

## Is Performance Appraisal System Anachronistic in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana? Evidence from the University of Cape Coast

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**Abstract:** *Until recently, performance appraisal (PA) has been admired by many organizations due to its relevance. However, in recent times, there has been a controversy over the use of PA systems. Many employees have come to believe that PA's purposes are out of date and as such cannot play any meaningful roles for most organizations. This study therefore, examined the extent to which PA system has been anachronistic in terms of its purposes as perceived by employees in the University of Cape Coast. A quantitative method with random sampling technique was used. The sample size was 233. The results of the study revealed that PA system is still perceived to be useful although the perceptions amongst respondents in terms of its purposes varied. While some employees perceived the purposes to be administrative, others consider its purposes to be more of developmental. However, most senior staff considered the current PA exercise as mere formality, which is there to reflect on the institutional culture of assessment. To them PA system is a waste of time and therefore anachronistic. Thus the University should reconsider and redesign its PA system to be in line with the aspirations of its employees by including them in its execution.*

**Keywords:** *Administrative, Developmental, Performance appraisal, Purposes, Ghana,*

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### I. Introduction

For many years now Performance appraisal systems have been known to be part of organisational issues which are often dreaded by employees in every organisation. They are meant to evaluate an employees' progress over a specified period and decide whether their performance meets the prospects of the jobs assigned to them. Formal performance appraisal has become a widespread instrument of human resource management [1]. The basis for performance appraisal is that they assist employees to improve upon their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Supporters argue that it helps employees appreciate how they are doing in relation to others in the organisation and provides them the chance to see areas of improvement [2]. Thus, it can be said that once an employee's performance is appraised, whether formally or informally, there is a good reason for bringing the process out into the open so that employees will be aware of how it is done, when it is done, and what the results are. [3] argues that employees are often hungry for feedback on how they are doing and where they stand, and as such organizations and managers owe that to their employees. PA is therefore a form of false kindness to withhold information from those who are performing poorly about their supervisors' assessments of them. The idea here is that PA systems can be seen as instruments that enable employees look toward the future and expect ways by which they can develop to become better performing employees and to realise high achievers. In actual fact, from a business perspective, PA can potentially increase productivity and make operations more efficient. This is because by having the ability to identify the lowest performers, organisational managers can decide whether those who score low have the possibilities to improve with additional training. However, if they cannot, then it might be more useful for the employer to dismiss the employee, while recognising and awarding higher performers accordingly. In this way, performance can be improved as other remaining employees are motivated [4; 5]

However, many organisations have begun to criticize and shred off the systems of performance appraisal as a result of perceived weaknesses. Critics of the systems have the beliefs that they have a number of limitations and that the time it takes to execute an appraisal is no way equivalent to the benefits. Among the critics is quality guru [6], who labeled performance appraisal systems a "Deadly Disease" in organisations, and claimed that they "leave people bitter, ..... some even depressed, unfit for work for weeks after receipt of rating, unable to comprehend why they are inferior" ( p. 102). [7] have found that raters often allow ulterior motives to color their appraisals of subordinates. [8] also argues that both appraisers and appraisees find the PA process distasteful and dysfunctional, and that PA causes low morale, reduces teamwork, and creates tension between employees and their employers. Besides, because the performance appraisal is a one-way form of communication, it places the boss in an authoritative and unapproachable position. Opponents further argue that

since all employees are different, and many PA systems have criteria that may or may not be exactly related to that employee's particular job, they cannot possibly be put into a box of prearranged criteria [9]. Thus, PA systems are lightning rods for controversy. While some believe they are indispensable, others accept that they are ineffective at best and in fact operate in most cases to the disadvantage of the most organizations. Nonetheless, while PAS have been seen as an indispensable tool to the organisational success by others, convincing evidence of appraisal's contribution to individual performance, let alone organizational performance, remains elusive [10; 11]

Thus, considering the above strong feelings on both sides of this issue, this paper aims at examining the extent to which PA system has been anachronistic in terms of its purposes as perceived by employees in the tertiary institutions in Ghana using the University of Cape Coast as a case study. The general objective is to gain an insight into how University of Cape Coast Administrative staff members view the purposes of PA in the context of today's management practices and to contribute to the debate on the usefulness of PA system. Based on the research findings we would then be able to make some recommendations for the Human Resource department. The intention is that the recommendations will help in making the performance appraisals more important and relevant to the HR department and the staff in general.

In achieving the above stated goal, the study first discusses the concept of performance appraisal as well as its purposes. This will be followed by the method used in this study, the study results and the discussion, and finally the conclusions and the recommendation

## **II. The Concept Of PA**

The concept of PA has been variously been defined by standard and authoritative texts as such has not any specific definition that can commonly be applied in the field of management. However, in terms of its contribution to organizational performance certain commentators see PA as a "strategic and integrated process that delivers sustained success to organizations by improving the performance of people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of individual contributors and teams" [12].

[13] also argues 'performance appraisals ... are ... a key lever to enhance organizational performance'(p. 289)

Similarly, in general terms, [14] argue that PA can be described as a systematic attempt to make a distinction between the more efficient employees from the less efficient ones and to differentiate among strengths and weaknesses individuals have across many job elements. In a way, PA is a formal process of employee monitoring [15] and usually involves "evaluating performance based on the judgments and opinions of subordinates, peers, supervisors, other managers and even workers themselves" [16]. In the same way, [17] asserts that PA involves "activities through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards" ( p. 473).

Given the above definitions it can be said that the primary goal of PA is to support employees' to change their behaviour for performance enhancement [18] (Roberson & Stewart, 2006). This takes place when managers either coach or counsel workers, communicate performance expectations as well as motivate subordinates to perform optimally [19]. Thus, an effective PAS not only correctly evaluates performance level of workers but also assists workers to meet the future work force obligation of an organization. In view of this, [20] describes the role of the PA as a tool for looking forward to what need to be done by employees in an organization so as to realize the purpose of the job to meet new challenges. However, in meeting these challenges, PA system cannot be considered as one way process rather it is a function consisting of a number of interconnected elements which include implementation, management, and communication [21].

## **III. Purposes Of Performance Appraisal System**

PASs are being used for a number of purposes in organizations. The literature indicates that they can offer workers with information about how they are perceived and where they stand in the organization. PASs can provide developmental feedback on the strengths that workers should take advantage of and the weaknesses where improvement may be needed. PA systems are valuable for keeping records of performance, good or bad, to provide information and justification for compensation, promotion, and sometimes termination or other disciplinary decisions [22]. From the various studies conducted, it has been noted that PAS improve employee performance and productivity [15; 23], develop employees to increase their skills [24] and to develop those performance areas where employee has low ratings [25].

Administratively, [26] argued that PASs are being used for decisions concerning salary, promotion, retention or termination/layoff. In the case of developmental purposes, PAS is used for decisions like training of employees, furnishing appraisee with regular performance feedback, employees' transfers, determining employees' strengths and weaknesses [26].

These purposes, according to [26] have significant impact on manager's motivation to rate his/her employees. It is claimed that manager do not severely rate employees if ratings are used for developmental purpose instead of salary decisions. On the other hand, [23] asserted that motivation of managers to raise ratings

is high if administrative decisions like pay raises, promotion are made on the basis of ratings and low if ratings are used for other purposes like feedback and development. Furthermore, [26] realised that employees showed positive attitude for appraiser and appraisal, when PAS was used for developmental purposes, while in fact these attitudes were absent when PAS was used for administrative purposes.

However, it has also been noted there are various costs of PA system. According to [22] there are financial costs as well as the cost of all the time it takes for managers to think about, prepare for, and conduct individual PA interviews with all of the appraised employees. In addition, PA system has the psychological costs such as disappointment, feelings of inferiority [27]. [8] also contends that PA system has other costs such as low morale and reduced motivation to fit into teamwork that could lead to concrete monetary costs as well. Also, others have the opinions that PA has other costs, such as increased turnover, decreased productivity, and damage to employees' mental well-being [22]. These are supported by [28] who argue that managers and lower employees do react negatively if the stated purpose of performance appraisal is not the same as the perceived results. In the same way, [29] argued that protests increase and satisfaction is reduced when employees perceive no value of organization's PA system. Similar opinions are expressed by [6], the father of Total Quality Management (TQM) who according to [27] listed PA as one of the "seven deadly disease" (p. 296) of management practices as it holds front-line employees responsible for poor organizational performance.

#### IV. Method

The study, however, adopted the survey method of quantitative research approach. In this study, data was collected with questionnaire distributed among the administrative and clerical support staff working in the public sector tertiary institution, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The frame of the available population was identified through personnel records of the individual Colleges/Faculties/Schools provided by the Division of Human Resource of the University of Cape Coast. The available population was defined as senior and junior employees who have participated as appraisees. The target population thus consisted of One Thousand Two Hundred

The sample size covered about 23.3% of the target population of the study (that is, 233 out of 1200) which was determined using the [30] mathematical relation model;

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{D^2(N - 1) + X^2(1 - P)}$$

s - Required sample size

$X^2$  = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841).

N= the population size.

P= the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d= the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

For the collection of the data from potential respondents, we personally distributed the questionnaires with covering letters providing information on the rationale of the study. We also offered envelopes to respondents so that confidentiality of their answers could be guaranteed. It was self administered and while respondents were asked to immediately return back questionnaires after completion, the whole exercise took about two weeks to gather all the responses.

In order to obtain the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, the first section of the questionnaires was designed in such a way that the respondents could provide answers relating to their backgrounds. Employees' perceptions concerning the two main purposes of the PA system were determined with two scales "Administrative Purpose" and "Developmental Purpose" made up of nine items. Items of these two scales were taken from the earlier research studies such as [31; 32]. The scale "Administrative Purpose" contains four items while the scale "Developmental Purpose" consists of five items. With the exception of the demographic variables, all other items were determined on five-point Likert response scales with 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

#### V. Study Results

On the basis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, it was found that 55% of the respondents were males and 45% were females. In terms of the age group, majority of the respondents (30%) were within the age group of 51 and above, while the minority (21.5%) were the younger ones with the ages between 20 and 30 years. Those who fell within the age groups of 31-40 and 41-50 were 22% and 26.5% respectively. This shows that the majority of the respondents were comparatively older employees.

With regard to number of years of working experience, the results indicate that a greater number of the respondents, about 29%, have only worked for less than two years, in contrast to 24% who have worked for two to five years. Only 18% have worked for six to nine years, while 20.5% have worked for 10-13 years. However, those who have worked for fourteen years and above were only 9%. The implication here is that those with less

experience are strongly represented, while those with more experience are least represented. This is reflected in the professional ranking of the respondents with the junior staff forming the majority of the respondents (52%), while the senior staff is 48 %.

**V.1 Perception On The Purposes Of Performance Appraisal**

On the question of the main purposes for conducting performance appraisal at the UCC, after analysing the responses, the results of the data revealed that majority of our respondents perceived PA system to have two main positive purposes namely: administrative (salary increment, promotion etc) and developmental (identifying training needs, allocation of task etc). In terms of Gender, 20% of male respondents considered the purpose of PA as administrative, while 44.5% had the positive view that the purpose of PA was for development. However, 35.5% perceived PA to be outdated as it is used as a mere formality. In this case, the institutions only adopt PA systems as yearly rituals thereby making its usefulness less obvious in terms of development nor administrative. Thus, most male employees perceived PA system to have clear costs in terms of money and time. Much in the same way, a fewer percentage number of female (21.1%) also considered the purpose of PA as only administrative. However, unlike the male, a greater percentage number of female (53.3%) perceived the purpose of PA as both administrative and development, with only 25.6% perceiving the purpose as a mere formality.

Overall, it can be said that there are differences in the assertion made by both male and female, and this study result in differences are reflected on the results of the t-test ( $t= 3.485, p = 0.001$ ) with a mean difference of 0.185

In the case of age group, it is clear that those within lower age groups (20-30 and 31-40) mainly believe that the purpose of PA is mainly developmental with a percentage figure of 79.1% and 65.9% respectively. In these age groups, only 11.3% and 20.0% respectively assert that the purpose of PA is mainly for ritual which is only to conform to the institutional cultural rules.

This is in contrast to those within higher age groups (41-50 and 51- above). Whilst 66.4% and 61.7% in the age groups of 41-50 and 51-above respondents respectively argue that the purpose of PA is mainly for both administrative and development, 33.6% and 40.3% respectively argued that the PA practices are anachronistic which are meant to serve the interest of the organisational culture. These differences are well supported by the results of F-test as it can be seen from ANOVA “TABLE 1”.

**Table 1 - ANOVA for performance appraisal purposes (age group)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	114.743	3	38.248	13.607	0.000
Within Groups	550.937	196	2.811		
<b>Total</b>	<b>665.680</b>	<b>199</b>			

Source: Field survey, 2015

From “TABLE 1”, after testing the relationship, it can be said that considering the F-value 13.607 whose significance is 0.000 that is less than 0.05, there is significant relationship between the age in which one belongs and the perception on the purpose of PA at a 5% level of significance. Thus, it was found out that the perception on the purpose of PA system in the University is dependent on the age group that one belongs. The same pattern of results can also be seen when it comes to ranking of staff (both the junior and senior staff). From the junior staff, a greater percentage number of respondents (72.5%) accepted that the purpose of PA was solely for development, whilst only 17.5% and 10% arguing that it was for administrative and mere formality respectively. In opposite, only 16.7% senior staff believe that is solely for development and 48.3% claimed that it was for both administrative, while the majority of 35% claimed that the PA exercise was just a mere formality, and thus anachronistic. These differences between these two groups are supported by the results of T-test ( $t=9.752, p= 0.000$ ).

These age group’s results is also mirrored in the views of the staff experiences. Amongst these groups, a greater number (54.9% and 62.1%) of relatively less experience (under 2 years and 2-5years respectively) considered the purpose of PA as development. Only 30% and 15.1% of those under 2 years working experiences claimed that the PA system was meant for administrative and for ritual purposes respectively. On the other hand, majority of the more experienced ones (40-50 and 51-above) also see the purpose as both administrative and development (63.4% and 53.3 respectively), with 36.6 % and 46.3% respectively perceiving that the purpose was only for rituals and therefore outdated. These differences are corroborated by the ANOVA “TABLE 2”.

**Table 2- ANOVA for performance appraisal purposes (staff experience)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	262.390	4	65.598	31.718	.000
Within Groups	403.290	195	2.068		
<b>Total</b>	<b>665.680</b>	<b>199</b>			

Source: Field survey, 2015

From the results of “TABLE 2”, it can be said that there is significant difference within these groups in terms of their perceptions about the purpose of PA ( $F=31.718$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). This might not be surprising taking into account the fact that most of the junior staff are within the lower age groups and have no or little experiences and have only had PA on the basis of development but not for higher wages or promotion. This is in contrast to the senior ones who are matured and have more experience in the University. For these groups of people, they have had experience with PA for these two main purposes which include: administrative and development and as such they seem to understand the whole exercise of PA within the University.

From the above perspectives, it can be noted that the employees in University of Cape Coast (UCC) do not perceived the purposes of PA to be anachronistic instead it is considered to be still useful. To both the junior and senior staff in UCC, the performance appraisal system operates as a very important tool in the facilitation of decision making of management. However, to the senior staff, not only does PA allow management to examine the contributions of individuals to the organization, but it also helps in identifying individuals’ training needs which help them to develop their skills for later personal development. This can be attributed to the senior staff numerous experiences with PA system in the University.

## VI. Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the extent to which PA system has been anachronistic in terms of its purposes as perceived by employees in the tertiary institutions in Ghana using the University of Cape Coast as a case study. The general objective was to gain knowledge and understanding of University of Cape Coast administrative staff members view on the purposes of PA in the context of today’s management practices. Many questions were asked and various answers were given by the respondents who happened to be the administrative staff of UCC. Looking critically at the stated objective of this study in comparison with the findings of the study, it can be said that the purpose for undertaking the study was achieved. The present study showed mixed responses i.e. neutral, agree and disagree of our respondents about the purposes of PAS at UCC. So the implication here is that there are divergent views amongst the various employees when it comes to the purposes of PA system. Nevertheless, they all had a common view that PA had been useful and that the purpose of PA system was not out dated. They had the opinion that PA system had various uses, which included the following: identification of individual training needs, allocation of tasks and making decisions regarding employees career moves, salary increase, promotions, retentions, terminations, layoffs, and identifying poor performance. These various uses were categorized into two, namely: administrative (i.e. evaluative) and developmental uses.

From their responses, it was clearly demonstrated that some junior staff perceived the use of appraisal to be more for developmental. The possible reason for this perception was because developmental use has its futuristic and helpful focus for employees who have been newly employed. This is in line with the literature, which asserts that people have an idea about the developmental use of PA, because development function is forward looking, directed towards increasing the capacity of employees to be more productive, effective, efficient and satisfied in the future. It covers such things as job skills, career planning, employee motivation, and effective coaching between managers and subordinates [33]. It is any endeavor concerned with enhancing attitudes, experiences, and skills that improve the effectiveness of employees [34]. Thus, with the junior staff interested in developing their careers, the management has every reason to put them through this developmental use of PA. This, ultimately, is to fill their skills and knowledge gap on the job, since they are fairly new staff. It is, therefore, not surprising that most of these junior staff considered the use of PA to be developmental, as it reflects what they have been informed about the need to have the PA exercise.

On the other hand, relatively a greater percentage number of senior staff had the view that the purpose of PA was for administrative. This means that senior staff was more aware of the fact that PA was used for such objectives as salary increases and retentions as well as lay-offs. This kind of use, according to the literature, is backward looking where past performance is reviewed in the light of the results achieved. Basically, it is used, first, to allow organizations to make decisions about individuals, and second, to compare candidates on some type of objective basis [35]. This is in contrast to some studies in the literature. For example, in a study done by [36] it was found that while some few senior respondents (29 percent) ranked using appraisals for promotion decisions and salary decisions (that is administrative purposes), majority of the respondents (65 percent) also

had the view that the purpose of PA was meant to be developmental. In this same study, although there was no clear indication for one use over the other, in fact, many senior respondents actually considered developmental uses, such as career planning, and training and development, as most important purpose. Elsewhere in the literature, it has been stated that development provided by the immediate supervisor has been shown to be an important and common use of performance appraisal [36]. In the study done by [37], it was shown that senior employees were more conscious of the fact that employee development and performance improvement were more important to them and, as such, wanted more emphasis to be laid on it in PA process. Previous researches on PA [38; 39] have also indicated that respondents' have more interest in the appraisals when they are used for developmental purposes, but are less enthusiastic when they are used for administrative purpose.

Besides these two perceptions, in the context of this current study, the majority of the senior staff considered the purpose to be both administrative and developmental. This study result is not anything new, taking into account what exists in the literature, which suggests that PA serves two basic purposes: the first is administrative ( i.e. evaluative) and the second is developmental [40; 35]. Considering this perception amongst most senior respondents on the dual use of PA, it can be concluded that this is not surprising, since they might have experienced both uses in their life time. However, there is a controversy over whether PA can be used for both purposes simultaneously. This is because, according to Boswell and [34, some researches indicated that the developmental and evaluative uses of PA are incompatible and should not be used together, although other research indicated there is either no correlation, or a slight positive correlation, when they are used together. In a study by [40], it was found that using the two together will not allow the institution to receive the maximum benefits available from the appraisal process as there can be a conflict. This is particularly true when it comes to employees' compensation. In this case, the results of the study can be affected as it could influence how honest and truthful a supervisor is with the employee. For instance, assessing a staff for promotion, salary increase and at same time career development needs identification could corrupt the assessor's results, especially if the 'ratee' is a senior staff, since a lower rating in one area could jeopardize the prospects of the other.

Finally, it must be said that from the current study, the results strongly suggest, however, that most of the senior employees see PA to have been reduced to into a mere formality, and a fruitless exercise. Most of the senior staff was convinced that PA exercises were there to fulfill institutional requirements. Implicitly it can be said that appraisals in UCC don't hold much value for most administrative staff, and they do little to elevate staff engagement, commitment or satisfaction levels.

In essence, it is fair to say that by the perceptions of university staff, the PAS purposes are not clear in their minds. The main reason could be attributed to less information about the purposes of the system or PAS's feeble connection with its purposes and inability to support HR decisions. For this reason, there is a need for the management to undoubtedly make the staff be aware of the actual purposes of PAS in the University by providing information. Furthermore, management should candidly tie HR decisions with PAS. This will develop perceptions in the staff that PAS has some purposes for which it has been practiced in the university.

## **VII. Limitations**

Despite the fact that this study has its strengths of being objective as a result of the use of quantitative method, it is still without limitations. First limitation is that this research has been conducted in only one public tertiary institution in Ghana considering the fact that there are as many as nine public universities in the country. Besides, the staffs that took part in the survey were only administrative employees excluding others like the lecturers. This means that only a small fraction of the employees' views within the university were considered. Therefore the results cannot be generalised to all the University staffs working not only in the University of Cape Coast but also the country as whole.

Another limitation is that the study has determined perceptions of PAS purpose based on individual's views which were subjective. As such, it is possible that individuals may have been influenced by their own experiences which can have positive or negative impact on their responses.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

This study has offered useful insight into employees in UCC's perceptions about the purposes of PA system in Tertiary institutions in Ghana. The results have shown that the employees have positive views on PA system in the institution in terms of purposes. To these employees, the purposes of PA system vis-à-vis administrative and developmental are not anachronistic rather they are still functional in our tertiary institutions such as the UCC. The implication here is that despite the numerous costs involved in PA system, the employees perceptions are favourable to the preservation of PA system within our universities and therefore should be kept at all costs. Institutions, whether they do or do not have formal PA programmes, should try hard to sustain the benefits of these programmes. However, the fact that there were discrepancies in terms of its purposes, appear to suggest that most employees have not yet had the chance to experience all the benefits associated with the purposes of the system.

Against this background, we suggest that institutional leaders must endeavor to identify all the perceived benefits employees are expecting to receive from their PA systems, find means to assess the extent to which those benefits in fact accrue to the institution, and finally, find means of improving more effectively and efficiently any or all of what has already been done. This will enhance employees' perceptions that the system is employed for achieving practical purposes common to all. Furthermore, employees will perceive that the management is becoming aware of their job performance and their hard works are not likely to be ignored and unrewarded. Eventually, the workers in the Ghanaian tertiary institutions will have positive attitudes toward PAS.

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