

*“Walking on Water”***An exploration of the University of Johannesburg Heads of Department’s experiences and perceptions of the University’s Performance Management System**

SE Seyama

[sseyama@uj.ac.za](mailto:sseyama@uj.ac.za)

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

**ABSTRACT**

Against the backdrop of the unrelenting influence of globalisation, marketisation, massification and the South African political transformation agenda, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) responded to a demand for accountability by aligning performance to its strategic goals and holding staff accountable for their performance through a performance management system (PMS). The implementation thereof has resulted in both positive and negative sentiments. This study is a descriptive phenomenological exploration of a selection of nine UJ academic Heads of Departments’ (HODs). In-depth semi-structured interviews provided data of the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions of the institution’s PMS. Duquesne School’s data analysis method as enunciated and used by Hycner and simplified by Groenewald was employed to construct the themes.

The findings showed that HODs support the implementation of a PMS within higher education (HE), alluding to its potential to enhance performance. However, participants’ narrative of their lived experiences highlighted the tension between the corporatisation agenda and the university’s traditional social role. Negative experiences were reported regarding the perceived inadequate financial rewards, high administrative workloads, reduced academic privileges and compromised academic excellence, all of which deprive managers of adequate performance bonus rewards. A lack of transparency on ratings and indecisiveness about the purpose of the PMS were also reported.

The emerging message is that the implementation of a quasi-corporate PMS within a complex academic environment is a recipe for demoralised and unappreciated academic managers.

Keywords: performance management, performance appraisal, rewards, academic autonomy