

Full Length Research Paper

Assessing the performance appraisal concept of the Local Government Service in Ghana

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This study seeks to investigate the assertion that staff performance appraisal was not being effectively implemented in the Local Government Service of Ghana. The East Mamprusi District Assembly was used for the case study. The rationale was to ascertain the truth or otherwise of this assertion and to make appropriate recommendations where necessary since it is believed that there is some correlation between staff performance appraisal and productivity. The data for the investigation were collected using questionnaire and interviews. Two sets of questionnaire were used, one for the appraisers and the other for the appraisees. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using percentages because it lends itself to easy interpretation and also because figures can easily be presented either graphically or in percentiles. The study found out that generally, staff performance appraisal was not done regularly and systematically as should be the case at the Assembly. This was because while some members of staff were appraised in a particular year, others were not. According to the findings, only the members of staff, especially the senior staff, who were due for promotion interviews, were those who initiated appraisal for the purpose of the promotion interviews. Purposes such as target setting, performance review, training and rewards were all virtually ignored. The study recommends that management of district assemblies, organizations, decentralized departments and institutions should effectively administer and appraise employees regularly.

Key words: Performance appraisal system (PAS), appraisers, appraisees, productivity.

INTRODUCTION

People differ in their abilities and aptitudes. There is always some difference between the quality and quantity of the same work on the same job being done by two different people. Therefore, performance appraisal is necessary to understand each employee's abilities, competencies and relative merit and worth for the organization. Performance appraisal rates the employees

in terms of their performance.

One of the basic and major needs in any organization is to evaluate its employees' performance continuously to find out whether they improve or not and know their situation in organization. In the same vein, employees want to know how well they perform on their jobs. A simple statement, almost axiomatic in any organization,

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yet it has probably caused more controversy, applied research and practical advice than any other assertion in the history of management writing and thinking (Kavanagh, 1997).

The efforts of employees can determine the success and survival of an organization (Drucker, 1994; Barney, 1995), and appraisal is potentially one way in which those efforts can be aligned with the aims of an organization, employees can be motivated and their performance managed (Orpen, 1997; Martin and Bartol, 1998; Cook and Crossman, 2004). Performance appraisal is among the most important human resource (HR) practices (Boswell and Boudreau, 2001) and one of the more heavily researched topics in work psychology (Fletcher, 2002), a subject of research for over 70 years (Landy and Farr, 1980).

Still, many organizations express dissatisfaction with their appraisal schemes and others do not even appraise their employees (Fletcher, 1997). According to Fletcher (2001), this may signal a lack of success of performance appraisal as a mechanism for developing and motivating people. There is general consensus among performance appraisal researchers and practitioners that assessment of appraisal reactions is important (Keeping and Levy, 2000). For instance, it is frequently argued that in order for performance appraisal to positively influence employee behaviour and future development, employees must experience positive appraisal reactions. If not, any appraisal system will be doomed to failure (Cardy and Dobbins, 1994; Murphy and Cleveland, 1995). Performance appraisal satisfaction is the most frequently measured appraisal reaction (Giles and Mossholder, 1990; Keeping and Levy, 2000).

Organisations use different tools and have a number of goals for performance appraisals, often resulting in some confusion as to the true purpose of performance appraisal systems. However, at its core, the performance appraisal process allows an organisation to measure and evaluate an individual employee's behaviour and accomplishments over a specific period of time (Wiese and Buckley, 1998). Performance appraisal is a vital component of a broader set of human resource practices; it is the mechanism for evaluating the extent to which each employee's day-to-day performance is linked to the goals established by the organisation (Coutts and Schneider, 2004).

Performance appraisal is a vital element of the human resource management system. Aside from the distribution of rewards, developmental guidance given to the employees is based usually on the performance appraisal and employees can express their perceptions and standpoint regarding their respective jobs, departments, managers and supervisors and of their organization in general (Erdogan, 2002).

According to Angelo and Pritchard (2006), "Performance appraisal" is a discrete, formal, organizationally sanctioned event, usually not occurring more frequently than once or twice a year, which has clearly stated

performance dimensions and/or criteria that are used in the evaluation process. Furthermore, it is an evaluation process, in that quantitative scores are often assigned based on the judged level of the employee's job performance on the dimensions or criteria used, and the scores are shared with the employee being evaluated.

The ideal purpose of the appraisal is to present employees with worthwhile feedback that the latter can instantaneously use to improve respective performance. This may involve encouragement to carry on with their good performances and positive behaviours and suggestions on what aspects need to be changed. Managers can demonstrate to their subordinates the value of improving their performance and of development of skills for possible promotion, added responsibilities, and increase in monetary compensation and benefits (Walsh and Fisher, 2005).

Performance appraisal could thus be seen as an objective method of judging the relative worth or ability of an individual employee in performing his or her task. If objectively done, the appraisal can help distinguish between a hard worker and a lazy one. A better performance appraisal system therefore should focus on the individual and his or her development as to make him or her achieve the desired performance or output. Authors define concepts according to their perception and therefore tend to lay emphasis on what they deem to be crucial and worth considering.

Performance appraisal system is ideally an organization's designed programme involving both the organization and the personnel to improve the capabilities of both. It therefore involves determining and communicating to an employee how he or she is performing the job and establishing a plan for improvement. The information provided by the appraisal system is useful in three major areas namely, compensation, placement and training and development. Appraisal helps to improve upon employee's performance by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. It also helps to identify those with potentials for greater responsibilities and assists in deciding on an equitable compensation system.

There are several methods of appraising employee; however, the commonly used in the public sector of Ghana are the close and opened ended appraisal systems. In the close ended appraisal system, a confidential report is usually submitted on the performance of an employee. It is only where an adverse assessment is made against an employee that the concerned individual is informed. In the open system, the performance of the individual is normally discussed with him or her before ranking or grading. It is quite disappointing to note that, despite the numerous advantages associated with the performance appraisal system in organizations, it is not effectively carried out in the local government service of Ghana though the service provides the scope for periodic and timely appraisals. Normally, appraisals in the Local Government Service are to be conducted annually as per

the existing practice.

The responsibility of the civil service in the newly emerging nations like Ghana grew colossally after the attainment of independence. The challenge was exacting and obviously overwhelmed a number of the staff, several of whom lacked the requisite knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the volume of work had increased tremendously because of the emerging responsibilities arising from the fast growing demand for service and rapidly enlarging clientele.

Recognizing the need to preserve and sustain the effectiveness of the role of the civil service in the governance of nations, many developing countries including Ghana have established regular programmes to institutionalize the periodic review and updating of their civil services to ensure their continuing competence. Although measures adopted by government to develop and sustain an efficient and competent civil service have been making encouraging impact, there has also been emerging noticeable evidence of widespread concern about the declining efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service.

This situation should therefore be considered as a challenge to be addressed by all concerned including even future generations of the public policy makers, researchers, consultants and opinion leaders among civil society. As administrators, there is concrete evidence of administrative lapses which can be described as grossly unprofessional. For instance, certain clerical errors and basic administrative blunders are being noted as petty and usually glossed over. Despite the numerous advantages of the performance appraisal system, the local government service of Ghana has lagged behind in satisfying public demand. This is a major concern and a serious challenge to the service that requires immediate attention.

Staff performance appraisal is undoubtedly linked to all the managerial and administrative functions of planning, organizing, coordinating, staffing and controlling. It is therefore a critical tool in the management of human resource for the achievement of organizations' objectives if properly administered.

Statement of the problem

Staff performance appraisal policy is a critical tool in the management of human resource for the achievement of an organization's goals and objectives if properly and adequately administered. The focus of this research is to find out why the staff performance policy of the East Mamprusi District Assembly is not being carried out with the due importance and seriousness it deserves though the system provides a scope for periodic and timely appraisals. Normally, appraisals are to be carried out once a year as per the existing practice.

The performance appraisal system designed for the Local Government Service of Ghana has not been

seriously and adequately implemented in the East Mamprusi District Assembly since its inception. Available records indicate that only the senior staff due for promotion are hurriedly appraised to enable them attend their interviews. In other words, appraisals are usually done just for the purpose of promotions.

For the junior staff of the Assembly, the least said about the concept the better. There are virtually none existing records to indicate that any of them have ever been appraised. This is indicative of the fact that both the appraisers and appraisees do not appreciate the real value of the performance to the organization (Assembly).

There is also the perception, especially by the junior staff of the Assembly that performance appraisal is only used to punish members of staff by way of demotion, denial of promotion and sometimes dismissal (firing). Others have the opinion that some senior officers are not conversant with the appraisal system hence their inability to do it correctly as expected.

The study generally seeks to promote the appropriate and effective use of the performance appraisal system in the East Mamprusi District Assembly placing much emphasis on achieving remarkable improvement in staff efficiency and high productivity. It specifically seeks to examine the effective use of performance appraisal system, the extent to which appraisees are involved in appraisal system at the Assembly, find out whether appraisees receive feedback on their performance appraisal conducted and enquire whether the appraisees are content (satisfy) with the appraisal system at the Assembly.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of performance appraisal

Performance appraisal has many definitions. "Performance appraisal" is a process within the overall performance management process (Dowling et al., 1999), and is defined as "the evaluation of an individual's work performance in order to arrive at objective personnel decisions" (Robbins et al., 2000).

Performance appraisal has been defined as the process of identifying, evaluating and developing the work performance of employees in the organization, so that the organizational goals and objectives are more effectively achieved, while at the same time benefiting employees in terms of recognition, receiving feedback, catering for work needs and offering career guidance (Lansbury, 1988).

Carrol and Scheider (1982) described performance appraisal as "the process of identifying, observing, measuring, and developing human performance in organization" This definition is very important, because it comprises all important components needed for the well-performed appraisal process. Identification criteria orientate the appraisal process to the determination of

what has to be examined – performance related criteria and not so much performance irrelevant characteristics.

Denhardt (1991) defines performance appraisal as a specific evaluation with respect to an individual's progress in completing specified tasks. Devries et al. (1981) define performance appraisal as a process by which an organization measures and evaluates an individual employee's behavior and accomplishments for a finite period. Moulder (2001) states that performance appraisals are valued for defining expectations and measuring the extent to which expectations are met. She goes on to state that appraisals can make clear to employees where they are having success and where they need to improve performance. Moulder indicates that appraisals are useful in setting goals and in fostering improved communications among work groups and between employees and supervisors.

Performance appraisal process is part of the performance management system. The term "performance management" was first used in the 1970s, but it did not become a recognized process until the latter half of the 1980. The most appropriate definition in the context of the research is that, performance management represents a strategic and integrated approach to delivering organizational success by improving the performance capabilities of both individuals and teams (Armstrong and Baron, 1998).

Purpose of performance appraisal

Performance appraisals are one of the most important requirements for successful business and human resource policy (Kressler, 2003). Rewarding and promoting effective performance in organizations, as well as identifying ineffective performers for developmental programmes or other personnel actions are essential to effective human resource management (Pulakos, 2003). The ability to conduct performance appraisals relies on the ability to assess an employee's performance in a fair and accurate manner. Evaluating employee performance is a difficult task. Once the supervisor understands the nature of the job and the sources of information, the information needs to be collected in a systematic way, provided as feedback, and integrated into the organization's performance management process for use in making compensation, job placement, and training decisions and assignments (London, 2003).

Evaluation of agencies and programmes help in determining levels of efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness and facilitate future planning to enhance the ability to meet client needs. Similarly, appraisals of individuals can also provide such vital information and opportunities for improvement. Indeed there is an inalienable link between the two. Dickenson (1991) argues that "to ignore individuals in the review process is to ignore a major input into the achievement of organisational out-

comes" (p109).

It is often said that organisations that perform well are a reflection of the efforts and successes of their staff. Recognising these efforts and appropriately praising or redirecting them is imperative for organisational success. This is the basic purpose of performance appraisals. George and Cole (1992.) describe it as, "to discuss performance and plan for the future" (p389). Wanna et al. (1992) define the objective of staff appraisals as "to improve planning and service delivery at the general level, but also to provide feedback to individual officers" (p162).

To underpin these discussions, there must be a reliable and accurate method by which to determine current levels of performance and compare them with predetermined levels of acceptability. There is therefore an inference of a need for quantifiable standards linked to job descriptions and expected performance (Wanna et al 1992). Wood (1989) argues that this leads to two types of appraisal mechanisms, based on either accountabilities or core competencies.

The challenge is to "find ways to discuss openly what has previously been left unsaid" (Cherry, 1993, p. 106).

Covey (1991), in discussing the work of Demming, makes the point that as managers we must be less concerned with supervising and concentrate on being leaders. He finds that, "sustainable cultural change can take place within an organisation only when the individuals within the organisation first change themselves from the inside out" (p265).

Cherry (1993) highlights the viewpoint of Demming (1982) that appraisal processes can be counterproductive to organizational success as they are odds with processes which encourage some degree of risk taking to meet client needs or develop new methodologies through trial. Also of this view is Mintzberg (1987) who considers a fundamental dilemma of strategy making is the need to reconcile the forces for stability and for change – to focus efforts and gain operational efficiencies on the one hand, yet adapt and maintain currency with a changing external environment on the other hand (p71). Cherry (1993, p. 103) however sees the appraisal process as fundamental to the success of organizational change initiatives citing the work of Dunphy and Hackman (1988) and the "powerful formative effects (of performance management) on the organisational power structure, on the workforce skill profiles and on corporate culture" (p23).

Dickenson (1993) espouses the common viewpoint of contemporary readings. The focus in its current application is to link performance review of individuals to overall corporate or strategic planning so that the outcomes of individuals' performance is related to organizational outcomes (p109).

Performance appraisal system: different methods

Decenzo and Robbins (1998) point out that there are

three existent approaches for measuring performance appraisal. These are absolute standards, relative standards and objectives.

Absolute standards

One category of appraisal methods is the use absolute standards. This means that employees are compared to a standard, and their evaluation is independent of any other employee in a work group (Dessler, 2000). Included in this category are the following methods: the essay appraisal, the critical incident appraisal, the checklist, the graphic rating scale, forced choice and behaviourally anchored rating scales.

The essay appraisal: It is the simplest evaluating method in which 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 term. This kind of evaluation usually includes some parts of other systems to cause their flexibility. This method often combines with other methods. In essay appraisal, we attempt to focus on behaviours (Mondy, 2008).

The critical incident appraisal: It focuses on key factors which make difference in performing a job efficiently. This method is more credible because it is more related to job and based on individual's performance than characteristic. The necessity of this system is to try to measure individuals' performance in terms of incidents and special episodes which take place in job performance. These incidents are known as critical incidents. In this method, the manager writes down the positive and negative performance of the individuals' behaviour in the evaluation term (Mondy, 2008).

The checklist: In this method, the evaluator has a list of situations and statements and compares it with employees. The checklist is a presentation of employee's characteristics and performance. The results can be quantitative and give weight to characteristics. Answers of checklist are often "Yes" or "No" (Decenzo and Robbins, 2002).

The graphic rating scale: According to Mondy (2008), this is the most commonly used method of performance appraisal because they are less time-consuming to develop and administer and allow for quantitative analysis and comparison. It is a scale that lists some characteristics and range of performance of each individual. Therefore, employees are ranked by determining a score which shows their performance level.

The utility of this technique can be enhanced by using it in conjunction with the essay appraisal technique.

Forced choice: Mondy (2008) contends that this method

evolved after a great deal of research conducted for the military services during World War II. It is a method in which the evaluator should rank individual work behaviour between two or more states. Each state may be favourable or unfavourable. The activity of evaluator is to determine which state has an explanation of employee most.

Behaviorally anchored rating scale (BARS): According to Wiese, (1998) this method replaces traditional numerical anchors tools with behavioural prototypes of real work behaviours. BARS enable the evaluator to rank employee based on observable behavioural dimension. The elements of this method are the results of a combination of major elements of critical incident and adjective rating scale appraisal methods. According to Decenzo and Robbins (2002), BARS has five stages. These are the generation critical incidents, developing performance dimensions, relocating incidents, rating of level of performance for each incident and development of the final instrument.

Relative standards

In this second general category of appraisal methods, individuals are compared against other individuals. These methods are relative standards rather than absolute measuring devices. The most popular of the relative method are group order ranking, individual ranking and paired comparison.

Group order ranking: In this method, employees are placed into a particular classification, such as "top one-fifth". For example, if a rater has 20 employees, only 4 can be in the top fifth and 4 must be relegated to the bottom fifth (Decenzo and Robbins, 2002).

Individual ranking: Dessler (2000) maintains that in this type of appraisal, individuals are ranked from highest to lowest. It is assumed that the difference between the first and second employee is equal to difference between 21st and 22nd employee. In this method, the manager compares each person with others than work standards.

Paired comparison: Mondy (2008), in his study found out that in this method, employees are compared with all others in pairs. The number of comparison is followed as $\frac{N \cdot (N - 1)}{2}$ in which, N shows the number of employees. After doing all comparisons, the best person is determined for each characteristic.

Objectives

The third approach to appraisal makes use of objectives. Employees are evaluated on how well they accomplished a specific set of objectives that have been determined to

be critical in the successful completion of their job. This approach is frequently referred to as Management by Objectives (MBO). Management by objectives is a process that converts organizational objectives into individual objectives. According to Ingham (1995), MBO consists of four steps: goal setting, action planning, self-control and periodic reviews.

360 degree feedback appraisal

360 degree evaluations are the latest approach to evaluating performance. It is a popular performance appraisal method that involves evaluating input from multiple levels within the firm as well as external sources. There are numerous authors who propose definitions of the 360 degree feedback process. "Feedback from multiple sources or '360 degree feedback' is a performance appraisal approach that relies on the input of an employee's superiors, colleagues, subordinates, sometimes customers, suppliers and/or spouses" (Yukl and Lepsinger, 1995). In a special edition of *Human Resource Management* on 360 degree feedback, Tornow (1993) observes that in 360 degree feedback programmes, feedback about a target individual is solicited from significant others using a standardized instrument. Jones and Bearley (1996) refer to 360 degree feedback as the practice of gathering and processing multi-rater assessments on individuals and feeding back the results to the recipients. Hoffman (1995) explains that 360 degree feedback is an approach that gathers behavioural observations from many layers within the organization and includes self-assessment.

The 360-degree evaluation can help one person be rated from different sides, different people which can give the wider prospective of the employee's competencies (Shrestha, 2007). It has been used for human resource development, appraisal and pay decisions (Armstrong, 1998; Stone, 2002).

The link of performance appraisal to rewards

Researchers (Bannister and Balkan, 1990) have reported that appraisee seems to have greater acceptance of the appraisal process, and feel more satisfied with it, when the process is directly linked to rewards. Such findings are a serious challenge to those who feel that appraisal results and reward outcomes must be strictly isolated from each other.

There is also a group who argues that the evaluation of employees for reward purposes, and frank communication with them about their performance, are part of the basic responsibilities of management. The practice of not discussing reward issues while appraising performance is, say critics, based on inconsistent and muddled ideas of motivation.

In many organizations, this inconsistency is aggravated by the practice of having separate wage and salary reviews, in which merit rises and bonuses are decided arbitrarily, and often secretly, by supervisors and managers. In the early part of the second century, performance appraisal was used in larger organization mostly for administrative purposes such as making promotions and determining salaries and bonuses.

Benefits of performance appraisal

Where performance appraisal allows the employees to get monetary and non-monetary rewards from management, it gives the most significant benefit for employees. In such a situation, it gives management and employees the chance to schedule time for one to one discussion on the performance over the period of time. This discussion between employee and supervisor allows them to discuss the main issues that impeded the performance and work. In the same vein, they will find measures of addressing the concerns raised. It can be observed from all over the world that organizations that provide constant feedback on performance appraisal to their employees, creates a strong bond between direct reports and supervisors only if the appraisal is conducted properly and fairly. This process also gives the opportunity to employees to review their performances and discuss the issues and difficulties they are facing in the work and also it gives the path to gain the aims and objectives in the future time. This interaction of direct reports and supervisors give the opportunity to help the future goals. Therefore, it enhances the productivity. So, this process gives the best time to employees to have chat with the supervisors without any hindrance and instruction (Orpen, 1997).

The importance of performance appraisal should not be misconstrued as if it is the integral part of the performance appraisal system. The appraisal system allows the supervisors and employees to discuss the future targets, training, rotation need, orientation and development, if needed. In this discussion, the supervisors and the direct reports discuss the various challenges about the present as well as the absent working skills, career development and what is to be done in the future (Dyck, 1997). Here, supervisor highlights the key skills of the direct report and makes or arranges for the future career inspirations. This discussion can be useful to measure the productivity of the organization, for the recruitment and orientation process. For example, the feedback can provide information about how employees are performing, their training need, futures aspirations and non-performing employees.

Appraisal data can also provide information on how well the recruiting strategies are working, what developmental process is good enough and what the effectiveness of employees is. Performance appraisal process could be a data sheet highlighting the overall performance of all employees; telling how well productivity has

improved, remains same or fall (Thompson and Dalta, 1970).

Challenges in performance appraisal

In order to make a performance appraisal system effective and successful, an organization comes across various challenges and problems. Raters' evaluations are often subjectively biased by their cognitive and motivational states (DeNisi and Williams, 1988; Longenecker et al., 1987), and supervisors often apply different standards with different employees which results in inconsistent, unreliable and invalid evaluations (Folger et al., 1992). In order to create better systems, researchers have traditionally focused on validity and reliability (Bretz et al., 1992) by designing newer "forms" of performance appraisals (e.g., behavioural-based systems that better define specific essential job functions of employees or 360-degree feedback mechanisms that allow for cross-validation via multiple raters). However, despite these recent advances in evaluation design, critics continue to argue that performance appraisal systems are not consistently effective (Atkins and Wood, 2002; DeNisi and Kluger, 2000).

Thomas and Bretz (1994) argue that evaluations are often perceived by employees and supervisors with "fear and loathing." Two possible explanations for the fear and loathing are the absence of a "sense of ownership" and an absence of rewards for properly completing the process. Cardy (1998) describes the appraisal process as "a difficult and error-ridden task." However, Cardy also points out that it is an important task that affects both the individual and the organization. As suggested by Drenth (1984), evaluation is a sensitive matter, often eliciting negative psychological responses such as resistance, denial, aggression, or discouragement, particularly if the assessment is negative. Thus high perceptions of evaluative performance appraisal use may result in negative feelings about the appraisal.

The employees' reactions to appraisals can be an important condition to improve the employee's performance. Recently, scholars have begun to argue that employees' emotions and perceptions are important in determining the efficacy of performance appraisal systems.

In fact, appraisal reactions such as satisfaction, acceptability and motivation to use feedback, are cited as an important trend in the appraisal research during the past ten years in a recent review of that literature (Levy and Williams, 2004).

SCOPE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted qualitative research design. According to Patton (1985) in Merriam (1998), "qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there". This understanding is an end in

itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting-what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what is going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. The analysis strives for depth of understanding".

Gambaga is the administrative capital of the East Mamprusi District in the Northern Region of Ghana. It is one of the oldest districts that have seen no or very little development. According to the 2000 population and housing census, Gambaga has a population of 180,877; of this figure 92,332 are females while 88,545 are males. This constitutes 51 and 49%, respectively. The average density of population is 59 persons per square kilometre.

The data were collected from staff of the East Mamprusi District Assembly. These included five heads of units within the Assembly and fifty other staff. The main methods employed in gathering data were questionnaires, observations and interviews. Two types of questionnaires were designed for the study; one for the appraisers and the other for the appraisees. These instruments were used to collect the primary data from the Assembly. The appraiser's questionnaires comprise fifteen (15) items, some with multiple choice responses on the issues. The appraiser's questionnaires were administered to the five (5) heads of the various units of the Assembly namely; the Central Administration, the District Planning Coordinating Unit (DPCU), the District Works Department (DWD), the District Finance Office (DFO) and The Internal Audit Unit (IAU). The appraisee's questionnaire which consisted of nineteen (19) items mainly of multiple choice responses were evenly distributed to the fifty (50) permanent staff of the Assembly to respond accordingly. The questionnaire was very simple to enable the respondents' answer them with maximum understanding and relative ease.

The researcher adopted and used observation on the permanent staff of the Assembly.

The researcher also employed methods such as individual interview, group interview as well as telephone interview especially for members of staff who were not literate such as the drivers, cleaners, watchmen and the labourers. The total staff strength of the East Mamprusi District Assembly as at the time of the research was sixty-seven (67), comprising fifty (50) permanent staff who are on the Controller and Accountant General's Payroll and seventeen (17) casual workers. The non-probability sampling techniques were adopted by the researcher. Under the non-probability techniques, both the purposive and convenience procedure were employed.

The study was designed to cover only the permanent staff of the East Mamprusi District Assembly hence only the 50 permanent staff were selected for the study because the casual workers were not regular at work and generally not accessible. It was also due to the fact that the appraisal concept basically involves the evaluation of the performance of permanent employees of an organisation who are referred to as the appraisees in this research.

Both the quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were adopted. Percentages and frequency table, bar graphs and pie charts were used to capture changes in the variables. The qualitative approach described the data using appropriate expressions in percentiles with distinct and precise language. The qualitative method was particularly used for the analysis of the interviews. This was followed by a correlation analysis to find out the relationship between staff performance appraisal and output or productivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Discussion of the data has multiple facets approaches, encompassing diverse techniques under a variety of

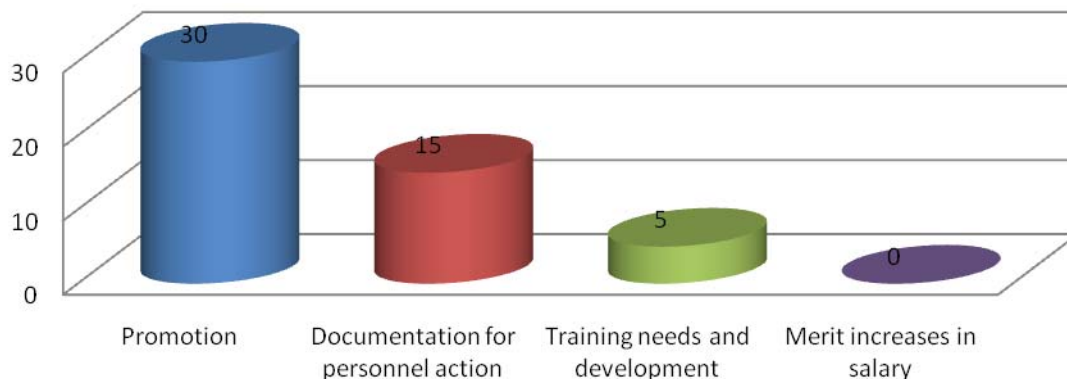


Figure 1. Rationale for conducting performance appraisal. Source: Field Survey 2013.

names, in different business, science and social science domains.

The research revealed that the graphic rating scale appraisal system was the one still invoke with only one type of appraisal form for both junior and senior staff as all 50 staff members indicated. According to Paterson (1922), he felt this method had several advantages over other methods of evaluation. First, the procedure is very simple. All the rater is required to do is place a check mark on a line indicating performance on a certain dimension. Secondly, the rater can make a precise judgment about a worker's performance. The rater is not restricted in his responses and is not forced to place the ratee in a category or class. Finally, the rater is freed from quantitative terms such as numbers to describe a worker's performance. Paterson felt that these quantitative terms influenced a rater's judgment. With this method, the rater can evaluate performance without numbers biasing his judgment.

The main rationale for conducting performance appraisal is for documentation for personnel action, training needs and development, merit increases in salaries (awarding hardworking employee) and promotions. Figure 1 provides response to reasons for performance appraisal systems.

From the figure above, thirty (30) appraisees, representing 60% indicated that performance appraisal was for promotion of employees, fifteen (15) representing 30% identified documentation for personnel action as the rationale for conducting performance appraisal, five (5) representing 10% mentioned that performance appraisal is used to identify the training needs and development of employees none responded for the determination of salaries. The appraisers, however, admitted that there are several challenges associated with the entire appraisal system such as the non-commitment of management to use the appraisal data for their intended purposes and variations from different raters. They also asserted that the information requested for on the appraisal form does not give a true reflection of the

performance of the appraisees. This supports Smith and Kendall (1963) who noted that the raters would be judging behaviours that are complex in nature. This raises a potential problem if one rater attributes a behaviour to one cause while a second rater attributes it to another. The idea that different raters all rate similarly, also called interrater agreement, is vital to a performance appraisal system. A lack of interrater agreement means that the results of the appraisals cannot be generalized across different raters. Employees rated by one rater may have received different scores on their appraisals had they been rated by a different rater. This issue is important when comparing employees with different supervisors, or raters, for the purposes of advancement or termination.

It was noted that promotions at the District Assembly are usually not done by the District Coordinating Director (DCD) of the Assembly and so it is impossible for him/her to give feedback to the appraisees. In this situation, it is extremely difficult to determine whether the performance appraisals can have any influence on the appraisees. Research conducted by Bannister and Balkan (1990) has reported that appraisees seem to have greater acceptance of the appraisal process, and feel more satisfied with it, when the process is directly linked to rewards. Such findings are a serious challenge to those who feel that appraisal results and reward outcomes must be strictly isolated from each other. There is also a group who argues that the evaluation of employees for reward purposes, and frank communication with them about their performance, are part of the basic responsibilities of management. The practice of not discussing reward issues while appraising performance is, say critics, based on inconsistent and muddled ideas of motivation.

It is also an established fact that promotions are usually based on the length of service at the Assembly other than individual performance. Officers due for promotion must take cognizance of the time and make the necessary arrangements for the relevant interviews. Grote (2002) contends that the purposes of performance appraisal are providing feedback to employees about their performance,

facilitating decisions concerning pay increases, promotions and layoffs, encouraging performance improvement, setting and measuring goals, determining individual and organizational training and development needs, confirming that good hiring decisions are being made, provide legal support for personnel decisions and improving overall organizational performance (pp. 4-5). Despite these laudable reasons given the study disclosed that forty-five (45) out of the fifty (50) members of staff of the assembly interviewed said they were not usually given any quarterly or annual feedback on their performance. It is therefore crystally clear that lack of feedback to employees on their performance either quarterly or annually is a serious drawback to their performance or output in the Assembly.

Outcomes of the data collected revealed that senior civil servants usually take their professional training courses at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) while the junior officers take theirs at either the Institute of Local Government Studies or the Civil Service Training Centre, both in Accra. George and Cole (1992) disagree with this planning process and stated that, the basic purpose of performance appraisals is to participate in the appraisal, plan the training activities, discuss the performance and plan for the future" (p389). Wanna et al. (1992) define the objective of staff appraisals as "to improve planning and service delivery at the general level, but also to provide feedback to individual officers" (p162).

According to Mullins (1993), appraisal is basically used to determine an employee's sustainability for training. All the fifty (50), representing 100% appraisees responded that their training needs were never discussed with them. This goes to confirm the assertion earlier captured in the literature review that management of the Assembly does not see the need for staff performance appraisal. One can therefore conveniently conclude that any form of appraisal conducted at the Assembly is usually not put to its intended purpose.

Furthermore, the appraisers confessed that the forms only elicited more behaviour responses than what the appraisees can actually achieve over a period of time. It was also realized that many of the questions on the appraisal forms were subjective and therefore could not be very reliable. Borman (1979) concurs that raters may have difficulty detecting similarities between the ratee's observed performance and the behavioural anchors. Because the anchors are very specific, finding congruence between the anchors and the performance can involve a high amount of inference. And, as Cascio (1998) notes, the more inferences made by a rater, the more likely that errors will occur. As well, it is possible that the ratee could have acted in direct accordance with two of the specific behavioural anchors (Bernardin and Smith, 1981). The problem for the rater is then to decide which example is more correct. This, again, involves inferences that could lead to rating errors. There is even

some evidence that the nature of the behavioral anchors seems to increase rater error (Murphy and Constans, 1987). The specific nature of the behavioural incidents may trigger memories of individual incidents of behaviour that match the anchors rather than serve to facilitate a more general recall of behaviour. Also, given that many individuals will be rated after the rater has already seen the appraisal instrument, the specific nature of the behavioural anchors may serve to prime the rater to look more carefully for behaviours that match those on the rating scale (Murphy and Constans, 1987).

The study uncovered that appraisal systems were in no way related to the reward system or salary administration. Salary increment is the policy of government which does not essentially relate to performance. It was also revealed that appraisal of staff performance are usually conducted only when members of staff are due for promotion interviews. The research findings also indicated that salaries and other incentives are usually not determined by one's performance measured through the appraisal process. This is not in consonance with what pertained in the USA in 1989 where salary administration was identified as the first on the list of the top ten uses of performance appraisal (Kreitner and Kinicki, 1989). The two hunters argue that when salaries and other incentives are directly linked to performance, employees are motivated to put in more efforts to increase productivity. This collaborates the assertion that performance appraisal in the East Mamprusi District Assembly is not seen as a key factor affecting staff performance or output. It is an undeniable fact that people usually work and achieves much when given adequate and objective feedback on their performance quarterly and annually.

As regards the relationship between promotions and performance, the analysis indicates that promotions at the East Mamprusi District Assembly depend more on performance at the promotion interview other than anything else. It also revealed that the length of service on a particular position is an important consideration for promotion to a higher grade. Winston and Creamer (1997), however, opined that performance appraisal should be linked to organizational productivity and rewards. Individual employees benefit from performance appraisal and should have a clear association to organizational achievement using a recognized reward system. Not having this clear link may result in negative consequences on employee morale and productivity.

With regards to the frequency of appraisal of staff at the assembly, the research revealed that all the employees who had their appraisals got them only when they were due for promotion interviews but not on annual basis or for the purpose of assessing their performance. According to Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory, an employee performs or is motivated to do so according to the expected result of the work done. Vroom concluded that people will be motivated to the extent that they can perceive links between effort, performance and rewards

available. He further argued that performance is a vital component of the expectancy theory. Specifically, he was concerned with the linkage between effort and performance. That employees need to know what to expect after a given task; however, it is critical for management to communicate what is expected of the employees. Furthermore, he argued that they must feel confident that if they exert an effort within their capabilities, it will result in a satisfactory performance as defined by the criteria by which they are being measured. However Vroom underestimated the fact that employees should feel confident in the process of evaluation in that, if they perform as they are being asked, they will achieve the rewards they value. The irregular conduct of performance appraisal stems from the fact that the appraisers themselves have not taken the issue of appraisal of staff at the Assembly seriously. The appraisal system therefore does not serve the purpose for which it is intended. This attitude according to the responses revealed that forty five (45) out of the fifty (50) respondents, representing 90% were not satisfied with the way performance appraisals were conducted at the Assembly making inference to the fact that the performance Appraisal system does not improve their conditions in anyway. According to a study conducted by McNerney (1995), many companies reported that they are not satisfied with their performance appraisal systems and procedures

Another significant finding was that all the five (5) appraisers interviewed disclosed that they never had any form of training in the performance appraisal system. This clearly testifies that the performance appraisal system is not considered as a key component of staff development and this deficiency seriously affects staff performance negatively at the Assembly. Since performance appraisal is a judgmental process, it puts the appraiser in a highly sensitive and emotionally charged situation that calls for extremely good interpersonal skills. This invariably calls for the need for appraiser training if the system at the Assembly has to be effective to achieve the purpose for which it was designed. In view of the immense role the performance appraisal system plays in management decisions, the absence of trained and qualified personnel for its implementation at the East Mamprusi District Assembly is a serious setback to staff development and performance. This finding contravenes Winston and Creamer (1997) study when they suggested that for performance appraisal to be most useful, it must be inherently joined to both supervision and staff development. They define performance appraisal as "an organizational system comprising deliberate processes for determining staff accomplishments for the purpose of improving their effectiveness" (p. 43). In their research, they found that in higher education performance appraisal is frequently either looked upon in a negative way because it criticizes peoples' efforts, or indifferently because it is merely a paper exercise that has little to do with other aspects of institutional life or work conditions.

The research further disclosed that the termination and retention of staff decisions were not directly based on the results of the performance appraisals conducted. All the five appraisers who responded to the questionnaire confirmed it. They all indicated that management of the Assembly has no authority over such decisions since that was the preserve of the Office of the Head of the Local Government Service. Management can only make recommendations for further action. Winston and Creamer (1997) consent that leadership should require from supervisors and recognize the importance of their contribution to the results of the appraisal process. Supervisors, who act as leaders of their departments and divisions and recognize that they do shape both individual and organizational behaviour, are more likely to be effective in carrying out their duties in the appraisal process than supervisors who perform their duties without thinking and interest. They argued that this can beef up management's strength by giving the power to take major decisions without any reservations.

When the appraisees were asked the last time or year they were appraised, six (6) said their last appraisal were in 2010, five (5) said in 2009, another five (5) said in 2008, fourteen (14) said they had never been appraised, while twenty (20) responded that they could not remember ever being appraised. As regards the appraisers, all the five (5) responded that their appraisal forms were only filled and endorsed when they were to attend promotion interviews. When asked whether they usually set targets for staff, all the five (5) appraisers responded in the negative. They further added that appraisals were purposely for promotions since appraisal data are usually requested only during promotion interviews. These findings are refuted by Coutts and Schneider (2004) when they noted that "police organisations that do not invest in performance appraisal training are sending a clear message, either wittingly or unwittingly, that they do not consider the performance appraisal system an important component of their HR practices". When the manager conducting any performance appraisal does not possess the skill or motivation to rate the subordinate's performance, problems are a foregone conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving any performance appraisal system is a complex proposition that requires developing sound appraisal procedures and motivated as well as skilled raters. Appraisal training is important to the success of an appraisal system. There is no substitute for training, which can minimize the occurrence of rating errors and improve reliability and validity (French, 1990). The study revealed that, most of the respondents lacked the needed knowledge about performance appraisal. Information or data gathered confirmed that the system as it exists does not measure up to the required standards. Though the

appraisers at the Assembly stated clearly that the Assembly staff know their job description, their overall performance is still far below expectation

The staff performance appraisal system adopted and used in the East Mamprusi District Assembly is not done regularly and annually as it is supposed to be the case in every appraisal system. The research also revealed that there is neither target setting nor a clear-cut job description for senior management staff of the Assembly. The mode of assessment was also found to be a one-way process which does not provide feedback for timely management decisions.

Evidence from the research also indicates that there is a weak correlation between the performance appraisal and productivity as exists in the East Mamprusi District Assembly. Factors responsible for that include lack of; appreciation of the impact of appraisal on staff performance, training for appraisers themselves, regular and systematic training programmes for staff and confidence in the entire Appraisal System.

The evidence from this research confirms that the absence of an effective performance Appraisal System in the East Mamprusi District negatively affects performance and productivity at the Assembly. The system therefore confirms the assertion that an effective appraisal system would enhance productivity.

The low level of staff performance at the East Mamprusi District Assembly therefore calls for an urgent need to design a new and more objective format to be adopted and used at the Assembly instead of relying on the current one which does fall short of modern day appraisal demands.

Evidence from the research indicates that there is a weak correlation between the staff performance Appraisal and productivity at the East Mamprusi District Assembly.

Some of the factors responsible were identified as lack of; appreciation of the impact of appraisal on staff performance, adequate knowledge and skills in appraisal by the appraisers themselves, regular and systematic training programmes for staff and confidence in the appraisal system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve upon the staff performance appraisal system at the East Mamprusi District Assembly and to derive its immense benefits for the Assembly, some recommendations for consideration by management include;

There is the need to properly train managers/supervisors to conduct effective appraisals to meet the ever-changing work environment. If performance is important to an organisation, so is the appraisal of that performance. If appraisal is important, then managers must be led to develop the skills that are critical for effective appraisal. Without these critical competencies, the organizational appraisal process cannot achieve its desired objectives.

No matter how well designed a performance appraisal system is, its effectiveness is largely determined by the understanding, commitment and skills of the managers who must actually implement the system. The performance appraisal system at the Assembly must address its intended purpose(s);

1. Appraisees must be seriously involved in the entire concept of the appraisal system of the Assembly;
2. Appraisees must be given adequate and objective feedback on their performance annually;
3. Appraisees must be familiar and content with the appraisal system of the Assembly;
4. There must exist a strong relationship between a good performance appraisal system and productivity or output of the Assembly and;
5. The performance appraisal system currently used at the East Mamprusi District Assembly must be seriously improved to enable the District Assembly drive the maximum benefits of the concept.

The existing appraisal system is more driven towards subjectivity other than objectivity. A more objective format should therefore be designed and adopted for use at the Assembly. It is therefore the fervent hope and belief of the researcher that these recommendations which are very essential ingredients of a good and effective appraisal system would be implemented to stimulate the performance of the staff of the East Mamprusi District Assembly to enhance productivity and output.

Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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