

Appraisal System And Staff Performance In Selected Secondary Schools In Uganda: A Comparative Case Against Public Service Appraisal System

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Abstract

One of the most lucrative businesses in Uganda is establishment of Educational Institutions. It goes by no doubt that the success of an educational business lies in the human resources. Human resources are at different management hierarchies which require co-support through appraisal practices. The study aimed at investigating the influence of appraisal system on staff performance in selected privately managed schools. The study followed a cross sectional design using mainly quantitative approach. Quantitative data was collected using self administered questionnaires. The major findings of the study were that two independent samples t-test revealed that the existing appraisal system in selected private schools conforms to the other recommended appraisal system of public service. Spearman's correlation coefficient revealed that the success of the appraisal system in private schools depends on the perceptions of staff. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient revealed a strong significant relationship between appraisal feedback and staff performance. Recommendations made were that private schools management should clearly observe guidelines for developing performance objectives like clearly assigning and identifying areas of responsibility for all staff and communicate priorities, make timely and consistent decisions that lead to favorable results as per the public service appraisal guidelines.

Key words: appraisal practice, employee perception towards appraisals, appraisal feedback, staff performance

Introduction

Performance appraisal system is at the centre of performance of all organizations especially in this era of stiff competition (Staff performance appraisal in the public service, 2007). Consequently, all organizations are looking for ways in which to enhance the employee performance. In Uganda, there is stiff competition between privately owned schools and public secondary schools. This study considers performance appraisal as a factor that is deemed to influence employee performances in these schools.

Theoretical Background: Goal setting theory

The theory of this study was based on Goal – Setting Theory by Latham and Locke (1970). In their theories, they highlight four mechanisms that connect goals to performance outcomes, direct attention to priorities, and focused mind and efforts. Goals challenge employees to bring their knowledge and skills to bear and to increase their chances of success. The more challenging the goal, the more people will draw on their full repertoire of skills. Goal setting theory leads to control theory which focuses on feed back as means of shaping behaviour. Control theory makes employees appreciate the discrepancy between what they are doing and what they are expected to do and take coactive action to overcome the discrepancy thus making feedback a crucial part of performance management process.

The challenge

The demand for effective human resources is a requirement for organizations to fulfil their obligations and functions (Public Service Act, 2000). In the same line, performance appraisal is considered among the tools that are used to evaluate the human resource and align teaching staff to the strategic objectives of the schools. These strategic objectives of the schools are the central pillars of education performance management, directly related to the schools' performances and have a direct impact on employee's performance, which ultimately affects the overall school performance and its objectives. However, the existing performance appraisal system in Private schools appeared to be problematic or unsatisfactory. Anecdotal evidence indicated that some employees in private schools perceived performance appraisals as a relegated human resource function that was not done in good faith and that the exercise rarely improved staff members' performance. Qualitative inquiry into the role of appraisals among some staff in selected private schools revealed its a witch hunting exercise which lacks objectivity. They further accused the appraisal system of being inadequate in the areas of effecting the agreed recommendations and communicating

appraisal objectives especially in quality of education service delivery improvement. Unless appraisers (supervisors) conform or approximate to the recommended appraisal practices, a state of victimization is likely to evolve, staff morale might reduce, staff inefficiency could arise which leads to poor performance of the private institutions and in the long run closure if it is not addressed.

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study aimed to;

- i. Investigate if or not the existing appraisal system in private schools complies with the recommended appraisal system by renowned scholars and Ministry of Public – Service Uganda
- ii. Examine the perception of private schools staff towards the existing appraisal system
- iii. Determine the effect of the appraisal feedback on the performance of staff members in the selected secondary schools.

Literature review

This section brings the reader up to date with current literature on a topic and form a basis for another goal such as future research that may be needed in the area. This chapter looked at the collection of readable materials on the topic that was researched on. It provides a handy guide to this particular topic.

Compliance of organizational set appraisal system with other scholarly and acceptable appraisal systems like Ministry of Public Service Appraisal System

Armstrong (2000) defines performance appraisals as a systematic way of evaluating a worker's performance and his potential for development. Referred to in this study are the school staff members whose performance has to be evaluated because they contribute to the attainment of educational objectives. This lies on the premise that proper evaluation should involve the use of appropriate and recommended appraisal practices that form a basis of this study. Decenzo and Robbison (2002) asserts that setting and communicating appraisal objectives creates clarity in the minds of the employees given the fact that members of staff have the opportunities to talk about the organizational objectives and to define their contributions to the achievement of those objectives. Ministry of public services performance appraisal guideline (2007) emphasizes that communication of performance objectives helps managers to have an opportunity to discuss the set objectives with the members of staff and establish their respective contributions to the over- all objectives. For the organizational unit clarity of objectives would create a spirit of consistent pursuit and achievement of objectives, the possibility of all pulling in the same direction and combined efforts to come up with an agreed plan and strategies to achieve the agreed upon objectives.

According to Tough (2009) in her article "setting effective performance standards" states that for any organization to be successful, the employer and employee must set and agree on the performance standards that will apply to each activity as well as how the standards will be achieved. Understanding the level of performance required gives the employee a sense of achievement which is one of the key ingredients to achieving performance standards and it applies to all employees at all levels. Aswathappa (2003), asserts that setting effective performance standards energizes and empowers the employee to take ownership of their positions, the employers too become energized and inspired ceasing to avoid confrontation and the performance of the organization goes up due to the fact that everyone knows what is expected of them, which provides certainty to move forward.

Employee perception and towards the existing appraisal system

Bacal (2009) recommends that when talking to an employee about a problem, one should phrase his comments in terms of preventing the problem from recurring, by using the inappropriate performance as a jumping off point, explaining why it is problematic, and then quickly moving on to preventing re-occurrence. This moves the focus from blame to improvement. He also suggests a cooperative, dialogue approach for managers. This approach puts the manager and employee on the same side, and working towards the same goals gets better and better.

Barrie and Sow (2008) claim there must be standards of comparison. People need to know how well they are doing at their jobs and where they could improve. It is important to keep in mind that appraisals do not equate to criticism. It may be necessary to explain the importance of completing tasks within timelines or changing the technique of doing a task. Unfortunately, many performance appraisals only frustrate the employee by adding more tasks to what appears to be an already over loaded agenda.

Appraisal feedback and staff performance

Feedback is not only important to individuals but also to organizations because of its potential influence on performance and a variety of attitudes and behaviors of interest to organizations. Whether these benefits are realized likely depends on how recipients of feedback react to the feedback. Indeed, reactions to feedback not feedback per se, are presumed to influence future job performance (e.g., Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), as well as job and organizational attitudes (e.g., Pearson, 1991; Taylor *et al.*, 1984). Because reactions to feedback potentially influence a variety of

outcomes, it is important to empirically verify if these benefits are realized. Given this apparent significance of studying reactions, many researchers have bemoaned the relative lack of research (e.g., Bernardin & Villanova, 1986), so much so that, Murphy and Cleveland (1995, p. 310) referred to reaction criteria as the "neglected criteria" of performance appraisal research. Satisfaction with appraisal feedback is regarded as one of the most consequential of the reactions to appraisal feedback (e.g., Dorfman, Stephan & Loveland, 1986; Giles & Mossholder, 1990; Keeping & Levy, 2000). For instance, Giles and Mossholder (1990) and others (e.g., Organ, 1988) have asserted that satisfaction as a measure of employees' reactions is a more encompassing indicator of reactions to appraisal feedback than more specific, cognitively oriented criteria, such as perceived utility and accuracy of feedback (e.g., Keeping & Levy, 2000).

In addition, because appraisals form the basis of several important decisions, satisfaction with feedback signifies recognition and future prospects within the organization. Thus, more favorable attitudes about reward contingencies develop when satisfaction is high than when it is low. These various psychological implications of satisfaction with feedback make it a significant determinant of future behavior and job and organizational attitudes (Taylor et al., 1984). The central role of feedback to the appraisal process and the importance of examining ratees' satisfaction with appraisal feedback are widely acknowledged (e.g., Ilgen et al., 1979; Keeping & Levy, 2000; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Given this, the relative lack of research on reactions to appraisal feedback served as the impetus for this study. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to build on previous theory and research and investigate the influence of satisfaction with feedback on subsequent job performance, attitudes and intentions.

The notion that rewards or anticipation of rewards have the potential to motivate people to higher levels of job performance is consistent with expectancy (e.g., Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996; Vroom, 1964), goal setting (e.g., Latham & Locke, 1991), social-cognitive (e.g., Bandura, 1991), and reinforcement (e.g., Skinner, 1969; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997) theories of motivation. The potential of feedback to influence employee performance is consistent with theoretical arguments put forth by several performance appraisal researchers (Cederblom, 1982; Ilgen et al., 1979; Ilgen et al., 1981; Klein, Snell & Wexley, 1987; Taylor et al., 1984).

However, in an exhaustive meta-analysis, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) concluded that although feedback generally improved performance, in more than one third of the studies feedback lowered performance. Their study focused on the effects of performance feedback per se (i.e., whether or not feedback was provided) on performance. This is very different from examining the effects of reactions to performance feedback, such as satisfaction with feedback, on subsequent performance. Because satisfaction with feedback implies acceptance of feedback of ratings and the feedback itself, it could be a better predictor of future job performance than the provision of feedback per se. If ratees are dissatisfied with feedback, they are less likely to use feedback to improve performance (Bernardin & Beatty, 1984; Ilgen et al., 1979). Several studies have reported that satisfaction with feedback has a positive effect on employees' motivation to improve their job performance (e.g., Burke, Weitzel & Weir, 1978; Nemeroff & Wexley, 1979; Russell & Goode, 1988).

Methodology

Private Secondary schools that have a set appraisal system for their teachers as a way of improving performance were purposively selected. These schools have a well structured record system for tracking the progress in performance of their teachers. Among these were Seeta High School, Namilyango Senior Secondary Schools, Mpoma Girls School. After establishing the total population, the study used Krejcie & Morgan, (1970) table to compute the sample size from the accessible population. Samples from the individual schools were computed using proportionate strata after which purposive sampling was used to select respondents with required information in respect to the objectives of the study. A structured questionnaire was administered to staffs whose items were scored using a five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. To ensure quality of data, Cronbach's alpha co-efficient was computed for all variables and it confirmed the reliability of the instrument that had been used in the study because all items in the construct generated values above 0.8. Validity was obtained using Content Validity Index that was obtained as 0.906 above the acceptable limit of 0.7. Data was analysed using three levels. First level univariate analysis had descriptive statistics mainly mean and standard deviation. Second level was bivariate analysis for relational statistics using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient to establish the relationship between feedback and appraisal success followed by independent samples t-test-measure of difference in means to establish the conformity of the appraisal system in private schools with that set by Ministry of Public service and coefficient of determination find out the extent to which perception of private schools staff members determine the success or failure of the appraisal system.

Empirical Results

Out of the 120 respondents, 53.8% were females whereas males accounted for 46.2%. Of these staff, 10% constituted top management staff (head teachers and their deputies) and 90% teaching staff. Concerning staff tenure, 7.7% had

less than one year working experience, 80% had 1-5 years working experience, 20% had 6-10 years working experience, none had 11-15 years working experience.

Hypothesis testing using Inferential statistics

Having crudely made predictions about the variables under study using percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations as descriptive statistics, analysis proceeded to inferential statistics in order to answer the research hypotheses as in the subsequent section below:

Two independent samples t-test

H1: The existing appraisal system within the selected private secondary schools conforms to the recommended appraisal system by Ministry of Public Service. This hypothesis was tested by computing the two independent samples t-test as per the table below:

Table 4: Paired samples t-test results

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	EXAPSYS	3.7347	120	.42206	.09210
	RECAPSYS	3.9643	120	.69949	.15264

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	EXAPSYS - RECAPSYS	-.22959	.65041	.14193	-.52565	.06647	-1.618	20	.121

The means generated from the existing appraisal system (EXAPSYS) and recommended appraisal system (RECAPSYS) were 3.73 and 3.96 respectively. Comparing the two means this implies that there is some variation between the existing appraisal system in the schools and the recommended appraisal system of 0.23. However, there is also a slight standard deviation range (0.277) meaning some divergence of the respondents' views between the two systems. To check if this variation is statistically significant, the study revealed sig. value of 0.121 which is not statistically significant. The implication of this is that the first hypothesis under mention is upheld as: *'The existing appraisal system in the schools studied conforms to other standard recommended appraisal systems by Ministry of Public Service and therefore, could be adopted and used by other schools and staff should adhere to it.'*

Coefficient of determination R-squared for staff perception on existing appraisal system

The second hypothesis was: To a great extent staff perception in private secondary schools determines the success or failure of the appraisal system. This hypothesis was tested by establishing the relationship using Spearman's Correlation Coefficient r and thereafter used to determine the coefficient of determination r-squared. Table 5 below presents the results:

Table 5: Coefficient of determination R-squared for staff perception and the success or failure of appraisal system

Correlations				
			STAFFPERS	EXAPSYS
Spearman's rho	STAFFPERS	Correlation Coefficient r	1.000	.696**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
		N	120	120
	EXAPSYS	Correlation Coefficient	.696**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
		N	120	120

The study revealed a strong positive relationship of 0.003 between staff perception and the success or failure of the appraisal system. This is because the sig. value obtained is below the acceptable limits of 0.05 and 0.01 at 95% and

99% levels of significant. R-squared 0.4844 obtained from $r=0.696$ revealed that the failure or success of the appraisal system in the selected private schools in Uganda is explained by only 48.4% variations in staff perception towards the same. The remaining 51.6% of failure or success of appraisal system is determined by other factors not covered in this study. These results imply that the appraisal success or failure among private secondary schools is determined by 48.4% of staff perceptions which is an average extent.

Relationship between appraisal feedback and staff performance

The third hypothesis under investigation was “There is a strong positive relationship between appraisal feedback and staff performance.” This hypothesis was tested using Pearson’s Moment Correlation Coefficient as it a relational statistic.

Table 6: Pearson’s moment correlation result between appraisal feedback and staff performance

Correlations			
		FEEDBACK	STAFFPERF
FEEDBACK	Pearson Correlation	1	.532*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	N	120	120
STAFFPERF	Pearson Correlation	.532*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	
	N	120	120

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The study revealed sig. value 0.013 that is statistically significant as it is below the acceptable limits of 0.05 at 95% level of significant. This implies the more appraisal feedback there is in schools and institutions, the more and better the staff performance. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a strong positive significant relationship between appraisal feedback and staff performance is upheld.

Discussion of results

Existing appraisal system in the private schools and recommended appraisal systems

The first objective aimed at investigating if the existing appraisal system in the private secondary schools conforms with the recommended appraisal system by renowned scholars and Ministry of Public – Service Uganda. The t-test results did not reveal statistically results from the means generated from both appraisal systems implying that the existing appraisal system complies with the recommended appraisal systems. These results are in agreement with Hal & Taylor (2002) who assert that one of the recommended appraisal practices is inducting new employees in the organizational policies to make them develop a strong belief and acceptance of organizational values which enhance their commitment. Moreover, most of the respondents were in agreement with this practice meaning it is a common accepted appraisal practice and recommended by many other appraisal practitioners.

Further, among the studied schools there seem to be a practice of setting and communicating appraisal objective. Decenzo and Robbison (2002) affirm that setting and communicating appraisal objectives creates clarity in the minds of the employees given the fact that the members of staff have the opportunities to talk about the organizational objectives and to define their contribution to attainment of those objectives. This appraisal practice in these schools is supported by Ministry of Public service appraisal guidelines (2007) that concretize that communication of performance objectives helps managers to have an opportunity to discuss the set objectives with the members of staff and establish their overall contributions to the overall objectives.

Setting and communicating performance standards is another recommended practice that was revealed as a practice among these private secondary schools. The results of the study are in agreement with Megan (2009) article who reveals that any organization to be successful, the employer and employee must set and agree on the performance standards that will apply to each activity as well as how the standards will be achieved. Meanwhile, Aswathappa (2003) asserts that setting effective performance standards energizes and empowers the employee to take ownership of their positions. The employee becomes energized and inspired to, ceasing to lower expectations in order to avoid confrontation and therefore performance of the organization goes up.

Another recommended appraisal practice revealed that complies with Public Service Appraisal guidelines is follow-up-action. Descriptive results revealed that performance standards are followed up with. On the contrary however, Armstrong (2000) and Mwenibirinda (2000) argue that follow up action which involves the quality of work done by each employee is the most difficult part of performance appraisal. A close examination of staff in these schools reveals that much as follow up is there, measuring quality of work is as challenging as pointed out by the previous scholars. This could be investigated further in another HR study by another scholar.

Perception of staff towards the existing appraisal system

The second objective sought to examine the extent to which perception of staff determine the success or failure of the existing appraisal system. The study revealed strong correlation results implying that the success or failure of appraisal system is dependent upon staff perception towards the appraisals. Meanwhile, literature reviewed also revealed that it is the appraiser's perception or attitude that determines the success or failure of appraisal process rather than the appraisee's attitude. Literature adds that the rater determines the ratees' attitude towards the appraisal system. For instance, Bannister, 2002 notes that to a well informed and credible appraiser, employees are more likely to view the appraisal process as accurate and fair.

Additionally, Oberg (2001) advises that the right decision by appraiser on what performance appraisal technique to use should determine the appraisee's perception for the rest of the process. Therefore it implies that appraisers should be aware that their appraisal practices will determine appraise perceptions and attitudes which ultimately determine the success or failure of appraisal process. Scholars from Total Quality Management (TQM) perspective argue that traditional performance appraisal of appraisers can hurt quality and team work because it can make employees develop perception as though they are competing against one another. This therefore implies that the perception of appraisee (staff appraised) also determines the success or the failure of the appraisal process.

Appraisal feedback and staff performance

The third objective aimed at determining the relationship between appraisal feedback and performance of staff members. The study revealed a very strong significant relationship between appraisal feedback and performance of staff. Ilgen (1979), Kluger & Denisi (1996) support these results by ascertaining that performance feedback has the potential to influence future performance of individuals and organizations at large. They are supported by Dorfman, Stephen & Loveland (1986) who revealed that satisfaction with appraisal feedback among staffs is regarded as one of the most consequential of the reactions to employee reactions. Early et al (1990) concludes that feedback discussions include a discussion of outcomes (ratings) and process (strategies to enhance future performance) both of which enhance motivation to perform. This study disagrees with Kluger & DeNisi (1996) who in their study concluded that appraisal feedback lowered staff performance.

Implications of the study/Conclusions

These were aligned to the objectives of the study. From the findings, the researcher made the following recommendations pertaining staff management in the schools, staff as members of the social system and policy formulation therein.

Existing performance appraisal in the schools and conformity to the recommended performance appraisal Practices

To individual staff, they should adhere to the appraisal practice set by the organizations since it has been revealed that appraisals aim at performance improvement and it is the main yard stick to measure performance.

School managers should clearly observe guidelines for developing performance objectives like clearly assigning and identifying areas of responsibility for all staff, set clear objectives, monitor processes, progress and results, clearly set and communicate priorities, make timely and consistent decisions that lead to favorable results as per other scholars appraisal guidelines.

The strategic managers should constantly review and streamline the appraisal system policy document to conform to up to date standards. Schools' management as a matter of policy should emphasize and move to a higher level the practice of setting documented performance standards or expectations which are known as a basis for appraising employee's performance.

Perceptions of staff determine the success or failure of the appraisal system

All staff members should be encouraged to participate. Comments should be solicited and suggestions regarding the process. This will make employees feel more empowered and develop an impression that the appraisal process is more balanced.

School Managers should train supervisors and management team on proper ways of conducting performance appraisal. Too often, supervisors reinforce a negative attitude towards performance appraisals because at times, the approach is demeaning and harsh.

The policy as an appraisal tool should be used in the development of skill sets of employee and improve their productivity and profitability. Management should offer measurable action steps designed to improve their position within the department and promote recognition within the schools.

There is strong significant positive relationship between appraisal feedback and staff performance.

The researcher recommends that school management should adopt the DISC (Describe, Impact, Specify, Consequences) feedback tool if it is to continue realizing the benefits of feedback process.

Management/Supervisors need to **describe** the situation or behavior that needs to be addressed in terms of observable or behavioral. Supervisors should avoid using ambiguous words that might be subjected to further interpretation.

Management/Supervisors need to clearly define in details the **impact** of subordinates outputs on the subordinate him/herself, on the department, and the organization as a whole. Describing the impact of the situation or behavior may provide a new insight for the subordinate who is receiving feedback as to how the situation or behavior affects his or her performance and helps set a tone of personal responsibility.

Management/Supervisors need to **specify** the change that needs to take place. This can be a 'one way' communication or a more collaborative conversation between the supervisor and subordinate depending on how ready and able the subordinate is to rectify the problem and accomplish the necessary change.

Management/Supervisors need to explain the **consequences** of making the requested changes or of failing to make the changes, if they persist, the negative impacts of the situation or behavior described in 'D' must be met with appropriate and fair consequences. In the discussion, there is a need to link the consequences positive or negative to the impacted areas noted in the discussion under 'impact.'

Contribution of the study

The findings of this study have several contributions to the present literature. First, this study contributes to the already existing body of knowledge in areas of staff performance appraisal systems.

Areas of Further Research

From the study, future researchers should enrich the findings of this study by carrying out and establishing other factors in details that influence the performance of staff members in educational institutions. There is need to compare perceptions of supervisors and subordinate employees towards the appraisal system in other learning institutions. There is a need to deeply study the compatibility of performance appraisal with Total quality Management and Balance Score Cards in other institutions.

Biography of author

Stephen holds a Master Degree in Management Studies and a PhD candidate. He is the Assistant research coordinator of the Faculty of Business and Administration and a member of the University Research Committee Chaired by the Vice Chancellor. With over ten years teaching experience, Stephen's research interests are in ICT, e-learning, project management and general management.

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