The Global Perspectives of Performance Management

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Abstract: Performance management is the process by which organisations set goals, determine standards, assign and evaluate work, and distribute rewards. But when you operate across different countries and continents, performance management strategies cannot be one dimensional. HR managers need systems that can be applied to a range of cultural values. This paper briefly looks at the various perspectives on this phenomenon.

Keywords: Global, performance, perspectives, management, organisation.

INTRODUCTION

Performance management is a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing performance in organisations by linking each individual's performance and objectives to the organisation's overall mission and goals [1]. Performance management is critical to small and large organisations – for-profit and not-for-profit, domestic and global – and to all industries. After all, the performance of an organisation depends on the performance of its people, regardless of the organisation's size, purpose or other characteristics. Unfortunately, however, if they have one, few organisations use their existing performance management systems in productive ways. Performance management is usually vilified as an 'HR department requirement'. In many organisations, performance management means that managers must comply with their HR department's request and fill out tedious, and often useless, evaluation forms. These evaluation forms are often completed because it is a requirement from the 'HR cops'. Unfortunately, the only tangible consequence of the evaluation process is that the manager has to spend time away from his or her 'real' job duties [2].

Of interest to this study was the study by Simons [3] on the effectiveness of performance management in knowledge based institutions. The staff indicated that this remains an under researched area.

However, a number of influential researchers have tended to condone the contingency approach to the extent that they asserted a certain form of performance approach appraisal is appropriate for knowledge based institutions. Indeed, the traditional approaches emphasise the need to enhance employee flexibility so as to compete effectively. This approach emphasises high levels of autonomy and independence, self-discipline and the need to speak to professional standards. Power of appraisees in such instances is derived from expert knowledge and skills and conduct guided by a code of ethics.

However, the need to balance traditional appraisal schemes with a focus on control which require those employees' performance objectives should emanate from and should contribute to those at departmental, divisional and corporate level bringing in another dimension [4, 5]. However, universities seem to be opposed to this view as it does not give adequate autonomy and academic freedom to professionals. The approach is seen as stifling innovation and self-development as it emphasises top down approaches.

The methodology adopted for this study is particularly significant since conclusions were based on perspectives of key stakeholders who in this case were the teaching staff and from two business schools and on the other hand from academic staff from universities. Another significant aspect was the use of in-depth interviews conducted over a period of three months. A structured questionnaire which focused on respondents' experiences appraising and being appraised as well as their general attitudes to performance appraisal was also used. Respondents were required to identify performance measures that academic staff as relevant and legitimate to the study and were required to evaluate their image and acceptance within their own organisations' performance appraisal system.

Three conclusions were drawn from the research. First despite the fact that there was significant criticism of performance appraisal, it would be difficult to do away with the approach. There were no clear cut

alternatives. Another problem is that universities rely on government funding.

It was also noted that there is significant evidence that traditional forms of performance appraisal are less appropriate for knowledge based organisations. In this instance measures which maximise academic staffs' effectiveness need to be considered. Thereby it is proposed that a stakeholders' synthesis approach could be most effective in developing performance appraisal system which recognise stakeholder interests and thereby warn their commitment.

In terms of the current research on performance appraisal and rewards a number of pointers could be drawn in order to guide performance appraisal processes in universities. It would appear universities cannot be completely distanced from the old universities which emphasised the laissez-faire approach to performance appraisal with their emphasis on independent thought, need for scholarship, collegiality and academic freedom, a new paradigm shift has to usher in. It should acknowledge economic realities given that education is a business. In this way universities need to be consumer oriented and staff should provide value for money. As a matter of fact, given the contextual nature which has to take into account changes in the financial and political climate which exerts pressure to increase student numbers and access, universities have to devise ways to remain relevant and should justify their need to carry on with university business. The extent to which the case institutions were to focus on ensuring performance appraisals would remain focused and linked to rewards.

Another significant study on performance management of academic staff in South African higher education noted that South African higher education is facing lots of demands for increased public accountability, responsiveness, capacity building, efficiency and effectiveness. They noted that over 30 different policy demands had led to change in scope, nature and intensity in academic work and to instil the need to subject academics work to performance and quality assessment. Indeed, this was a clarion call for the performance appraisal systems. Further this study emphasised the view that shortcomings exist in current appraisal systems.

They noted that some shortcomings emanated from past legacies as well as failure of most institutions to address real needs of academic staff while at the same time attempting to sustain the staffs' varied interests in the knowledge economy.

This study was also of interest to the researcher because the cited research followed a case study approach which hopefully would yield results which would provide insights into the nature of performance.

Moreover, the cited study's results were based on a twelve question semi-structured interview schedule which used various levels of interviewees. Results obtained showed that there were more similarities than differences in the perception of the staff. In the current study the researcher's interest was to identify common trends in the cases as opposed to making comparative analyses.

Another significant study by Kochanski, Anderson and Sorenson [6] indicated that globally most organisations still have a long way to go in order to fulfil their roles and objectives pertaining to performance appraisal. Apparently from identifying numerous shortcomings in performance appraisal systems, the study further concluded that performance appraisals in higher education institutions were poorly conceptualised and remained a poorly executed process which often fails to achieve intended purposes. Given the short-comings in the studies indicated above the researcher wanted to determine the extent to which performance appraisal systems can be executed to win staff support.

CONCLUSION

Performance management systems that do not make explicit the employee contribution to the organisational goals are not true performance management systems. Making an explicit link between an employee's performance objectives and the organisational goals also serves the purpose of establishing a shared understanding about what is to be achieved and how it is to be achieved. This is painfully clear in the case of Sally described above: from her point of view, the performance review forms did not provide any useful information regarding the contribution of each of her subordinates to the organisation.

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