

# Knowledge, attitude and practices among nurses on performance appraisal system at two district hospitals in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the knowledge, attitudes and practices among nurses on performance appraisal system at two district hospitals in Zimbabwe. A survey design was used. A questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect data. The sample was chosen using the non-probability method of convenience. Data was presented on tables and analyzed using descriptive statistics and themes. The findings showed that some nurses were trained in performance appraisals whilst others were not. Most nurses indicated that they were not adequately trained on the appraisal system. The majority understood the purpose and objectives of the system but they did not have adequate knowledge. The nurses viewed the system as necessary and commented that it has improved their work. However, the process of writing was viewed as stressful and time consuming. Although the system was being practiced in hospitals, most indicated that it was difficult to implement because of pressure of work, lack of knowledge and the paper work involved. The nurses complained that the system has not been followed by an increase in their remuneration. The study recommends the need for a continuous training of nurses on appraisal system. To be viable nurses who do well according to the system should be rewarded appropriately so that they are motivated to work hard. Research on how the system affects relations in hospitals is recommended.

**Key words:** attitude, knowledge, nurses, performance appraisal, practices.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s the Zimbabwean government undertook to improve the working conditions of civil servants in tandem with civil service reform process that accompanied the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Major reforms adopted included significant salary adjustments for professional civil servants, regrading and performance appraisal system. The Public Service Commission (PSC), the employer of civil servants, stated that salary increments, bonuses and promotions would be based on performance appraisal unlike the automatic system used previously. A new performance appraisal management system was introduced for civil servants from 1 July 1995. The initial stages of performance appraisal were characterized with training civil servants so that all were aware of the requirements of the new system.

The core of the new appraisal system was the idea of setting out targets and objectives at the beginning of the year that the appraiser and appraisee agree on. At the end of the year the

two would then meet to see whether the agreed targets were met. In order to achieve this there is a lot of paper work to be done. The worker writes down all the work plans, the objectives and activities for the whole year. After every four months the appraiser and appraisee meet to review progress. This new system was a complete departure from the old system in which appraisal was done at the end of the year with most of the writing done by heads of departments or stations. This study sought to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices among nurses about the performance appraisal system.

The study was important because it provided an opportunity as well as scope for the evaluation of appraisal system within the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. It was hoped that the study may improve and motivate the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare management staff on conducting performance appraisals. It might also provide policymakers, planners and implementers in the Ministry with pertinent information, which could be used as a basis for improving the usefulness of performance appraisal system in hospitals.

### *The Conceptual Framework*

Montebello (1999) defines performance appraisal as a structured formal interaction between a subordinate and a supervisor, that usually takes the form of a periodic interview (annually or semi-annually), in which the work performance of the subordinate is examined and discussed, with a view of identifying weaknesses and strengths as well as opportunities for improvement and skill development. Dulewicz (1989) says there is a “basic human tendency to make judgments about those one is working with, as well as about oneself.” Appraisal, it seems, is both inevitable and universal. In the absence of carefully structured appraisal systems, people will tend to judge the work performance of others, including subordinates, naturally, informally and arbitrarily.

The idea of performance appraisal is based on measuring the performance of a subordinate against a set of pre-determined objectives (Stoner et al., 1995; Rusu et al 2016). The objectives-based approach stresses the setting up of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time framed objectives, known by the acronym SMART, so that the worker’s performance can be assessed against jointly agreed criteria. An important characteristic of this method is its participatory

nature that helps to motivate workers to achieve goals set (Jones et al., 1998; Elicker et al., 2006).

Proper implementation is vital to the success of any new performance management system. During the “sell in” stage of the system, emphasis on the benefits of the system should be well spelt out. The organisation’s commitment to the initiative must clearly be highlighted. People need a lot of explanation and education about performance appraisal. They like to review the process in depth, citing future functions and benefits. Employees can be asked to publicly express their views on the positive aspects of the system; this helps to increase employee receptivity, and thus enhances implementation (Montebello, 1999; Ochoti et al 2012).

The system must be supported by appropriate follow up action. For example, seeing that key result areas, work plans or changes in duties and responsibilities actually take place; and that suitable arrangements are made to meet identified training and development needs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bandason (2002) study on the appraisal system among teachers indicates that teachers were not committed to the system and implemented it just for the sake of fulfilling one official requirement. The idea of using performance appraisal for salary increment was not supported by most teachers. This is similar to what was pointed out by Elicker et al., (2006) that many workers were not satisfied with performance appraisal process.

Research by Bannister and Balkin (1990) showed 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. Similarly, Ochoti et al (2012) believe that appraisal system should be linked to pay in order to motivate workers. Such findings are a serious challenge to those who feel that appraisal results and rewards outcomes must be strictly isolated from each other.

It is clear from the above that the implementation of performance appraisal system is affected by many factors such as knowledge, attitude and practices. This study is an attempt to find out how much nurses know, their attitude towards the appraisal system and the practices about performance appraisal system.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used the descriptive survey design. According to Best and Khan (1991) the descriptive survey is a non-experimental approach for systematically collecting, describing and analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher opted for the descriptive survey method due to its adaptability and flexibility in choices of respondents and information that will be analysed.

In this study the target population was seventy-five (75) nurses from two district hospitals in Mashonaland Central Province. These are the numbers of nurses on their

establishment when the study was carried out. The sample size studied was 30 nurses drawn from the population of the two district hospitals that constituted 40% of the total population.

Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used. Convenience or accidental sampling, according to Polit and Hungler (1989: 171) entails the use of the most readily available persons or objects in a study. It is the most commonly used sampling method in nursing. This method was used because of the nurses’ nature of duties. The individuals were selected by chance because some nurses were off duty, on night duty or night off, on vacation or maternity leave and off sick. The selection of the nearest and most convenient respondents was continued until the required sample was reached.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of respondents 20(66.7%) were senior and junior sisters. The results show that most of the respondents are female 23(76.7%). Forty percent 12(40%) are in the age range of 30-40 years. Thirty percent 9(30%) have been in the service for less than 4 years followed by those who have been in the service for 20 years and above 8(26.7%). The background shows that the study included many different nurses in terms of age, gender and experience who worked in hospitals so would provide a variety of responses.

*Nurses’ knowledge of the Performance Appraisal system*

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had received training on performance appraisal system. Half of them 15(50%) said they had received training when the system was introduced. They were further asked about the adequacy of the training. Most of them 29(97%) did not believe that the training was adequate. In an interview a matron commented, “The nurses struggle to do the writing which shows that they don’t understand some of the requirements.”

Table 1: Knowledge of Performance Appraisal (No. 30)

Statement	Agree %	Disagree %
The purpose of performance appraisal(P/A) is to		
a. Evaluate workers’ performance and potential for development.	83.3	16.7
b. Find dedicated nurses.	40.0	60.0
c. Select nurses for salary increase and promotion.	36.7	63.3
d. Find faults.	30.0	70.0
The advantage of P/A is to make members conscious of cost, profit and growth	50	50
The objective of P/A is to		
a. Improve performance and communication skills.	87.7	13.3
b. Identify personal traits of workers.	53.3	46.7

On the purpose of performance appraisal most of the respondents 23(83.3%) correctly answered that it is a process of evaluating workers’ performance and potential for development (Table 1). The majority of them 18(60%) are aware that the system is not meant to find dedicated

nurses; nor is it meant for fault finding 21(70%). On the objectives of performance appraisal most of the respondents 26(87.7%) were able to correctly answer that the system was meant to improve performance and communication skills. But more than half of them 16(53.3%) got it wrong when they agreed that another objective was to identify personal traits of workers. This indicates that some respondents do not have correct information about the objectives of the system.

In an interview a senior sister said, "Training was only done when the system was introduced. Those who joined later got the idea about the system from others informally." This was supported by a junior sister who said, "I don't know much about this system but at the beginning of each year I am supposed to write something. I just copy from senior workmates."

Although the results indicate that most respondents were knowledgeable about the purpose of the appraisal system, half of them were not trained on the system so seem to lack some details. This seems to support the importance attached to training by Montebello (1999) who believes workers need a lot of explanation and education about performance appraisal system so that they understand its functions and benefits. This also concurs with what was argued by Ochoti et al (2012) that training for those who rate others is important in order to implement the system properly.

*Nurses' attitude towards performance appraisal system*

Table 2: Attitude towards performance appraisal

Statement	No	%
Performance appraisal system is		
a. necessary	13	43.3
b. a source of nepotism	2	6.7
c. stressful	11	36.7
d. subject to favouritism	4	13.3
Performance appraisal has assisted in		
a. team building	2	6.7
b. performance	19	63.3
c. did not help	9	30.0

The majority of respondents 13(43.3%) felt that performance appraisals were necessary while 11(36.7%) said they were stressful. Most of the respondents 20(63.3%) believe that performance appraisal improved their performance. The results show that although the appraisal system is necessary it is stressful. Few nurses 2(6.7%) regard the system as a source of nepotism, which indicates that most respondents trust the way the system is being used to assess them. Few respondents 4(13.3%) believe that the system can be subjected to favouritism.

In an interview one of the respondents (nurse) said, "The appraisal system is characterized by too much writing when we are supposed to be serving patients. Once I knock off I

don't want to carry papers home to write about what I am going to do, so I have to do the write-ups while at work."

One of the sisters' in charge complained, "The whole process takes too much of my time because I have to sit down and discuss with all nurses in my ward. This means less time for the actual work." This was supported by one of the matrons who said: "Patients have sometimes complained about the time they spent in the queue whilst nurses do the filling in of performance appraisal forms."

The attitude of nurses towards performance appraisal system is both positive and negative depending on a particular aspect of the system. They have positive attitude about how it is used to assess workers and the way it has improved them to do their work. They do not believe that the system may be a source of nepotism or favoritism. This is similar to what Lawrie (1990) who also believes that it is potentially, "the most crucial aspect of organizational life."

Nurses have negative attitude about write-ups expected which causes them to have stress. They believe the writing is too much and compromises the time they are supposed to be serving patients. The stress is also due to the difficulties they experience in filling the forms, formulating the objectives and work plans for a whole year as some of them were not trained. This is why Mullins (1999) advises that administration should aim to keep form filling and paper work to a minimum and allow for reasonable time allowance for the activity.

*Practices*

Table 3 Procedures of performance appraisal (No. 30)

Statement	Number	Percentage
<b>Procedures regarded as</b>		
a. Easy	8	26.7
b. Difficult	22	73.3
<b>Discussions by supervisor</b>		
a. Yes	22	73.3
b. No	8	26.7
<b>Frequency of discussions</b>		
a. Quarterly	15	50.0
b. Every six months	10	30.0
c. Yearly	5	20.0
<b>Duration of discussion</b>		
a. 30 minutes	5	18.6
b. Less than 30 min	6	22.2
c. 1 hour	9	33.3
d. More than 1 h	7	25.9

The majority of respondents 22(73.3%) found the procedures of performance appraisal to be difficult (Table 3). In explaining the difficulty one of the nurses said it was

because she lacked adequate knowledge about the whole system. One of them went on to criticize it, “It was inconveniencing patients who had to wait while performance appraisal was in session.”

Most of the respondents 22(73.3%) said that supervisors carried out discussions as required by the Public Service Commission (PSC). Kreitner (1995) also supports discussions as an integral part of a formal appraisal in which the subordinate is given a feedback on performance. The minority of respondents 8(26.7%) who did not carry out discussions gave a variety of reasons for not discussing: shortage of manpower, not necessary or that it was not adequately explained during training.

Fifteen (50%) of the respondents carried out the discussions on a quarterly basis. The PSC requirement on frequency of discussions is that they should be carried out on quarterly basis. The results indicate that there is no uniformity, as half respondents are not following the rule.

he duration of discussions varied from less than half an hour to more than an hour with most (33.3%) saying that they had one-hour discussions (Table 3). If nurses such a long time to fill the forms while they are at work it means it inconveniences patients who have to wait.

*Performance ratings*

Table 4: Rating Scores: 2001-2004 (No. 30)

Rate	1	2	3 No (%)	4 No (%)	5 No (%)	Not rated No (%)	Totals
Yr 1	0	0	2 (6.7)	18 (60)	0	10(33.3)	30
2	0	0	1 (3.3)	14 (46.7)	0	15(50)	30
3	0	0	1 (3.3)	23 (76.7)	2 (6.7)	4(13.3)	30
4	0	0	0	24 (80)	0	6(20)	30

The results on Table 4 indicate that the majority of respondents received a rating of 4 between 2001 and 2004. For example, in Year 1 and 3, most respondents 18(60%) and 23(76.7%) respectively got a score of 4. No one was rated 1, 2 or 5. In 2003, few respondents (6.7%) were rated with a 5. According to the grading system on the form, ratings 1 and 2 indicate that the worker is below average, 3 means the worker is average, 4 indicates a good worker with 5 showing someone who is outstanding. The ratings for nurses between Year 1 and 4 indicate that most nurses are good. It shows that nurses are almost homogeneous in the way they perform. But the question is whether this is a true reflection of how they work. Daft (1997) says that assessing performance is difficult and in order to get out of the difficulty those who rate others give most employees a similar rating. Raters usually do this to avoid complaints by workers as they end up comparing their performance with that of others.

*Benefits of appraisals*

Table 5: Benefits of P/A (No. 30)

Benefit	No.	%
Re-grading	1	3.3
Advancement	1	3.3
Promotion	0	0
Bonus	3	10.0
Nothing	21	70.0
Other	4	13.3

On how performance appraisals have benefited nurses, most 21(70%) said they have not benefited (Table 5). The few who have benefited said benefits were by re-grading and advancement. A nurse at Hospital A said, “The system must be abolished because there is no remuneration.” Another nurse at Hospital B added, “It demotivates workers if no rewards are given”. These sentiments agree with Banister and Balkin (1990) who say that appraisees seem to have greater acceptance of the appraisal process and feel more satisfied when the process is directly linked to rewards.

V. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The study sought to show the knowledge, attitudes and practices of nurses about the performance appraisal system. The results of this research revealed that the majority of respondents are knowledgeable about the definition and purpose of the performance appraisal system. The study revealed that the attitude of respondents towards appraisal system is both positive and negative depending on a particular aspect of the system. For example, most of them felt that the system was a necessary instrument in assessing workers but they felt stressed up when they sit down to do the paper work. The study has revealed that some of the practices are being followed while others are not. For example, the majority of respondents held discussions with their supervisors in order to agree on objectives and plans. Almost half the respondents said that discussions were done quarterly as required by the employer while the other half reported that they had discussions after every six months or at the end of the year. This is not in tandem with the requirement of having progress reviews so that the appraiser and appraisee agree on necessary adjustments or areas of improvement. There is no uniformity on duration of discussions as this depended on individuals carrying out the discussions. It has also revealed that the respondents do not like some of the procedures. Most of the respondents felt that the procedures of performance appraisal were difficult. Most nurses said that the performance appraisal system has not benefited them in terms of re-grading, salary increases or promotion.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the majority of nurses showed that they were knowledgeable of appraisal system, it is of great concern that some lacked adequate knowledge of what is expected. This is because training about the system was only done when the

system was introduced so those who joined later did not benefit. The study revealed that some nurses generally had a negative attitude towards performance appraisal system because of the paper work involved and that they hardly received any benefits as a result of being appraised. The nurses were not wholeheartedly practicing what is expected of the appraisal system mainly because it disturbed their normal duties. Failure to follow the requirements of performance appraisal system may mean that the chances to achieve Sustainable Goal Number 8 of “decent work and economic growth” are lost or diminished.

The study recommends the need for a continuous training of nurses on appraisal system. To be viable those who do well according to the system should be rewarded appropriately so that nurses are motivated to work hard. Research on how the system affects relations in hospitals is recommended.

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