Full Length Research Article

AN EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM AT A NON-GOVERNMENTAL HEALTHCARE ORGANISATION IN SWAZILAND

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on theories of performance management. According to Armstrong (2009) the three theories of performance management are the social cognitive theory, goal theory and control theory. These explain how goal setting, boosting employees' self-confidence and providing feedback contribute to organisational performance. The aim of this study was to evaluate the performance appraisal system at NATICC. Areas investigated included: (1) the main reasons for doing performance appraisal at NATICC, (2) the employees' perceptions and their understanding of performance appraisal and (3) the challenges faced by the organisation in implementing performance appraisal (PA).

INTRODUCTION

This section provides a brief outline and indication of the term *performance appraisal*. This is followed by background information of the research problem, the problem statement, the aim of the study, the objectives of the study and the research questions. Lastly, the significance of the study and the format of the study are highlighted. Regardless of its usefulness, an ineffective appraisal system may create many problems, including low morale, decreased employee enthusiasm and lowered productivity (Islam and Rasad, 2005). Conducting a PA is often a difficult task because the process requires supervisors to fully understand the nature of the job they are evaluating. In addition, the information needs to be collected in a systematic way, and supervisors need to give performance feedback to employees.

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The usefulness of performance evaluation as a managerial decision tool depends on whether it is able to provide an accurate rating, as inaccurate PA's negatively impact employee engagement and effectiveness. In turn, this may open the organisation up to legal ramifications and result in compensation finances being misallocated and/or poorly spent (Deloitte, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of Performance Appraisal

This study is based on the three theories of performance management, which include (1) the social cognitive theory, (2) goal theory and (3) control theory (Armstrong, 2009).

Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory is anchored in the concept of self-efficacy (Armstrong, 2009). This implies that what people

believe that they can or cannot do has an impact on their performance. Therefore, developing positive thinking and boosting the self-confidence of employees may help them to improve their performance.

Goal Theory

According to Armstrong (2009), goal theory highlights mechanisms that connect developed goals to performance outcomes. These mechanisms are as follows:

• Goals direct attention towards priorities.
• Goals stimulate effort.
• Goals challenge people to bring their knowledge and skills in order to increase their chances of success.

Control Theory

According to Armstrong (2009), control theory is crucial to performance management and it centres on feedback as a determinant of behaviour. When people receive feedback on their behaviour, they are made aware of the differences between their actual performance and expected performance. This assists them to take corrective actions where necessary.

Definitions of Performance Appraisal

According to Deb (2006:205), PA, also known as performance review or performance evaluation, is a crucial phase of the performance management process. Kandula (2011:5) states that PA is often confused with performance management and these two are misunderstood as the same concept. Kandula (2011:5) also states that PA is a singular activity that is used to assess the performance of an employee for a predetermined duration on a set of parameters. Thus, PA is considered a management tool that is used to measure the actual performance of employees on a defined task. Though PA is defined as a singular activity, performance management is a process with different steps (Landy and Conte, 2009). There are three components of performance management. The first part is the definition of performance, which involves setting organisational objectives and strategies.

The second component is the actual measurement process (which involves PA).The last part is the communication between the supervisor and the subordinate about the extent to which the employee achieved organisational expectations (Landy and Conte, 2009). While Armstrong (2009) defines performance management as a systematic process for improving organisational performance by developing the performance of individuals and teams, Kandula (2011) defines it as a process of designing and implementing motivational strategies and interventions at a workplace with an objective to transform the raw potential of human resources into performance. From the above definitions, it is clear that performance management is broad, focuses on organisational performance and is more encompassing than PA, which is a component of performance management and only focuses on individual performance. Hernandez and O`Connor (2010) suggest that performance managements is one of the four interrelated functions of the human resource strategy in an organisation.

Therefore, it means that performance management cannot be defined without mentioning the other three functions, which are (1) compensation and rewards, (2) training and development, and (3) recruitment. In other words, if an employee performs well, he or she should be rewarded, and, if performance gaps are noted, he or she should be trained to improve performance.

According to Chandramohan (2008), PA is a method of evaluating the behaviour of an employee in doing a particular job in an organisation. This includes the qualitative and the quantitative aspect of an employee's job. The reason why PA also focuses on employees' behaviour is because it affects employees' employment results. One would assume that an employee with positive behaviour tends to work hard, thereby producing better results than those with negative behaviour. However, the major challenge of this definition is that measuring behavioural traits is complex and prone to human error. This may bring an element of bias and ultimately lead to dissatisfaction.

Aswathappa (2005:227) defines PA as a systematic evaluation of the individual with respect to his or her performance on the job and his or her potential for development. More comprehensively, the Aswathappa (2005:227) states that "it is a formal, structured system of measuring and evaluating an employee's job related behaviours and outcomes to discover how and why the employee is presently performing on the job and how the employee can perform more effectively in the future so that the employee, organizations and society all benefit." Aswathappa (2005:227) highlights that the PA is linked to job analysis, as shown below.

From the above definition, it means that PA is an objective way to measure past performance and identify areas that require improvement. The importance of this definition is that it tries to answer the question of "why employees behave the way they do at work?" By answering this question, one tends to understand the employees' behaviour and can easily provide interventions that may help employees' to improve or maintain a positive behaviour towards their work. On the negative side, this definition does not specify the frequency of doing PA's and the need to provide feedback to the employees.

Van Aswegen, Kleynhans, Meyer, and Markham (2006:142) define PA as a formal process of evaluating or assessing the work done by an employee or a team of employees. The authors highlight that PA is a planned and systemic activity that is official and prescribed by the organisation. This means that the outcomes of a PA are critical for advancing an organisation's goals. Whilst van Aswegen et al. (2006) define PA as a formal process, Lyster and Authur (2007) show that there is a formal and an informal PA.A formal PA is routine and systematic, whereas an informal PA is irregular, often not standardised and prone to subjective interpretation. At most, an informal PA is spontaneous and oral in nature and is often not documented rigorously. Informal reviews occur at any time of the year when the need arises (for instance, if there is a need to note a specific performance problem that needs disciplinary action). The advantage of informal reviews is that they also offer the same benefits as formal PA's do. In addition, they offer opportunities for extra employee training.
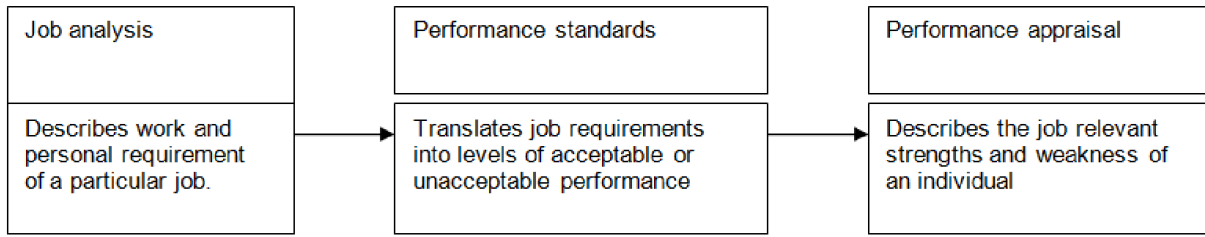
Source: Aswathappa (2005:227).

Figure 2.3.1. Relationship between Performance Appraisal and Job Analysis

PA is also defined as a periodic evaluation of the output of an individual measured against certain expectations (Ahmad and Ali, 2004). From this definition, it means that in order to have an effective PA in an organisation, it must be done against pre-set standards and the employees must be aware of the set standards prior to the evaluation. This means that there must be discussion and communication about the set goals between the supervisor and the subordinate prior to conducting a PA. In this study, PA is defined as a formal systematic process designed to regularly measure employees' performance against pre-set standards by providing constructive feedback to employees to form a basis upon which training needs are identified and administrative decisions can be made.

Methods of Performance Appraisal

According to Chandramohan (2008:128), the methods of PA are broadly split into two types (as shown in Table 2.6.1 below).

Table 2.6.1. Methods of Performance Appraisal

Traditional methods	Modern methods
1. Graphic rating scales	1. Assessing centre
2. Ranking method	2. Human resource accounting
3. Paired comparison method	3. Appraisal by results
4. Forced distribution method	4. Psychological appraisal
5. Checklist method	5. Behaviourally anchored rating scales
6. Free form appraisal	
7. Group appraisal	6. 360 degree appraisal method
8. Confidential reports	
9. Critical incident method	
10. Field review method	

Source: Chandramohan (2008:128).

Traditional Methods of Performance Appraisal

Chandramohan (2008:129) states that the traditional methods of PA are widely used. Some of the traditional methods in practice are described as follows:

Graphic Rating Scale

According to Chandramohan (2008:129), this method is also known as the linear rating scale and it is one of the oldest and most widely used methods. This method is also used at NATICC, whereby an employee is evaluated on several traits that include the following: punctuality, leadership, initiative, dependability, decisiveness, emotional stability, maturity, coordination and quality of work. The supervisor rates the employee on a scale using a numerical value or it can be expressed in terms of descriptions such as excellent, good or poor. The advantages and disadvantages of this method are:

1. Advantages of the graphic rating scale
- It is an easy to design.
- It is easy to use and it requires minimal time.
- It is easy to compare the scores of the different employees on different traits.

2. Disadvantages of the graphic rating scale
- The rating is arbitrary and subjective making it prone to errors.
- The method assumes that each trait is equally important for all jobs.
- The descriptive words that are used in the scales may have different meanings for different raters, and, as a result, it is not a reliable tool.

Ranking Method

This is also known as the "order of merit method", whereby the employees are ranked from the best to the worst on characteristics determined by the organisation, and the manager compares an employee to other similar employees.

Group Appraisal Method

This is when an employee is evaluated by a group of people rather than a single person and a general consensus is made. Although the technique is time consuming, it is more comprehensive and eliminates supervisor bias since it involves several judges.

Critical Incident Method

This is a PA method in which a manager keeps a written record of positive and negative performance of the employees throughout the evaluation period. These form a factual basis for discussion during the PA. For instance, if an employee fails to fulfil a challenging deadline, this can be used to discuss the employee's reliability during a PA.

Checklist Method

In this method, the appraiser uses a form with a list of statements or descriptions and chooses the ones that represent the characteristics and performance of the employee being evaluated. According to Chandramohan (2008), there are three types of checklist methods, which are the simple checklist, the weighted checklist and the forced-choice method.

Modern Methods of Performance Appraisal

Emerging PA methods include the 360-degree appraisal method, assessment centres and management by objectives (MBO).

360-degree Appraisal

According to Brett and Atwater (2001), the 360-degree feedback appraisal method is the process in which subordinates, peers, customers, and superiors provide anonymous feedback to managers on an employee's performance. The employee is then expected to use the performance data, along with a self-rating, in order to make appropriate changes to improve their performance. The advantage of this method is that it allows the appraisee to view him or herself in a way that others do. However, one disadvantage is that it can be a cumbersome process.

Assessment Centres

This technique is used to determine employees' potential for promotion. The employees from various departments are brought together at an assessment centre for a few days where they are given similar assignments to complete. The observers rank the candidates performance in order of merit. This is an objective evaluation method that uses techniques like role playing, business games and in-basket exercises.

Management by Objectives (MBO)

According to Kumar and Sharma (2000:223), MBO is "a system of management whereby the supervisor and subordinate jointly identify objectives, define major areas of responsibility in terms of results expected, and use these objectives and expected results as guides for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of each of its members." This method seeks to measure the performance of an employee by examining the extent to which predetermined work objectives have been met. The advantage of this method is that it is a results oriented process rather than an activity oriented one and it is based on the premise that performance can best be measured by comparing attained goals to set goals.

Problems Associated with Performance Appraisal

PA is one of the oldest management tools available and problems associated with it are well documented, with various suggestions for the possible sources of these problems outlined. Studies show that there are many approaches for appraising employee behaviour and performance, and, as a result, different methods of PA have left many managers in a state of confusion and frustration with the employee evaluation process (Gurbuz and Dikmenli, 2007). According to Bersin (2008), the biggest complaint from managers is that they are not given sufficient guidelines to assess their subordinates. Caruth and Handlogten (2001) affirm this, stating that many PA problems are not inherent to the method used, but usually arise because the appraisers are largely untrained. In other words, supervisors, by virtue of their rank, perform PA, something they may not clearly understand. This greatly affects the effectiveness and proper implementation of

a functional PA system. Forgie (2007) mentions that more than half of their professionals (appraisers) had a negative view towards their company's PA system. This was attributed to insufficient managerial skills and the lack of clarity between pay and performance. Forgie (2007) emphasised the need for managers to be trained in all elements of performance management. Unfortunately, this study does not attempt to assess whether the appraisers at NATICC have received formal PA training. It would be interesting to note this because training (or lack of training) may contribute to some of the challenges faced by the organisation in implementing the PA system. Some of the problems associated with PA are discussed below:

Lack of objectivity

According to Caruth and Handlogten (2001), one of the major weaknesses of PA is the lack of objectivity. For instance, the use of rating scales practiced at NATICC in measuring personality traits may affect the objectivity of the process. Because traits are difficult to measure and most of the time is open to subjective interpretation and personal opinions, the PA process is prone to errors. In addition, personality traits may have little or nothing to do with employees' performance. Therefore, in order to have a sound and effective PA system, one must ensure that objective factors that are job related and measurable are used in a PA system. One of the problems associated with a lack of objectivity in a PA system is that it places the employer and the supervisor in a vulnerable position if the employee challenges the results of the PA.

Perfunctoriness

According to Caruth and Handlogten (2001), for many appraisers, PA is a task they find difficult and unpleasant. They have a negative attitude towards it; some view it as a time consuming and complex process, while others see it as an unnecessary administrative human resource function. There are others that just don't relish the thought of discussing an evaluation with an employee. As a result of this, it is not unusual to find a PA being done hurriedly and superficially without much thought. This clearly shows that the appraisers need to be trained and made aware of the objectives and the benefits theta can bring to the organisation. Training also helps appraisers to have a positive attitude towards PA. It would be interesting to investigate the supervisors' perceptions towards PA at NATICC, but this falls outside of the focus of the study.

Central tendency

According to van Aswegen et al. (2006), central tendency is when the appraisers tend to rate all the employees near the average. Caruth and Handlogten (2001) state that this is one of the most common errors in performance management. Some of the reasons why appraisers do this are:

(1) It is an expedient way to do a PA and
(2) It relieves the appraiser of having to explain high or low performances (Caruth and Handlogten, 2001). In other words, they avoid criticism, which suggests that managers need to be trained in conducting PA's.

Lack of documentation

According to Lyster and Anther (2007), for appraisals to work effectively managers must document critical incidents, employee achievements and skills training opportunities throughout the year. At times, managers wait for PA periods to try and remember all the things that happened during the year. This restricts the employee and the organisation of an honest and effective appraisal. Thus, inadequate or a lack of documentation may lead supervisors to commit PA errors. If there is no documentation relative to work accomplishments, supervisors are bound to make assumptions about employees' performance, which may even be incorrect. One major drawback of this problem is that it opens a window for litigation if the employees are not satisfied with PA outcomes.

Legal issues associated with PA

PA data is used to make important administrative human resource decisions, such as promotion, training and dismissal. According to Aswathappa (2007), PA is a common target of legal disputes by employees involving charges of unfairness and bias. It is therefore important that a PA system is just, objective and without bias. This study aims to evaluate the employee's perceptions of the PA system fairness. It is worth noting that NATICC has not faced any legal battles with its employees emanating from PA disputes.

According to van Aswegen et al. (2006), appraisers must consider the labour legislation when conducting a PA. For instance, in South Africa a dismissal on grounds of poor performance is allowed in terms of the Labour Relations Act (no. 66 of 1995), but the appraisal process must be legally correct according to the Employment Equity Act (no. 55 of 1998) if the company wishes to avoid litigation. Appraisers must be trained and the process must follow the proper guidelines to protect companies from costly legal battles.

Lack of proper training

According to Caruth and Handlogten (2001), many organisations offer little or no training on how to evaluate performance and conduct a PA. Organisations believe that a promotion to a supervisory or managerial role automatically gives an individual an ability to perform all managerial functions, including conducting a PA, without the benefit of formalised training. Therefore, conducting formalised training with managers and supervisors eliminates some of the problems associated with PA.

Use bias

The way in which a PA is used by an organisation may introduce bias into the process (Caruth and Handlogten, 2001). For instance, if the major objective of a PA is to award pay increases based on merit, appraisers may have a tendency to rate poor performers as average in order to deny them pay increases.

Personal bias

The appraiser's personal feelings about the person being evaluated can also affect the results of PA. For instance, the appearance, dress code and mannerisms of appraisees can cause the appraiser to like or dislike particular employees, which may lead to positively or negatively skewed evaluations (Caruth and Handlogten, 2001). Other factors that may contribute towards this bias include sex, age, ethnic group or religious affiliations of employees. Van Aswegen et al. (2006) state that this form of bias may be conscious or unconscious and it is difficult to overcome because of its hidden nature. However, van Aswegen et al. (2006) also state that proper training can help improve PA and eliminate bias.

Recent behaviour bias

This occurs when the appraiser only takes into account the latest performance of an employee and fails to consider the performance that occurred over the entire evaluation period (Caruth and Handlogten, 2001). In order to avoid this form of bias, up-to-date documentation of the employees' performance during the entire evaluation period is needed. This is crucial because, without documentation, it is difficult for the appraiser to remember the appraisee's performance during the entire evaluation period.

According to Erasmus and Schenk (2008), some of the reasons why appraisal systems consistently fail to give the expected results are: (1) the technical issues in the system itself (for instance, complex administrative procedures) and (2) human issues related to perceptions and the interaction process between the supervisor and the subordinate (for instance, the lack of feedback in the process).

System design and operating problems

Problems associated with PA may arise solely because of the nature of the process. For instance, PA can be a complex and cumbersome process that may involve a lot of paperwork. According to Pan and Li (2006), appraisals are ineffective if the evaluation criterion is vague (for instance, aPA may focus solely on job activities rather than results or on personality traits rather than performance). This produces inaccurate ratings during a PA and may lead to unfair dismissals.

Boice and Kleiner (1997) state those PA systems are not generic systems and that a PA system must be tailor made and administered to match the employees and organisational needs. In addition, it needs to have a systematic framework to ensure that it is a fair and consistent process. In their study involving designing effective performance appraisal system, Boice and Kleiner (1997) concluded that designing an effective appraisal system requires strong commitment from top management, and the system should link the employees' performance to the organisational goals through individualised goals and objectives. They further argued that the system should provide appropriate training for supervisors and employees. Finally, it should guarantee accurate record keeping and ensure that there is a way of evaluating the system.

Appraisers (supervisors') problems

Even in well-designed PA systems, problems can arise if the raters or supervisors are not cooperative and well trained

(Ivancevich, 2004). These problems arise because the supervisors are not adequately trained to handle the process or they may not have been involved in the design of the system. Inadequate appraiser training can lead to a series of problems in handling PA's, such as inconsistent ratings, rating errors and bias (Cascio, 2003). Raters' problems have negative consequences, such as destroying the subordinates' trust and confidence in the procedural and distributive fairness of the performance appraisals system (Taylor, Kermode, and Roberts, 2006).

Appraisees' (employees') problems

The subordinates or appraisees may also cause PA problems. For instance, the subordinates may create a positive impression to the supervisors. According to Cook (1995), this form of flattery, called work area ingratiation, is one of the problems associated with ratees'. This form of flattery may cause the managers and supervisors to favour the employees that they are socially connected to. Favouritism leads to bias and inaccurate appraisals, which can harm organisational performance because it omits the information based on which job assignments are done. Another problem associated with favouritism is that it may dampen the morale of the other employees when they realise that poor performers with ingratiation behaviour are being rewarded.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Target Population

The target population consisted of all employees at NATICC (excluding the management) at the time of data collection, whichcomprised50 employees.

Data Analysis

The data from the study were inspected, cleaned and categorised before analysis. The analysis was done using Microsoft excel software and the results were presented using tables and charts. The respondents' views were grouped to reflect the findings relative to the research questions. Since the objectives of the study included evaluating the PA system and the employees' perception towards PA, descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of data.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included the following:

- The study was conducted in one institution with a small staff complement of 50 employees. Because of this, the findings of this study may not be a true reflection of the PA systems in other healthcare NGO's in the country.
- A convenience sampling strategy was used and this may have introduced an element of bias because this method is not random in nature; therefore, the results may not be a true representation of the target population.
- The study was limited to the employees' views only. The study would have benefitted from getting the employers views as well so that the two views could be compared.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are described in terms of gender, age, level of education and the number of years worked at the institution.

Gender

The gender analysis revealed that 64% of the participants were female, 36% were male. This shows that the majority of respondents were females.
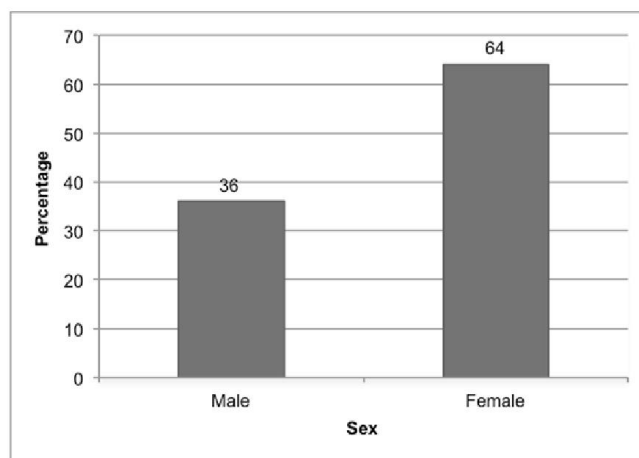
Figure 4.2.1. Sex Distribution of the Respondents

Respondents' Highest Level of Education

The graph below shows that 4% of the respondents reached form 5 or below, 12% have certificates, 60% have diplomas and 24% have degrees. This shows that 84% of the respondents have either a diploma or a degree, with the majority being diploma holders. Overall, the majority of the sampled participants possess a high level of education, which is indicative of a knowledgeable and skilled labour force.
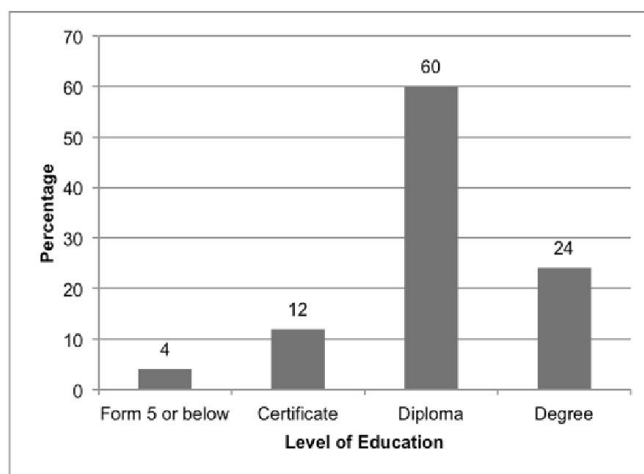
Figure 4.2 2. Highest Level of Education

The graph below shows that 4% of the respondents reached form 5 or below, 12% have certificates, 60% have diplomas and 24% have degrees. This shows that 84% of the respondents have either a diploma or a degree, with the majority being diploma holders. Overall, the majority of the sampled participants possess a high level of education, which is indicative of a knowledgeable and skilled labour force.

Age

Analysis of the age distribution of the participants showed that 8% of the respondents are aged between 20 and 25 years, 20% are aged between 26 and 30 years, 40% are aged between 31 and 35 years, 24% are aged between 36 and 40 years. Lastly, 8% are more than 40 years old. This distribution suggests that the majority of the employees at NATICC were relatively youthful.
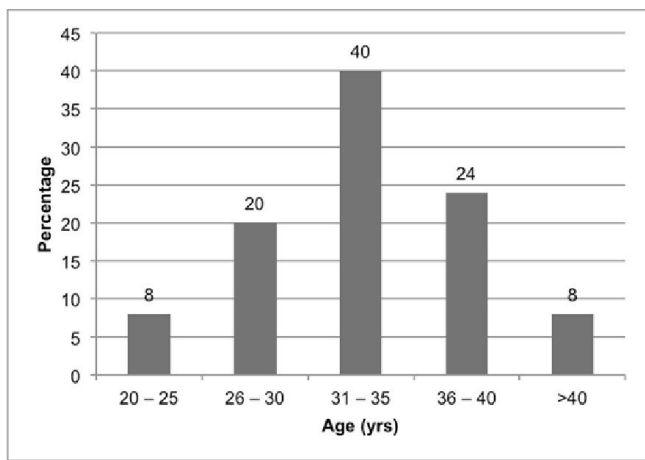
Figure 4.2.3. Age Distribution of the Respondents

Respondents' Years of Service

The graph in Figure 4.2.4 below shows that 36% of the respondents have worked for less than 2 years, 52% have worked for 3 to 4 years, 8% have worked for 5 to 6 years, and 4% have worked for more than 6 years. This shows that the majority (64%) of the respondents have worked for more than 3 years at NATICC.
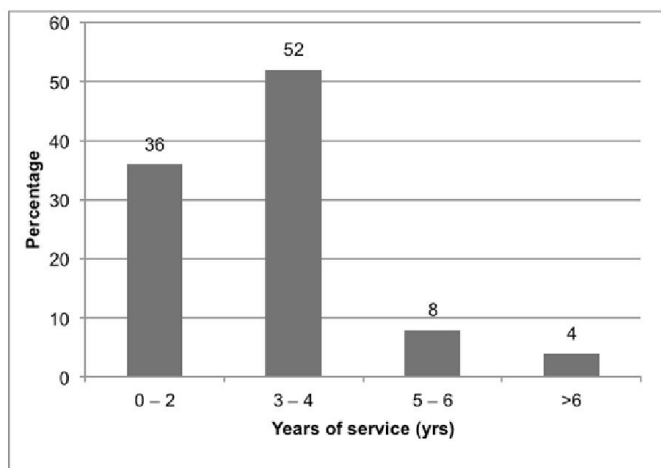

Figure 4.2.4. Respondents' Years of Service

Employees' Perceptions Towards Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is Used to give Feedback to the Subordinates

The chart in Figure 4.3.1 below shows that the majority of the respondents (88%) agreed that they received performance feedback during PA, 4% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 8% disagreed. These findings are encouraging because, according to Redman et al. (2000), managers need to be aware that feedback can provide direction and boost confidence. This finding only shows that the employees at NATICC receive feedback during PA. According to Armstrong (2009), control theory is crucial in performance management and this focuses on feedback as a determinant of behaviour. This shows that feedback can help appraisees to change their behaviour in order to improve their performance or it can positively reinforce behaviours associated with high performance. However, negative feedback needs to be handled with care.
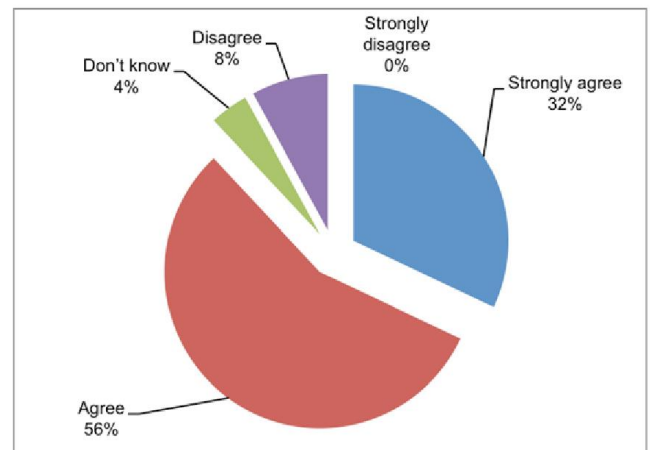

Figure 4.3.1. Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is used to Give Feedback to the Subordinates

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre Determines Pay and Promotion Decisions

The pie chart in Figure 4.3.2 shows that 48% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to determine pay and promotion decisions, 24% were not sure and 38% totally disagreed. Although 48% agreed, the findings show that the majority (52%) of the respondents were either not sure or disagreed.

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is used to Warn Subordinates about Unsatisfactory Performance and to Make Discharge or Retention Decisions

The findings in Figure 4.3.3 show that 48% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to warn subordinates and to make discharge or retention decisions, while 28% neither

agreed nor disagreed and 24% disagreed. This means that the majority (52%) of the respondents were either not sure or disagreed. Although Randhawa (2007:131-132) states that PA is used to punish non-performers either through demotion or dismissal, based on these findings one can assume that the appraisers at NATICC are not trained to provide effective appraisals or may be trained but are simply ineffective.
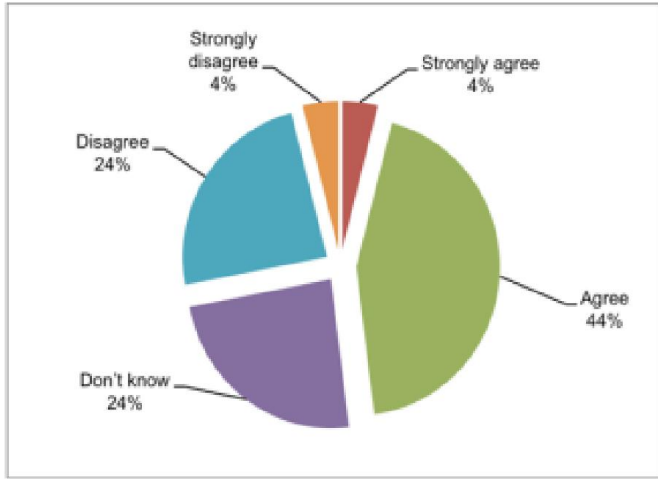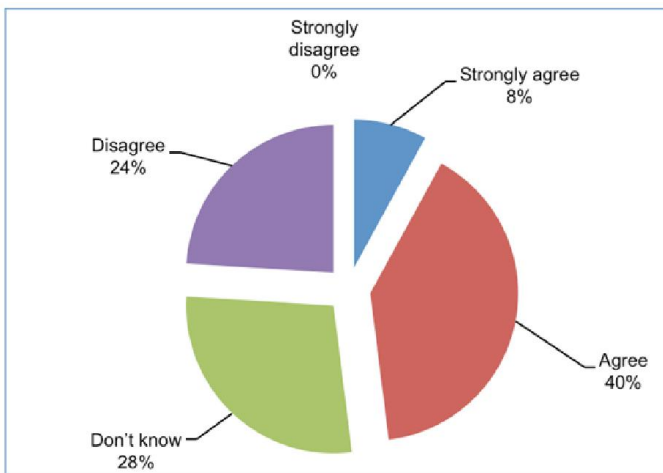

Figure 4.3.2. PA Determines Pay and Promotion Decisions

Figure 4.3.3. PA is used to Warn Subordinates and to Make Discharge or Retention Decisions

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is used to Coach Subordinates to Improve their Performance

The findings in Figure 4.3.4 show that 88% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to coach that subordinates, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, and only 4% disagreed. This is an excellent observation and it's encouraging to note that almost 90% of the respondents received coaching during PA. Randhawa (2007) describes the last step of a PA process as taking corrective action, which can be in the form of coaching employees to improve their performance. These findings suggest that the supervisors at NATICC know that coaching is one of the uses of PA.
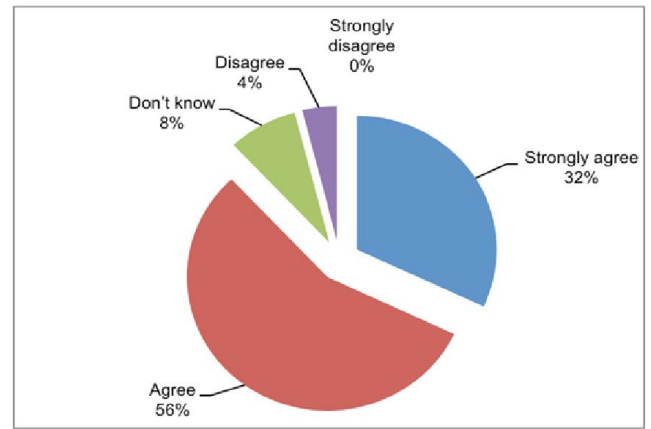

Figure 4.3.4. PA at NATICC is Used to Coach Subordinates

The information Gathered during Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is used to Motivate Subordinates

Analysis of the data in Figure 4.3.5 show that 76% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to motivate subordinates, 2% neither agreed nor disagreed and 12% disagreed. This means that the majority (75%) of the respondents agreed that PA is used as a motivational tool. Therefore, the employees appear to perceive the PA system at NATICC as a motivational tool. The use of PA as a motivational tool is based on the concept of self-efficacy, which is the belief that one can perform adequately in a particular situation (Deb, 2009:175). Therefore, it is the duty of the supervisors to influence behaviour and motivate their subordinates in order to improve their performance. More research needs to be done in this area as highlighted by DeNisi and Pritchard (2006), who state that PA research should focus on designing effective PA systems that can motivate employees to improve employee performance.
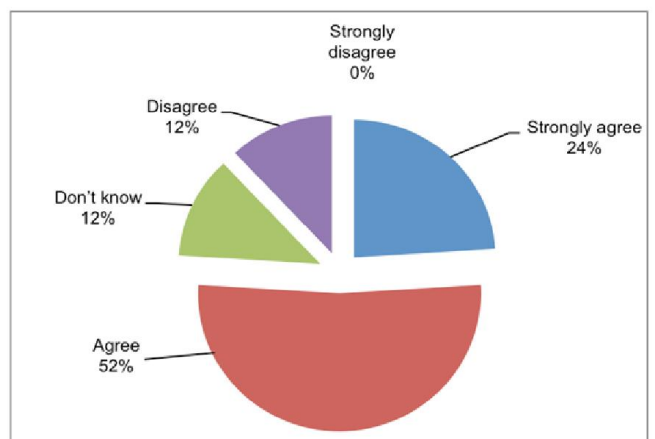

Figure 4.3.5. The Information Gathered during PA is Used to Motivate Subordinates

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre Strengthens the Relationship between Supervisors and Subordinates

The chart below shows that out of the 25 respondents 72% concurred that PA at NATICC strengthens the relationship

between the supervisors and subordinates, 16% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12% disagreed. Therefore, the majority (72%) of the respondents agreed. From this observation, it seems as though the supervisors at NATICC are more likely to influence their subordinates' behaviour in a positive way since they have a good bond with their subordinates.
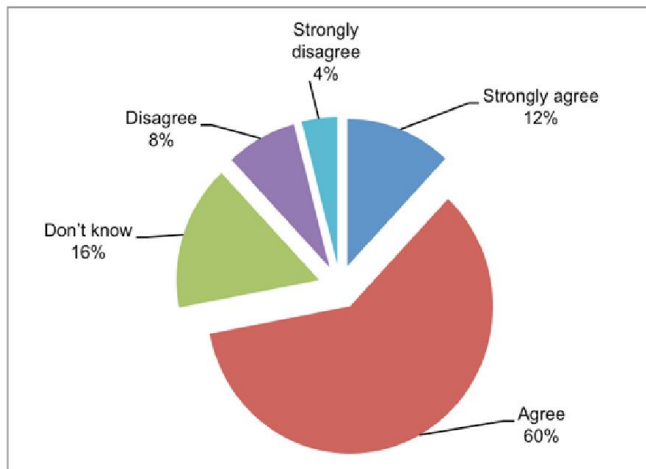

Figure 4.3.6. PA Strengthens the Relationship between Supervisors and Subordinates

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre Diagnoses both Organisational and Individual Problems

The findings in Figure 4.3.7 below shows that 64% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to diagnose individual and organisational problems, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12% disagreed. It is interesting to note that although 64% agreed, a significant portion was either not sure or disagreed. The remainder of the respondents did not perceive the system as a diagnostic tool. More research is needed on this subject perhaps using an interview schedule as the research instrument. This will allow the respondents to freely provide their opinions and feelings on this subject.
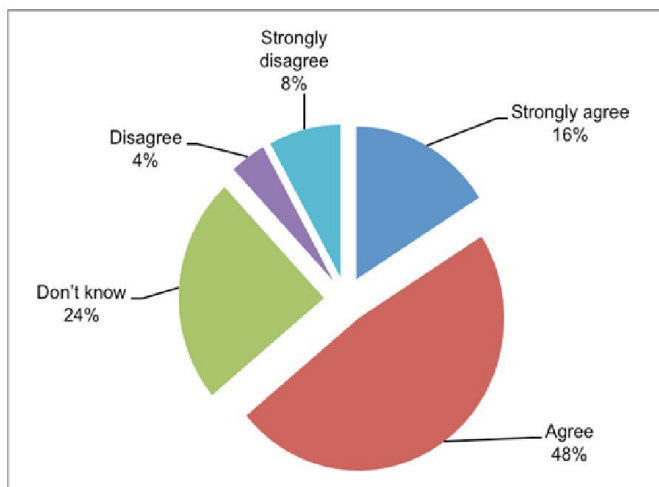

Figure 4.3.7. PA at NATICC Diagnoses Organisational and Individual Work Problems

In my Opinion, the Performance Evaluation System at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is Serving its Purpose

The pie chart in Figure 4.3.8 below shows that 48% of the respondents agreed that the PA system at NATICC is serving its purpose, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed and 28% disagreed. This means that less than half of the respondents agreed and the majority (52%) were either not sure or disagreed. It is interesting to note that less than half of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is serving its purpose when (1) 72% of the respondents agreed that PA helped them to improve their performance. This may mean that more research is needed on this subject to understand this observation.
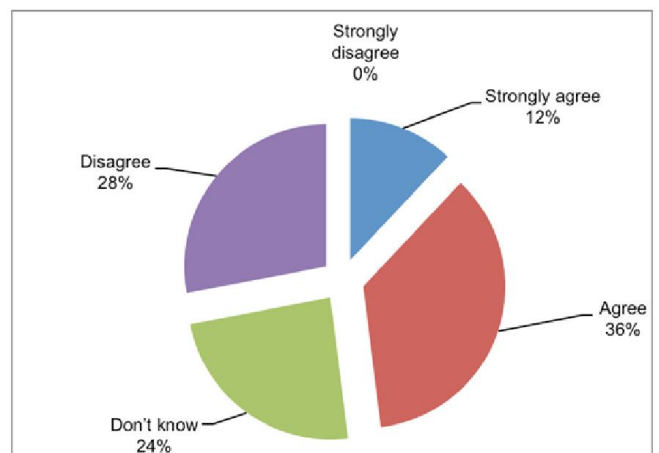

Figure 4.3.8. The PA at NATICC is Serving its Purpose

The Performance Appraisal Tool used at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is Clearly Defined and Objective

Figure 4.3.9 below shows that 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 68% agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed. This suggests that the majority (88%) of the respondents agreed that the PA tool used within NATICC is well defined and objective.
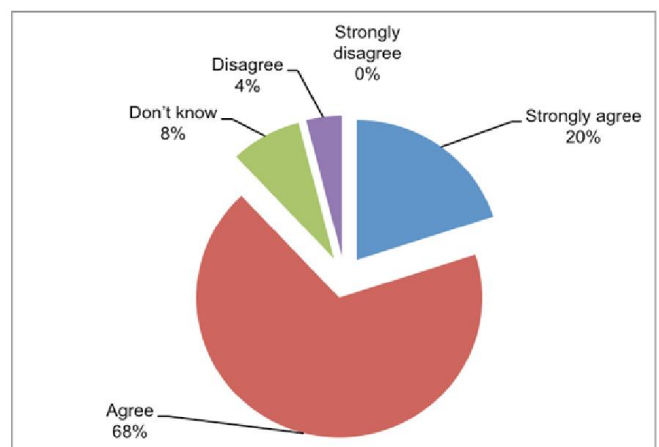

Figure 4.3.9. The PA Tool is Clearly Defined and Objective

This is important because, according to Pan and Li (2006), appraisals are ineffective if the evaluation criterion is vague. For instance, in some cases an appraisal can focus solely on activities rather than results.

Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre can Distinguish Good Performers from Non-performers

The chart below shows that, out of the 25 respondents, 16% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 16% neither agreed nor disagreed, 24% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. This means that the majority (56%) of the respondents agreed and 44% either disagreed or were not sure. Further, 28% of the respondents believed that the PA process at NATICC is not sensitive enough to separate true performers from non-performers. This is not surprising considering that less than half of the respondents felt that the PA process at NATICC was serving its purpose. Therefore, although 56% of the respondents agreed, one cannot conclude that PA system at NATICC can distinguish good performers from non-performers. Sensitivity of the PA is vital because it can determine the effectiveness of the process. According to Deb (2006:375), one of the elements of an effective PA system is that it should be sensitive in distinguishing true performers from non-performers.
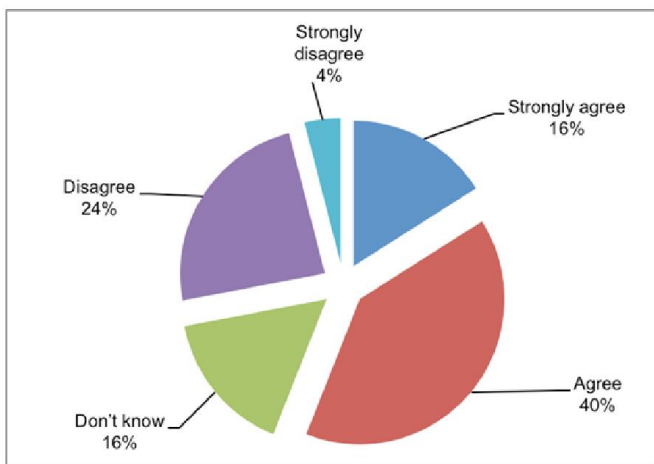

Figure 4.3.10. PA at NATICC Distinguishes Good Performers from Non-performers

The Performance Appraisal Tool at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is Tailor Made to Suit the Characteristics of my Job

Figure 4.3.11 below shows that 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 52% agreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, 16% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed. This means that the majority (72%) of the respondents agreed that the PA tool used at NATICC is tailor made to suit the job profile of the employees. This may be because, as Kleiner (1997) argues, PA systems are not generic, and, therefore, must be tailor made and administered to match the employees' and organisational needs. These findings suggest that the PA tool used at NATICC evaluates the employees based on their job characteristics.
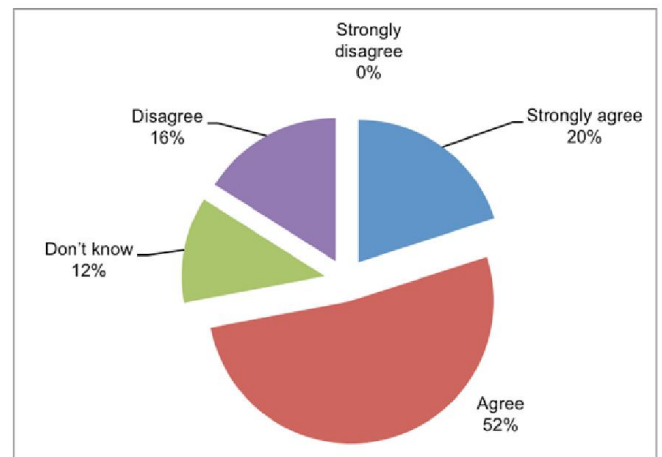

Figure 4.3.11. The PA Tool used at NATICC is Tailor Made to Suit my Job Profile

Employees can Challenge an Unfair or Inaccurate Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre

Figure 4.3.12 below shows that 12% of the respondents strongly agreed, 56% agreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% disagreed. The majority (68%) of the respondents agreed that they are able challenge an unfair or inaccurate PA, while 12% were not sure and 20% disagreed. Although, based on this variable, one cannot tell if there is an appeal mechanism at NATICC, it is encouraging to note that 68% of the respondents felt that they can appeal against an unfair appraisal. According to Grote (1996), most organisations provide an appeal mechanism to challenge unfair appraisals and this helps them avoid unnecessary lawsuits. A follow-up study needs to be done to explore the reasons why some of the respondents felt that they are unable to appeal against an unfair appraisal.
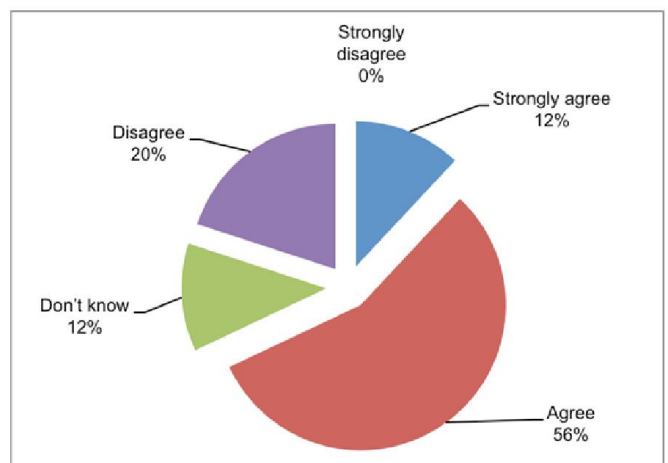

Figure 4.3.12. Employees can Challenge an Unfair or Inaccurate PA at NATICC

Performance Appraisal Reviews at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre Helped me to Improve my Job Performance

Figure 4.3.13 below shows that 32% of the respondents strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 0% neither agreed nor disagreed,

28% disagreed. Therefore, the majority (72%) of the respondents believed that PA improved their work performance. The findings indicate that PA at NATICC positively influences its workers performance. Therefore, NATICC has achieved the objective of improving its employee's performance using PA. According to Grobler and Warnich (2006:265), the objectives of PA fall into two categories, evaluative and developmental objectives, whereby developmental objectives involve developing the employees' skills and motivating them to improve their performance.
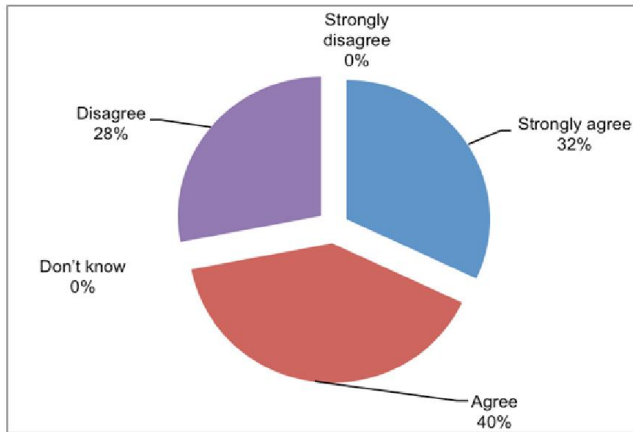

Figure 4.3.13. PA at NATICC Helped me to Improve my Job Performance

In my Opinion, Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre is Fair and Objective

The findings in Figure 4.3.14 show that 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, 28% disagreed and no one strongly disagreed. In summary, the majority (60%) of the respondents agreed that the PA at NATICC is fair and objective, whereas 28% disagreed. Fairness and objectivity are crucial elements for a PA system to achieve its objectives because, according to Caruth and Handlogten (2001), one of the major weaknesses of PA is the lack of objectivity. This leads to a lack of trust, bias and conflict at work, which, in turn, can lead to poor performance. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the management at NATICC ensures that their PA system is fair and objective.
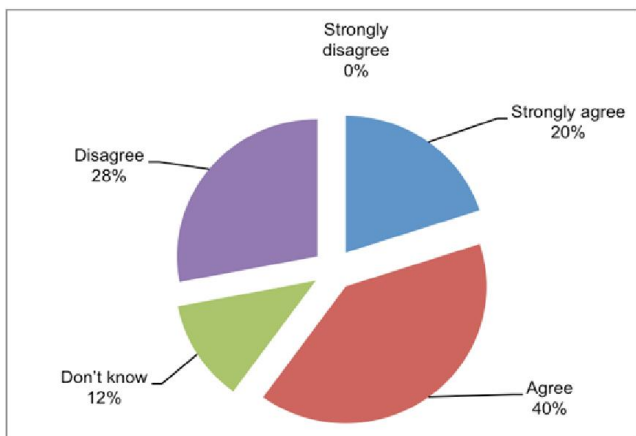

Figure 4.3.14. PA at NATICC is Fair and Objective

In my opinion, I think Performance Appraisal is a Waste of Time and Money

Figure 4.3.15 below shows that 8% agreed, 4% were not sure, 56% disagreed and 32% strongly disagreed. This means that 88% of the respondents believed that PA at NATICC is not a waste of time and money. This is encouraging and it is a good observation for the management at NATICC. Despite all the challenges associated with PA, the employees understand that it is essential and effective to performance management. Although the study did not investigate if the appraisees were trained in conducting PA's, these findings suggest that the employees at NATICC are well educated on PA and clearly understand the benefits of doing it.
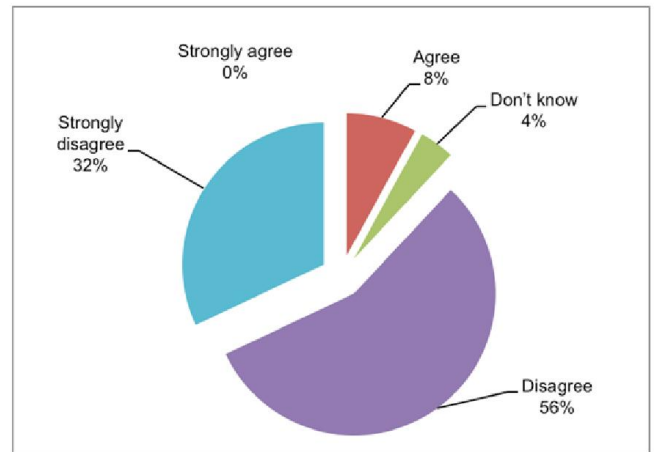
Figure 4.3.15. PA is a Waste of Time and Money

Supervisors Avoid giving Ratings which have Negative Consequences

The findings in Figure 4.3.16 below shows that 4% of the respondents strongly agreed, 48% agreed, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, 32% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. In brief, 52% agreed that supervisors at NATICC avoid giving ratings that have negative consequences (such as dismissals), 36% disagreed and 12% were not sure. A follow-up study needs to be done to explore some of the reasons why the majority of supervisors avoid giving ratings with negative consequences.

Figure 4.3.16. Supervisors Avoid Giving Ratings that have Negative Consequences

Supervisors Evaluate Actual Performance Against Pre-set Goals

The pie chart below shows that 52% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is done using pre-set goals, 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 36% disagreed. This means that 52% of the respondents agreed, while 48% either disagreed 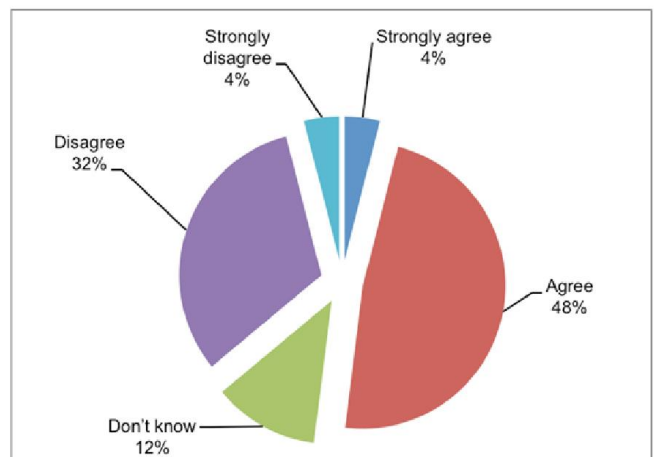or were not sure. Ahmad and Azman (2004) state that PA is defined as a periodic evaluation of the output of an individual measured against certain expectations. These findings suggest that the significant portion of the appraisees is not involved in the appraisal process and goal setting.
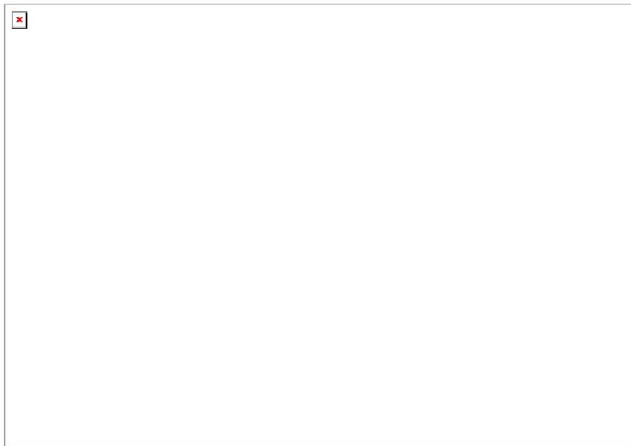

Figure 4.3.17. Supervisors Evaluate Performance Against Pre-set Goals

Inferential Statistics

The following statistics were computed using a combined score labelled "Performance Appraisal Perceptions", which comprised the summation of Section B questions 1 to 17. Due to the negative wording of the question, question 15 was reverse scored before summating the scores for each participant.

Pearson Correlation between Age and Performance Appraisal Perception

The Pearson correlation between age ($M = 33.28$, $SD = 5.72$) and performance appraisal perception ($M = 59.80$, $SD = 7.54$) was not statistically significant, $r = -.341$, $p = .095$. This indicates that age is unrelated to performance appraisal perception. This finding mirrors Gurbuz and Dikmenli (2007) perception, who suggest that employees' perceptions of PA generally do not vary significantly according to age.

Pearson Correlation between Years Worked at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre and Performance Appraisal Perception

The Pearson correlation between years worked at NATICC ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.50$) and performance appraisal perception ($M = 59.80$, $SD = 7.54$) was not statistically significant, $r = -.053$, $p = .800$. This indicates that years worked at NATICC are not related to performance appraisal perception. This finding is similar to Rupia et al. (2012:53), who found that there was no observed relationship between employee's perceptions of PA and length of service.

Independent Samples T-test for Sex and Performance Appraisal Perception

An independent samples *t*-test was calculated with sex as the grouping variable and performance appraisal perception as the dependent variable. The result indicated a non-statistically significant difference between males ($N = 9$, $M = 62.00$, $SD = 8.03$) and females ($N = 16$, $M = 58.56$, $SD = 7.22$), $t_{(23)} = 1.098$, $p = .283$. This indicates that males and females have similar performance appraisal perceptions. This could be due to the fact that all the respondents are working at the same organisation, and, therefore, the PA system used is the same for all females and males working at NATICC. This is consistent with the finding from a study in Kenya, which found that there was no observed difference between male and female employees' perceptions of PA (Rupia et al., 2012).

One-way ANOVA for Educational Qualification and Performance Appraisal Perception

A one-way ANOVA was calculated with educational qualification as the grouping variable and performance appraisal perception as the dependent variable. The result indicated a non-statistically significant difference between the form five and below ($N = 1$, $M = 64.00$), certificate ($N = 4$, $M = 59.25$, $SD = 6.13$), Diploma ($N = 14$, $M = 59.57$, $SD = 8.43$), and Degree ($N = 6$, $M = 60.00$, $SD = 7.87$)groups, $F_{(3,21)} = .103$, $p = .957$. This indicates that performance appraisal perceptions do not differ based on the educational level of employees. This is highlighted by Erbasi et al. (2012), who reported no significant difference in the employees' perceptions based on their educational level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from the Study

Findings from the Literature Review

A review of the literature showed that PA is an essential tool used by mangers to evaluate the performance of their subordinates and the two major objectives of PA are developmental and evaluative (Grobler and Warnich, 2006:265). It also highlighted that providing feedback is regarded as a critical step in the PA process and it determines the success or failure of a PA system. In addition, an effective PA system should be sensitive and distinguish true performers from non-performers (Deb, 2006:375).

However, regardless of its usefulness, ineffective appraisals can create many problems such as low morale, decreased employee enthusiasm and productivity (Islam and Rasad, 2005). One of the major weaknesses of PA noted is the lack of objectivity (Caruth and Handlogten, 2001). It was interesting to note that Caruth and Handlogten (2001) also noted that employees are motivated when there are financial rewards directly tied to their performance. This shows the importance of linking PA monetary rewards and promotion decisions. The literature review also revealed that inaccurate appraisals affect employee engagement and employees' effectiveness and may lead to legal battles and compensation issues (Deloitte, 2004). Therefore, it is clear that PA systems have been criticised for

failing to achieve employees' expectations as a result of inherent flaws or errors in the PA process. In view of the aforementioned pitfalls, many employees have perceived performance appraisal in a negative way.

Findings from the Primary Research

The findings from the study indicated that the demographic variables did not affect the employees' perceptions of PA, since there was no relationship between employees PA perceptions and age, level of education, years of service or gender.

Main Reasons for Conducting Performance Appraisals at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre

It appears that the PA system at NATICC focuses more on developmental objectives than evaluative objectives. The following were found to be the main reasons for doing PA at NATICC.

Performance Appraisal Provides Performance Feedback

The majority (88%) of the respondents believed that PA is used to provide performance feedback to employees for them to improve their performance and realise their potential. Therefore, this suggests that the PA system at NATICC is used to provide performance feedback.

Performance Appraisal is Used for Coaching

The majority (88%) of the respondents concurred that PA is used to provide coaching to the employees for them to improve their performance. This, therefore, implies that with the help of coaching the PA system at NATICC can separate performers from non-performers.

Performance Appraisal is Used to Motivate Employees

The majority (76%) of the respondents claimed that PA at NATICC is used to motivate the employees. This suggests that the PA system used at NATICC plays a part in motivating the employees to meet their goals and objectives at NATICC.

Performance Appraisal is Used to Strengthen the Relationship between Employee and Supervisor

The majority (72%) of the respondents believed that PA is used to strengthen the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates at NATICC. This shows that PA at NATICC is also used to bond the supervisors and their subordinates. This helps the supervisors to know their subordinates at a personal level.

The Employees' Perceptions Towards Performance Appraisal at Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre

Positive Perceptions

PA improves performance

The majority (72%) of the respondents believed that the PA has helped them to improve their performance. This means

that the PA at NATICC meets one of its objectives of improving employees' performance.

The PA tool is objective

The majority (88%) of the respondents agree that the PA tool used at NATICC is well defined and objective. This helps the supervisors to distinguish the performers from the non-performers.

The PA tool is tailor made to suit each employee's job profile

The majority (72%) of the respondents agreed that the PA tool used at NATICC is tailor made to suit the job profile. One can conclude that the PA system at NATICC is used to evaluate the employees' based on their individual daily activities.

Employees can challenge an unfair appraisal

The majority (68%) of the respondents agreed that they are able to challenge an unfair or inaccurate PA. Although this variable does not ask about the presence of an appeal mechanism at NATICC, it is encouraging to note that the majority of the respondents claimed that they are able to challenge an unfair appraisal. This suggests that there is a functional appeal mechanism at NATICC.

PA improves performance

The majority (72%) of the respondents believed that PA 'shave improved their work performance. One can conclude that: (1) motivation, (2) coaching, and (3) providing feedback helps the employees at NATICC to improve their performance.

The PA process is fair and objective

Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that PA system at NATICC is fair and objective, whereas 28% disagreed. This means that the PA system at NATICC, generally, is fair. One may assume that the PA tool itself is not the reason why the level of fairness is not very high, because the majority of respondents viewed it as well defined and objective. In fact, the appraisers may be reluctant or are not well trained to give objective assessments.

PA is not a waste of time or money

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents believed that PA at NATICC is not a waste of time and money. This means that employees at NATICC agree in principle that PA is essential for evaluating performance and understanding the benefits of doing a PA.

PA strengthens the relationship between supervisor and subordinate

The majority (72%) of the respondents concurred that the PA system at NATICC is used to strengthen the relationship between the supervisors and their subordinates. One can conclude that the supervisors and their subordinates have good interpersonal relationships.

PA distinguishes true performers from non-performers

The majority (56%) of the respondents felt that the PA system at NATICC is used to distinguish true performers from non-performers. This implies that the PA at NATICC is serving one the objectives of the PA system.

PA is done using pre-set goals

Fifty-two percent of the respondents believed that PA at NATICC is done using pre-set goals. This suggests that the employees' performance is measured against pre-set goals, and this assists the supervisors to make objective assessments. However, almost half of the respondents disagreed, which may mean that the management needs to evaluate the system of using pre-set goals in a conducting PA's.

Negative Perceptions

PA determines pay and promotion decisions

Less than half (48%) of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is used to determine pay and promotion decisions. This suggests that the PA system at NATICC is not linked with monetary rewards or promotion decisions. It seems that the system is mainly used for developmental objectives and not for evaluative objectives involving monetary rewards.

PA serves its purpose

The minority (48%) of the respondents agreed that the PA system at NATICC is serving its purpose. Based on this on variable alone, one cannot conclude that the PA system at NATICC is not serving its purpose because the majority of the respondents also felt that the same system helped them to improve their performance. However, more research needs to be done to explore what the respondents meant, perhaps using an open-ended questionnaire.

Supervisors avoid giving negative ratings

The majority (52%) of the respondents agreed that supervisors at NATICC avoid giving ratings that have negative consequences. More research needs to be done to investigate the reasons why the supervisors at NATICC may be avoiding giving negative ratings during a PA.

The Challenges Faced by Nhlangano AIDS Training Information and Counselling Centre in Implementing the Performance Appraisal System

PA is done using pre-set goals

Only 52% of the respondents agreed that PA at NATICC is done using pre-set goals. This means that almost half of the respondents were not involved in the PA process and setting their performance goals.

PA distinguishes performers from non-performers

Although the PA system at NATICC helps the employees to improve their performance, 56% of the respondents agreed

that the system is unable to distinguish true performers from non-performers. This is an interesting observation for the management at NATICC, which needs further investigation.

PA is associated with rewards

The PA at NATICC is not linked with monetary rewards or promotion decisions. One can conclude that NATICC operates on a limited budget since it is donor funded. Hence, most of the money is channelled towards service provision.

Supervisors and negative PA ratings

The supervisors at NATICC (1) avoid giving performance ratings that have negative consequences and (2) do not use the system to warn or discharge non-performers. This suggests that either the supervisors are not fully committed to the process or they are not trained to give negative ratings with dire consequences. The management at NATICC needs to investigate this further to identify if negative PA's are being avoided and rectify the issue.

Recommendations

This study provided insight to how employees at NATICC viewed the PA system used at NATICC. This forms a basis upon which NATICC can improve their system in order to improve organisational performance. Based on the research findings, the followings recommendations are made:

- The management at NATICC needs to train and motivate all the managers and supervisors about the PA process. This will equip the appraisers with the necessary skills that will enable them to provide fair, objective and accurate ratings.
- The management at NATICC should ensure that all the employees are trained regularly about the PA process so that they fully participate in the process. In addition, the employees should be informed about the grievance handling procedure to appeal against inaccurate and unfair appraisals.
- The PA system needs to be revised to improve the sensitivity of the PA tool so that true performers are distinguished from non-performers.
- Lastly, the management at NATICC should ensure that the PA system is linked with monetary rewards and promotion decisions to motivate the employees that are performing well.

Areas of Further Study

The areas for further research identified in this study include:

- To investigate the level of involvement of the employees in the PA process and the creation of goals at NATICC.
- The employers' (managers and supervisors) perceptions towards PA at NATICC.

Conclusion

The study concluded by assessing the employees perceptions about the PA system at NATICC and recommendations were

made on how to improve the system. Lastly, areas where further studies may be required in the field of PA were suggested.

NOTE: This study was presented to the regent business school by the principal author in 2014 for the award of the master of business administration degree (MBA). The dissertation was supervised by v. vinay panday and edited by professor anis mahomed karodia for purposes of producing a publishable journal article. Kindly note that the entire bibliography is cited and the applicable references to this edited article are contained within the bibliography cited.

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