

Full length research paper

Evaluation of the performance appraisal systems in KNUST and GIMPA libraries

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Academic libraries have a performance appraisal system comprising setting of goals, feedback, participation and incentives for performance. This study aimed at evaluating the performance appraisal system in the KNUST and GIMPA libraries in Ghana and give recommendations on improving the system. Questionnaires were randomly administered to 46 staff members of these libraries. Twenty three (50%) of respondents knew that the libraries operated a formal performance appraisal system. Sixteen (34.8%) had access to documentation on the current objectives and procedures of the system. Thirty one (67.4 %) respondents on employment were given formal job descriptions of which 25 (80.6 %) were supervised daily. For 34 (73.9%) respondents, their performances were assessed and evaluated within the academic year. Thirty one (67%) had formal meetings with their supervisors on their performance. Interestingly only four individuals had ever resisted appraisal results once or sometimes during the appraisal period. Overall, 42 (91.3 %) do not find being evaluated by another person threatening. The preferred motivations were; promotion, study leave with pay, or commendation. Only 19 (41.3 %) thought the current system was trustworthy. The existing performance appraisal systems in the libraries had inadequacies which created perception of inefficiency in the appraisal process.

Keywords: Corporate goals; organizational productivity; Academic libraries; Motivation; Employee job performance.

INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisal refers to a process, which studies and evaluates the job performance of personnel formally (Mondy, 2008). Appraisal is an effective instrument in the human resources management, which if performed correctly and logically, the organization will get its personnel to achieve their interest (Rezghi, 2000). Human resources are arguably the most valuable assets of any organization and obviously constitute the largest corporate investment (Roslender *et al.*, 2009). Employees' skills and competencies have significant bearing on organizations' productivity, profitability and

continued survival (International Labour Conference, 2008). Therefore, in order to achieve corporate goals and remain in business there is the need to assess employees' job performance and devise strategies to manage them in an effective manner. Performance appraisals are indispensable for the effectual supervision and costing of staff (Jabeen, 2011). It is an important factor in identifying the people's talents and capacities and its results can make them aware of advancements, plans and goals (Hamidi, 2010).

The issue of employees' performance in relation to achieving organizational goals has occupied management's attention for a long time. Differences in levels of employees' performance are attributed to differences in skill and ability in one part and difference levels of motivation in another (Boachie-Mensah and Dogbe, 2011). Inadequate skills and ability are usually

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rectified through training and development (Soh, 1998), while differences in motivation are corrected through the appropriate motivational strategies and policies. Therefore, for well-functioning organizations, the use of performance appraisal cannot be overemphasized. However, the extent to which appraisals play a valuable role in the organization depends on how it is conducted.

Performance Appraisal is arguably an important aspect of contemporary human resource management, where each individual institution/organization sets out uniform criteria and processes, and procedures for assessing output of staff in terms of quality, quantity, cost, and time over a period, usually during the preceding year. The Performance Appraisal process according to Mondy (2008) and Najafi *et al.*, (2000), entails an evaluation of job performance of personnel in an organization with a view to achieving positive organizational goals. Most organizations traditionally use performance appraisal as a tool not only to identify hard working employees, but also a tool to motivate staff. Yee and Chen (2009) says that performance appraisal evaluates employees' present and previous output within the laid down standards, but it also provides feedback on employees' performance in order to motivate them to improve on their job performance or at least encourage them to reduce inefficiencies in their work. In other words, from management of institutions/organizations point of view, performance appraisal provides the basis for taking decisions on employees' development, discipline, rewards, motivation, retention or separation, and/or back-up for legal action for or against an organization. Generally, performance appraisal performs three functions; to provide adequate feedback to support employees' development; to serve as a basis for modifying or changing behaviour to produce more effectively for organization; and to provide useful information to supervisors (Erdogan; 2000; Coens and Jenkins, 2002; Law, 2007).

There are various traditional appraisal techniques presently used by different organizations according to their objectives. Yee and Chen (2009) identifies different techniques of performance appraisal, including: ranking; trait scale; critical incident; narrative; and criteria based. Terrence and Joyce (2004) also identifies other methods of measuring staff job performance including management by objective (MBO); work planning and review; 360 degree appraisal; and peer review. Some organizations would choose the multifactorial approach, that is to "mix and match" or combine different techniques for their own performance appraisal that would meet their organizational needs. All available methods have their advantages and disadvantages.

Whatever the method of an appraisal, it must effectively address a particular organization's human resource deficiencies. An effective performance appraisal system should help the organization achieve its goals and objective if it is properly implemented.

A well-designed appraisal system can help organization separate outstanding performers from those who are below average. Organizations that identify hard working and productive employees and reward them accordingly, create conducive atmosphere for individuals and organizations' growth. But a poorly designed appraisal system can create anxiety and sometimes can provoke the morale of employee (Chen and Mia, 2004; Mulvaney, McKinney and Grodsky, 2008). A body of literature indicates that quite substantial depth of research has been done on this topic, but these studies have focused largely on industrial production plants and clerical as well as administrative work. Little has been written about the topic in library literature. In this paper, the authors examined performance appraisal systems in academic libraries using staff of two public tertiary institutions in Ghana, namely: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi; and Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA).

METHODOLOGY

Study area

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), located in Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, is the second public University established in the country to provide an environment for teaching, research and entrepreneurship training in science and technology for industrial and socio-economic development of Ghana, Africa and the rest of the World. KNUST has a library of excellence that provides information in electronic and print formats to staff and students mainly to support teaching, learning and research. It is also a research library for the general public in the Ashanti and other neighboring Regions in Ghana.

Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) located in Accra, the Capital of Ghana was established to "promote the social, economic, and political progress of the people of Ghana and other African Countries by provision of courses of training in Public Administration. GIMPA library started as a special library providing materials (mainly serial publications) on specific subject areas to a group of readers with a common subject interest and who worked towards a common purpose. Over the years, the library has transformed in size and in content into a University library, reflecting the course profile of the institute and responding to changing needs of the library's clientele. Currently, the library has a stock comprising both print and electronic sources of about 30,000 volumes of books and over 5,000 online journals.

Sampling technique and data collection

Between March and April 2012, questionnaires comprising mainly closed ended questions on the subject were administered to 46 individuals; 33 being KNUST library staff and 13, GIMPA library staff; in a random

selection from a sample size of 64. The research explored the performance appraisal system in the two institutions and critically examined the effectiveness of their appraisal systems in respect to promotion and motivation of employees among others.

Ethical consideration

A research consent form was given to each participant for completion and those who needed assistance were assisted by the researchers. The workers were alerted that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from participation at any stage.

Data analysis

All data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, 2008). Presentation was made using frequency tables.

RESULTS

Demographic details

Forty six (KNUST [71.7 %] and GIMPA [28.3%]) out of the sixty four library staff encountered responded to the questionnaires. They comprised 22 (47.8 %) males and 24 (52.2 %) females. Although their age range was between 20-60 years, the modal age was 31-40 (37 %) (Table 1). Of the ranks of the respondents, Junior Library Assistant (28; 60.9%); were of the majority; and Assistant Librarian (1; 2.2%) the least (Table 1). The majority (25; 54.3%) of the respondents were SSSCE, O'LEVEL, and/or A' LEVEL holders while the rest either have Diploma, First Degree, or Master's Degree.

Work experience

Seventeen (37%) had worked for between 6-10 years followed closely by fifteen (32.6 %) who had been working for 0-5 years, and 10 (21.7%) who had worked for between 11-15 years (Table 1).

The performance appraisal systems

Twenty three (50%) of the respondents knew that the two libraries operated on formal performance appraisal systems while 14 (30.4 %) did not know. Nine persons (19.6%) were not sure of the existence of the performance appraisal systems. Twenty eight (60.8 %)

understood the general objective of the performance appraisal systems while the rest either had a vague idea or had no idea of the performance appraisal system at all. Unfortunately, only 16 (34.8 %) had documentation of the objectives/procedures on current performance appraisal systems available to them. 60.9 % (28) had no documentation on the subject at all. Thirty one individuals (67.4 %), on employment, were given formal job descriptions while 15 (32.6 %) were not given. Of those given formal job description, 80.6 % (25) said their supervisors supervised their day-to-day performance of task (s) assigned to them. Thirty six (78.3 %) of these individuals agreed on goal setting, however 10 (21.7%) said they did not agree on goal setting. On review of goals, majority of the supervisors reviewed goals at least quarterly.

Assessment of performance

Performance of 34 (73.9 %) employees were assessed within the academic year while for 7 (15.2 %), performance was assessed within the calendar year. For five (10.9 %) respondents performance was not applicable (N/A). With the exception of 15 (32.6%) who did not have any idea on measurable factors that were used to evaluate them, the rest were either evaluated according to the number of books shelved, or their innovation in solving issues, or both. With the exception of planned objectives which were chosen by a few people as an area covered by performance appraisal, technical knowledge and skill, quality of work, level of commitment, training and development needs, and achievement of set targets were major areas where performance appraisal covered (Table 2).

Supervisory role in the appraisal system

On formal meetings with supervisors, 12 (38.7 %) met once or twice (13; 41.9 %) within the period; 6 (19.4 %) had meetings quarterly. Fifteen (32.6 %) had no formal meetings. Interestingly, only 4 (8.7 %) had ever resisted performance appraisal results once or sometimes during the appraising period from their supervisors; the rest (42; 91.3%) had never resisted results before. None of the respondents had ever sent their appraisal form to a second supervisor to be done again after it had been completed by a first supervisor. Forty two (91.3 %) did not find being evaluated by another person threatening with only 4 (8.7 %) thinking otherwise. Twenty (43.5 %) had a working manual in the Department/Library based on which they worked, while 26 (56.5 %) did not have any such document. Nineteen (95 %) individuals considered a working manual useful and (35 %) consulted it always or once a while (75 %), and 1 (5 %) person thought it was not useful; while 26 (54.3 %) did not know whether it was useful or not.

Table 1: The age distribution, ranks, and how long respondents have been working for 46 members of staff in the KNUST and GIMPA libraries

| Age range | Distribution | Rank | Distribution | Years of work | Distribution |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <20 | 2 (4.3) | Assistant Librarian | 1 (2.2) | 0 - 5 | 15 (32.6) |
| 21-30 | 20 (43.5) | Chief Library Assistant | 2 (4.3) | 6 - 10 | 17 (37.0) |
| 31-40 | 17 (37.0) | Senior Library Assistant | 6 (13.0) | 11 - 15 | 10 (21.7) |
| 41-50 | 5 (10.9) | Library Assistant | 9 (19.6) | 21 - 25 | 2 (4.3) |
| 51-60 | 2 (4.3) | Junior Library Assistant | 28 (60.9) | 26 - 30 | 1 (2.2) |
| | | | | Over 30 | 1 (2.2) |
| Total | 46 (100) | | 46 (100) | | 46 (100) |

Data is presented is number of individual with percentage distribution in parenthesis. *Source: Field Survey 2012*

Table 2: The criteria on which performance appraisal is assessed and the suggested means of motivation in the libraries

| Criteria for Assessment | Frequency | Suggested means of motivation | Frequency |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|
| Technical knowledge and skill | 22 | To be promoted | 40 |
| Quality of work | 28 | To be granted study leave with pay | 39 |
| Quantity of work | 18 | To attend local and international conferences and seminars | 29 |
| Level of commitment | 21 | To be given salary increment | 29 |
| Training and development needs | 19 | To be given cash prize | 19 |
| Planned objectives | 9 | To be given citation | 16 |
| Achievement of set targets | 20 | To be commended by supervisor | 30 |
| Working relationships | 27 | To be commended by users of the library | 22 |
| Professional conduct | 23 | To be commended by users of the library | 21 |

Source: Field Survey 2012

Motivation in appraisal

The top three ways by which respondents would like to be motivated if performance was considered positive were; to be promoted, to be granted study leave with pay, or to be commended by supervisors. Other options such as being given salary increments, cash prizes, and citations were least preferred (Table 2).

Feedback on evaluation

Feedback on evaluation was said to be irregular by 21 (45.7 %) and regular by 11 (23.9 %). However 14 (30.4 %) report that they had never had any feedback on evaluation. On the whole, only 19 (41.3 %) think the performance appraisal system they have currently is trustworthy; the remainder i.e. 27 (58.6 %) think it is not trustworthy. Thirty one (67.4 %) suggested an alternative method of assessing employees' job performance to the

current appraisal while 15 (32.6 %) thought the current system was alright.

DISCUSSION

The study highlighted the predominance of performance appraisals in contemporary human resource management. While not exhaustive, the issues summarized here should provide readers with a sense of the most pressing issues on both sides of the argument. Regardless of the beliefs held about the true effectiveness of formal performance appraisal, organizations would continue to use the tool for the foreseeable future.

From the demographic details, more than half of the respondents were Junior Library Assistants, possibly, because they had not received formal professional training. A variety of skills and abilities in a different array of performance tasks is required before one can be

competent in his job (Soh, 1998). It is an undeniable fact that when a staff works without knowing what exactly to be done, they end up not performing efficiently and effectively. If the training of employees is up to standard, their assessment is good but if the training is not up to standard it absconds negative impact on employees performance and leaves negative impact on employees motivation (Jabeen, 2011).

If experience and improvement of performance are related to the number of years on the job, then one third of the respondents had worked in the library for 5 years or less which eventually would suggest that they may not have much experience on the job. Experience, they say leads to an increase in knowledge or skill and it is the best teacher. It means, however, that what should have been achieved with experience within the shortest possible time would be otherwise.

A key objective of the current study was to examine the transparency of the performance appraisal process. The requirement for a transparent system is that everyone must understand and appreciate the system and all must be carried on board. Effective communication between employees and managers is crucial in that employees will need to know what is expected of them. Managers will need to provide a clear job description for every employee (Donata, 2011). Unfortunately library staff at GIMPA and KNUST are not satisfied with their organization's performance appraisal systems. The study revealed that the performance appraisal systems existed, it's objectives known but staff do not have access to the documents on the system. If they had such documents in addition to their appointment letters, it would have served as a working manual which would be useful to their performance.

It is worthy to mention that the period and criteria for assessment in these two libraries are timely and appropriate and deserves commendation. In a well-established Institution, Supervisors should be establishing due dates for their employees to turn in self-appraisals and planning to write final appraisals. Employees should be also be preparing to write their self-appraisal and turn in to their supervisor.

It is known that employees work best when motivated with pay increments (Booth and Frank, 1999; Boachie-Mensah and Dogbe, 2011). In the public policy debate, it has been common to associate the introduction of performance related pay with the aim of improving incentives and motivation among public employees (Brown and Heywood, 2002; Marsden, 2003). The study has shown however that aside pay, staff of these libraries want to be motivated by getting promoted, being granted study leave with pay or being commended by supervisors which usually is not the case. To motivate outstanding performers or hard working and productive employees, there is the need to consider the recipient(s) preference in order to achieve the objective. They are given citation and cash prize as motivation instead, which from the

study, are not preferred by the recipients. One way of proper supervision is having formal meetings with employers regularly. This would help share ideas, discuss problems and encourage one another on the job, among others. One third of the respondents, however, never had meetings with their supervisors which does not auger well for high performance. Feedback is a crucial element in any type of performance appraisal system as it provides support for employees' development (Coens & Jenkins, 2002; Law, 2007) and work improvement. It is one of the most vital parts of the appraisal system, since any person who receives positive feedback can be motivated to continue or improve performance to meet organisational requirements. Negative feedback must be accompanied by advice on how to remedy or improve performance (Redshaw, 2008). Feedback, from the study, was the major setback in the existing appraisal system in GIMPA and KNUST libraries, as it was either irregular or not at all. This causes dissatisfaction and demotivation among employees.

Majority of the staff did not find their appraisal systems in GIMPA and KNUST libraries trustworthy. This was probably because respondents had no access to documentation of job description, they were not been motivated enough and had no feedback on their performance yet they were expected to perform better.

CONCLUSION

Although performance appraisal systems in GIMPA and KNUST libraries exist and are satisfactory, there are some flaws which could be improved or modified. The implication is that it creates perception of inefficiency in the appraisal process and consequently hinders the overall effectiveness of formal performance appraisal system. An alternative system that nurtures employee job performance can be motivational and quite incentive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Per the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made to improve upon the performance appraisal systems in the two academic libraries:
- Staff without formal professional training should be given requisite training in the course of their work and those yet to be employed must have prerequisite training before being employed.
- Job description and/or working manual should be given on appointment to serve as a guide to performance of duties.
- Motivation preferred by staff should be given for outstanding performance.
- Regular formal meetings should be held and feedback on performance given regularly.

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