

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Title: SOCIAL WORKERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL WITHIN A SOCIAL SERVICES
DEPARTMENT AT THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OF THE WESTERN
CAPE

Mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
of Master Artium in Social Work



Submitted by: Nazlie du Toit
Student number: *****

Supervisor: **Professor S.S. Terblanche**

November 2004
Cape Town

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere gratitude that I thank the following persons for their contribution to my completion of this thesis:

1. My family and friends for their support, encouragement and inspiration.
2. To Professor Susan S. Terblanche for her structured guidance, tolerance and readiness to share her knowledge and experience.
3. The Erica Theron Fellowship for financial aid which enabled me to study at post graduate level.
4. The social workers and managers for their willingness to partake in the study.
5. The library staff at the University of the Western Cape for their assistance.



ABSTRACT

This study was interested in exploring and finding descriptions of experiences and perceptions of the performance appraisal systems in place and its value to social workers within the Provincial Government of the Western Cape: Social Services Department. A secondary goal was to identify performance standards as perceived by social workers.

The qualitative research method was used to seek answers to the research questions. The focus group interview was selected for data collection.

Data was analyzed according to the guidelines indicated by Denzin in Creswell (1998:147-148).

The researcher made use of purposive sampling in the selection of 10 participants for the focus groups for social workers and 5 participants from managers / supervisors to gather different views on the research topic.

Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were used as the main components in the model to determine the truth-value of the study.

Findings indicated that there was a poor understanding of performance appraisal amongst all participants and this impacted on how implementation was perceived and experienced.

Key concepts: human resource management, performance management, performance appraisal, managers/supervisors, career plan/path, peer appraisal.

DECLARATION

I declare that *Social workers' experiences and perceptions of performance appraisal within a Social Services Department at the Provincial Government of the Western Cape* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Nazlie du Toit

19 November 2004

Signed:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Declaration	iv

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1	Contextual information and Rationale for the study	1
1.2	Problem statement	3
1.3	Significance of the study	3
1.4	Research Methodology	4
1.4.1	Goal of the research	
1.4.2	Research approach	
1.4.3	Data collection method and process	5
1.4.4	Population, sample and recruitment of participants	16
1.4.5	Designing the interview guide	18
1.4.6	Data analysis	18
1.4.7	Data verification	20
1.5	The use of literature in the study	21
1.6	Limitations of the study	21
1.7	Ethical considerations	22
1.8	Definition of concepts	23
1.9	Proposed report outline	24

CHAPTER 2 – A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

2.1	Introduction	25
2.2	Human resource management and performance appraisal	26
2.3	Performance management and performance appraisal	28
2.4	Historical evolution of performance appraisal	30
2.5	Purpose of performance appraisal	31
2.5.1	Strategic purposes	31
2.5.2	Administrative purposes	32
2.5.3	Developmental purposes	32
2.5.4	Documentary purposes	33

2.6	The performance appraisal process	33
2.7	Appraisal mechanisms and techniques	35
2.7.1	Relative rating technique (comparative purposes)	36
2.7.1.1	Ranking	36
2.7.1.2	Paired comparison	37
2.7.2	Absolute rating technique	37
2.7.2.1	Essay method	37
2.7.2.2	Critical incidents	37
2.7.2.3	Behavioural or weighted checklists	38
2.7.2.4	Graphic scaling rates	38
2.7.2.5	Behaviourally anchored rating scales	38
2.7.3	Other performance appraisal techniques	39
2.7.3.1	Management by objectives	39
2.7.3.2	Assessment centres	39
2.7.3.3	Self appraisal	40
2.7.3.4	360 degree appraisals	40
2.8	Implementing performance appraisal	40
2.8.1	The appraisal interview	40
2.8.2	Conducting performance appraisal	41
2.8.3	Specific steps for managers	41
2.9	Summary	42

CHAPTER 3 – DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH

FINDINGS 43

3.1	Introduction	43
3.2	Discussion of findings	45
3.2.1	Understanding of performance appraisal	48
3.2.1.1	Rewarding performance	48
3.2.1.2	Employee development	52
3.2.1.3	Assessment/evaluation format	52
3.2.2	Experiences and expectations	64
3.2.2.1	Lack of transparency	64
3.2.2.2	Supervisor incompetence	67

3.2.2.3	Subjective process	74
3.2.2.4	Discriminatory process	78
3.2.3	Attitudes	80
3.2.3.1	Distrust and scepticism	82
3.2.3.2	Antagonism	84
3.2.3.3	Selective optimism	87
3.3	Summary	88
<u>CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		91
4.1	Introduction	91
4.2	The research methodology	91
4.2.1	Summary	91
4.2.2	Conclusions and recommendation	92
4.3	Findings on the perceptions and experiences of social workers of performance appraisal	95
4.3.1	Introduction	95
4.3.2	Summary of findings	96
4.3.2.1	Understanding of performance appraisal	96
4.3.2.1.1	Rewarding performance	96
4.3.2.1.2	Employee development	97
4.3.2.1.3	Assessment/evaluation format	97
4.3.2.2	Experiences and Expectations	99
4.3.2.2.1	Lack of transparency	99
4.3.2.2.2	Supervisor incompetence	99
4.3.2.2.3	Subjective process	100
4.3.2.2.4	Discriminatory	101
4.3.2.3	Attitudes	101
4.3.2.3.1	Distrust/suspicion of legitimacy	101
4.3.2.3.2	Antagonism	102
4.3.2.3.3	Selective optimism	103
4.4	Recommendations	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY		106
ADDENDUM		114

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 CONDUCTING FEEDBACK AND REVIEW SESSIONS

TABLE 2 CATEGORIES OF FINDING

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 APPRAISAL PROCESS



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The increased demand for transparency and accountability by client systems, communities, donors as well as dwindling funding for welfare services, have placed greater stress on social workers to justify the use of scarce resources and the degree of success such utilization has effected. This will result in greater focus on actual work and performance output and supervisors will also be expected to have a feedback system in place and to make performance distinctions. Performance appraisal is a management tool to facilitate processes for individual development and work control. According to Noe *et al*; (1997:196) performance is measured through performance appraisal, which is only one of the aspects for managing employee performance.



Performance appraisal is important to clients, employees and supervisors in that it identifies roles, expectations and standards agreed upon by supervisors and subordinates. Noe *et al*; (1997:197) further concurs that the purpose of the performance evaluation must be clearly defined including use for both judgemental and developmental purposes and linked to the organisations' goals and strategies, which is often neglected.

A study conducted by du Toit (1996:3) indicates that ninety-three percent of staff did not know how they were performing, which areas needed attention and which areas could be in the interest of the career path development of an individual employee. Whilst a different appraisal system has been presented to them in the intervening eight years,

implementation has happened haphazardly as there seems to be no clear understanding of the system. Neither have the appraisers been trained in the application of the system. Informal discussions with social workers at a district office reflect mistrust of the appraisal system. The researcher is concerned about the implication of this on service delivery for the people of this district office. Furthermore, the perception of the social workers in the past were that appraisal outcomes were determined by the relationship the social worker had with his or her manager/supervisor. This bias has fueled the distrust in performance appraisal.

The previous or old system was based on the individual writing incidents around an activity in previously identified categories of responsibility. This was then forwarded to the supervisor for rating which determined whether the candidate merited a standard increase or a merit award or both, depending on the process being finalized. Often the assessment for standard increases and merits would not coincide. The old system was also a report on work previously done, sometimes up to a twenty-four months period.

The new system reflects a staff performance management system that includes rewriting all job descriptions to be linked to individual performance development plans and feedback sessions. This process requires training as current employees have not previously been exposed to this. The training of all staff in understanding the new system is incomplete and already resentment to being excluded is evident.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The public service has over several years developed various performance appraisal systems. During 2003 a new performance management tool was developed and presented to staff at the various offices. It would appear that staff is still doubtful and suspicious of the implementation of this new tool. As previously indicated it would seem that research on social workers' perceptions and experiences of performance appraisal is a priority.

This research proposed to explore the experiences and perceptions of the performance appraisal systems in place and its value to social workers within the Department: Social Services and Poverty Alleviation: Provincial Government of the Western Cape.



The **research question** that flowed from the literature review and contextual information was;

“What are the experiences and perceptions of social workers of the current performance appraisal system in a Social Services Department at the Provincial Government of the Western Cape?”

1.3 SIGNIFIGANCE OF THE STUDY

Although the study was exploratory and contextual, it might contribute to identifying causes of resistance and stumbling blocks for the implementation of the performance appraisal in a specific setting and contribute to identifying performance criteria as

perceived by social workers themselves. It can also contribute to the identification of themes for a more comprehensive exploratory study.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology will only be discussed in this chapter and thus there will be no further section to elaborate on this.

1.4.1 Goal of the Research

The goal of the research was to explore social workers' experiences and perceptions of performance appraisal. A secondary goal was to identify performance standards as perceived by social workers.



The related process objectives were:

- To present a group perspective of social work experiences and perceptions by means of the focus group data-gathering methods;
- To compare the findings with existing related literature; and
- To present descriptions of participants experiences and perceptions.

1.4.2 Research Approach

De Vos *et al*; (2002:291) and Creswell (1997:17) assert that the nature of the research question determines the type of methodology to be used. This study was interested in exploration and descriptions. The inquiry proposed to answer “what” and “how” questions which, according to Creswell (1997:17) is typical in qualitative research.

Furthermore, qualitative research emphasizes the researcher's role as active learner rather than expert who passes judgement on participants.

1.4.3 Data Collection Method and Process

The researcher used focus group interviews for data collection. Krueger (1994:10-11) defines the focus group as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined topic of interest and a research technique that collects data through group discussions.

Careful planning with respect to participants, the environment and questions to be asked were key issues in order to conduct effective focus groups. Webb and Kevern (2001:798) also indicate that the principal justification for using focus groups is to “capitalize on interaction within the group to elicit rich experiential data”. The researcher, as social worker and trained social group worker, could also stimulate group communication on the relevant themes. Kitzinger (1995: 299) writes as follows in this regard:

“The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview. When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research into new and often unexpected directions”.

The topic selected for the research is of relevance for all social workers and the group perspectives on the issues are of utmost importance for the administrators. Participants' contributions were confirmed, reinforced or contradicted within the group discussion.

De Vos *et al;* (1998:313) comment that focus group interviewing as a data-collection method is not new; social scientists have been limited the use of focus groups . In the authors' description of the characteristics of the focus group interview it is recommended that a small group of no more than nine to twelve people be involved; people who are similar are selected with caution given to the selection of colleagues; focus groups are conducted in series to control observation effects; represents a data-gathering method that generate data regarding people's perceptions; produce qualitative data that is; words, categorizations and expressions that are used by the participants themselves and a focused discussion as the topics are carefully predetermined.



This is confirmed by Shaw (1996:4) who summarizes the advantages of focus groups as three fold: the interaction in the group is itself the data which enables the researcher to see how perspectives are actively constructed and negotiated in a social setting; the group is a collective corrective to the inherent power imbalance between researcher and subject; and they are helpful in establishing the nature and extent of consensus around an issue.

De Vos *et al;* also recommend the following process for focus group interviewing (1998:316 -320) :

- Selection and recruitment of participants. This is listed as the most overlooked and underestimated aspect of focus group interviewing. De Vos *et al*; (1998:317) notes that the selection of the focus group participants will depend largely on the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling is suggested as selection of participants will be against specific criteria identified by the researcher.

The researcher obtained the permission of the Superintendent General: Social Services and Poverty Alleviation and the Office Head, to conduct the study, to involve its social workers in focus group interviews and to use its meeting facilities. Social workers were asked to volunteer to be part of the respective focus groups (purposeful sampling –and more specific, availability sampling). Prior to the request for volunteers, many social workers had already indicated their willingness to be part of such a study

The researcher, in confirming with the office selected as the site for the study, requested from the office head to avail ten or twelve social workers in the office to constitute the social workers focus group. Mention was made that a range of input was sought and that the period of service and involvement with the office, were not to be used as exclusion criteria. The participants reported in the pre-group discussion different methods that were used in ensuring that fairness prevailed in the selection as more than the required number made themselves available to be interviewed. The combination of set criteria by the researcher and the internal controls of volunteering to participate for example; that the focus group should reflect the demographics of the

office, ensured that a balanced social workers group emerged. This resulted in a heterogeneous group in terms of gender, experience and years at the office, being assembled. All the available managers were included in the other focus group interview.

- The size of the focus group. Traditionally it ranges from six to twelve participants. De Vos *et al;* (1998:317) suggest that the ideal size to be between six and nine participants. Krueger (1994:23) cites smaller groups to be popular because they are easier to recruit and host, but concede that their small size limits the range of experiences available.

There were ten participants in the social worker focus group interview which resulted in rich data being collected. The small size of the managers group was beyond the control of the researcher as only four individuals serve in this capacity and one had to attend to a family commitment. The office head could also not swell the size of the group as training had been prearranged to coincide with the managers' focus group interview.

- Number of groups needed. De Vos *et al;* (1998:317) remark that two sessions with a particular group generate substantial information but the lack of information from the third and fourth session indicates that saturation point has been reached.

Ideally more than one focus group interview should have been conducted with each of the two groups. However, due to limitations of their understanding of the concepts related to performance appraisal saturation was reached in both groups within the first interviews.

- Ensuring that people will attend the focus group. As focus groups are time consuming De Vos *et al*; (1998:317) recommend that incentives such as snacks, free transportation or payment of participants used to secure attendance.

The researcher indicated that snacks will be available for both groups to enjoy after the conclusion of the interviews. It is uncertain that this ensured attendance as a previous appointment for the interview was postponed due to a misunderstanding between the office head and the researcher around dates. Also, one of the participants, in the post group discussion, questioned the researcher's sensitivity as the month of Ramadan was being observed. This did not prevent the complainant from ensuring that a quota of snacks was packed for later use!

- Selecting the interview location. Many factors related to location may influence the dynamics of interaction and discussion. It is advocated that the location be easy to find, free from outside attractions or hum of ventilation systems. Shaw and Gould (2001:147) confirm that the setting

for focus groups remain naturalistic as members are drawn from the research population and interviewed within or close to their communities.

The researcher had no control over the selection of venue as it was allocated by the office head. The staff complained that use of the boardroom should have been allowed as it was more suitable. The room was, however comfortable and presented no problems for communication and recording.

The managers' focus group interview was held in the office head's office which faces a busy street and this impacted on concentration.

- Designing the interview guide. Before designing the guide the concepts need to be clearly defined and critical questions that capture the intent of the study should be identified. The design of the interview guide is a vital task as it sets the agenda and provides the structure within which the group will interact. Scourfield in Shaw and Gould (2001:61) asserts that the process of interviewing social workers mirrors their practice. This supports the view that preparation of an interview guide is essential.

The researcher prepared a list of questions based on the themes identified within the research question. This preparation enabled the researcher to steer the discussion when needed.

- Moderator selection and preparation. The moderator should prepare him/herself for the focus groups and develop strategies to deal effectively with anticipated problems amongst focus group participants.

The researcher acted in the role of moderator and employed the skills utilized by trained social workers in group work processes.

De Vos *et al*; (1998:320) note that the following steps are typical in the phase relating to conducting focus group interviews:

- Purposeful small talk and pre-session strategies. The moderator should attempt to create an atmosphere of trust, friendliness and openness from the moment the participants arrive for a focus group interview. Purposeful small talk helps to create a warm and friendly environment and puts the participants at ease.

The researcher was previously attached to the site and used the pre-session to catch up on matters concerning the longer serving staff and becoming acquainted with the newer staff members. The social workers and managers have a keen sense of humour and these discussions were conducted in a very lighthearted manner.

- Physical arrangement of the group. The participants are normally seated around a table to ensure maximum opportunity for eye contact with the moderator as well as other participants.

Before the participants arrived the researcher arranged the room to ensure that everyone would be seated around a table with easy access to everyone else. Participants decided where to sit and appeared not to choose to sit closely to a perceived friend. Those who did displayed body language of comfort, whilst the others sought eye contact for affirmation of interaction.

- Handling unwanted participants. Participants who arrive under the influence of alcohol, a family member or someone in authority who is interested in the study can greatly affect the focus group interview. Usually such persons will be asked to wait in another room and could be asked to respond to the questions in writing.



In neither of the two groups this situation was experienced and the researcher was not called on to address it.

- Recording the focus group interview. Focus groups are normally recorded and notes taken by an assistant moderator. Special care should be taken that note-taking does not interfere with the spontaneous nature of group discussion. Group members should be informed beforehand that the discussion is to be recorded to capture everyone's comments.

The researcher started out both focus groups by indicating that the interviews will be recorded to ensure that everyone's view is considered with data analysis. The social

workers group was concerned about confidentiality and the researcher allayed their fears by confirming that should a transcript of the proceedings be requested by the office head, numbers rather than names will be assigned to their responses. This satisfied the participants. The managers' group expressed feeling restricted by the audio recording, but after a while relaxed and ignored the device.

- Beginning the focus group interview. As the beginning of the interview sets the tone and agenda for the rest of the procedure, it is important that the moderator creates a thoughtful, permissive and friendly atmosphere. Participants have to be informed that the opinion of each and every participant is valued and that they need not reach consensus on the topic under discussion. Confidentiality should be addressed from the onset as ensuring it is crucial for honesty during group interviews.

At the start of both interviews the researcher stressed that the opinion of everyone was important and valued and confirmed that it was not about the researcher's opinion. The researcher was called on once in the social workers interview to remind the group that everyone's input was important and that it did not depend on length of service.

- Techniques employed by the moderator. Moderators use some of the following techniques; encouraging all members of the group to speak, asking follow-up questions or probing.

Both groups had participants playing a dominant role and the researcher addressed this by directing questions at the silent participant or by just indicating, by calling their names, that it may be their turn to speak. The researcher also used probing and follow up questions to clarify contributions made by participants.

- Managing problems during group interviews. Four types of participants – the expert, the dominant talker, the shy participant and the rambler – present special problems. The moderator must be prepared for the unexpected and should firmly and swiftly guide the group back to its task.

Whilst there were dominant talkers in both groups, it did not prevent others from sharing their opinions as the researcher ensured that they were heard by providing opportunity for them to speak. Often, the researcher had to list the order for contributions to allow the shy participant the opportunity for input.

- Group dynamics. The more homogenous the group, the easier it will be for the moderator to make the group dynamic work in service of the goal and objectives of the research.

One of the positives of having people work together for long periods is that they easily express their opinions. This was clearly the case as information flowed which allowed saturation to be reached. The researcher was required to handle specific patterns of interaction, for example; the non verbal gestures indicating that the newer social worker

may not have a contribution to make. Communication patterns emerged, where in an attempt to get their opinion heard, communication happened in short phrases, particularly in the social work focus group interview, towards the end of the interview. Other than the issue of recognition for formal training, no major differences of opinion needed to be dealt with as all participants fed off one another in the discussions.

- Moderator roles and interview styles. An important dimension is the degree of direction coming from the moderator. The ideal situation is where different styles are employed to make provision for variation in spontaneity and interaction amongst participants, and to manage dominant and reticent participants. A second important dimension is the perception of the moderator of him/herself. Interview styles may also vary with the use of discussion aids. Some moderators merely raise questions whilst others facilitate and enrich the discussion with displays or demonstrations.

Shaw and Gould (2001:158) comments that social workers should be scientific practitioners. They assert that those who voluntarily draw on social work interventions will gain the benefits of best practice and thus will strengthen disciplined enquiry. The researcher voluntarily drew on social group work practices to ensure that all opinions were verbalized.

The researcher used a combination of styles and applied it to the situation. At different times, posing questions were enough to solicit responses but, at other times, it was required of the researcher to facilitate discussions. Open ended questions were posed to facilitate discussion but in the end specific questions needed to be asked to accomplish the goal of the study.

- Concluding the focus group discussion. A summary of the main points of view is helpful to summarize the group interview and to verify the information with the participants. The summary also aids the subsequent analysis. Hereafter the moderator will thank the group for participating, provide the promised incentive and wish them a safe journey home.



The researcher did not formally conclude the focus groups as advocated by De Vos *et al;* (1998:324). However, the groups were thanked for their participation and invited to enjoy the snacks brought for their consumption.

As the data-gathering process evolved it was not necessary to complement the focus groups by semi-structured interviews.

1.4.4 Population, sample and recruitment of participants

This study was confined to the social workers of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape: Social Services Department. De Vos *et al;* (2002:199) describe a sample as a small set of persons that together comprise the subject study. The

researcher used purposive sampling in the selection of ten participants for the focus groups for social workers and five participants from managers / supervisors of the Department Social Services and Poverty Alleviation - Provincial Government of the Western Cape in an attempt to get as many different points of view. The decision on the respective sizes for the focus group was made based on the actual number of social workers stationed at the office. Twenty-five (25) social workers work in the office, including the office head and 4 supervisors. Due to the limited number of supervisors/managers available all persons fulfilling this responsibility were included in the focus group aimed at eliciting administrators' experiences and perceptions.

As recommended by Bloor *et al;* (2001:53) even when the focus groups were going very well it is not allowed to run for longer than ninety minutes. As the number of group members will have significant implication for the transcribing of recordings of the group discussion for subsequent analysis, Bloor *et al;* (2001:26) advise groups consisting of between six and eight participants should be the optimum size for focus group discussions.

The researcher compared transcripts with themes used for the focus groups and did not need to arrange additional focus groups as saturation was reached. Saturation according to Barnett (2002:6) is the idea that no new themes have emerged and that coding more transcripts will produce repetition of themes.

1.4.5 Designing the Interview Guide

The following themes were explored relating to performance appraisal and was open-ended.

- Experience of performance appraisal.

Probing questions were asked and interaction stimulated to gather in-depth information to explore resistance or positive experiences.

- Processes followed with the implementation – preparation, implementation, follow-up/ feedback.
- Perceptions (understanding) of performance appraisal systems.
- Processes to be followed for implementation –The groups' views were explored on what the appropriate steps would be for implementation of the performance appraisal system.



The above guide had to be adapted to the different groups to facilitate discussion as the limited understanding resulted in the focus on issues rather than current performance appraisal process.

1.4.6 Data Analysis

The data gathered was analyzed according to the following guidelines as indicated by Denzin as recorded in Creswell (1998:147-148) and Macleod Clark *et al*; 1996 :

- The researcher began by organizing the transcripts for reading.

- The researcher read through the transcripts and noted the themes that emerged. The researcher reported on group interactions and related how agreement was reached and which areas resulted in conflict or agreement.
- The researcher described the meaning of the experience by following Stevens' (1996:172) proposed questions as a basis for analyzing group interaction by detailing group perceptions, consensus process, dominant views and handling of emotions.
- The researcher found and listed statements of meaning for the group and then grouped it into meaningful units.
- The researcher developed a textual description answering the question "what happened".
- Hereafter a structural description on "how" the phenomenon was experienced made.
- The researcher used figures of statements to narrate the essence of the experience.
- The researcher then commenced with drawing up the report.



Macleod Clark *et al*; (1996:150) indicate that focus groups are different to other methods of data collection in qualitative research and it is important to maintain a sense of the whole group within the analysis.

All group discussions were recorded on audiotape for later transcription and the researcher took notes on group dynamics relating to amongst others atmosphere, behaviour, contributions and interactions.

1.4.7 Data Verification

De Vos *et al;* (1998:351) emphasize the need for criteria against which trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. The researcher used the model advocated by Lincoln and Guba in De Vos *et al;* (1998:351-352) that covers credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability as the main components to determine the truth-value of a study. Creswell (1998:203) proposes that in any given study the researcher must at least implement two of these criteria.



Credibility is the alternative to internal validity and shows that the study was conducted in such a manner which ensures that the subject was accurately identified and described. The researcher ensured credibility by:

- Ensuring that field notes were made soon after the interviews.
- Careful and detailed recording of data.
- Defining the parameters of the study.
- Having peer reviews of data transcriptions and data analysis.

Transferability is the alternative to external validity and refers to the degree of applicability of the finding to other contexts and settings or with other groups.

Transferability was achieved by:

- Providing dense descriptions of the research methodology.
- Presenting sufficient descriptive detail about the setting and the participants.

Confirmability captured the objectivity of the study. Asking whether the findings of the study will be confirmed by another study will attain this. A confirmability audit has taken place by:

- Recording all focus group interviews.
- Transcripts of recordings.

1.5 THE USE OF LITERATURE IN THIS STUDY

Creswell indicates (1998:10) that the decision on a theoretical perspective to frame the study, is taken based on the goal of the research and strategy of enquiry.

As discussed in Chapter two (2.1, page 25), literature will be used inductively in this study and therefore comparison of literature to the findings of this study will be done and not vice versa. However, a theoretical perspective will be presented in Chapter two with the aim of framing the study.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The study is limited in that:

- It is contextual in a very specific setting and the information cannot be generalized to other settings.

- The depth of the exploration was in a sense influenced by the limited understanding of performance appraisal as the identification of performance standards was not achieved.
- The scope may have been influenced by the number of participants in the managers group.

However, the sharing of experiences and perceptions contributed rich information on their understanding of performance appraisal.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Royse (1991:240-243) lists a few of the following ethical guidelines that were fully adhered to:



- All subjects involved in the research were volunteers.
- Sufficient information about the study were provided to ensure that risks and benefits are understood.
- No volunteers were compensated for participation in the study.
- Participants could have withdrawn at any time if they so wished.
- All literature sources of information are acknowledged.
- The researcher is an experienced social group worker and ensured that group norms was agreed on and implemented so as to ensure freedom of opinions, respect and non-discrimination.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

Human Resource Management

Noe *et al*; (1997:13) describes human resource development and management as the company's effort to develop and utilise the work force and to maintain an environment conducive to full participation, continuous improvement , and personal and organisational growth.

Performance management

Performance management is defined by Armstrong (2001:6) as a means of getting better results from a whole organisation by understanding and managing within an agreed framework, performance of planned goals, standards and competence requirements.



Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal (or evaluation) is a systematic process of measuring a person's performance in the job, based on predetermined performance criteria. (Smit, 2004:2)

Managers/Supervisors –

For the purposes of this study **managers/supervisors** are defined as those first line function supervisors of social workers. This individual may or may not officially carry the title of “manager”.

Career plan/path

Career plan/path is defined as purposeful activities, studies (formal and informal) and exposure in the workplace that may lead to an employee attaining his/her career goals.

Peer appraisal

Is the use of the experience of social workers to assess performance of peers/colleagues on the same level. They should not occupy positions in the higher levels of the organizational structure when evaluation of their colleagues' performance. This is important to ensure feedback from those performing similar tasks.

1.9 PROPOSED REPORT OUTLINE

Chapter 1 Introduction to the study.

This chapter will reflect the contextual information, rationale for the study, significance of the study and research methodology



Chapter 2 A theoretical perspective on performance appraisal.

This chapter will explore a framework for establishing the importance of the study, a benchmark for comparison to other studies and to extend ongoing dialogue.

Chapter 3 Data analysis and discussion of research findings.

This chapter will address the answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4 Conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter will present conclusions on the findings and offer recommendations based on the findings.

Bibliography

CHAPTER 2

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Creswell (1998:20) states that literature in a research study achieves several purposes namely that it firstly, shares with readers prior studies closely linked with the study being reported, secondly relates a study to the larger ongoing dialogue on the topic as well as filling in gaps and extending prior studies. Lastly, it provides a framework for the establishing the importance of the study and a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings.

Creswell (1998:21) further states that in qualitative research literature should be used inductively as the study is exploratory. For this reason Creswell (1998:84) argues that the decision on whether literature findings and theoretical perspectives should be presented before or after data-collection, depends on the strategy of the inquiry. The option could be put on a continuum on 'before-after' with the possibility of both. The inductive form of reasoning should however not be sacrificed in this decision.

For the purpose of this study the researcher opted for providing a theoretical perspective in the beginning of the report so as to 'frame' the study and as a useful 'backdrop' to the study (Creswell,1998:22).

However the literature will also be presented when reporting findings of the study for comparison purposes.

In this chapter the concepts of human resource management as related to performance appraisal, the evolution, purpose, process mechanisms and techniques and implementation of performance appraisal will be discussed.

2.2 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

An organization consists of interrelated components and is more than the sum of the functional elements like operations management, financial management, marketing and human resource management. According to Weinbach (2003:71), management is the realization of organizational goals through amongst others planning, organizing, leading and controlling organisational resources. Management is given responsibility to manage all these resources, including the human resources. The management of each of these components plays an important role in the overall functioning of the organization. The management of the human component is also vitally important. Swanepoel (2003:13) confirms that:

“The employee’s work performance behaviour at work, and satisfaction levels has to be monitored and kept in line with the requirements of the organisation”.

Whilst Smither (1998:7) describes work performance as the record of outcomes produced on a specific job function, activity or behaviour during a specified time period.

For human resources to be confirmed as an organisation’s biggest asset, it should be viewed and dealt with as an integral part of the strategic formulation process. This is

confirmed by both Noe *et al*; (2003:197) and Swanepoel (2003:173) when they remind us of the importance of involving the employees when a vision/mission statement for an organisation is developed. Since the work design will be one of the first individual-level considerations, the human resource department will have to explore decision making at this level as it will have a major impact on the performance measurement of staff.

The efficient use of an organisation's human resources begins with staffing and this implies finding the right person for a specific job. Latham *et al*; (1994:3) however, state that before a selection test can be developed, the word 'right' must be defined; implying that on the job behaviour must be defined. The core of the performance appraisal system is thus the definition of effective employee behaviour. This is supported by Latham *et al*, (1994:3) who argue that the validity of a test is determined by measuring the performance of the people on the test and measuring their performance on the important aspects of a job. Only if there is a strong correlation between the two measures is the selection procedure valid.

The human resources department is responsible for four key areas in the management of human resources. Noe *et al*; (1997:351) identify these key areas as staff procurement, personnel utilization, employee care and well-being and labour relations. This study will focus on 'staff procurement' as it is the component responsible for performance management. Swanepoel (2003:218) notes that the staff procurement includes the areas of work force planning, recruitment and performance management.

The latter includes appraising and managing work performance, thus making it the focus of discussion.

2.3 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Swanepoel (2003:375) states that it is important to distinguish performance management from performance appraisal as the former is a broader view of performance appraisal where rating is de-emphasized. Performance management is defined by Armstrong (2001:6) as a means of getting better results from a whole organisation by understanding and managing within an agreed framework, performance of planned goals, standards and competence requirements.

Swanepoel (2003:372) defines performance appraisal as a systematic and formal process by means of which the job-relevant strengths and weaknesses of employees are identified, observed, measured recorded and developed. When locating the role of performance appraisal in human resources management it is important to identify the typical purposes for its use and the relationship between performance appraisal and other human resources management functions.

Performance appraisal has been widely acknowledged for monitoring progress towards outputs and identifying learning needs of employees. From a social work perspective Lewis *et al*; (1983:106) confirm that employers need tools to enable managers to help individuals improve performance, plan future work, develop skills and abilities for career growth and to strengthen the quality of their relationship as manager and employee.

In line with the above, it is clear that performance criteria for social workers should include not only meeting the organizational goals but also having their performance appraised. As a profession it also fulfills ethical responsibilities to clients, colleagues, practice settings, fellow professionals, social work profession and the broader society. This is supported by Gray (1996) who states that the purpose of ethical codes for social work is to, amongst others;

“Determine behavioral expectations associated with professional responsibility, form a basis for the appraisal and evaluation of the social worker’s actions by providing standards against which the actions of social workers could be judged”.

Weinbach (2003:163-164) stresses the importance of performance appraisal for social work managers but also indicates that the task is most disliked by social work managers and those who are evaluated. He regards it as of utmost importance to explore the resistance in order to successfully implement a system that will contribute to employee growth and organisational goal attainment.

Measuring performance of professionals in social service is a highly complicated task, because there are so many variables that play a role (Lewis *et al*; 1991:135). Social workers should be involved in the process of defining criteria for the social work setting as an essential step in the evaluation of outcomes.

Millar (1990:65) states that the problem of performance appraisal in the field of social work is further compounded by the lack of hard objective measures. He further notes that performance goes unobserved because of the nature of services rendered and the confidential nature of the employee-client relationship. We cannot specify the technologies of social work as specifically as other professions or the technologies of production, there remain an aura of mystery about what constitutes an effective service.

2.4 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Although not called performance appraisal the Bible has many examples where the evaluation of an individual performance is an important issue; merit exams were given for selection and promotion decisions as early as the Han Dynasty, 206 BC – 220 AD and ‘Imperial Raters’ were employed in the early third century AD by the Wei Dynasty to rate the performance of the official family members (Wiese *et al*; 1998:233).

The start of performance appraisal is generally looked upon as starting in 1813 when an Army General submitted an evaluation of each of his men to the US War Department (Wiese *et al*; 1998:233).

Arvey *et al*; (1998) reports that between 1950 and 1980 most research focused on the instruments used in making performance ratings in order to provide the most objectives measures for performance. The 1980’s saw raters becoming the focus of studies where research was used to shape the behaviour of raters, ratees and other uses of performance appraisal (Arvey *et al*; 1998).

However, the link between appraisal research and practice still remain, as researchers have not asked practioners and managers what they regard as the most important questions (Arvey *et al*; 1998).

2.5 PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Performance appraisals are expected to serve a number of purposes simultaneously. Noe *et al*; (1996:198-199) and Swanepoel (2003:372-373) agree that performance appraisals are for administrative and developmental purposes. However, Noe *et al* (1996:198) adds a strategic purpose. Schofield (1996) lists more specific possible purposes for performance appraisal and this will be covered under the appropriate headings.



2.5.1 Strategic Purposes

Noe *et al*; (1996:198) and De Cenzo *et al*; (1996:322) concur that a performance appraisal system should link employee activities with the organisation's goals. This calls for flexibility in the system in order for it to be adjusted to the changing goals and strategies of an organisation. Many companies do not use performance appraisal to communicate its objectives. This is supported by research referred to in Noe *et al*; (1996:198-199) regarding the purposes of performance appraisal where no question were included about the extent to which it is tied to the company's strategic objectives. This is supported by Schofield (1996) in that the author lists establishing and monitoring objectives and targets, maintaining equity in treatment of staff, facilitating succession planning and monitoring the effectiveness of personnel policies as strategic.

2.5.2 Administrative Purposes

Administrative purposes, according to Swanepoel (2003: 372) and supported by Noe *et al*; (1996:199), concern the use of performance data to make reward decisions, placement decisions, promotion and retrenchment and for validating selection procedures. Schofield (1996) lists examples of this as providing feedback on individual performance, reviewing salary, conditions of service and other rewards, providing a basis for promotion, dismissal, probation, and avoiding trouble through meeting legal or political needs.

2.5.3 Developmental Purposes

This third purpose is utilized to develop employees who are both effective and ineffective at their jobs. It provides individual employees feedback on their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve future performance. (Noe *et al*; 1996:199 and Swanepoel, 2003:373). Swanepoel adds that it can focus on the organisational level as well by:

“facilitating organisational diagnosis and development by specifying performance levels and suggesting overall training needs; providing essential information for affirmative action programmes; promoting effective communication within the organisation through ongoing interaction between superiors and subordinates.”

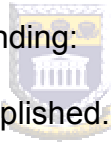
This is supported by Schofield (1996) who finds; Providing a basis for self-evaluation; diagnosing of training and career development needs; and discovering individual and department potential as some of the developmental purposes of performance appraisal.

2.5.4 Documentary Purposes

De Cenzo *et al;* (1996:322) suggest that the final purpose of performance appraisal is the issue of documentation. They also suggest that the evaluation system support the legal needs of the organization. It is important to have documentation to support that any personnel action taken was appropriate.

2.6 THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS

Maund (2001:572) states that performance appraisal focuses on what has been achieved and what needs to be done to improve it. It is a process intended to facilitate effective communication between managers and employees. She suggests four key components to ensure a clear understanding:

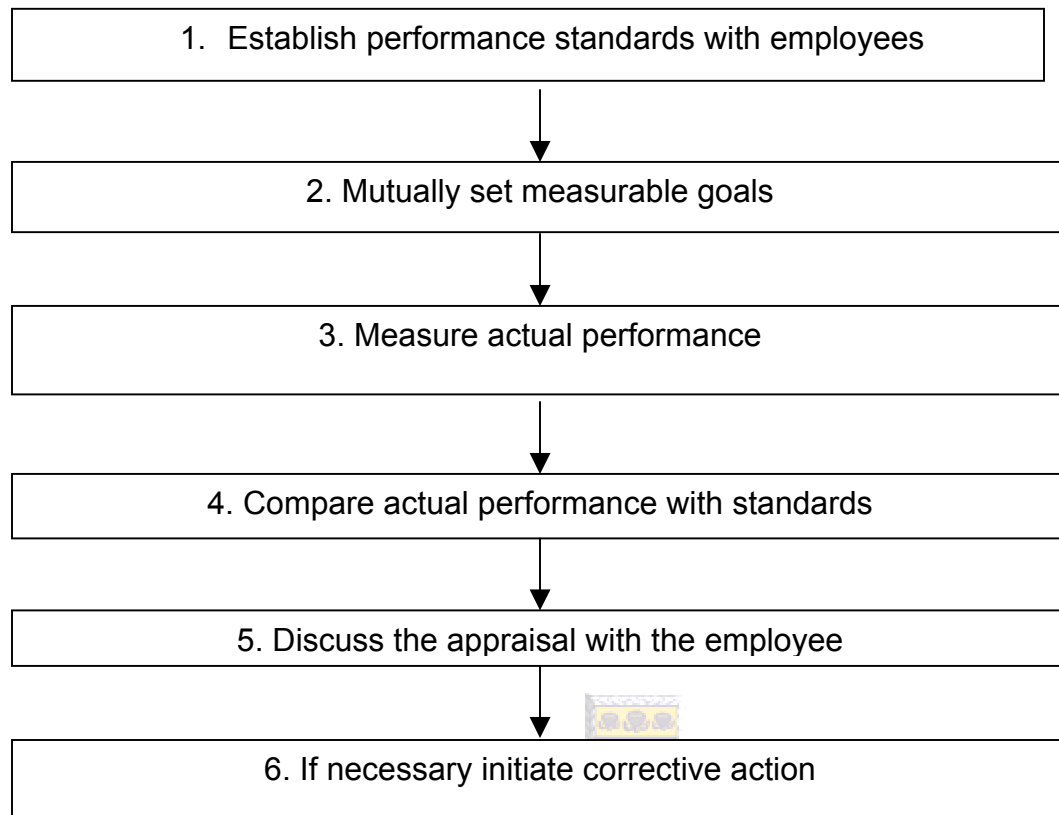


- The work that must be accomplished.
- The criteria by which the achievement will be judged.
- The objective of the exercise.
- The process for giving the appraisee feedback on achievement.

(Maund, 2001:572).

De Cenzo *et al;* (1996:326) concur and suggest the following expanded view for the appraisal process (refer Figure 1):

Figure 1.



The appraisal process begins with the establishment of performance standards in accordance with the organisation's strategic goals, evolved out of the company's strategic direction, the job analysis and job description of the employee (De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:327). This stance is supported by Bernardin *et al*; (1993:395), who state that any effort to develop any appraisal system must begin with the jobs to be appraised. Millar (1990:69) refers to this first step as determining the criteria of evaluation which is crucial to any performance evaluation system.

Once the performance standards have been set it must be communicated to the employee; it must not be expected that the employee will know what is expected of

them. The third step in the process is the measurement of performance by means of personal observation, statistical reports, oral reports and written reports. A combination of these sources increases the probability of reliable information (De Cenzo, *et al*; 1996:327).

The fourth step is the comparison of actual performance with standards to note deviations between standard and actual performance to move to the next step. This is an emotionally charged step which could result in negative and positive motivational consequences. The final step is the initiation of corrective action and can be of two types:

“One is immediate, and deals predominantly with symptoms and the other is basic and delves into causes”

(De Cenzo, *et al*; 1996:327)



2.7 APPRAISAL MECHANISMS AND TECHNIQUES

Several authors including Kreitner, (1986:327-328) and Swanepoel (2003:385) suggest that there are three general approaches to appraising performance i.e. trait orientated appraisals (for example trait scales), behaviour oriented appraisal (for example critical incidents) and outcome or results oriented appraisals (for example management by objectives).

Kreitner, (1986:327) suggests that the trait oriented appraisal approach has the dubious distinction of being the most widely used and one of the weakest approaches. Personality traits are not by themselves measures of behaviour or performance as they

are unstable within individuals. They tend to be unfair and do not stand up well in court (Kreitner, 1986:328).

Performance appraisal systems that focus on specific job-related behaviour are strongly recommended by experts in the field as the rationale that behaviour and not personality traits or abilities is responsible for the job success or failure (Maund, 2001:573 and Kreitner, 1986:328).

The outcome/results oriented appraisal approach focuses on what has been achieved against measurable and participatively set goals (Lewis *et al*; 2003:138; McKenna *et al*; 2002:176). Both Kreitner, (1986:327-328) and Swanepoel (2003:385) also classify techniques according to its main purpose:

- Comparative purposes (relative standards).
- Developmental purposes (absolute standards).

2.7.1 Relative rating technique (comparative purposes)

2.7.1.1 Ranking

This approach orders appraisees from the best to the worst performer and has no provision for ties (De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:333; Lewis *et al*; 1991:136; Kreitner, 1986: 331; McKenna *et al*; 2002:175).

2.7.1.2 Paired comparisons

This procedure requires the evaluator to compare each worker separately with each other worker and the eventual ranking is determined by the number of times the worker was judged to be better than the other worker. De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:333; Lewis *et al*; 1991:136; Kreitner, 1986: 331; McKenna *et al*; 2002:175 and Swanepoel, 2003:385 all agree that although this approach allows for everyone to be compared with everyone the process could become difficult when large numbers are involved.

2.7.2 Absolute rating techniques (absolute standards)

2.7.2.1 Essay Method

The rater is required to write an essay on each employee describing individual strengths and weaknesses. This is a time consuming method and dependent on the writing skills of the raters (De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:328; Kreitner, 1986: 329; McKenna *et al*; 2002:174; Swanepoel, 2003:387).

2.7.2.2 Critical incidents

The appraiser highlights key events that show the exceptionally good or bad behaviour of the employee in relation to particular outcomes at work (Lewis, 1991:137; Kreitner, 1986:329; McKenna *et al*; 2002:174; Swanepoel, 2003:387; De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:329).

2.7.2.3 Behavioural or Weighted Checklists

This format provides the rater with a list of descriptions of job-related behaviours that have to be marked if they are descriptive of the individual being rated (Kreitner, 1986:329; McKenna *et al*; 2002:174; Swanepoel, 2003:387; De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:329).

2.7.2.4 Graphic scaling rates

This is a very popular format representing a scale for a specific characteristic where the rater indicates to what degree the ratee possesses that characteristic (Kreitner, 1986:329; McKenna *et al*; 2002:174; Swanepoel, 2003:387).

2.7.2.5 Behaviourally anchored rating scales

BARS are a variation of the graphic rating scale. The performance dimensions are defined in behavioural terms and the different levels of rating are divided into the increments of the job behaviour with examples of critical incidents. This is considered to be the strongest performance appraisal technique (De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:330; Kreitner, 1986:329; Swanepoel, 2003:387). Lewis (1991:138) asserts that the kind of behaviour involved in human services might lend itself to the use of BARS.

Millar (1990:72) recommends BARS for utilization within the human services arena as the technique comprises a flexible set of principles rather than a 'single, rigid, set of rules governing data collection'. He further suggests that that the following steps be used when using BARS as a performance appraisal instrument for social service organisations:

- Use half of the staff to generate effective and ineffective behaviours associated with the job.
- Have someone familiar with BARS and external to the organisation, cluster those illustrations into a set of job dimensions.
- Have the illustrations translated to the performance dimensions by the half of the staff who did not generate them.
- Retain those illustrations which are retranslated by 60% of the group; these will become the scale anchors.
- Also have the second group rate each anchor on a 7 point scale as to how effectively or ineffectively it represents performance on the appropriate dimension.
- Test the resulting instrument and refine as appropriate.



2.7.3 Other performance appraisal techniques

2.7.3.1 Management by objectives

Management by objectives became fashionable in the 1970's and stresses the link between individual and departmental objectives. This approach gave credence to performance appraisal being a two-way process rather than top down (McKenna *et al*; 2002:177; De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:334).

2.7.3.2 Assessment centers

This is a procedure originally adopted to test managerial potential. Swanepoel (2003:390) states that in South Africa assessment centers enjoy a relatively high level

of popularity. Despite its potential advantages it has shortcomings as a practical performance appraisal technique for all levels of employees due to the costly nature of the procedure.

2.7.3.3 Self- appraisal

Maund (2001:575) suggests that in order to get away from the top down 'sterile and biased' approach the use of self-appraisal should be introduced. By using this method appraisees state how they feel, the value of training received, the effects of amendments to their jobs, perceptions of key objectives of the job, future aspirations and training and development required to meet those aspirations (McKenna *et al*; 2002:176; Maund, 2001:576).



2.7.3.4 360 degree appraisals

Maund (2001:576) lists this technique as the most exciting development in the field of performance management. Organisations are using 360 degree appraisals by gathering, usually through a questionnaire, views of peers, the appraisee's manager and sometimes, internal customers. Swanepoel (2003: 387) feels that this approach fits more comfortably into the latest trends in leadership and strategies such as empowerment, self-responsibility and team work.

2.8 IMPLEMENTING PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

2.8.1 The appraisal interview

Several authors agree that the formal appraisal interview remains a prominent feature of most performance appraisal systems. Maund (2001:575) asserts that a poorly conducted interview can be seen by the employee as being worse than not having an interview at all.

2.8.2 Conducting performance appraisal

Harris (1997:204 -209) suggests that there are two phases for managers to follow in conducting performance reviews and lists how the employee can handle a review. He recommends the following for conducting feedback reviews:

- Distinguish between formal and informal feedback sessions.
- Focus on behavioural examples.
- Seek the employee's input.
- Carefully plan the feedback session.
- Use effective communication skills during the feedback session.
- Document everything.



2.8.2.1 Specific steps for managers

The nature of the review session depends on the employee's general performance as well as the purpose of the session. Harris (*ibid*) states that the informal session is used to solve specific performance problems while the formal session is used to summarize the employee's performance for the year.

Table 1.

Conducting the informal feedback session	Conducting the formal performance review session
Summarize general performance	Summarize general performance
Introduce problem areas	Establish objectives and areas for improvement for the next year
Determine cause of the problem	Discuss the employee's developmental needs
Obtain solutions	Summarize the session
Establish goals	
Encourage the employee	
Document the meeting	
If the problem persist	



2.9 SUMMARY

It is clear that performance appraisal has many facets that are interrelated and requires clear understanding. In human services, where there is no easy measure of performance, processes and techniques for performance appraisal needs clear definition. In social work the variables involved in the assessment are many but of utmost importance for successful implementation of any performance evaluation.

A discussion around implementation will be presented in Chapter 3 when the data is analyzed and presented.

CHAPTER 3 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The felt complexity that encouraged this research was mentioned in Chapter 1.1, page 1 (Contextual information and Rationale for the study). The perceived mistrust of the performance appraisal system by the staff and the concern regarding the implication of this on service delivery for the people of this district, are just some of the conflicts with implementation.

The main research question to be answered in this study was:

“What are the experiences and perceptions of social workers of the current performance appraisal system in a Social Services Department at the Provincial Government of the Western Cape?”



The method of data collection, as mentioned in Chapter 1.4.3, page 5, was focus group interviews where direct questions on the understanding and experiences of performance appraisal and also the process for implementation were posed. It must be emphasised that the understanding of both the groups interviewed is largely based and related to their experience.

Three themes were formulated for discussion in the focus groups, namely:

- The understanding of performance appraisal systems by social workers and their managers.

- Experiences and perceptions of performance appraisal within the district office.
- Views on perceived challenges for appropriate implementation as captured in the category reflecting experiences and expectations.

All data was transcribed verbatim and the major themes that emerged were categorised, as in Table 2: Categories of findings (pages46-48).

Three main categories of findings with related sub-categories emerged:

- Understanding of performance appraisal

The discussion in this category of the findings will focus on what the participants cognitively, think and know of performance appraisal.

- Experiences and expectations of performance appraisal

The findings will reflect how the participants qualitatively evaluate the process they are exposed to as opposed to their ideal system.

- Attitudes impacting on performance appraisal

Attitude, for the purpose of this study refers to a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in a certain way (www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn). This indicates that the experiences, feelings, beliefs and understandings of performance appraisal influence a mental state which will become apparent in behaviour and responses.

Relevant reference will be made to appropriate literature to compare and corroborate findings and comparisons will be made where these emerge.

As mentioned in Chapter 1.4.4 page 16, the data population consisted of social workers and managers / supervisors of a Social Services Department of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape. A distinction has been found between the understanding of performance appraisal on the part of the social workers and their supervisors. This significant interpretation will receive attention in this chapter. The changes made in the application of performance appraisal will also be explored as will the difficulty in implementation. These have been categorized into the various levels at which these difficulty were identified.



The respondents made recommendations, either covertly or overtly, throughout the research. These make a significant contribution to the academic discussion on the subject. All identified themes and concepts will be conceptualised with reference to related literature and in order of appearance in Table 2 on pages 46-48.

3.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The concepts of understanding, perceptions and experiences are interrelated and present some difficulty in separating them in the discussion. Perception reflects peoples' experiences of realities and might have influenced the participants understanding of performance appraisal as most of them might lack formal exposure to the subject of

performance appraisal. However, the data-analysis yielded themes that could be categorised according to the afore-mentioned categories.

The discussion which follows will be based on the following categories and sub-categories of themes that emerged from the data analysis,

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>SUBCATEGORY</u>
<p>3.2.1. Understanding of performance appraisal</p>	<p>3.2.1.1 Rewarding performance</p> <p>3.2.1.1.1. Financial</p> <p>3.2.1.1.2. Other incentives</p> <p>3.2.1.2 Employee development</p> <p>3.2.1.3 Assessment / Evaluation format</p> <p>3.2.1.3.1 Transparent process</p> <p>3.2.1.3.2 Job analysis/ Descriptions</p> <p>3.2.1.3.3 Standards /criteria</p> <p>3.2.1.3.4 Simplistic</p> <p>3.2.1.3.5 Objective outside rater</p> <p>3.2.1.3.6 Continuous process with feedback (Formative assessment)</p> <p>3.2.1.3.7 Outcome assessment (summative assessment)</p>

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS - continued

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>SUBCATEGORY</u>
<p>3.2.2. Experiences and Expectations</p>	<p>3.2.2.1 Lack of transparency</p> <p>3.2.2.2 Supervisor incompetence</p> <p>3.2.2.2.1. Conflicting roles</p> <p>3.2.2.2.2. Managerial competence</p> <p>3.2.2.2.3 Immaturity</p> <p>3.2.2.2.4 Motivation</p> <p>3.2.2.3 Subjective process</p> <p>3.2.2.3.1. Favouritism</p> <p>3.2.2.3.2. Lack of criteria</p> <p>3.2.2.4. Discriminatory process</p> <p>3.2.2.4.1 Discrimination based on colour</p> <p>3.2.2.4.2. Supervisor advantage</p>

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF FINDINGS - continued

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>SUBCATEGORY</u>
3.2.3 Attitudes	3.2.3.1 Distrust and scepticism 3.2.3.2 Antagonism 3.2.3.3 Selective Optimism

3.2.1 Understanding of performance appraisal

3.2.1.1. Rewarding performance



Findings indicated that participants understood performance appraisal as a tool for rewarding performance. Swanepoel (2003:488) and Bernardin *et al*; (1993:420) refer to this as extrinsic rewards which include all those rewards which an employee can get from sources outside the job itself. They also concur that the organization has a large degree of control over the nature and monetary cost of the extrinsic reward and can thus manipulate the use of incentives to affect employee behaviour.

3.2.1.1.1 Financial rewards

Social work participants' immediate responses to the question about what performance appraisal is were that it was "financial" and that it was for identifying those who deserve a merit or notch increase or promotion.

Compare, for example, the following quotes which indirectly or directly reflect this theme:

“It’s about getting more money”;

‘One has to be rewarded. There has to be an outcome of something and that has to be financial. You have to be appraised for something, otherwise what is the purpose?’;

“Nothing happens in between the report being written and the outcome. One year we did not even know, we got our salary slips and there it was. And then you go underground because if this (the result) come out there will be war”;



“I agree with them there should be ongoing appraisal but at the end of the year should get a financial reward”.

The managers hold a somewhat opposing view.

“It is important that performance appraisal not be too closely linked with money. But the unfortunate part is that in today’s world we want upward mobility, financial or otherwise”.

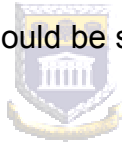
Kohn (1995:4) claims that rewards and punishment are two sides of the same coin. Catching people doing something right is no different to catching people doing

something wrong. Kohn further states that rewards fail as they secure temporary compliance but do not produce lasting change in attitudes, destroys cooperation as people compete against each other, destroys relationships between supervisors and subordinates and discourages risk taking and creativity. The problem of linking performance appraisal with financial rewards is that it is bound to inhibit honesty and openness – employees are unlikely to point out the problem they have, if they think this will have a negative effect on their pay.

3.2.1.1.2 Other incentives

There were some indications from social workers that rewards could also be non-monetary.

“If it is not remuneration there should be some kind of incentive, a weekend away or something”;



“It does not have to be financial; it can be in the form of support and assistance”;

“I think the bottom line is, its human nature, you expect something. It’s just the way life works, but I agree it can be something else”.

The managers related being envious of friends, who appear to have many incentives for performance.

“They have such a lot of incentives, recognition and things like that are important. I think here we do not really have incentives for people to strive towards”.

They also agree that giving a reward may impact on the atmosphere in the office.

“Just being able to give that little thing – even if it is a bunch of flowers. We need to creatively look at what we budget for incentives. It’s about creating a particular atmosphere where the littlest action gets public recognition and rewards”.

Bernardin *et al*; (1993:379-482) concede that employees may not believe the performance measure will accurately assess performance, and they often have an inflated idea of their performance levels which translates into unrealistic expectation of rewards.

Currently within the Department of Social Services and Poverty Alleviation: Provincial Government of the Western Cape, this expectation is supported by its hierarchical structure. Social workers are promoted to different levels due to years of service and not on competency based criteria. After a period of seven years a social worker could find him/herself at Chief Social Worker level without having any managerial responsibility. (Documentation to this effect is not available, but confirmed as being in practice during focus group discussions). This reinforces the notion that performance appraisal is a system linked to financial rewards alone. It also makes it difficult for employees to believe in the equity of the rewards (Bernardin *et al*; 1993:492).

3.2.1.2 Employee development

The managers indicated that performance appraisal should be about employee development. In this regard supervisors felt that;

“Staff performance management is linked to career paths, individual development of colleagues and the enhancement of people”;

“And it’s now about taking the person along with you in the process”.

There is nevertheless, also agreement with social workers that;

“... Not just about advancement of people, but the enhancement (it) is also concerned with”.



Harris (1997:76) confirms the linkage between annual career reviews and planning by validating the importance of performance appraisal and regular feedback in the human resource planning.

3.2.1.3 Assessment / Evaluation format

This theme emerged in relation to participants’ understanding of the format (methods and process) of assessment for performance appraisal.

Participants reflecting of their understanding of the format for appraisal relates to current practice in the Department of Social Services and Poverty Alleviation. The department utilises critical incidents where the appraisee has to write on key events that is supposed to reflect exceptionally good or bad behaviour of the employee in relation to

particular outcomes at work. Lewis, 1991:137; Kreitner, 1986:329; McKenna *et al*; 2002:174; Swanepoel, 2003:387 and De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:329 all refer to this technique, but in context of only one of several methods that should be used.

There is an indication that there is discontent with this limited understanding of performance appraisal methods.

The supervisors' view,

“Is performance about incidents? The occasional once off thing, that happens in January and the again in whatever”.

“Performance is about consistency, keeping up the performance and it's not about isolated incidents”.



The social worker group states,

“... but there should be two kinds of appraisal , one that is on going and being rewarded for something well done, a project or something, and then a final at the end of the year”.

Many authors report that there are differences between formal and informal appraisal. The latter will happen twice a year at predetermined interval whilst the former is part of the continuous evaluation of the employee (Bernardin *et al*; 1993; Millar, 1998; Weinbach, 2003).

Weinbach (2003:173) writes that most organisations have written procedures in place for conducting performance appraisals. There are usually two parts to a performance evaluation – a written evaluation and an evaluation conference.

The social workers suggested that any performance appraisal system should include;

“Clearly defined steps that monitor the implementation of the performance appraisal system”.

“There are no criteria. And if there is it has never been communicated to us!”

3.2.1.3.1 Transparent process

Responses of social workers imply that they understood performance appraisal to be a transparent process:



“...something in terms of transparency and the whole openness of the process. For me, in a sense it feels like you have no role to in play your own life. Once the reports and incidents have been written you have no control over the process”;

“... Consultation in the development of performance appraisal with definite timelines for the implementation”;

“.... With continuous involvement”.

Managers feel that they have always placed communication high on the agenda for performance appraisal;

“... and when we engage around a process of staff performance, I always question “are we on the same page, do we have the same perspective, do we have the same reality”, that is the ever challenge in my life”.

Lewis *et al*; (2001:135) recommend that the process be participative, the organisation’s system be designed by a representative group of employees and that criteria for a specific job be developed by the subordinate, supervisor and ideally others who know the subordinates work.

3.2.1.3.2 Job analysis/ descriptions



Swanepoel (2003:224) and De Cenzo *et al*; (1994:135) define job analysis as a technical procedure which systematically explores the activities within a job. Thus, in the job analysis process the duties, responsibilities and accountabilities of a job is analysed and generates two outcomes – namely job descriptions and job specifications (Swanepoel, 2003:224).

Job descriptions define the nature of the job, the environment and the conditions under which the employment is carried out. It is a written statement of the content of a job which is derived from the analysis of the job (Maund, 2001:160).

There was no agreement that job analysis and descriptions play a role in performance appraisal.

“Now we have gone through a process of job description, you have sort of guidelines that personalised your job description”;
were the managers’ view.

There appears however, to be a concern amongst social workers of the limited understanding of the weight it carries to define expectations for performance.

“We get told that your service standards and job descriptions will be enough (to assess performance)”.



However, the managers feel that they have worked with social workers on performance plans and thus have set the scene for future performance appraisal.

“Based on the job description we can now start to develop the performance plan.
And it’s now about taking the person along with you in the process”.

Daley (1998:376) and Kreitner (1986:327) put forward that the one requirement for the ideal performance evaluation system is an up-to-date job analysis as foundation for the appraisal so that expectations for performance are clear. The definition of job analysis and job descriptions above reflects that this discussion should be seen as part of supervisor-employee interaction to reach agreement on the job requirements.

3.2.1.3.3 Standards / Criteria

Cascio (1998:304) and Swanepoel (2003:376) suggest specific requirements for an appraisal system as a criterion to judge performance of individuals, namely, relevance, reliability, sensitivity, freedom from contamination, practicality, acceptability and legal compliance.

Social work participants indicated that performance appraisal implies that there should be criteria. The social workers were also more specific in what they understood criteria setting to be;

“There are guidelines, your individual issues are identifies, who you are, where you at, were they would like improvement”.



Millar (1998:222) defines a good performance evaluation system as meeting three main criteria: it should be valid, reliable and practical. Thus it should measure what it is supposed to measure, give consistent appraisals to all individuals, be acceptable to all staff and be relatively easy to use. This will be achievable should there be clear service standards for all areas of work.

In this regard social workers responded as follows:

“Currently the job description and the service standards are the ground rules, but we must note that it is not an official standard. It is something their section developed for themselves”.

Swanepoel (2003: 384) advocates that in establishing performance standards it should be mutually agreed upon and provide details of the fixed worker output, the criteria to be used for assessment and how the performance will be measured.

There was agreement amongst both groups that provincial norms, preferably legislated, should be developed to ensure that all offices will appraise their social workers along the same lines. The managers' comments were;

“It must be the Department, we need a provincial norm”;

And

“I think we need an independent provincial body to set the norms. I do not think that our head office has the capacity, or the strength, or the will to be able to see thing through”.



The social workers stated;

“I feel strongly about uniform service standards, even legislate it”;

“We just go to the legislature and do it”.

And

“We just need some kind of document”.

A strong questioning voice expressed concern about bringing calculations into social work performance appraisal.

“This whole thing about bringing Maths into social work is problematic. This whole system is about counting. We work with people and we cannot count

output, and also positive input. That is why I have a problem bringing concrete mathematical issues into our profession”.

Lewis *et al*; (2001:133) caution that performance appraisal should not be looked at in isolation and should flow from clearly defined job descriptions with clear standards and expectations and is based on the supervisor having worked closely with the subordinate.

3.2.1.3.4 Simplistic

The social workers also understood performance appraisal to be a simplistic system and process even if it is still about financial rewards!

“... Increases without pain, in the month of appointment”;

‘(a) Simplified performance appraisal policy!’



The supervisors, list their need for a simplified system in a different way.

“It was difficult for you as a supervisor”,

“As individuals, in a real way, one manipulates the outcome of these panels”.

A simplistic system for social workers may not be possible as in most human service organisations performance appraisal system need to fulfil both evaluation and development functions because separate appraisal programs would be too expensive (Lewis *et al*; 1991:135).

3.2.1.3.5 Objective outside rater

There was also agreement amongst social work participants that:

“(Performance appraisal) must be done by an outside objective person. I do not think that the office manager is the right person”.

“I do not know if somebody who dislikes me can objectively assess my performance”.

However the supervisors believed that they are ideally located to do the rating of an employee.

“Based on the job description we can now start to develop the performance plan.

And it’s now about taking the person along with you in the process”.



Social workers’ concern with objective raters is often described by authors (Harris, 1997; De Cenzo *et al*; 1996; Lewis *et al*; 2001) in terms of rater errors. Some commonly encountered judgemental biases include;

Leniency and strictness errors where mostly favourable or very harsh ratings are assigned to all employee by the appraiser.

Central tendency, the rating of all employees as average.

Halo effect, allowing the assigned rating of one performance dimension to influence the ratings on all subsequent dimensions,

Same as me and different from me error, the tendency to rate higher those employees perceived as behaving similar or different to the rater and

Contrast error, allowing the rating of an individual to be influenced by the relative evaluation of the preceding ratee (Harris, 1997:191; Swanepoel, 2003:380; De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:335-337, Lewis *et al*; 2001:138).

Outside raters, and even the most advanced and complex techniques for appraisal, will not control all possible interactional problems. Consequently, the developing and fostering of sound and effective supervisor – employee relationships in the performance management process must be emphasised. Raters who feel uncomfortable about confrontation with subordinates may assign average ratings where poor ratings would have been appropriate, and ratees may resist or trivialise findings should they perceive the assessment as a blow to their self esteem (Weinbach, 2003:164).



3.2.1.3.6 Continuous process with feedback (formative assessment)

The formative assessment of performance appraisal is defined by Weinbach (2003:288) as the assessment of the implementation of the system. This is clearly linked to feedback from those who have been appraised and thus the discussion regarding the process and feedback will be combined.

“There are no criteria. And if there is, it has never been communicated to us!”

“Nothing happens in between the report being written and the outcome. One year we did not even know, we got our salary slips and there it was. And then you go underground because if this (the result) come out there will be war.”

A phrase that clearly applies to performance appraisal is “the best surprise is no surprise”. In an appraisal process that is continuous the supervisor cannot save up performance related information and unload it during the appraisal review. De Cenzo *et al*; (1996:339) offers as solution for this problem that the manager share on a day to day basis both expectations and disappointments with the employee. By providing the employee with frequent opportunities to discuss performance before reward or punishment consequences occur. Where ongoing feedback has been provided the formal sit down process is less traumatic.

Another social workers’ contribution reflects the absolute need for feedback;

“Quarterly evaluation will give me an impression of where I should be at the end of the year. Throughout the year I will be able to motivate myself to work if the score is not what I want it to be”.

Echoed by the managers group;

“I would like to get to the point where my motives are not being questioned. Somehow people are not used to being praised for work well done. They turn out very sceptical when you recognise good work”.

Noe *et al*; (1996:225) and Harris (1997:202) concede that performance feedback is difficult but offers the following solutions to handling performance reviews:

- Feedback should be given regularly and not once a year.
- Ask the employee to rate his./her performance before the interview.

- Encourage the subordinate to participate in the session.
- Recognise effective performance through praise.
- Focus feedback on behaviour or results, not on the person.
- Minimize criticism.
- Agree to specific goals and set a date to review progress.

3.2.1.3.7 Outcome assessment (summative assessment)

Weinbach (2003:288) refers to summative assessment as the outcome or impact of the evaluation on the employee. This assessment is usually conducted when the process of performance appraisal has been or is nearing completion.

Social workers were cynical when the matter of feedback came up for discussion. They took time in communicating that their experiences with regards to feedback were almost non-existent and a protection of the poor judgement made by supervisors.

“The supervisors know they make wrong decisions and that’s why they do not give feedback. Two years in a row that supervisor did not give that person a reason why not (a positive appraisal was not received)”.

The performance feedback process is complex and provokes anxiety from both the manager and employee. One manager reported that;

“You say the most simple word and unintentionally, but people have the capacity to turn this word into a living hell for you”.

A newer social worker to the office confirms that there is an attempt to meet some of the recommendations listed above by Noe,1997 and Harris,1998;

“.....working (for) three months. I still get that support, as I am still in my probation period. I get told when I am doing a good job. I get good support from my supervisor”.

Social workers perceive feedback sessions as traumatic and this is best summarized by the statement from one of their group;

“The fallout from the rest of the staff, for the people that get it, is a very sore subject. I think it is a subjective process that destroys friendships, it destroy something of your faith in yourself as you saw a very ugly side of your friends and colleagues. You still hear comments”.



3.2.2 Experiences and expectations of performance appraisal

The subsequent discussion will attempt to present the alleged process of implementation of performance appraisal for the participants of the study. Thus, it will focus on their evaluation and experiences of the current process.

3.2.2.1 Lack of transparency

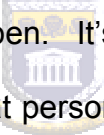
In order to ensure that distrust of the system is minimized, social workers assumed that the process of evaluation should be transparent.

“And when people start lobbying the very strong people on the panel, you can already see who is going to get and who not”;

“...something in terms of transparency and the whole openness of the process. For me, in a sense it feels like you have no role to in play your own life. Once the reports and incidents have been written you have no control over the process”;

“It’s about the perception that the candidates have already been chosen”;

“I would go as far to say that I do not know whether that which have been taking place here can be called performance appraisal. The way it is done no one is evaluated”.

“The process is also not very open.  It’s this closed up thing that gives rise to bickering and one saying that that person is not such a good performer. And the way it is done sometimes leaves so many questions”.

These comments from social workers reflect the lack of confidence they have in the system but are largely based on their understanding of performance appraisal. They concede that they do not fully understand it, which makes for unnecessary tension amongst staff. The absence of clearly defined criteria, communication of the process and the perceived shifting of boundaries for some and not others are some of the comments that support their notion of a process that lacks lucidity.

“Boundaries get shifted all the time; it depends on the person for whom they need to shift the boundaries. Especially if your perception is that that person is the boss’ favourite”.

Some suggestions from social workers on how this can be improved are;

“There needs to be a real openness as to what goes on in all sections so that we can move away from this sort of thing (counting potties joke)”;

“If there is transparency it will not matter, that field will always have a backlog. If the process is followed it will not matter”.

McKenna *et al*; (2002:173) state that it is important to set targets which are acceptable to those whose performance is going to be appraised, and to do so in a climate characterised by open communication between superior and subordinate and strive for partnership in action. In addition, the use of reliable, fair and objective measures of performance, comparison of actual performance with planned performance with feedback provided to the appraisee goes a long way in ensuring that there is at least the perception of transparency.

Finally, there were complaints regarding the following:

“This is the problem I have with the Department. They bring us the blueprint and there is never any form of consultation in developing the system”.

3.2.2.2 Supervisor incompetence

The notion of raters, their suitability and objectivity emerged highly in the discussions in both groups. The social workers group were vocal about the perceived lack of competence of the supervisors in the application of performance appraisals. It was felt that;

“A level of maturity is required that I’m not sure that the current supervisors have that level to objectively assess my performance”;

“My experience is that we have four supervisors. One will not help you when it comes to performance appraisal, one will just take part in it, the other will assist across the board, and the last one, if that one is behind you , you have it”.



The supervisors conceded that;

“...its not just about seeing colleagues alongside you, it’s about the perception of my own inner shortcomings, fears, dislikes and the opportunity to change it”.

3.2.2.2.1 Conflicting roles

Swanepoel (2003:379) states that the two conflicting purposes also force managers into fulfilling conflicting roles in performance appraisal, serving simultaneously as both judge and counsellor. Social workers felt that:

“ you get the supervisor that will actually sit down with you and really motivate you and point out certain things that you could write about or should be written about and/or even volunteer to write it for you”.

And,

“Some supervisors play a mothering role. They assist you with the reports and interviews and then give you a merit”.

But their greatest concern was with managers competing on the same level with them.

“Players and referees in the same game”;

“Having their own axes to grind”;

“And the office head was trying to get the supervisors first to the top notch”.

Which was supported by their contention that:

“And if the supervisors were not yet shifted to the next notch, you as a worker could not get the notch, because they get first”;

3.2.2.2 Managerial incompetence



Social workers explicitly indicate that they do not experience supervisors as competent to conduct performance appraisal. The required skills for supervisors are divided into two important concepts for both groups. Compare the following quotes from social workers in this regard;

“I do not think that the supervisors have enough skills or training to evaluate us. They are supervisors based on years of experience and they require training in actual managerial skills”.

“I think they should work on this management thing and then on the implementation (of performance appraisal)”.

The managers group’s view is summarized as follows:

“There is a lot of training to get through, but at least we have started.

We have not been trained on how to do performance appraisal, management, time management, that is the problem”.

Despite the fact that the interviews are the responsibility of line management, it will most likely be the human resource practitioner’s job to ensure the effectiveness of this process by training supervisors how to plan and conduct appraisal interview properly. This has clearly not occurred as the supervisors report that complete training for their role as managers and raters have not been done.



“We have not been trained completely as appraisers but have been trained how to write up job descriptions. And the drafting of the performance plan. At some point there was somebody that came and spoke around the new staff performance management system. You would get things on paper like examples and you would work and develop it further until it made a bit more sense”.

It is important to recognise that performance management is at the heart of the general management processes (De Cenzo *et al*; 1996:321).

Thus, it is important that supervisors are perceived as, at least, being skilled in the art of management.

Harris (1997:193) list three ways how lack of preparedness to conduct performance appraisal can come about namely;

- Low self confidence; where raters are reluctant to participate due to feelings of incompetence.
- Limited familiarity; due to not knowing how well their employees are performing.
- Lack of time; managers may lack the time to gather sufficient information and to conduct thorough feedback sessions.

The managers group registers all the above as reasons for the current state of performance appraisal in this office.



“Performance appraisal is not an acceptable practice as yet in terms of the role I chose to perform”;

“The problem is that you have to do functional work as well not just look after the staff’, its just time consuming, it takes a lot of time to do justice to”.

Most supervisors are interested in advancement and want to know how they are doing. Even though supervisors are first level managers they are no different from those who report to them. Ideally they should receive periodic appraisals from their superiors. Unfortunately the ideal is seldom realised. In his survey of over 5000 managers, Walter Mahler (Mahler, 1955) found that almost half have never received performance reviews;

44% had never been told the requirements for higher level jobs; and 31% had never been encouraged by their superiors to take specific action to prepare them for advancement.

Managers, however, concede that there is no place for ineffective organisational policies and practices as it undermines performance management activities. This is articulated as follows;

“I feel it smacks of incompetence where management had to apply their thematic processes in terms of what is management, and would have concretised what we are now beginning to grapple with. What is the role of a manager as opposed to the role of the unit manager?”



Weinbach (2003:164-165) states that the dislike for employee evaluations may result from those doing the evaluations acting as if sometimes it is nothing more than a ‘necessary evil’. Paradoxically, it is expected of social workers to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, community strengths and resources but when needed to evaluate a colleague we react with distaste.

3.2.2.2.3 Immaturity

There were comments from the social workers that they did not believe that supervisors have the emotional maturity to undertake and complete the comprehensive tasks demanded by performance appraisal.

“A level of maturity is required that I’m not sure that the current supervisors have that level to objectively assess my performance”.

The managers group emphasized that the power struggle between supervisors and social workers could result in a battle of wills to determine the agreed standard for a particular performance level.

“You must really stand out amongst your peers for me to consider you for a merit “.

The social workers group questioned confidentiality, linked this closely with the maturity level of the appraiser, and inferred that the managers are unable to keep information to themselves;



“I’m talking openness and honesty within the appraisal process”;

“I am assuming openness and honesty is linked to confidentiality”;

“What’s confidential (here)? “;

“But off the record, there is nothing confidential in this office. There are ways and means of getting to information”.

The above comments reflect a clear lack of emotional competence on the part of all participants. While they may be highly technically skilled their inability to form sound interpersonal relations impact on their impartiality in analysing their own value and shortcomings.

The social workers agree with Goleman (2003:16) who defines emotional competence as a learned capability based on emotional intelligence and the degree to which an individual has mastered specific skills and abilities that allow them greater effectiveness in the workplace.

3.2.2.2.4 Motivation

Maslow (1970) asserts that people are motivated by social, esteem and self actualization or self fulfilment needs. Thus management reward systems should be endeavouring to satisfy the individual's higher level needs for self esteem and self fulfilment. Graves (1974) contends that human beings exist at 'different levels of existence and displays the behaviour and values characteristic of the people at that level'.



The above is referred to by Swanepoel (2003:488) as intrinsic rewards which the employee has to give to themselves. As Bernardin *et al*; (1993:420) point out that if you feel little or no satisfaction from completing a challenging task, there is little the organisation can do about it.

The social workers group list individual cases where even this could be denied them by the undermining of their work by colleagues;

“Whether I am a good worker or not, I took the chance and I was rewarded.


Nobody in this office can determine whether I am a good worker or not”;

“This whole thing of welfare planners counting potties started out as a joke, but now it is the norm”.

3.2.2.3 Subjective process

There was an all round acceptance that the current process for performance appraisal did not lend itself to assurances of objectivity. The experiences of the social workers thus far only served to support this poor view;

“I have never experienced performance appraisal positively. Simply because, I see too much subjectivity from top down; from senior top level to the person being appraised. Sometimes it’s greater sometimes its not”, manager group participant.

They questioned whether the appraiser  could ever take ‘your personhood’ out of the process.

“There are so many issues on the desk of the unit manager they often do not have time to lift their heads and look ahead”.

The supervisors also assumed that as they had performance plans, this provided and brought objectivity to performance appraisal.

“Based on the job description we can now start to develop the performance plan. And it’s now about taking the person along with you in the process”.

Chaiken and her colleague cited in Avery *et al*; 1998 found that decision makers will be motivated to engage in information processing until they feel that they have sufficient

information to make an accurate judgement, and once this is reached motivation to engage in information processing will decrease. The social workers questioned the fairness of this attitude by supervisors;

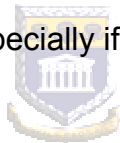
“... who is the supervisor to say that you cannot write about that?

So I am saying that my supervisor is not supportive in guiding me to highlight certain attributes”.

3.2.2.3.1 Favouritism

Social workers regarded the process of appraisal as subjective due to favouritism by supervisors and staff at the head office. This is reflected in their assertion that;

“Boundaries get shifted all the time; it depends on the person for whom they need to shift the boundaries. Especially if your perception is that that person is the boss’ favourite”.



Managers disagree;

“If I see someone doing well, I will recommend him for a merit award, because he deserves it, not because I like him”.

De Cenzo *et al*; (1996: 325) reflect that emotions in evaluation often affect the employee satisfaction of the evaluation process. In evaluating performance, emotions may arise and if these emotions are not dealt with correctly, it may lead to greater conflict, often perceived by the employee as favouritism.

This is taken into the future working relationship and impact on the feedback provided to the employee.

The supervisors conceded that;

“...its not just about seeing colleagues alongside you, it’s about the perception of my own inner shortcomings, fears, dislikes and the opportunity to change it”.

“I would like to know that I will be appraised objectively. I would like to be appraised sometime. It is expected that you know (how you are performing), we often do that to the office manager as well”.

The social workers were however clear on how they viewed the skills of the supervisors.

“I do not think that the supervisors have enough skills or training to evaluate us. They are supervisors based on years of experience and they require training in actual managerial skills”.

De Cenzo *et al*; (1996:343) recommend that if good raters cannot be found, the alternative is to make good raters as training of appraisers can make them more accurate raters. The authors also comments that common rater errors are minimized or even eliminated by encouraging managers to be exposed to rater training. This protects the organisation from demoralised staff, decreasing productivity and making it liable for wrongful termination claims.

3.2.2.3.2 Lack of criteria

The social workers' view of the lack of criteria is largely based on the fairness of rewards;

“It's about the perception that the candidates have already been chosen”.

This is confirmed by the managers' admission;

“We not fully into the new staff performance appraisal system yet and I hope that that will be better in terms if me now having to appraise someone and even me having to be appraised by my supervisor. That they have there, that it is a standard that is set and that I will be measured against something that is known to me”.

“And given the unsavouryiness  one has to put in the correct checks and balances”.

“We challenged with not being sorted out with performance plans. We need the measuring now. We do not have a measuring tool and we need to be practical in terms of having something that you can measure you against”.

But the conciliatory tone comes from the managers;

“Staff will not have a choice, but each and every one will have to give input. We all have an idea of what has to happen, what should happen and what must happen”.

Cascio (1998:328) claims that the impact of a lack of criteria for performance appraisal, is that the likelihood of predicting future performance is affected.

3.2.2.4 Discriminatory process

3.2.2.4.1 Discrimination based on colour

The social workers group evaluate the appraisal process as discriminatory based on colour. Compare the following excerpt;

“Performance appraisals here are done along racial lines. No black social worker has been appraised in this office. There is a high turnover of black social workers in this office and I link that to racism. Black social workers are negatively appraised. Only coloured social workers get (positively appraised)”.



Oppler *et al*; (1992) found that differences observed between black and white ratees in performance do not necessarily imply bias; such difference could reflect actual and true differences between such samples. However, the experiences of the staff group confirm a definite correlation between lower assessment for black social workers and bias.

“That is not only a perception but also stories that have been going around and the way people have been treated. The black social workers that left all come out of a particular section and they all left the same way”.

3.2.2.4.2 Supervisor advantage

The perception of supervisor advantage is fuelled by the assertion that both the office head and head office side with them in the allocation of notch increases and merit assessments;

“The talk at the time was that the office head was trying to get the supervisors first up to the top notch”;

“It came down to the decision made by head office that the supervisor will get the notch first”.

The performance feedback process is complex and provokes anxiety from both the manager and employee. One manager reported that;

“You say the most simple word and unintentionally, but people have the capacity to turn this word into a living hell for you”.

Here is an indirect assertion that the manager may abuse his/her power in the assessment procedure. Lewis *et al*; (1991:207) note that an individual's power to direct or influence others comes from a variety of sources. The authors cite connection power as becoming a reality when the supervisor is perceived as having close contact with influential people.

3.2.3 Attitudes

As previously indicated, attitude, for the purpose of this study refers to a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in a certain way (www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn). Therefore, experiences, feelings and beliefs/understandings of performance appraisal influence a mental state, which will become apparent in behaviour and responses.

The previous section reported on content analysis of data which were gleaned from participants' verbal responses. However, Coffey and Atkinson (1996:83) indicate that we analyze not only content, but also "meaning and metaphor". The authors imply that it is not just about, 'what is said, but also 'how it was said'. Themes reported here are categorized as attitudes in that it is often perceived behaviour and inferences drawn from contributions rather than explicit commentary. In the focus group discussions much of this information also emerged from group interaction and dynamics.

The researcher observed that although interaction between participants in both focus groups were free and open, some participants were overbearing and appeared to want to dominate discussions. This was not questioned by the other participants and the inference can be drawn that many participants prefer to follow the lead of the more vocal. As a result, concern can be expressed regarding the input by other group members as the position of noncompliant voice may not have been welcomed.

A hierarchical structure also appeared to be in place as it was deemed and verbally confirmed through rationalization. Those social workers who had fewer years of experience may not have an opinion or understanding, own and others experience and perceptions of performance appraisal. The researcher's skill in social group work had to be employed to secure the group hearing the opinion of the 'newer' staff member.

"He is new",

Was the loud response the researcher received when requesting an opinion of one of the silent participants.

The contrasts in the level of interaction within groups were revealing. Within the social workers group there was the openness to express, even in inappropriate language, as the atmosphere was relaxed and nonchalant. Almost, as if it was a relief to finally share their opinion on this important process in their professional lives. On the other hand, the atmosphere in the managers group was stiff and almost stifling, as the smaller group forced voicing of opinions but also the recording of the session was more obvious. They communicated that they felt controlled by the recorder. Also, their group session was after that of the staff and they felt exposed and on trail.

"It's this thing (referring to the recorder)".

Here also there appeared to be different levels of communication and participants' innate sense of respect prevented them from interrupting inappropriate responses.

The nonverbal cues were of interest as eye contact between participants was particularly obvious when support for a comment was being sought. This non-verbal call for support was often responded to with nods or sniggers. Expressions of confusion on the 'newer' staff members' faces were obvious to the researcher but the other participants were oblivious to it. This clearly reflected not only an indifference on the part of the longer serving staff members, but also confirmed a reluctance to hear others' opinions.

A lesser degree of this insensitivity was also present in the managers' group as one participant tried to assert seniority. Here the absence of eye contact was obvious but had no impact on the responsible participant.

Participants also all displayed a sense of helplessness around the transparency of the process. There was a powerlessness communicated with their body language whenever the notion of transparency was raised.

3.2.3.1 Distrust / scepticism

Social workers expressed an attitude of distrust and scepticism in the performance appraisal system. The previously mentioned excerpts in 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 indicated that these attitudes were reflected in perceptions about supervisor incompetence and the subjectivity of the process. Distrust was also reflected in responses about the encouragement of collegial envy and past behaviour of colleagues.

The following quote reflect the attitude of scepticism and distrust;

“I would go as far to say that I do not know whether that which has been taking place here can be called performance appraisal. The way it has been done, no one is evaluated”.

Distrust was specially exhibited in strong feelings about the length of service and ‘histories of people’. There was open resentment towards those who referred to past behaviour as standard practice and did not give recognition for improvement in attitude and performance.

“With older colleagues, to have to continuously break down the histories to enhance collegueship, but you also breaking down your own inhibitions”.



“It not just seeing the colleague alongside me, its and opportunity to change my own inner shortcomings, fears dislikes, and so forth.”

“We have years of relationships going on in this office. Its not always been positive, it had to be persevered, engaged and nurtured to get to the point where we can say we started to arrive”.

The above summarizes the managers’ comments.

Social workers reflected as follows on this;

“The fact that many of us have been here for years has positives and negatives. One of the negatives is, and this is my opinion, is that people have histories of

one another and you take that into account and you combine it with a certain personality aspect and that is bound to affect the performance appraisal of someone”.

3.2.3.2 Antagonism

There was an open antagonism when favouritism from supervisors was discussed. Affected participants were at pains to impress upon the group that they also suffered from being a favourite. They expressed resentment that they had to also suffer being scandalised about and called for sensitivity towards them. However, it became clear that those scandalising did so out a feeling of jealousy as they perceived favourites to be more upwardly mobile than them.

“And if your supervisor knows you and has a good relationship with you, she is going to push very hard (for you to get a positive appraisal)”.

“The fallout from the rest of the staff, for the people that get it, is a very sore subject. I think it is a subjective process that destroys friendships, it destroy something of your faith in yourself as you saw a very ugly side of your friends and colleagues. You still hear comments”.

The worst of the cynicism and scorn were articulated by social workers regarding the discussion pertaining to feedback. The tones were clipped, emotional and gestures indicated that it has to be a short discussion. The figures of speech were aggressively expressed and comments were of disdain and contempt.

“This is going to be a short discussion. We do not get feedback”.

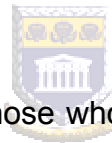
And,

“Nothing in between, short discussion”.

“I’m not sure if this will work here”;

Strong feelings reflecting antagonism were evoked when discussions around the length of service and ‘histories’ of people were discussed.

“...is that people have histories of one another and you take that into account, and you combine it with a certain personality aspect and that is bound to affect the performance appraisal of a person”.



There was open resentment towards those who referred to past behaviour as standard practice and did not give recognition for improvement in attitude and performance. Similarly, they displayed feelings of being done-in by management when it came to effective performance appraisal.

“Objectively you cannot blame the way people are going on. The whole thing of human emotions. But it is also linked to the way things have been done”.


“The fallout from the rest of the staff, for the people that get it, is a very sore subject. I think it is a subjective process that destroys friendships, it destroy something of your faith in yourself as you saw a very ugly side of your friends and colleagues. You still hear comments”.

It appeared that their aspirations of mobility, acceptance and sound interpersonal relationships were being affected by those who could successfully become the supervisors' favourite. There was open resentment expressed in scandalising and minimizing others efforts and achievement, even amongst friends for the position the favourite assumed.

There were also feelings of resentment / antagonism about what was perceived as 'unfair advantage of supervisors' and a social worker expressing this in the metaphor of:

“Players and referees in the same game”;

And perceives the supervisor as having unfair advantage as,

“I was asked specifically by the  office head to stand down in favour of my supervisor”.

Peculiarly, this view was shared by the supervisors, who agreed that;

“I have never experienced performance appraisal positively. Simply because, I see too much subjectivity from top down; from senior top level to the person being appraised. Sometimes it's greater sometimes its not”.

“That is not only a perception but also stories that have been going around and the way people have been treated. The black social workers that left all come out of a particular section and they all left the same way”.

The feelings and attitude of antagonism and resentment was also reflected in responses about discrimination based on race as quoted in 3.2.2.4.1, page 78.

“No black social worker has been appraised in this office. There is a high turnover of black social workers in this office and I link that to racism. Black social workers are negatively appraised. Only coloured social workers get”.

3.2.3.3 Selective optimism

All was not about doom and gloom for the participants. The managers and some social workers felt encouraged and anticipated the implementation of the new system.

However, the managers’ enthusiasm was differently expressed and social workers were more guarded.



The managers expressed their belief in the success of the new system in the following manner;

“I personally feel that we find ourselves in a challenging situation and we should be positive in what lies ahead for us”.

“That is the challenge with the new system and people are very aware and that you can actually see a change in attitude, they are aware, conscious, they mention it also”.

“With the new system I am of the opinion that that you can take the person with you, right from the start. And work through those processes”.

A social work participant conceded that;

“Some of us have job descriptions, some sections have service standards, now we just need to work on implementing the system correctly for all, with holistic assessment”.

3.3 SUMMARY

The analysed data compiled from two focus group discussions, were discussed with reference to three major categories and related sub-categories namely, understanding of performance appraisal, experiences and expectations of performance appraisal, attitudes reflected during the study and impacting on performance appraisal. Findings were discussed in narrative style and sub categories were contextualised within the framework of relevant literature and supported by quotations from the original transcriptions.

In the first category the understanding of performance appraisal by social workers and their managers were described. These were categorized into sub categories namely, rewarding performance, employee development and assessment/evaluation format. The social workers' understanding of performance appraisal was that it related mainly to rewards be it financial or otherwise. As noted, a further subcategory of the first category was employee development. From the responses it was clear that only managers understood the importance of this to any staff component. Staff expressed it as secondary to a tool for rewards or promotion. There was no differentiation between the

responses of the longer serving social workers and the 'newer' ones. Another subcategory to this category was assessment or evaluation format. Input here was largely based on the participants experience as many of them have not been exposed or read about performance appraisal. Their contributions focussed on the need for a transparent process, clear job description with criteria for assessment, a need for a simplistic system, objective outside raters and a continuous process of evaluation with feedback.

The second category dealt with their experiences and expectations of performance appraisal. Several subcategories were discussed and can be summarised as, lack of transparency, supervisor incompetence, subjective process and the discriminatory nature of implementation. From the data collected it would appear that attempts at performance appraisal have left the staff worst off as it was poorly implemented. A new system is being advocated but limited training has been given to appraisers and appraisees that little improvement is noticed. This category also attempted to cover the challenges faced with implementation and tried to capture some recommendations made by the participants. The discussions were individually done and relevant literature was referred to.

The final category dealt with the attitudes, meanings and metaphors observed during the focus group interviews. Subcategories have been identified and discussed individually and reflected the attempts by social workers and managers to implement a performance appraisal system in the dark. It also reflects how this poor attempt has

influenced relationships, created envy and division amongst staff, including managers. This discussion also reflects the big learning curve the participants need to embark upon before performance appraisal can be implemented with the possibility of being a success.



CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter one an outline was given of the qualitative research process used to explore the research problem. Chapter two described the relevant literature in order to frame and provide a backdrop to the study. Chapter three focussed exclusively on the findings of the study, well supported by relevant literature.

The aim of this chapter is as follows:

- To summarize the discussion on research methodology and the subsequent findings of the study;
- To draw conclusions on the findings;
- To make relevant recommendations based on the findings.



4.2 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.2.1 Summary

Due to the subjective nature of the research subject, the qualitative research process was undertaken, using the course of action proposed by De Vos *et al;* (1998). The following phases recommended by De Vos *et al;* (1998) were utilised, that is, selecting a research problem; choosing a qualitative approach; opting for a research design; structuring for data collection; data analysis; data verification and report writing.

The research problem on which the research was based was formulated as follows:

What are the experiences and perceptions of social workers of the current performance appraisal system in a Social Services Department at the Provincial Government of the Western Cape?

The research was based on the qualitative research paradigm as the topic dealt with the subjective nature of experiences and perceptions of social workers of performance appraisal. The research design was based on De Vos *et al*; (2002) and Creswell (1997) assertion that the nature of the research question determines the type of methodology to be used. The inquiry proposed to answer “what” and “how” questions, which is typical in qualitative research. The qualitative research emphasizes the researcher’s role as active learner rather than expert who passes judgement on participants. Data collection entailed decisions on aspects such as defining the population, the research setting and the content.

The method of data collection was focus group interviews. Group discussions were used throughout with a focus on three basic themes. The focus group interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Guidelines for data analysis by Creswell (1997) were used. The researcher coded the focus groups interviews. Categories that emerged from the data analysis were subjected to literature control. Lastly, data verification was done based on the model by Lincoln and Guba in Creswell, 1997; using the criterion of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

4.2.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations relate to the section on the research methodology solely, as conclusions and recommendations on the findings of the study will be dealt with separately in this chapter.

Qualitative approach: This approach proved to be appropriate to the study conducted. The researcher was comfortable with this approach, despite the vast amount and processing of data this generated. As limited research has been done on the perceptions and experiences of performance appraisal for social workers, it makes this an ideal research project using the qualitative methodology.

The researcher recommends well-timed collection and analysis of data due to the protracted and cumbersome nature of this task. The researcher will also recommend methodical investigation in literature study to ensure a current contribution to literary thought on performance appraisal.

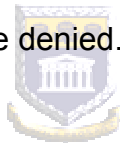
Research Design: No technical hitches were presented with the research design and were matched to the qualitative nature of the study. All participants and the researcher were comfortable with the research design.

Focus group interviews: This method of data collection proved very appropriate considering that the population were social workers and their managers who have very busy schedules. It also provided participants and opportunity to feed off one another's comments resulting in rich data being collected. The interviews were conducted at their site and wasted no time in travel and search for locations. Both focus groups were comfortable with the method of data collection.

The number of participants in the staff group had to be limited to ensure that all contributions were heard. The managers' group were small and may have impacted on the scope of the study.

Audio-taping: As mentioned both focus group interviews were recorded. The staff group had no qualms but the managers' group were initially self-conscious and felt restrained.

The researcher found the use of the audio-tape to be invaluable in collecting accurate information on a highly subjective topic. The researcher also found that whilst one can debate the pros and cons of an audio-tape, the vast contribution to scientific collection of data in qualitative research cannot be denied.



Social workers as participants: The use of social workers as participants contributed to the structured nature of the research process as they were arguably good participants. The researcher chose to interview samples from both groups since they represented a broader and contrasting view of the same subject. One should bear in mind that social workers and managers, as is evident from the findings, have differing views on a particular subject by virtue of their location in the hierarchy of the organisation. This was accommodated in the study by the separation of the staff and manager groups as well as categorising and analysing their views separately. The data will reflect this.

Guidelines for data analysis: The guidelines for data analysis recommended by Creswell (1998) were applied in this study. These could be used with very little adjustment and proved to be very practical and pliable. It can be recommended for novice researchers with limited research experience.

Guba's model of trustworthiness: De Vos *et al*; (1998:351-352) state that most researchers find this model to be invaluable in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative study. Due to the limited time allocation and busy schedules of participants prolonged and varied engagement with participants did not happen. However, informal discussions with peers over a lengthy period contributed to the awareness of the felt difficulty which encouraged this study.



Other actions taken to ensure trustworthiness in this study were; triangulation, peer examination of research methodology and implementation , interviewing skills and techniques such as probing, clarifying and reframing, descriptions of research methodology and code-recorded procedures.

4.3 FINDINGS ON THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

4.3.1 Introduction

In chapter three an extensive discussion was given on the findings of the two focus groups interviews conducted. Reference was made to the main categories and sub-categories (on pages 46-48), which emerged from the data. The findings were

discussed in narrative form and each category and sub-category was highlighted by appropriate quotations from the transcripts and then compared with relevant literature and available research.

Three main themes could be identified from the data collected. These were labelled, understanding of performance appraisal, experiences and expectations of performance appraisal and attitudes that emerged were covered.

The first theme was divided into three sub-categories, i.e. rewarding performance, employee development and assessment/evaluation format. The second theme was on the experiences and expectations and several sub- categories, as reflected in table one emerged. The third theme was on the attitudes revealed and experienced by the participants.



4.3.2 Summary of findings

4.3.2.1 Understanding of performance appraisal

4.3.2.1.1 Rewarding performance

Participants' cognitive understanding of performance appraisal was that it was a tool identifying those who deserve a merit or notch increase or promotion. They expect to be rewarded in some way for their contributions. This limited understanding impacts on the successful future application of a performance appraisal system.

Kohn (1995:4) cautions against a performance appraisal system where rewards play a big role as it do not produce lasting change in attitudes and destroys cooperation due to competition and relationships between supervisors and subordinates.

4.3.2.1.2 Employee development

The managers gave indication that performance appraisal should be about employee development. Successful performance appraisal gives a candidate indication of what the limitation and growth areas are, but can also early on identify talents to be harnessed and thus provide direction for future career planning and paths.

Harris (1997:76) validates the importance of performance appraisal and regular feedback and the linkage to annual career reviews in the human resource planning function.



4.3.2.1.3 Assessment/evaluation format

Critical incidents are the only assessment tools in use to determine levels of performance. There is discontent with this limited understanding of performance appraisal as there are usually two parts to a performance evaluation – a written evaluation and an evaluation conference.

There was no agreement that job analysis and descriptions play a role in performance appraisal. This caused concern amongst staff of the limited understanding of the weight it carries to define expectations for performance. The managers feel that they have

worked with staff on performance plans and thus have set the scene for future performance appraisal clear service standards for all areas of work.

There was agreement amongst both groups that provincial norms, preferably legislated, should be developed to ensure that all offices will appraise their staff along the same lines. Staff also expressed concern about bringing calculations into social work performance appraisal and felt the need for a simplistic system and process to fulfil both evaluation and development functions. Staff concern with objective raters was repeatedly verbalised. Feedback by means of formative assessment and summative assessment is critical to both groups.

Many authors report that there are differences between formal and informal appraisal. The latter will happen twice a year at predetermined interval whilst the former is part of the continuous evaluation of the employee (Bernardin *et al*; 1993; Millar, 1998; Weinbach, 2003).

Daley (1998:376) and Kreitner (1986:327) propose that the one requirement for the ideal performance evaluation system to be on up-to-date job analysis as foundation for the appraisal so that expectations for performance are clear. Millar (1998:222) defines a good performance evaluation system as meeting three main criteria: it should be valid, reliable and practical. Thus it should measure what it is supposed to measure, give consistent appraisals to all individuals, be acceptable to all staff and be relatively easy to use. Lewis *et al*; (2001:133), however, caution that performance appraisal should not

be looked at in isolation and should flow from clearly defined job descriptions with clear standards and expectations and is based on the supervisor having worked closely with the subordinate.

4.3.2.2 Experiences and Expectations

4.3.2.2.1 Lack of transparency

To ensure that distrust of the system is minimized, staff requested that the process of evaluation be transparent. Comments from staff reflect the poor belief they have in the system but this is largely based on their understanding of performance appraisal. They concede that they do not fully understand it, which creates unnecessary tension amongst staff. The absence of clearly defined criteria, communication of the process and the perceived shifting of boundaries for some and not others are some of the comments that support their notion of a process that lacks precision.

Lewis *et al*; (2001:135) recommend that the process of performance appraisal be participative with input on design being sought by a representative group of employees and that criteria for a specific job are developed by the subordinate, supervisor and others with whom the subordinates may work.

4.3.2.2.2. Supervisor incompetence

The perceived lack of competence of the supervisors in the application of performance appraisals impacts on the implementation of any performance appraisal system. The two conflicting purposes of development and evaluation also force managers into

fulfilling conflicting roles in performance appraisal, serving simultaneously as both judge and counsellor. With managers competing on the same level as staff concrete grounds for bias were cited. It is important that supervisors are perceived as, at least, being skilled in the art of management. This is a popular view held by the staff group but also listed as a gap by the supervisor group. The required skills for supervisors are divided into two important concepts; one of training in performance appraisal and management skills. Participants felt strongly that the undermining of their work by colleagues impacts on their motivation to perform and to be subjected to performance appraisal.

De Cenzo *et al*; (1996:321) note that it is important to recognise that performance management is at the heart of the general management processes. Thus it is important that supervisors are perceived as, at least, being skilled in the art of management.



4.3.2.2.3 Subjective process

Due to the emotional nature of the implementation, emotions are not dealt with correctly, leading to greater conflict; and often perceived by the employee as favouritism. Few examples of positive experiences with performance were cited due to the perception of subjectivity on all levels.

De Cenzo *et al*;1996:334) recommend that if good raters cannot be found, the alternative is to make good raters as training of appraisers can make them more accurate raters. This protects the organisation from demoralised staff, decreasing productivity and making it liable for wrongful termination claims.

4.3.2.2.4 Discriminatory

Despite the fact that differences observed between black and white rates in performance do not necessarily imply bias, several confirmations of perceptions confirms the discriminatory nature in terms of colour of the implementation of performance appraisal. Further discrimination is perceived by giving the supervisor advantage when notch increases are recommended and is fuelled by the assertion that both the office head and head office side with the supervisors.

Oppler *et al*; (1992) found that differences observed between black and white rates in performance do not necessarily imply bias; such difference could reflect actual and true differences between such samples.



4.3.2.3 Attitudes

Findings were also reported based on observations from group interaction, feelings expressed, non verbal cues and the manner meanings were expressed and metaphors used. The following attitudes regarding performance appraisal appears to be prevalent;

4.3.2.3.1 Distrust / suspicion of legitimacy

Social workers expressed an attitude of distrust and scepticism in the performance appraisal system. Distrust was also reflected in responses about the encouragement of collegial envy and past behaviour of colleagues. Distrust was specially exhibited in strong feelings about the length of service and “histories of people”. There was open

resentment towards those who referred to past behaviour as standard practice and did not give recognition for improvement in attitude and performance.

4.3.2.3.2 Antagonism

There was an open antagonism when perceived favouritism from supervisors was discussed. Affected participants were at pains to impress upon the group that they also suffered from being a favourite. They expressed resentment at having to suffer being scandalised about and called for sensitivity towards them. However, it became clear that those scandalising did so because they feel jealous as they perceived favourites to be more upwardly mobile than them. It appeared that their aspirations of mobility, acceptance and sound interpersonal relationships were being affected by those who could successfully become the supervisors' favourite. There was open resentment expressed in scandalising and minimizing others efforts and achievement, even amongst friends for the position the favourite assumed.

The worst of the cynicism and scorn were articulated by social workers regarding the discussion pertaining to feedback. The tones were clipped, emotional and gestures indicated that it was to be a short discussion. The figures of speech were aggressively expressed and comments were of disdain and contempt.

Strong feelings reflecting antagonism were evoked when discussions around the length of service and 'histories' of people were discussed. There was open resentment

towards those who referred to past behaviour as standard practice and did not give recognition for improvement in attitude and performance.

The staff displayed feelings of being cheated by management when it came to effective performance appraisal. There were also feelings of resentment / antagonism about what was perceived as 'unfair advantage of supervisors'. This view was also shared by the supervisors who in turn felt victims to subjectivity.

The feelings and attitude of antagonism and resentment was also reflected in responses about discrimination based on race.

4.3.2.3.3 Selective optimism



The managers and some social workers felt encouraged and anticipated the implementation of the new system. However, the managers' enthusiasm was differently expressed and social workers were more guarded.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the research findings and the literary contextualization of the findings, the following recommendations can be made;

- 4.5.1 The social work profession in South Africa needs to establish a Code of Ethics, which will amongst other contain clear criteria and standards of performance for social workers.
- 4.5.2 The above should be legislated and all social workers, irrespective of their context of employment will be subjected to it.
- 4.5.3 Social work education has to be redefined and management training requires being higher on the agenda for social work training institutions.
- 4.5.4 Those social workers, currently employed in management positions should be exposed to skills enhancements in the art of management. The opportunity for lifelong learning in management should be created by social work training institutions.
- 4.5.5 The Department of Social Services and Poverty Alleviation should suspend the current implementation of the performance appraisal system, subject to all social workers in its employ being subjected to extensive training on performance appraisal.

4.5.5 To train all supervisors in rating performance.

4.5.6 A system of ongoing feedback, both formative and summative, should be implemented.

4.5.7 Developing a performance appraisal system suited to assessing the performance of social workers with behaviour based methods.

4.5.8 Implementing the use of multiple raters to increase the probability to attain more accurate information.

4.5.9 That supervisors only do selective rating, keeping them confined to those areas they knowledgeable in.



4.5.10 The Social Services Department should address the hierarchical structure which places social workers and their managers on the same level thus causing unfair competition.


4.5.11 It is recommended that quantitative study be conducted on the impact of performance appraisal on service delivery.

4.5.12 A more comprehensive exploratory study should be undertaken.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong M. 2001. *Performance Management – Key Strategies and Practical Guidelines*. 2nd Edition. London: Kogan Page.
- Arvey, R.D. and Murphy, K.R. 1998. Performance evaluation in work settings. *Annual Review of Psychology, Annual, 1998*.
- Barnett, J. M. 2002. *Occasional Research Paper 1: Focus Group Tips for Beginners 1*. Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning, Texas.
- Benardin, H. J. and Russell, J.E. 1993. *Human Resource Management: An Experiential Approach*. New York. McGraw hill, Inc.
- Bloor M., Frankland J., Thomas M., Robson K. 2001. *Focus Groups in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cascio, W. 1998. *Applied psychology in human resource management*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Coffey, A and Atkinson, P. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data*. London: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design – Choosing among Five Traditions*. London: Sage Publications.
- Daley, D. 1998. 'Designing effective performance appraisal systems'. In S. Condrey (Ed.). *Handbook of human resource management in government*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- De Cenzo, D. A. and Robbins, S. P. 1996. *Human Resource Management*. 5th Edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- De Vos, A.S. (Ed). 1998. *Research at grassroots – a primer for the caring professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- De Vos A.S. (Ed). 2002 *Research at Grass Roots – For the social sciences and human service professions*. Second edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- du Toit, N. 1996. *Assessing the organisational climate of the Wynberg, Cape Town Social Services Department*. Unpublished study. Wynberg: PAWC: Social Services.
- Goleman, D. 1998 *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

- Gray, M. 1996. 'Moral Theory for Social Work'. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, Volume 32(4).
- Graves, C. W. 1974. Human nature prepares for a momentous leap. *The Futurist*.
- Harris, M.M. 1997. *Human Resource Management: A Practical Approach*. Fort Worth: The Dryden Press.
- Harris, M. M. and Schaubroeck, J. 1998. 'A meta-analysis of self-supervisor, self-peer and peer-supervisor ratings'. *Personnel Psychology*, 41.
- Harris M. M. 1994. 'Rater motivation in the performance appraisal context: a theoretical framework'.  *Journal of Management*, Winter 1994.
- Kitzinger, J. 1995. 'Introducing focus groups'. *British Medical Journal*.
- Kohn, A. 1993. *Punished by rewards*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kreitner, R. 1986. *Management*. 3rd Edition. Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Krueger, R A. 1994. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lewis, J. A. Lewis M. D. Souflie, F. Jr. 1991. *Management of Human Service Programs*. 2nd Edition. Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Lewis, J. A., Lewis, M. D. Packard T. Souflie, F. Jr. 2001 *Management of Human Service Programs*. 3rd Edition. Belmont, USA: Brooks/Cole Thomson Learning.

Latham, G.P. and Wexley, K.N. 1994. *Increasing Productivity Through Performance Appraisal*. 2nd Edition. New York: Addison Wesley Publication Company.



Macleod, C. J., Maben, J. and Jones, K. 1996. The use of focus group interviews in nursing research: issues and challenges. *NT. Research* 1.

Mahler, W. 1955. *Principles of Human Relations*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Martin, L.L 1993. *Total Quality Management in Human Service Organizations*. London: Sage Publications.

Martinez, J. 2001. *Assessing Quality, Outcome and Performance Management*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Maslow, A. 1970. *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd Edition. London: Harper & Row.

Maund, L. 2001. *Introduction to Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice*. New York: Palgrave.

McGregor, D. 1959. An uneasy look at Performance Appraisal. *Training and Development Journal*. June 1987.

McKenna, E. and Beech, N. 2002. *Human Resource Management - A concise analysis*. Harlow, England: Financial Times Prentice Hall.

Millar, K. 1998. Evaluating performance. In R. Edwards, J. Yankey and M. Altpeter (Eds.), *Skills for effective management of nonprofit organisations*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Murphy, K.R. and Cleveland, J.N. 1995. *Understanding Performance Appraisal: Social, Organisational, and Goal-based perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Noe, R. A. Hollenbeck, J. R. Gerhart B. Wright, P. M. 1997. *Human Resource Management – Gaining a Competitive Advantage*. Second Edition. Chicago: Irwin.

Oppler, S.H.Campbell, J.P. Pulakos, E.D. Borman, W.C. 1992. Three approaches to the investigation of subgroup bias in performance measurement: review, results and conclusions, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77 (2).

Royse, D. 1991. *Research Methods in Social Work*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.

Schofield, A. 1996. Developments in Performance Appraisal in Commonwealth Universities. *CHEMS Paper No 5*.

Shaw, I. 1996. *Evaluating in Practice*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Shaw, I. and Gould, N. 2001. *Qualitative Research in Social Work – Introducing Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Smit, A.dV. 2004. *Performance Appraisal*. Unpublished article. Rondebosch: University of Cape Town.

Smither, J.W (Ed.). 1998. *Performance Appraisal – State of the Art in Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey – Bass Publishers.

Stevens, P.E. 1996. Focus Groups: collecting aggregate-level data to understand community health phenomena. *Public Health Nursing*, **13**.

Swanepoel, B. (Ed.). 2003. *South African Human Resource Management- Theory and Practice*. Third Edition. Lansdowne: JUTA and Co.

Webb, C. and Kevern, J. 2001. Focus groups as a research method: a critique of some of the aspects of their use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **33(6)**.

Weinbach, R. W. 2003. *The Social Worker as Manager – a practical guide to success*. Fourth Edition. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.



Wiese, D. S. and Buckley. M. R. 1998. The evolution of the performance appraisal process. *Journal of Management History*, Volume 4 No.3. MCB University Press.

<http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~wpoff/cor/grp/prejudice.html> 2004/11/12

<http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~wpoff/cor/grp/andbehav.html> 2004/11/12

<http://www.hyperdictionary.com.dictionary/understanding> 2004/11/12

<http://www.hyperdictionary.com.dictionary/understanding> (Webster's 1913 Dictionary)
2004/11/12

<http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn> 2004/11/12



ADDENDUM: FOCUS GROUP PREPARATION

DATES: 21 October 2004, 8 am to 10am
25 October 2004, 2pm to 4pm

TARGET GROUPS: Social Work staff (10 to 12 members)
Social Work Management Team (4 members)
Social Services, District Office

Programme:

1. Introduction

- Reassure 'Confidentiality'
- Seek permission to record proceedings
- Clarify role of interviewer (my opinion not important, their views being explored, what my nodding may or may not imply)
- Request that they identify themselves when they speak

2. Background to the study

Social workers have no easy measure of performance – passionate about wanting us to receive the recognition the profession deserves.

Why I selected this office?



3. Themes

3.1 What is your understanding of PA systems?

3.2 Experiences of PA

What are you experiences?

Explore resistance and positive experiences

3.3 Process followed with the implementation

What preparation is done?

How do you experience PA implementation?

Explore experiences in terms of Feedback and or follow up.

3.4 What do you recommend the process for implementation to be?

Explore the views on appropriate steps for implementation

Notes:

How did the themes develop?

(Agreement, heated feeling)

Report on group interaction, dynamics

Atmosphere during discussions

Contributions and interactions