Teachers’ Perceptions on the Implementation of the Performance Management System in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: The study investigated teachers’ perceptions on the implementation of the performance management system in one cluster of high schools in Zimbabwe. The study was located within the goal setting theory of motivation as developed by Edwin Locke. Forty senior teachers were purposively selected to participate in the study. A case study design which combined both qualitative and quantitative methods was used in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires and focus group interviews. The study found that teachers were not adequately prepared to implement the performance management system due to an interplay of factors such as poor articulation of the system, lack of training, shortage of resources in schools, absence of professional development programmes in schools as well as insufficient funding. The study recommends that the revitalisation of training support for school personnel, funding of schools as well as the improvement of communication systems among stakeholders within the education system could help enhance the effectiveness of the system.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions including schools the world over are currently facing the greatest challenge in providing quality education and to be accountable to their clients and communities (Darling-Hammond and Richardson 2009). Most educational planners and policy makers have therefore made the management of teachers’ performance and their professional development their critical core business. A popular justification for focusing on the management of the performance and professional development of teachers is that teaching quality is regarded as the largest in-school factor that affects student learning. Therefore, managing teachers’ performance is critical as it helps them continuously improve their skills, which in turn impact positively on student achievements.

The reason that teachers play a central role in the delivery of quality education, makes it imperative that they are well monitored and they receive quality training so that they are able to deliver a service of the highest standard. Many governments and leaders in education the world over are resorting to the use of performance management system (PMS) to realise this goal. As Santiago et al. (2009) observed, the PMS helps accurately measure, monitor and enhance the performance of teaching staff as well as motivating teachers through professional development, recognition and reward. The apparent scarcity of studies that focus on teachers’ perceptions of their capacity to implement the performance management system in Zimbabwe necessitated the current study.

The Essence of Performance Management

Armstrong (1996) regards performance management as a means of getting better results from the organisation, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competence requirements. The same author observes that performance management is concerned with the interrelated processes of work, management development and reward. It covers activities that begin with goal setting at the organisational level and end with appraisal of performance of employees, followed by rewards and consequence management (Sallis 2002).

Performance management is necessary to maintain the vitality of the organisation. It is based on the principle of management by agreement or participative management rather than management by command (Bezuidenhout 2006). Under the PMS, supervisors such as school heads and teachers (supervisees) jointly work out performance goals, review performance, provide feedback and work out remedial actions. Its emphasis is on development and the initiation of self-managed learning plans and the integration of the individual and corporate objectives (Berry 1998).
Guthrie and Reed’s (1986) study of selected schools in Europe revealed that participative management that incorporates effective supervisory communications can enhance employees’ job satisfaction significantly. The PMS makes this possible by meeting employees’ needs in such areas as gaining recognition, sensing achievement and competence, experiencing growth and meeting objectives (Kapfunde 1999).

In the context of the school system, the thrust of the performance management system is to identify specific needs of teachers, provide support for continued growth, promote accountability, monitoring the school’s overall effectiveness and evaluate teachers’ performance (Santiago et al. 2009). International literature on teacher performance (Brower 2005; Society for Human Resource Management, India 2012) clearly illustrate that when teachers and school management work jointly in integrating performance measurement processes for professional growth with school improvement efforts, both individuals and institutions tend to improve. In this way, the PMS acts as a form of in-service professional development, and as a means of identifying the weaknesses and needs of teachers for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning (Shultz 2006).

Verspoor (2004) observes that the success of the PMS is predicated on a number of factors, that range from the way the system was communicated to teachers and schools, level of staff training on PM, quality of coaching and guidance teachers got from school heads, availability of resources in schools and whether or not schools and clusters conduct staff development workshops on PMS. The existence of these conditions is important as it helps individual teachers understand the procedures and processes of the PMS.

Notwithstanding its perceived usefulness, the use of the PMS in the education sector has raised some controversy as highlighted below. Heystek et al. (2005) argue that the PM was inherited from business and industry where performance could be linked to monetary compensation. The authors note that in education, unlike in business, it is not always possible to link PM to financial rewards as doing so may discourage staff from participating in the process. In the same vein, Riches and Morgan (1998), contend that it is more difficult to determine what constitutes a high standard in a school than, it may be in a business and industry. As Gerber et al. (1998:193) succinctly put it, “…in business, PM revolves around the issues of input and output and the related remuneration while in education it is very difficult to compare inputs and outputs as these differ within a school and from school to school”. This difficulty makes it nearly impossible to have a provincial or national system of remuneration for good performance. This is particularly so in schools that are characterised by diversity owing to differences in availability of resources, funding models and historical situations.

Heystek et al. (2005) contend that the time factor is very critical in PM. The same authors go on to observe that the core business of teachers in schools is teaching and given the time-consuming nature of PM activities, teachers hardly have ample time to participate in the appraisal process.

Riches and Morgan (1998) cite the difficulty of assessing teaching as one problem associated with the use of the PMS in schools. Their argument stems from the observation that there are no universally agreed criteria for good teaching in the profession. This means that it is not easy to design an instrument that can be used to assess good and creative teaching. The author therefore agrees with Robins (2007) who advises that, in evaluating or measuring performance, appraisers should always realise that they are attempting to measure the invisible and the subjective side of measurement, a process that requires extreme caution particularly in the school context.

Sergiovan and Starrat (1993:71) observe that the most sensitive issue surrounding educator evaluation is the criteria, which should be used to make the variables more concrete and measurable. All scaling instruments are susceptible to the halo effect and being too generous or too strict when evaluating. Clearly, the process of appraising, measuring or evaluating human performance is value-laden and brings the issue of objectivity and validity to the fore.

**Background to Performance Management System in Zimbabwe**

The history of performance management system in Zimbabwe dates back to the events that took place at independence in 1980. Upon attaining independence, Zimbabwe embarked on
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an ambitious educational expansion at all levels of the education system (Kapfunde 1999). For instance, in 1979, there were 2401 primary schools in the country, but slightly over a decade later in 1991, they had almost doubled to 4549 (Zvobgo 1998). In 1980, the total primary school enrolment was 1 235 994 but it rose by 86% to 2 294 934 in 1991 (Mumbengegwi 1995). Secondary school enrolment underwent a tenfold increase from 66 215 to 708 080 during the same period. This phenomenal expansion had serious implications in terms of staffing, resources and effectiveness of the system. Firstly, it meant that the government had to face the inevitable consequence of employing relatively young inexperienced and poorly qualified staff in order to cope with the massified education system. Secondly and as a direct consequence, it led to the deterioration of quality and standards in education, as amply manifested by tumbling pass rates, high dropout rates and high unemployment rates for the school graduates (Kapfunde 1999; Zvobgo 1998). The two authors further observe that at the same time, there were wide concerns over the rising levels of demotivation amongst the teaching staff currently in the system. This was clearly attested by among other things the huge brain drain as many teachers searched for greener pastures abroad.

Against this background, in 1987, the Public Service Commission (PSC), which is the employer of all workers in the service of the State including teachers, conducted an in-depth study and audit of the education system with a view to recommend strategies to revitalise the system so as to improve the quality of education (Zigora and Chigwamba 1997) was done. Accordingly, the PMS was adopted in 1995 as one of the mechanism of enhancing the effectiveness of the education system as well as making schools more accountable. It was envisaged that through the PM the ministry of education would be able to accomplish its mission of maintaining or improving the quality of public education while at the same time seeking to maintain or enhance staff satisfaction and development through training (Zvobgo 1998).

Goals of the Study

The study aimed at understanding high school teachers’ perceptions of their capability at implementing the performance management system in selected schools in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe. Getting feedback on teachers’ experiences of the performance management system in schools is a prerequisite for the successful capacitation of teachers with the skills and competencies needed in the process. The study sought to contribute to international debates on the efficacy of the performance management system in the school context. The study will provide advice for policy in government and education departments about how to implement the PMS in the education sector and thereby helping to improve the twin challenges of raising quality in education and staff motivation.

Theoretical Perspective

The study is informed by the goal-setting theory as developed by Edwin Locke. In terms of this theory, a goal is the aim of an action or a task that a person consciously desires to achieve or obtain (Locke and Lathan 2002). The goal-setting theory starts from the simple observation that setting performance goals for employees motivates them to strive towards achieving these goals (O’Neil and Drillings 1994). In this way, an assigned goal influences employees’ beliefs about being able to perform the task at hand and if it becomes certain that current performance is not achieving desired goals, employees will be motivated to increase effort or change their strategy (Schultz 2006). In terms of this model, the individual staff members will meet with his/her evaluators/supervisors to plan the goals, criteria for appraisal, standards as well as strategies to achieve these. The individual staff member’s goals and standards are designed in line with those of the organization. During the year, the individual staff member will meet with his/her appraiser to review progress and amend goals and strategies if necessary. This theory was relevant to this study because the performance management system is among other things a process of setting specific performance goals for the employee which in turn serves as a potent motivating force for the employee.

Heystek et al. (2005) observe that the effectiveness of the goal setting theory is contingent upon the capacity of individuals in an organization to combine their efforts towards a coordinated goal. Seyfarth (1996) cites individual
autonomy as the major advantage of this model. However, the author is quick to point out that some individuals may set weak or over-ambitious goals which may actually distort performance.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The research employed a case study of a cluster of four schools in which data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Information regarding teachers’ views on their capacity to implement the PMS was collected by asking questions to the sample through a questionnaire and focus groups. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to access the perceptions, attitudes, understandings, feelings and experiences held by teachers with regard to the subject of study (Steyn 2011; Wiersma 2000).

Sample

Forty teachers selected from a cluster of four schools participated in the study. The convenience sampling technique was used to select the cluster of schools which was close to the researcher’s place of residence so as to cut on travelling costs. All the four schools were government-owned, enrolling students from form one to form six. Purposive sampling was used to select ten senior teachers with teaching experience of eight years and above from each school. This consideration was important as the researcher wanted to engage information-rich participants in the study, those teachers with substantial experience with the performance management system.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a questionnaire instrument administered to all forty teachers. Respondents to the questionnaire instrument had the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on their responses on the space provided. Data were also collected through focus group interviews conducted with twenty teachers randomly selected from the sample. Focus groups allow for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives that enhance the meaningfulness of the data (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). It is because of the richness and complexity of the group dynamics that emerge in a focus group interview that justified its inclusion in this study. The complementary use of these two instruments was meant to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

Procedure

Permission to conduct research in the selected schools was sought and granted by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in the Masvingo Province. The participants in the study were briefed about the purpose of the study. Participants’ permission was sought to record the interviews and to take down field notes. All field notes were expanded by the researcher immediately after the interview as a mechanism for verification. Participants’ consent to complete a questionnaire was sought but they remained free to withdraw from the study or to withhold any information that they did not like to disclose.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative in approach. The researcher transcribed and inductively coded interview data and field notes into categories and themes. Data from the questionnaire were analysed descriptively using frequency tables. In the analysis, ‘strongly disagree’ (SDA) responses were merged with the ‘disagree’ (D) responses and treated as ‘disagree’ responses. Likewise, the ‘strongly agree’ (SA) responses were merged with ‘agree’ (A) responses and treated as ‘agree’ responses. Questionnaire responses were presented in juxtaposition with responses from focus group interviews in order to bring wholeness to the data instead of presenting data as discrete units.

RESULTS

In this section, teachers’ perceptions on the implementation of the performance management system are discussed and linked with the literature according to the following categories: the way the PMS was communicated to teachers, teacher training on performance management, coaching and guidance from school heads, resources in schools, cluster staff development workshops on PMS.
The Way the PMS was Communicated to Teachers

The respondents were asked to indicate on a questionnaire whether the performance management process was well explained to teachers before it was implemented. Table 1 shows that 15 respondents (38%) agreed that the system was well explained to them while 25 (62.5%) disagreed with the statement. It is evident from this that the PMS was not well communicated to most teachers prior to its implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
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Related sentiments were also recorded during the focus group discussions. There was a general feeling among most focus group participants (70%) that information about the performance management was not well communicated to the relevant stakeholders particularly teachers. During the discussions, it emerged that the performance management system was just imposed on schools by the central government and school heads in turn imposed it on their teachers. This had the ultimate effect that there was no ownership of the system by those who were supposed to implement it, namely teachers and school heads.

The following remark from one of the focus group participants bears testimony to the above:

One thing I would like to highlight is the fact that the performance management is an imposed system. Teachers have never been consulted in the first place and yet the success of the system depends on teachers’ cooperation.

Training on Performance Management System

The question of interest was to find out if teachers had been adequately trained to understand the process and procedures of PMS. Table 2 shows the results to this question.

One of the assumptions of this study was that teachers’ ability to implement the performance management system was a function of the nature and quality of training that they received prior to its implementation. A total of 31 (77.5%) of the teachers indicated that they received inadequate training while 9 (22.5%) said they received adequate training. This finding was corroborated by sentiments captured during the focus group interviews. It emerged from focus group interviews that while the training that some teachers received was inadequate, other teachers did not receive any form of training at all.

The following sentiments raised by three participants from the focus group discussants can help to illustrate the point:

We have lack of training. There is no adequate training for the teacher so that they actually understand the essence of performance appraisal and benefits which might be actually derived from the system.

I think only one group of teachers was trained and after that it’s just in-housing training at the school. You find that at the end of the day most of the teachers just copy the written work from their colleagues. So they do not understand the meaning of performance management.

But... when we were doing now the final rating, the headmaster was also confused as he didn’t even understand how to calculate the marks. So I think there is need from time to time, teachers need training so that it becomes effective.

What emerges from the above responses is that teachers in the cluster appear to lack direction, confidence and certainty with regards to the implementation of the performance management system.

Coaching and Guidance from School Heads

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they received regular coaching and guidance on performance management issues from their supervisors, namely school heads (See Table 3). On
this issue 34 respondents (85%) said that they did not receive regular coaching and guidance relating to performance management whilst 15 percent thought otherwise. When the same issue was followed up through focus group interviews, it emerged that teachers who did not receive coaching and guidance made assumptions that their supervisors were not knowledgeable about the performance management process.

Table 3: Teachers received regular coaching and guidance on PM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
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The finding that there was no proper monitoring of the PMS seems to suggest that supervisors themselves were not competent in the subject.

School Resources to Support the PMS

The research question intended to find out whether schools had adequate resources to support the implementation of the performance management system. Table 4 shows that 5 respondents (12.5%) agreed with the statement that schools had adequate resources to support the performance management system while 35 respondents (87.5) disagreed with the statement. It is important to note that of those who disagreed 42.5% of them showed strong disagreement making it clear that in the eyes of many teachers, the schools had no resources to support the performance process.

Table 4: Schools have adequate resources to support the performance management system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
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In the open-ended section of the questionnaire, 16 respondents (40%) expressed the view that, while many schools had good infrastructure, they did not have funds to purchase resource books and other materials for use by teachers. Focus group discussants (65%) also raised the view that funding of school projects, including the performance management system, became an acute problem due to the socio-economic-political melt down experienced in Zimbabwe. The shortage of resources in schools meant that teachers were poorly equipped to manage their professional work in the first instance and ultimately the PMS.

School Staff Development Programmes on PMS

Participants were asked to indicate whether their schools conducted periodic staff development workshops to capacitate teachers with skills and knowledge to implement the PMS. Table 5 shows that 38 respondents (95%) disagreed with the statement that schools conduct regular staff development workshops on performance management system while 2 (5%) agreed with the statement. Interestingly none of the 5% respondents who agreed with the statement expressed strong agreement. On the other hand, of the 95% who said schools did not conduct staff development workshops, 42.5% were of the strongly agree category. From these results, it is clear the schools in this study did not conduct staff development workshops on performance management issues.

Table 5: The school conducts periodic staff development workshops with teachers to capacitate them on the use of the performance management system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
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In the open-ended section of the questionnaire, 10 respondents (25%) expressed the view that schools and teachers in the cluster were engrossed with adverse working conditions which were aggravated by harsh economic conditions prevailing in the country at the time. Under such conditions, teachers paid little or no attention to staff development issues since they were demotivated. This was corroborated by some of the comments made by participants...
in focus group discussions. The following remarks were typical:

Participant A: The hyperinflationary environment in Zimbabwe has eroded all our earnings such that our salaries have been reduced to nothing.

Participant B: In these hard times my primary concern is on where to get the next meal for my family. There are no food stuffs in the shops and most supermarkets are empty. Sometimes you spent the whole day queuing for basic food stuffs like mealie-meal, sugar, cooking oil you cannot think of attending a meeting or workshop.

Participant C: No one can work or plan a successful lesson with a hungry tummy. What the point of attending meetings when you are worried about what to provide for your family.

These sentiments point towards teaching corps whose attitude towards the implementation of the performance management system was adversely affected by economic conditions. Under such conditions, it would seem to suggest that the smooth implementation of the performance management system would become highly problematic.

DISCUSSION

It emerged from the study that teachers in the cluster were not well equipped in terms of capacity, skills, resources, training and motivation to implement the performance management system. The imposition of the system on schools by central government had the undesirable effect in that there was no ownership of the system by those who were supposed to implement it, namely teachers and school heads. Teacher involvement is critical as non-involvement tends to negatively affect their attitude towards the system thereby affecting the overall outcome of the system. Murdock (2000) cited by Monyatsi et al. (2006:429) corroborates on this view by asserting that “...teacher participation in initiating and contributing to the instruments and procedures used to evaluate their performance is crucial as it leads to motivation and empowerment as teachers develop a full understanding of the whole process”.

In terms of the goal setting theory, individuals tend to be actively motivated to accept and work towards the attainment of goals that they have contributed in forming (Blackman 2001). This is so because involvement in goal formation tends to improve goal acceptance and individual commitment towards it. Therefore, the PM, as a system of goal-setting, should have involved teachers from the planning to the implementation phase so that they would embrace it. As Furnham (2001) succinctly puts it, for any incentive system to be effective and sustainable, it has to involve input from all relevant stakeholders in the design phase. I therefore concur with Mestry et al. (2009) who advise that National Departments of Education’s advocacy programmes on PMS need to be intensively driven if the system is to be embraced by stakeholders.

Training teachers on the procedures and processes of the performance management system is regarded by Verspoor (2004) as a key variable in its successful implementation. This study revealed that most teachers were not trained on performance management serve for a few teachers who received a once-off training. Thus, teachers’ lack of training on performance management gives the impression that there was no shared understanding amongst teachers on how they should relate to the performance management system. This has the overall effect that most teachers in the cluster did not understand how the system worked ultimately affecting their capacity to implement it. Lack of training also logically meant that teachers in the cluster appear to lack direction, confidence and certainty with regards to the implementation of the performance management system. Training teachers on the procedures and processes of the PMS has been shown by Bischoff and Mathye (2009) to be a pre-requisite to the success of any system of performance management.

Robbins’ (2007) study on motivation and performance among teachers in Mali revealed that training was at the core of the success of most performance management programmes. With both teachers and school heads lacking skills and training on how to implement the PMS in Zimbabwe, its success became highly problematic. Monyatsi et al. (2006) also cited lack of pre-service or in-service training on performance management by teachers as a major obstacle to the effectiveness of the teachers’ appraisal system in Botswana.

This study established that teachers did not receive any form of coaching and guidance with regards to performance management from their
managers (school heads). This undermines the teachers’ capacity to implement the system as the absence of coaching impacts negatively on their continuous professional development which is an integral element of the performance management system. Oyen and Macibibi (2004) observe that managers and supervisors need to make coaching an integral part of the performance management process so as to motivate employees and improve performance. In support of this, Brower and Beach (2005) add that coaching should be on-going throughout the performance period so as to assist employees achieve success. The need for coaching and guidance in PMS is further underlined by Bisschoff and Mathye (2009) who assert that teachers need to know how they are performing and they need regular support from their supervisors.

The survey and the interview findings showed that the lack of resources in schools impacted negatively on the teachers’ capacity to implement the process of PMS. This makes it incumbent upon the Zimbabwean government to increase the funding that is allocated to schools. With adequate funding, schools will be in a position to purchase materials and resources that support teaching as well as being able to organise development programmes to assist teachers improve their knowledge, skills values and attitudes. This is crucial as it empowers teachers in schools, thereby helping them become better equipped for the performance management system. The Zimbabwean PMS was among other things meant to motivate teachers through professional development of teachers. Professional development of teachers has been identified by Mestry et al. (2009) as a necessary process in any successful system of performance management.

CONCLUSION

This study examined teachers’ perceptions of their capacity to implement the performance management system in Zimbabwe. Overall, the study revealed that the Zimbabwean performance management system remained laden with serious challenges that affect teachers’ capability to implement the system. Such challenges stem from among other things, poor planning, lack of sound communication, inadequate funding and lack of staff training. Training and re-training therefore remains central to the success of the PMS. The study therefore calls for a more political will and commitment on the part of government and education policy makers to address these and other challenges so as to create a conducive environment within which the PMS can be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Zimbabwe need to customise its performance management system to enable it to respond to the unique needs of staff in the education sector. This study also recommends that training of staff (both teachers and school heads) be prioritised if at all the PMS is to succeed. Further, a more participatory approach needs to be observed when implementing the PMS so that teachers in schools do not only identify with the process but may also become advocates of the PMS.

REFERENCES


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