"Not Worth the Sweat": Performance Management Rewards at a South African University

by **Sadi Mokhaneli Seyama** and **Clive Smith**

Abstract

The advent in universities of managerialism with its drive for individual accountability through performance management systems (PMSs) is contentious. With the implementation of a PMS at a South African university, academic heads of department (HoDs) have been key players in the performance reward component of the PMS. This study, following a qualitative descriptive research design based on in-depth interviews, explores a sample of HoDs' experiences and perceptions of the institution's performance reward system. Most of the participants are sceptical of the PMS as they view it as a business-oriented practice that is not compatible with the nature and objectives of higher education institutions (HEIs). They consider the reward strategy not only to have a limited effect in promoting high performance behaviour, but to be a cause of discontent due to implementation inconsistencies, nebulous award criteria, lack of transparency about ratings, and the negligible monetary value of the reward.

Introduction

The long-standing professional trust approach to performance in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) has, as elsewhere in the world, come under the scrutiny of government bureaucrats. The *South African Higher Education Act* (South Africa, 1997) provides the legal framework for transformation in HEIs, which includes a paradigm shift in the approach to quality assurance (CHE, 2004; Ullyatt, 2004). This change introduced a system of accountability to the central government as the major stakeholder through the Council on Higher Education (CHE), modelled on corporate governance practice (CHE, 2004). This signalled a clean break with the traditional *laissez-faire* approach to quality based on an academic culture of professionalism, academic autonomy and collegiality. Formerly, individual accountability was normative rather than prescribed by formal bureaucratic evaluations (Molefe, 2010). Economic challenges, together with increasing stake-holder expectations, have created a highly competitive higher education (HE) environment (Egginton, 2010; Molefe, 2010). To ensure a viable academic market share, HEIs introduced performance management systems (PMSs) that integrate individual performance with institutional strategy. These PMSs reflect institutional business needs, determine high performance expectations, and require accountability (Insler, 2010).

Morris, Stanton and Mustard (2011) argue that the optimum measure for employee accountability is a PMS linked to rewards. Such a PMS is an integrated process that evaluates and tracks performance within the work environment in order to judge outcomes in relation to job specifications (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 2006). A PMS is deemed to be an "instrument for improving efficiency, effectiveness and equity of programs, organizations and services" (Van Helden, Johnsen & Vakkuri, 2012, p. 161). In the context of a HEI viewed as a corporate

entity, where performance is driven by the goals of the organization, employees are accountable, both individually and collectively, to the organization for meeting its performance targets (Shraeder & Jordan, 2011). This explains why employees are considered to be not just a cost to an organization, but also an investment that managers should fully optimise (Shraeder & Jordan, 2011). However, managers are also to ensure that employees benefit from the PMS such that there is mutual benefit to both managers and employees. In order to be globally relevant, HEIs resort to attracting high performing and ambitious employees by adopting more competitive corporate strategies for staff recognition, rewards and retention (Higher Education Funding Council of England, 2005). Similarly, acknowledging that a performance reward system is one of the success factors for institutional competitiveness, the University of Melbourne (2007) states its intent to differentiate itself by focusing on adequately rewarding its distinguished academics with cutting edge, inventive and significant reward practices. However, as Terpstra and Honoree (2009) have noted, there was limited evidence at the time to corroborate any claims endorsing the success of performance reward strategies in HEIs.

Since performance management in an academic environment is a complex and sensitive issue (Sousa, de Nijs, & Hendriks, 2010), managing its performance is important in order to "provide organizations with a strategic advantage in their ongoing pursuit of competitive goals and imperatives" (Nankervis & Compton, 2006, p. 84). Furthermore, Egginton (2010, p. 120) argues that:

> Performance and reward are, at one and the same time, emotive yet objective concepts, at the very heart of management theory and practice. It is performance that drives productivity, competitive advantage and profitability. It is the reward system that ultimately drives cost base, retention and recruitment and – in its widest sense – shapes a healthy work environment.

The present study explores HoDs' experiences and perceptions of the PMS and its associated financial rewards at a South African university. This focus is particularly relevant given that these HoDs are at the core of the institution's drive to achieve its vision, mission and strategic goals.

We begin with a review of a selection of literature on performance rewards as part of a PMS, followed by an overview of performance rewards in HEIs within both global and South African contexts. Following the outline of the methodological procedure followed, the research findings are presented and discussed in the light of the literature.

Performance Rewards as a Dimension of PMSs

Organizational performance is a key indicator of how an organization needs to position itself for future growth (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & De Menezes, 2012). Individually and collectively, employees determine organizational performance. Its employees' performance is therefore critical to an organization. So, too, are the organization's strategies for performance development, execution, review and rewards. Within a performance management context, performance rewards are considered to be one of the most important predictors of job satisfaction (Hellriegel et al., 2012, p. 420). These rewards can be financial (payments in the form of wages, salaries and bonuses) and/or non-financial (benefits such as sick leave, insurance and retirement plans, and so forth) (Galanou, Georgakopoulos, Sotiropoulos, & Dimitris, 2010). Non-financial rewards, such as career development opportunities to upgrade employees' skills, are an option often used by public sector organizations such as HEIs (Romzek, as cited in Westover & Taylor, 2010). Rewards can also be intrinsic to the work, for instance rewards related to individual need satisfaction, the job and organization context, and management behaviour (Hellriegel et al., 2012, p. 410).

Financial rewards have sometimes been characterised as investments that organizations use to strengthen ties between themselves and their employees, thereby reinforcing employees' motivation (Behn, as cited in Westover & Taylor, 2010). Financial rewards serve to demonstrate recognition of employees' contribution to organization success, enhance their career ambitions, promote high performance, and elicit acknowledgement from their colleagues (Armstrong, 2010). Conversely, when financial rewards are perceived to be inconsequential, they can result in low job satisfaction and high turnover intent among employees (Armstrong, 2010). Galanou et al. (2010) and Hurd, Barcelona, and Meldrum (2008) emphasise that performance rewards are essential organization tools that can be deployed by leaders and managers to enhance employees' motivation and performance directly or indirectly.

Extrinsic, such as financial, rewards are connected to employees' performance in relation to their job description and the related key performance areas (KPAs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) (Diamond, as cited in Carl & Kapp, 2004) over a period of time (Galanou et al., 2010). This enables the measurable, and hence "objective", assessment of an employee's performance. However, Ngcamu (2013, p. 317) posits that "there is one potential determinant of PMS effectiveness that has received relatively little attention: how closely the results of the performance management system are tied to significant rewards".

The motivational efficacy of rewards is directly proportional to employees' perception of the rewards' correspondence with their own performance, on the one hand, and, on the other, with how employees assess their own accomplishments and rewards in relation to those of other employees (Adams, 1963; Hurd et al., 2008). To ensure that rewards produce motivation, Cintron and Flaniken (2011) suggest that there must always be direct (perceived) compatibility between the levels of performance input and that of the rewards output. They contend that a (perceived) disparity between rewards and performance could affect motivation negatively. Employees may with-hold effort and commitment to compensate for lower rewards when they feel under-rewarded (Kidwell & Bennett, 1993). Some may undermine the organiza-tion in subtle ways such as via illegitimate absenteeism or sabotage of equipment (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). Others may seek greener pastures. On the other hand, employees who perceive themselves to be rewarded fairly for their effort are, in comparison with their fellow employees, more likely to be committed and loyal to their organization and to put in extra effort (Sonnenberg & Goldberg, 1992). In addition, even a well-designed reward system will have little performance-enhancing value if employees do not understand it (Hellriegel et al., 2012, p. 429).

Some studies suggest that financial performance rewards can have an opposite effect to the intended goal of enhancing performance (Forrest, 2008). Possible negative effects include, for example, unhealthy competition among employees and decreased job satisfaction due to a hostile work environment (Kellough & Seldon, as cited in Kim, 2010). More importantly, public sector employees have indicated a preference for non-financial as opposed to financial rewards (Forest, 2008; Pearce, Stevenson, & Perry, 1985). In addition, the use of monetary incentives to improve employee performance in the public sector could escalate personnel budgets to an unsustainable level (Holzer & Rabin, as cited in Kim, 2010). Furthermore, the exclusive use of pay-for-performance rewards could have the effect of diluting intrinsic public service motivation (Hurd et al., 2008). However, Westover and Taylor (2010) found that public sector employees who are aware of the high rewards earned by their counterparts in the private sector often displayed low levels of job motivation, suggesting that it is not the financial reward itself, but the amount awarded, that has motivational value. Proponents of monetary performance rewards are emphatic that financial rewards can attract more competent and better-qualified employees (Holzer & Rabin, in Kim, 2010).

The argument for a strong link between performance and reward value suggests that employers should be aware of the *kinds of reward* that employees appreciate most in order to develop human resource systems that will facilitate agreed upon fair and transparent processes for employees to gain these rewards (Hurd et al., 2008). Hurd et al. (2008) believe that inappropriate utilisation of rewards can hinder high staff performance. Performance reward systems, and especially financial ones, have to do with the complexity of the human condition. As such, they are fraught with sensitivity, ambiguity and the potential for destructive unintended consequences. For this reason, it is incumbent upon HEIs to thoroughly interrogate the notion and practice of performance reward systems before they are introduced. Any performance reward system should have written across it: "Fragile. Handle with Care".

Performance Rewards in Higher Education

Within the HE context, performance-related rewards have not had the desired effect. From an international historical perspective, Kamen and Sarup's (1978) study reveals that discrepancies in performance-linked reward systems cause employees to distrust institutions. As a consequence, employer-employee relations are harmed. Equally, Pearce et al. (1985) found that a performance-contingent pay system did not enhance the performance of academic managers or of the organization in general. Likewise, Prewitt, Phillips, and Yasin (1991) refer to research in universities that confirmed "faculty perceptions of problems with merit pay plans, and faculty levels of dissatisfaction with such plans". Watts (as cited in Carl & Kapp, 2004) argues that the effect of a pay-for-performance incentive scheme on research and publication outputs was inadequate to prompt performance-enhancing behaviour. Similarly, in Terpstra and Honoree's (2009) study, academics reported that monetary performance rewards had no positive influence on their teaching and research motivation.

Academic performance management was introduced in South African HEIs much later than in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England and the USA (Franzsen, 2003). Empirical evidence from South African studies demonstrates that academics are apprehensive of and resistant to the notion of performance management, perceiving it to be a corporate tool inappropriate for a HEI context which is concerned with knowledge generation, not profit (Du Plessis, 2011; Ngcamu, 2013). Those South African HEIs that first introduced PMSs were conversant with the various models, structures and formats that had been introduced in other contexts. As such, they were in a position to develop an authentic and effective performance management culture among South African academics (Du Plessis, 2011; Franzsen, 2003; Mapesela & Strydom, 2004). However, South African HEIs have been confronted

by implementation challenges that defeat the purpose of performance management, which is to enhance individual and organization performance (Du Plessis, 2011; Franzsen, 2003; Mapesela & Strydom, 2004).

Seyama and Smith (2013) found that inconsistencies within the implementation process, as well as ill-defined rating criteria, significantly impede effective PMS implementation. Parsons and Slabbert (2001) furthermore found the lack of adequate financial resources to compensate staff to be one of the impediments to the successful implementation of a monetary performance rewards strategy within HEIs. Academics perceive their remuneration as not market-related (Pienaar & Bester, 2009) and have expressed dissatisfaction with their insignificant bonuses (Franzsen, 2003; Potgieter, 2002). Ball (as cited in Pienaar & Bester, 2009) highlights that, due to the perceived inconsequential monetary rewards, HEIs are at risk of failing to attract and retain highly competent and experienced academics. This is of concern in the light of South African HEIs' intentions to achieve more challenging strategic objectives and attain global relevance. These studies also question the view that academics have a lesser regard for monetary rewards (Forrest, 2008), particularly in view of Potgieter's (2002) finding that inadequate salaries is one of the reasons South African academics experience job dissatisfaction and leave HEIs.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted on the basis that it endeavours to explore and describe the phenomenon that prompted the researcher's curiosity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), in this case HoDs' experiences and perceptions of a university's pay-for-performance reward system (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As the research site is a single HEI with clear boundaries, we adopted a predominantly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, p. 38) single-case case study design (Merriam, 2009, p. 46).

Using convenience selection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), the research was conducted in a comprehensive university that is an amalgamation of four historically diverse HEIs. The university's executive management committee is currently driving a process to position the university among the top few percent of universities world-wide, according to various university ranking criteria. The PMS is a core component of the university's strategy.

The research process was initiated with an epoché in line with Hycner's (1985) postulation and Giorgi's (1992) processes, as simplified by Groenewald (2004). The purpose of an epoché is to allow the researcher to recognise his or her beliefs and presuppositions about the phenomenon and then to "bracket them off" (Giorgi, 1997; see also Creswell, 1998, p. 54; Stones, 1988) in order to foreground the participants' experiences and perceptions. This we did by brainstorming our own experiences and perceptions of, and reading about, PMSs. This enabled us to become aware of our predispositions. We put ourselves in the shoes of the participants, addressing the question, "How do you experience the university's PMS?" One of us, for example, is supportive of the system, while the other – having had negative experiences – is not. One of us also feels the performance bonus is so little as to be meaningless. Being aware of our biases enabled us to take them captive during the data generation and analysis processes. While one may question the extent to which it is possible to achieve "pure" bracketing, it is nevertheless an important intention (Van der Mescht, 1996, p. 50). The epoché was followed by in-depth interviews with nine purposefully selected (Patton, 2002, pp. 45-46) HoDs, each from a different faculty. The sample of HoDs selected to participate consisted of representatives of both genders as well as of the three racial groups represented by the institution's HoDs in general. Each HoD selected needed to have been in the position for at least three years. The longest serving had been an HoD for 10 years.

Data analysis followed the systematic and rigorous process outlined by Giorgi (1997). This process was first developed by Van Kaam at the Duquesne School and expanded on by Hycner (1985). We started the data analysis by reading the written epoché again, to remind us of our biases so as to preclude their influence on the analysis. The transcribed interviews were read holistically (Van der Mescht, 2004). Thereafter, natural meaning units (NMUs) were identified. This entailed identifying participants' statements, expressed in their own words, which make complete sense (Van der Mescht, 2004). The next step was to determine the extent to which the NMUs addressed the research aim, on the one hand, and, on the other, provided relevant components of meaning (Hycner, 1985). We selected the NMUs that were specific to the participant HoDs' experience and perceptions of pay-for-performance rewards.

Clustering the relevant NMUs was the next step. It involved going beyond individual participants' NMUs (Hycner, 1985) to identifying their shared and idiosyncratic experiences and perceptions. Interview transcripts were re-visited and cross-referenced with the relevant NMUs. Pertinent quotations were selected. To determine relevant themes, we re-examined the clusters of meaning in order to identify central ideas. General and unique themes from all the interviews were summarised as we sought both common and unique threads. Groenewald (2004) advises that inimitable, and even dissenting, voices should not be disregarded, as they are imperative for

further clarifying the focal phenomenon. Finally, we conceptualised the findings by linking them to the literature.

To ensure the study's reliability, the four constructs proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985)– credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – were utilised as general criteria for the evaluation of the research (Toma, 2006). The purposefully selected HoDs were in a position to be credible witnesses to their own experience of performance management at the university. Engaging in epoché, providing thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions and experiences (Maxwell, 1992), and subjecting the interview transcripts to checking by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) all contributed to the trustworthiness of the study.

The research proposal was approved by the ethics committee at the researchers' university. Prior to each interview, the research topic, aim, objectives and significance were explained to each participant. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form to sign indicating his or her willingness to participate in the research. The consent form stipulated the participants' right to voluntary participation and withdrawal should they so wish, without any penalty, and the right to privacy, with confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms (Creswell, 2007).

Findings and Discussion

The themes presented and discussed below arose out of the process described above, where the NMUs were clustered and then scrutinised for common and uncommon inferences.

Inadequate Financial Rewards
The study revealed wide-spread support among participants for a performance reward system that offers financial remuneration to staff who excel. They believe that financial rewards are an expression of an institution's appreciation for its staff's contribution. In addition, given their belief that academics are generally poorly remunerated, they believe that monetary rewards can motivate staff. However, the HoDs are dissatisfied with the amount of the bonus payments. They perceive it to be too little to add significantly to their salary. Participant 3 stated that,

> *Being an HoD at this institution is a disadvantage. There is absolutely no value to all the input you give to ensure that the department runs smoothly. All you get is a management allowance that is ridiculous.*

Participant 5 referred to the injustice of the bonus amount in view of the HoDs' position: "*Look at the*

level of HoD. Maybe ten or fifteen [thousand rand] *is not enough. Maybe twenty, thirty. But ja* [yes]*, for lecturers, especially my department, ten or fifteen will be okay.*"

Participant 3 elaborated further on the discrepancy between rank and remuneration:

> *Senior lecturers appointed now earn better salaries. HoDs see these differences. They* [HoDs] *work with the budget. They* [the university] *could at least look at your performance of a number of years and say they have been good. Then reward you financially to show their appreciation.*

Terpstra and Honoree (2009) argue that the differentiation in performance and in staff ranking in HEIs is so limited as to be inconsequential, such as that between senior lecturers and HoDs in Participants 3's and 5's contexts.

Our findings are consistent with the results of Benade's (2009) study, which also found dissatisfaction with the amount of the financial rewards. Armstrong (2010) cautions that, where financial rewards are deemed deficient, they tend to contribute to low job satisfaction levels and high turnover rates, thereby undermining the potential benefits of a PMS. Of concern is the finding of Jenkins, Gupta, Mitra, and Shaw (1998) that, while monetary rewards may enhance performance quantity, they have been found to have more potential to reduce performance quality.

Financial Reward Implementation Disparities
Participants experience disparities in the implementation of the monetary rewards strategy across faculties. In some faculties, deliberations on performance ratings are transparent, whereas they are shrouded in secrecy in others. Furthermore, participants pointed to a lack of transparency in how the bonus amounts are determined. Participant 6, for example, has no idea of how he has been rated since the introduction of the system:

> *I've got no idea how it works. I know in my case I have put forward some name[s] of some staff that they've been exceptional. Not that I went through a formal appraisal of performance. The performance of the year, either it's publication and/or he volunteers or he gets involved in extramural activities and all those type[s] of things. I feel that he should be rewarded. I give the name to the dean and then I don't know if they use it.*

Insler (2010) reported on the effect of inconsistent PMS administration in HEIs. Meybodi's (2010) study revealed that such inconsistencies pose a threat to the

success of a PMS. It would appear that at least some faculty deans use their discretion alone in determining how each category of performance rating should be remunerated, which would account for the disparities in processes followed and amounts paid. With such an approach, employees in the same institution, having the same rating, end up with different bonus amounts. This makes some employees feel that they are unjustly treated. They become distrustful both of management (Ngcamu, 2013) and the entire PMS.

Nebulous Criteria for Assessing Performance

Perceived nebulous criteria for assessing performance perhaps goes some way toward accounting for why some faculty deans use their discretion alone in determining how each category of performance rating should be remunerated. At the university concerned, a summary rating of 3 on a 5-point scale indicates that performance expectations have been met. A rating of 4 indicates that performance expectations have been exceeded, and a rating of 5 indicates outstanding performance. Staff rated at 4 and 5 are eligible to be rewarded with a performance bonus. Participant 2 explains why she supports this system:

> *You are measured against the thrusts of the university. So, that's quite objective. And another thing is that you are not just measured subjectively. You are measured objectively because you have to [provide] evidence. According to the way they have allocated the 4s and 5s it's quite objective. So, me, I'm quite satisfied with the awarding system.*

However, some HoDs believe that the rating criteria are unclear. Their scepticism stems from the perceived lack of guidelines on what constitutes performance beyond a 3 rating. A rating of 3 is described as the attainment of agreed performance targets. Some HoDs therefore insist that their performance agreement should be explicit about the key performance indicators (KPIs) that would grant them a rating above a 3. Participant 1 stated, "*I'm saying that if you tell me when we have our meeting, if you [are] my line manager, 'If you want to be a 4, this is what I expect of you', then I am going to make it.*" Participant 4 is of the opinion that, for anyone to be rated a 5, they should really deserve it and their performance should be truly exceptional: "*I think that to receive a 5 you really must have deserved it. You must have done an exceptional job to be able to get a high rating. What is hard for me is the fact that, if you have just done your job, you know, you get nothing. It is a lot. It's already a high expectation.*"

The findings reflect a long-standing concern about ratings. Katz (as cited in Koehler, 1986) found that HEI management tends to engage in "thumb sucking"

when making decisions about weights and rates for performance appraisals and promotions. Taylor (2013) observes that, unless employees perceive performance reward criteria and ratings to be clear and objective, they will not accept such a PMS and will experience a great deal of work dissatisfaction.

Excessive Workloads

The complex nature of the HE work environment – characterised as it is by increasing bureaucratic demands and pressures to meet ever-increasing targets for enrolment, graduation rates, postgraduate outputs, stricter financial controls, and so forth – has created a perception among HoDs that people are working much harder. The HoDs in the study believe that university remuneration has not kept pace with these increased demands and pressures. Some HoDs are of the view that the standard for achieving a rating of 5 is too high, and that it is almost impossible to achieve within the current complex and demanding HE context. Participant 4 noted that

> *It is demanding and you can't be good at everything. You've got no choice. You work hard. I've never worked as hard as I have in the last eleven years of my life. This is very hard [work], that never stops.*

Participants 1 and 3 bemoaned the excessive demands on academics. Participant 1 believes that "*Everything that has changed and transformed higher education is a lot of pressure on academics because they feel that all these activities are taking them away from their core function. And now all of a sudden they've got admin for this, admin for that.*" And Participant 3 observed: "*Remember, we are still expected to do research and publish as individuals. There are other things that you are expected to do as an individual in addition to managing other people within the department.*"

Thus, some HoDs believe that staff should be rewarded when they achieve a rating of 3 because just to get there is an achievement. In support of this practice, Participant 4 argues that, "*even if we achieve what you are supposed to achieve* [laughs]*, it's still very, very hard work. It's still very difficult.*"

Margetson (as cited in Parsons & Slabbert, 2001) found that academics experience increased work stress and consequent low motivation due to the worsening work environment. Tight (2009) identifies the source of much of this increased pressure as the higher administrative demands, together with the demands for more teaching and higher research outputs. Pienaar and Bester (2009) note that the position of academics in this regard is worsened by a lack of support to help ameliorate the increased workload.

Prioritising Research as a Key Performance Area

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the excessive status given to research in the reward system. Research is rated most highly among the KPAs and is therefore allocated most of the monetary rewards. According to Participant 3, *"The institution has to re-look the rewards system. They need to create another level of professional development, same level and recognition as researchers. These okes* [blokes/people]*, all they have to do is to publish and their performance is solely based on that."*

Confirming this view, Participant 7 states that:

> *Something that I often had a problem with, and to this day I still have a problem with – call it the marrying of the university and technikon – and for us traditionally the emphasis had been heavily on teaching. I personally felt that in some cases enough credence was not given to the teaching. You know, because to give you an idea, unless you have a PhD and [are] publishing you can't be promoted.*

Participants criticised the lack of reward paths for staff members whose time is taken up by heavy teaching workloads, leaving them with little or no time for research. Such employees will never be in a position to achieve a performance bonus even though they are committed to their teaching and contribute to the department's success. Participant 9 highlighted this concern:

> *I think the playing field needs to be balanced. They need to understand the difference. The person who's in the lab four days in a week full day, who doesn't contribute, and the person who lectures four hours a week and contributes three articles and brings R400,000 to the university. They cannot be judged on the same scale. The workloads are completely different, and until you get equal distribution and equal understanding of the different types of workloads, it's never gonna be fair.*

Participant 7 hints at a more troubling effect of prioritising research:

> *My concern is that those that are young – they come in with the pressure to have a master's degree, and after that they have to have their PhD – that, you know, they don't get to a point where they fully focus all their energies. And you find that results in opportunity for students' unhappiness in terms of their marks, amount of time that they get. Also in terms of people voluntarily ... initiating to go beyond what they are supposed to do.*

In line with these findings, Jackson (1999, p. 144) noted that "promotion sometimes was not seen in terms of management interest, but was seen much more as a reward for academic excellence of which research was the key driver". Likewise, in Pienaar and Bester's (2009) study, respondents complained that their performance evaluation prioritised research over teaching. Tight (2009) observed that academics have a high regard for research as it propels their professional scholarship stature, enhances promotion opportunities, and earns their colleagues' respect. They therefore prioritise their time for research activities.

Non-Financial Rewards

Despite their misgivings about the reward strategy, HoDs expressed their commitment to their jobs in the face of numerous challenges. They continue to pursue their department's targets, as the financial rewards do not constitute their sole or even primary motivation. Most of them remain in their positions because they are dedicated to their respective professions and students. In response to the question about why they are still in their current jobs in spite of the challenges they face, Participant 3 stated, *"Because there is a bigger picture for the profession. It's not about this* [the monetary rewards]. *I've got a very different focus to what I had before because it* [the PMS] *used to really frustrate me and my focus is different now."*

Participant 3 takes advantage of the non-financial rewards available as a way of contributing to his job satisfaction: *"I try and get at least an overseas trip a year out of the university. And at least I have then these intangible benefits to it."* This is an illustration of the survivalist approach taken by HoDs to mitigate the negative effects of inadequate financial rewards (see Chanza, Snelgar, & Louw, 2013).

Participant 2's job satisfaction comes from achieving academic credence for her department and not from the expectation of a performance bonus: *"It is just a formality. If you know who you are and what you want. You know, as an individual in the profession, in the department, where do you want to put your department at, benchmarking it? So there's nothing like 'I'm working because of performance management'. I don't even think of it."*

These findings are consistent with Franzsen's (2003) and Mapesela and Strydom's (2004) studies where participants felt strongly that, besides monetary rewards, performance management rewards should also include developmental opportunities, promotion, private work prospects, research time, and so forth. Despite the negative sentiments about the performance

management rewards strategy, it is evident that intrinsic motivators are at play in the participant HoDs' job involvement and commitment (McInnes, as cited in Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2010). McInnes (in Houston et al., 2010) opines that intrinsic motivators provide a more sustainable and worthy option than extrinsic motivators for academics. In support of intrinsic motivators, Fredman and Doughney (2012) contend that an environment that propagates an ethos of academic freedom is more motivating and performance enhancing, and thus provides more job satisfaction.

Summary and Conclusion

In principle, the research participants support financial rewards linked to a PMS, particularly because they regard HE salaries as inadequate. In addition, their perception is that, following the implementation of a PMS in the university as a means to enhance performance, their own work-loads have increased and they work longer hours, under more stressful conditions, within an increasingly complex and demanding work environment, with fewer resources. Against this backdrop, they consider the performance bonuses to be paltry and somewhat of an insult – and certainly too little to serve as an incentive to "perform". In the research participants' view, any performance bonus must be aligned with, or even outweigh, the performance expectations, especially those that require "walking on water" (Seyama & Smith, 2013). In short, a performance bonus must make any extra effort worthwhile financially. It must have a more powerful "pull" to perform than the performance expectations' "push" to perform. The benefit of performing must exceed the sacrifice to perform. Part of the challenge here is for HEIs to alter their budget priorities in the light of their claims of limited financial resources. However, HEIs are not profit generating organizations. Even with altered budgetary priorities, HEIs will find it difficult to provide financial performance rewards capable of comparing favourably with those in the corporate sector.

The research participants perceive high research output to be the sole determinant of what constitutes outstanding and excellent performance (Seyama & Smith, 2013) and therefore of performance that merits a financial reward. HoDs who thrive in other areas of academic life, such as teaching or research supervision, feel excluded from both the potential financial rewards and other non-financial rewards, such as the intrinsic pleasure of doing what they love doing best in the academic domain. Within an academic context, there are non-financial rewards that have a greater attraction for many academics than financial rewards. Such non-financial rewards are excluded from the PMS. What is needed is a holistic reward strategy that recognises both financial and non-financial rewards.

Another challenge is the perceived nebulous criteria for, and therefore different understandings of what constitutes, outstanding and excellent performance. This creates general uncertainty about performance expectations. In addition, HoDs and their staff have different mental images of what the different levels of performance look like in practice. This makes the reaching of shared agreements about performance very difficult.

Related to the vagaries surrounding performance criteria is the inconsistency in the implementation of performance rewards within and across faculties. Since the faculty deans are the final arbiters in the determination of HoD bonuses, the onus rests on them both to be perceived as, and in fact to be, fair in their implementation of the performance reward system. Without this, they will lose their colleagues' trust and reinforce the existing distrust of and dissatisfaction with the PMS. The research participants advocate full transparency in this process to help obviate any semblance of favouritism or any other unfairness or inconsistency. This places deans in an unenviable position, as they attempt to make much of what is unquantifiable quantifiable.

The above summary lends itself to the following suggestions:

- If they are to be persevered with, performance management financial reward systems need to be developed and agreed upon by all role-players in order to ensure a common understanding of their purpose, implementation, what performance at different levels looks like (Seyama & Smith, 2013), and the size of performance bonuses. This could go some way toward achieving a sense of fairness.
- Financial performance payments need to be meaningful or significant, however that may be agreed upon. This would apply too in respect of the difference in bonuses between different levels in the PMS.
- Role-players should recognise and give equal weighting to academic achievements besides published research as part of a shared agreement about a PMS (Seyama & Smith, 2013).
- Role-players should explore traditional academic non-financial reward options to mitigate against the perceived inadequacies of an exclusively monetary reward system as part of a shared agreement about a PMS.
- Role-players should consider removing the dean's discretion in deciding on the size of bonuses.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that, in an institution

that has so recently introduced a PMS linked to financial rewards, the dissatisfaction expressed by its HoDs resonates with the experiences of staff in those South African HEIs that implemented PMSs much earlier. This is valuable feedback for those decision-makers who are responsive and sensitive to the implications and often unintended consequences of their performance management decisions.

Referencing Format

About the Authors

Sadi Mokhaneli Seyama
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
E-mail address: sseyama@uj.ac.za

Sadi Mokhaneli Seyama is a Lecturer in Somatology in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Johannesburg, where she served as Head of the Department of Somatology for six years.

She holds a BTech degree in Somatology from the Technikon Witwatersrand and a Master's degree in Education Leadership and Management from the University of Johannesburg, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Education Leadership and Management at the University of Johannesburg.

Her research interests are in the areas of performance management in higher education, middle management leadership in higher education, work integrated learning, and citizenship education.

Clive Smith
Faculty of Education
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
E-mail address: csmith@uj.ac.za

Clive Smith is Senior Lecturer in Education Leadership and Management at the University of Johannesburg, specialising in organization change and qualitative research methodologies. A former high school principal, he was involved in pioneering one of the first racially and culturally diverse high schools in South Africa.

While a Fulbright scholar at the University of Oregon in the USA, he completed a Master's degree in Education Policy and Management, followed by a PhD in Organization Development.

Dr Smith's main areas of research are organization change readiness and processes, culture in organizations, transformative leadership, and mixed paradigm research.

References

Adams, J. S. (1963). Towards an understanding of equity. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *67*(5), 422–436. doi: 10.1037/h0040968

Armstrong, M. (2010). *Armstrong's handbook on reward management practice: Improving performance through reward*. London, UK: Kogan Page.

Benade, M. (2009). *A critical appraisal of performance management (appraisal) in higher education: Case study at Stellenbosch University* (Unpublished master's research report, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa). Retrieved from: http:// www.researchgate.net/publication/46419151

Carl, A. E., & Kapp, C. (2004). Performance management in higher education: Bridging the gap. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *18*(2), 16–33. doi: 10.4314/sajhe.v18i2.25452

Cintron, R., & Flaniken, F. (2011). Performance appraisal: A supervisor or leadership tool? *International Journal of Business & Social Sciences*, *2*(17), 29–37. doi: 10.15640/jhrmls.v3n1a3

Chanza, A. W. D., Snelgar, R. J., & Louw, G. J. (2013). The motivational value of rewards amongst Malawi's health professionals. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, *11*(1), 517–531. doi: 10.4102/sajhrm. v11i1.517

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (Eds.). (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Abingdon, UK: Routledge. (Original work by Cohen & Manion published 1979)

Council on Higher Education [CHE]. (2004). *Annual report of the Council on Higher Education: 2003–2004*. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative enquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed*.*). London, UK: Sage.

Du Plessis, M. (2011). Re-implementing an individual performance management system as a change intervention at higher education institutions: Overcoming staff resistance. In C. Despres (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 7th European Conference on Management, Leadership & Governance* (pp. 105–115). Reading, UK: Academic Publishing Ltd.

Egginton, B. E. (2010). Introduction of formal performance appraisal of academic staff: The management challenges associated with effective implementation. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *38*(1), 119–133. doi: 10.1177/1741143209351660

Franzsen, K. (2003). A critical overview of trends and practices in performance management in the South African higher educational environment. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *17*(2), 131–138. doi: 10.4314/sajhe. v17i2.25306

Fredman, N., & Doughney, J. (2012). Academic dissatisfaction, managerial change and neo-liberalism. *Higher Education, 64*(1), 41–58. doi: 10.1007/s10734-011-9479-y

Forest, V. (2008). Performance-related pay and work motivation: Theoretical and empirical perspectives for the French civil service. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 74*(2), 325–339. doi: 10.1177/0020852308089907

Galanou, E., Georgakopoulos, G., Sotiropoulos, I., & Dimitris, V. (2010). The effect of reward system on job satisfaction in an organizational chart of four hierarchical levels: A qualitative study. *Canadian Social Science*, *6*(5), 102–123.

Giorgi, A. (1992). Description versus interpretation: Competing alternative strategies for qualitative research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *23*(2), 119-135. doi: 10.1163/156916292X00090

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *28*(2), 235–260. doi: 10.1163/156916297X00103

Grobler, P. A., Warnich, S., Carrell, M. R., Elbert, N. F., & Hatfield, R. D. (2006). *Human resource management in South Africa* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Thomson.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1), 42–55. Available at: http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3 -1pdf/groenewald.pdf

Hellriegel, D., Slocum, J., Jackson, S., Louw, L., Staude, G., Amos, T., Klopper, H., Louw, M., Oosthuizen, T., Perks, S., & Zindiye, S. (2012). *Management: Fourth South African edition*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Higher Education Funding Council of England [HEFCE]. (2005). *The higher education workforce: Interim report*. Bristol, UK: Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Houston, D., Meyer, L. H., & Paewai, S. (2006). Academic staff workloads and job satisfaction: Expectations and values in academe. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *28*(1), 17–30. doi: 10.1080/13600800500283734

Hurd, A., Barcelona, R., & Meldrum, T. (2008). *Leisure services management*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies, 8*(3), 279–303. doi: 10.1007/BF00142995

Insler, D. (2010). *Pay for performance grows in higher education*. Retrieved from http://www.sibson.com/news-and-events/hot-topics/?id=531

Jackson, M. P. (1999). The role of the head of department in managing performance in UK universities. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, *13*(3), 142–149. doi: 10.1108/09513549910269502

Jenkins, G. D., Gupta, N., Mitra, A., & Shaw, J. D. (1998). Are financial incentives related to performance? A meta-analytic review of empirical research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *83*(5), 777–787. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.83.5.777

Kamens, D., & Sarup, G. (1978). Reward systems, faculty alienation, and militancy: Academic dilemmas in the middle of the academic procession. *Research in Higher Education*, *8*(3), 227–240. doi: 10.1007/BF00992088

Kidwell, R., & Bennett, N. (1993). Employee propensity to withhold effort: A conceptual model to intersect three avenues of research. *Academy of Management Review*, *18*(3), 429–456.

Kim, J. (2010). Strategic human resource practices: Introducing alternatives for organizational performance improvement in the public sector. *Public Administration Review*, *70*(1), 38–49. doi: 10.1111/j.15406210.2009.02109.x

Koehler, W. F. (1986). From evaluations to an equitable selection of merit-pay recipients and increments. *Research in Higher Education*, *25*(3), 253–263. doi: 10.1007/BF00991790

Konovsky, M. A., & Pugh, S. D. (1994). Citizenship behaviour and social exchange. *Academy of Management Journal*, *37*(3), 656–669. doi: 10.2307/256704

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mapesela, M. L. E., & Strydom, F. (2004, November). *Performance management of academic staff in the South African higher education system: A developmental project*. Paper presented at the OECD Conference on *Trends in the Management of Human Resources in Higher Education*, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Marshall, G., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(3), 279–300.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meybodi, M. Z. (2010). The impact of just-in-time practices on consistency of benchmarking performance measures. *Advances in Competitiveness Research*, *18*(1&2), 73–88.

Molefe, G. (2010). Performance measurement dimensions for lecturers at selected universities: An international perspective. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management, 8*(1), 13 pages. doi: 10.4102/sajhrm. v8i1.243

Morris, L., Stanton, P., & Mustard, J. (2011, February). *Performance management: The academic experience*. Paper presented at the 25th Association of Industrial Academics of Australia & New Zealand (AIRAANZ), Auckland, New Zealand.

Nankervis, A. R., & Compton, R.-L. (2006). Performance management: Theory in practice? *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 44*(1), 83–101. doi: 10.1177/1038411106061509

Ngcamu, B. S. (2013). The empirical analysis of a performance management system: A case study of a university in South Africa. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Sciences*, *5*(5), 316–324.

Parsons, P. G., & Slabbert, A. D. (2001). Performance management and academic workload in higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *15*(3), 74–81. doi: 10.4314/sajhe.v15i3.25328

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (Rev. ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pearce, J. L., Stevenson, W. B., & Perry, J. L. (1985). Managerial compensation based on organizational performance: A time series analysis of the effects of merit pay. *Academy of Management Journal*, *28*(2), 261–278.

Pienaar, C., & Bester, C. (2009). Addressing career obstacles within a changing higher education work environment: Perspectives of academics. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *39*(3), 376–385. doi: 10.1177/0081246309903900311

Potgieter, C. (2002). *Black academics on the move: How black South African academics account for moving between institutions or leaving the academic profession*. Pretoria, South Africa: Centre for Higher Education Transformation [CHET].

Prewitt, L. B., Phillips, J. D., & Yasin, K. (1991). Merit pay in academia: Perceptions from the school of business. *Public Personnel Management*, *20*(4), 409–417.

Schraeder, M., & Jordan, M. (2011). Managing performance: A practical perspective on managing employee performance. *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, *34*(2), 4–10.

Seyama, S., & Smith, C. (2013). An exploration of the University of Johannesburg heads of departments' experiences and perceptions of the university's performance management system. In F. E. Gouws & C. C. Wolhuter (Eds.), *Educational research in South Africa: Practices and perspectives* (SAERA 2013 Conference Proceedings) (pp. 223–249). Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Sonnenberg, F., & Goldberg, B. (1992). New bottom lines? *Executive Excellence*, *9*(12), 3–4.

Sousa, C. A. A., de Nijs, W. F., & Hendriks, P. H. J. (2010). Secrets of the beehive: Performance management in university research organizations. *Human Relations, 63*(9), 1439–1460. doi: 10.1177/0018726709357083

South Africa. (1997). *South African Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Stones, C. R. (1988). Research: Toward a phenomenological praxis. In D. Kruger, *An introduction to phenomeno-logical psychology* (2nd ed.) (pp. 141–156). Cape Town, South Africa: Juta.

Taylor. P. (2013). *Performance management and the new workplace tyranny: A report for the Scottish Trades Union Congress. Glasgow, UK: University of Strathclyde.* Available at: www.stuc.org.uk/files/Document%20download/ Workplace%20tyranny/STUC%20Performance%20Management%20Final%20Edit.pdf

Terpstra, D. E., & Honoree, A. L. (2009). Merit pay plans in higher education institutions: Characteristics and effects. *Public Personnel Management*, *38*(4), 55–77.

Tight, M. (2009). Are academic workloads increasing? The post-war survey evidence in the UK. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *64*(2), 200–215. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2273.2009.00433.x

Toma, J. D. (2006). Approaching rigour in applied qualitative research. In C. F. Conrad & R. C. Serlin (Eds.), *The Sage handbook for research in education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry* (pp. 405–424). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ullyatt, T. (2004). "Addicted to the status quo". Academic fantasies and the primary task in faculties of the humanities: Perspectives on higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *18*(2), 109–130.

University of Melbourne (2007). *Reward and recognition of professional staff: A framework*. Available at: https://hr.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/73891/RRR_Framework_Professional_Staff.pdf

Van der Mescht, H. (1996). *A phenomenological investigation into leaders' perceptions of themselves, their followers and their organizational contexts* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Van der Mescht, H. (2004). Phenomenology in education: A case study in educational leadership. *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *4*(1), 1–16. doi: 10.1080/20797222.2004.11433887

Van Helden, G. J., Johnsen, A., & Vakkuri, J. (2012). The life-cycle approach to performance management: Implications for public management and evaluation. *Evaluation*, *18*(2), 159–175. doi: 10.1177/ 1356389012442978

Westover, J. H., & Taylor, J. (2010). International differences in job satisfaction: The effects of public service motivation, rewards and work relations. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *59*(7 & 8), 811–828. doi: 10.1108/17410401011089481

Wood, S., Van Veldhoven, M., Croon, M. A., & De Menezes, L. M. (2012). Enriched job design, high-involvement management and organizational performance: The mediating roles of job satisfaction and well-being. *Human Relations*, *65*(4), 419–445. doi: 10.1177/0018726711432476

_____