

WHICH HUNTING IS IT? IS IT WITCH HUNTING? PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL IN SELECTED EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF ZIMBABWE IN 2013

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ABSTRACT

Performance management systems (PMS) are fought with challenges especially in the civil service of Zimbabwe. Educational institutions ranging from primary schools, secondary schools colleges right up to universities were sampled for this study. The main thrust of the paper is on the role and function of performance appraisals methods used to appraise employees and barriers (existing and potential) to performance management. I found that the most common constraints were poor timing, organisational structure and lack of feedback. I therefore recommend that oganograms, mission-statements, vision, values be made more visible. This paper also advocates for the cultivation and sustenance of organisational culture which supports effective performance, appropriate training & development and involvement of external consultants.

Key Words: *Performance, appraise, appraiser, appraisal, performance management system, implementation, resistance*

Introduction

Agere and Noella (1988) see consumers of the public service as the largest critical mass that demands effective, efficient and explicit service delivery. Their observation greatly motivated this study. Service delivery in the civil service was found to be far below expectations. Throughout the country, government employees were described as ineffective inefficient and even lazy. Worse still they were condemned in the media for their proclivity towards corruption. The public lamented that one could not get things done before greasing the palms of civil servants. For instance extra lessons had become a common phenomenon within the education sector. Teachers and lecturers deliberately did just enough to avoid being fired and then, after work they used their offices, garages and gazebos for extra lessons/ lectures. This is how they made money. Civil servants could be characterised by the way they dragged their feet at work and chatted freely in small groups while queues of people (waiting to be served) grew longer and longer. This study paid attention to the education sector which is part of the civil service. To try and mitigate the typically ugly scenario of civil service delivery, the performance appraisals

system was introduced in 1995. The government of Zimbabwe had to adopt a new civil service policy whose objective was to achieve the maximum quality of service with minimum resources. Such a decision was appropriate considering the fact that during the (1980- 1990) Zimbabwe's economy had declined drastically.

Statement of the Problem

Performance measurement systems (PMS) are not effective in educational institutions especially those run by the state.

Objectives of the Study

1. To enhance the understanding of PMS and justify its use in organisations.
2. To examine the historical development of performance appraisals system in the civil service.
3. To determine the levels of training and/or preparedness for PMS by supervisors and their subordinates.
4. To assess the impact of performance measurement system on the quality of education.
5. To establish the major problems encountered by both supervisors and appraisers during performance appraisal interactions.
6. To recommend possible solutions that would improve supervision and subsequently get better standards of service.

Significance of the Study

Findings of this study were meant to provide an enabling environment for the implementation of PMS. This would ultimately enhance levels of acceptance by all members of institutions. Rapport between appraiser and appraisee should result in effective supervisory practices especially in government/ state institutions.

Review of Related Literature

The history and purpose of performance appraisal

Performance appraisal has been part and parcel of organisation for centuries. In the 1970s the traits method was used to rate employees concerning this approach Drucker (2002:390) says, "An employer has no business with an employee's personality. Employment is a specific contract calling for specific performance and nothing else. Any attempts of an employer to go beyond this is usurpation ... abuse of power" This aversive stance towards the traits method is buttressed by Stewart and Stewart (1977:12) who say there was a clear surge of interest..... in the mid sixties often coinciding with the introduction of management by objective (MBO) systems.

In the United States of America the employees tried all they could, to avoid friction with Trade Unions. Morgan (1970) emphasised that the gist of the appraisal is to treat employees as individuals in a close working relationship which is based on mutual respect. This paper's data collection instruments thus embraced the way (s) in which top management and supervisors maintained high levels of employee satisfaction. In the Ministry of Education, there were mechanisms such as ED 57 and ED 94 that were used to appraise performance of staff. These

were replaced by the performance appraisals system of 1997. Such change was a recognition of the need to improve PMS. Planned change, which Margulies and Raia (1980) describe as an intentional and conscious endeavour to bring about something new in response to prevailing circumstances of the organisation, needs effective management. This paper took a keen interest in the implementation (i.e. the management) of new performance appraisals systems.

Implementation of Performance Management

Leopold (2002) outlines steps in implementation of performance management as follows:

A performance agreement which sets out key result areas derived from job descriptions; Defining objectives in specific measurable achievable realistic terms; Continuous monitoring and assessment in the ensuing years. He adds that a central component of PMS is the process of performance appraisals which is made up of systematic and scheduled performance reviews and performance appraisal- interviews. It is against this background that this paper investigated the nature of performance appraisals systems in the State Educational Institutions. The public service commission,(PSC) circular number 2 of 1996 states that “ The Public Service Commission will henceforth monitor and supervise the performance efficiency and effectiveness of the civil servants , involving the auditing of the whole performance appraisal system”. This further justifies this paper’s concern with grassroots experiences/ activities.

Resistance to change

Newsroom and Davis (1993) cite reasons for employee resistance to change, which include threats on personal security, status and social interaction. They emphasise the need for commitment to support change so that it is successfully implemented. In line with Newsroom and Davis, Northcraft and Neale (1990) see the resistance to planned change as emanating from habit, resource limitations, threats to power & influence, fear of the unknown and defensive perception”. The questions and interviews addressed the barriers to implementation of new PMS.

Purpose of Performance appraisals

According to Kreitner (1989:359) performance appraisal is “... the process of evaluating individual job performance as a basis for making objective personal decisions” Morgan (1970) and Bowie (1972) found a close link between performance appraisal systems and Performance management systems called management by objectives(MBO). However Kreitner (1989) argues that Mb is a poor method especially considering that goals of MBO are individualised. This paper points out that even if goods are individualised they should still be in tandem with the organisational and Ministerial objectives.

Rue and Byars (1982:257) argue that performance appraisals systems are meant to prepare employees for the future opportunities that may arise in the organisation; improve employee performance in the present job and provide a record of employee performance that can be used as a basis for future management decisions. Mc Lagan (1993) echoes the same observation. However Deming (1986) in Spangerberg (1994) argues that performance appraisal hinders effective total quality management (TQM). Deming says performance appraisals leave the rates bitter and feeling inferior; they are detrimental to team work because they foster rivalry and fear; the measures used to evaluate performance discourage quality because they are not meaningful. The data collected established what pertained to the civil servants at different levels of learning.

Rummler and Brunche (1990) add weight to Deming's position by pointing out that performance appraisal assumes that the person being evaluated is to a large extent responsible for the results. They emphasise the need to fix the system not the employees. They argue that we spend too much time fixing people who are not broken and not enough time fixing organisational systems that are broken. To further show the flaw of PMS, Scholtes (1990) refers to the oversimplification of the performance appraisal system and the fact that it fosters mediocrity as employees are not prepared to try anything new which may not work and thereby threaten their ratings. Data collection deliberately included how PMS were perceived by the participants.

Attitudes towards performance management systems

Plunket (1975) posits that attitudes will certainly influence the performance(s) output and the reputation of the unit or organisation as a whole. Fay (1990) in Spangenberg (1994) argues that organisations cannot succeed unless and until performance appraisal is integrated into the culture of the organisation. Even the Zimbabwe teachers association (ZIMTA) denounced haphazard change, citing the fact that supervisors and supervisees had not been trained in the performance appraisals system (ZIMTA 19TH Annual Conference 2000). In 2001, ZIMTA pointed out that the education service may not always reflect effectiveness instantly as happens in individual lines. This paper takes particular interest in this comparison and endeavours to establish how the educators and educational managers perceive the validity of the Public Service Commission's performance appraisal system to educational institutions.

Cronje (2001) says performance serves to achieve organisational goals and develop employees. He notes that lack of cooperation resulted from the fact that most employees had negative views of performance management – seeing it as witch hunting. I kept wondering how a system could be expected to be effective when its purpose was not understood. Moyo (1970) and Moyo (1992) both agree that problems of implementing PMS come about if the supervisors are not trained to implement a model that has been generated elsewhere.

Cooperation is an essential determinant in the effectiveness of performance management systems. Howe (1990:80) agrees with Spangenberg (1994) by saying an imposed exercise may well be regarded as worthless bureaucracy if it does not contribute to greater understanding between employees and their supervisors". Imposition of the PMS and the need for training were the major issues. In support of this observation, Wagen (1994) says "once PMS are operational, they require on- going maintenance and monitoring of tasks. Even Fletcher and Williams (1992) advocate for the impetus on training and proper use of PMS. This tallies with Cary (1975:13) who sees that, "There should be full cooperation of the employees who are to be rated; of the supervisors to operate the scheme and of the management which is to use the results".

Drawbacks to performance management systems

Musaazi (1975) and Grant Smith (1977) say there is bias that tarnishes PMS, making supervisors evaluate personal traits instead of current performance. The data collected had to be related to craft competence of supervisors and perceptions of employees. Sergovanni and Starrat (1979) point out that leadership styles determine the effectiveness of Performance Appraisals. Questionnaires and interviews used were meant to either confirm or dismiss the link between the different leadership styles and the success or failure of PMS. For instance, Bruce (1993) says authoritarian leadership is characterized by one-way communication (top- down) and very little,

if any, room for feedback and builds distrust between management and staff. I found it imperative to consider leadership styles in the sample.

Research Methodology

This study used the descriptive survey in agreement with Chikoko and Mhloyi (1995) who say this is the best design for the collection of original data for purposes of describing a population large enough to be observed directly. The questionnaires, interviews and observation were utilised to collect data. The sample used in this study consisted of:

Level of education	Number of organisations	Educational managers	Employees	Total of participants
Primary schools	6	6	24	30
Secondary schools	6	6	24	30
High schools	6	6	16	22
College	3	6	12	18
University	3	All faculties	30	45
		15		
Totals		39	106	145

There were questionnaires for top management (planners and policy makers); supervisors (school heads, principals) and some for classroom practitioners and lecturers in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture and Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. There was an effort to include virtually all levels of education due to the fact that management patterns vary depending on the organisational structures that prevail per level. For interviews, appointments were made with participants well in advance.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Findings of the study were presented in simple descriptive language, in tabular form, bar graphs and pie charts.

Frequency of Performance Appraisal Interactions

Period	Quarterly	Per Term/ Semester	Once A Year	Not At All	Total
Number	25	48	65	7	145
Percentage	17	33	45	5	100%

It was established that in schools, the appraisals were scheduled to be done every term but examinations often interfered with schedules. In double- session,(hot-seating) schools, time was a very scarce resource. More often than not, appraisals were done only when Head Office(s) set a due date and somehow demanded feedback from all institutions.

Extent to which appraiser and appraisee agreed during performance interviews

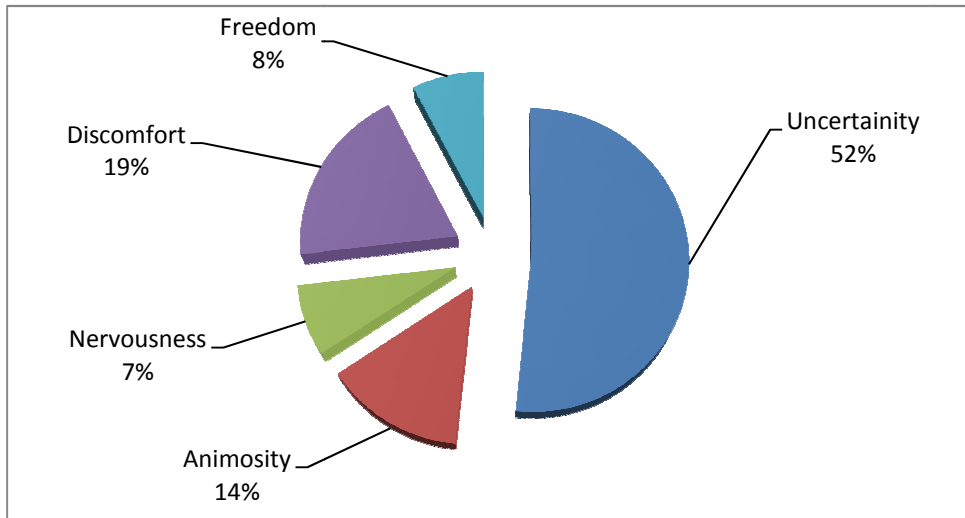
In the majority of cases (78%) subordinates agreed with the ratings given to them by their appraisers. Even those who did not agree with their supervisors complained only after the appraisal interviews as they sought sympathy from their peers. This was attributed to fear of victimisation by their supervisors. Details were presented in the following table:

Extent of agreeing	Frequency	Percentage
Partially agreed	28	19
Often agreed	35	24
Always agreed	66	46
Rarely agreed	16	11
Totals	145	100%

Emotions associated with performance appraisal interviews

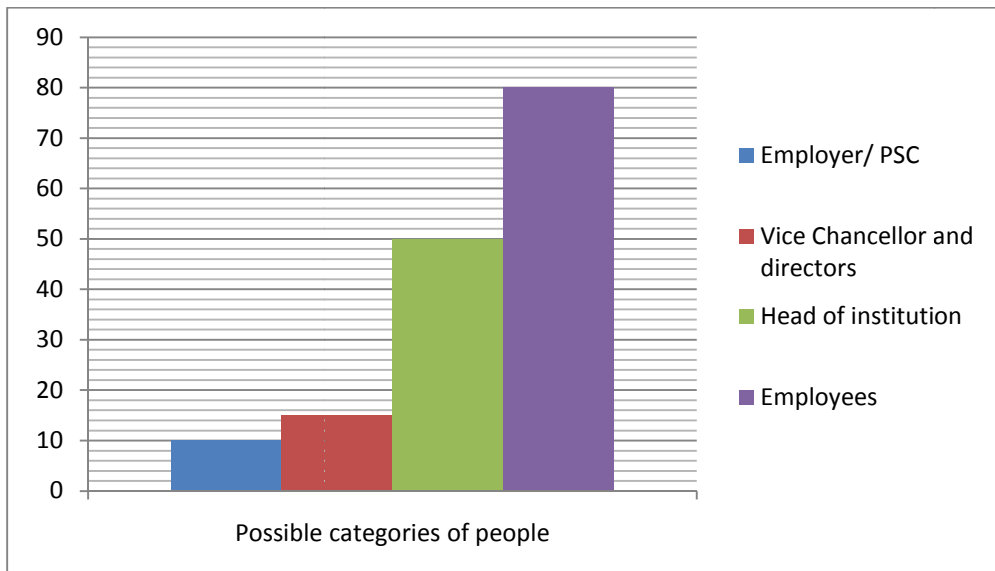
Findings revealed that subordinates did not enjoy the experience of being interviewed by their supervisors. For those who had complied with organisational targets, there was no problem. However some employees complained about subjectivity which confirmed what Musaaazi (1975) and Grant (1977) say in the literature reviewed earlier on.

The pie chart shows the dominant feelings associated with performance interviews



The experienced employees were not scared but the younger, inexperienced ones expressed their nervousness and discomfort. Generally, performance appraisal was unwelcome. Conflicts and tension disturbed organizational climate during appraisal interviews.

Who should set key result areas (KRAs)?



Participants were in favour of each employee setting his/ her own key result areas, in consultation with their immediate supervisors. The most important guiding aspect was to ensure that the KRAs tallied with the organizations strategic goals. Schools, colleges and universities were therefore perceived to be the equivalents of strategic business units (SBUs) which were largely responsible for implementation of strategy. Employees openly showed that they hated supervisors who imposed KRAs on them.

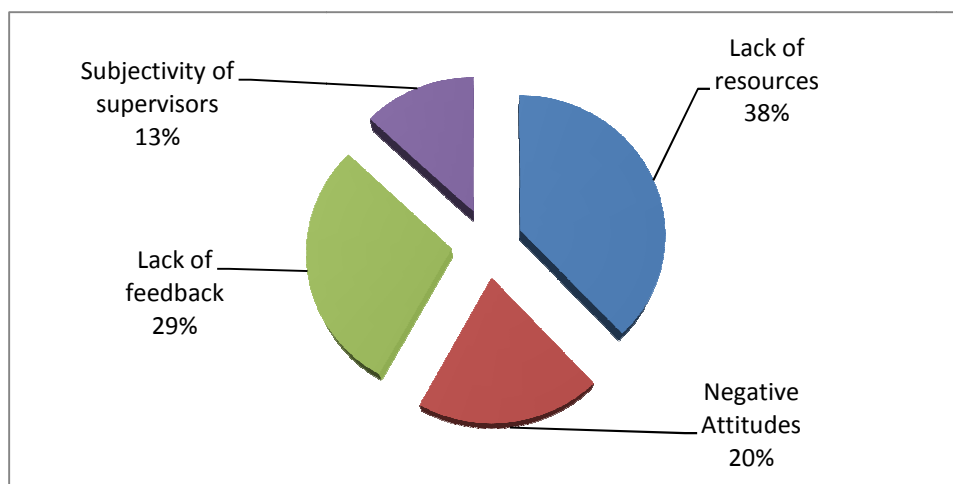
Objectives of the performance management system

Responses of participants were presented in the table that follows

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
To improve performance of employees	70	48
To regulates salaries	12	9
To victimize employees	31	21.4
Not sure	32	22
Totals	145	100%

Unfortunately, what was practised, did not agree with the ideal/ expectations. The performance appraisal systems were not effective, despite the fact that 48 % of the participants knew the role and functions of PMS. Findings pointed against Hudson's (2004) survey which concluded that 70-80% of employees disagreed that performance reviews helped them to enhance their individual performance.

Challenges/ Barriers to Performance Appraisal System



Supervisors attributed the failure of PMS to lack of resources, subordinates' negative attitudes and the fact that there was no feedback. Employees complained about their supervisors' subjectivity and the fact that the outcome of appraisals had no impact on their promotion, grading and/ or salary increase(s).

Performance of supervisors

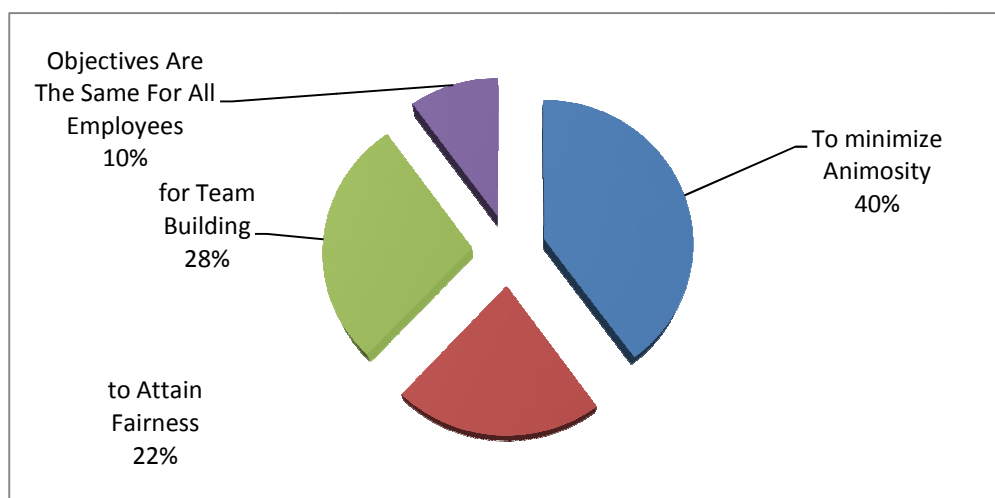
The interviews with supervisors/educational managers revealed that most of them did not have anybody from the top management appraising their performance. They spoke of auditors who

periodically came to check the Accounts/ Finance Departments only. Among universities, only 12% of the participants had experienced internal quality audits that embraced compliance with manual procedures in all the units. Leaving supervisors unsupervised was found to be a source of poor performance, starting from the “top”.

Those who conducted performance appraisal interviews every school term/ every semester had the advantage of identifying weaknesses and taking corrective action timeously. Government day-schools had less opportunity for effective implementation of PMS than their boarding counterparts. However, even the institutions that had all the required resources, did not attach adequate significance to PMS.

Why PMS were characterized by average rates?

Responses from educational managers confirmed McGregor (1957) s’ observation which states that managers are reluctant to give critical feedback to subordinates. They admitted that it was not easy to make judgements about personality traits, without straining relationships. The table that follows shows the reasons for average rating/scores:-



Even the low performers would not protest if average scores were allocated to all employees. However, if the facts are exposed and used as key determinants of rates, then lower scores would be for low-performers and non performers. Most raters did not want to go through the exercise of explaining why they gave poor scores and so they preferred to avoid conflict. These findings actually confirmed what Sibanda (2000)’s observation that interpersonal conflict(s) and tension increase during performance appraisal interviews. Resorting to a “safe zone” was not a solution since it did not meaningfully contribute to employee-development, nor did it help to achieve organisational objectives.

Who Should Evaluate Employee Performance?

55% of the participants argued that the immediate supervisors(s) should asses their subordinates since they held responsible for their subordinates’ performance. However some bosses were found to be unqualified to evaluate the unique contributions of their subordinates. With

technological developments, which distance the immediate superior from employees, it meant that the immediate boss was not a reliable evaluator of performance. 30% of the participants thought peers were reliable sources of appraisal data. Unfortunately biases of friendships may subvert the intentions of performance appraisal. In keeping with the concept of self management and empowerment, 10% of participants said employees should assess and evaluate their own performance. This low percentage enhanced the position of Bretz and Read (1992), in Robbins who says self-evaluation often results in disagreements with superiors' ratings. This was attributed to the overinflated assessment and self-serving bias. Only 5% thought immediate subordinates should be tasked with performance appraisal of their bosses. Despite the fact that this can be very accurate and consistent with the organizations' effort to be open and empower employees, the approach is characterized by fear of reprisal from bosses who are given low ratings

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper found that organisational results were dependent on a range of factors which were often outside the control of the individual, and that it was not quite fair to evaluate performance through results of organisations. Automatic promotion of learners from primary school level into secondary school is a policy that allows even those who have failed all the subjects at Grade Seven, to proceed to the next stage. This further absolves the teachers from poor examination results/ low pass rates for the institutions. Individuals should not take the blame because it is the system which needs to be addressed, not individual teachers. The quantitative expansion that has been witnessed in Zimbabwe's education sector has indeed increased access, (for the majority of its people) at all levels of education. Unfortunately, the massive expansion has greatly compromised quality of education. The outstanding discrepancy I found was that performance management was about individual performance and yet Performance Management Systems were designed from organisational perspective. Worse still many PMS did not have objective measurement systems and instead relied on opinions of supervisors which were marred by subjectivity. At institutional level, there were no Human Resource units to drive the PMS and this contributed to their demise. Findings pointed to the need for effective leadership and the following recommendations:

1. Overhauling the Public Service Commission's performance management format.
2. Budgets for performance management implementation.
3. Continuous training and development of supervisors and supervisees in line with the ever-changing socio-economic environment.
4. Development and implementation of organization-specific PMS, to replace the 'one size fits all' approach.
5. Attaching results of performance management interviews to rewards, as is the case in the private sector.
6. Developing organization-specific PMS to suit the different circumstances and institutional profiles.
7. Provision of teaching materials, adequate infrastructure and suitably qualified employees

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