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PROBLEMS FACED BY HEADS OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL IN ZIMBABWE: PERCEPTIONS OF HEADS OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS IN NKAYI DISTRICT

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Abstract

Performance appraisal management is taking centre stage in modern thinking in awarding pay increases and bonus in most countries. Zimbabwe has not been an exception to this phenomenon. According to Hains (2009) performance appraisal management is synonymous to management by objectives. Performance appraisal management is a means of getting better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework and planned goals, objectives and standards (Belin, 2009). In Zimbabwe, performance appraisal is carried out using an appraisal form. The head of school, who carries out the rating gives a judgement on the teacher being rated. At the beginning of the appraisal period, the supervisee formulates objectives for the period with the assistance and concurrence of their supervisor (Mlilo, 2007). In other words, the subordinate is encouraged to take an active part in setting up of their production targets and then measuring progress towards these goals. In Zimbabwe, this is a relatively new system and as such, it is bound to come across a number of operational challenges. This study was therefore principally directed at investigating the problems faced by both heads and teachers as they attempt to implement the new system. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population comprised of all primary and secondary school teachers from Nkayi District in Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe totalling 1100. The random sample procedure was used total of 200 respondents were used of which 30 were heads of schools and 170 teachers. There were 105 females and 95 males in the sample. The research instrument used was the questionnaire. The study revealed that heads and teachers lacked the necessary competencies to carry out performance management. The findings also revealed that the Government did not avail adequate resources to heads and teachers to effectively implement this system. The study recommends that workshops and in-service sessions should be mounted for both heads and teachers to staff develop them on this system. Furthermore, adequate funding should be availed to schools so as to expedite the proper and full implementation of performance management.

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Introduction

Teacher performance appraisal is a process directed at determining the teachers' abilities and effectiveness in performing the schools' instructional and other related tasks. Critical elements in job performance appraisal include the nature of assessment tool used and the supervisor's characteristics. In Zimbabwe performance appraisal is carried out using an appraisal form that is both structured and unstructured. The supervisor who carries out the rating gives a judgement on the supervisee or the one who is rated.

Hains (2009) state that an important part in the appraisal system is the interview. The first stage in the process of performance appraisal process is the holding of a conference by the supervisor and the supervisee. At this conference, the supervisor holds a discussion with the supervisee in order to come up with the agreed job assessment areas. They can also agree on the timing of the targets to be achieved (Mlilo, 2007). In Zimbabwe, this is a new system and like any new innovation it has met a variety of receptions by the workers particularly in the civil service.

Castetter (2008) argues that in Zimbabwe it has been tradition that workers are paid their salaries and bonuses at the end of the month and year respectively. However, with the introduction of performance appraisal, all this is set to change. Individuals are now to get remuneration depending on the rating one gets after the appraisal cycle. As a result of this situation, civil servants have raised objections to the new system. Teachers have also shown lack of interest in the implementation of performance appraisal through their trade unions. Against the background of current policy and legislation on performance appraisal, this paper reports on the implementation of this system in a small sample of schools in Zimbabwe based on the findings of a quantitative study.

Statement of the problem

School heads and their teachers tend to face a multi-dimensional problem in regard to the implementation of performance appraisal in educational institutions world over (Belin, 2009; Castetter, 2008; Martin and Bartol, 2008). On the same note, performance appraisal management is taking centre stage in awarding pay increases and bonuses in modern nations (Hains, 2009). The study sought to investigate the problems faced by teachers and heads of schools in the implementation of performance appraisal.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to empirically explore the way how the process of performance appraisal is implemented in Zimbabwean schools so as to come up with strategies of making the system more acceptable and effective in achieving goals of schools.

Research questions

The study sought to answer the ensuing questions.

- Are heads and teachers in Nkayi District conversant with performance appraisal?
- Were heads and teachers consulted when the concept of performance appraisal was introduced?
- Did heads and teachers receive sufficient training on performance appraisal?
- What are Zimbabwean teachers' and heads' views on performance appraisal?

Significance of the study

The importance of this study stemmed from the fact that it sought to expose the major challenges that heads and teachers experience during the implementation of the performance appraisal system. It was also hoped that the study would proffer possible suggestions to improve on the implementation of this system and possibly suggest corrective measures to be taken by the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in addressing the challenges posed to heads and teachers by the performance appraisal system.

Limitations of the study

In view of the small size of the sample and sub samples used the findings of the study would have limited generalisability. It has to be pointed out also that attitudes about an issue are essentially subjective and cannot be measured accurately. In other words, attitudes have no universally and accepted scales of measurement and measures that were used in this study cannot be considered to be very accurate.

Delimitation of the study

The researcher delimited the investigation to establishing the challenges faced by heads of schools and teachers as they attempt to implement performance appraisal in both primary and secondary schools in Nkayi District in western Zimbabwe. Views from 30 school heads and 170 teachers were used in the research. Perceptions from other key stakeholders like District Education Officers, Education Officers, Public Service Commission Inspectors, School Development Committees/Association members nor parents were not sought by this study.

Literature Review

According to Castetter (2008) performance appraisal management is synonymous to management by objectives. Robinson (2009) on the other hand, argues that performance appraisal management is a means of getting better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework and planned goals, objectives and standards. McCaffery (2008) states that performance appraisal management consists of a range of activities, the primary aim of which is to help managers to increase the effectiveness of their staff who would be rewarded accordingly. Szilaggi (2001) posits that the purpose of this system is to develop people and improve performance through a clear understanding of goals and regular coaching as well as providing honest and accurate formal evaluations to support rewards for performance practices. Managers and subordinates have a mutual responsibility for making the process work.

A performance appraisal is a systematic and periodic process that assesses individual employee's job performance and productivity in relation to certain pre-established criteria and organizational objectives (Mayer and Gavin, 2005). Other aspects of individual employees are considered as well, such as organizational behaviour, accomplishments, potential for future improvement and strengths and weaknesses (Denisi, 2000). Cederblom (2002) states that there are three main methods of collection of performance appraisal data which are; objective production, personnel and judgemental evaluation. Judgemental evaluations are the most commonly used with a large variety of evaluation methods (Martin and Bartol, 2008).

According to Solitany (2005) performance appraisal historically has been conducted annually (long cycle appraisals) however, many companies are moving towards shorter cycles (every six months, every quarter), and some have been moving into short-cycle (weekly-bi-weekly). McGiven and Ferlie (2007) propose that the interview could function as providing feedback to employees, counselling and developing employees and discussing compensation, job status or disciplinary decisions. Performance management systems are employed to manage and align all of an organisation's resources in order to achieve highest possible performance (Richard, 2002). Gemmings and Schwab (2008) argue that how performance is managed in an organization determines to a large extent the success or failure to a large extent the success or failure of the organization.

While there are potential benefits of performance appraisal, there are also some potential drawbacks. As Cummings and Schwab (2008) observe, performance appraisal can help facilitate management-employee communication, however, performance appraisal may result in legal issues if not executed appropriately as many employees tend to be dissatisfied with its processes.

According to Abu-Doleh and Weir (2007) not everyone is in favour of formal appraisal systems. Many employees, especially those it affects the most by such ratings are not very enthusiastic about them. There are many critics of these appraisals including labour unions and managers. As Josh (2013) posits labour unions argue that seniority rather than assessment of employee merit should be taken as the basis for promotion. However, as Timperly (2007) also observes length of job experience alone is no indication of the ability to perform a higher level job. That is why senior people should be given the first opportunity for promotion, but they must qualify for that promotion because of their abilities, not solely because of length of service. Performance appraisals can provide a reliable basis for these decisions. On the other hand, Solitany (2005) states that managers who have had unsatisfactory experiences

with inadequate or poorly designed appraisal programs may be skeptical about their usefulness. Many managers do not like to play the role of a judge and be responsible for the future of their subordinates. They are often uncomfortable about providing negative feedbacks to the employees and this tendency can lead them to inflate their assessments of the workers' job performance, giving higher ratings than deserved (Solitany, 2005).

Although performance appraisals can be so easily biased, there are certain steps that can be taken to improve the evaluations and reduce the margin of errors. These according to Cederblom (2002) include the following: -

- Training – creating an awareness and acceptance in the people conducting the appraisals that within a group of workers, they will find a wide range in different skills and abilities.
- Providing feedback to raters – trained raters provide managers who evaluated their subordinates with feedback, including information on ratings from other managers. This reduces leniency errors.
- Subordinate participation – by allowing employee participation in the evaluation process, there is employee-supervisor reciprocity in the discussion for any discrepancies between self ratings and supervisor ratings, thus, increasing job satisfaction and motivation.

Research Methodology

The study employed the quantitative methodology. Quantitative research was chosen for its ability to enable this study's findings to be generalized to other districts (Anderson, 2011). The quantitative methodology was also found useful in this study because it enabled the researcher to investigate 30 heads of schools and 170 teachers perceptions on challenges they experience as they attempt to implement performance appraisal. The study settled for the survey research design. The use of the survey research design enabled the researcher to gather widespread perceptions of the respondents on the studied phenomenon (Bell, 2003).

The study's population comprised 1100 heads of schools and teachers. The study employed the simple random sampling technique to select the respondents because it permitted every head of school and teacher an equal opportunity of participating in the study (Kumar, 2008). The researcher used a questionnaire with a mixed bag of close-ended questions and two-open-ended questions to collect data from the respondents. Close-ended questions enabled the researcher to collect pre-determined respondents' opinions regarding the studied phenomena (Kumar, 2008). The researcher was able to obtain the actual feelings of the respondents regarding challenges they experience during the implementation of performance appraisal in Nkayi District.

Data collection and analysis

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions. The questionnaire was chosen because as Cohen and Manion (2005) observe, has the ability to reach many respondents who live at widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty. However, as Anderson (2011) argues, the questionnaire generally has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researcher distributed the questionnaires at various meetings and workshops for heads and teachers and collected them after a day or two through the organizers of meetings or workshops. Data collected from the questionnaires produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

Findings and discussion

The study set out to explore the challenge that heads of schools and teachers experience during the process of performance appraisal in Zimbabwean schools. This section is presented in two parts, namely, presentation of data and discussion of the data'.

Presentation of data**Table 1: Profiles of heads and teachers (N=200)**

Categories of respondents	Number of respondents	% Frequency
Heads	30	15
Teachers	170	85
Total	200	100

Table 1 above shows that the sample constituted 15% heads and 85% teachers. This was to be expected as teachers make up the bulk of the educators in the district. It is therefore a fair representation of the head/teacher ratio in the district.

Table 2: Composition of sample by gender (N=200)

Categories of respondents	Male		Female	
	Nf	%f	nf	%f
Heads n = 30	18	60	12	40
Teachers n = 170	77	45	93	55

The heads' sample contained more males (60%) than females (40%). The teachers' sample on the other hand contained more females (55%) than males (45%). Both sets of data were considered statistically significant to the extent that they tended to confirm the gender gap (in favour of males) with regards senior management in education which had always been pointed out by many gender activists and educational publications.

Table 3: Performance management is a waste of time (N=200)

Response category	Numbers	Percentage
Agree	148	74
Undecided	10	5
Disagree	42	21
Total	200	100

Table 3 above shows that 74% of the respondents agreed with the statement that performance management was a waste of time. Only 21% disagreed with the statement and thought it was not a waste of time.

Table 4: Salary increments should be awarded using the appraisal rating (N = 200)

Response category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	30	15
Undecided	10	5
Disagree	160	80
Total	200	100

The majority of heads and teachers (80%) disagreed with the statement that salary increments should be awarded through the appraisal system. Only a few (15%) agreed with the suggestion.

Table 5: Performance appraisal should be used as a criteria for promotion (N = 200)

Response category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	130	65
Undecided	0	0
Disagree	70	35
Total	200	100

The majority 65% of respondents stated that performance management should be attached to promotion criteria. Only 35% disagreed with the statement.

Table 6: There is lack of commitment on performance appraisal by policy makers (N = 200)

Response category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	160	80
Undecided	30	15
Disagree	10	5
Total	200	100

Table 6 shows that 80% of respondents felt that policy makers were not committed to enforcing performance management. A paltry 15% felt the policy makers were committed.

Table 7: Performance appraisal improves relationships between appraisers and appraises (N = 200)

Response category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	110	55
Undecided	10	5
Disagree	80	45
Total	200	100

More than half of the respondents (55%) felt that performance appraisal improved relationships between appraisers and appraises. However, 45% of the respondents felt that it did not improve relationships.

Table 8: Teachers and heads have received adequate training in the implementation of performance appraisal (N = 200)

Response category	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	40	20
Undecided	10	5
Disagree	150	75
Total	200	100

The majority of the respondents (75%) disagreed with the statement that teachers and heads received adequate training in the implementation of performance appraisal. Only a paltry 20% agreed with the statement.

The questionnaire had two open-ended questions which complemented data from the close-ended questions. The first question wanted to find out from the respondents whether they fully comprehend the phenomenon of performance appraisal as introduced by the Government of Zimbabwe. The overwhelming majority of both heads and teachers appeared to have a hazy idea of this system. They could not distinguish it from the other methods of monitoring performance of teachers in schools.

The second question sought to discover whether respondents were consulted during the conceptualization of the system. Both teachers and heads of schools indicated that they were only consulted during the time of implementation.

Discussion

Data reveal that heads and teachers view performance management as a waste time. This perception tallies with observation made by Abu-Doleh and Weir (2007) who argued that many employees, especially those it affects the most are not very enthusiastic about the performance management. As Josh (2013) posits, workers and labour unions argue that seniority rather than assessment of employee merit, should be taken as the basis for promotion.

Findings from the study also reveal that the majority of respondents did not want salary increments to be determined by performance appraisal ratings. They also did not want the use of performance appraisal as a criterion for promotion. This information tallies with findings by Salitany (2005) who states that managers who have had unsatisfactory experiences with inadequate or poorly designed appraisal programs may be skeptical about their usefulness. As Timperley (2007) discovered, many managers do not like to play the role of a judge and be responsible for the future of their subordinates. They are often uncomfortable about providing negative feedbacks to the employees and this tendency can lead them to inflate their assessments of the workers' job performance, giving higher ratings than deserved (Solitany, 2005).

Data discerned from the study also revealed that respondents felt that policymakers lacked commitment towards supporting performance appraisal. As Cederblom (2002) observes, a successful performance appraisal system depends on the support and commitment by policymakers. Workers must be provided with adequate resources and skills to implement the system.

Findings from the study also revealed that most respondents believed that if properly implemented, performance appraisal has the potential to improve relationships between teachers and their heads. This underlines the importance of adequate preparation for the full implementation of the system.

Data also shows that respondents indicated that they did not receive adequate training before the system was thrust on them. Training is fundamental before the introduction of a complex system like performance appraisal as Cederblom (2002) advises, that training is about creating an awareness and acceptance in the people conducting the appraisals both supervisees and supervisors.

Conclusions

In the light of the above findings, the ensuing conclusions suffice.

- Both theoretical and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that both heads of schools and their teachers perceive performance management as a waste of their time.
- Respondents did not want salary increments to be determined by performance appraisal ratings. Neither did they want performance appraisal ratings to be used as a criterion for promotion purposes.
- Heads and teachers thought that policymakers lacked commitment towards supporting the implementation of performance appraisal.
- Both heads and teachers indicated that if the performance appraisal system was properly implemented it had the potential to improve relationships between teachers and their heads.

- Findings of the study seem to confirm that Zimbabwean teachers and heads did not receive adequate training before the introduction of performance appraisal.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers draw some recommendations.

- There should be more training of both appraisers (heads) and the appraisees in order to help the implementers of the appraisal system to appreciate the benefits of this system.
- The Government should allocate adequate funds so that the supervision of performance management is done effectively and efficiently.
- There should be no monetary attachments to ratings of performance appraisals until a time when both appraisers and appraisees have fully appreciated the system in their operations.
- Heads and teachers as stakeholders to performance management should be allowed to make their inputs with regards to performance management in the school. Most suspicions associated with the system may be dispelled and greater understanding of what is expected from each and every stakeholder greatly appreciated. This in turn could enhance organizational development.

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