Performance appraisal System an effective performance management system: Perceptions of employees at Mashwede Holdings.

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Abstract

The research sought to assess perceptions of employees on the effectiveness of performance appraisal as a performance management tool at Mashwede Holdings in Zimbabwe. The research was carried out in the form of a case study in which a sample of 52 employees from a population of 74 employees was used. Stratified random sampling procedure was employed in selecting elements from 6 managers and 46 general employees. Questionnaires and interviews were used in triangulation to collect data on the sample. After analyzing the collected data, it was found that performance appraisal assist in performance measurement. The study also found that the effectiveness of performance appraisal system is a cause of concern because of its shortfalls. The effectiveness of performance appraisal system has been hampered by various challenges such as halo effect, horn effect, stiffness, central tendency and personal bias. The study recommended that modern methods of performance appraisal be used and make use of contemporary performance management systems like Results Based Management (RBM) and Balance Score Card system (BSC).

Keywords

Perceptions, performance appraisal, performance management and goals

Introduction

Over the past decade, Zimbabwe's economy has been crippled by economic, social and political unrest, organizations have been grappling with numerous problems, some of which have threatened their survival and growth. Zimbabwean organizations were not spared from this since they were no longer plod along historical tracks and able to preserve status qou. Confronted with this harsh reality, organizations had to find survival strategies in a bid to gain a competitive edge, cut costs and improve productivity. Thus to gain a competitive edge, organizations were left with no option but rather to manage employee performance. The greatest challenges faced by companies in Zimbabwe were performance problems, liquidity crisis, and capital challenges. This instability intensified between 2007 and 2009 resulting in the decline of business activities in almost every sector of the economy.2009 was seen as an overhaul of the Zimbabwean environment and it marked the beginning of a new era in Zimbabwe as the situation has been said to have greatly improved due to dollarisation.Economic analysts revealed that the adoption of multi currency system has led to resuscitation of various sectors of the economy. The manufacturing industry was also said to be one of the beneficiary sector under this new environment due to increased social and business activities. However, the above sentiments seem to be just statements without real value when applied to manufacturing sector. Since the adoption of multi currency system, the manufacturing sector realized poor employee performance.

Related literature

This research is guided by Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and Locke and Latham's (1979) Goal theory.

Locke and Latham (1979) Goal theory

Latham and Locke (1979) postulate that organizations must device mechanisms that connect goals to performance through:

- Directing attention to priorities;
- Stimulating effort;
- Recruiting employees with knowledge and skills as this enhances organizational success and
- Setting challenging goal as this allow employees to apply their skills.

Latham and Locke (1979) propounds that effective performance management means setting and agreeing objectives against which performance can be measured and managed.

Vroom's (1964) Expectancy theory

Vroom (1964) postulates that the expectancy theory is based on the assumption that an employee will be motivated to put effort if they believe that their effort will result in higher performance which leads to better rewards. The expectancy theory also suggests that the motivation behind performance is the belief that effort will be rewarded that is expectancy. Employee are also motivated to work given their performance will be rewarded (instrumentality).Finally the theory assumes that workers are motivated to work if the value of their rewards is positive (valance).Vroom (1964) illustrated this by the following equation

Motivation=Expectancy x Instrumentality x Valence

Performance appraisal

Mondy et al (1999) define performance appraisal as a formal system of periodic review and evaluation of an individual's or team performance. They further state that performance appraisal is a backward looking activity, which seeks to assess historical performance with a view of using it to influence future performance. Dawson (1990) also defines performance appraisal as a formal assessment of how well an employee is doing his or her job. In addition, Moorhead and Griffin (1995) defines performance appraisal as a power sharing exercise that requires co-operative and constructive endeavor with input from both staff and management.

Actors in performance appraisal

Immediate supervisor

Mondy et al (1999) states that immediate supervisor appraises their immediate subordinates because they are in position to observe, direct and evaluate the subordinate‘s performance. However results of a research carried out by Gary et al (2008) revealed that managers who receive positive result of the performance usually rate employees higher than managers who receive negative results regarding their performance.

Subordinates

Mondy et al (1999) states that subordinates can review their supervisor's performance. This process is called as upward feedback. Upward feedbacks assists in assessing management style, methods of communication and extend of delegation. The ratings by subordinates help to identify competent superiors. However the major challenge is fear of reprisal by management once negative feedback is given and this often compels subordinates to give positive ratings.

Peer appraisal

Peers or colleagues can appraise the performance of another colleague especially in situations where work is organized around teams (Mondy et al 1999).Peers are in a better position to evaluate job elements which subordinates or superiors cannot do. These elements include interpersonal skills, communication skills, reliability and initiative.

Self-appraisal

Mondy et al (1999) note that if employees understand the objectives that they are expected to achieve and standards by which they are to be evaluated they are in a good position to appraise their own performance. Employees generally rate their performance more favorably than do their supervisors and this can lead to conflict and poor job performance. In contrast a research by Audrey (2004) revealed that people from collectivist cultures are less self-enhancing, suggesting that they give them ratings equivalent to their performance.

Customer appraisal

Because customers are critical in the survival of any enterprise some organizations use them to rate the performance of their employees particularly those who work directly with customers for this purpose it may be necessary to include the customers in objective setting(Mondy et al 1999). This appraisal approach is favored in that it leads to increased customer satisfaction, which in turn translates to increased business success.

Methods of performance appraisal

Traditional methods of performance appraisal

Traditional Methods are old methods of performance appraisals based on studying the personal qualities say time consiciousness, team work, leadership and initiative.

Ranking Method

According to Dessler et al. (2011) ranking method is ranking employees from best to worst on a particular trait, choosing highest, then lowest, until all ranked .Superior rank subordinates in order of their merit, from the best to the worst. The relative position of each employee is expressed in terms of his numerical rank. Manager compares each person with others than work standards (Dessler, 2000).

Graphic Rating Scales

According to Dessler et al. (2011), graphic rating scale is a scale that lists a number of traits and a range of performance for each. The employee is then rated by identifying the score that best describes his or her level of performance for each trait.

Critical Incident Method

Flanagan (1954) defines the critical incident technique as a set of procedures designed to describe human behavior by collecting description of events. According to Dessler et. Al (2011) critical incident method is keeping a record of uncommonly good or undesirable examples of an employee's work related behavior and reviewing it with the employee at predetermined times .

Narrative Essays

Dessler et al (2011) postulate that evaluator writes an explanation about employee's strength and weakness points, previous performance, positional and suggestion for his (her) improvement at the end of evaluation time. This technique mainly attempt to focus on behavior.

Importance of performance appraisal system

Murphy and Cleveland (1995) state that performance appraisal improve individual career decisions and decisions about where to focus one's time and effort. They further suggest that performance appraisal assist organizations by providing a set of tools for evaluating the effectiveness of current or planned ways of operating. In addition, Oberg (1972) notes that appraisals can help encourage supervisors to observe their employees more closely and to do a better job of managing them.

Derven (1990) argues that performance appraisal help organizations identify talented employees and future leaders in the company. In addition,Derven (1990) states that there is positive correlation between job and strategic goals of the organization and this can directly increase the profitability of the company once the appraisal systems is built on measuring customer satisfaction.Cattel (2001) puts forth the advantages of a performance appraisal system as a forum for better understanding between manager and employee. Sharing the same sentiments is Barney (1986) who suggests that an organisation can gain competitive advantage if the performance appraisal system influences the culture in the organisation.

Daley et al (2002) argue that performance appraisal is an important management tool for measuring employee job performance, clarifying personnel decisions such as promotion, demotion, transfer and retention.Mani (2002) also states that performance appraisal help in developing develop employee capacity through feedback or identifying their training needs. McGregor (1972) concurs with Daley et al (2002) and postulates that performance appraisal exists because it provides systematic judgments to support salary increases, promotions, transfers, and sometimes demotions and terminations. He further propounds that performance appraisal serves as a basis for training, coaching and counseling employees.Mohrman et al. (1989) argue that performance appraisal serves as an important communication tool between an organization and its employees that aids aligning employee performance goals with organizational goals. They also state that once proper performance appraisal has been done, it can contribute to boosting employee motivation and their productivity. Mani (2002) propounds that organizations lacking performance appraisal systems risk costly litigation when they are unable to support decisions to terminate or lay off employees. In the absence of a valid system for assessing the performance of all employees, managers risk suboptimum promotion decisions they may promote one employee and increase his or her pay when another employee's performance would be superior and give a higher return on the salary investment. In addition, studies by Oh and Lewis (2009) emphasized that given the results-oriented government reform efforts, performance appraisals became a critical component of the contemporary performance management and it will contribute to improving organizational productivity by providing employees with developmental feedback and motivating them by linking rewards to performance. Performance appraisal in theory contributes to advancing supervisor-employee understanding, validating promotion and hiring procedures, and reinforcing organizational values by supporting an organization’s culture (Murphy and Cleveland 1991).

Shortfalls of performance appraisal System

Employees have mixed feelings with performance appraisal systems. Rasch (2004) argues that managers commit mistakes while evaluating employees and their performance and some of these biases are perceived by employees as ways of unfairly interpreting their performances. Shelley (1999) defines bias as an inaccurate distortion of a measurement. Moats (1999) postulates that performance appraisal system can be affected by subjectivity and hence dilute the quality of employee evaluation. To overcome the effects of prejudice, many organizations must train appraisers to avoid biases. McNamara (2000) identifies eight common forms of biases which are:

First Impression (primacy effect)

McNamara (2000) states that primacy effect occurs when raters form an overall impression about the ratee on the basis of some particular qualities identified by them. The identified qualities and features may not provide adequate base for appraisal.

Halo Effect

Pitsis (2008) defines halo effect as a process by which the perception of a person is formulated based on a single favourable or unfavourable trait or impression. In addition, McNamara (2000) argues that hallo effect tends to shut out other relevant characteristics of a person. For example if an employee has few absences, supervisor might give a high rating in all other areas of work. To reduce halo bias Clegg et al (2008) suggest that supervisors must clearly specify the categories to be rated and rating all employees on one characteristic at a time.

Horn Effect

McNamara (2000) defines this bias as a situation where an individual's performance is completely appraised on the basis of a negative quality or feature perceived. This results in an overall lower rating than may be warranted.

Excessive Stiffness or Lenience

Mondy et al (1999) defines leniency as giving undeservedly high marks to the subordinate and strictness as being unnecessarily critical of a subordinate performance and giving low marks unduly. Moats (1999) argue that rater's values, physical and mental makeup at the time of appraisal, employees may be rated very strictly or leniently. Additionaly, Kurt (2004) argues that some of the managers are likely to take the line of least resistance and rate people high, whereas others, by nature, believe in the tyranny of exact assessment, considering more particularly the drawbacks of the individual and thus making the assessment excessively severe. The leniency error can render a system ineffective and this makes the whole process a waste of time.

Central Tendency

McNamara (2000) defines central tendency as a process where appraisers rate all employees as average performers. Additionally Mondey et al (1999) postulate that the biggest shortcoming of appraisal is that supervisors would usually prefer the safer zone where they don't award high marks or low ones but just settle in the middle. Moats (1999) argue that central tendency error occurs when appraisers are hesitant to grade employees as effective or ineffective. Supervisors pacify their indecisiveness by rating all workers near the center of the performance scale, thus avoiding extremes that could cause conflict or require an explanation. Having this then it means performance ratings given is not a true reflection of employee performance.

Personal Biases

Mondey et al (1999) argue that a supervisor may have a personal bias based on such things as race, religion, gender etc and unduly rate the subordinate's performance. The further state that it is worth noting that all these shortfalls can be minimized or completely avoided if the performance management is carefully followed and if objectives set are SMART clear and jointly agreed upon. In support, Moats (1999) states that that personal bias results from a rater's dislike for a group or class of people that is when that dislike carries over into the appraisal of an individual, an inaccurate review of performance is the outcome.

Spillover Effect

McNamara (2000) defines spillover effect as a process where the present performance is evaluated much on the basis of past performance. The person who was a good performer in distant past is assured to be okay at present also (McNamara 2000).

Recency Effect

Mondy et al (1999) state that an employee's recent performance may be used as an overall indicator of his performance during the specified period. Rating is influenced by the most recent behavior ignoring the commonly demonstrated behaviors during the entire appraisal period. The recency effect is a corollary of the natural tendency for raters to judge an employee's performance based largely on his most recent actions rather than taking into account long-term patterns (McNamara 2000).

Limiting the effects of supervisor bias

McNamara (2000) suggests ways which can be used to reduce bias which are as follows:

Awareness Training

Supervisors need to be informed of the types of subtle bias that can interfere with their performance as appraisers. They need to understand that bias reduces employee morale and motivation.

Developing Poor Performers

Incentives, financial or non-financial, may be offered to encourage supervisors to make special efforts to help poor performers improve. Incentives motivate poor performers to put maximum effort bearing in mind that once they achieve targets they will receive incentives.

Counseling, Transfer, Termination

There is always the possibility that an employee who receives poor appraisal results is in fact a chronic poor performer. No employer is obliged to tolerate poor performance forever. Consistently poor appraisal results will indicate a need for counseling, transfer or termination. The exact remedy will depend on the circumstances.

Research Methodology

The research adopted a case study research design in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The case study was chosen because the researchers had insufficient funds to carry a census of all manufacturing companies in Harare. Results of the findings will be used to infer to the population of manufacturing companies in Zimbabwe.

Study Site

The study was carried out in Harare.Mashwede Holdings was chosen because it is located at a place which is highly convenient to the researchers.

Sampling Method

The study used a sample of 52 employees from a population of 74 employees. Fifty Twenty two employees comprises of 6 managers and 46 non managerial. The sample size comprised of 5 employees from human resources, 8 marketing, 15 finance and 24 production. The researchers used a stratified random sampling technique, researchers divided the employees into two segments, that is management and for non-managerial workers. The researchers used 70 per cent of the population, which is way above the recommended 10 percent by Best and Khan (2003).

Data Collection Instruments

The research instruments used in this research were formal questionnaires and key informant interviews. Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Edwards (2003) posits that pre-testing of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the practitioner. Key informant interviews were used to obtain in-depth data from the selected few.

Data Entry and Analysis

The data was coded into the computer using SPSS, to allow analysis to be carried out. The analysis carried out was largely descriptive and comparisons were made between the results. All data was presented in tables.

Results

The table below shows responses by respondents to suggested statements on the effectiveness of performance appraisal as a performance management system.

	SA	A	NS	D	SD	FREQUENCY
SS1	43	40	7	6	4	100
SS2	21	7	1	36	35	100
SS3	65	1	4	20	10	100
SS4	3	2	5	51	39	100
SS5	62	8	6	4	20	100
SS6	23	20	14	30	14	100

Table 1: Responses to suggested statements (SS) on the effectiveness of performance appraisal system. Source of data: Raw Data

Key: SS on effectiveness of performance appraisal system.

SS1: Perfomance appraisal is a system of periodic review of employee performance.

SS2: Supervisor is the major actor in performance appraisal.

SS3: Traditional methods used in performance appraisal renders the system ineffective.

SS4: Performance appraisal is an effective tool of measuring employee performance.

SS5: Supervisor bias is the major shortfall of performance appraisal system.

SS6: Awareness training is the major strategy to counter performance appraisal shortfalls

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Key: Responses to SS

SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; NS: Not Sure; D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree

Analysis of Table 1

The majority 83% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that performance appraisal involves periodic review of employee performance while 10% of the respondents thought otherwise. On the statement that supervisor is the major actor in performance appraisal, an overwhelmingly 71% oppose the statement with as big as 35% of the respondents strongly disagreeing. However, 21% of the respondents strongly agree with the suggested statement. On SS3,66% of the respondents support the statement that traditional methods of performance appraisal renders the system ineffective. On SS4, 90% of the respondents were against the statement while only 5% were supporting the statement. On SS5 70% support the suggested statement. On SS6 there was a balance of responses. The table below, which is derived from the responses table above, explores the extents to which each statement was supported by respondents through the means of ranking the scores obtained by each suggested statement

	SA(SA*2)	A (A*1)	NS (NS*0)	D (D*-1)	SD (SD*-2)	SCORE	RANK
SS1	86	40	0	-6	-8	112	1
SS2	42	7	0	-36	-70	-57	5
SS3	130	1	0	-20	-20	91	2
SS4	6	2	0	-51	-78	-121	6
SS5	124	8	0	-4	-40	88	3
SS6	46	20	0	-30	-28	8	4

SS1 and SS3 are the suggested statement to which the respondents significantly agreed to with a score of 112 and 91 respectively. The order cascaded down through SS5 (score 88); SS6 (score 8); SS2 (score -57) until the least agreed SS4 with a score of -121.

Discussion

The findings on the definition of performance appraisal are consistent with Mondy et al (1999) who define performance appraisal as a formal system of periodic review and evaluation of an individual's or team performance. Sharing the same definition is Dawson (1990) who also defines performance appraisal as a formal assessment of how well an employee is doing his or her job. In addition, Moorhead and Griffin (1995) defines performance appraisal as a power sharing exercise that requires co-operative and constructive endeavor with input from both staff and management.

The results on the statement that supervisors are the major actors in performance appraisal relationship are in line the findings of Mondy et al (1999) who states that immediate supervisors are major participants in performance appraisal and appraises their immediate subordinates because they are in position to observe, direct and evaluate the subordinate's performance. Contrary, Audrey (200) states that there is no major actor in performance appraisal it depends with the company policies and system as to who appraise who. In support mondy et al (1999) states that there many actors in performance appraisal namely customers, peers and subordinates. Results on the statement that traditional methods used in performance appraisal renders the system ineffective are in line with the findings of Dessler (2000) who argues that ranking method of performance appraisal force managers to compare each employee with other than work standards and this makes the system inefective.In contrast, Flanagan (1954) states that critical incident which is a traditional method enables managers to assess and describe human behavior and once this has been done its now easy to manage employees. Sharing the same sentiments with Dessler (2000) is Drucker (1954) who argues that to make performance appraisal effective employers must make use of modern methods like MBO, 360 degrees and 720 degrees.

On the statement performance appraisal is an effective method of measuring employee performance, the findings concurs with McNamara (2000) who state that performance appraisal has central tendency bias where appraisers rate all employees as average performers. Sharing the same sentiments is a research carried out by Gary et al (2008) revealed that managers who receive positive result of the performance usually rate employees higher than managers who receive negative results regarding their performance. Additionally Mondey et al (1999) postulate that the biggest shortcoming of performance appraisal is that supervisors would usually prefer the safer zone where they don't award high marks or low ones but just settle in the middle. In support,Rasch (2004) argues that managers commit mistakes while evaluating employees and their performance and some of these biases are perceived by employees as ways of unfairly interpreting their performances. Sharing the same sentiments is Moats (1999) who also postulates that performance appraisal system can be affected by subjectivity and hence dilutes the quality of employee evaluation. In contrast, Daley et al (2002) argue that performance appraisal is an important management tool for measuring employee job performance, clarifying personnel decisions such as promotion, demotion, transfer and retention. Seconding is Mani (2002) who states that performance appraisal help in developing develop employee capacity through feedback or identifying their training needs and therefore make the system effective. In addition, studies by Oh and Lewis (2009) emphasized that given the results-oriented government reform efforts, performance appraisals became a critical component of the contemporary performance management and it will contribute to improving organizational productivity by providing employees with developmental feedback and motivating them by linking rewards to performance. There was a balance of thoughts with regards to strategies that can be used to reduce the shortfalls of performance appraisal Some respondents revealed that awareness training is the major strategy. Their thoughts are supported by McNamara (2000) who postulates that there are many strategies which can be used by managers that is awareness training, developing poor perfomers, transfers and teminations.He further states that supervisors need to be informed of the types of subtle bias that can interfere with their performance as appraisers. They need to understand that bias reduces employee morale and motivation.

Conclusion

The research findings show that employees perceived performance appraisal as a system overtaken by time and is an effective tool of managing employee performance.

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