe & Naicker, 2021).

In the context of South Africa, where historical inequalities have led to significant disparities in education, HRM can play a pivotal role by fostering continuous professional development and training programmes (SDG 4). Performance management systems that emphasise development goals can ensure that employees acquire the skills necessary for their roles, promoting lifelong learning and educational advancement (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). Investing in employee training and development ensures that the workforce remains skilled and adaptable, which is essential for economic growth and innovation. Leveraging technology in performance management can enhance efficiency and accuracy. However, it is crucial to balance technological advancements with the human aspect of performance management to ensure that employees feel valued and engaged (Mamman et al., 2018).

By addressing socio-economic inequalities (SDG 10) through equitable HRM practices and performance management systems, organisations can reduce disparities within the workforce. This is particularly important in Africa, where historical inequalities persist. Inclusive HR policies and performance management practices ensure that all employees, regardless of their background, have equal access to opportunities and resources (Mamman et al., 2018).

Human resource management and performance management contribute to the development of strong institutions by promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour (SDG 16). Effective performance management

systems ensure that employees and employers are held accountable for their actions, fostering a culture of integrity, transparency and trust within the organisation. Ensuring that resources are allocated equitably and that institutions are held accountable for their performance is crucial for sustainable development (Haywood et al., 2018).

Cultural and contextual sensitivity in sustainable development goal and human resource management practice

Management practice, theory and application often stem from developed, educated, democratic, economically advanced countries where SDGs may be more achievable. However, the implementation and management of both HRM and SDGs in varying cultures and contexts have not been sufficiently documented, indicating a lack of empirical research in linking HRM to SDGs in specific contextual applications (Brewster & Brookes, 2024). The diverse landscape of South Africa requires performance management systems that are culturally congruent, hence HRM practices must be inclusive, and consider the varied cultural backgrounds of employees to foster a unified and productive work environment (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2023).

Integrating HRM and performance management with the UN's SDGs is not only essential for organisational success but also for broader societal progress. In South Africa, addressing the unique socio-economic and cultural challenges through sustainable HRM practices can significantly contribute to achieving SDGs (Brewster & Brookes, 2024). By promoting equitable opportunities, fostering continuous development, and ensuring accountability, HRM and performance management can drive sustainable development and improve the quality of life for all South Africans (Rasool et al., 2019).

Research design

The research design and methodology selection are a foundation of any study as it provides a systematic framework, which guides the research process and aims to address the research problem at hand (Jamshed, 2014). The research design will cover the research approach, research setting and sample, entrée and establishing researcher roles, procedure, data collection, data recording, strategies for ensuring data quality and integrity, data analysis, and reporting style that was used in this study.

Research approach

The study used a qualitative interpretivist exploratory approach to investigate the nuanced and subjective challenges experienced by security managers. Through the utilisation of in-depth semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, participants' lived experiences and contextual factors were captured (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The exploratory nature of the design allowed for flexibility in uncovering unexpected insights and deepening the understanding of the performance management applications with a focus on identifying patterns and themes that reflected the participants' perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive and authentic representation of their experiences (Upmeier zu Belzen et al., 2021).

Research strategy

This study used a phenomenological case study design strategy to explore the lived experiences of security managers within a specific context with the aim of providing an in-depth examination of these experiences within their real-life settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study focused on understanding how managers perceive and make sense of challenges experienced with their performance management system. The study was underpinned by a constructivist theoretical framework, positing that knowledge is constructed through interactions between individuals and their environments. This perspective emphasises the subjective nature of reality, recognising that multiple, co-constructed realities exist based on individuals' experiences and interpretations (Jung, 2019).

Research method

The research methods section details the research setting and participants, focusing on entrée and researcher roles, data collection instruments and strategies to ensure data quality and integrity, concluding with an outline of the thematic analysis process and ethical considerations.

Research setting

According to the study's objectives, managers of the security department at a tertiary institution were identified as the target population. Because of time constraints and the scope of the study, the target population was limited to a specific geographical location. The management staff were stationed at two campus sites in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Management staff were selected for their experience with security officers and performance management processes, providing a realistic representation of the workforce.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Entry into the research setting was achieved once the researcher secured permission from the ethics committee, senior administrators and met with security managers to explain the study and encourage participation. Informational sessions were held, and respect for participants' schedules and transparency helped create a collaborative environment. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research requires an intensive and extensive role of the researcher in every step of the research process including the interactive experience with participants in which the researcher acted as a neutral observer, immersing in managers' routines without influencing them, and built trust through open communication, confidentiality, and respect (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Researcher reflexivity was addressed by note-taking and journalling throughout the research process to account for changes in research perspectives. The researcher facilitated data collection, sampling techniques, and analysis with permission from top management. The researcher utilised an interview guide and reviewing feedback reports. Finally the researcher ensured the data was presented scientifically, avoiding personal bias in interpretations and findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research participants and sampling methods

The study focused on managers of security officers at a tertiary institution in Durban, South Africa, to gather detailed, context-specific information. Twelve managers, six from each of two campuses, participated and were selected using purposive sampling based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria such as being permanent employees with at least 2 years of experience and background in performance management. Since performance management occurs at all operational levels within any organisation, due to the scope and objectives of this study, managers of security staff were only considered as plausible participants for this study. The inclusion of female managers aimed to ensure gender inclusivity and account for diverse experiences. The sample of the study constituted 12 security managers – nine black African males, one Indian male and two black African females. Participant recruitment was facilitated through the institution's Office of the Registrar gatekeeping authorities and the researcher upon attaining ethics approval (HSSREC/00006204/2023) and consultation with the security management department.

Data collection methods

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilising semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. To gather comprehensive data, 12 in-person interviews were conducted with management staff at a tertiary institution. Interviews were scheduled based on participant availability and venue booking, considering the operational constraints of the security personnel who were the subjects of this study. Each interview was audio recorded and supplemented with participant note-taking to facilitate accurate and systematic transcription and data analysis. The interview schedule used by the researcher encompassed additional sub-questions (probing questions) which served to probe for detail and richness of responses from participants in order to validate the research approach of this study. The approach aligns with the qualitative research objective of providing detailed descriptions and contextual understanding of human experiences (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Data recording

To ensure credibility and accuracy in qualitative interviews, audio recordings were the primary data recording instrument to capture data for transcription and analysis, ensuring no personal information of participants was recorded (Patton, 2014). Field notes were also written during interviews, as note-taking and summaries were used to record non-verbal cues and relevant information, aiding in the contextualisation, thereby enhancing the quality of research findings (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). The researcher played a crucial role in the data collection process, including designing the interview, building rapport with participants, actively participating, and probing during interviews. The researcher maintained neutrality and took notes throughout the data collection process (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

The scientific terms reliability, validity, and generalisability are synonymous with quantitative research methods; however, similar concepts and strategies are adopted in qualitative research to improve credibility and rigour of qualitative data collection and analysis methods. For this study, the researcher was guided by the constructs of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability to prove trustworthiness (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Credibility is similar to internal validity in quantitative terms and was achieved by authentically capturing participant perspectives and employing established data control measures during collection and analysis. Transferability refers to whether findings can be applied or transferred to other groups of individuals and was addressed through detailed descriptions of the study's context, population, and methodology, ensuring applicability to other settings (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Dependability was maintained by adhering to a clear research purpose, articulate participant selection, and rigorous data collection methods, creating a replicable study framework. The effort to maintain confirmability was ensured by the researcher maintaining objectivity by presenting participant viewpoints accurately, minimising researcher bias, and documenting findings through existing literature and methods, thereby upholding objectivity and reliability in the results (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Data analysis

The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis framework to identify, analyse, and report themes in the data. This method fits well with the phenomenological case study design, focusing on extracting essential meanings from participants' experiences (Brough, 2019).

The six phases followed were as follows: Step 1 involved familiarising oneself with one's data, which encompassed transcription of interview audio recordings which were done verbatim in a dialectic manner between researcher and the participant. Step 2 involved generating initial codes, by examining the text line by line to identify meaningful units and labelling them with appropriate codes in relation to research questions and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Step 3 included searching for themes, using mind-map visualisation. Analytical judgement was applied to identify significant themes relevant to the research questions, and

keywords were noted to aid analysis. In step 4 of reviewing themes, potential themes relevant to the dataset were assessed for their relevance to the research questions. Redundant themes were discarded, while others were refined or combined. Each theme was reviewed to ensure it provided insight into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Step 5 included defining and naming themes. The researcher used NVivo software to develop thematic maps for each identified theme and applied research questions to them. Fundamental aspects of each theme were identified, and a detailed analysis was written, including sub-themes and descriptive keywords. Finally, clear and explanatory names were formulated for each theme. Step 6 was conducted by the write-up and presentation of research findings, conclusions, and recommendations in a logical and systematic manner. Combining the analytical narrative research method with NVivo generated tree maps and word clouds the findings were contextualised to strengthen the validity of interpretations and discussions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Reporting style

Using NVivo software as a tool, the researcher generated word clouds and tree maps to support and validate the findings. Word clouds visually represented the frequency of words in the transcripts, highlighting key themes. Tree maps displayed prominent themes and sub-themes, with their size corresponding to their frequency, helping to explore relationships in the data. The reporting style of research findings will be generated in a summary table, presented in Table 1, highlighting the main theme and sub-themes to enhance the understanding of the data and add clarity to research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Ethical considerations

To ensure the ethical conduct of this research study in order to safeguard the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants, the project adhered to the following principles of privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent, non-maleficence, and data security. An application for full ethical approval was made to the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and ethics consent was received on 05 December 2023. The ethics approval number is HSSREC/00006204/2023.

Results

The study investigated the challenges faced by security managers in executing performance management systems in the tertiary education sector, highlighting the need to align performance management and HR practices with sustainable development and specific contextual needs. The main theme identified was challenges influencing managerial perceptions of performance management of which sub-themes are covered in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Theme summary table.

Main theme	Sub-theme
Challenges influencing managerial perceptions of performance management	• Communication, education, training and development deficiencies • Technological barriers in performance management processes • Allocation of resources, rewards and compensation

Main Theme: Challenges influencing managerial perceptions of performance management

The findings related to performance management challenges experienced by managers included three multifaceted sub-themes, namely communication, education, training and development deficiencies, technological barriers in performance management processes and allocation of resources, rewards and compensation. The following results were found:

Sub-theme 1: Communication, education, training and development deficiencies

According to Schleicher et al. (2018), one of the major challenges contributing to the failure of performance management systems is the lack of employee training and development, especially at lower skilled and graded job levels. This sub-theme covered challenges experienced by both managers and their subordinates, which inform negative perceptions of performance management. Training, resources, computers, job descriptions, levels of education are shown to create numerous challenges with the current performance management system. Prominent responses of participants included the following:

> 'The other thing, uhm, refresher is more important about security, to know about what they are doing, what they not supposed to do, because some, they did their security in 1980 something. Yeah, so sometimes they forgot what the training was about … Yah most of the challenges, is one is not providing suitable training. That's the challenge.' (Zakele, Male, Grade B)

> 'I think that they needed to support their family. That is why they didn't finish school. I think that apartheid is still affecting our jobs. Things are still difficult … I did not finish school because of politics. It is hard … Yes, if I finished school life would be easier.' (Sibusiso, Male, Grade B)

> 'The main issue that I experienced here is communication. The communication is too poor, as I told you that today I heard you were coming to interview. If there was good communication, they were supposed to tell us.' (Nduna, Male, Grade B)

> 'I can't help them because I don't know what's going on. If HR can give us more workshops so that everyone will be clear with what they are doing.' (Wonder, Male, Grade B)

> 'That would be my take on the biggest challenges, aside from the lack of training and upskilling of the employees. Basic thing would be education. So, in saying that, we do have a lot of staff that are not adequately educated … So, I believe that they should be given an opportunity to be educated to a required standard level.' (John, Male, Grade B)

Sub-theme 2: Technological barriers in performance management processes

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) mention that information technology and knowledge management impact performance management highly, through the need to produce and manage performance metrics and data analytics. However, there is still a challenge in successfully integrating performance

management technology because of differences in education and contextual applications. Respondents indicated that managers as well as subordinates in the department, encountered challenges with technology, limited training and resources:

> '… Most of them, they are not computerised. They are not good in computers. You have to take them and show how to do it … If the university can arrange maybe just a small space for a computer for security, just in their spare time they can familiarise themselves with the computer. I think, uhm, will help us a lot.' (Shivambu, Male, Grade B)

> '… Not everybody has been exposed to using the computer and it is fast advancing each and every time … You get more resistance from people who say that they can't use this.' (Thando, Male, Grade B)

> 'Maybe it's to log onto the system. Some of them, they don't know how to login. As I hinted before, that the challenge that we have is this KPA was created for us, so some of the things that are there, uhm, it doesn't make sense.' (Pretty, Female, Grade B)

> 'Especially computer first, that's the training … We did get training once, see from 2014 maybe just once and just for 2 days, we know just the basic, we can't learn on 2 days … just to get the knowledge of the computer because everything we did with the computer now. Guidance and training is not enough.' (Zakele, Male, Grade B)

Sub-theme 3: Allocation of resources, rewards and compensation

Armstrong and Taylor (2020) mention that resource allocation, rewards, and compensation are important aspects of the performance management process and include both tangible and intangible incentives. Participants highlighted the following aspects with regard to sub-theme 3:

> 'Why I'm saying the problem is the resources, it's the lack of resources and they turn around to give those resources is also long … We don't have resources, so how will one succeed.' (Mike, Male, Grade B)

> 'As I've said, the resources, the problem is that they are very little. It doesn't even meet the 50% threshold, so it's very difficult to perform better. Even the systems that are supposed to support security, we find that some of these things are not working. We have opened fences.' (Emmanual, Male, Grade B)

> 'Now the challenges that we also do encounter, especially with the performance bonuses, start with people who don't get paid; start when they talk amongst themselves. At a point one will say he did get the performance bonus, therefore his basic will now change.' (Luyanda, Male, Grade B)

Discussion

The discussion section examines the key findings of the study on the challenges experienced by security managers in implementing performance management systems within the tertiary education sector. The research aimed to shed light on these challenges to enhance organisational effectiveness and support sustainable development through improved HR and institutional practices. By analysing these sub-themes, this study provides insights into how these difficulties impact the effectiveness of performance management systems and suggest practical solutions for overcoming them in the context of higher education.

Outline of the results

The results of this study, focusing on the primary theme, 'Challenges Influencing Managerial Perceptions of Performance Management' discuss concerns in communication, education, and training; technological barriers; and resource allocation, rewards, and compensation. These insights highlight the obstacles to effective performance management in higher education security departments and suggest practical implications and recommendations to address these challenges in alignment with SDGs.

Main theme: Challenges influencing managerial perceptions of performance management

The primary theme, 'Challenges Influencing Managerial Perceptions of Performance Management', summarises the core problems faced by security managers in implementing effective performance management systems within the tertiary education sector. This theme emerged from the study's objective to explore and understand these challenges to enhance organisational effectiveness and support sustainable development in higher education institutions.

Performance management systems are essential for aligning individual performance with organisational goals, improving employee motivation, and ensuring accountability, all of which are crucial for sustainable development in HR practices. However, the study identified several critical barriers that influence how managers perceive and engage with these systems (Tyokwe & Naicker, 2021).

Sub-theme 1: Communication, education, training and development deficiencies: Prominent challenges experienced by managers affect how employees understand the performance management system. Training, resources, computers, job descriptions, levels of education are shown to create numerous challenges with the current performance management system. The interpretation of the above-mentioned findings points to challenges in communication, employee education levels, and training and development, which highlight the need for, and importance of, proper communication, and ongoing training and development initiatives that support employee growth and skill enhancement (Schleicher et al., 2018).

These findings align with the need to address SDGs 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 10 (reduced inequalities) by revealing that employees who are not trained, skilled and educated adequately struggle to understand and navigate performance management and evaluation processes, which leads to negative perceptions, dissatisfaction and misunderstandings between managers and employees (Navajas-Romero et al., 2022). The absence of effective communication exacerbates training and development deficiencies and leads to employees struggling to grasp and comprehend vital aspects of performance management processes, as highlighted in the literature (Schleicher et al., 2018).

There is a need for refresher courses, educational sessions, and workshops that are tailored to the specific needs of employees. Effective communication is also required to address the challenges and bridge the gap between understanding performance expectations and processes, which may foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement, and ultimately enhancing job performance and satisfaction (Shanthi et al., 2023). Facilitating quality education, training and development (SDG 4) will allow the institution to keep up with 21st century performance management standards, hence aligning with SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) (Brewster & Brookes, 2024).

A lack of adequate training and development initiatives contributes to employees' negative perceptions to, and dissatisfaction with, the performance management process as they do not understand the system. These findings coincide with research by Odhong et al. (2018) that found that the security sector is characterised by low levels of knowledge, skills, training, development, and education, which lead to declining employee engagement and the failure of performance management systems (Odhong et al., 2018).

Sub-theme 2: Technological barriers in performance management processes: There is still a challenge in successfully integrating performance management technology because of differences in education and contextual applications. From the responses provided by managers, another challenge that negatively affects performance management is employees' lack of computer literacy, particularly with the current online performance management system. Employees clearly do not understand how the system functions thereby affecting managers' abilities to perform and manage their staff effectively.

These findings underscore an urgent need for basic computer literacy training that will help employees navigate online platforms and use the online appraisal and digital systems more effectively. These findings concur with arguments in the literature that an increasingly digitised world, proficiency in technology and technological developments are essential for optimal job performance and performance measurement standards (Teixeira et al., 2018).

In terms of technological barriers in understanding performance management processes, both managers and employees attributed the employees' inabilities to use the system effectively to extremely low computer literacy levels. Not only did this hinder the appraisal process through the online system, but managers also mentioned that employees struggle with navigating other digital platforms, such as email. This suggests an urgent need for basic computer literacy training to facilitate the utilisation of online performance management systems, which is imperative for developing countries such as South Africa in order to facilitate SDG 8, that is, decent work and improve future economic growth of the country (Khan & Muktar, 2021).

Teixeira et al. (2018) also support the notion that information technology and artificial intelligence is the future of performance management that relates to the findings of the research objective, which speaks on knowledge management. These findings emphasise the importance of developing human capital, knowledge management and technology, as these aspects define the future of performance management. Hence, it becomes vital that organisations are adapting, training, and developing employees to manage evolving markets and technological changes (Teixeira et al., 2018).

Sub-theme 3: Allocation of resources, rewards and compensation: The managers' responses show that limited access to resources such as computers, training materials and two-way radios, and a lack of transparency in rewards systems present as challenges, as they impede the employees' ability to acquire and employ the necessary knowledge and skills to manage performance effectively. Inadequate resources lead managers and employees alike to feel ill-equipped to meet performance expectations, which may lead to reduced productivity and demotivation. Managers stated that they do not have the capacity because of the lack of resources. This indicates that the institution needs to allocate additional resources and employ better reward strategies in the security department (Osafo et al., 2021).

Wang et al. (2014) found that challenges arise because of discrepancies in employees' perceived knowledge of performance management. Hence, knowledge-related competencies and perceptions correlate with organisational factors such as resource allocation, feedback and communication, training and skill development, and rewards that affect how employees perceive the effectiveness of performance management processes (Wang et al., 2014).

The allocation of resources, rewards and compensation were also challenges identified by managers. Limited access to the resources impedes security officers' abilities to perform well, and contributes to poor performance, slow response times to crime and disruption on campus sites, reduced service delivery and demotivation (Anthony, 2017). The managers also found that grading and pay scales were not consistent. There is also a lack of transparency and feedback regarding reward systems and how rewards are calculated and allocated, which links SDG 10, and the need to reduce inequalities and provide decent work conditions and resources (SDG 8) in performance management processes (Khan & Muktar, 2021).

Anthony (2017) mentions that resource allocation and rewards are important aspects in facilitating a successful performance management system and should be constantly reviewed and updated to avoid unproductive performance outcomes (Anthony, 2017). While Armstrong and Taylor (2020) mention that a reward system goes beyond monetary compensation and should reflect fairness and accuracy, by including both tangible and intangible incentives (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

Practical implications

To improve performance management in the security department, the tertiary institution should focus on increasing adult basic education and training (ABET), and development, particularly in technological skills and literacy. Conducting regular performance needs assessments can identify skill gaps and resource shortages, enabling targeted training and resource allocation. Promoting diversity and cultural sensitivity and enhancing communication and feedback mechanisms are also crucial. Additionally, implementing non-monetary rewards and ensuring internal promotion opportunities can boost employee engagement and motivation. Shifting from a productivity-driven to a service delivery-oriented management approach will emphasise service quality, enhancing overall performance and aligning with SDGs such as quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Integrating these practices supports HRM strategies, fosters an inclusive work environment, and promotes long-term sustainable success of performance management within the security sector in particular. Future research in this area should consider contextual factors, as the same activities may yield different results in varying fields. This consideration will enable HRM to significantly contribute to achieving the SDGs on a broad and meaningful scale (Brewster & Brookes, 2024).

Limitations and recommendations

This study's limitations include a small sample size, potential subjectivity and bias inherent in qualitative research, and limited generalisability because of focusing on one South African institute of higher learning and a particular industry. To address these limitations, future research should employ broader samples, mixed-method and meta-analyses approaches to explore the contextual nature of performance management, particularly in under-researched sectors such as security, among others. Additionally, developing models which account for the relationship between HRM practice, contextual influences and SDGs may aid in developing comprehensive insights in the future.

Conclusion

This study examined the obstacles security managers face with the performance management systems within the tertiary education sector. The primary theme identified was challenges influencing managerial perceptions of performance management. Key findings highlighted that inadequate training, poor communication, and low technological proficiency significantly impede effective performance management. Managers reported that insufficient training and low education levels undermined employees' understanding and engagement with performance management systems. Technological barriers, particularly low computer literacy, further complicated the execution of these systems. Additionally, limited resources, inconsistent reward systems, and a lack of transparency in compensation demotivated employees and reduced productivity.

The study recommends ongoing education and training, enhanced communication, and better resource allocation to improve performance management systems, aligning them with SDGs corresponding to quality education, decent work, and reduced inequalities advocating that future research develop and align inclusive models integrating HRM practices, contextual influences, and SDGs.

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Data availability

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

Disclaimer

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