



Contributing Factors to Poor Service Delivery by Administrative Employees in the Gauteng Public Service in South Africa

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Abstract

This article reports on a study that was conducted among non-managerial administrative employees in the public sector in Gauteng. The researchers attempted to determine the effect of specified job factors on the wellbeing and service delivery of these employees. Poor service delivery in the country triggered the research. The focus was on the opinions of administrative employees as they are often the ones who have to face the public and do the work. Employees were generally satisfied with their job environment and other job factors. However, the practical skills tests revealed a very low level of competency and the lack of typing and keyboard skills seemed to be the main problem. If the problem is not attended to, poor service delivery will probably continue which will result in cost increases, higher frustration levels of the community, and a decrease in foreign investment.

Key Words: computer literacy skills; job satisfaction; motivation; office knowledge; poor service delivery.

Résumé

Le présent article porte sur une étude menée chez les employés non-cadres du secteur public à Gauteng. Les chercheurs ont tenté de déterminer l'effet des facteurs spécifiques liés à l'emploi sur le bien-être et la qualité des services fournis par les employés. L'élément déclencheur de cette recherche a été la mauvaise qualité des services dans le pays. La réflexion a principalement porté sur l'opinion des agents de l'administration étant donné que c'est eux qui font face au public pour exécuter les tâches. Dans l'ensemble, les employés ont dit être satisfaits de leur environnement de travail et des autres facteurs liés à l'emploi. Cependant, les tests pratiques ont révélé un faible niveau de compétence et le manque de maîtrise de l'outil informatique semblent être la grande difficulté. Si la question n'est pas prise en charge, la mauvaise qualité des services va

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probablement se poursuivre, avec comme conséquences une hausse des coûts, un niveau de frustration plus élevé de la part de la communauté, et une baisse des investissements étrangers.

Mots clés : compétences en informatique; satisfaction professionnelle; motivation; maîtrise des méthodes et procédures de bureau ; mauvaise qualité des services.

Introduction and Objectives

Poor service delivery by local government is crippling South African businesses and impeding growth. The government departments concerned fail to get the job done because they do not employ enough qualified and skilled people.

Since 1967, output per worker per unit of capital in South Africa has fallen from R7,297 to R4,924 a year – a decline of 32.5 per cent (Sharp 2012). From the peak in 1993, this measure of labour productivity has fallen by 41.2 per cent, bringing it down to the lowest level in 46 years in this country (Adcorp Employment Index 2011). Mazibuko (2012), Parliamentary Leader of the Democratic Alliance party in South Africa, said that South Africa is less efficient than many of its emerging market competitors, that our labour force is uncompetitive and that our labour productivity is much lower than that of the rest of the developing world.

Numerous research studies have been conducted, focusing either on the negative perspectives of executives or on customer perceptions regarding poor levels of service delivery in the global public-service environment (Mazibuko 2012). Others have focused on personnel management programmes (PMPs) and the implications of their implementation. Although a PMP primarily focuses on employee performance, this study focused on job-related factors, knowledge; and the skills levels of the administrative support staff at the lowest level of employment in the public service such as administrative or filing clerks, receptionists, typists or data capturers, secretaries, office managers, executive secretaries, personal assistants and telephone operators. Service delivery needs to improve and local government departments should not only improve the working environment, but also train their employees so that they are capable of doing their jobs properly. The South African government also needs to acknowledge mistakes being made during the implementation of the policy of employment equity, which is exacerbating the problem of skills shortages (TUT 2007:1).

Although numerous newspaper, research and published articles on service delivery in the public service are available, a very limited amount of literature on the topic focussing specifically on administrative staff in the public service in South Africa is available. This necessitated the extensive use of the Internet

and other sources of information. It should be noted that the Internet sources researched for the study originated from reliable sources, such as government institutions and professional bodies that promote the implementation of a best-practice model for the administrative employee in various government sectors.

The problem examined in the study on which the article is based pertained to those employees in the public service in Gauteng who were not performing at optimum level and were not working productively. Job factors that could influence productivity such as the level of job satisfaction, job involvement, the motivation of the employees and the skills levels of the employees were investigated. These factors were analysed to determine whether the job-related support given by government was sufficient and to determine the level of satisfaction among the employees. Further assessments, including a theoretical test, a computer literacy test and a speed and accuracy test were also conducted. This was done to determine whether the employees were actually capable of performing their jobs productively. If a problem can be identified, then it can be addressed. Alternatively, poor service delivery will remain a headache not only for consumers but also for government. The research on which this article is based provides a background to the working environment as perceived by the employees in the public service in Gauteng. It also provides the results of the knowledge and skills tests done with these employees. A discussion of the results against the objectives set, as well as recommendations, follows. The following contributing factors to poor service delivery are briefly discussed:

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be defined as ‘the individual’s opinion about how well personal expectations at work correspond to outcomes (Salminen 2012:3), or as an employee’s generally positive attitude towards the job. It can be affected by factors such as working conditions, pay and benefits, the employee’s attitudes towards the organisation and supervision, towards the work itself, and the employee’s health and age. Job satisfaction is a general attitude that results from specific attitudes and factors (Rue & Byars 2010:72). Job satisfaction is imperative for both employers and employees in an organisation, since it is likely to influence the performance of the employees and that of the organisation as a whole positively. Employees have to be happy at work as they spend most of their day in their work environment (Appel 2006:1). The question that needs to be asked is what makes administrative employees satisfied or dissatisfied in their workplace to an extent that ultimately determines whether they find the working environment either fulfilling or disappointing.

The belief that satisfied employees tend to be more productive than dissatisfied employees has been a basic tenet among managers for years, but

it is only recently that research has begun to support this theory after decades of questions about the satisfaction-performance relationship. An employee with a high level of job satisfaction invariably has positive attitudes towards his or her job, while a dissatisfied person has negative attitudes about his or her job (De Bustillo Llorente & Macías 2005:657; Lotich 2014; Rue & Byars 2010:72; Spagnoli, Caetano & Santos 2012:606-609).

Job Involvement

Job involvement relates directly to job satisfaction and both form part of job attitudes. Chughtai (2008:169) defines job involvement as an individual's psychological identification with or commitment to his or her job. It reflects the degree to which they are cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in and concerned with their present profession. Job involvement measures the extent to which employees identify psychologically with their profession and consider their perceived performance level important to self-worth. Employees who experience a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and really care about the kind of work they perform. Increased levels of job involvement are positively related to organisational citizenship and job performance. Job involvement is a primary determinant of organisational effectiveness and individual motivation (Chughtai 2008:170).

Motivation

Committed employees are usually motivated employees (Mohsan et al. 2011:227) and motivated employees try their utmost to succeed. Motivation is not something that the supervisor does to an employee. Rather, it is something that is intrinsic, coming from within the employee. The supervisor or manager can create an environment that encourages motivation on the part of employees. This is the context in which the supervisor motivates employees. Motivation is the process where needs produce motives, which lead to the accomplishment of goals. Needs are caused by deficiencies, which can be either mental or physical. Motives are responsible for producing action. The accomplishment of goals satisfies the need and reduces the motive. When the goal is reached, balance is restored. Other needs soon arise, however, and the sequence repeats itself (Rue & Byars 2010:62-64). Several motivational models, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's existence, relatedness and growth theory, McClelland's need for achievement theory, Herzberg's two-factor theory and Vroom's expectancy motivation theory have been developed in the organisational psychology literature and are usually divided into two main categories: one focuses on an employee's internal attributes (content theories) and the second category focuses on the employees' interactions with their direct environment (process theories) (Sloof & Van Praag 2008:798).

The motivation theories search for the understanding of exactly what inspires employees to perform well in their jobs in order to satisfy both the individual and the organisational needs. Organizational goals, for example, should be in harmony with those of the employees. The different levels of needs according to Maslow must all be addressed so that both the needs of the employees and of the organisation can be met (Akwara et al. 2014:24-25). Herzberg's two-factor theory indicates that addressing issues related to motivators (such as achievement and empowerment), while desirable, would not necessarily result in increased levels of job satisfaction if the hygiene factors (for example, working conditions, employee benefits, job security, salary and interpersonal relationships) related to job dissatisfaction were not also properly addressed (Hunter 2006:11).

Productivity

Productivity can be defined as the amount of output (products and services) generated per unit of input (including time, money, labour and other sources) (Nasiripour et al. 2012:46). West (2011:1) states that a pleasant working environment is central to getting the most out of employees. According to a survey of more than 100 London office staff conducted by Metro Design Consultants, almost half (49 per cent) of the respondents indicated that an office makeover would increase their productivity, and more than half (64 per cent) thought a better working environment would make them more organised and enable greater job satisfaction. Another research project on the US workplace environment (The Grensler Design + Performance Index 2008:9) focused on the relationship between workplace design, work satisfaction, and ultimately on productivity. Almost 90 per cent of senior officials averred that effective workplace design was crucial to increase employees' productivity level. The outcome of the survey suggested that businesses can enhance their productivity by improving their workplace design. A significant 90 per cent admitted that their attitude to work was adversely affected by the poor quality of their workplace environment. In addition, 89 per cent blamed their work environment for the level of job dissatisfaction that they experienced (The Grensler Design + Performance Index 2008:13).

Improving productivity in the workplace also means improving skills. Skills applied in the workplace can increase productivity by enabling employees to achieve more with the available resources and technology, thus enabling organisations to adapt more quickly and increasing employees' capacity to innovate by creating, adopting and applying new ideas and technologies (MacCormick 2008). Skills development by itself does not necessarily lead to improved productivity; it creates the possibility and capacity for improvement when applied in the workplace.

Skills and Knowledge

The umbrella term of 'skills' elaborates on what managements expect from their employees. This includes basic skills, generic skills, trade-specific skills, and job-search skills (Papalexandris & Nikandrou 2000:391). The term 'skill' may imply a hiring criterion, an element of a job used in the determination of compensation, a national population characteristic of interest to the labour market managers, an intended result of training, or (if lacking) a reason for the inability of employees to perform productively or the unemployed to find a position. Skill is variously inserted into action as a conceptualisation through which management can be accomplished. A study conducted in the USA showed that human resource managers chose literacy and numeracy skills as the most important skills for job performance, followed by leadership and work ethic skills (Rosenberg et al. 2012:14).

Governments globally want a skilled and adaptable workforce to maintain or improve national prosperity and the delivery of social services. Organisations are interested in a workforce capable of responding to the changing work requirements in ways pertinent to their workplace needs, in order to sustain the effective provision of their goods and services (Harteis & Billet 2008:209).

Umeh and Andranovich (2005:31-36) identify the following skills as very important: technical, writing, knowledge of procedures, financial management, negotiation, supervision, analytical management, organisational flexibility, communication and bureaucratic politics. However, these skills are mostly related to management positions and the research on which this article is based focused only on those skills applicable to the administrative employee and his or her direct working environment. These skills would be those related to their job and include among others typing, computer literacy, numeracy, communication, planning and time management skills.

Research Methodology

Although there are many possible factors that influence service delivery, the independent variables investigated in the study were job factors, computer skills and general office knowledge. The job factors were divided into job satisfaction, job involvement and motivation and the dependent variable (service delivery) was measured according to the productivity level of administrative employees. The reason for using productivity is that it can possibly serve as a measure to determine the level of service delivery. Independent variables of skills and knowledge were added at a later stage to gain a better understanding of the reasons for poor service delivery.

The research design is discussed under the headings of research participants, research approach, measuring instruments, data collection, statistical analysis and ethical clearance.

Research Participants

The researchers used the Gauteng province for the study. The population for this study included administrative support staff members employed in the public service and working as administrative or filing clerks, receptionists, typists or data capturers, secretaries, office managers, executive secretaries, personal assistants and telephone operators. The sample size for the first part of the study was 158 and 32 for the assessments that followed. The purposive and snowball sampling methods were used. The samples were not representative and the results will not be generalised. However, the results do cast some light on the situation that will probably be found in many local government offices in South Africa.

Research Approach

The research used both qualitative (subjectivist) and quantitative (objectivist) approaches to obtain the data needed for this article. The following dimensions were retained: the perspectives of respondents regarding their management (subjective), job satisfaction (subjective), motivation (subjective), physical working environment (objective), and technology (objective).

Instruments

Firstly, a survey was conducted by means of a structured questionnaire. The researchers made use of a range of question types, which included closed, dichotomous, open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The study relied exclusively upon the opinions and preferences of the recipients. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: section A dealing with relevant demographical information and section B covering questions probing job description, commitment, morale, productivity, job satisfaction, corporate culture, engagement, loyalty, trust, physical workspace, information and communication technology (ICT), the public service and human resource (HR) processes. Once the results of the first questionnaire had become available, the researchers realised that more information was needed to meet their objectives. The results of the first questionnaire indicated that the respondents were generally happy with their work environment. However, given their poor service delivery, three different types of tests were designed to meet a further objective of evaluating their knowledge and skills levels: a theoretical test, a computer literacy test and a speed and accuracy test.

The theoretical test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions aimed at attempting to determine the knowledge level of the respondents on the following topics: the business and office environment, information management, communication in the office, and office finance. These were topics identified by industry as needed by administrative employees. Participants were given 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The practical computer literacy test was given to measure the level of computer literacy skills possessed by administrative employees. It was decided to use only MS Word and MS Excel as application packages, because these two packages are those mainly used in the daily execution of administrative tasks. The performance-based tests included only the basic features of each application package. It was decided not to incorporate advanced features, as these cannot be tested if the basic foundation is not established prior to the testing of advanced features. Respondents were chosen for the assessment process from more than one level of administrative employees, and from those both with and without formal computer literacy training. The tests were conducted in the working environment of the participants, using the equipment and environment which they were familiar with in order to limit stress factors. The participants had to have the Microsoft™ Office 2007 or 2010 application packages loaded as a prerequisite for participating in the research study, as the tests were compiled using the MS Word and MS Excel 2007 editions. The researchers developed three non-standardised tests, namely the MS Word (Test 1); MS Excel (Test 2); and a speed and accuracy test (Test 3), incorporating all six cognitive levels according to Bloom's Taxonomy. In order to measure the level of ICT skills possessed by administrative employees, criterion-referenced testing was used for the MS Word and MS Excel test. Tests 1 and 2 took the following form:

- The tests were compiled by using the subject Information Administration I syllabus, as followed at universities of technology in South Africa.
- International frameworks and syllabi were consulted to ensure that the tests complied with international standards.
- The tests were specifically designed for the South African market regarding subject content and language framework.
- The duration of the tests (in minutes) were calculated according to a standardised character-count and word-count method using the following steps:

Step 1: Count the number of characters that should be typed throughout the question paper. Add 10% to the total number.

Step 2: Divide the answer obtained in step 1 by 5. This answer gives you a 'character count' (character counting method).

- Step 3: Divide the answer in step 2 by the number of words typed per minute. (For this test the number of words per minute was 6, which is the minimum requirement for level 1 students).
- Tests were compiled by using a predetermined number of outcomes, in this case 45, which meant that within the allocated time the individual had to demonstrate the ability to execute 45 different end-user-related functions (for example, moving text, inserting page borders, creating columns, formatting text, creating tables, inserting clip art and manipulating the picture) as indicated in the syllabus.
 - The tests were as follows after calculation: MS Word = 60 minutes (1 hour), MS Excel = 40 minutes, and the Speed and Accuracy tests = 10 minutes.
 - The tests were moderated by two subject experts from the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in South Africa to verify the subject outcomes and duration.

The speed and accuracy test was completed, measuring from 10 words per minute in intervals of 5 words per minute up to a maximum speed of 70 words per minute, to cater for a wide range of speed outputs. Respondents were timed for 10 minutes from the beginning to the end of the passage, and the maximum speed reached for the particular passage was calculated and marked for accuracy errors. The test was moderated by a subject expert to verify the counting of characters to determine the different speed outputs, as well as for any typing or accuracy errors.

Data Collection

The first questionnaires were delivered to and collected from public-service institutions in Gauteng which did not have Internet facilities, and electronically distributed where e-mail addresses could be found on the public government website. The electronic distribution was done by using the SurveyMonkey Web Link accompanied by an e-mail outlining the purpose of the study, as well as a copy of the covering letter to administrative employees in government departments. A request was made to administrative employees to complete the questionnaire by accessing the link published on the researcher's Facebook wall. Professional bodies were contacted with a request to publish the link in their monthly newsletters. The snowball sampling process used in this instance proved to be a great success, although constant reminders had to be set out. Questionnaires were distributed to government departments by field workers. Finally, 158 completed questionnaires were returned.

The performance-based tests were conducted at the respondents' places of work to ensure a familiar environment. An appointment was made with

the human resources personnel of the Departments of Agriculture, Labour, Education and Training, Public Works, Social Development and the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in Pretoria to explain the study and the procedures, and to obtain permission to conduct the performance-based tests among their administrative employees. The participants received an intranet message that explained the nature of the research and the purpose of the tests. It was emphasised that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Appointments were made with those who were willing to participate to accommodate the respondents' schedules and the researchers were responsible for conducting the tests. The participants were timed with a digital stopwatch to ensure that the same standard was maintained throughout the test period. The tests were completed and printed directly after completion. The researchers requested the participants to transfer all the files that were saved during the test to one central external saving device under the file name issued to each participant. Two fieldworkers were employed to assist with these tests and to explain the purpose of each test to the participants. The fieldworkers were trained to ensure that all the digital tests were properly done and saved on a memory stick.

Unfortunately, for the performance-based tests, another sample (from the same population however) had to be used, as the first questionnaire was completed anonymously and the respondents could not be traced again for the second one. The second sample was acquired in the same way as the first. Both the knowledge and skills tests were completed by the second group of respondents.

Statistical Analysis

Data was supplied through the SurveyMonkey™ programme either in the programme itself where graphs could be created automatically, or sent by the administrators of the programme to be downloaded in Excel format and thereafter converted to Stata format by the personnel of StatTransfer. Stata V11 was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics (actual count or frequencies and proportions or percentages) were generated in tabular formats. Where the quantitative research method was used, the variables were measured by means of the data gathered through the questionnaires and results deriving from the standardised skills test. Numerical values were then used in the process of statistical analysis. The data obtained after assessing the practical skills tests by hand was captured per participant in a tabular form that was used as a point of departure to discuss the results.

Ethical Clearance

Permission to conduct the study was requested from and granted by the research forums of TUT. The instruments were submitted to and approved by the

Research Forum of the Department of Office Management and Technology and the Business School of TUT. The respondents participated voluntarily. They were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study and the main motivation for undertaking the research. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any time. Regarding the performance-based tests, the respondents were invited by e-mail to participate voluntarily and the purpose of the tests, which had been approved by the public service's human resources officer, was explained. Prior to the testing, the administrative employees were briefed on how the tests had been compiled, how they would be conducted, what would be tested (i.e. the outcomes) and how the results would be used and published.

Results

The results are discussed under the following headings: characteristics of the public service employees, job-related factors and job support in the public service, motivation to work in the public service, and computer literacy skills and general office knowledge.

Characteristics of the Public Service Employees

A majority of 73.42 per cent of the 158 respondents in the Gauteng province were females, reflecting the fact that the administrative environment is still a female-dominated field. The majority of the respondents (40.51 per cent) were white, followed closely by black/African (39.24 per cent), coloured 9.49 per cent, Indian 7.59 per cent, Asian 2.53 per cent and other 0.63 per cent participants. The largest number of appointments was made after 1994. The reason why the majority of appointments were made after the year of democracy emphasises the fact that the government was fully implementing policies to minimise racial imbalances as well as promoting job creation. The ages of the respondents reflect a relatively young workforce, with 75.32 per cent being younger than 45. It follows that this segment of the population can make a very positive contribution to improve the productivity levels of their institutions, as they are young enough to be well skilled and trained with the latest technology and working methods. The majority of respondents (57.60 per cent) had a post-school qualification, although 39.87 per cent had only a Grade 12 or matriculation certificate. The fact that only 2.53 per cent of the respondents had failed the high school exit-level examinations indicates that, during their employment, they had not improved their qualifications from Grade 11 or lower to meet the above-mentioned exit level for high schools locally. A total of 42.40 per cent of the respondents did not have any post-school qualifications, which might have a negative effect on general productivity in

the service. Regarding the distribution of administrative positions held by the respondents in the public service, a majority of respondents (66.46 per cent) were employed in responsible administrative positions (secretary, office manager, executive secretary and personal assistant) where certain competency levels are required in order to function optimally as an administrative professional. The majority of 97.50 per cent of respondents were employed in permanent positions. There was an even spread of respondents regarding their years of service, varying from 4 to more than 25 years of service with 8.86 per cent of the respondents having been in service for less than 4 years.

Job-related Factors and Job Support in the Public Service

The respondents were asked about job-related and job support factors to determine whether the job-related support given by government was sufficient to enable them to do their jobs efficiently. A summary of their responses can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1: Job-Related Factors and Job Support in the Public Service

| Factor | Responses |
|--|---|
| Training | Training offered included skills improvement courses (125 responses), internal workshops (98 responses), conferences/seminars (71 responses), and mentoring (42 responses). Only 11 respondents indicated that they had no training opportunities. |
| Provision of adequate equipment to perform administrative duties | The respondents were supplied with all the necessary equipment and technology to perform their duties without any hindrance and that they were extremely satisfied. |
| Computer software | Most of the respondents used word processing, e-mail, intranet, spreadsheet and presentation software in order to execute their daily tasks. Voice recognition, web design and desktop publishing were the software programs least used in the public service. |
| ICT service support | The majority of respondents (39.24%) indicated that their ICT-related problems were solved within 24 hours after reporting the fault. A matter of concern is that 25.32% of the respondents pointed out that they had to wait for week or more to receive assistance after reporting a fault. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Standard of Information Technology (IT) equipment</p> | <p>Just over half of the respondents (50.63%) were of the opinion that their IT equipment was outdated, but that they still managed to perform their duties without experiencing any levels of frustration. A total of 8.88% of the respondents stated that their IT equipment was so old that they hardly managed to perform their daily duties.</p> |
| <p>Additional technology to increase productivity and efficiency</p> | <p>They ranked faster and more powerful computers as their first need to be fulfilled; secondly, they felt that there was a need for additional or upgraded software; and, thirdly, they felt that a laptop would increase their productivity rate and efficiency.</p> |

Source: Constructed from results

As indicated in Table 1, the employees seem to have ample opportunity to improve their skills which should have a positive impact on their general productivity levels. They were happy with their equipment and software, but the ICT support does not seem to be sufficient which causes frustration and has a negative impact on staff morale and productivity. Outdated equipment impeded overall performance and probably had a negative effect on the general productivity levels of the employees. (The fact that they were generally happy with their outdated equipment probably stems from their past experience of being used to having nothing and now they have a job and a computer.)

Motivation to Work in the Public Service

The respondents were asked about their motivation to work in the public service and their level of satisfaction in the workplace. A summary of their responses can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Motivation to Work in the Public Service

| Factor | Responses |
|-----------------|--|
| <p>Benefits</p> | <p>The South African public service provides annual bonuses to employees (140 responses), provides career advancement opportunities (78 responses) as well as opportunities for employees to improve their qualifications (76 responses). Only 42 of the respondents received overtime and 50 were authorised to work flexi-hours.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Physical workspace | The responses were generally positive. The factors that were viewed negatively included storage space, childcare facilities and recreational facilities. |
| Relationships | The respondents mostly agreed that they had a good working relationship with their superiors and peers. On the negative side, they thought that they had a dead-end job and that they did not get praised for doing a good job. |
| Commitment to work in the public service | More than 80% of the respondents were very or extremely committed and loyal towards the organisation. This could possibly be ascribed to the high level of job security which they enjoyed. |

Source: Constructed from results

Although dissatisfaction with some factors did not affect their work directly, it probably influenced their well-being negatively. These matters surely need to be addressed in order to increase job satisfaction, boost morale and increase productivity.

Computer Literacy Skills and General Office Knowledge

The performance of each participant was tested in the skills audit for MS Word, MS Excel, speed and accuracy. The MS Word and MS Excel tests were each compiled with 45 outcomes. Only seven candidates were able to make five or fewer than five accuracy errors in the MS Word test. Of the 32 participants, only 14 managed to execute 23 (50 per cent) and more of the outcomes. None of the candidates was able to deliver a text document in MS Word that met the minimum criteria, which stipulated the production of a well-prepared and executed document without grammatical or spelling errors. Two candidates were not able to create and type an MS Excel spreadsheet. Only seven candidates could complete the MS Excel test and deliver an end product with more than 23 outcomes reached. The majority of participants were not able to perform basic calculations in MS Excel such as calculating the total of a range and to apply formulas to determine the average, minimum and maximum data in a specific range. Only two candidates were able to create a basic chart from the data in the spreadsheet. Basic features such as inserting rows, merging and centering text, deleting rows and columns, inserting headers and footers, changing the paper orientation, manipulating borders, shading cells and rows, and aligning text were not executed by the majority of the participants.

Participants were timed for the duration of 10 minutes to determine if a reasonable speed (minimum of 25 words per minute) could be reached, error free. Only 12 candidates managed to type a document that contained fewer than five accuracy errors. While two candidates could not reach 15 words per minute, 10 candidates typed 15 and 20 words per minute (that is a relatively low production speed) and the remainder of the candidates (20) managed to type a speed of 25 words per minute and higher. From the results reflected above, only six participants were efficient in the MS Word and MS Excel tests. Only five participants were able to type the ten-minute speed and accuracy test with fewer than three accuracy errors. The majority of the participants (21) were not equipped to perform tasks where end-user skills and knowledge play an important part in the productivity level of an employee. The reasons for the poor results stem from the fact that 68.75 per cent of the respondents indicated that their practical computer skills were never tested when they were appointed in their positions. Only five of them did a computer skills test and two did a speed typing test.

The average percentages obtained in the theoretical tests for the office-related topics can be seen in Figure 1.

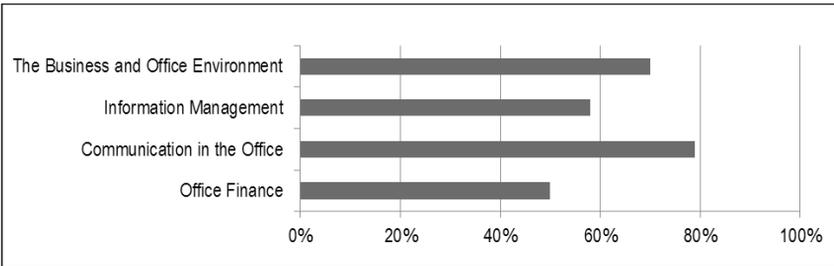


Figure 1: Average Percentages Obtained for the Office-Related Topics

Source: Constructed from results

Although the theoretical test was not the main focus of this article, it is interesting to note that the respondents were the least competent in office finance and information management. This might be one of the contributing factors influencing productivity and service delivery in South Africa.

Discussion

The study revealed that certain job factors need to be in place and that employees need to be properly trained before they can be expected to function productively. Generally, the employees took a positive view of their physical workspace environment and were mostly satisfied with job-related factors

such as their equipment and technology, the ICT support they received and the level of comfort of their offices. Factors of dissatisfaction included the absence or limited childcare and recreational facilities. The majority also enjoyed the secure working environment, with relatively little risk of being retrenched, as well as good salaries and benefits. As regards motivation, the majority experienced their professions as challenging and the variety of duties and tasks contributed to higher levels of job satisfaction. Recognition for tasks well performed can still improve as it boosts morale and improves employee engagement and productivity, which in turn have a positive influence on the organisation. Most of the respondents indicated their loyalty and were satisfied with the service they were employed in at the time. The MS Word practical skills tests revealed a very low level of competency in general. The results indicated a low level of accuracy, with most employees not managing even half of the outcomes and none of the candidates being able to deliver a text document in MS Word that met the minimum criteria. The MS Excel tests revealed similar results, with the majority not being able to perform basic calculations or execute basic features of the package. The respondents lacked the requisite typing and correct keyboard skills to be productive. They generally performed better in the theoretical component than in the practical component; however, very low scores were recorded in the Information Management and Office Finance sections. Although these findings cannot be generalised, they probably do not differ from the situation in the other provinces in South Africa. Further research would be beneficial for the entire country.

The following recommendations are suggested:

- The public service should procure modern and updated technological office equipment to ensure that productivity levels do not drop as a result of outdated equipment.
- The public service should invest in offering in-house or offsite skills training courses instead of conferences or seminars, where skills are not improved and employees do not participate actively.
- Administrative employees should attend relevant on-going training sessions to ensure that a high standard of efficiency and productivity is maintained.
- Candidates that have applied for a position in the South African public service must only be appointed if the minimum criteria with regard to practical and theoretical skills are met.
- Human resources should focus on the soft aspects of Human Resources Management, such as morale and job satisfaction, which are considered to be important drivers of performance.

Job satisfaction is vital to all employees, since it is likely to influence their performance and that of the organisation positively as a whole. Furthermore, job involvement relates directly to job satisfaction. Employees who experience a high level of job involvement strongly identify with and care about the kind of work they perform. A pleasant physical environment regarding offices and office space will boost employee morale and ultimately improve their level of productivity. Finally, improving productivity in the workplace means improving skills. Higher skills levels should enable employees to achieve more with the available resources and technology, such as improving service delivery in this case. Training must be specific and focused on the needs of the public service. Indeed, if the skill levels of the employees are improved, it will influence Gauteng businesses positively, facilitating growth, bringing South Africa up to standard with its market competitors and increasing labour productivity to be in line with the rest of the developing world.

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