

SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL IN A SCHOOL ORGANISATION

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the importance of performance appraisal using the school as the site of implementation. Schools, just like any other public or private organization, have many employees or staff members whose performance has to be periodically appraised for their individual growth and that of their organisation. The paper argues that performance appraisal should be viewed as a process, and not simply as the creation of ubiquitous standards. The overriding purpose of performance appraisal is to help staff to improve and, thus, to improve organisational effectiveness. Performance appraisal therefore addresses institutional needs as well as staff member needs, abilities, motivation and expectancies. Effective appraisal systems must possess the attributes of clarity, openness, and fairness. Appraisal activities, as an ongoing process should connect the process to organisational functioning and have as their focus staff improvement, not simply salary adjustment and or disciplinary action. Appraisal systems are related to institutional productivity requirements. They are expected to reveal under-productive units and to serve as a response to focus attention on problem areas and also reward productive units and staff.

Key terms

Successful, performance appraisal, school, organization, staff, teachers, head.

Introduction

Staff appraisal is a process of review by teachers, school heads, deputy school heads and other senior teachers of individual competencies, performance, and professional needs (Mpofu, 1997). In a small school, it is likely to be the school head that carries out the appraisal of staff, but in a large school this may be delegated to the deputy head or head of department. It is a process in which an individual teacher and a senior colleague collaborate in evaluating that teacher's work as a professional person. This means appraising all aspects of a teacher's organisation of their classroom, how they manage classroom activities, including the use of time and materials, how they behave towards pupils, other teachers, the school head, parents and the community.

Reasons for appraisal

Appraisal is directed towards helping a teacher to become as effective as possible in the teaching / learning process, and also towards meeting a teacher's needs for professional development, for example, in-service training and career prospects (Medlin, 2013). We should not, therefore, view appraisal as a mechanism for fault-finding and criticizing, but as a means of building the teacher's positive self-image and motivation to be as good a teacher as possible (Fletcher and Williams, 1992). In Zimbabwe, as in much of Africa, education is becoming more learner-centred than previously, on the basis that pupils need to become actively involved in their own learning processes, in order to learn and develop to the full. Pupils and teachers too, need to participate in their own development, becoming able to analyse and reflect on their own competencies. From this, they are more likely to become independent thinkers and doers. For the majority of teachers, this requires a change of attitude, and this can only come from a willingness to review continually what takes place in the classroom and the school, and the effects particular actions have on others.

Requirements for appraisal

As Cole (2007) postulates, a good appraisal process, in which the teacher is able to be honest about strengths and weaknesses, and about where help and encouragement are needed, depends on a spirit of trust between the school head, or other senior teachers, and the teacher being appraised. It follows that the head, or the senior teacher carrying out the appraisal, must be a professional person who is respected for their competence, and who has a good relationship with the staff.

This means that if they have to give criticism for lateness or lack of preparation in the classroom, they give it with the understanding that the particular teacher needs guidance. Thus, the supervisor's comments will not be made in an unkind manner, but with the intention of being constructive. This should be the case even where a teacher refuses or is unable to change unacceptable behaviour, and there is need to initiate disciplinary action in the interests of the learners. If the supervisor is seen to be a person who really knows the teacher, the pupils and the classroom reality, and is known to be a person who has respect for the feelings of teachers and pupils, appraisal is more likely to take place in a spirit of mutual confidence (Roberts, 2002).

Differences from other forms of assessment

Appraisal is not undertaken as a means of assessment of a teacher for purposes of rating or grading. It is a very different process from being inspected or supervised by a person in higher authority, in which the teacher has no share. Indeed, if appraisal is carried out in a negative spirit of sitting in judgement, it fails in its purpose. Instead, the teacher should be treated as a stakeholder in the educational process, working in a collaborative way to become as good as possible, and as a person who has professional needs and interests. The role of the school head in this, is that of educational leader in the school, with the task of creating an effective learning

environment for all pupils, of all abilities, and with varying needs that should be met. The teacher being appraised shares this task (Mpofu, 1997).

The process of staff appraisal

There are a number of steps to be taken in carrying out staff appraisal. Before these can begin, the supervisor needs to have discussions with the staff as a whole. Teachers need to be confident that they can be open with their supervisor so that if they feel the management style is faulty, they can say this in the knowledge that the head and other members of the management team will review their own styles.

A second important element is to emphasise that what is said during the process of appraisal will be treated as confidential. A teacher, who reveals personal insecurity or details of an unhappy domestic life during discussion, needs to feel sure that his situation will not become common knowledge in the staff room or community. Professional ambitions, too, have a right to be kept private. Appraisal should not be used as a means of making comparisons between one teacher and another.

Establishing a good atmosphere

In the first stage of discussion with staff concerning appraisal, the head needs to make clear the purpose, and how it is to be done. The actual procedures should be discussed, and staff ideas taken into account. A timetable needs to be drawn up, so that each teacher has time to prepare his or her own thoughts, knowing when the head will carry out observations within specific classrooms, and when interviews will be held. Follow-up procedures should be discussed, in which actions will be initiated, for example, planning for in-service training. The head, or the senior staff member to whom they have delegated the task or designated senior staff, should prepare for the whole process by analyzing the head's attitudes to leadership, as in the following activity.

The heads' attitudes as to whether, for example, he / she looks for incompetence in the teachers, or try to identify competence, are important in determining whether staff appraisal is likely to be a positive process of staff development (Armstrong and Murlis, 2004).

The teacher's own assessment

As Cole (2007) postulates, the process begins with the teacher's own personal review of successes, failures, professional and personal needs. One method that is often used is to keep a diary to record thoughts about the daily activities of the classroom. A teacher's everyday life is normally so busy that, unless time is set aside for this, the important activity of reflection gets set aside. A teacher might write as follows:

'Today, I began to feel that teaching the whole class together in Mathematics left some children bored. The clever ones finish their work very quickly, and get it right, and then misbehave,

while some of the others were so slow and did not seem to understand. I would like to organise them in groups but am not sure how to do it. How will I make sure that all the class is getting on with their work if I do not have them all facing the blackboard?'

Classroom / task observations

A good school head probably needs to visit classrooms on a regular basis. They will discover that this helps them to be knowledgeable about what is happening in the school. Classroom / task observations in staff appraisal may well be already part of the school's routine. For the purpose of staff appraisal, the head needs to arrange a time to observe a specific lesson. They should be present in the classroom for the whole period to observe the entire sequence of the lesson. Only then can the head form their ideas about the preparation, organisation and management of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The questions which follow may be helpful in providing a structure for class observations:

1. Is the classroom clean and would a pupil find it a pleasant place to be in?
2. Does the teacher begin the lesson on time.
3. Has the lesson been well prepared and does it match with the syllabus or scheme of work?
4. Are all materials shown in the lesson plan available to the pupils?
5. Do pupils listen when the teacher speaks, and do they appear to respect the teacher without seeming afraid?
6. Does the organisation and management (whole class work, group work, individual activity, practical activity and pupil participation) meet the needs of the pupils and the subject area?

The head's responses to these questions will provide him/her with important information concerning the teacher's ability to provide learners with good quality teaching. If they observe poor preparation or interaction with pupils, these may indicate that the teacher has other problems. These may concern discipline or complaints from parents or community, for example, about lateness or possible alcohol abuse. Such information provides other data that needs to be discussed in the appraisal interview.

Appraisal interview and target setting

This should take place as soon as possible after the classroom observations, so the supervisor and the teacher need to make an appointment to meet (Guest, 2002). The form and length of the interview can vary, but there should be discussion of the classroom observations. Since the purpose is to assist the teacher's professional development and the learning experiences for the children, the approach should be positive. Praise should be given as much as possible, for example, 'I noticed how busy you were trying to keep the clever ones occupied whilst the slow

ones were finishing their work'. The aim is to build the teacher's confidence and self esteem because, through this, the teacher is more likely to discuss uncertainties about his or her work. In the example of the diary quoted earlier, the supervisor and the teacher may then go on to discuss ways of grouping pupils to provide for different ability levels.

From the discussion in the interview, targets can be set. The supervisor can arrange for help to be offered within the school, or for other in-service training. They can arrange for help to be offered within the school, or for other in-service training. The head can encourage the teacher to try out other methods of working, with the assurance that there will be full support during a time of change. Managing change can be stressful for a teacher, because of fear of failure and many people prefer not to take risks.

Some avoidance behaviour, for example, lateness, absenteeism or alcohol abuse, can stem from feelings of inadequacy. The teacher, whose lesson is badly prepared, can be asked if he or she thinks that the lesson would have been better if he or she had not been late or drunk. This opens up the subject, but in a positive spirit, which is more likely to lead to full and frank discussions of the teacher's professional responsibilities. Here, targets can be set which must be realistic, and any improvement should be commented on, for example, 'You were only late one day this week. Keep trying, the teaching was much better'. In this way, the teacher's morale can be raised and, for some, can be sufficient to bring about real improvement.

Follow-up discussion / meetings

An important point about the appraisal process is that it should be an on-going process. In-service training arrangements may be initiated, discussion of improvements in teaching and learning in the classroom may take place, or a teacher may need to be encouraged to seek promotion. All such activities are part of the supervisor's professional responsibilities as educational leaders in the school. In the large school, part of this task will be shared by senior staff.

Case study

1. Use the diary made by the teacher shown above.
2. In your observation of a lesson in this teacher's classroom, you have noted as follows"

'Mrs. Mukendwa started this lesson punctually. Her explanations to her Form 4 class were clear, and she revised the procedures for carrying out division by 10. She chose two pupils to work out examples on the board and then gave all the class four examples to work out on their own in their books. During this time, Mrs. Mukendwa walked round the classroom, looking at pupils' work. After ten minutes, six children had finished their work while all the rest were still working. The six early finishers began to misbehave, tickling other children and banging pencils on the table.

Mrs. Mukendwa spoke sternly to the six, and told them to sit still and be quiet. At the end of the lesson, most of the class had not finished’.

3. Which, from A and B below, is a positive appraisal technique?

A. Ask Mrs. Mukendwa how she felt about her lesson and listen to her description of her worries. Discuss these with her, and suggest ways of grouping the class according to mathematical ability, with different work or amount for each group. Ask her if she would like help in doing this.

B. Tell Mrs. Mukendwa that she should become angry with the slow workers and tell them to hurry up. Tell Mrs. Mukendwa that you are not satisfied with her work and that she must make sure that children do not misbehave. Inform her that you expect better performance from her in the next appraisal.

4. If you were Mrs. Mukendwa, which of A or B would you find more helpful? Give your reasons.

Professional development activities

Some professional development activities can be carried out within the school, for example, the head of department provides assistance in improving the teacher’s skills in classroom management. Others may need asking the school inspector or subject adviser to arrange in-service training on a course. The teacher, following appraisal, may show leadership potential, and the school inspector or other senior management should be informed of this.

Frequency of appraisal

The decision as to how often the appraisal of each individual teacher should take place should be made by consensus within the school as a whole. This decision depends on the size of the school, and how many senior staff are available but, overall, once a year is a reasonable interval (Osborne,2014).

Benefits of appraisal

The benefits of staff appraisal have been referred to throughout in this paper. School effectiveness includes a combination of the way in which the work of individual teachers and senior management within the school collaborate for the benefit of the learners.

The benefits can be summarized as:

- Skills development, through in-service training, experiments with teaching style, often assisted by organisational change.
- Career development, through in-service training.
- Improved relationships: each understands the other better.

- Increased knowledge of the school and individuals.
- Productive links between appraisal and school development and planning.
- Improved learning opportunities for pupils.
- Improved morale and efficiency within the school.

Summary

When carried out in a spirit of willing co-operation, with positive attitudes on both sides, heads and other supervisors should find that staff appraisal contributes to school effectiveness. To be successful and have the desired benefits, the head and other supervisors must examine closely their own styles of leadership. They should ask themselves whether their styles provide for a shared sense of responsibility amongst all school staff. Supervisors should also be aware that all staff members are stakeholders in the educational life of the school, and are more likely to be motivated to improve their performance, if they feel a sense of ownership. The supervisors, in turn, will feel supported in their often difficult and lonely task.

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