

## **An Assessment of Performance Management in Six Higher Education Institutions in Erbil - Kurdistan Region**

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Received: January 2, 2015

Accepted: March 12, 2015

Online Published: March 25, 2015

**Abstract:** In this research, the aim is to identify the extent to which Performance Management is used in six (three private- three-public) universities in Erbil – Kurdistan Region. Six universities used as samples of the study. Through this research, the researcher attempted to enable Higher Education Institutions to improve and develop their Performance Management by using current trends of Performance Management approaches and methods and dispensing with old ones. Qualitative research methodology adopted for conducting this research, using structured interview data collection, non-observation participation and document analysis techniques. Twelve managers were interviewed in six higher education institutions. Findings showed that the phenomenon of performance management was not fully understood amongst most of the managers interviewed in the six universities, and there was confusion between the concepts of Performance Management and Performance Appraisal. The results showed that only one of the six universities officially practices Performance Management, and the three other universities practice Performance Appraisal only, and two of the universities do not even practice any of Performance Management policy. This research recommends the six universities to implement Performance Management to improve the performance of individuals and align individual goals and objectives with the university strategic goals and to improve the overall performance of the university to achieve its strategic goals.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Institutions, Performance Management, 360° Appraisal, Balanced Scorecard, Performance Appraisal

### **1. Introduction**

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), after gaining semi-autonomy and establishing regional government, KRG have achieved notable development in sectors of construction, lifestyle, technology and building infrastructure. In addition, KRG needs to further develop the fields of science, technology, and management. Investment in human capital and increasing the ability of human capital should be one of the priorities of the KRG, thus universities and institutes of higher education will play a major role in this task (MHESR, 2009). Evidently, universities are playing a dynamic role in evolving human capital in the economic and development growth of nations (Jalaliyoon & Taherdoost, 2012). Therefore, universities play a fundamental role in the future of nations and their position in the world economy through labor productivity, quality of

life and strengthening of civil society (Sherwani, 2014). Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have to adopt and introduce modern management approaches (Bendaraviciene, 2010). Consequently, for universities to increase and manage their performance, they need to implement Performance Management (PM) policy to improve the performance of individuals and the overall performance (Sherwani, 2014).

In 2009, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) adopted a new roadmap to reform the higher education system whose mission to achieve quality in HEIs, because the old model of managing universities was not adaptable with current developments and its improvements were limited (MHESR, 2009). In the reformation packages, MHESR introduced new new methods for accountability, from these methods were (Total Quality Assurance, Student Feedback Forms for Academic Instructor, Continous Academic Development, and adjustment of university structure (MHESR, 2009). The aim of introducing such methods as Total Quality Assurance means to provide a system for evaluating performance (Khailany & Linzey, 2011). Certainly, the introduction of such methods, pressured and created demands for accountability in universtities and that influenced the behavior of the lecturers to show their best skills to enhance their performance and satisfy students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Higher Education Institutions in Erbil, Iraq**

Higher Education Institutions are multi-product organizations, which produce two different outputs, research and teaching by using multiple inputs (Warning, 2004). In Kurdistan Region, and most of Middle-East countries, in different situations, in 2006, MHESR was established in Erbil, and it was mirror to the system of managing HEIs in the Federal Government of Iraq but past experiences has shown that this model was bureaucratic (MHESR, 2009) and criticized by non-existence of performance monitor (Khailany & Linzey, 2011). Therefore, in 2009, Ministry recognized and analyzed the weaknesses of the old system and adapted a new system for reforming the HEIs in Kurdistan Region (Ala'Aldeen, 2009). Currently, in Erbil city there are public and private universities with plans of opening new private universities in the near future.

The reformation program signed off by MHESR in 2009, initiated considering improvements in performance to develop and provide a point of differentiation between universities. However, the universities of Kurdistan Region and Erbil city specifically are not highly recognized internationally. Nevertheless, they are developing rapidly due to the competition among these universities, which has made the issue crucial for each university to perform better to gain a higher position among other universtities. In the reformation package, Total Academic Deveopment was one of the important methods provoked universities to start documenting the activities, and motivating lecturers to begin developing their performances. Moreover, MHESR recommended the univesity staff to evaluate their performance against the Key Performance Indicators annually to attract admirable attention in their performance (Khailany & Linzey,

2011). In addition, universities in Erbil have different sources for being accountable and manage performance. First source is obliged by MHESR which is called External, and the second obligated and designed within the university Line Managers (top managers) or Human Resources Department is called Internal source. Clearly, it can be noticed MHESR underpins HEIs and recognized the significance of their outcomes on region's growth and development. However, HEIs need to introduce various performance management practices for motivation in order to cope with development and demands to be more result-oriented for overall improvement of university performance (Decramer et al, 2008).

## **2.2 Performance Management**

Performance Management (PM) has been defined differently by many authors and there is no standard definition of PM. However, it is defined as “process for establishing shared understanding about what is to be achieved and how it is to be achieved, and an approach to managing and developing people that improves individual, team and organizational performance” (Armstrong, 2009). PM is the main pillar of human resource management and the most difficult system to be implemented (Pulakos, 2009) due to its complexity in reality (Den Hartog et al, 2004; CIPD 2013; Abdulkareem & Oyeniran, 2011) therefore, in some situations it is necessary to use coercive pressures to puruse and implement the system.

PM is considered as a continous or cyclical process by many authors (Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Stewart & Brown, 2009; Verweire & Den Bergh, 2004; Briscoe, Schuler, & Claus, 2009; Smither & London, 2009), and considered as a process of alinging or integrating organizational and individual objectives to achive effectiveness (Armstrong, 2009). In the literature, there are many discussions on interchangability of names between PM and Performance Appraisal (PA), and it is a common mistake, when an organization only implements PA, and assumes that they have PM (CIPD, 2012). PA is defined as “the formal assessment and rating of individuals by their manager at, usually, an annual review meeting” (Armstrong, 2006). In fact, PA is a major part of the broader context which is performance management (Armstrong & Appelbaum, 2003; Den Hartog et al, 2004). It is critical to create a PM system, in HEIs to better understand through measures and rewarding individuals through accurate evaluation, but PM must be redefined to function effectively in HEIs (Deshmukh, 2010).

In fact, the focus of PM should be on development and motivation of academics and administratives, but the current PM practices failed to satisfy them , the reason is because there is a disconnect between rhetoric of PM and the reality it is being experienced in universities (Morris et al, 2011). However, it is still believed the concet of PM is applicable in the segment of HEIs as it is in profit-oriented enterprises but it needs to be redefined to modified to suit HEIs situation that allows institutional transformation and systematic adjustment (Serdar, 2010; Sherwani, 2014; Abdulkareem & Oyeniran, 2011). Likewise, PM aims to establish a culture in which individuals take responsibility for continous improvement of business process, own

skills, behavior and contribution (CIPD, 2013), PM is important for organization in the areas of managing strategically, administration, communication, development, organizational maintenance, and documentation (Smither & London, 2009). The system of PM is starting with planning, acting, monitoring and reviewing the performance, but characterized by a continuous cycle for continuous improvement and creating a culture of taking responsibility and coordination (Armstrong, 2009). Moreover, PM needs to be characterized by providing information on important matters that promote appropriate behavior and mechanism for accountability and control (Melo et al, 2008).

In measuring institutional and individual performance, universities may not need to measure performance only, but also to manage the performance based on the measurements to anticipate the needed changes in the strategic direction (Beardwell & Claydon, 2010). Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is one of methods of measuring performance that is progressively used in HEIs, and it is endorsed by some authors as (Wang, 2010; Jalaliyoon & Taherdoost, 2012). BSC is a tool of PM could be implemented at HEIs, and it is a strategic weapon for them and well suited to HEIs situation to improve communication and provide feedback mechanism to foster universities overall performance (Pingle & Natashaa, 2011). In order to be able to compare performances and measure the success and improvement, HEIs need to create indicators of performance to measure the outcomes by referencing to key performance indicators (KPI). In University context, performance appraisal goes through three functions which are identifying and evaluating individual performance, providing incentives, and monitoring university's progress to attain the goals (Dilts et al, 1994). The recent model of performance appraisal is 360° appraisal, it is a process that by which the performance of an individual is evaluated by all the individuals he/she is working with, includes manager, subordinates, and customers (Armstrong, 2009).

Line Manager's role is crucial in the delivery of PM and in fact, PM is what managers do, because they are there to achieve the results through people and other organizational resources (CIPD, 2009). Without line manager's support and cooperation, it is unlikely that a performance management can be implemented successfully and PM should be owned by Line Managers (Carter & McMahon, 2005). Likewise, PA is typically owned and seen as a function of Human Resources Department (Thrope & Holloway, 2008). Hoare in 1995 published a report which indicated some key principles for the best use of PM in HEIs, and they are: having a clear relationship between performance of individual and strategic direction, inform and provide feedback on the level of performance, identifying areas to be developed in the future, and collecting data to make decision (Hoare, 1995 as cited in Morris et al, 2011).

### **3. Method**

The methodology of this research is qualitative by reviewing existing literature and an empirical study by conducting three methods which are structured-interviews with non-participant

observation and document review in Erbil universities. The approach to this research is inductive and the main goal of the research is to assess the use and definition of PM by six HEIs in Erbil – Kurdistan Region. The first stage of the research started with a preliminary investigation to get better insights into the existence of PM practices currently implemented in universities and to identify whether the selected six universities in Erbil use PM Policy. After the identification, interviews conducted with the relevant managers of PM of the HEIs. The desired outcome of the research is a comprehensive understanding of the current PM practice in the six Erbil – Kurdistan Region universities. In depth-interviews chosen to understand the use, purpose, definition, approaches and perceptions of using PM by specific managers responsible for managing performance in HEIs.

Moreover, The interviews in average took almost one hour each. Likewise, English and Kurdish language are used during the interviews, the interviews are recorded and transcribed. Besides structured interviews, the interviews supplemented with non-participant observation, document review and analysis. Twelve managers interviewed, while this is limited in number. However, these participants were key players in their respective universities and they were able to provide critical insights into the study. The respondents in the interviews were from different levels of positions in the management of their HEIs and purposive sampling is used. Qualitative researches must be evaluated on its own merits in terms of validity and reliability (Rolfe, 2006). In this study, several strategies have been taken to increase the qualitative research validity and reliability. In particular, strategies to increase the trustworthiness, authenticity and rigor of the research were undertaken. These include Respondent Validation or Member Checking, Peer viewing Debriefing, Validation of the Interview, Thick Descriptions, and Audit trail. Furthermore, the whole process documented in details to increase reliability as advised by (Flick, 2009).

Ethics in this study considered and participation was the interviewee's desire to participate in the study and it depended upon the participant's willingness to share his/her experience. Participants were not obligated, forced or pressured to partake in this research. In addition, during the interviews the researcher was clear about his role and was aware of sensitive issues and potential conflicts (Orb et al, 2001; Saunders,i et al.i, 2009). To avoid unethical issues, the researcher used and applied ethical principles as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

#### **4. Findings**

In the interviews with line managers or Quality Assurance Unit Directors of six HEIs in Erbil, the findings based on the interviews indicated the following headlines. The phenomenon of PM was not fully understood among most of the managers interviewed in the six universities and there was a great confusion between PM and PA. In most of the HEIs, when they have been asked the question “whether they have PM officially in the university”, most of the managers

thought they have PM, only when they have PA. In the six universities, the managers identified the sources and obligations stimulate the university to use PM, the answers divided into two sections, there were external sources and internal sources.

The list of external sources and obligations that are applied by Quality Assurance Unit are:

- 1- Student Feedback for Academic Instructor and Academic Instructors Feedback for Head of Department: they are appraisal forms organized by MHESR during the reformation. The forms are prepared for private and public universities of Kurdistan Region to evaluate the performance of lecturers in students' perspective and to evaluate the performance of Head of Departments in the lecturers' perspective. At the end of each semester, the appraisal forms are controlled and distributed by a member of the Quality Assurance Committee in each department of the university and the results of the appraisal are returned to the line managers of the university.
- 2- Quality Assurance Assessment Procedures: as known as the "50 point of Quality Assurance". The procedure organized by the MHESR. The procedure obliges the academics in the private and public universities to collect 50 points during the academic year. The points obtained through organizing, attending or presenting in seminars or conferences, writing journal articles or any academic related activity. The aim of the procedure is to stimulate the academics to increase their performance and academic activities, and measures their performance during the year using their points as an indicator.

The appraisals and procedures recommended by MHESR to be documented and kept in the academics personal files called "Staff Portfolio" for each lecturer as evidences of academic activities. However, there are also internal sources and incentives that are applied by the universities to review, manage and to increase performance.

One of the private universities uses the following tools:

- 1- Academic Incentives for Academic Lecturers: this program financially rewards and compensates academics when they publish a book, article or journal, attend a conference, claim a patent or participate in scholarly activities. This program helps the academics to increase their academics performance and reduces the financial hinders face them while doing the academic activities by compensating the costs of the activity.
- 2- Success Course Statistics: the program is based on statistical measures of the performance of lecturers and students, by using the criteria of how many student failed or passed students are in every single course of the university. The program aims to help the line managers recognize and analyze the deficiencies and it helps the university to monitor and review the overall performance of its faculties.

Some other tools used by another private university are:

- 1- Assessment of Abroad Senior Lecturer: the assessment includes a senior lecturer from another university to assess the quality of work in the university, checks whether the department develop and work properly, and share the experiences to improve the overall performance.
- 2- Internal Group Assessors: the program includes a group of lecturers of the university leads by the Quality Assurance Unit Director. Their aim is to evaluate the performance of a specific department in the university.
- 3- Peer-to-Peer Evaluation: a specific lecturer in one department is assessing the performance of another lecturer in the same department confidentially based on an appraisal form.

Three universities out of the six universities have PA, internally to evaluate the performance of the academics and administrators, based on different PA forms. Out of the universities that currently apply PA, two of them apply PA once in the employee's career in the university, and the other, at the end of every academic year. One of these three universities has probation period besides PA. The probation period is only in the fixing period and it is only once in the employee's career in the university. The probation is three stages; an appraisal of performance after two months, six months, and one year after the employment date. Findings indicate that the use of PM was only existed in one university, three universities were only using PA, and two universities were not using any policy of PM.

The current approaches to PM by the universities were: Performance Appraisals, Probation. In the two universities that did not have PM, nor PA, the reasons for not having PM was asked, one of the managers stated that, "PM policy should be implemented in our coming early academic year, but due to the new establishments and ignorance we couldn't have such a policy". Another manager said, "We used to have a performance appraisal from top-down of the university, but after the reformation and establishment of Quality Assurance, we cancelled it, because we thought that it would be an extra practice". Among the six universities, two universities managers said they intend to use 360° appraisal in the near future.

## **5. Discussion**

From the research findings, it can be noticed that among the six universities, only one university has a fully recognized PM Policy, in percentage this is only 14%. The major problem found in the study is the confusion between PM and PA. Most of the managers thought when they have a PA that means they have PM but that is not accurate. Moreover, literature supports the idea that, PA is a major part of PM (DeNisi, 1996). The internal and external obligations in some of the universities are mainly used to appraise performance of the academics lecturers to find the poor

performers. However, there was no link between PA and rewards or effective training and development programs. Thus, that is what makes the PA become a tool for eliminating and changing, but the practice such as Peer-to-Peer, Academic Incentives for Lecturers and Course Success Statistics are good tools of PA of academics in universities to appraise the performance of academics.

Furthermore, one of the good practices of PM policy used by the university that has PM is a probation period and the continual PA. Because, when the employee is going through three different stages of probations, it helps to identify the employee's deficiencies and efficiencies, and then the probation follows continuous PA, training and development programs. In the findings, the relationship between Human Resources Department and Performance Management can be perceived. In universities that possess a well-functioning HR department, the possibility to have a PM policy or at least a PA increases. Accordingly, in the study, PA was possessed mostly by the universities that had a HR department. The approaches to PM used by the six universities were (Performance Appraisal and Probation), but there are other tools of PM and Performance Review that is not utilized by the universities. However, one of the tools of PM that is in the future plans of two of universities is 360° appraisal, because it can reduce bias of subordinates, it produces information from multi-source and that makes the information more reliable.

Moreover, none of the universities reported Balanced Score Card used currently as an approach neither to PM nor in their future plans, BSC could be implemented at HEIs as a strategic weapon and it is well suited to a HEI situation. Performance Development Plans (PDP) is another approach to PM can be used by universities to help the employees set their own development plans and it helps the managers to understand the employee's needs.

## **6. Conclusion**

The universities need to recognize and differentiate the differences between Performance Management and Performance Appraisal, and the terms should not be used interchangeably. Public and private universities need to implement PM Policy to improve the performance of individuals and align individual goals and objectives with the university strategic goals to improve the overall performance of the university to achieve its goals. PM should not be a tool to control, punish and dismiss the employees, but it should be a tool for improvement, support and a better communication between managers and employees. It should provide required training and development programs to improve the skill-set of the current and future workforce. PA in universities should appraise the performance of everyone in the university including academics and administrators, the focus should be equally on both academics and administrators but with different key performance indicators. Availability of a well-functioning Human Resource Department in a university can be very beneficial to the university to implement and

design an effective PA and review and to keep the records of the results. Universities can take advantage of the recent trends of Performance Management such as 360° Appraisal and Balanced Score Card, to manage the performance of the university more effectively.

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