

REPORT ON INTERVIEWS WITH DGs AND SURVEY RESULTS

Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME)

2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) conducted interviews with a sample of more experienced national and provincial Directors-General and a Chief Executive Officer. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the DG/CEO experience with the Heads of Department Performance Management and Development System. A separate process in the form of an online survey was also conducted to obtain inputs from the other categories of online HoD PMDS users.

The methodology used for this research was a mixed method approach using the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and the quantitative data from the survey. The analysis was done according to the themes used for the interviews and the survey, which amongst others included the different phases of the performance management cycle, user experiences with the HoD online system, understanding the need for performance management, employee development, overall impact and effectiveness of HoD PMDS and rewards, recognition and consequence management.

The findings from both the interviews and survey have been reported in this document together with inputs/recommendations. The findings have paved the way forward towards policy and system enhancements with the aim of improving compliance and quality with HoD PMDS. This will support improved performance management as well as national and provincial goals. In conclusion, it is suggested that departments learn from each other and share good practices in the community of practice group created by the DPME. Continuous communication/feedback and support from DPME/Offices of the Premier who are responsible for overseeing the implementation of HoD PMDS and the Department of Public Service and Administration as the policy custodian department is critical in achieving an effective HoD PMDS.

List of abbreviations

CEOs	Chief Executive Officers
DG	Director-General
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluations
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
EAs	Executive Authorities
HODS	Heads of Department
MECs	Member of the Executive Council
MPSA	Minister for Public Service and Administration
PMDS	Performance Management and Development System
PSC	Public Service Commission
SOS	State of the Service

Figures and tables

Figure 1: Phases of the HOD-PMDS system

Figure 2: Responses by Gender

Figure 3: Responses by Designation

Figure 4: Responses by role in the HoD-PMDS

Figure 5: Responses by Race

1. BACKGROUND

The Directive on the Performance Management & Development System (PMDS) for Heads of Department (HoDs) was issued by the Minister for Public Service and Administration (MPSA) in terms of section 41(3) of the Public Service Act, 1994. Together with regulations 71(1) and 88 of the Public Service Regulations of 2016, the directive took effect from 1 April 2018. Guidelines for HoDs Performance Management were subsequently developed by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in consultation with the Department for Public Service and Administration (DPSA), the Public Service Commission (PSC), and Offices of the Premiers (OTPs) to support the implementation of the PMDS for HoDs. As the department responsible for the implementation of the HoD PMDS, the DPME has been working closely with the DPSA in providing inputs on the revision of the HoD PMDS Directive. During this process, it became evident that the HoD PMDS guidelines and the online system would need to be changed after the amended HoD PMDS Directive has been approved. In addition, the DPME continuously identifies areas for improvement via consultation and input from different system users. Important categories of users are Executive Authorities (Ministers and MECs), Directors-General (DGs/HoDs), followed by relevant departmental coordinators. This would ensure appropriate, relevant and effectiveness of the PMDS system. Thus, the DPME gathered relevant data and feedback for the identification of areas of improvement within the system. This report provides a documentation of this process, research methodology, findings and recommendations.

2. GUIDING POLICY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

On the 18th of November 2020, during the 6th administration, the Cabinet approved the Framework for the ‘Professionalization of the Public Service’. One of the five pillars of the framework is “effective planning and performance management”. This has resulted in a need for the improvement and review of the PMDS for HoDs to, amongst others, strengthen the roles, responsibilities, and relationship between Executive Authorities (EAs) and HoDs as outlined in Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan¹. The cabinet further resolved that a new HoD PMDS be tabled for consideration, where the new system would provide mechanisms to link the performance of the HoDs to that of the institution as one of the factors influencing the system. A further rationale was to introduce a system that will objectively determine performance, and address systematic challenges that result in instability and poor relations between the EAs and HoDs. Finally, the Cabinet also resolved that the Public Service Commission (PSC) must play a more significant role in the performance evaluation of all HoDs to improve objectivity. Currently, the PSC facilitates the performance evaluations of the DG in the Presidency and the nine provincial DGs.

One key element in the implementation of this policy framework, is that the DPME developed an online system to complete and submit all HoD PMDS documents. This was supported by the DPSA

¹ Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan, titled “Capable and Developmental State” outlines the diagnostic and priority areas for achievement by 2030. Refer to <https://www.dpme.gov.za/> for more information.

Circular No 11 of 2021, which makes it compulsory to complete and submit all HoD PMDS documents online. Apart from continuously identifying areas where the online system can be improved, the DPME also needs to ensure that the online system remains aligned with relevant policies and directives, and that the system is effective and fully caters to the needs of the users. As a result, user feedback is a valuable tool to gather information on the quality, and user-friendliness of the system, as well as assessing if the system meets the needs of its relevant users. The HoD PMDS guidelines were developed in this regard, and users were provided with training in the implementation and application of the framework. The user manuals were distributed for the four different phases of the HoD PMDS, namely: (i) performance agreement; (ii) mid-year review; (iii) annual assessment; and (iv) evaluation phase. The online system has been implemented and came into effect from the 2021/22 performance cycle.

It is within this context that the DPSA with the support of the DPME was tasked to review the PMDS for HoDs, with the following specific objectives:

- 2.1. Enhance alignment between the performance agreements of Ministers with the HoDs;
- 2.2. Address the systematic challenges that result in instability and poor relations between Executive Authorities and HoDs;
- 2.3. Strengthen the link of the performance of HoDs to that of the department;
- 2.4. Introduce independent triggers for the exit of non-performing HoDs; and
- 2.5. Clarify the role of the PSC in terms of convening the evaluation panels that are chaired by the Director-General in the Presidency who is also the Head of Public Administration (HOPA).

3. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was adopted, generating qualitative and quantitative data to inform this review. Regarding qualitative methods, the DPME conducted key-informant interviews with a sample of 11 DGs/HoDs/CEOs to assess the strengths and areas for improvement of the HoD PMDS. The interviews covered the users' understanding and experiences of the HoD PMDS as well as utilising the online HoD PMDS across the different phases of the PMDS cycle. Refer to annexure A for the interview questions guiding the data generation for the interviews conducted.

Concerning the quantitative data collection method, a separate process in the form of an online survey was followed to obtain inputs from other categories of online system users, for example, capturers of the HoD PMDS system; coordinators, and chiefs of staff. There are 156 national and provincial departments however the survey was only sent to departments where DGs/HoDs are on a fixed-term contract. The departments with suspended and acting DGs/HoDs were excluded from the survey as they were not required to comply with the Directive on PMDS for HoDs. Departments with newly appointed DGs/HoDs were excluded from the survey as they are not familiar with the process, the DGs/HoDs are given three months from their date of appointment to complete and submit their performance agreement. Thirty-three respondents assessed both the strengths and areas for improvement. This approach guided the DPSA as the policy custodian, as well as DPME

and/or the Offices of the Premier (OTPs) in their functions as oversight and coordination respectively. This also served to enhance the effectiveness of the tool while also supporting employee growth and performance. The sampling strategy included the following criteria for inclusion in the survey as target groups:

1. **System users:** different roles and levels in public service e.g., EAs, DGs/HoDs, chiefs of staff, coordinators and capturers
2. **System administrators:** Officials from DPME who administer and monitor the online system.

The online survey was open for two months for completion by all the different system users. Thirty-three (33) HoD PMD system users participated in the survey. The respondents were from national and provincial departments. It must be noted that given the different HoD PMDS roles (EAs, DGs/HoDs, chief of staff, coordinator and capturer) and as well as other role-players that provide information towards the performance agreements, mid-year and annual assessments e.g., Office of the Premier, HR, Finance and Supply Chain Units, etc. There are some cases where there was more than one respondent from a department and in some cases, there were no respondents from a department. As a result, the number of departments does not reflect the number of respondents.

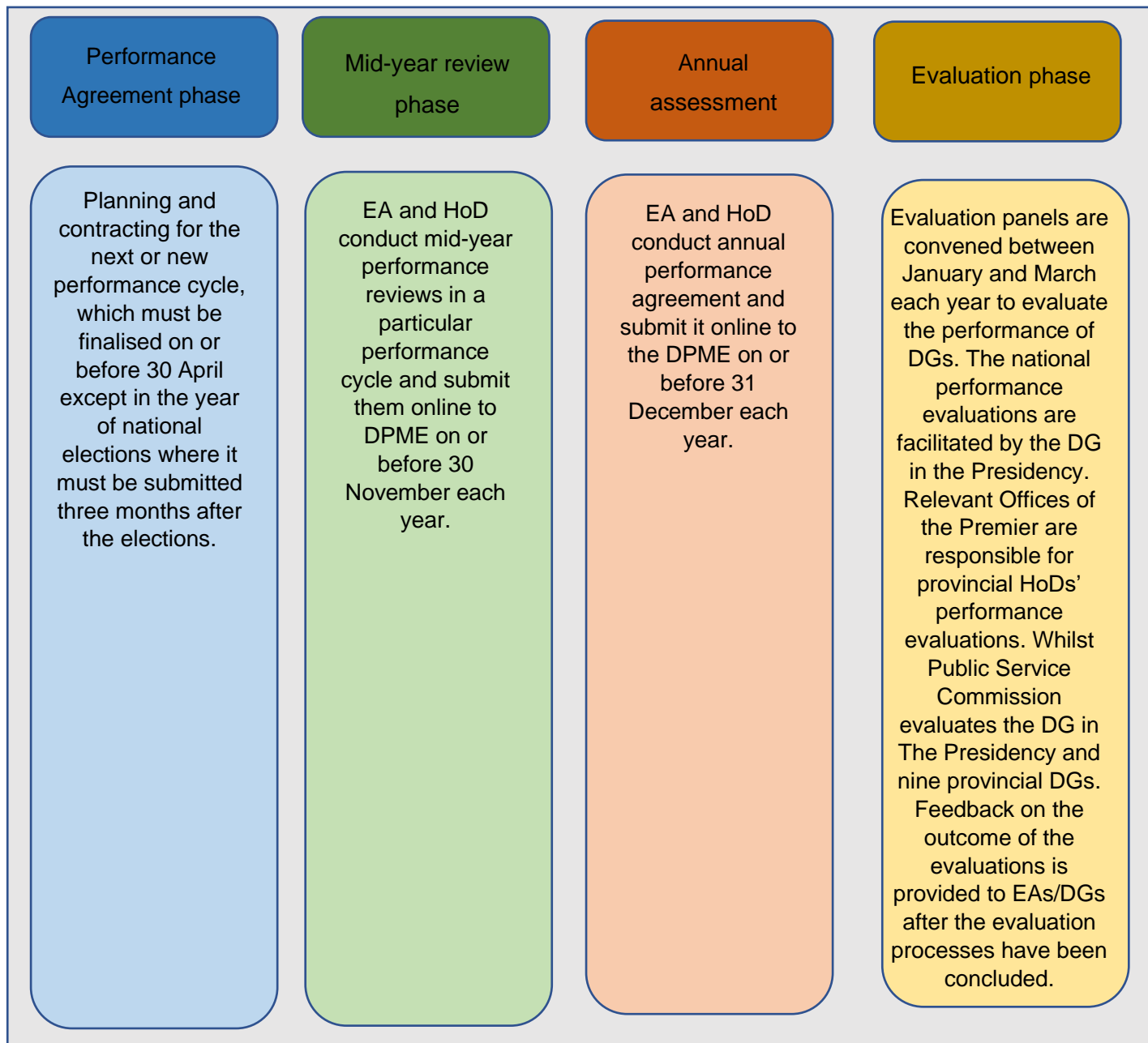
3.1 Limitations

The DPME sent regular reminders to the national and provincial departments requesting the completion of the survey, however, the response rate was low. It was realised that not all users received training and as a result, not all would have the same level of expertise or understanding of the utilisation of the system. The survey questions covered the user's understanding as well as experiences of using the online HoD PMDS. It is important to note that the survey was not compulsory and was also completely anonymous to ensure honest feedback and responses.

4. FINDINGS

This section provides detailed findings of both the qualitative and quantitative data generated. The four phases of the HoD PMDS mentioned in earlier sections are outlined in Figure 1 and provide an organizing frame to integrate the findings according to the relevant phase and themes generated. An outline of the four phases is followed by descriptive analysis of the responses by gender, designation and roles. More in-depth findings are based on the data derived from the key-informant interviewees as well as the responses from other HoD PMDS users. The survey questions of the study covered the understanding of users together with their experiences of utilising the online HoD PMDS system.

Figure 1 Phases of the HoD PMDS system

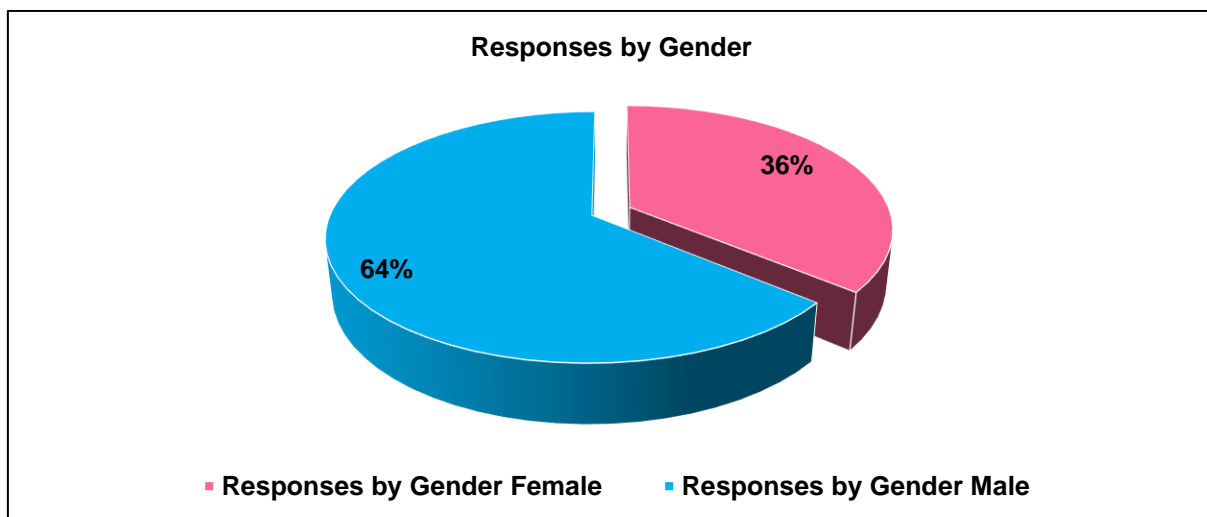


4.1. Descriptive analysis

Gendered responses, designation and roles

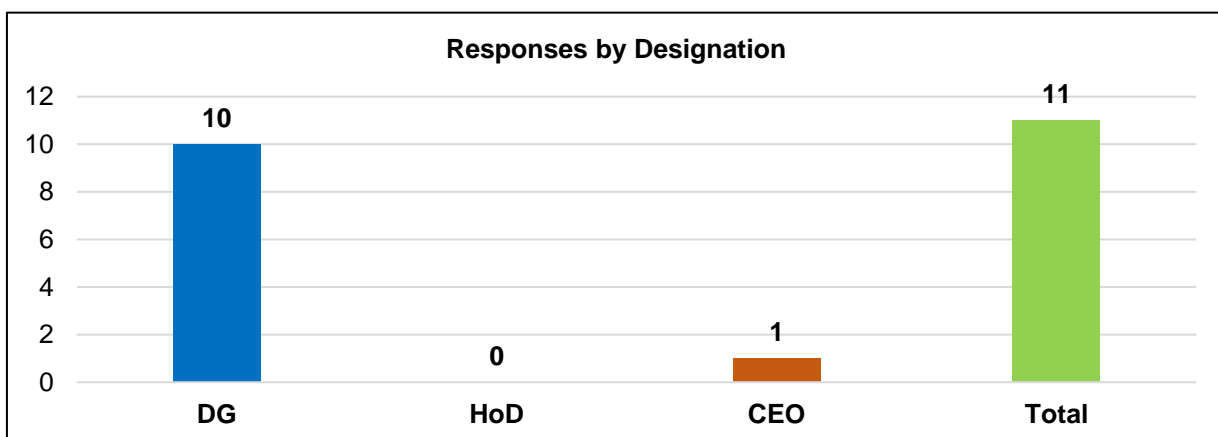
Of the 11 DGs/HoDs/CEOs) who participated in the interviews the distribution in terms of gender, and designation was as illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Figure 2 Respondents by Gender



The survey responses received revealed that more females are working with HoD PMDS compared to males.

Figure 3 Respondents by Designation



Of the 33 users who participated in the surveys, the distribution in terms of user roles, gender and race was as illustrated in Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Figure 4 Respondents by role in the HoD PMDS

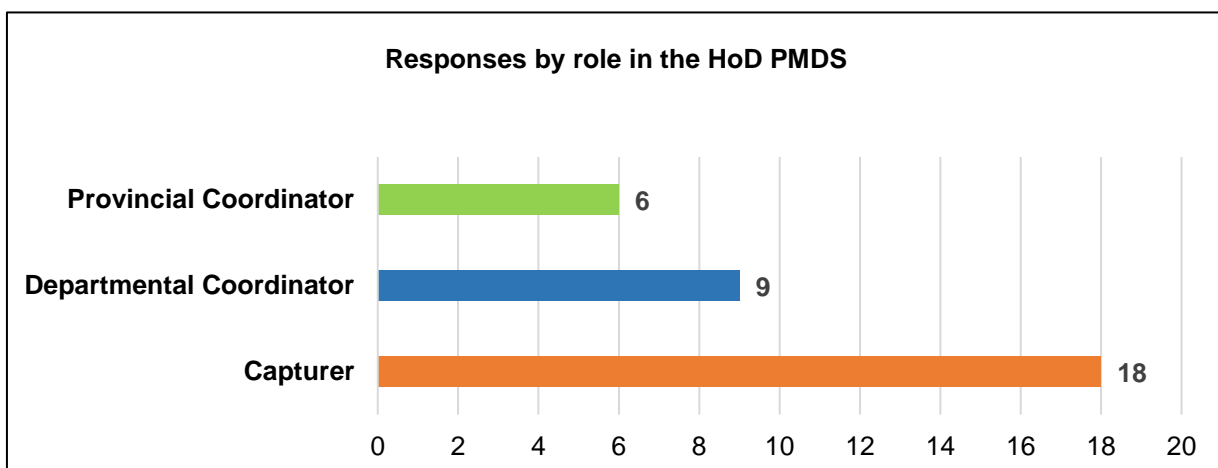
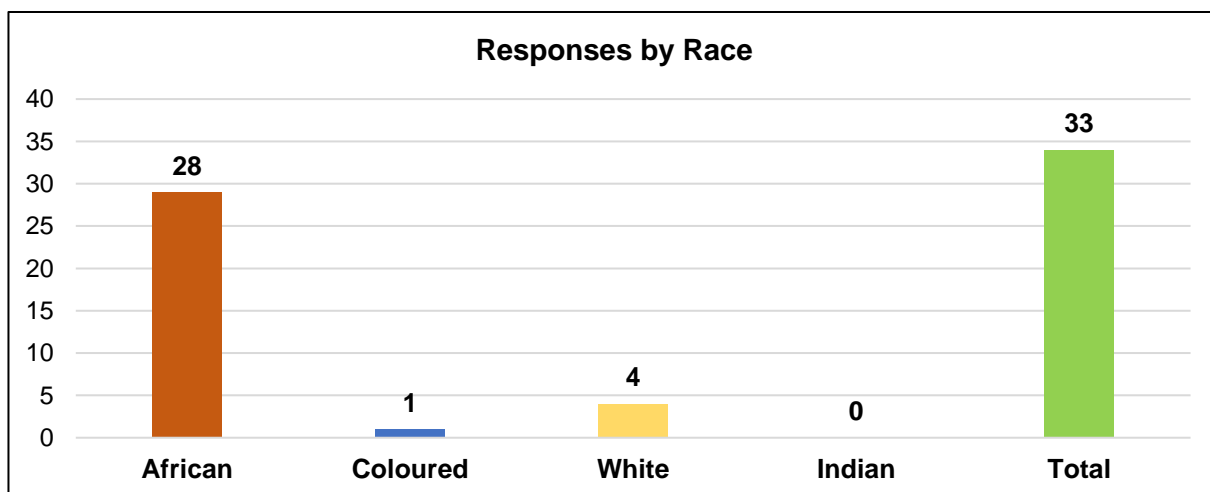


Figure 5 Respondent by Race



The table provides a representation of the racial status of the employees in the public based on responses received

4.2. The need for PMDS

Questions were posed to the DGs to determine their understanding of the need for a PMDS. Regarding the process of recruitment and selection, the need for it to be strengthened was expressed. It was suggested that the example of some private sector institutions be explored for their rigorous processes which include competency tests and prior interviews. This requirement is implemented from SMS positions and upwards in the public sector through the DPSA Recruitment and Selection Directive. In this sense, the PMDS should complement the recruitment process by addressing competency gaps.

The purpose of PMDS should not be viewed as a punitive measure but rather as a developmental tool to provide necessary support for improvement. Feedback on performance is considered essential, and there is a call for continuous improvement and implementation of the HOD PMDS processes. In addition to that, the PMDS could serve as an accountability tool. However, while some participants who were interviewed expressed the need for accountability, others criticized the system's lack of robustness and alignment with private sector practices. In addition, the system users indicated in the survey that they understood the importance of their roles in the HoD PMDS to support the EA/DG/HoD/CEO. A good understanding of the HoD PMDS entirely by the different role-players could lead to better compliance with the Directive.

When responding on the effectiveness of the HoD PMDS, all of the users who participated in the survey indicated that they believed that it effectively assesses the individual contribution and organisational performance of DGs and HoDs. They also agreed that the Directive was correctly developed, to assess both individual and organisational performance. The individual performance of a DG/HoD is linked to organisational performance as they

provide leadership and strategic direction in the achievement of the organisational goals. Decisive and ethical leadership is essential to set the scene in leading departments as one of the participants stated, “How you behave, and shape the department determines the outcome”. Due to the ongoing training workshops and support provided by the DPME, all respondents understand the difference between individual and organisational performance. This understanding will greatly assist in how the DGs/HoDs performance agreements are crafted.

The feedback on the user-friendliness of the online system from survey respondents is mixed with 21 respondents indicating that the system is user-friendly, and 4 respondents did not experience the system to be user-friendly. It is noted that 8 respondents did not answer this question. This suggests that there might be variations in experiences and perceptions among users. A survey respondent indicated that there are challenges related to viewing and downloading captured information, which highlights the need for user-friendly templates for easy editing. Most respondents however indicated that the system is user-friendly and challenges are promptly addressed by the DPME team.

With regards to whether the PMDS operates within the required speed, most respondents indicated that it does. It is, however, noted that the ICT infrastructure in different provinces/departments may pose challenges in accessing the online system. When asked about whether the online HoD PMDS meets all the requirements for its intent, a large survey portion of the respondents indicated that it does. The DPME team continuously identify areas where the system can be improved to ensure a user-friendly system that fully caters for the user's requirements.

There was consensus amongst the majority of respondents that the HoD PMDS timeframes are reasonable. When asked about whether the HoD PMDS should be delegated to other levels of capturing, survey respondents gave mixed responses. The content of the Performance Agreement should be first discussed between the EA and DG/HoD which is communicated to the capturer for capturing on the system. The intention of giving the capturing role to another official was to alleviate the DG of the administrative burden. The captured information must then be verified by the DG/HoD. The high number of participants who were anti-delegation of HoD PMDS to other levels may be due to ensuring that the DGs/HoDs are accountable for their performance.

Regarding the impact and effectiveness of the system, while respondents generally agreed on the importance of having a HoD PMDS, some expressed dissatisfaction with the current system's effectiveness, particularly at the DG level. Concerns were raised about the system being bureaucratic and not effectively capturing the impact of DGs' work on society. Despite

the challenges expressed, the importance of managing performance was highlighted. The HoDs and DGs emphasised the importance of performance management to ensure, amongst others, the achievement of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), and National Development Plan (NDP) goals. Performance management is seen as a tool for measuring effective implementation, accountability, and identifying competency gaps. There is a consensus among respondents that without a performance management system, goals may not be achieved. The system helps in monitoring, incentivising, and supporting individuals for improvement. Part of performance management is the importance of communication for purposes of advancement. This includes mentoring and coaching, leadership training, implementing good practices, and instilling a climate of performance management and improvement. Participants did, however, also caution against the management of compliance rather than true performance management, and added that the focus should shift towards outcomes, predetermined goals, and assessing effective leadership.

The need to have a national conversation around leadership indicators and performance measurement in the public sector was noted. This would include an emphasis on effective leadership, resource allocation and filling of positions within the prescribed timeframe with the best suited individuals. The duration of appointments should also be considered as there is may be a need to strike a balance between bringing in new knowledge and allowing time for adaptation.

Some users indicated that the PMDS should be reported similarly to Auditor General (AG) outcomes, with a focus on percentage compliance with Performance Agreements (PAs) based on Persal reports. Some of the participants propose the inclusion of Persal reports as uploaded evidence. Another respondent stated that the Departmental Coordinator has limitations due to having only view functions, limiting their ability to assist in certain aspects. The DPME designed the functions for the different users for specific purposes, i.e., the coordinator's role is to oversee and coordinate the entire HoD PMDS process and ensure the timely submission of the Performance Agreement.

There was general agreement among the respondents on the importance of the four dimensions of the HoD PMD system, however, there were suggestions for improvements/amendments in the weighting and composition of the Key Government Focus Areas (KGFAs). Suggestions include revisiting KGFAs to ensure relevance, addressing duplication between individual and organisational performance dimensions, and considering the complexity as well as the size of departmental work in assessments. Most respondents agreed that a one-size-fit all approach is unfairly disadvantaging DGs in charge of departments that have a more complex mandate as well as those departments that employ large numbers of employees.

4.3. Phase 1: Performance Agreements (PAs)

The first phase of the HoD performance cycle is entering into a Performance Agreement which explains the expectations, activities, indicators, target dates and resources required among other important information that the DG/HoD would be responsible for in the performance cycle.

4.3.1 Entering into Performance Agreement

The due date for the performance agreement of DGs/HoDs is the 30th April each year unless if it is a year of national elections which is then three months after the month of elections. DGs were asked to elaborate on their understanding and inputs on performance agreements. Upon drafting and entering into performance agreements, it was noted that sharing a vision with the Executive Authority (EA) at the beginning of the performance cycle, scene setting, and the prioritisation of key actions are necessary. It is considered crucial to engage with the EA during the preparation of the Annual Performance Plan (APP) to ensure proper alignment with the performance agreement. Thus, an integrated process, clear measurable targets, and alignment of the performance agreement and the organization's goals are important.

4.3.2 Alignment of a Performance Agreement with other planning documents

The lack of integration and linkages between different Heads of Departments (HoDs) and spheres of government, however, is identified as a major issue. There is a call for synergy, especially in projects involving multiple departments, to avoid working in silos. Even at the departmental level, it is important to avoid working in silos, information sharing at all levels and throughout different business units is critical. This will support improved inter-departmental collaboration. The importance of aligning departmental goals with political commitments and improving collaboration between different government spheres was emphasised.

4.3.3 Amendment of Performance Agreements based on DPME feedback

Opinions of the survey respondents were divided on whether the 30 days provided to amend the DGs/HoDs' performance agreement is sufficient. While almost a third of respondents believe it is enough, the rest indicated that it is not. This suggests that there may be differing perspectives on the adequacy of the given timeframe. The time allowed for the amendment of performance agreements is similar to the time for the development/drafting thereof (30 days). It is an area that the DPME can take into consideration when reviewing the Guidelines on HoD PMDS.

For those who responded that the 30 days provided were not sufficient the reasons included several challenges related to the 30 days for amending DGs'/HoDs' performance agreements. Key reasons included the complexity of departmental

operations, the unavailability of key stakeholders, the need for concurrence from multiple parties, and the time-consuming nature of the amendment process. Additionally, concerns were raised about the sufficiency of training and the understanding of provincial operations by DPME, as well as the need for more time for engagement and discussion between DPME and HoDs. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable for all departments, and considerations for the unique circumstances of each department should be considered. One of the respondents indicated that the feedback provides valuable insights into the challenges faced during the amendment process.

4.3.4 Individual versus organisational performance of a DG/HoD

A focus on both individual impact and organisational performance was suggested by those who were interviewed. The link between individual and organisational performance requires individual performance and teamwork which was argued by one of the participants who said, “You are as good as the team you lead, the morale of the team is important”.

DGs' contributions to building a clear value chain, defining roles and responsibilities must be reflected clearly in the KRAs of the HoDs/DGs performance agreements. The DGs of DPME responsible for the implementation of the HoD PMDS and DPSA as the policy custodian are also involved in the evaluation of national DGs, therefore there was a suggestion that their evaluation be conducted by the Public Service Commission.

When asked about what should form part of the individual performance of a DG/HoD, some respondents indicated that there should be standardised Key Result Areas (KRAs) in the performance agreements of DGs/HoDs across the public service, specifically focusing on the mandate and corporate administration of the department. This will emphasise the individual role of the DG/HoD in achieving departmental objectives. This will also ensure that measurement is fair and transparent. The corporate services/programme 1 - administration should include areas such as strategic and annual planning, risk management, budget/expenditure plans and reports, gender mainstreaming plans and reports, HR planning/reporting, IT/automation, legal services reports and statistics, highlighting the role of coordination, managing processes, and effective decision-making as critical components. Currently, some of the areas are being assessed on the DGs'/HoDs' annual assessment however it needs to be strengthened.

Some respondents indicated the importance of regular review and updated outdated Key Government Focus Areas (KGFAs) to ensure relevance. The importance of being cautious about including non-strategic matters in the DG's performance agreement, ensuring alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP), MTSF, other strategic government plans as well as organisational goals, Annual Performance Plan (APP) and Business Plan was also mentioned. However, it is important to avoid duplicating APP targets in the performance agreements of DGs. If not, this will result in double dipping between individual performance and the APP. It was mentioned that workshops for DGs/HoDs must be considered to enhance their understanding of the system.

All respondents to the survey indicated that they believe that the DG/HoD performance agreement is strategic, aligning with the overall strategic goals of the organisation. From the survey it was revealed that users are of the view that although there should be alignment between the duties of the DG/HoD and APP expectations, it is important to avoid duplicating APP targets as this will result in double-dipping which means that the DG/HoD will be assessed twice on the same indicator. It was mentioned that PAs are perceived as being too operational, lacking strategic elements linked to State of the Nation Address (SONA) and State of the Province Address (SOPA) pronouncements. Performance Agreement capturing done by individuals outside the DGs/HoDs office can cause delays and may hinder the process. The system allows other managers to provide inputs via the capturer, which is considered an advantage.

Some respondents indicated that the emphasis should be on governance and should include an integrated District Municipality Model for relevant DGs/HoDs to account for their role. There is a need for the assessment of skills and competencies to be part of the individual performance dimension. The DG/HoD must be able to use his/her knowledge, skills and competencies to assess the Deputy Directors-General (DDGs) and other direct reports.

4.3.5 Nature of DG/HoDs Performance Agreement - Strategic/Operational

Approximately two thirds of the respondents to the survey indicated that the content of the performance agreements are drafted by the relevant DG/HoD. The rest disagreed and stated the opposite. With regards to how operational the DG/HoD PMDS is, about a third of respondents stated that the DG/HoD performance agreement is strategic, and aligned with the strategic goals and objectives of the organisation. Three respondents indicated that performance agreements are more operational as opposed to strategic due to the inclusion of operational aspects, including oversight, reporting roles, and the need to show how targets are achieved.

The rest either found the question not applicable or expressed uncertainty about the distinction between strategic and operational aspects. The majority of the respondents strongly assert that the DG/HoD performance agreement is strategic, reflecting alignment with organisational strategies and goals. Some responses suggest that the operational aspects may be covered in branch-specific plans and not necessarily in the DG/HoD performance agreement. The DPME has observed over the years that DGs/HoDs performance agreements are not strategically crafted and therefore quality assurance feedback is provided to ensure that the Performance Agreement is strategic.

4.3.6 Suggested areas on KRAs and KGFA's for the reviewed Directive

When survey respondents were asked what they think should form part of a DG's Key Result Areas (KRAs), they indicated the following: Governance and Leadership with emphasis on providing strategic leadership, direction, and high-level management of the department. Financial and Personnel Management responsibilities. Aligning with the strategic activities, priorities, and mandates of the department. It should reflect the core functions and strategic mandates of departmental programs. There is also a need for risk management to be incorporated and understanding and implementing of government prescripts.

There was a suggestion for a generic KRA dealing with corporate support services, scored for compliance similar to audit outcomes, to improve PMDS compliance and service delivery. Some respondents believe that everything needed is already covered in the performance agreement, while others suggest specific KRAs such as risk management, integration into the District Development Model, and commitments from SONA and Executive Authority Priorities.

4.3.7 Selecting from a menu of standardised KRAs

A vast majority of users of the HoD PMDS indicated that they support the idea of standardising some areas of DG/HoD Key Result Areas (KRAs). A few respondents (4 out of 33) expressed reservations or disagreement with standardisation. Of those who indicated that KRAs should be standardised, the areas for standardisation included those functions that are similar for all DGs, such as Financial, Supply Chain, Corporate Services, strategic management, risk management, human resources management and business support services. Other areas that were suggested to be standardised include leadership, ethics, and organisational culture. There should be consideration for standardisation based on sectors or clusters.

When asked whether it is necessary to amend the DGs/HoDs performance agreements, the majority (23 respondents) indicated that it should be amended.

Some respondents advocate for the necessity of amending DGs/HoDs performance agreements, to address evolving priorities, align with changing strategic objectives, or enhance the effectiveness of the performance management system. Those who disagreed indicated that it is unnecessary to amend the performance agreements, suggesting that the existing performance agreements adequately capture the required performance areas.

4.3.8 Good practices for improving the quality of Performance Agreement

Some respondents proposed conducting periodic reviews to assess the relevance and alignment of performance agreements with changing organisational priorities and strategic objectives. Another proposal was to seek input from key stakeholders, including DGs/HoDs, executive authorities (EAs), and relevant departments, to ensure that amendments are well-informed and reflect a consensus on performance expectations. A suggestion was received to design performance agreements with flexibility and adaptability to accommodate changes in organisational goals, government priorities, and the broader operating environment. It is also important to communicate the reasons behind any proposed amendments and ensure that the stakeholders understand the intended benefits of such changes. A balance between maintaining stability in performance agreements and introducing dynamism to address emerging challenges and opportunities is crucial. By considering these recommendations, Departments can navigate the decision-making process around amending DGs/HoDs performance agreements in a manner that enhances the effectiveness and relevance of the performance management regulations.

The challenges experienced in amending DGs/HoDs performance agreements were indicated by users of the HoD PMDS. These included difficulties in amending agreements when DGs/HoDs are transferred or seconded to new positions, leading to delays or challenges in aligning the agreement with the current role. Another challenge is getting all parties involved in the agreement to revisit and re-submit the amended performance agreement, potentially due to busy schedules or differing priorities. The time-consuming nature of the process, particularly when executives have busy schedules, can lead to delays in finalising amendments. Some respondents mentioned confusion amongst data capturers who may not be familiar with the department's strategic priorities, leading to difficulties in crafting KRAs at the HoD level and obtaining baseline information. There are still challenges experienced with the online system, such as downtime or limitations that prevents the smooth submission and amendment processes, IT officials being the only ones able to amend the system and potential delays in the quality assurance process. In cases where there are natural disasters or immediate changes in the department's focus it may require adjustments to targets, adding complexity to the amendment process.

Lack of ownership and resistance by DGs/HoDs makes it difficult to timeously finalise required amendments and hinders efforts to improve the quality of performance agreements. The inability of capturers to engage DGs directly for questions of clarity regarding the performance agreement negatively impacts the amendment process. Some respondents indicated that once an agreement is submitted, it is almost impossible to make changes to the document.

4.4. Phase 2: Mid-Year Review

There were a mix of responses regarding feedback discussions on performance which could apply to both mid-year reviews as well as annual assessments. Some respondents have regular discussions and feedback, while others highlighted challenges due to transitions in Ministerial leadership. The importance of regular feedback meetings, a culture of evaluation/feedback, and pressure on EAs to ensure DGs' assessments take place was acknowledged. One of the respondents indicated that quarterly review assessments are conducted for all HoDs within the province, providing continuous assessment, which serves as a good practice. Weekly meetings with the Premier were cited by a provincial DG and indicated that the facilitation of regular performance reporting and problem-solving was a critical success factor that would eliminate feedback gaps. The importance of continuous engagement with the EA was emphasised for immediate problem resolution and smoother formal assessments. Survey users indicated reasons for feedback discussions not being facilitated at times. There are instances where the planned meetings do not take place as scheduled, possibly due to the busy schedules of the EA and DG/HoD or other unforeseen circumstances. A participant argued that a DG/HoD should insist on having a one-on-one. The 30-day timeframe can contribute to challenges in facilitating discussions. These dates/timeframes are however planned and captured in the performance agreement of the DG/HoD. For some respondents, especially new users, the process might be unfamiliar, and the Office Manager or relevant personnel may have a better understanding. The involvement of the Chief of Staff and the Executive Support in the Offices of HoDs is crucial in facilitating performance processes between the Executive Authority (EA) and the DG/HoD.

Regular discussions/feedback between the EA and DG/HoD is crucial. It is imperative that all stakeholders are well-informed about the importance of timely discussions. In cases where physical meetings cannot be conducted the EA and DG/HoD can also utilise online discussions.

Some DGs mentioned that there were challenges in scheduling feedback discussions, and suggestions were made to have prescribed quarterly performance reviews. The reasons for the challenges included the busy schedules of Ministers, transitions of EAs affecting quality, and differences in understanding roles between EAs and HoDs due to inadequate induction. Self-assessments by DGs are critical as it is a good guide in measuring their performance

against set targets. Some of the respondents were of the opinion that newly appointed DGs should be allowed more time before entering into performance agreements with their EAs in order to allow sufficient adjustment time together with improved onboarding processes. Currently, the Directive on PMDS for HoDs allows newly appointed DGs/HoDs three months to complete and submit their performance agreements to the DPME/OTP.

Regarding the time period for feedback, this varies from Minister (EA) to DG and some are timely while others have delays. The delays could be due to changes in leadership and transitions as well as the busy schedules of both DGs as well as EAs.

Further challenges in the mid-year review phase specifically, include issues with political changes affecting assessments, limited appetite from EAs to conduct assessments, and poor compliance with the PMDS process. Acting appointments pose challenges as the current system does not address performance assessments for HoDs in acting roles and the need for their acting allowances to be earned based on monthly proof of fulfilling requirements. Unforeseen additional work after a performance agreement has been signed and submitted, poses a challenge as it would require amendments to the performance agreement as well as repeating the online approval and submission processes.

Stumbling blocks include a silo mentality, lack of linkage between departments, and insufficient integration in performance agreements, particularly in projects involving multiple departments. Timing issues related to EA's availability and the need for improved institutionalisation of EAs' PMDS were mentioned. Challenges with EAs not communicating on time and difficulties in getting feedback were highlighted. When it comes to the mid-year review phase, challenges also include the influence of political interests on the assessment of DGs, and the alignment between the EA and DG's Performance Agreements being crucial for positive evaluations.

These stumbling blocks can be eliminated through a hands-on approach from HoDs, addressing poor performance, and actively engaging with staff. It also requires more interaction between teams responsible for capturing PAs and those dealing with APPs, creating a full value chain to ensure alignment, and using data and reports for analysis to improve PA quality. Teams must be alerted to changes in resources to ensure alignment throughout the system.

From the survey done with users of the HoD PMDS, it was revealed that mid-year reviews become challenging, especially when covering percentages of outputs that are not under the direct control of the relevant DG/HoD, under the standardised key government focus areas, e.g. women in SMS, youth and persons with disabilities. There is a split in opinions regarding the effective addressing and elimination of stumbling blocks in the HoD PMDS processes.

There are different implementing departments which are DPME and Offices of the Premier in each province, whilst the DPISA is the policy custodian department.

4.5. Phase 3: Annual Assessment

Continuing with the matter of the timeframes, fully digitising the HoD PMDS and bringing forward the annual assessment timeframe was suggested. Overall, opinions of the 31st December as the submission date for the annual assessments were mixed. Some found it reasonable, while others suggested changes to make it more accessible and ensure improved commitment. Adhering to timeframes, especially due to the busy schedules of Executing Authorities (EAs), was again mentioned as a stumbling block.

Considering the 360-degree assessment, it was generally supported, with views on including inputs from staff, peers, and stakeholders. Some respondents suggested that the 360-degree assessment be phased in to ensure it complements the existing system. One respondent indicated that there must be an emphasis on simplicity and highlighted the importance of including the right people (a good understanding of public service and an expert in performance assessments) for meaningful contributions.

Participants in the survey were asked whether the 360-degree assessment would improve the HoD PMDS. The majority of participants (23) indicated that they believed that 360-degree assessments would improve HoD PMDS, suggesting potential positive outcomes and benefits. Some participants express uncertainty or a neutral stance, possibly indicating reservations or a need for more information about the potential impact. Further exploration or clarification may be needed to understand the specific concerns or considerations influencing these views. The importance of ensuring that the 360-degree is conducted by people that understand the environment of the public service, nature of the work of the DG/HoD and relevant department is critical.

Users of the HoD PMDS were asked for suggestions on how the 360-degree assessment can best be implemented. Twenty-six (26) responses were received for this question providing valuable suggestions on how the 360-degree assessment can be implemented effectively.

The importance of clearly defining the goals of the 360-degree feedback initiative, addressing individual and organisational readiness as well as establishing clear criteria for assessing both organisational performance and how individual performance impacts the organisation was highlighted. It is necessary to develop a well-designed process for administering the assessment, and selecting appropriate tools.

Identifying and preparing participants for the assessment process is critical at the time of contracting and the relevant employees/stakeholders must be made aware that they will be involved in the assessment process. Training to understand the importance and purpose of holistic performance assessments is essential for the success of the 360-degree assessment approach. The National School of Government (NSG) will be instrumental in the development and roll-out of training. There must be a clear link between individual and organisational performance, managing and holding individuals accountable for poor performance as well as recognising good performance. This can also serve as a tool for development based on the good practices that are identified.

Stakeholders should be involved in assessing the DGs, possibly through submitting feedback before evaluation meetings. DGs/HoDs can receive feedback from direct reports (DDGs) and fellow DGs/HoDs, utilising State of the Service (SOS) results and participant satisfaction ratings ensuring a well-rounded assessment.

Prior to the implementation of the 360-degree assessment the organisation must be prepared for the changes of the new approach. It is important to create a conducive environment for colleagues and other stakeholders to provide input freely and without bias which would ensure that these inputs are honest and truthful. The assessment should be administered correctly to obtain the best results which must be used to improve the performance, training and learning within the organisation.

The success of the implementation is dependent on the maturity of the Public Service, political office bearers and all stakeholders who will be involved in the 360-degree assessment approach. There was also a suggestion to extend the 360-degree assessment to all Senior Management Service (SMS) members in the public service.

Concerns were, however, raised about the subjectivity and possible disparities, especially given the high level of the DG positions and potential influences between administrative and political heads as well as a possible delay in the finalisation of assessments. There were further concerns that senior managers may have an opportunity to vent disagreements, potentially influencing the outcome of a moderation. One of the participant's said, "Give me an honest assessment for example I have suggestions on how to improve the performance of the department and the efficiency". It was also mentioned that the transparency in providing objective performance might be compromised, raising concerns about the fairness of the assessment process. A respondent suggested that the 360-degree assessment might be abused, especially if it focuses on personal feelings or decisions that certain individuals didn't appreciate. There is a call for a focus on abilities, knowledge and skills.

Some respondents expressed uncertainty or lack of understanding about what a 360-degree assessment entails. There was also some uncertainty about the role and contribution of the Public Service Commission in the 360-degree assessment process. The assessments should go beyond the supervisor's perspective, indicating a preference for a broader evaluation.

The respondents highlighted concerns related to fairness, transparency, potential biases, and the need for a clear understanding of the 360-degree assessment process. Education and communication about the purpose and mechanics of 360-degree assessments may address some of these concerns. Users of the HoD PMDS indicated on the survey that concerning annual assessments, a lack of feedback on targets achieved creates a challenge in finalising individual performance reviews or assessments. Late finalisation of performance assessments between the Minister (EA) and DG/HoD leads to non-compliance. There were concerns raised about DGs being penalised for late submissions which were caused by the EAs, suggesting a need for more accountability on the part of EAs.

The management of performance that exceeds targets requires a stronger focus on impact rather than just meeting targets were highlighted as areas requiring attention in recognising highly effective performance. Some respondents expressed a desire to revert to quarterly performance discussions for more regular and meaningful assessments. The annual assessment is generally based on the performance contract entered at the beginning of the financial year. However, variations due to changing priorities were acknowledged, and regular one-on-one discussions were recommended. The importance of incorporating honest assessments and continuous improvement discussions beyond the formal assessments was emphasised.

Participants in the survey were asked whether the due date for the annual assessment (31 December annually) is conducive. There was a mixed response to this question, with 16 respondents indicating that it is not a problem, while 17 respondents indicated there is a problem with the due date. It is also noted by the DPME that most employees are on leave during December which leads to high levels of non-compliance. Those who indicated that there is a problem with the due date indicated that the year-end period could be stressful, and setting a deadline during this time may negatively impact work-life balance. Others may perceive the year-end as a busy operational period, making it challenging to focus on performance assessments.

There were suggestions for changing the due date to November, considering December as a challenging period due to holidays and recess. There were proposals for aligning DG/HoD timeframes with all employees in the department, ensuring assessments are conducted simultaneously. The reason it is not aligned is because other employees in the department

need to craft their performance agreements in line with that of the DG/HoD therefore the earlier date for the DG/HoD was implemented. There were also some suggestions for aligning timeframes with the end of the financial year cycle for comprehensive APP target reviews. Other respondents suggested extending the submission period to January or later, accommodating holidays, and ensuring a reasonable timeframe for performance discussions. There was also some advocacy for considering the availability of Auditor-General findings in determining the timing of annual assessments. The proposals received will be considered during the review of the timeframes in the Directive for HoD PMDS.

Some respondents expressed concerns that a 9-month (April to December) cycle is too long and suggested the need for a closer timeline to avoid delays and ensure timely submission. The reason for the 9-month cycle is to allow for the publication of the Annual Reports and Auditor-General findings. Several respondents highlighted the challenges associated with the festive season, including holidays and numerous campaigns, affecting the availability of PMDS role players. There are certain departments that experience high activity levels between October and December, posing challenges for accounting officers and executive authorities to engage in PMDS matters during this period. There were also suggestions to consider alternative due dates, such as January or February, to accommodate the Christmas break and ensure availability for discussions between the EA and DG/HoD. The proposals received will be considered during the review of the timeframes in the Directive for HoD PMDS.

There were suggestions to involve the MECs in the assessment submission process, with both HoD and MEC signing off after the MEC has rated the HoD and to enhance the system with the development of an APP (Annual Performance Plan). This is already part of the existing HoD PMD process/system. A recommendation was received to consider adopting new trends, such as electronic signatures, to modernise the system. The DPME team responsible for the implementation of the HoD PMDS has requested the System Developer to investigate the possibility of electronic signing and its implementation.

Another respondent suggested the implementation of specific timeframes and guidelines for both DG and EAs to guide them on what is acceptable and unacceptable in putting together the DG's PA. This includes timeframes for PA amendments. The current HoD PMDS Directive and Guidelines already include the requested information and also provide an example of how a performance agreement must be crafted. After conducting quality assessments of performance agreements, the DPME/OTP provides feedback on how the agreement should be amended to ensure compliance with the Directive on PMDS for HoDs.

It is noticed that the suggestions mainly focused on streamlining the submission process, incorporating modern technologies, and providing clear guidelines for timeframes. These ideas aim to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the HoD PMDS.

4.6. Phase 4: Evaluation/Moderation

Questions were asked to DGs regarding their experiences with evaluations or moderations. Regarding feedback discussions, the evaluation of a provincial DG is facilitated and chaired by the Provincial Public Service Commission together with 3 EAs and 2 or 3 peers from other provinces. Feedback is received within 2 to 3 days after the meetings. Challenges regarding timely feedback were mentioned, with a suggestion to improve in this area. From the survey results, it was also revealed that delays in receiving evaluation outcomes hamper the implementation of corrective measures (implementation of improvement plans) for DGs/HoDs. The need to involve the President in the feedback process was emphasised to recognise highly effective performance. This practice will also serve as motivation for other DGs.

On the accuracy of evaluations, the evaluation process was considered fair, but there were suggestions to consider a template for reporting and motivating work done "unplanned over and above." Some concerns were raised about the subjectivity involved in scoring "over and above." The need for guidelines on dealing with "over and above" contributions was emphasised. One respondent indicated that the system was generally viewed as fair, with room for improvement. Whilst another respondent suggested the evaluation process can be improved to ensure more objectivity and fairness of the system.

Opinions from the respondents varied on who should chair evaluation panels. Suggestions included co-chairs of clusters, the Chair of the Public Service Commission (PSC), or experienced retired Directors-General. The DG in the Presidency currently chairs but may need support or rotation to avoid unfairness and fatigue. There were mixed responses regarding the involvement of the PSC in the evaluation panel. Their role in the process was debated, with some supporting their involvement and others suggesting they should observe rather than chair as they are responsible for mediating any disagreements or grievances arising from the evaluation process. Participants expressed diverse views on how the PSC's role should be enhanced in the evaluation process. Some suggested granting the PSC full rights to act as assessors, providing oversight or act as moderators during the evaluation process, which would assist in monitoring fairness during evaluations and provide an additional layer of scrutiny. While others emphasised the PSC's role in maintaining objectivity and impartiality, especially in light of current political dynamics. Some recommend the PSC's involvement as an independent oversight body, providing an impartial perspective without direct decision-making authority.

With regards to including Executive Authorities (EAs), opinions varied. Some supported their involvement for better understanding while others indicated that there may be challenges due to their busy schedules. The appointment of the Head of the Public Administration (HOPA) was suggested as a potential improvement.

The inclusion of policy experts was generally supported with the emphasis on involving experts who understand the public service context and have relevant experience. Some also suggested involving experts from relevant sectors and universities. Some respondents recommend involving stakeholders who regularly interact with the DG, due to their understanding of departmental operations. Other suggestions included representation from DPME, the Presidency, Ministers, and other DGs, possibly as part of a secretariat or in specific roles. There was a proposal to form a panel of professionals with a good track record who understand public service. Another proposal, to ensure comprehensive evaluations, was to have MECs and DG serve as panel members and for the Premier to be the Chairperson. The involvement of the Auditor-General is suggested, possibly to ensure a focus on accountability and compliance. There were also views that the current panel arrangements are working adequately, and there might not be a need for significant changes.

4.7. Cross-cutting issues

From the survey study, it was revealed that the constant turnover in office managers of DGs/HoDs makes coordination challenging. Lack of public service experience negatively impacts MEC support which further adds to the difficulty. A general lack of commitment to implementing performance management in the public service is observed. Challenges arise when relevant individuals are uncooperative, impacting the smooth progression between different stages and resulting in the non-compliance of DG/HoD performance management documents. One respondent proposed linking performance management to salary, suggesting that a salary could be stopped if HoD PMDS documents are not submitted without a valid reason. However, this is not currently permissible within the legislative framework.

Lack of familiarity with the HoD PMDS processes in the HoD's office staff leads to reliance on HR, emphasising the need for urgent training. Another challenge mentioned was the time constraints for DG/HoD due to operational reasons posing challenges in meeting deadlines and dedicating sufficient time for performance management. The Directive on HoD PMDS however, has standing time-frames which do not change except in years of national elections, therefore the planning of HoD PMDS and compliance with due dates must be prioritised. Thus, it is evident that the planning of HoD PMD-related tasks requires more attention.

A challenge is noted when people do not know their respective roles and responsibilities, and as a result, they are despondent in performing their dedicated HoD PMDS roles, which results

in delays and/or non-compliance. The sign-off by the Minister/MEC (EA) were mentioned as a potential stumbling block by several respondents.

4.8 DG/HoD developmental areas

Regarding reasons for DGs not indicating their developmental needs on their performance agreements, busy schedules, heavy workloads, and exhaustion were cited as hindrances to attend identified development areas. Some, however, suggested that it should be compulsory for DGs to indicate their development needs in the Personal Development Plan (PDP). There were suggestions to improve the onboarding process, including mentorship, coaching, and sabbaticals, proposed as a means to plan and allow DGs to take time for self-development which would allow them to be updated and encourage continuous development. There were also suggestions for reviewing entry qualifications for DG positions and creating a conducive environment for development. The role of the National School of Government (NSG) in facilitating programmes or opportunities for DGs to enhance their skill levels is important.

To realise identified developmental needs, suggestions included implementing a Professional Development Points system, improving onboarding processes, and creating a conducive environment for continuous development. Compulsory degree or diploma requirements for DGs and a set of mentors to write independent reports were proposed. Further suggestions included leveraging the Revolving Door policy for sabbaticals and systematic mentoring and coaching. Emphasis on planning, providing time for training and having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities in mentorship.

4.9 Recognition, rewards and consequence management

With regards to rewards and recognition programs, there is a need to review financial incentives in the public sector – especially for DGs. One of the participants stated that “There were good intentions to have monetary rewards, however, it was abused to the core and be-devilled the whole system”. Consideration of non-monetary rewards such as leave, tax incentives, or a letter from the President recognising outstanding achievements might be necessary. Clean audits and performance exceeding targets should be included in recognition programmes as achievements. Opportunities for high performers can include training programs, study tours and other means of benchmarking for good practices. Longer terms for DG/HoD contracts will allow for continuity of departmental goals and national plans, the assessment of long-term impacts and provide more time for performance improvement.

There was consensus from the majority of respondents that the current system lacks effective recognition and rewards, which negatively impacts motivation and performance. Some of the suggestions included exploring non-monetary incentives such as training opportunities, time off, and recognition from the President and EA for outstanding performance. The need for

fair financial incentives, especially considering the high level of responsibility and workload of HoDs, is highlighted. On the other hand, some DGs/HoDs are in their position for the betterment of the country and their focus is not on the monetary gain. One of the participants said, “I stayed in government for a different reason, the financial rewards given do not match the work and performance agreement entered into”.

Regarding non-compliance and insubordination, respondents’ views varied on whether non-compliance with the PMDS directive should be considered insubordination. Some suggested that non-compliance could be due to the political/administrative interface or unforeseen delays. There must be emphasis on the effective roles of Heads of Office and other functions within the HoD PMDS, simplifying the process, and ensuring all role-players fulfill their tasks. The need for induction courses for EAs on PMDS was highlighted.

Some of the respondents raised concerns about delays caused by EAs not finalising, signing and submitting Performance Agreements (PAs). There were suggestions for political involvement to ensure the timely completion and submission of HoD PMD documents. Simplifying the system, utilising reminders from relevant departments (DPSA, DPME and OTPs) and considering implementation of consequence management and incentives to improve the compliance rate were some of the other suggestions made to improve compliance.

4.10 Condonation

Condonation only needs to be applied in cases where the DGs/HoDs did not comply with the due dates. In accordance with the Directive on HoD PMDS condonation needs to be obtained from the Minister for Public Service and Administration (MPSA) within 30 days from the due date.

The majority of respondents, 15 out of 16 that applied for condonation, indicated that their requests were approved by the MPSA. Only one (1) response mentioned that the condonation request was not approved. Any request for condonation will be declined by the MPSA if it is submitted after 30 days from the due date and if valid reasons were not cited. Some of the respondents mentioned that feedback was not provided by the MPSA, indicating a communication gap. Reminder emails are sent to non-complying departments to inform them to apply for condonation within the prescribed time frames (30 days from the due date). Follow-ups must be made by the department(s) with the DPSA if no response is received for condonation after 30 days.

Priorities of the Executive Authority (EA) and Head of Department (HoDs) are not aligned, leading to a perception that performance management is viewed as an administrative

nuisance. There was a suggestion to score EAs based on HoDs' PMDS compliance. Some responses indicated consistent and timely submission, eliminating the need for condonation requests. Challenges in honouring scheduled performance discussion dates between EAs and DGs/HoDs due to various commitments were also cited.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Impact of the PMDS

The DGs who were interviewed indicated that they were committed to their work and values and do not feel that HoD PMDS drives their performance. Some of the responses obtained were about leaving a good legacy, being passionate about what they do, and the love for their country. On the other hand, HoD PMDS should be seen as an opportunity to grow and develop. There are multiple benefits if performance management systems are applied appropriately. It provides clear understanding of what is expected from the official as well as the goals and deliverables of the department. It creates an amicable work environment due to clear roles and responsibilities. It identifies high flyers (extraordinary performers) and those who are not performing optimally, so that plans can be made for additional training or performance improvement. This would lead to individuals who are striving for exceptional achievements. Robust performance management system enables leaders to make objective decisions.

5.2. Understanding the need for PMDS

It is evident from the interviews conducted with the DGs that there is a need for the current performance management system to be reviewed to strengthen its effectiveness. A comprehensive review of the existing HoD PMDS should address the identified shortcomings, aligning with best practices from the private sector. There is a need for continuous training on the HoD PMDS as it will assist in enhancing the understanding of the need for PMDS and the implementation thereof.

5.3. Performance Agreements

During the capturing of performance agreements, there must be an improvement in the integration and linkages between departments and the different spheres of government, particularly in projects involving multiple departments is critical. The drafting of PAs must be strengthened by using an integrated approach, clear targets, and alignment with organisational goals through engagement with EAs. There must be a focus on both individual impact and organisational performance with clearly formulated indicators/targets that supports the building of a value chain inclusive of all role-players. It is also important to enhance induction programs for EAs and DGs to clarify their roles and responsibilities. Longer-term appointments for DGs could be explored to enhance knowledge transfer and

continuity. It is important to establish who is the cause of non-compliance and implement escalation mechanisms in the case of Ministerial non-compliance to prevent DGs from being penalised who comply with PMDS requirements. The role of the DG in the Presidency (Head of Public Administration) in improving compliance must be considered.

When the survey participants were asked whether they agreed with the quality assurance feedback provided by the DPME or OTP, the majority of respondents agreed with the quality assurance feedback provided by the DPME/OTP. However, there is still a small portion who do not agree with the feedback. This suggests that there may be varying perspectives on the effectiveness or accuracy of the quality assurance process conducted by DPME/OTP. It might be beneficial for the DPME/OTP to address the concerns raised by those who disagree to improve the overall quality assurance process. DGs/HoDs who do not agree with the quality assurance feedback are not compelled to amend the performance agreements, they should however draft a letter indicating the reason(s) why they are not amending and upload it on the HoD PMD System, otherwise, they will not be allowed to progress to the next phase of the HoD PMDS. Since the implementation of the Directive on HoD PMDS in 2018, it has been noticed by the DPME during quality assurance of performance agreements that the majority of performance agreements submitted are not strategic and outcomes-based.

The content of the performance agreement must be provided by the DG/HoD, as they will be rated on the indicators provided in the performance agreement. It is a concern that a mentionable number of respondents indicated that the contents of the performance agreements are not obtained from the DG/HoD which places doubt regarding the validity of such information. A balance between standardisation and flexibility in DG/HoD KRAs should be achieved to optimise performance alignment and organisational effectiveness. Given the majority of support for standardisation, Departments may consider identifying and standardising certain key areas within DG/HoD KRAs to ensure consistency and alignment with organisational goals. While standardising certain aspects, allow flexibility in other areas to accommodate the unique context and priorities of individual departments.

5.4. Mid-year and Annual Assessments

It is important to enhance the culture of evaluation and regular feedback discussions between the EA and the DG this will ensure ongoing improvement in performance management. Regular one-on-one discussions should be encouraged between EA and the DG for continuous improvement and honest assessments throughout the performance cycle. Implement a system of prescribed quarterly performance reviews to ensure more regular feedback and discussions and fully digitise the HoD PMDS process to streamline assessments and facilitate easier tracking and reporting. There needs to be a shift in the focus from an "audit culture" to a more "qualitative impact" assessment, recognising contributions that go beyond meeting targets. Suggestions were received for longer

adjustment periods for new DGs, this will result in better induction for EAs/DGs, and building a quality assurance mechanism for PMDS before formal assessments can take place. Enhanced training for EAs should be facilitated to ensure fair and effective assessments of DGs/HoDs. To improve the integrity of the HoD PMDS assessment the phased-in approach of the 360-degree assessment can be introduced, it is important to include the right people with good understanding of the work of the relevant DG/HoD for meaningful feedback.

5.5. Evaluations/Moderation

Explore ways to involve the President in the feedback process to enhance the evaluation system's credibility. The EAs together with the DGs/HoDs should ensure that recommendations from the evaluation panels are effectively followed through to drive performance improvement. The evaluation panel must work towards improving objectivity with DGs/HoDs who lead departments based on size and complexity. Acknowledge the peer review system and explore ways to enhance its effectiveness in HoD PMDS. The chairperson of evaluation panels can be rotated to avoid potential bias. Consider exploring options like involving experienced retired/seasoned Directors-General. To improve the integrity of the evaluation process, the inclusion of relevant policy experts with a deep understanding of the public service context and relevant experience can be involved in the evaluation of a DG/HoD.

Respondents supporting inclusion of the PSC in the evaluation panel may perceive benefits such as impartiality, external oversight, and enhanced objectivity in the evaluation process. Those opposing inclusion may have concerns about potential challenges, bureaucratic processes, or a preference for internal evaluation structures. It could be a balanced approach, potentially involving the PSC in specific phases or aspects of the evaluation process where their expertise and oversight could add significant value without compromising efficiency can be considered.

5.6. DG/HoD Development Areas

DGs/HoDs should be encouraged to indicate development needs in their Performance Development Plans (PDPs) to ensure continuous learning and keep abreast with the changes taking place in their environment. The onboarding process must be strengthened for DGs/HoDs, this includes, amongst others, mentorship, coaching, and sabbaticals. A block release approach should be considered for onboarding. Consideration should be given to exploring the implementation of a Professional Development Points system to track and incentivise continuous learning for DGs/HoDs. Mentoring and coaching programs for newly appointed as well as poor-performing DGs/HoDs by more experienced and or retired DGs/HoDs would assist newly appointed members with the smooth transition into their new roles as well as to improve performance for under-performing DGs/HoDs. Both mentors and mentees must understand their roles and responsibilities. DGs/HoDs should be encouraged

to take sabbaticals, allowing them planned time for self-development and exposure to new practices. A system should be introduced to ensure that continuous learning and development takes place. It is important to strengthen policies regarding the induction of DGs/HoDs within a specified timeframe. Finally, continuous support, manuals, and training videos are provided by the DPME to make the HoD PMD system experience user-friendly and easy. The DPME is in the process of engaging the NSG to develop HoD PMDS training courses for the different roles.

5.7. Recognition, rewards and consequence management

Financial incentives can be explored to attract high-calibre candidates for DG/HoD positions. Consideration should be given to implement non-monetary rewards, such as leave, recognition programs, i.e., certificate of recognition from the President for highly effective DGs. The existing measures for non-compliance should be strictly applied. The role of the Head of Public Administration in ensuring compliance and implementing consequence management is imperative.

5.8. HoD PMDS overall system

Overall, the HoD PMD on-line system is seen as beneficial, but there are suggestions for improvements such as implementing auto-save functionality, enabling online signing capabilities, and addressing technical issues that may result from time-to-time promptly. System improvements would reduce delays and improve overall compliance. Training and support for system users, particularly Executive Authorities, were highlighted as essential for effective implementation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Lack of impact of the PMDS

HoD PMDS must be used as a strategic tool to help manage the Political Administrative Interface. It must be used to clarify roles, expectations and performance. The reviews must also be used to adapt the agreement and implement mitigations.

6.2 Lack or limited knowledge/understanding of HoD PMDS Directive/guideline: It is important that DGs/HoDs and the other role-players read the Directive on PMDS for HoDs together with the guidelines before crafting their performance agreement. The use of the training manuals and videos developed by the DPME should assist in crafting correct performance agreements and will minimize the need to amend such areas. It is also important to develop protocols for immediate response to changes in focus or external factors, ensuring a quick and efficient adjustment of targets if the need arises.

6.2 Lack of consequence management for non-compliant EAs: Respondents from the survey and interview participants mentioned that it is not always the DG/HoD who is non-

compliant with the Directive on PMDS for HoDs. Sometimes the EA is non-compliant but the DGs/HoDs forfeit their performance incentive. It is recommended that non-compliant EAs are reported to the President and consequence management be implemented.

- 6.3 Delays with the evaluation outcome feedback:** It was noted that some of the provinces have good practices in this regard which can be replicated at the national level. Some of the processes used in national can be streamlined/simplified to reduce the time to provide feedback.
- 6.4 Lack of continuity with HoD PMDS administrative support in the Offices of the DGs/HoDs:** It was noted that when administrative support staff leave the Offices of the DGs/HoDs, newly appointed staff are unfamiliar with the HoD PMDS process. It is essential that proper handover is done when new staff members are appointed, and they can attend the training with the NSG when the training is implemented. The current administrative staff can train other staff in the office for assistance when a need arises.
- 6.5 Insufficient understanding of the operational work by newly appointed DGs/HoDs:** It is imperative that newly appointed DGs/HoDs have the required leadership/technical skills however departments operate differently with different cultures therefore it is suggested that DGs/HoDs spend a few days at the coal face of service delivery to obtain a better understanding of the work and challenges at this level. It should be beneficial if this can happen during induction.
- 6.6 Lack of culture for improvement:** It has been observed that there is a lack of continuous improvement in the area of HoD PMDS. The DPME/OTPs as the departments responsible for ensuring the implementation of the HoD PMDS need to foster a culture of continuous improvement, implementing effective change management strategies to address resistance and facilitate the adoption of recommended amendments, encouraging all stakeholders to actively participate in refining and enhancing the performance agreement process. This can be achieved through continuous communication/ regular engagement with all role-players to ensure ownership, clarity, and a collaborative approach, by emphasising the importance of proper planning of HoD PMD processes, meeting due dates, recognising the importance of each role-player involved in the process as well as sharing good practices. System capturing and amendment of user-roles are determined by each department based on the preference of the DG.
- 6.7 Delay in the enhancement of the HoD PMD System:** There were concerns from respondents regarding the efficiency and user-friendliness of the HoD PMD online system. Addressing this concern would allow for easier amendments and submissions of HoD PMD documents. In moving with technological changes, it is necessary to consider creating a HoD-

PMDS APP to support working remotely as well as implementing an online electronic signature functionality. The automation of notifications on the system needs to be implemented throughout the different stages/roles e.g., automated email notifications to the next person responsible for actioning documents to be implemented, the HoD and secretary can be copied in all notifications so that they know at any given time what the status is. There should be automated responses when documents are approved, returned for amendments, and notice of late submissions. The DPSA should consider implementing an automated system for condonation applications and responses.

Addressing these recommendations may help Departments overcome challenges and create a more dynamic, responsive, and effective process for capturing and amending DGs/HoDs performance management documents on an-annual-basis.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the feedback provided during the interviews highlights the importance of addressing issues related to recognition, compliance, system effectiveness and user experience to improve the overall performance management system for HoDs. From the interviews conducted it has been noted that some DGs/HoDs/CEOs have better relationships with their EAs and some do not experience many challenges with their PMDS. While other DGs experience more challenges which may also result in late or non-submission of HoD PMD documents. In many of the questions, the DGs/HoDs/CEOs were unanimous in their responses e.g., not having time to attend training, the importance of incentives and the phased-in approach of the 360-degree assessment. There were several good suggestions from the participants which will be incorporated into the reviewed Directive on PMDS for HoDs.

The survey results provided good insight into the experiences of the HoD PMDS users/roles in navigating the system. It is important to address system-related issues as soon as identified as well as ensure that the system is updated/enhanced continuously to ensure that it will meet the needs of users. It became evident that some departments are high performers in the implementation of the HoD PMDS and that others should learn from the good practices to improve overall compliance with the HoD PMDS prescripts. A community of good practice was created on WhatsApp. Continuous communication with system users to remind them of due dates, provide feedback as well as render online support is crucial. The implementation of automated notifications on the HoD PMD system to further enhance compliance and ensuring a more user-friendly system is essential. The training of users is important and must be enhanced, as a result, the DPME is in the process of working with the National School of Government (NSG) to roll out training programmes for the different role players of the HoD PMDS. After completion of some of the courses, the users will be certified as competent which will also assist in professionalising the HoD PMDS.

8. ANNEXURE A: Interview Questions and responses

9. ANNEXURE B: Survey Questions and Answers