



# **ASSESSMENT OF THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

**2010**

## TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE ASSESSMENT.....	1
3. METHODOLOGY.....	1
4. LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK APPLICABLE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE.....	2
5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC.....	5
6. DEALING WITH POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC: EXISTING WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS.....	9
7. HOW EMPLOYEES CAN BE CAPACITATED TO BEST HANDLE THE INCOMPETENCE OF THEIR PEERS AND/OR SUPERVISORS.....	11
8. INTERVENTIONS TO MANAGE THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES WHOSE SUPERVISORS ARE UNDERPERFORMING .....	12
9. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC.....	15
10. CONCLUSION .....	17
ANNEXURE A: MEASURING INSTRUMENT, REFLECTING THE SURVEY RESULTS.....	
	19

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Office of the Public Service Commission (OPSC) has introduced various communication initiatives such as MyDG.gov and information sessions to enhance internal communication and to contribute to greater stability within the organisation. MyDG.gov specifically provides for employees to share ideas and make suggestions about possible improvements in the way the OPSC works as an organisation. Reporting to MyDG.gov is anonymous and the Director-General responds to all ideas and suggestions.

A submission has been made via MyDG.gov regarding advice requested in a situation where both the Chief Director and the Director of a component were underperforming. This request did not only relate to the poor performance of the relevant supervisor, but also to its impact on the management of the Deputy Directors in the Component.

Poor work performance has a negative impact on productivity and workplace effectiveness and failure to address poor performance could cause resentment and have a negative impact on those employees who are performing satisfactorily. Therefore, the Director-General appointed a Task Team to assess and advise the OPSC on how to manage poor performance in the OPSC in line with the current performance management prescripts.

## **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE ASSESSMENT**

The assessment results should provide or indicate the following:

- a) The effectiveness of the management of poor performance in the OPSC.
- b) The existing weaknesses and strengths in the OPSC to deal with poor performance.
- c) How employees can be capacitated to best handle the incompetence of their peers and supervisors.
- d) Interventions to manage the performance of subordinates whose supervisors are underperforming.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The Task Team held a meeting to establish a common understanding of the assessment. Key issues to be addressed during the assessment were identified, information on the process followed in the handling of previous cases of poor performance within the OPSC was assessed and the assessment methodology was decided upon.

A review of the prevailing legislation on managing poor performance and desktop research were conducted.

It was decided to make use of a questionnaire, due to the sensitivity of the issue and due to the fact that it will be more cost effective than interviews if both Head Office and the Regional Offices were to be included in the survey. The questionnaire was also designed to ensure anonymity so as not to make employees apprehensive. The purpose of the questionnaire was to –

- a) identify weaknesses & strengths in the OPSC when dealing with poor performance; and
- b) to determine the effectiveness of the management of poor performance in the OPSC.

At Head Office, the questionnaire was delivered by hand to all employees of the OPSC, irrespective of their rank/level within the Institution. However, since not all employees were in their offices at the time the questionnaire was distributed, it was also forwarded electronically to all staff. In order to facilitate the anonymous completion and return of questionnaires, a “Survey Box” was placed at the lifts on each floor. An announcement regarding the survey was also made via the *Lift News*.

In addition, the questionnaire was e-mailed to all Regional Offices, and employees were requested to return the completed questionnaires to Head Office in an envelope. All employees were electronically reminded of the due date for the submission of completed questionnaires.

Out of 212 questionnaires distributed, a total of 85 completed ones were received by the cut-off date (i.e. a response rate of 40%). Taking into consideration that established survey principles requires a minimum response rate of 10%, the 40% is regarded as a representative sample of the research population. The results of the 85 completed questionnaires received by the cut-off date were recorded in a database.

The final phase of the assessment involved consolidating and analyzing information gathered and the compilation of the report with findings and recommendations. These findings and recommendations, as well as the legislative and regulatory framework, are discussed below.

#### 4. LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK APPLICABLE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE

The legislative and regulatory frameworks applicable to the management of poor performance are summarized in **Table 1** below.

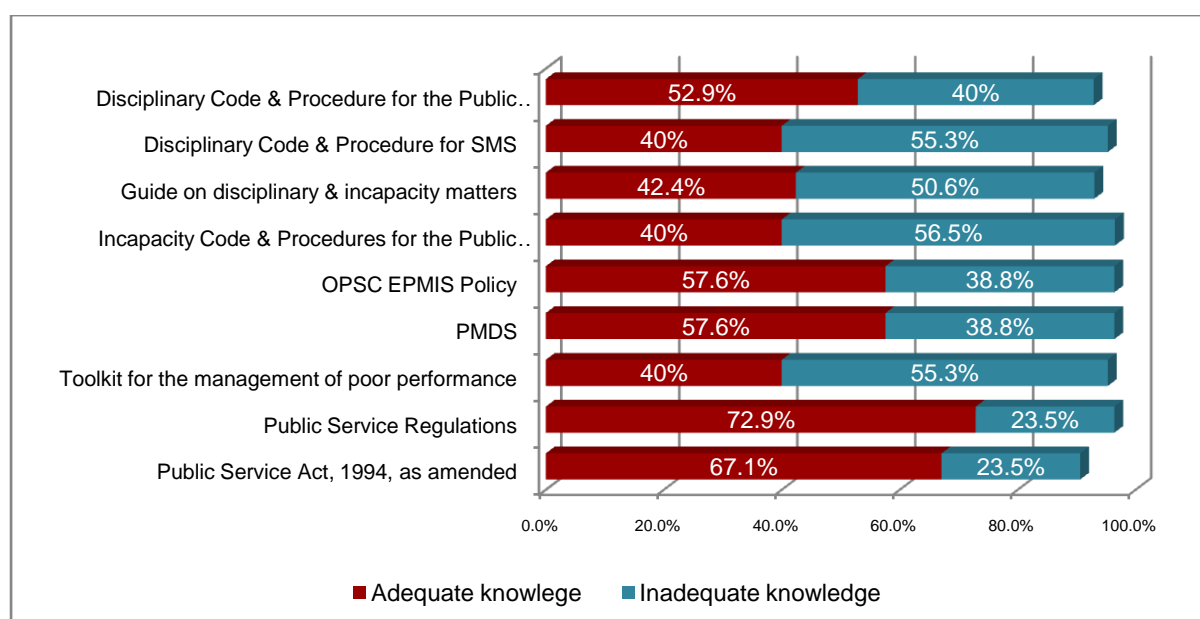
**Table 1: Legislative and regulatory framework applicable to the management of poor performance**

PRESCRIPT		DESCRIPTION
Public Service Act, No. 103 of 1994 (as amended)		<p>The following sections in the Act are relevant to the management of performance in the Public Service:</p> <p>Section 3(5): Assigns powers and duties concerning the internal organisation of a department to its Executing Authority. This includes the career incidents of employees other than HoDs, such as performance management and discipline in a department.</p> <p>Section 7(3)(b): Provides for the following responsibilities of HoDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• efficient management and administration;</li> <li>• effective utilisation and training of staff;</li> <li>• maintenance of discipline;</li> <li>• promotion of sound labour relations; and</li> <li>• proper use and care of state property.</li> </ul>
Public Service Regulations		Chapter 1, Part VIII deals extensively with the management of performance in the

(PSR), Government Notice No. R441 of 25 May 2001 (as amended)	<p>Public Service.</p> <p>Chapter 1, Part VIII, paragraph A, outlines the principles of managing performance as such:</p> <p>“Departments shall manage performance in a consultative, supportive and non-discriminatory manner in order to enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness, accountability for the use of resources and the achievement of results...The primary orientation of performance management shall be developmental but shall allow for effective response to consistent inadequate performance and for recognising outstanding performance. Performance management procedures should minimise the administrative burden on supervisors while maintaining transparency and administrative justice.”</p> <p>Chapter 1, Part VIII, paragraphs B - D, give Departments powers to determine systems for managing performance that are consistent with the aforementioned principles. It also sets out various requirements in terms of those systems, which include but are not limited to compelling supervisors to monitor and assess performance and notifying an employee in writing if his / her performance is unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Chapter 1, Part VIII, paragraph E, deals with managing unsatisfactory performance. It empowers and compels Departments to provide a framework to assist poor performing employees to improve their performance and sets out processes to be followed in the event there is no or insufficient improvement in their performance.</p>
Chapter 4 of the Senior Management Handbook: Performance Management and Development (PMDS)	Chapter 4 of the Senior Management Service (SMS) Handbook describes the process and requirements of performance management and development for members of the SMS. Sections 6.7 and 15.11 outline the approach to dealing with unsatisfactory performance by members of the SMS.
Employee Performance Management and Improvement System (EPMIS) Policy of the OPSC	The EPMIS Policy provides for a framework for performance management, employee development and reward processes within the OPSC. The policy applies to employees on salary levels 12 and below. Paragraph 14 deals with poor performance.
Incapacity Code and Procedures for the Public Service (PSCBC Resolution 10 of 1999)	<p>Section 4 of the Resolution outlines a procedure in respect of poor performance.</p> <p>This procedure is stated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsection 4.1 compels the employer to give written reasons if the employer is of the view that an employee is not performing in accordance with the job that the employee has been employed to do. The employer is also compelled to consider the employee's reasons in a meeting, which may also involve an employee representative, should the employee so choose.</li> <li>• Subsection 4.2 of the resolution describes what should transpire within the meeting, i.e. it sets the agenda on issues that should be discussed in the meeting.</li> <li>• Subsection 4.3 deals with a process to be followed to improve performance, including agreeing on the time-frames by when performance should have improved. It also places a duty on managers to remove or address barriers to performance.</li> <li>• Subsection 4.4 deals with formal notification to the employee if the level of performance of the employee has not improved within the time-frames established in terms of subsection 4.3.</li> <li>• Subsection 4.5 of the resolution deals with choices that the employer can consider after consulting with the employee, including instituting formal</li> </ul>

	<p>misconduct proceedings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsection 4.6 is a reminder that prior to exercising any option in dealing with consistent poor performance, a hearing would be necessary to establish the severity of failure to meet the performance standards.</li> <li>Subsection 4.7 provides guidelines to the employer that should a decision be taken to place an employee in a different job that entails lower pay, consent must be obtained from the employee.</li> </ul>
Chapter 7 of the SMS Handbook: Misconduct and Incapacity	<p>Chapter 7 of the SMS Handbook, amongst others, describes the procedures that must be applied in cases of misconduct and incapacity due to poor performance in respect of members of the SMS. Annexure A of Chapter 7 provides for Acts of Misconduct, which include the following:</p> <p>“Performs poorly or inadequately for reasons other than incapacity.”</p> <p>Paragraph 3 deals with the Incapacity Code and Procedures for SMS members, amongst others, provide for measures to assist SMS members to overcome poor performance; avert and correct inadequate performance and give reasonable assistance to members who are incapable of performing in accordance with the needs of their jobs.</p>
Disciplinary Code and Procedures for the Public Service (PSCBC Resolution 1 of 1003)	<p>The Code describes the procedures that must be applied in cases of misconduct in respect of employees on salary levels 12 and below. Annexure A of the Code provides for Acts of Misconduct, which include the following:</p> <p>“Performs poorly or inadequately for reasons other than incapacity.”</p>
Toolkit on the management of poor performance in the Public Service (December 2007)	<p>The Toolkit is intended to provide managers and supervisors with practical guidelines on how to deal with poor performance.</p>

During the survey, employees were asked whether they had adequate knowledge of the above-mentioned prescripts. The views of the respondents are reflected in **Figure 1** below.



**Figure 1: Percentage of employees who indicated the adequacy of their knowledge of the prevailing prescripts/policies on managing poor performance**

Considering the role of the Public Service Commission (PSC) in providing advice to national and provincial departments regarding the Public Service legislative and policy framework, it is quite alarming to note that on average 46.7% of respondents indicated that they have inadequate knowledge regarding the legislative framework on the management of poor performance.

**Figure 1** above shows that only 40% of respondents indicated that they possess adequate knowledge of the Toolkit for the management of poor performance, the Incapacity Code & Procedures for the Public Service and the Disciplinary Code and Procedures for SMS members. This is confirmed by one of the findings of an Assessment Panel (appointed during 2009 to review the human resource function in the OPSC) that the management of performance leaves much to be desired<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, given that 31.8% of respondents indicated that they have been personally involved in the management of poor performance, it is quite likely that some of these employees did not have adequate knowledge of the prevailing prescripts when they had to apply the same.

Of even greater concern is the fact that 38.8% of respondents indicated that they did not have adequate knowledge of the EPMIS policy, yet the said policy forms part of the Orientation Training of the OPSC. In addition, all employees at Head Office and Regional Offices received training on the implementation of the said Policy when it was revised and approved with effect from 13 January 2009.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC**

According to the survey results reflected in **Annexue A**, more than half of respondents (i.e. 56.5%) were of the opinion that poor performance within the OPSC is a problem. Cognisance of this worrying opinion should be taken against the background that 67.1% of respondents were of the opinion that poor performance is **NOT** managed in an effective manner in the OPSC. These findings correlate with those of a similar investigation by the PSC, where 57% of employees believed poor performance to be a problem<sup>2</sup>.

However, the process of assessing the effectiveness of the management of poor performance in the OPSC is twofold. In the first instance, it involves the management of performance as an ongoing process aimed at improving performance, and in the second instance it is the management of poor performance following the outcome of performance ratings of “Not fully effective” or “Unacceptable”.

These processes are discussed in more detail below.

---

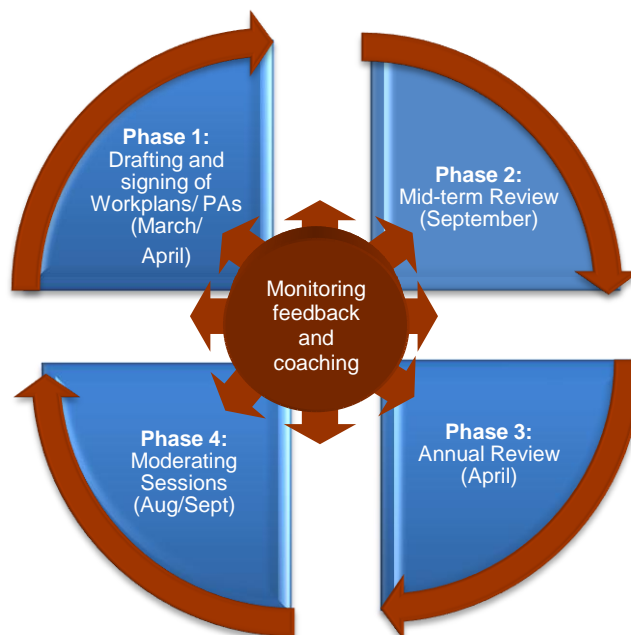
<sup>1</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Report of the Assessment Panel on the role of Human Resource Management in the Office of the Public Service Commission. September, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Report on the management of poor performance in the Public Service. August, 2007.

## 5.1 Management of performance on an ongoing basis

Continuous development and quality improvement is one of the key principles that underpins the performance management and development system of the Public Service. The PSR in Chapter 1, Part VIII/B, amongst others, determine that the supervisor shall as far as possible, meet on a regular basis with the employee to discuss the basic objectives of her or his component and the employee's role in the success or failure in achieving those objectives. The employee's supervisor shall also monitor the employee's performance on a continuous basis and give the employee feedback on her or his performance. If the employee's performance is unsatisfactory, the PSR determines that feedback should be provided, in writing, at least four times a year.

The four key phases in the performance management cycle, for both employees on salary levels 2-12 and the SMS within the OPSC are reflected in **Figure 2** below. It shows that, throughout the year, supervisors are required to monitor performance, provide feedback to employees regarding their performance and, if required, coach them to reinforce key results and behaviour.



**Figure 2:** Four key phases in the performance management cycle of the OPSC

While it may seem like an added responsibility to supervisors' already "full plate," supervisors that provide ongoing feedback and coaching against established goals are actually making their job easier and employees will always know what is expected of them. At the time of the mid-term and the annual review, it will merely require a formalization of the existing relationship between a supervisor and the employee.



The advantages of regular feedback and coaching are, among others,-

- a) It will make the job of the supervisor easier when employees build their skills and independence.
- b) It increases productivity, the quality of work and the effectiveness of the work group.
- c) Employees' motivation and initiative is increased with effective feedback and coaching.
- d) Creativity and innovation in problem solving increases with effective feedback and coaching.
- e) It can prevent problems from occurring.

3

It would, however, appear that managers in the OPSC do not ascribe to the practice of ongoing feedback and coaching, as only 12.9% of respondents indicated that formal mentoring and coaching programmes take place in their components. In addition, only 25.9% of the respondents indicated that adequate informal on-the-job training takes place in their components.

The total development effort will be incomplete if supervisors fail to establish proper communication with their employees. In this regard, studies in various companies in the United States have shown that even though most companies have made a financial commitment towards employee-development activities, they often fail to establish basic communication-linking processes between the employee and supervisor that can add support and value to their total development effort<sup>4</sup>. This appears not to be the case in the OPSC, and it was positive to note that 60% of respondents indicated that communication takes place between them and their supervisors.

## 5.2 Dealing with performance that does not meet expectations

In regard to the management of poor performance following the outcome of performance ratings of “*Not fully effective*” or “*Unacceptable*”, the outcome of the performance ratings for all employees of the OPSC on all salary levels over the past three years have been assessed. **Table 2** below reflects the total number of employees with performance ratings of “*Not fully effective*” or “*Unacceptable*”, and the overall percentage that they comprise of the total number of employees within the OPSC.

**Table 2:** *The total number of employees with performance ratings of “Not fully effective” or “Unacceptable”, and the overall percentage that they comprise of the total number of employees within the OPSC*

FINANCIAL YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	TOTAL NUMBER OF NON-PERFORMERS	% OF TOTAL
2006/07	222	0	-
2007/08	220	1	0.5%
2008/09	222	3	1.4%

The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) provided guidelines based on

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from <http://www.unh.edu/hr/performance-management/ongoing-feedback-and-performance-management.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Employee Development Through Coaching, Mentoring and Counselling: A Multidimensional Approach: [http://entrepreneur.com/trade\\_journals/article.html](http://entrepreneur.com/trade_journals/article.html)

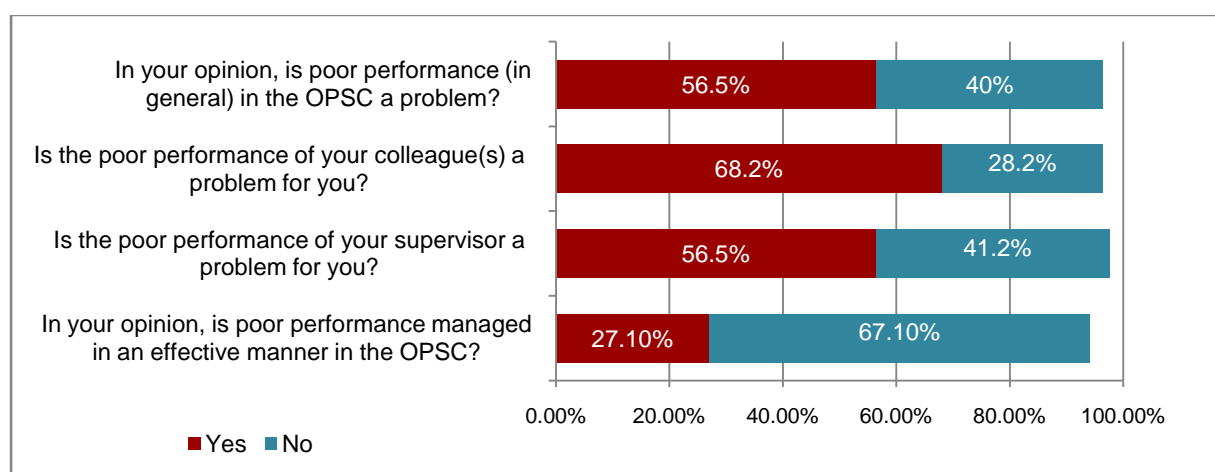
the statistical normal distribution curve principles to assist moderating committees to evaluate the outcome of performance ratings. These guidelines, reflecting the performance categories and the percentage of staff that could normally fall within each category<sup>5</sup>, are as follows:

**Table 3: Performance categories**

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY	TOTAL SCORE	% OF STAFF THAT COULD FALL IN THIS CATEGORY
Unacceptable performance	69% and lower	5%
Performance not fully effective	70% - 99%	15%
Performance fully effective (and above)	100% - 129%	60%
Performance significantly above expectations	130% - 149%	15%
Outstanding performance	150% - 169%	5%

Although the above guidelines pertain to the performance of members of the SMS, performance assessment principles remain the same, irrespective of the level of the employee assessed. Considering the guidelines provided by the DPSA, the percentage of staff within the OPSC whose performance is either not fully effective or unacceptable is well below the norms. The fact that it is below the norm might be as a result of the reluctance of supervisors to follow the formal processes of dealing with poor performance, and rather resort to counseling. On the other hand, it could point to the fact that the mentoring and coaching of employees throughout the performance cycle is effective. The latter scenario is, however, less likely given that only 45.9% of respondents indicated that their supervisors provides continuous guidance and leadership to them and only 38.8% indicated that poor performance is identified and addressed in good time.

**Figure 3** below reflects the responses of employees who participated in the survey pertaining to their opinion regarding the management of poor performance within the OPSC.



**Figure 3: Perceptions of employees regarding poor performance**

It was unsettling to note that there is a perception amongst employees that participated in the survey that the OPSC is harbouring a high percentage of poor performers (i.e. 56.5%).

<sup>5</sup> Republic of South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration. Senior Management Service PMDS Circular 1 of 2007, Annexure A, paragraph 3.

Such a perception has detrimental effects, including a negative impact on the morale of employees, which could tarnish the whole institution, fuelling negative attitudes amongst employees.

There seems to be disjuncture between the actual number of employees whose performance is either not fully effective or unacceptable (as reflected in **Table 2** above), and the response by 68.1% of respondents that the poor performance of their colleague(s) and supervisors (i.e. 56%) is/was a problem for them.

The fact that 67.1% of respondents indicated that poor performance was not managed in an effective manner in the OPSC supports the likelihood that appropriate action is not being taken against poor performing employees.

Should this be the case, there is an urgent need to train managers on the management of poor performance and to instill a culture where managers are not reluctant to take formal action against employees. It is disconcerting to note that 80% of the employees indicated that they have never received formal training/induction on the management of poor performance.

## **6. DEALING WITH POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC: EXISTING WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS**

In order to determine the existing weaknesses and strengths in the OPSC to deal with poor performance, the manner in which the cases of poor performance referred to in paragraph 5.2 above, have been dealt with was assessed. A weakness in the process being followed in the OPSC is that employees are, in accordance with the prevailing prescripts, assessed for a financial year (1 April to 31 March of the following year), but the moderation takes place around August/September of each year (refer to phases 3 and 4 in **Figure 2** above). Supervisors are accordingly only requested to develop a Training and Development Intervention Programme (TDIP) after an employee's overall performance had been found as not fully effective or unacceptable during the moderation process. Analysis of TDIP's and progress reports does not show that concrete action was undertaken between the end of the financial year up until the outcome of the moderation to enable the employees to reach the required standard of performance in the following financial year. Therefore, a period of approximately six to seven months had lapsed before corrective action was formally embarked upon. This state of affairs could create the impression that managers are not committed to address poor performance, as evidenced by the 52.9% of respondents who confirmed this perception. The same concern was raised by the Assessment Panel appointed during 2009 to review the human resource function in the OPSC who reported<sup>6</sup> that although the Office has adequate systems in place for performance management and development, feedback on employees' performance is provided only towards the end of the subsequent financial year.

---

<sup>6</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Report of the Assessment Panel on the role of Human Resource Management in the Office of the Public Service Commission. September, 2010.

The responses of employees who participated in the survey were analysed and the following strengths and weaknesses were identified through their responses (the percentage respondents is indicated in brackets):

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are held responsible if they perform below the standard (77.6%)</li> <li>• Supervisors are held responsible if subordinates perform below the standard (76.5%)</li> <li>• Performance management &amp; development is regarded as important (76.5%)</li> <li>• Employees are able to differentiate between poor performance and misconduct (69.4%)</li> <li>• Neither nepotism nor favouritism prevails in the OPSC (64.7%)</li> <li>• Employees' performance standards are well defined and clear (62.4%)</li> <li>• Adequate communication takes place between staff &amp; supervisors (60%)</li> <li>• Employees know who is responsible for what during performance management (60%)</li> <li>• Work volume &amp; responsibilities are even distributed (60%)</li> <li>• Employees give their best, as career opportunities in the OPSC are limited (57.6%)</li> <li>• There is trust/honesty between employees and their supervisors (57.6%)</li> <li>• Pressure is placed on employees to meet expected standards (55.3%)</li> <li>• Poor performance is addressed by supervisors and NOT passed on to the HR/LR units (55.3%)</li> <li>• Supervisors differentiate between unacceptable/acceptable/excellent performance (54.1%)</li> <li>• Managers are NOT ignorant when managing poor performance (50.6%)</li> <li>• A culture of excellence exists in the OPSC (50.6%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of formal mentoring/coaching programmes exists (87.1%)</li> <li>• Employees have never received formal training on the management of poor performance (80%)</li> <li>• The HR/LR units are providing inadequate guidance (76.5%)</li> <li>• Inadequate informal on-the-job training takes place (72.9%)</li> <li>• Poor performance of colleagues is problematic for employees (68.2%)</li> <li>• Poor performance is NOT managed in an effective manner (67.1%)</li> <li>• The morale of employees is low due to limited career opportunities (64.7%)</li> <li>• Employees are not familiar with the process to follow when managing poor performance (58.8%)</li> <li>• Poor performance is not done in a fair, consistent &amp; objective manner (58.8%)</li> <li>• Poor performance of supervisors is problematic for employees (56.5%)</li> <li>• Managers do NOT have the courage to deal with poor performance (56.5%)</li> <li>• Steps to follow in the management of poor performance are NOT understood (56.5%)</li> <li>• Poor performance is NOT identified and addressed in good time (56.5%)</li> <li>• Managers are inadequately experienced to deal with poor performance (55.3%)</li> <li>• Managers do NOT provide guidance and leadership (54.1%)</li> <li>• Managers are NOT committed to address poor performance (52.9%)</li> <li>• There are too many steps to follow in the management of poor performance (51.8%)</li> </ul>

Although the responses from employees who participated in the survey showed some strength, such as the 62.4% of employees who regard their performance standards as clear, it is on the other hand quite disturbing that 36.5% of the employees' performance standards are not clear to them. This is an indictment on both supervisors and employees, as the PMDS and EPMIS place co-responsibility on supervisors and employees to define performance standards in their annual Work Plans/Performance Agreements that will contribute to achieving the OPSC objectives.

In addition, the lack of clarity in regard to performance standards also ultimately impacts negatively on the appraisal of the employee's performance, as supervisors do not have the confidence to motivate their actions against clear standards.

Given the fact that the PSC is the custodian of good governance in the Public Service, the fact that only 50.6% of respondents believe that a culture of excellence exists in the OPSC do not bode well for the image of the Institution. This furthermore points to the fact that a large percentage of employees do not support the strategic culture of the OPSC.

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit." Aristotle*

## **7. HOW EMPLOYEES CAN BE CAPACITATED TO BEST HANDLE THE INCOMPETENCE OF THEIR PEERS AND/OR SUPERVISORS**

The perception of 40% of respondents that poor performance is a problem could be ascribed to various reasons, including organizational blind spots, personal factors, poor leader development and selection/succession planning practices. To this end, note should be taken of the following finding made by the Assessment Panel appointed during 2009 to review the human resource function in the OPSC<sup>7</sup>:

*"...the selection committee members utilises the interview technique as the only method of recruitment and selection of prospective employees. This approach has in some instances led to the appointment of inappropriate persons to critical posts ...".*

Employees supervised by an incompetent supervisor get frustrated and their morale adversely affected, as their supervisor tends to exude negativity. Such a situation results in the supervisees experiencing stress, low morale, lack of self-confidence and becoming confrontational. In order for the OPSC to help the affected employees, the following interventions could be considered:

### **7.1 Strengthening their Emotional Intelligence**

Coleman, 1995<sup>8</sup> and other theorists believe that emotions energise and generate internal actions. Emotional Intelligence enables individuals to deal effectively with each other, build strong emotionally aware teams, to respond quickly to changing situations and handle conflicts and challenging situation with composure.

68,1% of the respondents indicated that poor performance of their supervisor is a problem for them and 55,3% of the respondents reported that managers do not provide guidance and leadership. These employees may have negative attitudes towards work, and their perceived circumstances must affect their morale and ultimately their performance negatively. To deal with this situation, the OPSC could consider presenting a programme on emotional intelligence. A programme on emotional intelligence will enable the affected employees to cope with the negativity caused by their supervisors. It will also assist employees to use their emotions to generate actions aligned to the strategic goals of the OPSC. Furthermore, Employees Assistance Programme can be of great help to employees to cope with stress

<sup>7</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Report of the Assessment Panel on the role of Human Resource Management in the Office of the Public Service Commission. September, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Luthans, F. Organisational Behaviour. 11<sup>th</sup> Edition. McGrawHill. January 2007

caused by an ineffective supervisor.

## **7.2 Stimulating performance-driven behaviour**

According to de Waal<sup>9</sup> in practice, efficient and effective steering and control is needed so that managers and employees display performance-driven behaviour, which is defined as goal-orientated. In terms of the survey conducted, the 82.2% of the respondents are of the view that the OPSC needs to instil the culture of excellence. This implies that the OPSC should determine the factors that have a positive effect on performance-driven behaviour and regular use of performance management process.

Employees should therefore be educated about behavioural factors such as respect, trust, sense of duty and a high standard of professional ethics that are important for the successful implementation of performance management.

## **7.3 Accountability**

The effectiveness of performance management is determined by the degree in which the employees actually feel responsible for the performance results and the willingness to use the system to obtain performance information, which may help to improve results<sup>10</sup>.

The degree in which employees feel responsible is expressly different from that in which employees are made responsible. The degree in which the affected employees feel responsible for the results are connected to the relevance of performance indicators, which measure their responsibility area. The more relevant these indicators are, the stronger the stimulus to engage themselves. Supervisors and overseeing managers should therefore ensure that employees have buy-in in establishing well formulated and measurable performance indicators.

# **8. INTERVENTIONS TO MANAGE THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES WHOSE SUPERVISORS ARE UNDERPERFORMING**

## **8.1 Possible interventions to manage the performance of employees whose supervisors are underperforming**

A pertinent human resource challenge of a modern and responsive Public Service is to ensure that it is staffed, at all times and at all levels, by the most suitable persons with appropriate skills, experience and competencies<sup>11</sup>. While effective recruitment and promotion strategies can provide a partial solution to that challenge, training and staff development are two key aspects of human resource management that can guarantee the other part of the solution. The possible interventions for managing performance of subordinates whose supervisors are underperforming are explained below:

---

<sup>9</sup> De Waal. AS. Stimulating performance-driven behaviour to obtain better results. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, Vol. 53. 2004

<sup>10</sup> De Waal. AS. Stimulating performance-driven behaviour to obtain better results. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, Vol. 53. 2004

<sup>11</sup> Republic of Mauritius. Pay Research Bureau Report. 2008

*a) Control of the affected employees' performance by the Overseeing Manager*

The Overseeing Manager (one or two levels higher than the supervisor) needs to understand that performance management ensures that the organization and the structure within it are working together in an optimum manner to achieve desired results. Employee recognition is an indispensable ingredient to attain the strategic direction and contribute to improved performance. It is a cascading effect in which employee objectives are derived from the component's needs and the organisation's vision.

The EPMIS and PMDS processes offer an opportunity for employees and supervisors to put forward key activities, indicators and target dates (standards), as well as personal development plans to reach specific objectives while maintaining the performance expectations of the OPSC. Each Performance Agreement or Workplan must be aligned with the strategic direction of the organisation and contribute towards the employee's professional and personal objectives and aspirations.

In terms of the findings of the survey, 67.1% of the respondents indicated that poor performance was not managed in an effective manner in the OPSC. This clearly indicates that performance management is not receiving the required attention of supervisors and employees. In order to promote the effective implementation of the performance management system, the Sub-Directorate: HRD should encourage Overseeing Managers to monitor whether regular feedback and coaching sessions are taking place between supervisors and the supervisees in their components.

*b) Mentoring and coaching*

Given the fact that 12.9% of the respondents indicated that formal mentoring and coaching take place in their components, whilst only 25.9% indicated that adequate informal on-the-job training takes place, it is evident that mentorship and coaching, as an intervention, is required at all levels. This will equip supervisors with knowledge and skills necessary for guiding, leading and counselling of their supervisees on work and career related issues.

The OPSC has an approved Mentorship Policy<sup>12</sup>. However, certain challenges are being experienced, hampering the effective implementation of the Policy. As a result, the OPSC does not have a pool of trained and competent mentors who can be assigned to employees experiencing performance related problems and challenges. In order to deal with the problem of poor performance, the training of employees identified or who volunteered to be mentors by an accredited service provider is important. The trained and competent mentors should be matched to employees to assist with issues related to day-to-day activities and career development.

---

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Public Service Commission. Mentorship Policy. 21 May 2010



### c) *Communicate performance feedback frequently*

According to Cascio and Aguinis<sup>13</sup> one of the central purposes of a performance management system is to serve as a developmental tool. To improve, there must be some feedback regarding the present performance. Thus, if there is no formal performance feedback system in place, employees' performance will not improve. Ideally, continuous feedback process should exist between a supervisor and subordinate so that both may be guided.

Weaknesses identified during the survey indicated that 56.5% of the respondents were of the opinion that poor performance is not identified and addressed in time and 55.3% of the respondents were of the view that supervisors do not provide guidance and leadership. In addition, 90.6% of respondents were of the opinion that enhanced communication between supervisors and supervisees on poor performance matters could assist in improving the effective management of poor performance. Overseeing Managers should therefore ensure that adequate and regular communication takes place with subordinates of poor performing supervisors regarding their (the subordinates') performance. The role of the Overseeing Manager in such instances is therefore crucial.

## 8.2 Interventions identified during the survey

Supplementary to the interventions highlighted above, during the survey respondents' opinions were obtained on possible interventions that could assist in improving the effective management of poor performance management in the OPSC. The subsequent results (i.e. suggested interventions), in order of preference, are reflected in **Table 4** below:

**Table 4:** *Interventions identified during the survey*

INTERVENTION REQUIRED	% SUPPORT
Training (to all staff) on the management of poor performance	92.9%
Identifying & addressing poor performance pro-actively	92.9%
Enhancing communication between staff & supervisors on poor performance matters	90.6%
Bringing existing applicable prescripts to the attention of all employees	89.4%
Ensuring that misconduct is not confused with poor performance	88.2%
Following existing structures & steps during the management of poor performance	88.2%
Ascribing to a culture of excellence within the OPSC	88.2%
Reflecting changes in the work-environment in workplans	88.2%
Enhancing communication between supervisors & the HR unit on poor performance matters	88.2%
Tracking and monitoring the attainment of outputs in a rigorous& continuous manner	88.2%
Regular information sessions by the HR unit on the management of poor performance	87.1%
Emphasising the importance of the implementation of Performance Improvement Plans	87.1%
Staff committing them to share knowledge & skills to assist poor performers	87.1%
Providing support to supervisors (by the HR unit)	85.9%
Providing process flow charts on the steps during the management of poor performance	82.4%
Staff willing to expand their knowledge in order to address supervisors' inadequacies	80%
Assigning designated mentors to poor performers	78.8%
Utilising the Employee Wellness/Assistance Programme, if appropriate	78.8%
Labour unions should form an integral part of the process of managing poor performance	69.4%

<sup>13</sup> Cascio.WF and Aguinis H. Applied Psychology in Human Resource Management, 2005. Pearson Prentice Hall.



INTERVENTION REQUIRED	% SUPPORT
Staff willing to take additional responsibilities upon them	62.4%

It is interesting that the least supported intervention was the willingness of staff to take additional responsibilities upon them (62.4%). This response could be linked to the 64.7% of respondents who indicated that the morale of their colleagues is low due to limited career opportunities. In other words, employees who have limited career advancement prospects would be more reluctant to assume additional responsibilities.

Given the survey findings on the effectiveness (including the strengths and weaknesses) of the management of poor performance in the OPSC, as well as possible interventions in this regard, specific recommendations are made as discussed below.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT OF POOR PERFORMANCE IN THE OPSC

Emanating from an analysis of the survey results and findings made, as well as a limited literature study conducted into the management of poor performance, the Task Team cannot but echo the recommendations made in Chapter 6 of the Report on the management of poor performance in the Public Service<sup>14</sup>. However, for purposes of this assessment it was deemed appropriate to re-align and summarise these recommendations as follows with due regard to the uniqueness of the OPSC, its existing internal performance management processes, as well as the financial constraints experienced by the organization:

### 9.1 Managers/supervisors should be held responsible for managing poor performance

As indicated in paragraph 6 above, strengths identified by the majority of respondents during the survey included the following:

- Supervisors are held responsible if subordinates perform below the standard.
- Adequate communication takes place between staff & supervisors.
- There is trust/honesty between employees and their supervisors.
- Poor performance is addressed by supervisors and NOT passed on to the HR/LR units.
- Supervisors differentiate between unacceptable/acceptable/excellent performance.
- Managers are NOT ignorant when managing poor performance.

In view of the above findings, it is recommended that care be taken to ensure that managers/supervisors are –

- held accountable for the management of poor performance of their subordinates; and
- assessed during the course of their performance reviews in this regard (i.e. the

<sup>14</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Report on the management of poor performance in the Public Service. August, 2007.

mandatory Core Competency: People Management and Empowerment)

## 9.2 Mapping poor performance management

The Directorate: Human Resource Management and Development (D:HRMD), in collaboration with the Human Resources Best Practice (HRBP) components, should develop (map) a customised internal process for managing poor performance in the OPSC. This process should be undertaken within the legislative and regulatory parameters alluded to in paragraph 4 above, taking into account the unique circumstances prevailing in the OPSC.

Once the process has been developed, all staff should be informed/sensitized by the D:HRMD/ HRBP components of the procedure and steps to be followed and who to contact in order to seek advice.

## 9.3 Capacitating managers/supervisors to manage poor performance

In addition to strengths identified during the survey, weaknesses raised by respondents (see paragraph 6 above) included the following:

- A lack of formal mentoring/coaching programmes exists.
- Employees do not receive formal training on the management of poor performance.
- Inadequate informal on-the-job training takes place.
- Employees are not familiar with the process to follow when managing poor performance.
- Steps to follow in the management of poor performance are not understood.
- There are too many steps to follow in the management of poor performance.

Given the above, it is recommended that –

- internal workshops be arranged and presented by the D:HRMD to all staff with a view to sensitise them on all aspects relating to the management of poor performance;
- the *Toolkit for the Management of Poor Performance in the Public Service*<sup>15</sup> be made available to all managers and supervisors in the OPSC;
- staff be sensitized by the D:HRMD regarding the processes contained in the Mentorship Policy of the OPSC;
- the names and contact details of HR and LR specialists within the OPSC who are able to provide support and advice be made available;
- the Chief Directorate: Professional Ethics should provide training to employees on the Code of Conduct for the Public Service, with emphasis on behavioural factors such as respect, trust; sense of duty and a high standard of professional ethics; and
- the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy or other departments be consulted with a view to develop and present a basic management skill course focusing on general and people management skills.

---

<sup>15</sup> Republic of South Africa. Public Service Commission. Toolkit for the management of poor performance in the Public Service. December, 2007.

#### 9.4 Revising staffing practices

In view of the survey results reflecting negative opinions on the management abilities and skills of managers and supervisors in the OPSC, it is recommended that the current Recruitment and Selection Policy and practices be reviewed by the D:HRMD/HRBP components in order to provide for compulsory writing-, cognitive- and problem solving skills assessments prior to the filling of all posts.

This will not only ensure a right match of skills and competencies against job requirements, but will also reduce the risk of poor performance due to inadequate skills and experience.

#### 9.5 Making available of the results of the survey

In addition to the above recommendations, it would also be beneficial to release the findings of the survey contained in this report. An awareness of the perceptions of employees, as well as of the internal strengths and weaknesses within the OPSC with regard to the management of poor performance will definitely be to the benefit of the Institution.

Therefore, it is recommended that the outcome of the survey into the management of poor performance in the OPSC, and subsequent findings and recommendations made, be placed/ published internally on the Intranet of the OPSC. Consideration should also be given to complement such placement/publication with regular supplementary articles in the official newsletter of the Office, namely the *Izwi lase* (the Directorate: Communication and Information Systems should liaise with the D:HRMD and HRBP components in this regard).

### 10. CONCLUSION

Whilst it is acknowledged that instances occur within the OPSC (and in any other institution for that matter) whereby the poor performance of managers impact negative on their subordinates, in the case of the OPSC this is the exception rather than the rule. Statistics in support of the afore-mentioned are reflected **Table 2** (see paragraph 5.2 above), indicating that as little as 0.5% and 1.4% of employees of the OPSC received performance assessment ratings of “*Not fully effective*” or “*Unacceptable*” in the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 financial years, respectively.

Compared against guidelines provided by the DPSA in 2007 stipulating that the percentage of staff that could fall in the “*Not fully effective*” and “*Unacceptable*” performance categories could be 5% and 15% respectively, the picture in the OPSC does not seem to be too dark.

However, the fact remains that more than half of the employees who participated in the survey (i.e. 56.5%) were of the opinion that poor performance within the OPSC is a problem. In addition, 67.1% of respondents were of the opinion that poor performance is not managed effectively in the OPSC.

It is trusted that the above recommendations will not only assist in changing these opinions and perceptions, but also contribute towards efforts to make the OPSC an *employer of*

*choice*. It nevertheless remains the responsibility of all employees of the OPSC to contribute towards the instilment of a culture of excellence in the Office by, amongst others, empowering themselves with a view to render performance of a high standard.

# ANNEXURE A: MEASURING INSTRUMENT, REFLECTING THE SURVEY RESULTS

		Yes	No	No resp.
1.	In your opinion, is poor performance (in general) in the OPSC a problem?	56.5%	40%	3.5%
2.	Is the poor performance of your colleague(s) a problem for you?	68.2%	28.2%	3.5%
3.	Is the poor performance of your supervisor a problem for you?	56.5%	41.2%	2.4%
4.	Have you ever been personally involved in the management of poor performance?	31.8%	68.2%	-
5.	Have you ever received formal training/induction on the management of poor performance?	20%	80%	-
6.	In your opinion, is poor performance managed in an effective manner in the OPSC?	27.1%	67.1%	5.9%
7.	Indicate the correctness of the following statements in relation to the management of poor performance:			
7.1	I have adequate knowledge of the following prescripts/policies:			
		True	False	No resp.
	Public Service Act, 1994, as amended	67.1%	23.5%	9.4%
	Public Service Regulations	72.9%	23.5%	3.5%
	Toolkit for the management of poor performance in the Public Service	40%	55.3%	4.7%
	Performance Management & Development System (PMDS)	57.6%	38.8%	3.5%
	OPSC Employee Performance Management Improvement System (EPMIS) Policy	57.6%	38.8%	3.5%
	Incapacity Code & Procedures for the Public Service (Resolution 10 of 1999)	40%	56.5%	3.5%
	Guide on disciplinary & incapacity matters (DPSA)	42.4%	50.6%	7.1%
	Disciplinary Code & Procedure for members of the Senior Management Service (SMS)	40%	55.3%	4.7%
	Disciplinary Code & Procedure for the Public Service (Resolution 1 of 2003)	52.9%	40%	7.1%
7.2	I am familiar with the process to follow when managing poor performance	30.6%	58.8%	10.6%
	Human Resources & Labour Relations units are providing adequate guidance	21.2%	76.5%	2.4%
	Adequate communication takes place between me & my supervisor	60%	38.8%	1.2%
	Adequate informal on-the-job training takes place to address development needs	25.9%	72.9%	1.2%
	Formal mentoring/coaching programmes are in place in my component	12.9%	87.1%	-
7.3	Changes in objectives, strategies & workplans impact negatively on my performance	40%	56.5%	3.5%
	The high number of vacant posts impacts negatively on my performance	41.2%	55.3%	3.5%
	Regular changes in leadership impact negatively on my performance	42.4%	56.5%	1.2%
	In terms of performance management, I don't know who is responsible for what	38.8%	60%	1.2%
	My work-volume & responsibilities are uneven distributed as a result of favouritism	30.6%	68.2%	1.2%
	My work-volume & responsibilities are uneven distributed as a result of vacancies	30.6%	67.1%	2.4%
	My work-volume & responsibilities are uneven distributed as a result of poor management	36.5%	60%	3.5%
	My manager is committed to address poor performance	45.9%	52.9%	1.2%
	My manager does have the courage to deal with poor performance	43.5%	56.5%	-
	My manager provides continuous guidance and leadership to me	45.9%	54.1%	-
	My manager is <b>not</b> ignorant when it comes to managing poor performance	50.6%	49.4%	-
	My manager is adequately experienced to effectively deal with poor performance	43.5%	55.3%	1.2%
7.4	There is trust/honesty between me and my supervisor	57.6%	36.5%	5.9%
	Officials in the OPSC in general lack a culture of excellence	41.2%	50.6%	8.2%
	No pressure is placed on me by my supervisor to meet expected standards	42.4%	55.3%	2.4%
	I am not sure how to differentiate between poor performance and misconduct	29.4%	69.4%	1.2%
	I know I will get away with poor performance (nothing will be done)	22.4%	75.3%	2.4%
	I am sure of my job (I have job security)	63.5%	32.9%	3.5%
	I will <b>not</b> be held responsible if I perform below the expected standard	21.2%	77.6%	1.2%
	My supervisor will <b>not</b> be held responsible if I perform below the expected standard	22.4%	76.5%	1.2%
	My supervisor will <b>not</b> be held responsible if he/she performs below standard	23.5%	74.1%	2.4%
	Nepotism & favouritism prevail in my component	30.6%	64.7%	4.7%
	I do not have to give my best, as the career opportunities in the OPSC are limited	37.6%	57.6%	4.7%
	The morale of my colleagues is low due to limited career opportunities	64.7%	28.2%	7.1%
7.5	Poor performance is identified & addressed in good time in my component	38.8%	56.5%	4.7%
	The process of managing poor performance is too time consuming/takes too long	41.2%	50.6%	8.2%
	There are too many steps to follow in the management of poor performance	51.8%	37.6%	10.6%
	I have limited understanding of the steps to follow in managing poor performance	56.5%	42.4%	1.2%
	My performance standards are well defined and clear to me	62.4%	36.5%	1.2%
	Performance management is not done in a fair, consistent & objective manner	58.8%	37.6%	3.5%
	Performance management & development is a waste of time	21.2%	76.5%	2.4%
	Too many role players are involved in the management of poor performance	38.8%	47.1%	14.1%
	My supervisor differentiates between unacceptable/acceptable/excellent performance	54.1%	42.4%	3.5%
	Poor performance is not addressed by my supervisors, but passed on to HR/LR	31.8%	55.3%	12.9%

8. In your opinion, which of the following could assist in improving the effective management of poor performance management in the OPSC?

	Yes	No	No resp.
Training (to all staff) on the management of poor performance	92.9%	4.7%	2.4%
Regular information sessions by the HR unit on the management of poor performance	87.1%	9.4%	3.5%
Assigning designated mentors to poor performers	78.8%	17.6%	3.5%
Emphasising the importance of the implementation of Performance Improvement Plans	87.1%	8.2%	4.7%
Making available process flow charts on the steps during the management of poor performance	82.4%	14.1%	3.5%
Ensuring that misconduct is not confused with poor performance	88.2%	7.1%	4.7%
Bringing existing applicable prescripts to the attention of all employees	89.4%	7.1%	3.5%
Following existing structures & steps during the management of poor performance	88.2%	7.1%	4.7%
Ascribing to a culture of excellence within the OPSC	88.2%	5.9%	5.9%
Identifying & addressing poor performance pro-actively	92.9%	3.5%	3.5%
Reflecting changes in the work-environment in workplans	88.2%	7.1%	4.7%
Utilising the Employee Wellness/Assistance Programme, if appropriate	78.8%	16.5%	4.7%
Providing support to supervisors (by the HR unit)	85.9%	10.6%	3.5%
Enhancing communication between staff & supervisors on poor performance matters	90.6%	5.9%	3.5%
Enhancing communication between supervisors & the HR unit on poor performance matters	88.2%	7.1%	4.7%
Tracking and monitoring the attainment of outputs in a rigorous& continuous manner	88.2%	8.2%	3.5%
Staff willing to expand their knowledge in order to address supervisors' inadequacies	80%	14.1%	5.9%
Staff willing to take additional responsibilities (of their poor performing supervisors) upon them	62.4%	31.8%	5.9%
Staff committing them to share knowledge & skills to assist poor performers	87.1%	7.1%	5.9%
Labour unions should form an integral part of the process of managing poor performance	69.4%	25.9%	4.7%

9. Any other suggestion(s) that you might have to improve the management of poor performance in the OPSC:

Adequate opportunities be developed for in-service training.  
Clear segregation of responsibilities.  
Employees to be trained on poor performance/misconduct.  
Encourage self-development.  
HRD should be familiarised with the principles of poor performance management.  
Improve salaries for secretaries.  
Management of performance to be a continuous process.  
Management to be supportive of-/recognising junior staff.  
Managers to be more sensitive towards cultural diversity & focus on task at hand.  
Managers to manage the work in a professional manner by enhancing their knowledge.  
Nepotism, favouritism & victimisation should be rooted out.  
Office to be open to change - stop the stereotyping.  
Officials to indicate date & time tasks given & completed - indicate workload & time spend.  
Poor performance to be dealt with decisively - don't sideline poor performers.  
Re-allocation of tasks & resources / deploying staff to Regional Offices to improve performance.  
Restructuring the Office. Regular feedback on performance.  
Revising processes such as the handling of submissions.  
Rotate Moderating Committees to eliminate assessments based on personality/favouritism.  
Sensitise managers on good management styles.  
Setting clear performance standards. Management of performance to be a continuous process.  
Staff to be allowed the opportunity to share their thoughts.  
Stop appointing incompetent managers just to comply with EE standards.  
Supervisors to oversee subordinates.  
Train supervisors & managers to id & understand poor performance.  
Utilize performance appraisals to raise the morale of employees.  
Work study of entire Office - ease high work load on Regional Offices.