

Performance Management as best practice for improving the Namibian Public Schools

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Abstract

This paper examines several important elements of measuring performance in primary and secondary education and its contribution to best practice in education. Education management has increasingly been dominated by the norms and requirements of general management ideologies that focus on performance controls and target achievements. Under this regime, solving the labour problem — relatively low productivity — has taken priority over all other forms of management. 'There are tendencies of individually grievance, absenteeism, increased instrumentalism and dull compliance in the job' according to Sugrue and Day 2002, p. xv. The application of tighter controls over performance will encourage development through the allocation of real and meaningful responsibilities to employees. Performance management can raise levels of performance to achieve better outputs and outcomes in education.

In England the introduction of performance related pay means that poor performance, as indicated by pupil test scores, may be taken into account in appraising teacher performance and reviewing pay according to the OECD'S report.

Namibia does not award any type of credits to teacher performance, not even as related especially to the outcome of external exams. From experience, in many public schools in Namibia no action is taken due to cases of poor performance. According to (Sugrue & Day 2002, p. xv) changes need to be done based on Performance Management which can be used as a method to put pressure on (teachers, management and the whole education system) to force management to address underachievement'. There is a growing need to increase productivity in schools as a result of improving the standards. The Namibian Ministry of Education will need to review current practices and develop an understanding of performance management and to assist teachers as such.

Introduction

The term "Best Practice" has been used to describe "what works" in a particular situation or environment. Education is the core issue in any country; it's the backbone of a country's success and of improving educational opportunities for *all* children. Education is therefore recognized as critical for the success of Namibia's development reform agenda, especially its successful transition to a 'Knowledge Economy'. This means better performance or higher productivity in education which depends upon the levels of knowledge, skills, capacities and positive work attitudes, and values of all stakeholders. As an educator, performance in our education system has become a big concern for me and since the Namibian Government is spending most of its national budget on education it is expected that the country achieves high standards in its human capital development endeavours.

According to Armstrong and Baron (1998), the definition of performance management is that it is a strategic and integrated approach of delivering sustained successes to the company by improving individual and group performances and also developing the capabilities of teams and individuals.

In education effective Performance Management ensures

- teacher self reflection and goal setting;
- emphasizes the importance of classroom observation and feedback;
- provides constructive feedback to teachers from supervisors, peers and students; and
- the promotion of teamwork, collaboration and action learning by teachers to obtain the best outcomes for students.

Once implemented teachers themselves will value that Performance Management provides to their professional development, acknowledge their work and see improvement in the classroom thereby contributing to best practice in education.

Literature Review

How do employers manage employees in order to get the maximum benefits from their performance? The answer to this question has long depended on how managers view people, work and organizations. Since the late 1800s, ideas about how to manage workers have moved through at least three stages according to Miles (1975).

During the first stage, which lasted from the late 19th century until the early 1930s, managers were influenced by the concept of Social Darwinism and the work of Frederick

Taylor. Taylor's work tended to focus on increasing worker efficiency. Most employees find work distasteful, that they value monetary rewards more than other rewards, and that few of them are suited for creative tasks (Miles, 1975). Therefore, boosting performance generally meant simplifying tasks and providing close managerial supervision.

The second stage, brought about by what could be termed the human relations, emerged from a series of experiments at a Western Electric plant in Hawthorne, Illinois, between 1927 and 1932. Ideas on how to boost performance evolved beyond increasing efficiency.

The third stage also began in the 20th century and is called the human resources (Miles, 1975). It emerged as a direct response to an economic recession that began in 1957 and the evidence that the human relations in schools had not generated effective workplace applications (Wren, 1979). There are numerous sources to humanism which include a firm belief in human rationality, human perfectibility through learning, and the importance of self-awareness. Therefore, improving the performance of workers meant that we focus on individual differences. Although Miles' document is outdated, these stages are still implemented in management today. As a result, Approaches to evaluating and motivating employees in particular, became essential to the whole concept of the management of employee performance.

Factors that determines best practice

What can determine best practice in education was summed up from the (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – (OECD, 200n) on its international survey on teaching and learning. The results of this survey provided insights into how education systems are responding to best practice by providing the first internationally comparative perspective on the conditions of teaching and learning. The 2009 OECDs Report draws on another OECD study of 2005 which reviewed teacher policies and identified important gaps in international data. With this review the OECD aimed at helping countries review and develop policies to make the teaching profession more attractive and more effective. These OECD studies examine important aspects of teachers' professional development; teacher beliefs, attitudes and practices; teacher appraisal and feedback; and school leadership in the 23 participating countries. The report was produced by the indicators and analysis division of the OECD directorate for education. The project has been led by Michael Davidson, who with Ben Jensen, co-ordinated the drafting and analysis for the report. The report identified the following factors as determinants of best practice in education.

School Climate

According to the 2009 OECD Report school climate' can influence student attainment and learning. Positive school climate is associated with higher levels of student achievement. Positive school climate can increase teachers' job satisfaction and it can affect their productivity. Teacher's behaviour in turn can affect school climate (including; teachers arriving late at school, teacher's absenteeism, and teacher's lack of preparation). These behaviors' can hinder student learning and lead to destructive behaviours among students such as arriving late at school, absenteeism, classroom disturbances, cheating, vandalism an, failing to perform academically.

Teachers Beliefs and Attitudes

According to the report, (2009, p. 263) "teachers can shape students learning environment and influence students motivation and achievement" As a teacher I also noted that from a young age, a learner of 6 years believes wholeheartedly in what the teacher tells him/her. Whether an object is red, blue or green – the colour is determined by what the teacher says. So I agree with the OECD Report that teachers' influence is very important, both positively and negatively.

The report emphasized that "classroom management, clarity of performance, well-structured lessons and encouraging feedback are key aspects which can have a positive impact on student achievement. Teachers provide learning opportunities which must be effective, and to be utilized by students. 80% of learning outcomes are determined by teachers turn-over" (2009, p. 263).

Strong Leadership

The report further indicates that school leadership creates a common culture of high expectations on skills and knowledge to improve the performance of all students/learners. It advises a co-operative culture between management and teachers with clear shared goals.

I believe that open door policies between management and teachers can be an advantage that can create a friendly atmosphere and a positive teamwork culture. The principal remains the central source of leadership influence.

The OECD findings are supported by Leithwood, K.A. & Riehl, C (2003, p. 4) who summed up school leadership as follows:

“School leadership has an effect on student learning and it can help teachers to embrace goals, to understand the changes to strengthen teaching and educate students. Therefore students need access to high quality instructions where they can benefit from positive effects of strong leadership. Leaders influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals, and also that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well and to work towards improvement. Strong leadership set directions by inspiring others to create and share meanings, high performance expectations, monitoring organizational performance and have a positive communication. Effective educational leaders influence the development of human resources in their schools by providing individual support and offering intellectual stimulation. Effective leaders enable schools to function as a professional learning community to support and sustain performance at school by strengthening school culture and managing the environment.”

According to Leithwood, K.A. and Riehl, C (2003) strong leadership must be able to educate diverse groups of students and those successful leaders of schools in highly diverse contexts focus on building powerful forms of teaching and learning. Leaders must have deep commitment to their organization, the advancement of the organization’s missions, and the wellbeing of everyone.

School Resources/Facilities

The OECD report emphasized the importance of school resources. When there’s a shortage of resources a hindering of instruction can take place and a lower student performance can be expected.

According to my observation in Namibia there is clear proof that public schools and private schools with adequate resources and facilities show better student performance. Hence there must be concerns for schools in rural areas or with disadvantaged background, not only lack resources to meet requirements of students due to fewer resources, but also fail to perform at the level of more privileged schools. Many schools lack proper text books, science labs, qualified and experienced teachers, proper computers, instructional material, and library materials. Shortages of teachers in Namibia arise in specific subject areas like; Sciences, Mathematics and Languages.

According to the TALIS survey sudden resignations and absenteeism of teachers also hinder a smooth learning environment. It forces situations where teachers are appointed on a temporary basis and that hinder effectiveness in teaching and connections between learners and teachers.

Some other factors such as best practice that are important in my opinion are as follows:

Parental Involvement

"The two main educators in a child's life are their parents and teachers."

Parents can assist their children with homework activities, and also see to it that homework is done effectively. Parents can monitor out of school activities e.g. by setting limits on TV watching, cell phone calls and text messaging, accesses to internet site like Facebook and Twitter. Learners can spend hours on these types of internet sites and, due to neglect, on their responsibilities. Reading with parents at home can help children to gain on their achievements. Parents can set goals and standards, recognize achievements, and also encourage special talents displayed by their children. Parents can show interest in children's performances academically, socially and physically. Visits at school can reinforce the idea that home and school are connected.

Parents can volunteer to support teachers in supervising activities such as fundraising efforts and some administration work. Parent's involvement through volunteering can in turn improve teachers' morale.

Teachers Knowledge of Subject Matter

A teacher's professional knowledge affects all phases of instruction, content and planning. One of the main problems affecting Namibia's performance is unqualified teachers especially in rural areas. Some teachers lack professional knowledge and experiences.

I believe that subject matter is an essential component of teacher knowledge. Teaching entails helping others learn. The understanding of what it is to be taught is a central requirement of teaching. The numerous tasks of teaching, such as selecting learning activities, giving explanations, asking productive questions and evaluating student's learning depend on the teachers understanding of what it is that students are to learn.

A Strategic Lesson Planning

As an experienced teacher I emphasise Quality Lesson Plannings which is connected to learning and include basic competencies and learning objectives, activities to make provision for special needs of learners, demonstrate understanding through review and recall and the necessary resources that will be used. Lesson delivery must be clear, stimulating and focused on the topic, suitable to the learner's level of understanding and is purposeful and focused on the syllabus content.

A strategic lesson plan includes an introduction that ensures a connection to what learners already know. Learners will be more receptive to new knowledge if a lesson starts with an activity which will help them to switch on to skills which they already know. They will be more confident in showing what they already know and will be more motivated and interested in what follows. An activity at the beginning of a lesson that involves participation will ensure that all learners are ready for new concepts. Sharing objectives or learning outcomes is the key approach. The purpose for learning is to know: why we are learning, what we are learning and how we will learn. Learners must be motivated and focused on the learning based activities and also to know exactly how they will be assessed and the expectations to ensure effective feedback based on learning outcomes and also ensure independence for learners to understand and work independently.

In active learning learners are active through involvement, listening, explaining, answers and questions and to finding solutions. Learners can participate through team work/group work and sharing. A demonstration to show learners' understanding through role play can be encouraged through explaining to teacher or classmate, as well as summarizing questions and answers and homework. Review and recall indicates whether a lesson was stimulating or not. At the end of each lesson delivery time must be allowed for revision or to assess learning outcomes or objectives.

Learner Centered Approach

Lea et al. (2003: p.322) in their studies of higher education students' attitudes to student centred learning summarizes some of the literature on student centered learning as a *"reliance on active rather than passive learning, it's an emphasis on deep learning and understanding, it's increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student, it's an increased sense of autonomy in the learner, it's an interdependence between teacher and learner, it's a mutual respect within the learner teacher relationship, and it's a reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both teacher and learner."*

This approach can serve as the best practice in education apart from other constraints like overcrowded classes where it cannot be practical. This approach supports group learning and learner participation, questions in class encourages the use of higher thinking skills. Collaborative thinking leads to knowledge and a sense of responsibility, and not getting stuck in the idea of spoon feeding, but to know that each with member of the group efforts is needed. Learners talk and act more than sitting and listening like it was in the traditional curriculum. These approaches direct teachers also to achieve expectations and that student have solid foundations before continuing with new skills and new objectives.

The relationship between best practice and performance

There is a relationship between best practice in education and performance management of teachers. Best practices can have a greater effect on making performance management a tool to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Year after year the examination results of Namibian public schools are showing low output. Even though the elements that determine best practice in education are in place, they are not however, linked with performance management. Although studies have shown that certain teachers are more effective than others, research has yet to explain effective ways to enable teachers to raise student achievement. According to my knowledge, best practice can also be achieved by setting objectives which can link teacher beliefs, attitudes and school climate (teachers work) to the school plan and individual career development.

The performance management and Development of Teachers in Australian Schools Report by the NEXUS Strategic Solution in Australia (August 2009) which interviewed principals and teachers revealed that the majority of schools see building teacher capacity for the purpose of achieving school objectives as the primary purpose of Performance Management. It stated that such a performance management should have a central focus on professional development in order to improve professional practice. It also indicated that effective performance management ensures teachers' self reflection and goal setting. It further emphasized the importance of classroom observation and providing constructive feedback to teachers from supervisors, peers and student. Performance management is further found to promote teamwork, collaboration and action learning and to enable teachers to obtain the best outcomes for their students. According to this document, teachers themselves value the opportunity for a performance management system that acknowledges their achievements.

The NEXUS Report further indicates that Performance Management is linked to school planning and goal setting which should be derived from a school Improvement Plan. Normally, Performance Management follows a cycle of one to three years, with a formative process. Teachers engage themselves in some self-reflection and setting their goals in the year in discussion with their supervisor. If a school's passing rate target is 80%, teachers are expected to incorporate the schools' goals and priorities into their goal setting process. Goals should be lined to curriculum and student outcomes.

My opinion is that performance management has an intentional and positive impact in ANY career field; and more especially in the teaching and learning field. But, one would expect that teachers can be understood well with regards to the importance of using performance-related feedback. After all, school grades are accumulated on a daily or weekly basis - there is no better opportunity to present some performance-oriented feedback on a similar schedule. Therefore, an effective Performance Management system

can lead to improvements in teacher performance. The best education systems in the world are characterized by ongoing performance management according to the NEXUS report. I believe that a successful supervisor has the ability to communicate on how a person is performing on a regular basis and to recommend the necessary development and training to improve performance.

In Namibia, the Ministry of Education introduced the School Evaluation Instruments in 2007, which acts as a guide for the National Standards and Performance Indicators. This model serves to assist management and the staff in evaluating the school's overall performance, and improvement over a period of one year. This Instrument involves teachers' self-assessment improvement of their classroom practice, as a result of professional development. It serves as a guide to developing best practice within the Namibian public education system. This serves to lead to a common and a fair national evaluation system for public schools.

According to the Aspen Education Program (2010, p.4) evaluation systems are a critical component of performance management because evaluations provide information that drives other aspects of performance management. Evaluations can serve multiple purposes: from assigning ratings to teachers; to identifying areas of strength as well as areas in need of improvement; to engaging teachers and their supervisors in reflecting on practices and outcomes as well as identifying goals and strategies for improvement. Aspen Education (Program 2010, p.4) indicated that:

"The system can't support a developmental process if areas of strengths and weakness aren't identified without rating performances. Successfully, sorting teachers into performance categories would mark an improvement over traditional teacher evaluation systems, under which all teachers are rated satisfactory".

Although the School Evaluation Instrument has the intention of improving teacher performance, it is not well integrated with the performance and development cycle when teachers are assessed. The School Evaluation Instrument is usually conducted during the middle of a school year. Further, the School Evaluation Instrument does not describe teachers' skills, knowledge and professional standards, as well as identifying professional learning activities based on their previous performance. In my opinion, it would be good for a teacher to fill in a self evaluation at the start and end of a school year. In this way a teacher can have a better idea of his or her performance after the results are known. This can guide teachers in a better way so as to see where to improve and plan with new objectives at the start of the year.

Another problem is that some schools and teachers do not see performance management as valuable and constructive. Also, there is no strong back-up service to assist teachers who are underperforming. A regular and consistent system can be formulated whereby

teachers are assessed, not only once a year, but on a monthly or weekly basis, with the purpose of improving the learning outcomes. As an experienced teacher, I believe recognition to high performance must be given at the beginning of a new year after the results of the previous year. This is a very important measure towards motivation.

As a teacher, I observed that Namibia's current evaluation results are disconnected from the learning outcomes for students and schools, thereby condoning poor performance and ignoring the contributions of the most effective teachers. From my own knowledge the most effective teachers in public schools in Namibia do not receive recognition therefore no awards are allocated to teachers with satisfactory performances especially those serving in rural and remote areas. Moreover, as a teacher employed by the Ministry of Education for about twenty years, I cannot record any observations done by supervisors or subject advisors, union leaders or school board members. I recall one observation that was done, but no feedback was given and today until I do not know if I ever achieved the objectives or expectations as a teacher.

High-performing organizations invest more time in assessing performance and giving feedback to professional employees. A strong leadership is necessary for principals and inspectors to observe teachers. To make Best Practice work through Performance Management useful information needs to be provided to supervisors to be able to correctly support and evaluate subordinates. The Ministry of Education needs to determine what information about teaching performance is needed, audit the information they have, and make decisions about how to use such data to support teachers.

I strongly believe that strong leadership as best practice can be effective if principals are coached and monitored by inspectors to help them in their planning and goal setting. Targets must be set and be monitored by management. It is essential for management to monitor and provide feedback to be provided with the aim of improving teaching skills. An ambitious school improvement programme can be used to better the teaching and learning environment in schools, and to address identified weaknesses in teacher performance. My viewpoint is that teachers alone cannot be expected to bear the risk – or the accountability for results. In the private sector, performance management does not focus primarily on the front-line employees. In the public education context, performance expectations and evaluations for principals and head of departments need as much, if not more, attention as those for teachers. This does not imply that teachers are not accountable for their own performance, or that low performance is excused. If systems are serious about improving performance leadership development, evaluation, and accountability will be top priorities, alongside the focus on teachers so as to bring about best practice in schools. Principals are responsible for the culture of the school and for creating and maintaining an environment of trust and mutual respect, which is essential for sustained school improvement. Principal performance needs to be measured against student learning gains, just like teachers. There is therefore a need to build the capacity of principals to manage their schools for improvement.

According to the Nexus report inspectors, subject advisors, union leaders must work closely with School Management for the purpose of improving performance. There must be a goal setting and planning meeting early in the year followed by two to three meetings throughout the course of the year with the final meeting generally seen as a summative session, in which formal feedback on Performance would be given. In such a session there can be a review of achievements and identification of areas where improvement is required.

I also believe that evaluations done at private and public schools, in previously disadvantaged areas, must be dealt with differently. The reason being that private schools have more facilities open to students such as computers, libraries, science labs and better teacher/parent involvement. I also believe that performance management cannot be effective and it cannot be a deterrent of best practice in education when teachers have a poor understanding of its purpose.

Recommendations for performance management as a method of creating best practice in Education

I have argued that performance management is essential for best practice in education. Improvement in performance management however, requires professional development, especially for teachers and principals. Such professional development programmes should include activities that develop skills and knowledge aimed at improving education standards and outputs. It should be noted that effective professional development must be ongoing and should include training, practice and feedback, and follow-up support. In Namibia follow-up support is lacking.

The NEXUS Program (2009) summed up the benefits of a Performance Management structure as key to professional improvement. The Report noted that responses from schools made it clear that the most significant benefit to schools and teachers is its contribution to the professional improvement of schools. Such an improvement builds a learning culture in which students and teachers are continually engaged in the learning process. Many schools have recognized that effective learning by teachers involves individual mentoring and coaching. Teamwork is also important in improving teaching practice. Feedback and classroom observation are essential for enabling teachers to improve their classroom practice. Many schools in Namibia require classroom observation as part of their performance Management and development process.

The NEXUS (2009) research concluded that teachers appreciate the benefits of a dedicated performance and development process. Performance and development processes require teachers to:

- take time to reflect and comment on their own practice,
- set individual goals in the context of school wide planning,
- recognize and celebrate their achievements, and
- give constructive feedback on established criteria on how to improve their practice.

In this way, performance and development processes allow teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically. These opportunities are spread to all teachers, allowing them to become experts in their different fields. The development of teachers serves objectives like the updating their knowledge of a subject, to help weaker teachers become more effective, to exchange information and expertise among teachers. In Namibia there is a cluster system to enable weaker school to interact with stronger schools in order to upgrade their standards of performance. A stronger management and motivation will make the cluster system more effective and enable schools to develop and apply new strategies concerning the curriculum and teaching practice.

Teachers perceptions are important and can influence their behaviour.

My recommendation is that clear expectations among teachers and evaluators (inspectors, school management, school board, union leaders) must be in place. Firstly, Performance standards should include activities such as observations, continuous assessments test scores, learner's homework books, test books, attendance of teachers, extra mural activities, and other administrative work. Since teacher attitudes in best practice play an important role in the Continuous Assessment of learners they should also be used as measure for teachers' Performance. At the moment there is a misconception regarding Continuous Assessment of learners. Teachers believe that tests and quizzes are the only method of assessing a student understanding of course materials. In actual fact, every learning topic must be assessed. If learners perform poorly, heads of department must note it immediately after moderation and evaluation of all scores. If there is an indication that there is a problem which needs to be addressed by Heads of Department, specific teachers must be supported by another experienced teacher to solve specific problems. Furthermore, another assessment needs to be done to ensure that learners have improved and the new course work marks should be used in their Continuous Assessment. Continuous assessments must be seen as instruments to measure whether learners achieved the necessary level of understanding on a specific topic. Many public schools fail to assist learners in this matter.

Conclusion

I have argued that performance management systems contribute greatly to developing best practice in education. It is my view that the Performance Management process may identify serious weaknesses in education systems. If a teacher's performance is causing serious concern, a meeting with the teacher must be called to consider the evidence of

such serious concern. If the case is more serious, then an appropriate period of support must be provided at the end of which there will be a final meeting to review progress. If the teacher is still experiencing difficulties, then consideration may have to be given, as to whether formal capability procedures should begin.

Further, performance management may give a distorted picture of learning in schools. Indicators of performance that capture the complexity of children's learning may be developed and as such play a very important role in promoting social inclusion. Children learn through a complex interaction between what the school provides and the resources that they bring with them, but such resources are not equally distributed among pupils. The development of sophisticated indicators may be used to help identify need, to support targeted interventions where they are most required, and to identify and spread effective practice.

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