

Perceived Challenges of Implementing the Performance Management System in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The study examined the challenges experienced by teachers when implementing the performance management system (PMS) in Zimbabwean high schools. A qualitative survey design was used. Forty school teachers and five school heads participated in the study. The sample for teachers was randomly selected while the school heads were purposively selected from five high schools in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews in this study. The study found that lack of training on performance management (PM), abuse of the system by school heads, failure by school management to provide staff development programmes, lack of meaningful reward as well as shortage of resources were the major obstacles affecting the implementation of the system. Recommendations thus mainly focused at ways of mitigating such challenges so as to revitalise the PMS.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching quality has been shown to be the largest in-school factor affecting student learning as well as quality of education at both organisational and individual level (Bartlett 2000). Consequently, educational planners and leaders in education now place a lot of premium on the management of teachers' performance and their development. Managing teacher performance is critical as it helps teachers continuously improve their skills, which in turn, helps students achieve their potential. This among other things necessitates the accurate monitoring, measurement and appraisal of teaching performance with a view of identifying areas of further development. Acknowledging the key role that teacher professional development plays in improving the quality of teaching and classroom practices, many governments have adopted the performance management system (PMS) as an instrument of improving educational standards. While the performance management system offers a lot of hope on how to improve educational

quality, Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) India (2012), notes that very few organisations have been able to really implement and effectively utilise the potential of a PMS. This study therefore intends to examine perceived implementation challenges of performance management in a cluster of high schools in Zimbabwe.

Performance Management Defined

Sallis (2002) regards performance management as '...an interlocking set of policies and practices which have as their focus the enhanced achievement of organisational objectives through a concentration of individual performance. Robins (2007) regards performance management as "...an approach to creating a shared vision of the purpose and aims of the organisation, helping each individual employee understand and recognise their part in contributing to them, and in so doing manage and enhance the performance of both individuals and the organisation.

According to Goldstein (2006), teacher performance management is a continuous process of identifying, evaluating and developing the work performance of teachers, so that the goals and objectives of the school are more effectively achieved, while at the same time benefiting teachers in terms of recognition of performance,

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professional development and career guidance. The performance management system covers activities beginning with goal setting at the level of the entire organisation and ends with appraisal of performance of employees, followed by rewards and consequent management (SHRM India 2012). It is a systematic approach to performance improvement through an on-going process of establishing strategic performance objectives, measuring performance, collecting, analysing, reviewing and reporting performance data. Guthrie and Reed (1986) state that such data may be used for awarding tenure to probationary teachers, identifying candidates for promotion to higher responsibility, improving individual's motivation; dismissing or demoting the incompetent as well as rationalising and redeploying employees.

Bartlett (2000) and Bell (1988) identify four basic benefits that an effective performance management system should provide employees with namely,

- (a) Clear understanding of job expectations
- (b) Regular feedback on performance
- (c) Advice and steps for improving performance
- (d) Rewards for good performance

In the Zimbabwean context, the central focus of performance management is the improvement of professional practice, motivating teachers and instilling a sense of accountability in teachers. The introduction of the PMS in Zimbabwe and the world over has been characterised by the concern for improved quality, a greater degree for accountability and more efficiency as well as a move to develop teachers as professionals (Zigora and Chigwamba 2000). In this way, the performance management system functions 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. The crux of this research is to understand the challenges experienced by teaching personnel in the implementation of the PMS in selected high schools in Zimbabwe.

Design

The study employed a survey design that involved the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in a complementary manner. The use of a qualitative design enabled the research-

er to develop an understanding of individuals and events in their natural settings (Sibanda et al. 2011). The study sought to establish factors that hinder the success of the performance management programme in Zimbabwe from the teachers' perspectives.

Sample

A sample of 45 participants was drawn into the study comprising 40 high school teachers and 5 school heads. The gender profile of the participants was 65% males and 35% females with an age range of 25-55 years. The convenience sampling technique was used to select a cluster of 5 schools which was close to the researcher's place of residence so as to cut on travelling costs. The purposive sampling technique was used to select eight senior teachers with teaching experience of eight years and above from each school. This criterion was considered important since the researcher wanted to collect information-rich data from teachers with substantial experience with the performance management system. Each school head from the five schools was purposively selected to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide were used for data collection. The teachers' semi-structured questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A examined the biographical data of participants including age, gender, professional qualification and experience while part B presented a survey on perceived challenges of implementing the performance management system in the cluster under study. Part C had open-ended questions on challenges of implementing the system. Participants were to respond by ticking one of the three options namely less important, fairly important and very important. Participants had the opportunity to elaborate and expound on their responses on the spaces provided.

An unstructured interview guide was used with 5 school heads. The same issues that were captured by the teachers' structured questionnaire were presented to school heads in an unstructured format. A briefing exercise was conducted before the interview where the issue of confidentiality was explained to the participants.

To ensure validity of the questions, the instruments were trial tested with one secondary school that did not participate in the study in accordance with Bless and Higson Smith's (2000) suggestion.

Goals of the Study

The study determined perceived implementation challenges of the performance management system in one cluster of schools in Zimbabwe. By eliciting the views of teachers and school heads the study thus sought to address the main question: What are teachers' perceptions of factors that hinder the implementation of the performance management system?

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the goal setting theory as expounded by Edwin Locke. The theory works from the assumption that setting goals for employees provides a structure that direct actions and behaviours leading to improved performance. The theory states that goal setting is essentially linked to task performance (Mullins 2005). It states that specific and challenging goals along with appropriate feedback contribute to higher and better task performance (Verspoor 2004). Goal setting is based on the assumption that employee efforts within an organisation will be influenced by the goals assigned to or selected by these employees (Lathan 2004). Several conditions are particularly important in successful goal achievement namely, goal acceptance and commitment, goal specificity, goal difficulty and feedback.

Ethical Compliance

Permission to conduct the study was sought and granted by the Provincial Education Director of Masvingo Province, where the schools were located. Questionnaires and interviews were administered and conducted by the researcher at scheduled times during normal school hours. Informants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses prior to the interviews.

Data Analysis

The results were analysed using frequency tables in the case of questionnaire data and content analysis and verbatim statements for the qualitative data collected through interviews.

RESULTS

The questionnaire items sought to gauge teachers' perceptions of factors that impacted negatively on the implementation of the performance management system. These factors were as follows:

Failure to consult school personnel during the design phase of the PMS, teachers lacking skills and knowledge, school heads not coaching and mentoring teachers, abuse of the PMS by school heads, lack of staff development programmes, no meaningful reward for high performers, teachers, lack of training on PMS, shortage of resources and materials in schools, and lack of feedback on PM results. Teachers were asked to rank the factors in accordance to how they felt such factors acted as hindrances to the

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions of factors that hinder the successful implementation of the performance management system

<i>No.</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Less important</i>	<i>Fairly important</i>	<i>Very important</i>
1	School personnel not consulted during the planning and design phase of the performance management system	5 (12.5%)	4 (10%)	31 (77.5%)
2	Teachers lacking skills and knowledge about the performance management system	15 (37.5%)	10 (25%)	15 (37.5%)
3	No coaching and mentoring from school heads	6 (15%)	15 (37.5%)	19 (47.5%)
4	Lack of transparency by school heads	10 (25%)	3 (7.5%)	27 (67.5%)
5	School heads abusing the performance management system	12 (30%)	4 (10%)	24 (60%)
6	Schools not conducting staff development programmes with their staff	15 (37.5%)	10 (25%)	15 (37.5%)
7	No meaningful reward for those teachers who perform well	0(0%)	3 (7.5%)	37 (92.5%)
8	Teachers lack training on performance management system	6 (15%)	10 (25%)	24 (60%)
9	Shortage of resources and materials in schools	4 (10%)	6 (15%)	30 (75%)

system. Hindering factors were thus categorised as either less “important”, “fairly important” or “very important”. Responses elicited were then analysed in juxtaposition with those obtained from open-ended questions. Table 1 shows the responses to the items:

The first item sought to establish whether failure to consult teachers about the PMS could have acted as a hindrance to its successful implementation. Taking into account the 4(10%) and 31(77.5%) respondents who rated the factor as fairly important and very important respectively, lack of consultation seems to be a significant hindrance to the success of the PMS in the cluster under study.

Teachers expressed mixed feelings on the extent to which their lack of skills was considered as a hindering factor in the performance management process. On this item 15(37.5%) respondents rated lack of skills by teachers as less important and an equal number of respondents rating it as very important while 10(25%) respondents regarded it as fairly important. These figures seem to suggest that while some teachers acknowledge the importance of skills in the PM process, others do not attach much significance to this factor.

Lack of transparency by school heads was considered as very important by 27(67.5%), fairly important 3(7.5%) and as less important by 10(25%). Taken together, these figures show that teachers in this cluster consider transparency by school heads as a significant factor in the successful implementation of the PMS.

Responses from open-ended/section in the questionnaire also pointed lack of transparency by school heads as a hindrance to the successful implementation of the PMS. The following remarks from three teachers were typical:

Teacher A: The human element in assessment tends to take precedence over professional considerations. Rewards may not be suited for the work done. Therefore impartiality in its implementation should be the cornerstone of performance management.

Teacher B: A system should be put in place to make the headmaster have impartial judgments of individual teachers. Some of its aspects are unfairly executed by administrators.

Teacher C: Personality clashes between the administrators and the teachers is one of the major barrier to the performance management system.

If these comments are anything to go by, then a lot need to be done so as to improve the transparency in the implementation of the PMS especially at school level.

On the issue of lack of coaching and mentoring by school heads, the respondents who rated this factor as fairly important and very important combined stood at 34 (85%) while 6 (15%) rated the issue as less important. It is therefore clear from these statistics that coaching and mentoring is considered important to the success of the PMS.

Related to lack of transparency by school heads was the issue of abuse of the PMS by heads of schools. On this item the fairly important and very important responses combined was 28(70%) with 12 (30%) rating it as less important. From these responses it appears the abuse of the system in the schools under study was quite rampant. Therefore, the success of the system was to a limited extent hampered by the abuse of the system by school heads.

Responding to the open-ended part of the questionnaire some of the teachers raised related comments as follows:

Teacher C: The appraisers seem not to know what they are expected of appraising the appraise, some see it as a platform to settle down their scores with other people and hence drifting away from the core business of performance appraisal

Teacher D: The system is abused and so it's a hindrance to the success of the system because if a headmaster is not always in good books with teacher A, he/she will give him/her a two, and thus settling old scores with the teacher.

Fairly mixed opinions were raised on the issue of failure by schools to conduct staff development programmes with teachers. The factor was rated as less important by 15(37.5%) and as very important by another 15(37.5). It was rated fairly important by 10(25%) of the respondents. These results suggest that in the eyes of the teachers, staff development programmes, while important, were probably not very crucial as a factor. Teachers in the study were all senior teachers with a number of them holding first degrees and in some cases second degrees in education. With such good educational backgrounds, probably most teachers did not feel that continuous staff development was essential to their professionalism.

Teachers in the study rated lack of reward for teachers who perform well as an overwhelming factor towards the failure of the PMS. This was clearly evidenced by all the 40 respondents rating the factor as important with 37(92.5%) of these rating the factor as very important and 3(7.5%) giving it a fairly important rating. These findings clearly attest to the importance of reward in the performance management system. The fact that financial reward plays a pivotal role in the smooth functioning of the performance management system was also raised in the open responses where four teachers remarked as follows:

Teacher D

Well ever since I started working I was working on performance management appraisal and the work related remuneration or performance related remuneration was just too insignificant to motivate anybody. I remember in my first year I got three dollars and if you compare that money as motivation it was just too insignificant to motivate anyone so as a result I just feel this should be done away with

Teacher E

Whilst the performance management is meant to assist teachers to improve themselves in their profession, this has not been the case due to the fact that the system has never motivated them but had demotivated them by not fulfilling what it is meant for, remuneration.

Teacher F

It could have assisted a lot but nothing fruitful has emerged out of this system due to dis-gruntlement because teachers are not remunerated out of it.

Teacher G

There is one major obstacle, namely lack of motivation through remuneration.

From the teachers' responses, a major constraint to the performance management system was either insignificant financial reward or no financial reward at all.

Lack of training by teachers was rated as important by 34(85%) and less important by

6(15%) of the respondents. These results help to show that training is regarded as a felt need by most teachers in the study. Responses from the open-ended questions also pointed towards the fact that teachers were either inadequately trained for the PMS or they did not receive any preparatory training at all prior to the commencement of the system. This could be the most probable reason why most teachers in the cluster reported not having a firm grasp of how the system works. Elaborating on this matter, one teacher raised the following comment:

I think in terms of training, it appears the management from the top and the teachers are more or less confused about the way these things (performance management system) are carried out so I am worried about the quality, hence we call for training or retraining so that there is uniformity.

The issue of shortage of resources in schools also appeared to be a hindering factor in the implementation of the PMS judging by 36(90%) respondents who rated it as important factor as compared to 4(10%) who thought otherwise. The issue of resources was also raised in open responses. Two teachers raised the following comments in this regard:

Teacher Y

Failure by the government to provide training materials and other resources to schools is a major obstacle to the success of the performance management system.

Teacher Z

There is no system that can succeed without resources and support from the government. Our schools are poor and so they are not able to purchase resources needed to implement different school programmes

Interview Results for School Heads

The interview was used to complement the responses from teachers. School heads are critical stakeholders towards the success of the performance management system since they supervise and evaluate teachers' performance and identify training needs for their teachers. School heads also play a critical role by mentoring and coaching teachers so that teachers are able to achieve their set performance goals or targets.

Consultation of School Personnel

All the 5 school heads (100%) indicated that the performance management system was imposed on schools without meaningful engagement of school personnel. School heads reported that it was difficult to motivate teachers to embrace the PMS since they felt that the system alienates them.

Teachers Lacking Skills and Knowledge about the Process and Procedures of PMS

School heads voiced the concern that most teachers lacked skills and knowledge of the system since they did not receive training on performance management in the first place. It also emerged that some school heads did not receive training on performance management system. This had the ultimate effect that they were not well equipped to conduct in-service training sessions with teachers in schools. The need for training was underscored by remarks made by three school heads as illustrated below:

School head 1: "... we have lack of training and there is no adequate training for the teachers so that they actually understand the essence of performance appraisal and the benefits which might actually be derived from the system".

School head 2: You find that at the end of the day most teachers just copy the written work from their colleagues. So they do not understand the meaning of performance management.

School head 3: The performance management system was just rushed by the government without adequate training of teachers and this compounds the problem of implementation.

Thus, school heads and teachers were in agreement that lack of training could be one reason why there were so many inconsistencies in the manner in which the PMS was being implemented in schools.

Lack of Financial Reward for Teachers Who Performed Well

One of the goals of the PMS was to motivate teachers through the recognition and reward of good performance. All the school heads, like teachers indicated that the current performance management system, while it had a close on performance related pay, teachers rarely got it even if they achieved the set performance targets set

for them. Highlighting the need for financial rewards for the performance management system, one school head had this to say:

Our appraisal system is linked to some bonuses or some remuneration but in practice, teachers rarely got it even if they perform well so I think this creates a problem. Most teachers feel there are no perceived benefits obtained from the system.

Shortage of Resources in Schools

The interview results with school heads revealed that all schools faced problems of resources to implement the PMS. It emerged that central to the problem of resources was the issue of insufficient funding of schools by the government thereby making it difficult for schools to procure materials and other resources to support teaching and learning activities.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the performance management system is fraught with many obstacles that tend to inhibit its implementation. The revelation that teachers in schools were not consulted at the inception of the system has crucial implications in terms of teachers' commitment and attitudes towards the system. Non-involvement of teachers in PM creates the illusion that teachers are not significant role players in the educational policy-making process (Biputh 2008). As Bisschoff and Mathye (2009) observe in respect of performance appraisal in South Africa, teachers normally reject the performance measurement systems that are imposed on them by the department of education. The same author goes on to add that such types of measurements are often misconstrued as devices to punish teachers. Expanding on this view, Mullins (2005) argues succinctly that initial advocacy of the performance management system to familiarise teachers with performance standards, the levels of performance expected of them as well as the criteria that will be used to evaluate their performance is critical. Therefore communication and advocacy remains key to the successful implementation of the system.

The study established that poor and /or lack of training on the part of teachers meant that teachers were not only inadequately prepared but also lacked the requisite skills and knowl-

edge needed for the success of the system. Naturally and as a direct consequence, this meant that teachers and school heads lacked the much needed competencies that are essential for the successful implementation of the PMS. Lack of training by teachers is probably one of the reasons why there were a lot of inconsistencies in the manner in which the PMS was being implemented in the schools. This is not surprising given the fact that even school heads who were supposed to see to it that the PMS succeeds were themselves not trained. This obviously impacted negatively on school heads' capacity to mentor and coach their teachers notwithstanding the fact that coaching and mentoring are central to any system of performance management. Goldstein (2006) posits that mentoring and coaching help to shape performance and increase the likelihood that the employees' results will meet the desired expectations. The process is underpinned by the realisation that the immediate supervisor has a responsibility to recognise and reinforce strong performance by an employee and identify and encourage improvement where it is needed. As amply demonstrated by Bergh and Theron (2004) managers and supervisors should learn the steps of effective coaching and mentoring as on-going processes of helping employees build to higher levels of performance. In this regard, coaching and mentoring should not be viewed as isolated events but as vehicles for continuous professional development that takes place throughout the performance cycle.

The implementation of the performance management system in Zimbabwe can be improved through training on ethics by school heads so that the system is conducted in a transparent manner with minimum abuse. Overall, teachers seemed to be dissatisfied with the way in which the performance management system was being abused by school heads in schools. This revelation confirms findings by Biputh (2008) who remarks that the biggest disadvantage of having one's immediate senior as supervisor is that personal prejudice, personality clashes, and friendship ties might creep in thereby hindering objective appraisal. It is therefore envisaged that the system could be improved significantly if training in management development is made an integral element of the PMS.

Related to the issue of lack of coaching and mentoring is the problem of failure by schools

to conduct staff development programmes with teachers to keep them abreast with issues that relate to performance management and their professional development. The fact that teachers need professional support for their work is confirmed by both empirical and theoretical evidence. Thus failure by schools to hold staff development programmes with teachers can be understood in terms of the twin factors of acute shortage of resources in schools as well as lack of capacity and skills on the part of school personnel particularly school heads.

It turned out that teachers in the study did not receive periodic school-based in-service training programmes as expected in an effective performance management system. This, it can be argued, made it difficult for teachers concerned to adequately meet the needs of their students. Lack of continuous professional development became a major constraint on the part of teachers most of whom had not received initial training on PM thereby undermining their capacity to implement the system. Staff development has been hailed by Zigora and Chigwamba (2000) as an on-going process of helping employees build higher levels of performance. At the same time Mullins (2005) asserts that periodic staff development programmes conducted throughout the performance period helps employees achieve success and document performance good and bad. It is therefore imperative that the training of teachers through staff development be intensified so that they are confident in the discharge of their professional duties.

This study revealed that monetary issues were of paramount importance to the success of the performance management system in the cluster. The revelation that most teachers did not receive any financial rewards notwithstanding the fact that they had met the set performance targets and objectives proved to be a major obstacle to the success of the system. It turned out that in the few instances where teachers received some form of performance related cash rewards, such payments were too insignificant to motivate the teachers in any meaningful way. This study therefore noted that if the PMS is to motivate teachers, the promised performance related awards and remuneration should be paid to all deserving teachers as and whenever they are due. It is also crucial to point out that if such remuneration is to spur teachers into exerting

more effort, such payments should be as meaningful as possible. These findings are in line with Musingafi's (2007) findings that money or salary can be a motivator particularly for the lower level employees, who still grapple with meeting the basic physiological needs of life.

CONCLUSION

The performance management system can be a good mechanism for quality assurance in education if implemented in the right manner and enabling environment. The study, though limited in scope, clearly showed that the current Zimbabwean performance management system need to be reviewed to make it compatible with international trends of making education more responsive to the needs of the clients. This study has shown that the Zimbabwean performance management system, while well-intentioned, is fraught with numerous challenges that impacted on its implementation. These range from poor advocacy and communication about the system, lack of training on PM, shortage of resources in schools, abuse of the system as well as lack of reward. These impediments need to be addressed with a sense of urgency if at all the performance management system is to remain credible in the eyes of the stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has identified major gaps with regard to the implementation of the performance management system in Zimbabwe. In the light of the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations are made to inform policy makers, teachers and other stakeholders in the field of education and quality assurance.

(a) There is need to ensure that the performance management system is well articulated to all stakeholders, namely teachers and school heads so that it is well understood before implementation. Teachers and school heads should be actively engaged right from the planning, implementation and evaluation stage of the system so that they are not reduced to mere consumers of decisions from top government authority. This is critical as it will instil a sense of authorship and ownership of the system by teachers leading to its acceptance.

- (b) The ministry of education should review the implementation of the PMS in order to make it more responsive to international trends in teacher professional development and quality assurance in educational delivery.
- (c) Teachers and school heads need to be continuously trained and retrained on PM so that they acquire the basic competence required for its implementation.
- (d) Government need to increase funding of educational programmes such as the PMS so that such initiatives are able to achieve the intended outcomes
- (e) Government need to demonstrate more commitment to the PMS by awarding teachers who perform well the much needed performance related pay or bonus.

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