Impact of Perceptions on Performance Appraisal in the Education Sector in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The study sought to assess the perceptions on performance appraisal by employees in the secondary education sector and the extent to which these perceptions have affected performance by secondary education teachers in Zaka District, Masvingo and whether the Public Service Commission has responded to the appraisal process in line with its blueprint.

Keywords: Evaluation, Perception, Performance Appraisal, Public Service

I. INTRODUCTION

Employees from the secondary education sector, under the auspices of the Ministry Of Education Sports and Culture form an integral part of the Public Service of Zimbabwe. In order to appreciate the impact of performance appraisal in the sector, one may need to consider the circumstances that led to its adoption by the said ministry. According to Module Two developed by the Manpower Planning and Development Agency of the Public Service Commission, the following were the major weaknesses of the Zimbabwe Public Service: Public servants are viewed as lazy; it was felt that Public Servants were wasteful with regards to how they used resources; public servants were criticized for not being result-oriented; and they were blamed for focusing on processes rather than on products. In order to address these perceptions, the performance management system was adopted as a management tool to bring about the desired changes in the Public Service.

Whereas the appraisal system was adopted as a corrective management tool run along the lines of fire fighting, it was therefore the purpose of this study to assess its impact in the education sector which coincidentally happens to be the biggest employer in the Public Service. The Public Service Regulations Statutory Instrument 1 of 2000, Section 8, paragraph 3 states that; “…at the conclusion of every performance appraisal, the commission or Head of Ministry or department, as the case may be, shall decide on what action, if any, is to be taken on the basis of the appraisal”.

Statement of the problem: In order to redress the shortcomings of the civil service highlighted above, the Public Service had to adopt performance appraisal as a corrective human resource management tool. This research therefore sought to assess: (i) the impact of perceptions that employees in the secondary education sector have on the performance appraisal process and (ii) whether the Public Service Commission has responded to appraisal results in line with its blueprint.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the perceptions by employees on the performance appraisal system in the secondary education sector in Zaka district.

Hypothesis: This study was intended to test the following hypothesis: Employee perceptions contribute to a no significant relationship between the performance appraisal process and the actual performance by secondary education officers.

II. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

What is performance appraisal? Performance appraisal is the human resources activity used to determine the extent to which the employees are performing the job effectively, whilst Module Two by The Manpower Planning And Development Agent of The Public Service Commission views it as the systematic evaluation of individuals or teams with respect to their performance on the job and their potential for development. It involves an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform a given job.

Why appraise performance? Cole (1997) identifies the reasons for appraisal as follows, among others: to identify an individual’s current
level of performance, to identify employ’s current level of performance, to enable employees to improve their performance, to provide a basis for rewarding employees in relation to their contribution to organizational goals, to motivate individuals, to identify training and development needs, to identify potential performance, and to provide information for succession planning.

The procedural justice theory suggests that the procedures that are used to appraise performance must be perceived as fair in order for motivation to be high. Dessler (2005) emphasized the need for supervisors to be familiar with basic appraisal techniques, understand and avoid problems that can cripple appraisals, and know how to conduct appraisals fairly. He further asserted that one who rates his or her employees too high or too low is doing a disservice to them, to the company and to him or herself.

Developing an effective PA system: George and Jones (1996) gave a summary of how an effective PA (Performance Appraisals) system could be developed.

1. Choosing the mix: With formal appraisals, the performance dimensions and the way workers are evaluated on them are determined in advance. Informal appraisals on the other hand identify and rectify problems as they arise (George and Jones 1996).

2. Choice of factors to evaluate: Carrel, Albert and Hatfield (1995) argued that policy makers had to determine exactly what areas of performance are going to be reviewed and how these areas relate to an organization’s goals. These could be derived from specific job descriptions or may be a uniform set of employee requirements included in all Performance appraisals.

3. Choosing methods of appraisal: Within organizations, different methods may be used for different groups. According to Carrel et al (1995) the methods are broken down into traditional categories based on the standards for success chosen. Comparative methods such as ranking or forced distribution rate the overall performance of one employee directly against that of others while absolute standard methods such as rating scales or management by objectives (MBO) rate the employee against some objectives, selected, or imaginary goals.

Below is a brief description of the two categories of evaluation techniques as outlined by the article “Performance Appraisal” on Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia:

A. Individual Evaluation Techniques: Those techniques when the standards of performance are defined individually, without references to other person(s), i.e Graphic Rating Scale, Forced choice, Narrative evaluation, Critical Incident method, Checklists and weighted checklists, Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS, Behavioral Observation Scales (BOS)).

B. Multiple Person Evaluation Techniques: The Wikipedia article describes these methods as those requiring the performance of one employee to be directly and intentionally compared with the performance of other employees. These include Ranking, Paired Comparison, Forced Distribution

Choosing who appraises performance: The person’s immediate supervisor was the obvious appraiser but other options have become popular as well (George and Jones 1996). These options according to the Wikipedia include: Rating by a committee of several superiors, Rating by the employee’s peers (co-workers), Rating by the employee’s subordinate, Rating by someone outside the immediate work situation and Self-evaluation.

Key Result Areas: The Public service module Two defines key Result Areas as critical groups of duties and tasks from the job description that an individuals must performance in order to achieved set targets. The Key Results Areas help individuals to focus on groups of duties and tasks according to their performance. It goes on to identify by which key Result Areas could be developed: Agree on duties and tasks to be performed by the individual, Group those duties and tasks which are related, Rank these groups according to their importance, and Share 100% among the groups so that the most important group has the highest percentage and the important group has the least percentage.

Objective Setting: The module on performance management in the Zimbabwe Public Service has the following as the key characteristics of an objective: Objectives are derived from duties and tasks in the Key Result Areas, Every objective starts with “to”. It must comply with the SMART principle –this means that each objective must be Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Results oriented and time
framed. Objectives must be prioritized so that the next important objective has the least percentage.

**Action Plans:** Standards are defined by the Public Service Module Two as indications how well an objective has been in the same modules. They clearly state the achievement of an objective in terms of quantity, quality, time, and cost or in monetary terms. Standards therefore are the outcomes or indicators of how well an objective has been achieved. Standards therefore are always captured as possible outcomes of an objective.

**Management By Objectives (MBO):** MBO is a philosophy of management first proposed by Peter Drucker in 1954. Employees establish objectives (such as sales per product and so on) through consultation with their supervisors and then use these objectives as a basis for evaluation. It is the cycle, which begins with setting the organization’s common goals and objectives, and ultimately returns to that step.

**Weakness of MBO:** It is time consuming to develop, may encourage short-term perspective, and may use contaminated criteria or deficient criteria. However, the choice of technique to use should be based on purpose of the appraisal and cost-benefit decisions.

**Final Rating:** It entails a comparison of actual performance output against the desired standards or predetermined objectives. Each objective is given a rating on a scale 1 to 5. To come up with the final rating, the weighing of each objective is used.

**Training Needs Identification:** Schuler (1984) has continued successful performance and the strengthening of individual weaknesses to make employees more effective and productive as some of the rationale behind performance appraisal. The gap between actual and desired performance is called the performance gap by Carrel et al (1995). Programs therefore have to be designed to fill this gap. A valid job-related appraisal system with built up strengths and weaknesses in employee’s performances and indicate training and development needs.

**Training Appraisers:** Carrel et al (1995) argue that appraisers also need training. They suggest that topics that need to be included are as follows: The purpose of performance appraisal, How to avoid problems- halos, bias, central tendency and so on, How to conduct non-discriminatory appraisals, The ethics of appraisals, How to conduct effective appraisal interviewers, and Impression management-including demotion- preventive strategies and promotion- enhancing strategies.

**Reaction to appraisal:** Module Two by the Manpower Planning and Development Agency of the Public Service Commission agree with the statutory instrument 1 of 2000. It states that in cases of poor performance the following strategies can be adopted: Re-visiting the work plans, Changing objectives and standards, Transfer and regarding, Job rotation, Warnings, Retirements and Discharge.

**III.MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research is a quantitative descriptive survey that seeks to assess perceptions on performance appraisal.

**Population of the study:** Zaka district had 38 secondary schools, 450 teachers, and 38 school heads. It had one District Education Officer (D.E.O) and four education officers (E.Os). Two schools were used for pilot study and 30 schools were randomly sampled from the list of schools. All headmasters of the sampled schools and education officers were included and a total of 215 respondents were considered.

**Sample and sampling techniques:** 30 secondary schools were randomly selected and all education officers were included. From the 30 secondary schools, all the 30 school heads and the deputy heads were included and 5 other teachers randomly selected from the staff list. The sample thus constituted 215 respondents.

**Research Design:** A descriptive as well as correlation analysis was done. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the effect of demographics and the appraisal systems on performance.

**Instrumentation:** A self-constructed questionnaire was given to experts for content validation after which necessary adjustments were made. A pilot study was conducted using the adjusted questionnaires to test their reliability.

**Data Collection:** The list of schools from which appraises and supervisors (heads, deputy heads, HODs and any other such teachers empowered to act as supervisors) were subjected to questionnaires was obtained from the District Education officers in Zaka prior to their permission.
Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics, analysis and regression statistical methods were used to analyze the data. The MINITAB software programme was used to analyze the data in order to find the mean, standard deviation and to find whether there is going to be any significant relationships in the data.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

High mutual agreement on work plan goals between appraisees and supervisors does exist. It can also be deduced that appraisees can frame objectives that are SMART and always remember to stick to agreed work plans. Some respondents agreed that they do all termly reviews at year end. This therefore means to say that problems appraisees face on their work plans can only be identified and addressed at year end. This nullifies the very purpose of such reviews. Such a slacking on the part of supervisors should be immediately put to check by their heads of department. Public Service inspectors should be more aggressive on their inspections to make sure this anomaly is addressed.

Most appraisees were undecided regarding the manner in which rating procedures were done. Most supervisors also avoid extreme scores of 1 and 5. Identification of training needs as perceived by the appraisees is also average. It shows that most of the supervisors do not discuss the section on training needs with their subordinates. This section is treated as a mere formality and no follow ups are done on the part of supervisors to meet the training needs of appraisees. Since the strengthening of individual weaknesses to make employees more effective and productive is one of the rationale behind performance appraisal, neglecting the training needs of employees renders the whole exercise irrelevant, Schuler (1984).

Supervisors agree with appraisees on work plan formulation. Thus both parties comply with the SMART principle on objective formulation. On this aspect both supervisors and appraisees responses concur. Supervisors admit that reviews are done timeously but appraisees contradict this assertion. However, 34.5% of the supervisors observe that the morale of their subordinates decrease after reviews/interviews. This compares very well with 43.2% of the appraisees who experience this decrease of morale. It therefore shows that the way reviews/interviews are done leaves a lot to be desired. Training workshops for supervisors need to be arranged to correct this.

Closer statistical analysis indicates that 72.9% of the supervisors avoid extreme scores of 1 and 5. This concurs quiet well with the responses registered by the appraisees. Thus, supervisors fall to prey to the central tendency bias when rating. This could be because they are either scared of resentment from their subordinates or shudder at the thought of writing reports justifying such scores which may even further expose gross irregularities in the manner in which the whole exercise is done.

Supervisors' perceptions on training needs vary greatly. Closer statistical analysis indicates that 44% of the supervisors do not even discuss training needs with their appraisees. 50.8% of these same supervisors leave their subordinates to arrange for their own training. On this aspect both parties concur. This is quite serious an anomaly since the gap between accrual and desired performance is left unbridged.

Appraisees are undecided as to whether better results, morale and meeting training needs can be attributed to performance appraisal. Supervisors are also undecided as to whether better results, morale and meeting training needs can be attributed to performance appraisal. Reactions to the appraisal process have a very weak relationship to the process itself. It means to say that the blue print in the Public Service Regulations Statutory Instrument 1 of 2000, section 8, paragraph 3, is not being implemented by heads of departments and the Public Service Commission itself.

Central tendency bias on rating by supervisors prevents outstanding subordinates to be promoted or that the Public Service Commission itself is slow to reward outstanding officers. This could either be attributed to a lot of red tape or financial constraints on its part. Supervisors are concurring with their counterparts regarding the weak relationship between the appraisal process and the rewarding aspects. The relationship between better results and the reaction to appraisals by way of demotion/charges, promotion or advancements is not significant.

The researchers accept null hypothesis “Employee perceptions contribute to a no significant
relationship between the performance appraisal process and the actual performance by secondary education officers”. This means that better results in secondary schools in Zaka District cannot be attributed to the appraisal processes. This is however according to appraisees.

Supervisors have a strong belief that the process contributes to better results in secondary schools. They may thus fail to take cognisant of other variables such as the desire for excellence for its own sake and the embarrassment associated with the Bottom 10 Principle which may motivate appraisees to achieve better results other than the appraisal process itself.

The relationship between the commitment of appraisees and the reaction to appraisals by way of demotion/charges, promotion or advancements is not significant. The researcher therefore accepts null hypothesis, “Employee perceptions contribute to a no significant relationship between the performance appraisal process and the actual performance by secondary education officers”. Commitment to work by appraisees can therefore be attributed to other variables other than the appraisal process.

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The conclusion drawn from the study is that while appraisees and supervisors agree on work plan formulation; reviews/interviews, ratings and the identification of training needs are not done satisfactorily. Both appraisees and supervisors admit that promotions, demotions/discharges or advancements taken on the basis of the appraisal process are very slow to come forth, meaning a weak reaction by the Public Service Commission to appraisals. Appraisees do not attribute better academic results and even their commitment to work to the performance appraisal process. The researcher also concludes that supervisors attribute better results and commitment by appraisees to the performance appraisal process.

Recommendations: In light of the findings of this study, the researchers deemed it necessary to provide some recommendations that will improve the impact of performance appraisal on the secondary education sector in Zaka District.

1. To Policy Formulators (Government and the Public Service Commission):
- That response to appraisals be immediate as this will help the process achieve its intended purpose.
- Empowering its civil service by providing more computers, though expensive for a start, they will help do away with a lot of red tape and delays.
- That action be taken on the basis of appraisals if it is to be relevant.
- That supervisors be subjected to more training workshops which focus on how reviews/interviews, ratings and training needs identification should be done.

2. To Policy Implementers (Provincial Education Directors, EOs, Heads, etc.):
- That the whole appraisal process should be done in line with policy.
- That bias on ratings tend to frustrate outstanding appraisees if they are bunched together with underperformers.
- That training needs identification, being the ultimate to the appraisal process, need to be taken seriously with training workshops or in-service studies being aggressively taken to bridge the gap between actual and desired performance among appraisees.

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