The Role of Performance Appraisal in Further Education:

The Case of a Post-Secondary College in Malta

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Abstract: This paper is based on part of the research findings of a study conducted on the role of performance appraisal (PA) in post-secondary education that used a mixed methodology approach. The literature on PA highlights the divergence in opinion among practitioners and academics as to what the role of PA is, the form that it should take, and its effectiveness as an HRM tool. Given these conflicting viewpoints, the initial research study sought to determine the perceptions of academic staff on PA in an educational setting. This involved researching their views on the benefits and negative aspects of PA, the role of PA, the appraisal criteria and source to be used, and how the PA process is best conducted. This paper only focuses on respondents' views on the benefits and shortfalls of PA, its role in educational institutions, and the source of appraisal; and on certain aspects of the quantitative data that was collected in the original research. The research findings confirm that PA is expected to be used concurrently for both developmental and administrative decisions. Furthermore, PA is primarily regarded as a positive process that is expected to result in a number of benefits for both the organization and the individual academics. PA is expected to result in the identification of clear work goals, improved performance, increased motivation, better feedback, increased accountability, and fairer distribution of rewards. Despite its important role and the expected benefits arising from PA's use in education, the respondents identify a number of issues that impinge on PA's success when put into practice.

These include; an inappropriate PA model being used, PA being applied in isolation, lack of commitment to the process, inappropriate/lack of training on the conduction of appraisal, an organizational culture and management/staff relationships that do not encourage openness, and an appraisal process that focuses too much on the allocation of monetary rewards. Respondents also singled out a number of issues that need to be tackled for PA's successful implementation; such as the identification of joint objectives, improved communication and continuous feedback, an open management approach, and for management to believe in the positive role of appraisal.

Keywords: performance, appraisal, management, education, effectiveness

The college selected for this case study is one of the larger post-secondary colleges in Malta where aspiring students are prepared for entry to university. The college structure regarding academic staff consists of principal, vice-principal, five area co-ordinators (each area consists of a number of subjects grouped together), a subject coordinator for each subject, and the lecturing staff. Area and subject coordinators perform a supervisory role. PA for academic staff is carried out by the area and subject coordinators.

PA for academic staff was introduced in 2002 as part of a new collective agreement. The PA system sought to increase efficiency and performance, increase authority and accountability, and reward these through the allocation of a performance bonus.[1] Three areas of performance measurement were identified: lecturing and tutoring, research, and administration. The established criteria were primarily quantitative. Staff members were assessed on the established amount of teaching duties, number of publications, and amount of administrative duties performed.

The PA procedure involved the preparation of a work forecast by

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1   University of Malta, *Agreement between the University of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers on the Academic Staff of the University of Malta* (2002), 22.

each staff member at the beginning of the academic year; the preparation of an appraisal report by each staff member at the end of the academic year; and an appraisal by the subject and area co-ordinator.[2]

Research objectives

As the literature below highlights, there is disagreement as to what the exact role of PA is, the form that it should take, and its effectiveness as an HRM tool.[3] Given these conflicting viewpoints, the study sought to determine the perceptions of academic staff in an educational setting on PA. This involved researching their views on the benefits and negative aspects of PA, the role of PA in educational institutions, the appraisal criteria and source to be used, and how the PA process is best conducted. Given the complexities involved in PA's use, the main objective of the investigation was to establish whether PA is a desirable and useful HRM tool that should be used in educational settings and to determine the type of appraisal that should be adopted.

Literature review

The controversy surrounding PA
PA's controversial nature is evident in the academic literature. Edmonstone, Schraeder *et al*., Pfeffer, and Chang and Cheng link PA to a number of benefits.[4] These include improved employee performance,

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2 Ibid.

3 G.E. Roberts, 'Perspectives on enduring and emerging issues in performance appraisal', *Public Personnel Management*, 27 (3) (1998), 301–20.

4 J. Edmonstone, 'Appraising the state of performance Appraisal', *Health Manpower Management*, 22 (6) (1996), 9–13; S. Schraeder, J.B. Becton, & R. Portis, 'A critical examination of performance appraisals: an organisation's friend or foe?', *The Journal of Quality and Participation*, Spring 2007, 20–5; J. Pfeffer, *The Human Equation* (Boston, 1998); and R.L. Chang & W.L. Cheng, 'The Effect of Human Resource Management Practices on Firm Performance: Empirical Evidence from High-tech Firms in Taiwan', *International Journal of Management*, 19 (4) (2002), 622–31.

better communication, increased employee motivation and commitment, employee development, increased managerial control, and the synchronization of individual objectives to organisational goals.

The changing role of performance appraisal

PA initially started off as a measure and assessment of employee performance but has progressed to a process that manages and develops employees in a wider performance management (PM) context.[5] Consequently, PA's focus has shifted from the assessment of past performance to developing future or potential performance.

Early forms of PA
Traditionally PA consisted of an annual interview between supervisor and employee where the supervisor assessed the work done by the employee, with little or no input from the latter. This type of appraisal is criticised because; it is considered judgemental, it concentrates on past rather than future performance, and is threatening to appraisees. Consequently, traditional appraisal fails to improve performance, promote employee development, and achieve organisational goals.[6]

These limitations prompted McGregor to adopt a totally different approach which linked PA to management by objectives.[7] Accordingly McGregor's appraisal model required supervisors to help employees set their own short-term goals. At the end of the appraisal period, the employees self-appraise their performance against the self-set targets and the employees together with their supervisor, examine and discuss this self-appraisal in order to determine 'not only weaknesses but also

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5   G. Randall, 'Employee Appraisal', in K. Sisson (ed.), *Personnel Management in Britain* (London, 1989), 149–71; M. Armstrong & A. Baron, *Managing Performance: Performance management in action* (London, 2006).

6   Ibid., D.S. Wiese & M.R. Buckley, 'The Evolution of the Performance Appraisal Process', *Journal of Management History*, 4 (3) (1998), 233–49; Randall.

7   D. McGregor, 'An Uneasy Look at Performance Appraisal', in *Manage People not Personnel: motivation and performance appraisal* (Harvard, 1957), 155–65.

strengths and potentials'.[8] The manager's responsibility is to help guide the employee to further personal development rather than act as a judge on past performance; the focus of appraisal shifts to future performance and appraisal is based on self-appraisal rather than top-down appraisal.

Performance appraisal in a performance management context
In the nineties, the term PM was increasingly used in the literature with the result that PA and PM were used interchangeably by practitioners and researchers.[9]

According to Edis[10] and Fowler,[11] PM systems seek to improve individual and organisational performance by linking individual objectives with those of the organization. Tomlinson (1999:7) considers PM as being 'about planning for performance, measuring performance, developing to improve performance, and rewarding performance'.[12]

These extracts suggest that PM is used to refer to nothing more than a developmental and forward looking form of PA, as advocated by McGregor in 1957. This misunderstanding arises because numerous practitioners/researchers fail to distinguish between PM at the individual level and a broader form of PM, which focuses on and links individual and organizational performance, and is strategically based. PM at the individual level closely resembles McGregor's and Tomlinson's approaches to PM and consequently involves practising and implementing a developmental and forward looking form of PA. On the other hand, broader PM is strategic since it is concerned with broader issues facing the organisation, and involves linking the different aspects of management such as: employee training and development, developing an appropriate organizational culture, reward, leadership

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8   Ibid., 160.

9   S. Bevan & M. Thompson, 'Performance Management at the Cross Roads' *Personnel Management*, Nov. 1991, 37–9.

10 M. Edis, *Performance Management and Appraisal in the Health Services* (London, 1998).

11 A. Fowler, 'Performance management: the MBO of the 90s', *Personnel Management*, July 2000, 47–51.

12 H. Tomlinson, 'Performance management and performance measurement', *Professional Development Today*, Autumn 1999, 7.

style, etc.[13] In this eventuality PA becomes a vital tool within a wider PM system.

Alternative forms of appraisal

Another development regarding PA is the use of other appraisal sources besides one's immediate supervisor. The latter was traditionally regarded as the most appropriate person to conduct PA because it was assumed that he has the best knowledge about the individual's work and performance.[14] However, appraisal by the immediate supervisor has been linked to problems of reliability and unintentional and intentional bias.[15] Furthermore, in educational settings where academics tend to maintain a separate identity leading to autonomy and individuality, the immediate supervisor may not be fully aware of the quality and extent of work of his immediate subordinates.[16] Gold and Redman et al.[17] accordingly recommend the use of self- and peer-appraisal, since the person being appraised and peers have the greatest knowledge about an academic's performance.

Another appraisal method increasingly used is upward/student appraisal of teachers, which has been linked to: improved management style, employee empowerment, and increased productivity.[18] In educational settings, upward appraisal also addresses problems with teaching methodologies since teachers become aware of deficiencies that would otherwise go unnoticed.[19]

13 M. Armstrong & A. Baron, *Performance Management: Key Strategies and practical guidelines* (London, 2000).

14 C. Fletcher, *Appraisal and Feedback: Making performance review work* (London, 2004); A. Fowler & T. Boland, 'A systems perspective of performance management in the public sector organisation', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13 (5) (2000), 417–46; D. Torrington, J. Hall, S. Taylor, & C. Atkinson, *Human Resource Management* (Essex, 2002).

15 T. Redman, E. Snape, D. Thompson, & F. Ka-Ching Yan, 'Performance Appraisal in an NHS Hospital', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 10 (1) (1993), 48–62.

16 J. Gold, 'Academic Staff Appraisal: Do-It-Yourself", *Education + Training*, 35 (2) (1993), 32–6.

17 Redman *et al*.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. 24.

The use of each of these forms of appraisal on their own is, however, highly unlikely, especially where PA is used for evaluative/control objectives because each mode of appraisal has problems of subjectivity and bias, and management looses control over the appraisal process.[20] Fletcher consequently recommends 360-degree which should lead to improved communication and organizational flexibility, a balanced and fairer assessment, and enhanced performance.[21]

Factors adversely affecting performance appraisal effectiveness

Multiple objectives
Randall[22] and Mani[23] observe that the ultimate scope of PA is to improve individual performance. However, PA is also used for other objectives such as; reward decisions, motivating staff, succession planning, identifying and developing potential and promoting dialogue.[24]

According to Fletcher, multiple objectives hinder PA effectiveness especially when not enough time is dedicated to PA.[25] This is exacerbated when PA is linked to rewards since reward decisions tend to override the whole process and obstruct constructive dialogue on development needs.[26]

This line of argument prompts Burgess,[27] Marsh and Scott,[28] and

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20 McCarthy & Garavan, 2001. McCarthy, M. Understanding 360° feedback, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25 (1), 5–32.

21 C. Fletcher, 'Appraisal: an idea whose time has gone?' *Personnel Management*, Sep. 1993, 34–7.

22 Randall.

23 B.G. Mani, 'Performance Appraisal Systems, Productivity, and Motivation: A Case Study', *Public Personnel Management*, 31 (2) (2002), 141.

24 Tomlinson; Redman *et al*.

25 Fletcher,

26 Ibid.

27 R.G. Burgess, *A problem in search of a method or a method in search of a problem? A critique of teacher appraisal* (Milton Keynes, 1989).

28 I. Marsh. & A. Scott, 'Staff Appraisal: Lessons from United Kingdom Industry?', *The vocational Aspect of Education*, 43 (15) (1991), 205–13.

Simmons[29] to recommend a developmental form of PA based on trust, involving self/peer appraisal and the identification of weaknesses. This should be kept separate from the processes of reward and promotion.

Defining and measuring performance

PA's successful implementation is also hindered by the difficulty involved in defining and measuring performance. This is because objective criteria for many jobs either do not exist, or they fail 'to capture the essence of what is involved'.[30] This is of particular relevance to education, where the output of teaching is considered difficult to measure owing to its complexity[31] and the fact that the outcome or output of education professionals is highly influenced by contextual/ environmental factors.[32]

The influence of environmental and contextual factors on individual performance highlights the importance of the need to evaluate and manage not only individual performance but also organisational performance. This draws attention to one of the main limitations of PA. That of simply focusing on individual performance at the expense of organisational performance, thereby assuming that the evaluation of employee performance will automatically lead to improved performance at both individual and organizational level. This draws attention to the need for implementing PA as part of a wider PM programme, and confirms that improved performance can only come about if organizations embrace the wider concept of PM.[33]

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29 A. Simmons, 'An "expert witness" perspective on performance appraisal in universities and colleges', *Employee Relations*, 24 (1) (2001), 86–100.

30 B. Townley, 'The Politics of appraisal: lessons in the introduction of appraisal into UK universities', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 25 (2) (1990), 175–91.

31 M. Eraut, 'Teacher appraisal and/or teacher development: friends or foes?', in H. & J. Elliott (eds.), *Rethinking Appraisal and Assessment* (Milton Keynes, 1989), 20–3; M. Von Glinlow, 'Appraising the Performance of Professional Employees', in A.M. Mohrman *et al.*, *Designing Performance Appraisal Systems* (London, 1989); L. Hartley & P. Broadfoot, 'Assessing teacher performance', *Journal of Education Policy*, 3 (1) (1986), 39–50.

32 M. Armstrong, 'A lesson in "how not to"', *People Management*, Oct. 2000 (12), 57.

33 Tomlinson; I. Draper, 'From appraisal to performance management', *Professional Development Today*, Spring 2000, 11–20; D. Middlewood & C. Cardno, 'The

Performance appraisal and rewards

Disagreement exists in the literature with regards to the benefits of linking PA with rewards, especially if this involves pay. Performance-related pay is regarded as desirable because it delivers a message that performance is important, it motivates employees to perform better, and is considered fair and equitable to reward people according to their performance.[34]

Kohn, on the other hand, asserts that rewards do not lead to long-term changes in attitudes and behaviour but only to temporary compliance. Furthermore, rewards may negatively affect work relationships because they discourage risk-taking and creativity, and negatively affect intrinsic motivation.[35] Additionally, the linking of PA to rewards complicates the appraisal process since the most appropriate type of reward for the employees has to be determined, and one has to make sure that reward allocation/justification does not limit appraisal openness leading to the PA interview becoming a salary discussion, thus preventing genuine developmental discussion.[36]

The type of reward to be used is also widely debated and despite the increased link with pay not all academics agree to its use.[37] Von Glinlow believes that in the case of professionals, PA's success as a motivational tool depends on PA visibly being linked to rewards.[38] However, professional employees' expectations and reward preferences are significantly different, and instead of financial rewards, professionals prefer career, job-content and professional rewards.[39] This is corroborated by E.L. Deci's research[40] which suggests that

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significance of teacher performance and its appraisal', in D. Middlewood & C. Cardno (eds.), *Managing Teacher Appraisal and Performance A Comparative Approach* (London, 2001).

34 Armstrong & Baron.

35 A. Kohn, 'Why Incentive Plans Cannot Work', *Harvard Business Review*, Sep.–Oct. 1993, 54–63.

36 Redman *et al*.; P. Dove & S. Brown, 'Issues for Appraisal', *Education + Training*, 35 (2) (1993), 16–19.

37 A. Storey, 'A leap of faith? Performance pay for teachers', *Journal of Education Policy*, 13 (5) (2000), 509–23.

38 Von Glinlow.

39 Ibid.

40 E.L. Deci, 'The effects of contingent and non contingent rewards and controls on

managers and professional workers may suffer a decline in motivation if an increased emphasis is placed on extrinsic rewards such as pay. Instead professional development opportunities are regarded as more likely to motivate professionals. Thus, a developmental type of PA is likely to be more rewarding than a PA system linked to pay.

Methodology

Several books have focused on the philosophy of research and different research methodologies.[41] Much of this literature distinguishes between two main approaches: the quantitative and the qualitative. The former is used by researchers who hold a positivist research philosophy, while the latter by those who uphold an interpretative research philosophy.[42]

These two approaches to research are often regarded as poles apart so that research is either classified as quantitative or qualitative. In practice, research often contains elements of both approaches so that this distinction is often blurred. This leads Bryman to warn against driving a wedge between these two basic approaches.[43] Consequently, this has given rise to a mixed method approach to research. The mixed method approach might involve the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the use of both quantitative and qualitative practices, and the reporting of both qualitative and quantitative issues.[44] This mixed methodology is supported by what Bryman defines as the 'technical version'.[45] This is an

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intrinsic motivation', *Organisational/Behaviour and Human Performance*, 8 (2) (1972), 217–29, cited in P. Lewis, 'Performance Related Pay in Higher Education; nine lessons ... but no songs of praise', *Education + Training*, 35 (2) (1993), 11–15.

41 A. Bryman, *Research Methods and Organization Studies* (Oxford, 2000); id., *Social Research Methods* (Oxford, 2001); M. Saunders, P. Lewis, & A. Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students* (London, 2003); J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (London, 2003).

42 Saunders *et al*.

43 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

44 Creswell.

45 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 20.

outlook which regards quantitative and qualitative data-collection and data-analysis techniques as capable of being combined.

This study is a mixed method research investigation based upon pragmatic assumptions of knowledge. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. Such an approach was adopted because of the nature of the research questions set. This paper initially uses survey research because of the size of the population.

A five-point scale questionnaire was devised and distributed to a total of 180 full-time academic staff members. Ninety-one were filled in and returned, giving a response rate of 50.5 per cent. To simplify analysis, a three-point scale was devised, representing the percentage of respondents who 'agreed', 'disagreed', or were 'undecided' to each statement. The mode for each response was also calculated. The perceptions of the staff members conducting appraisal (the area and subject coordinators) were compared to the perceptions of the academic staff being appraised and the results were cross-tabulated and analysed using statistical analysis software. Owing to reasons of length, only the responses given by the academic staff are presented here.

Findings and analysis

For reasons of space and confidentiality issues, this paper will focus primarily on the quantitative data collected. However, some reference to a few of the qualitative comments will also be made. Moreover only respondents' views on PA's benefits, PA's negative attributes, PA's role, and the source of appraisal are discussed.

The benefits of PA

This section of the questionnaire gauged respondents' views on the possible benefits of using PA in an educational institution. Ten statements were presented to respondents. The absolute majority of respondents agreed to most of the statements presented, with the exception of the statements which focused on improved work

relationships where the majority were 'undecided' about whether PA leads to improved relationships with the appraiser and other members of staff. Comments added by some respondents show that this is probably because appraisees are aware that PA could become a bone of contention that may negatively affect work relationships, especially if the wrong approach is adopted by the appraiser.

The fact that a very high percentage of respondents agreed to practically all these statements clearly highlights that, PA is considered as a beneficial HR tool that plays an important role in educational institutions. Over 70 per cent of respondents 'agreed' that PA is beneficial because it helps clarify work goals; helps in the achievement of work goals; and leads to the formal recognition of good performance. Between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of respondents agreed that PA is useful because it leads to better performance; increased motivation and commitment; improves feedback on work performance; and makes academic staff more accountable to students and authorities.

These findings complement much of the research reviewed. Similarly to what had been proposed by McGregor back in 1957, respondents believe that PA should be goal-oriented and that one of the main functions of PA should be the identification and achievement of work goals rather than just assessing performance.

The findings also imply that academics expect their achievements to be recognized and this may be taken to indicate that recognition is in itself considered as a form of reward. Furthermore, the belief that PA can lead to increased motivation and job commitment ties up with Randall's and Mani's views that the ultimate scope of PA is to improve individual performance.[46]

The negative side of PA

This part of the questionnaire sought to assess academics perceptions on the shortcomings linked to PA by the literature. The lower percentage

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46 Randall; Mani.

rate of agreement to these statements shows that the negative perceptions of respondents on PA are less pronounced. This is taken to imply that respondents believe that the benefits of PA outweigh its negative attributes.

The only statement that gained a high percentage acceptance rate (85 per cent) is that PA is ineffective if conducted in isolation and that it consequently should be linked to other performance-enhancing policies. This clearly reveals that respondents are aware that using PA in isolation as a means of improving performance is unlikely to give the desired results. As one of the respondents commented, 'PA must form part of management's and the college's culture, rather than as something that needs to be got over and done with'. The latter comment suggests that not much time is committed to PA and that academics may feel that they do not own the PA process. This supports much of the literature previously identified, mainly by Tomlinson,[47] and McAfee and Champagne,[48] which emphasized the need for PA to form part of a wider PM strategy and integrated with other performance enhancing policies.

In the case of the other statements, between 35 per cent and 45 per cent agreed that PA is ineffective because assessing and measuring performance is subjective, negative criticism may lead to demotivation, and that performance depends on uncontrollable external factors. Furthermore, 51 per cent agreed that determining the teacher's part in the learning process is difficult. The latter result complements the research findings of Eraut,[49] Burgess,[50] and Von Glinlow[51] who specifically single out teaching, due to its specific characteristics, as being difficult to assess.

47 Tomlinson.
48 R.B. McAfee & P.J. Champagne, 'Performance Management: A strategy for improving employee performance and productivity, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 8 (5) (1993), 24–32.
49 Eraut.
50 Burgess.
51 Von Glinlow.

The fact that the majority feel that negative criticism may lead to demotivation suggests that respondents feel that PA should be conducted in a way that emphasizes the positive aspects of one's performance rather than the negative. Some respondents also pointed out that the effectiveness of PA very much depends upon the skill and predisposition on the part of the appraiser not to use negative criticism, as the latter can be counterproductive. Respondents also suggested that much depends upon the spirit in which PA is conducted and the type of relationship that exists between the appraiser and assessed. An overbearing approach could do more harm than good.

Fifty-one per cent of the respondents felt that PA is not considered time-consuming. This is probably due to the fact that not much time is devoted to PA at the college and this is a factor which greatly influences the effectiveness of the PA process at the institution.

The role of performance appraisal

This section of the research sought to gauge the perceptions of respondents on the diverse functions attributed to PA by the literature and the problems associated with linking PA with both developmental, administrative, and control objectives. Overall, respondents generally agreed to the different statements, with the exception of the possible use of PA for the harder HR decisions of retention or termination of employment and disciplinary action. In these cases, two observations made by respondents shed light on the possible reason for this. One relates to the subjectivity of PA, making it liable to be contested. The other relates to the animosity and tension that would arise if it is known that PA is being used for such 'hard' decisions. Respondents also pointed out that assessors do not have the authority to implement contentious HR decisions.

The statements that gained more than 70 per cent agreement were all linked to teacher development. In fact, between 77 and 88 per cent agreed that PA should be used for: the setting of objectives and their review; to identify areas for performance improvement, for professional development and training needs; for coaching and supporting individuals

on an ongoing basis; and to help staff members improve their teaching methods and techniques. The high percentage of respondents 'agreeing' to these statements clearly reveals that PA is associated with management by objectives and the improvement of future performance rather than being only concerned with the measurement of past performance.

Between 50 and 63 per cent agreed that PA should be used for: the improvement of communication, the allocation of an annual performance bonus, identification of individuals for future promotion, and monitoring of individual performance. Also, 42 per cent agreed that PA should be used for identifying and recognizing outstanding faculty members, whilst 44 per cent agreed that PA should be used for the allocation of wage increments.

The high rate of agreement to the developmental objectives, the lower rate of agreement with the use of PA for the above administrative decisions, and disagreement with the use of PA for harder administrative decisions indicates that there is a bias towards the use of PA for developmental purposes rather than for administrative decisions and shows a general consensus towards the use of PA to help individuals develop in their careers. This is in line with the assertions made by Randall[52] and Wiese and Buckley[53] that PA should focus on the development and achievement of future objectives, rather than just assess past performance. However, the support for the softer administrative decisions also reveals that academics expect PA results to be used for more than just developmental needs.

The fact that 76 per cent agreed that 'PA should be used to coach, develop and support individuals on an ongoing basis' may also be taken to indicate that respondents believe that PA should be a continuous process rather than a one off interview held at year-end. The belief that PA should be a continuous process was also reflected by that 62 per cent of respondents 'agreed' that PA should be used as a means of improving communication between staff and management.

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52 Randall.
53 Wiese and Buckley.

The majority agreed to the use of PA for remuneration purposes such as the allocation of wage increments (46 per cent) and an annual performance bonus (65 per cent), supports the existing practice at the college of using PA for the distribution of monetary rewards. Having said this, when analysing the latter results one needs to keep in mind that the only tangible outcome of the PA process at the college is the allocation of the PA bonus and that that over 99 per cent of respondents claimed that they had received the full performance bonus over the past three years. This might have influenced the above results.

The source of appraisal

This section of the questionnaire sought to determine the perceptions of respondents on the appraisal source. Possible appraisers presented to respondents included self, area coordinator, subject coordinator, college principal, colleagues, students, qualified professionals, and the possibility of using multiple sources of appraisal.

Of the different possibilities presented the only appraisal source that was agreed to by the absolute majority of respondents was assessment by the subject coordinator (69 per cent). This reflects a preference to performance being appraised by the immediate supervisor. The other options agreed to by a relative majority were student assessment (46 per cent), assessment by area coordinator (40 per cent); and assessment by qualified professionals external to the college (39 per cent). The lower percentage of those agreeing to the last two options and the fact that responses were more or less equally distributed among the three response groupings hints at this source of appraisal not being a favourite option among respondents.

All the other options were disagreed to by the majority. Of the possibilities presented to respondents the least popular options were: the college principal, peer appraisal and self appraisal. Appraisal by the college principal was disagreed to by 69 per cent; peer appraisal was disagreed to by 55 per cent; and self appraisal by 44 per cent. The high percentage that disagreed with the principal conducting appraisals makes this option the least desirable. Comments added show that

respondents feel that this would not be humanely possible given the large number of staff members involved, and that the principal 'is too distantly removed to be able to objectively assess performance'. This highlights the importance of assessment being conducted by persons close to those being assessed.

The use of multi-rater (360-degree) appraisal involving all of the above options is not a popular option. However, the majority (60 per cent) indicated a preference to the use of a combination of the above options. A form of multi-rater assessment involving the subject coordinator, the area coordinator, students, and an element of self appraisal are considered as being most appropriate by respondents. Comments added reveal that respondents prefer different sources of appraisal because it makes performance appraisal more reliable and leads to less bias and more objectivity.

Conclusion

PA is a complex process whose effectiveness is widely contested in literature. What initially simply involved the assessment of past performance by one's immediate supervisor is now also being used for the development and management of future performance. PA is also being used to achieve a number of different often conflicting objectives while different sources of appraisal may be used. PA may also be applied in isolation or as part of a PM framework. Consequently, the different way PA can be put into operation is endless and this adds to the complexity of the situation.

The PA system in the college chosen for this research was primarily introduced for the assessment of performance and the allocation of monetary reward through a performance bonus. This case study sought to identify what the perceptions and expectations of academics that have experienced PA are regarding PA's: benefits and negative aspects, its main role and the sources of appraisal.

The research conducted in the chosen college underscores the high expectations of academic staff members vis-à-vis PA and the important function that it is expected to play in the college and similar educational

institutions. This research also reveals that academics primarily associate PA with a number of benefits rather than disadvantages and that it is expected to be used to realise a number of developmental and administrative functions concurrently. These include the identification of work goals, improvement of employee performance, increased motivation, better feedback, increased accountability, and the allocation of monetary and other rewards. The findings also reveal that, if given a choice, academics would prefer a PA that focuses on teacher development being used for training decisions, improving teaching methods and continuous coaching.

The respondents also emphasised the need for more than one appraisal source. The most favoured appraisal sources identified were one's immediate supervisor and students. Furthermore, the research findings showed that respondents expect PA to form part of a wider performance management framework involving an appropriate management style and the application of other performance enhancing policies in order to improve its effectiveness.

The above findings help to clarify a number of issues regarding PA's use that have important implications for its use in educational settings. The benefits attributed to PA by the respondents, first and foremost, clearly highlight PA's standing as an important and useful HRM tool. It is therefore not surprising that PA (albeit in different a form than originally used in the past) remains one of the major HRM tools still used for improvement of employee performance. The attributed benefits of PA by the academic staff also emphasize the desirability of formalizing and extending PA's use in the post-secondary sector.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the type of appraisal used should definitely not be the traditional PA involving assessment of past performance. A forward looking PA process should be adopted that focuses on teacher development, training and improving performance. Preferably the appraisal process should involve more than just setting objectives at the beginning of the year and assessing the achievement of those objectives at the end. Appraisal should rather be a continuous process that focuses on improving communication between those being assessed and those responsible for conducting the appraisal.

The expectations of PA are high, however trying to achieve too much from one HRM tool in isolation is likely to lead to its failure. If the main objective of PA is to improve employee and organisational performance, PA should definitely not be implemented in isolation. Its link to a wider PMP is essential for its successful implementation. This would probably entail the adoption of a more professional HR approach to management of schools that focuses on the management of other important aspects such as developing a performance oriented culture, the adoption of an appropriate management style, improving communication, ongoing training, and making improved teacher and organizational performance the prime consideration in policy making and adoption.

Additionally, putting into practice any form of PMP requires proper planning and commitment by all concerned. Management, assessors, teachers/lectures and probably also union representatives should be involved in its design and implementation. Proper training should also help ensure consistency in its implementation and this should shed credibility to the whole exercise.

Finally, a word of caution regarding the linking of PA to rewards is considered appropriate. Linking PA to rewards, whatever form they may take, needs careful consideration. This implies that further study and research is required on the issue. Though the findings show an overwhelming support for PA being used to determine pay, one must keep in mind that the results obtained were positively influenced by the fact that 98 per cent of respondents were awarded the full bonus and this casts doubt as to whether the PA system was distinguishing between respondents who deserved such a bonus or not.

When drawing conclusions one should keep in mind that this study has been conducted within one particular context. Consequently, one cannot draw quick or hasty conclusions and generalise about the findings. Studies within other contexts would help to get a better understanding of how educators within different education sectors feel about the matter. Another issue that needs to be looked into is the influence of organisational culture and the personal experience of respondents towards PA on the results obtained. Similar studies have

been conducted by Scicluna,[54] Zammit,[55] Spiteri & Zahra[56] on PMP in the secondary and primary sectors. Comparing these studies to the above might also be a useful exercise which may shed light to this field of study.

54 J. Scicluna, 'The Performance Management Programme', Assignment presented as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Administration and Management), Jan. 2008.

55 T. Zammit, 'The Perceptions of the Educator towards the Performance Management Programme', Unpublished MBA dissertation, Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, University of Malta, 2005.

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