

EFFECT OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM ON MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMICS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

OJOKUKU, R.M.

Department of Management and Accounting
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria
roselineojokuku@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT

Nigerian universities are presently experiencing a number of challenges, primary among which is dearth of experienced academics, due to the mass exodus of lecturers to other countries in Africa and overseas, where the environment is more conducive to work and remuneration packages are more competitive. Series of research studies have established that a strong relationship exists between human resource (HR) practices and employee motivation and performance; however much still needs to be done in terms of investigating how it applies to academics in Nigerian universities. This study therefore set out to examine the impact of performance appraisal (PA), which is a key HR practice, on the motivation and performance of academics in Nigerian universities. The study sample was drawn from four (4) public universities in south western Nigeria. Data was sourced with the aid of a questionnaire, while percentage and multiple regression analysis were used for data analysis. Findings showed that the university academics see their performance appraisal system as not being accurate and fair enough because it does not capture adequately, all the job components that make up their performance during the review period. The performance appraisal system was also found to exert a strong influence on the academics' motivation and overall performance. It was recommended that the PA system for academics should be reviewed by university management such that all the components of their job are captured, evaluated, and adequately rewarded. This is expected to impact positively on the motivation and overall performance of the academics, thereby working as a veritable tool for steering university education towards the right direction for national development.

Keywords: HR practices, performance appraisal system, motivation, performance, academics, public universities

INTRODUCTION

The long term success of an organization is related to its ability to measure how well its employees perform within a predetermined period, and how effectively it uses that information to ensure that performance meets set standards, and also improves over time (Fisher, Schoenfeldt and Shaw, 2003). Grote (2000) refers to this process as performance management, and describes it as a handy umbrella term for all organizational activities involved in managing people on the job. Performance management helps to direct and motivate employees to maximize their efforts on behalf of the organisation; it is thus an essential instrument for an organization to meet its strategic objectives (Werner, Schuler, and Jackson, 2012).

Performance appraisal (PA) is that part of the performance management process in which an employee's contribution to the organization, during a specific period is assessed. According to Mullins (2002), the underlying objective of PA, is to improve the performance of the individual employee, thereby leading to improvement in the performance of the organization as a whole. PA is one of the ranges of tools that can be used to manage performance effectively, in that it provides data which feeds into other elements of the performance management process. As noted by Mathis and Jackson (2008), a PA system is often the link between additional pay and rewards that employees receive, and their job performance. If used effectively, PA can improve motivation and performance, but if used inappropriately, it can have disastrous effects (Fisher *et al*, 2003). For PA to be effective, it must of necessity be anchored on the performance criteria that have been outlined for the job. Riggio (2003) describes performance criteria as the means for determining successful or unsuccessful job performance. They are one of the products of a detailed job analysis. Performance criteria spell out the specific elements of a job and make it easier to develop the means of assessing levels of successful or unsuccessful job performance. It can thus be inferred that an appraisal system not hinged on this all important criteria, can neither be appropriate nor fair, particularly to the employee, whose performance is being evaluated. In fact, some key points in the arguments of those opposed to performance appraisal is that, most of the time, wrong things are rated and the wrong methods used (Deming, 1986; Gilliland and Langdon, 1998).

Situations arise whereby only some selected job elements are evaluated or given preference or higher points above other job elements in which the employee was equally engaged during the review period. This calls to

question the fairness of the appraisal system and its ability to effectively produce the desired outcomes. Mickerney (1995) underscored the intricacy of PA by describing it as a difficult and complex activity which is often not performed well by many organizations. The end result of this is that it produces exactly the opposite effect to those intended (Coleman, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria today, there is a general atmosphere of discontent pervading the entire labour scene, and Nigerian university academics are not left out in the general state of dissatisfaction and frustration (Ologunde, Asaolu, and Elumilade, 2006). Nigerian public universities have witnessed a series of industrial conflicts in recent years due to failure of the employers to review their conditions of service, despite the increasingly high cost of living (Tamuno, 1999). Many university teachers are leaving because of deteriorating conditions of service, lack of adequate teaching and research facilities and relatively poor remuneration (Sanda, 1991). In Nigeria today, the general state of poverty makes economic reward a very important reason why people go out to work, thereby making money to rank highly as a critical motivator (Muo, 2007). This situation has made it imperative for Nigerian workers to pay particular attention to human resource (HR) practices which have direct bearing on their financial rewards and social status. One of such HR activities is performance appraisal (PA), which is the focus of this study.

A major outcome of PA is promotion and its attendant increase in financial benefits plus enhanced professional and social status (Tessema and Soeters, 2006; Shahzad, Bashir and Ramay, 2008). Performance appraisal outcomes tend to have high motivational impact and are a major determinant of employee performance. The three main functions of universities, which incidentally also define the job description of university academics, are teaching, research and community service (B-HERT, 2006; Sharyelfu, 1999). In today's world of knowledge explosion and flood of information, university academics must, of necessity, be active learners and organizers of knowledge. In addition to teaching, university academics are responsible for creating knowledge through research and getting it published in scholarly journals. They are also expected to be relevant to the society at large in terms of service to the community (Aslam, 2011; Skerritt, 1992). This matrix of tasks makes the job of university academics highly demanding, thereby requiring an effective performance evaluation system that will ginger higher motivation for enhanced job performance (Aslam, 2011).

It must be emphasized that an effective performance appraisal system is one that takes cognizance of all the components of an employee's job performance, and does not focus on selected ones. In Nigerian public universities, experience has shown that emphasis during performance evaluation of academics is mainly on achievement in research, as documented by number of scholarly publications, within a particular review period. Performance on the teaching and community service components of the job are often relegated to the background, such that no matter how well a lecturer performs on these aspects, it makes insignificant contribution to his desired appraisal outcome. It is only the research efforts, as evidenced by the number of scholarly publications churned out within the review period, that really count.

However, despite the fact that engagement in research helps to update, sharpen, enlarge and enrich the teacher's knowledge base, which is in turn transferred to the students, the present conditions in the Nigerian public university system is hardly conducive for conducting meaningful research. Facilities that can stimulate and promote academic research such as current journals and textbooks, functional libraries and laboratories, internet facilities, research grants and so on, are very inadequate, making research an uphill task and costly venture for university academics.

In the light of the foregoing, this study set out to investigate how an appraisal system that is anchored mainly on one job component, that is, research output, affects the motivation and overall performance of university academics in Nigeria. Furthermore, although a number of studies have examined effect of performance appraisal on university teachers' performance (Shahzad *et al*, 2008; Anjum *et al*, 2011; Akinyele, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Rasheed *et al*, 2011; Aslam, 2011), none of these studies focused on the aspect of performance criteria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the impact of performance appraisal system on the motivation and overall performance of academics in Nigerian universities. The specific objectives were

- i. to ascertain the university academics' perception of the accuracy and fairness of their performance appraisal system.
- ii. to assess the effect of the performance appraisal system on the motivation and performance of the university academics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Job Performance

Job performance is one of the most important work outcomes and an extremely vital criterion that determines organizational success or failure. Campbell (1990) defined performance as a behaviour which consist of directly observable actions of a worker, and also mental actions or products such as answers or decisions, which result in organizational outcomes in the form of attainment of set goals. Bailey (1982) cited in Rothwell and Kazanas (2003), gave a classic definition of performance as the result of a pattern of actions carried out to satisfy an objective according to some standard. Sturo, (2007) described performance as the extent of completion of the tasks that make up an individual's job. According to Pattanayak (2005), the performance of an employee is his resultant behaviour on a task which can be observed and evaluated. It refers to the contribution made by an individual in the accomplishment of organizational objectives.

Performance is a multidimensional construct (Bates and Holton, 1995) and this leads to the conclusion that when evaluating and rewarding performance of individuals and teams, a number of factors have to be considered including both inputs (behaviour) and outputs (results) (Armstrong, 2012).

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal (PA) is a vital HR activity that is of critical importance to an organization. Fisher *et al* (2003) describe PA as that part of the performance management process in which an employee's contribution to the organization during a specific period is assessed. The feedback from this process allows an employee to know how well they have performed in comparison with the set standard of the organization. Mullins (2002) also contributed by describing a comprehensive PA system as the basic yardstick for assessing an individual's performance, highlighting the individual's potential for career advancement, and most importantly, for improving performance.

Purpose of Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal serves many purposes for the worker, the manager, and the organization (Cleveland *et al*, 1998). For the worker, PA serves as a means of reinforcement and career advancement (through praises, pay raises, promotion, and increased responsibility). For the manager, PA serves as a basis for making personnel decisions such as promotions, transfers, firings, etc. It also serves as a means of assessing workers' goal attainments and opportunity to provide feedback and interact with subordinates. For the organization, PA facilitates assessment of the productivity of individual workers and work units. It also serves as a means of validating personnel selection and placement methods, means for recognizing and motivating workers, source of evaluating the effectiveness of organizational intervention such as training programmes, system changes, etc (Riggio, 2003). Performance appraisal therefore represents a formalized process of worker monitoring and is intended to be a management tool to improve the performance and productivity of workers (Brown and Heywood, 2005).

Mathis and Jackson (2008) summarize the uses of PA into two – administrative uses and developmental uses. In the former, PA is used for making pay and other administrative decisions about employees, while in the latter; the emphasis is on employee development such as identifying strengths, areas for change, training and development needs, and planning of future opportunities.

Motivation

Armstrong (2012) defines motivation as the force that energizes, directs, and sustains behaviour. It is concerned with the strength and direction of behavior, and the factors that influence people to behave in certain ways. Mathis and Jackson (2008) view motivation as the desire within a person that causes that person to act in order to reach a goal. Robbin (2000), offered a specific work-related definition of motivation as the willingness to exert high levels of effort towards organizational goals, conditioned by the effort and ability to satisfy some individual need. Roy (2001) defined work motivation as a process of energizing employees to the work goals through a specific path. The need for motivation at work is borne, mainly, out of its perceived impact on work performance. Cole (2002) enumerated factors such as employees' knowledge, skills, and nature of task, technology in use, management style and organizational climate, as being important determinants of employee performance. However, these factors working alone, according to Cole (2002), are not enough to bring out the best performance in a worker. For an employee to work in a particularly desirable way, and with a given amount of effort and enthusiasm, he needs to be motivated. Werner *et al* (2012) underscored this by asserting that the most capable employees in an organization will not perform well unless they are motivated. Hannagan (1995) also corroborated this by emphasizing that the key to effective work performance lies in an understanding of human motivation because, according to Linder (1998), motivated employees are more productive and help the organization to survive.

Performance Appraisal, Employee Motivation, and Job Performance

The linkage between performance appraisal, employee motivation and job performance has been established by several studies. Aslam (2011) identified ambiguity in the appraisal process as one of the factors that resulted in poor motivation and acted as a key stumbling block in the delivery of expected performance by university teachers. Werner *et al* (2012) also noted that performance management practices address issues of employee motivation thereby ensuring that their capabilities are fully utilized.

Methodology

Ex-post facto research design was employed for the study. A sample of eighty (80) respondents was drawn from four (4) public universities in south western Nigeria. Public universities were chosen because of their relatively uniform administrative practices. The study sample cut across five (5) ranks within the academic staff strata – Reader (Associate Professor), Senior Lecturer, Lecturer I, Lecturer II and Associate Lecturer. No sample was drawn from the ranks of Professor and Graduate Assistant, owing to the fact that Professors are already at the peak of the promotion ladder, while Graduate Assistants are expected to obtain their Masters degree before advancing to the next level (with or without publications). Data was generated with the aid of a Likert-type questionnaire, while percentage and multiple regression analysis were employed for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The first objective of the study was to ascertain the university academics' perception of the accuracy and fairness of their performance appraisal system. To properly address this objective, the study sought to find out, in the first instance, the level of awareness of the respondents about their performance criteria, that is, the tasks and duties expected of them on their job. Results (see appendix for tables) showed that 93.8% of the respondents are fully aware of what is expected of them on their jobs. 61.5% of the respondents however did not agree that all the components of their job are assessed during the annual review exercise. A further confirmation of this is given by 68.8% of the respondents who agreed that the result of the annual review exercise does not reflect all components of their performance during the review period. Finally, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents, 93.8%, agreed that there is need for review of their performance appraisal system, if it is to be fair and accurate.

The deduction to be drawn from the foregoing analysis of responses is that university academics do not have a favourable perception of the performance appraisal system currently being used for them. In other words, they do not perceive it as being a fair and accurate measure of their actual or overall performance during the review period. This view was further supported by the result of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the perception of the accuracy and fairness of the university academics' performance appraisal system, which yielded an F value of 34, significant at 0.05%. This finding is in line with that of Jamil and Raja (2011) that performance appraisals need to be devised in such a format that has all the elements and aspects of performance, so that it can help to recognize the level of performance of the employees. Anjum *et al* (2011) also found that majority of university teachers have a strong wish for fair and systematic performance appraisal.

The second objective of the study was to ascertain the effect of performance appraisal system on motivation and performance of the university academics. The response analysis revealed that 61.3% of the respondents regarded performance appraisal as being very important because it has a lot to do with their promotion and salary increase. A response rate of 95.1% also affirmed that university academics are highly motivated when their salary is paid as at when due. The implication of this result is that workers are sensitive to the outcomes of HR activities that have direct bearing on their promotion, which most often, result in salary increase. Such HR activities (in this case, performance appraisal) have impact on their motivation and subsequent productivity. This supports the findings of Shanzad *et al* (2008) and Messah and Kamencu (2011). Further analysis also showed that 77.5% of respondents agreed that they put in more effort and perform better when highly motivated. This is a confirmation of the link between motivation and performance. It is therefore imperative for university managers to deploy their HR activities in ways that will stimulate motivation and improve performance of workers in the university system. Results also showed that 96.3% of the respondents saw scholarly publication as an aspect of their job that is very vital and instrumental for promotion and salary increase, hence publishing is accorded utmost priority in their job performance. This result confirmed the earlier findings that university academics are aware of what is expected of them to be promoted.

The fact that other components the job of university academics such as teaching and community service are not given significant consideration during the annual review exercise is attested to by a response rate of 82.6%. It can be inferred from this result that the lecturers may not be deploying as much effort to these other job aspects as they are doing to publishing, since these other aspects do not make significant contribution to the desired appraisal outcome of promotion and salary increase. This state of affairs may have unpalatable implications for

performance on the other aspects of the job of the academics, such as teaching and community service. It is a well known fact that the primary responsibility of a university teacher is to teach, impart knowledge, and create manpower, for national development. However, if performance on this aspect of the job is not adequately measured and rewarded, it is likely to result in diminished motivation, lack of commitment, and poor performance. Furthermore, the result of the regression analysis suggests that the appraisal system strongly influences the academics' motivation and performance. The R value of .77 signifies a strong relationship between performance appraisal and the academics' motivation and performance, while the R^2 value indicates that performance appraisal contributes to the academics' motivation and performance by 59%. With this result, the need to review the present PA system, such that it significantly captures, measures, and rewards all aspects of the academics' performance, is brought to the fore. Doing this is expected to considerably increase the lecturers' motivation, and boost their overall performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

University education is, no doubt, one of the most important forms of tertiary education relied upon by a nation for its technological and economic development. Enhancing the performance of universities, particularly in terms of the output of its academic staff, should therefore be of utmost priority to government and university management. Performance appraisal is one of the key HR activities that have vital implications for employee motivation and performance, and it was the focus of this study. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that academics in Nigerian public universities do not have a favourable perception of the PA system currently being used for them. The reason for this is that it fails to adequately capture, measure, and reward all aspects of the academics' job performance within the review year. Furthermore, the findings showed that, due to the direct bearing which performance appraisal outcome has on the lecturers' promotion prospects and financial reward, performance appraisal significantly affects the lecturers' motivation and performance. It is therefore recommended that the management of Nigerian public universities should explore the responsiveness of Nigerian academics to motivation, through effective use of HR tools. Performance appraisal is a key HR activity designed to deliver reward for performance; hence it is a vital instrument for enhancing employee motivation and performance, if properly used. The need to review the present PA system for university academics is therefore imperative, so as to leverage on its potential as a veritable HR tool for driving university education towards the right direction for national development.

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APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

Table 1: I am fully aware of all the components of my job as a university lecturer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	-	-	-
Disagree	2	2.5	2.5
Neutral	3	3.8	3.8
Agree	49	61.3	61.3
Strongly agree	26	32.5	32.5
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author’s Field Survey

Table 2: All the components of my performance are assessed during the annual review exercise

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	7	8.8	8.8
Disagree	45	56.3	56.3
Neutral	5	6.3	6.3
Agree	11	13.8	13.8
Strongly agree	12	15.0	15.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author’s Field Survey

Table 3: The overall result of annual review exercise does not reflect all aspects of my performance as a university lecturer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid			
strongly disagree	7	8.75	8.75
Disagree	14	17.5	17.5
Neutral	4	5.0	5.0
Agree	42	52.5	52.5
Strongly agree	13	16.25	16.25
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author’s Field Survey

Table 4: For fairness and accuracy there is need for a review of the performance appraisal system being used for university lecturers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid strongly disagree	1	1.3	1.3
Disagree	3	3.8	3.8
Neutral	1	1.3	1.3
Agree	29	36.3	36.3
Strongly agree	46	57.5	57.5
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author’s Field Survey

Table 5: Annual review is very important to me because it has a lot to do with my promotion and salary increase

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid strongly disagree	26	32.5	32.5
Disagree	5	6.3	6.3
Agree	22	27.5	27.5
Strongly agree	27	33.8	33.8
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey

Table 6: I am highly motivated if I earn my promotion and salary increase as at when due

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid strongly disagree	2	2.5	2.5
Disagree	1	1.3	1.3
Neutral	1	1.3	1.3
Agree	17	21.3	21.3
Strongly agree	59	73.8	73.8
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey

Table 7: I put in more effort and perform better when I am highly motivated

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid disagree	1	1.3	1.3
Agree	17	21.3	21.3
Strongly agree	62	77.5	77.5
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey

Table 8: My topmost priority is publishing because it is the major aspect of my job that earns me promotion and salary increase

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid disagree	3	3.8	3.8
Agree	51	63.8	63.8
Strongly agree	26	32.5	32.5
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey

Table 9: My performance on other job components such as teaching and community service is not given significant consideration during annual review

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid strongly disagree	1	1.3	1.3
Disagree	5	6.3	6.3
Neutral	8	10.0	10.0
Agree	31	38.8	38.8

Strongly agree	35	43.8	43.8
Total	80	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Field Survey

Table 10: Result of Analysis of Variance on perception of accuracy and fairness of performance appraisal system

Model	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between	11,857.742	4	2964.435	34	0.03
Within	6,578.842	76	86.563		
Total	18,436.584				

Table 11: Result of Regression Analysis on influence of performance appraisal on motivation and performance

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5692.6	3	1897.53	40	0.00
Residual	3652.5	77	47.4		
Total	9345.1	80			

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.
	B	Std error	Beta		
Constant	3.906	1.828		2.137	0.36
	0.434	0.64	.807	6.996	0.00

Predictors: (constant) performance appraisal, $R = 0.774$, $R^2 = 0.59$