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Evaluating the Performance Appraisal Practices in the Ghana Civil Service

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Abstract:

In recent times, organizations have seen the need to improve the performance of their employees through various means to ensure higher productivity. One of such measures is performance appraisal systems. This study aimed at evaluating the performance appraisal practices in the Ghana Civil Service. The study employed a descriptive research design in answering the research questions. Target population comprised of 224 employees from the Office of the Head of Civil Service and other government agencies under the Civil Service. The simple random sampling approach was adopted to give equal chances to all employees selected for the study. Data collection instruments were a semi-structure interview and a questionnaire. The study found that employees had negative perception about the appraisal system. It was also discovered that, performance appraisal reports do not commensurate with the actual performance of employees, and that, the appraisal system in place do not encourage specific performance. However, the study found that issues like promotions, demotions and transfers were based on performance appraisal reports. The challenges identified in the implementation of effective appraisal system included lack of resources to execute duties satisfactorily, lack of logistics to effectively implement the appraisal system, inadequate education on the need for performance appraisal, ineffective supervision from appropriate authorities' lack of commitment due to the fact that the performance appraisal system is not linked to pay and rewards.

Keywords: Performance appraisal practices, civil service, Ghana

1. Introduction

In recent times, public sectors in many countries are undergoing profound restructuring and reforms in order to improve performance and thus providing quality services. This process of reforming public administration is seen as necessary to meet the dual challenges of improved services with fewer resources. One of the most popular tools used for reform activities at present is Performance Appraisal Systems. The efforts of employees can determine the success and survival of an organization (Armstrong, 2010), and appraisal is potentially one way in which those efforts can be aligned with the aims of an organization.

Performance appraisal is one of the basic Human Resource Management Practices and one of the most researched topics in work psychology over the last seven decades. The major reason for ensuring performance management processes are working properly is to strengthen the link between strategic business objective and routine activities of organizations. Managing performance is an integral part of the public service delivery mechanism (Bianchi, 2010). It is a process by which an organization can assess whether it is delivering the right services according to its mission and objectives in the right amount, at the right cost, at the right time, and to the right people. Tracking of employee progress at regular interval against performance goals and objectives provides the opportunity to recognize and reward employees for outstanding performance which ultimately increase job satisfaction and productivity. The core assumption in performance management is that managers and policy-makers learn from performance information and make better decisions in the future based on empirical evidence.

Hugh and Hill (2009) suggest that many organizations express dissatisfaction with their appraisal schemes. The scholars posit that the dissatisfaction with appraisal systems may indicate a lack of success of performance appraisal as a mechanism for developing and motivating people. There is a general consensus among performance appraisal researchers and practitioners that assessment of appraisal reactions is important (Armstrong, 2010). For instance, it is frequently argued that in order for performance appraisal to positively influence employee behaviour and future development, employees must experience positive appraisal reactions.

The Public Service including the Civil Service of Ghana under the auspices of the Public Services Commission (PSC) in the last two decades has undergone several reforms, designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery. One of its initiatives has been the desire to establish a workable performance management system. The purpose is to ensure an effective performance culture that sets objectives, targets and aligns staff performance to organizational

and national development goals. In 1974, the Annual Confidential Reporting System was reviewed to allow appraisers to have access to and comment on their performance appraisal reports.

Additionally, Performance Evaluation System was introduced in the Public Service in 1992 under the Civil Service Reform Program which sort to enhance the interactive process between managers/supervisors and staff. And in 1997, the Performance Agreement System was introduced to provide an objective means of assessing the performance of Senior Staff of the Civil Service. This covered Chief Directors in the Ministries, Regional Coordination Councils and Directors in the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the Civil and Local Government Services. The system became operational only from 1997 to 2008 because of its ad-hoc implementation and lack of feedback system. For the other Public Services, a hybrid of performance management appraisal models has evolved based on the exigencies of the time and the dictates of their various Governing Boards/Councils. Some of the Boards/Councils were not particularly aware of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring an efficient and operational performance management system.

It is undeniable fact that the human resource of every organization is its most important asset. It is therefore not surprising that the development of human resources in both public and private sector organizations has become critical (Ofosuhene, 2018). The importance of a well-functioning Civil Service in Ghana's development process is unquestionable. The civil service of Ghana is by far one of the most important organs for the achievement of the national developmental agenda. It is thus very important to ensure that the Civil Service is better placed to efficiently and effectively achieve this very important goal.

Although considerable effort in the past and present has been put in terms of budgetary support by the Government so as to improve on their outputs, this has been hampered by inadequate comprehensive performance management policy and an uncertain rewards and sanctions framework (Walker & Andrews, 2013). In order to introduce some elements of the impact stage in its evolutionary development, the Public Services Commission whose advice and opinions are recognized as authoritative and indicative of best practices in human resource management and development introduced a performance management framework in 2008 to improve the system. This system follows a logical succession of stages which facilitates explicit links between each phase of the performance management process be it probation, appraisal, career development, promotion, rewards, discipline etc. The key elements according to (Adei & Boachie-Danquah, 2003) included; ensuring an objective, universally acceptable and transparent scheme of assessment of performance, translation of national development plans into work plans by institutions, developing performance targets from the work plans by institutions, ensuring that work is aligned with the strategic efforts and direction of individuals and the organization they work for through realistic targets, developing work plans based on the Strategic/Business Plans of the institutions, developing processes and framework for rewards, incentives, sanctions, training, career development etc. to ensure the cultivation of the performance management mindset in the Public Service, establishing Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism for ensuring adherence and compliance.

In spite of these numerous efforts to improve the performance management system, it is evident that the system lacks impetus to improve the performance of the Ghana Civil Service (Ohemeng, 2011). Considering the crucial role Performance Appraisal play in employee performance strategy, this study sought to discover the extent to which Civil Servants consider the existing performance appraisal system as effective and efficient. The study is also to discover the various challenges confronting the effective implementation and utilization of performance appraisal in the Civil Service and how to ensure a better utilization of this system.

1.1. Problem Statement

In today's competitive business world, it is understood that organizations can only compete with their rivals through innovation and creativity, and organizations can be innovative and creative by managing their human resources well. The human resource system can become more effective by having a valid and accurate appraisal system used for rating performances of employees (Armstrong, 2010). Perceptions of employees about the targets, outcomes and uses of performance appraisal results would be valuable depending on a number of factors, for example, employees are more likely to be receptive and supportive of a given performance appraisal program if they perceive the process as a useful source of feedback which helps to improve their performance (Mullins, 2007). Employees are likely to embrace and contribute meaningfully to a given Performance Appraisal scheme if they perceive it as an opportunity for promotion, and as an avenue for personal development opportunities, a chance to be visible and demonstrate skills and abilities, and an opportunity to network with others in the organization. On the other hand, if employees perceive Performance Appraisal as an unreasonable attempt by management to exercise closer supervision and control over their tasks perform, various reactions may occur.

It is however disheartening to note that despite Civil Servants' awareness of the existence of some general Performance Appraisal System, within the Public Service, and the requirement for public organizations to appraise their staff at least once in year, staff performance appraisal does not happen annually in Ghana Civil Service presently. Performance targets are not set for staff and staff performance appraisals are not undertaken regularly. It is observed that performance appraisals are conducted in most cases only when staffs are due for promotion. It is also speculated that even in such cases, performance appraisals tend to be overly positive. In the few cases where performance appraisals are critical, they seldom lead to withholding of increments or promotions as prescribed by the formal regulations. Based on numerous complaints by employees, it can be concluded that, the current Performance Appraisal System is beset with the following implementation difficulties and problems: Absence of a clearly defined, articulate and enforceable implementation framework, low executive commitment/involvement and support for the Performance Appraisal System, absence of rigor, objectivity and continuity in the administration of the system, non-linkage of the process to an

enforceable Reward and Sanctions Mechanism, ignorance of most Civil Servants on the merits of Performance Appraisal System, non-linkage of the system to staff development, i.e. training and career development, and lack of effective monitoring and annual reporting and feedback mechanisms. The end result has been the inability of the Civil Service to measure and evaluate the performance of their work. The cumulative effect is low productivity which ultimately affects the delivery of government programs.

1.2. Research Objectives

1.2.1. The Objectives of This Study Were to

- Ascertain the staff perception of the performance appraisal practices and the performance appraisal procedure in Ghana Civil Service,
- Identify the uses of the performance appraisal results in the Ghana Civil Service,
- Find out if employees are satisfied with the existing appraisal system,
- Investigate the challenges involved in the implementation of the appraisal system in the Ghana Civil Service.

1.2.2. Research Questions

- What is the perception of employees about the existing performance appraisal system in the Ghana Civil Service?
- Are performance appraisal results used judiciously in the Ghana Civil Service?
- Are employees satisfied with the existing performance appraisal system in the Ghana Civil Service?
- What are the challenges involved in the effective implementation of the performance appraisal system in the Ghana Civil Service?

2. Overview of Literature

Performance appraisal is a process by which a superior evaluates and judges the performance of a subordinate. Performance appraisal systems include the processes and procedures involved in implementing, managing, and communicating the actions involved in performance appraisal. Many organizations employ a formal or informal assessment system that measures employee performance and contribution (Krattenmaker, 2009). Performance appraisal is considered to include a communication event scheduled between a manager and an employee expressly for the purposes of evaluating that employee's past job performance and discussing relevant areas for future job performance. According to Clausen, Jones and Rich (2008) performance appraisal is a process that involves determining and communicating to employees how they are performing their jobs and establishing a plan for improvement. Bianchi and Rivenbark (2014) also affirm that performance appraisal is the name given to procedures which make regular assessment of employee performance, which is normally undertaken annually. Performance appraisal enables employees to receive feedback on their performance; identify training needs and make further plans for development. Formal performance appraisal are the means of telling a subordinate how he/she is doing and suggesting needed changes in his behaviour, attitudes, skills or job knowledge (Armstrong, 2010).

It has been established that knowledge of the use of performance appraisals information is important for the development of human resources (Ferreira and Otley, 2009) and essential to its design since different types of information may be required for different purposes. The uses of performance appraisal information have been broadly classified under two broad headings: counseling and development, and the evaluation and discussion of administrative decisions. Under this classification are more general uses which include; taking reward decisions, performance improvement, employee motivation, improving communication between supervisors and subordinates, succession planning and as a formal assessment of performance. Other scholars like Simon (2000); Vakkuri and Meklin (2006) and Moynihan (2008) also presented a classification of the reasons for conducting appraisals in organizations, and these included documentations, within-person decisions (feedback on strengths and weaknesses) and between-person decisions (who to promote).

According to Armstrong (2010) Performance Appraisal systems are used for two main purposes: to serve a variety of management functions such as decision-making about promotions, training needs, rewards, etc. and to enhance developmental processes of employees or as an evaluation instrument. Poister, Pasha and Edwards (2013) observed that performance appraisal system have two main uses; evaluative and developmental. The evaluative function includes the use of performance appraisal for salary administration, promotion decisions, retention-termination decisions, and recognition of individual performance, layoffs, and the identification of poor performance. Developmental functions include the identification of individual training needs, providing performance feedback, determining transfers and assignments, and the identification of individual strengths and weaknesses. It has been suggested that these purposes often result in conflict (Safdar, 2011). This conflict may prevent the appraisal process from attaining its full usefulness to the organization, perhaps even contributing negatively to individual behaviour and organizational performance.

According to Das (2011) employee satisfaction towards performance appraisal has been the most frequently measured and it has been primarily conceptualized in three ways: (a) satisfaction with the performance appraisal interview, (b) satisfaction with the appraisal system, and (c) satisfaction with performance ratings. He further argued that it is necessary to address employees' reactions toward their performance appraisal for many reasons, including (a) the notion that reactions represent a criterion of great interest to practitioners and (b) the fact that reactions have been theoretically linked to determinants of appraisal acceptance and success but have been relatively ignored in research. Employee satisfaction with performance appraisal would be positively related to work performance (Busco and Riccaboni, 2010). In view of the fact that performance appraisal often includes equipping employees with new knowledge and skills,

it may also contribute to employers perceived investment in employee development. According to Armstrong (2010) employees who believe their organization is committed to providing them with developmental activities may feel an obligation to repay the organization through high work performance. Indeed, if performance appraisal systems will enhance communicating strategies, goals and vision, employees would experience higher levels of commitment to the attainment of organizational goals and, therefore, become more affectively committed to their organization. Moreover, developmental performance appraisal is also about increasing employees' perceptions of being valued and being part of an organizational team (Ferreira and Otley, 2009). Again, if performance appraisal satisfaction reflects perceived investment in employee development, employees will probably reciprocate by way of higher affective commitment to the organization (Armstrong, 2010). Research suggests that organizational commitment is positively associated with the use of explicit evaluative criteria and openness to discussing the appraisal and negatively related to role ambiguity (Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). In addition, since performance appraisal satisfaction is enhanced by employee participation and perceived clarity of goals, it may also be positively related to affective commitment. Jawahar (2006) reports that satisfaction with appraisal feedback was positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively related to turnover intentions. Consequently, Armstrong(2010) submits that appraisals can have a positive impact on job satisfaction when employees believe that they are being evaluated by the "proper" criteria.

Iqbal(2012) also investigated how perception of performance appraisal use relates to employee satisfaction with both appraisal and appraiser. They emphasized support for the importance of individual development in the performance appraisal process and focused on employee perceptions of performance use. Their results supported the importance of employees perceiving developments as part of the performance appraisal process. It is therefore reasonable for Organizations to perhaps make the developmental aspect of the performance appraisal process clear so that employees can understand and believe that the primary purpose of their performance appraisal is for job and career development

Researchers like (Molefhi, 2015); (Kanana, 2017) and (Kichigina, 2017) noted that organizations are faced with numerous challenges in conducting or implementing effective performance appraisal systems for higher productivity and quality service delivery. A major and recurrent criticism of performance appraisal systems is their openness to subjectivity and discrimination. Subjectivity is more likely to arise from the day-to-day behaviors and practices of those involved in the process of appraisal than the policies and procedures developed to guide that practice. Performance Appraisal System is often judged subjectively because performance in many jobs is not amenable to objective assessment. Such subjectivity enables a rater's personal agenda to drive the appraisal rating process (Cosenz and Bianchi, 2013). Subjectivity can also become a problem when appraiser and appraisee are colleagues. Nilsson, Olve and Parment, (2011)stated that working with and for people we know, their good and bad points become obvious and it is often impossible to detach an appraisal interview from all the other interactions which the employees have had over the past period.

Hence, the implementation of an effective Performance Appraisal program is complicated by the difficult task of obtaining a truly fair and accurate appraisal of an employee. Some common problems in Performance management are design flaws and lack of credibility. Many performance management systems consist of an annual appraisal which may review a list of objectives. In most cases the connection between individual objectives and organizational values, goals and strategies are not in congruent (Culbertson, Henning and Payne, 2013). He further explained that, most performance management systems do not adequately address specific job requirements or objective measurement systems, relying instead on opinions of supervisors and, in some cases peers, which are notoriously subject to bias from a number of sources, hence the lack of credibility. The authors noted that the problems associated with performance appraisal include the lack of agreement on appropriate appraisal criteria, concerns over the validity and reliability of evaluation methods, and the negative perceptions of employees towards the appraisal system (Culbertson, Henning and Payne, 2013).

3. Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design in order to describe the conditions of the current performance appraisal system and the prospects for the way forward in the Ghana Civil Service. Target population comprised 224 employees from the Office of the Head Civil Service, the Ministry of Education and the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies at the Civil Service Training Centre within the study period. The purposive sampling technique was first employed to target only full-time employees at the Office of the Head of Civil Service and the Ministry of Education, that is, those on government pay roll who have gone through performance appraisal exercise. Then after the simple random sampling technique was adopted which gave equal chance to all the employees to be selected. Additionally, the judgmental sampling technique was also employed to select key persons from the two selected organizations for semi-structured interviews. This was to allow for the selection of Officials who were knowledgeable in the subject under study. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included self-administered questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Organizational reports, journals, newspapers and relevant books were reviewed which constituted the secondary source.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. Employee Perception on the Current Appraisal System

One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain employees' perception on the performance appraisal system currently in use at the Ghana Civil Service; consequently, the respondents were asked to indicate their views on the current appraisal systems. The figure 1 below shows the level of responses.

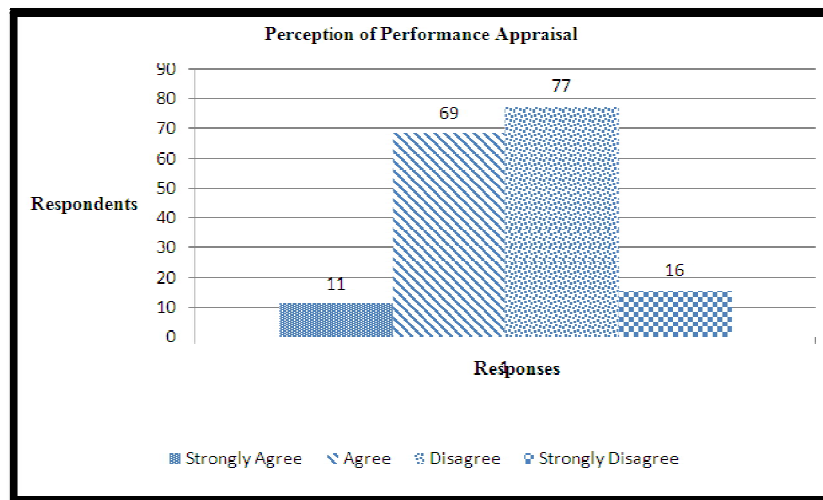


Figure 1: Perception of Performance Appraisal
Source: Field Data, (2018)

From figure 1, 11 (6.4%) perceive the performance appraisal system as strongly positive (strongly agree), 69 (39.9%) perceive the performance appraisal as positive (agree). On the other hand, 77 respondents (44.5%) have negative impression (disagree) about performance appraisal system while 16 respondents (9.2%) have very negative impression (strongly disagree) about the performance appraisal system. From the above analysis, it can be said that majority of the respondents have negative perception about the current performance appraisal system of the Ghana Civil Service. In spite of this, appreciable number of respondents believes in the performance appraisal system. Some responses therefore warrant further discussion.

Respondents were again requested to indicate their views on the relationship between performance appraisal and job description, skills needed for balanced assessment and, performance appraisal and improving employee productivity. The responses are summarized and converted into graphical format and the resultant chart is presented on the figure below. Data series in green colour on the X axis represents responses of strongly agree and agree fused together as agree (strongly agree + agree = agree). Strongly disagree and disagree responses are also put together as disagree (strongly disagree + disagree = disagree) represented in silver colour on the X axis of the data series chart.

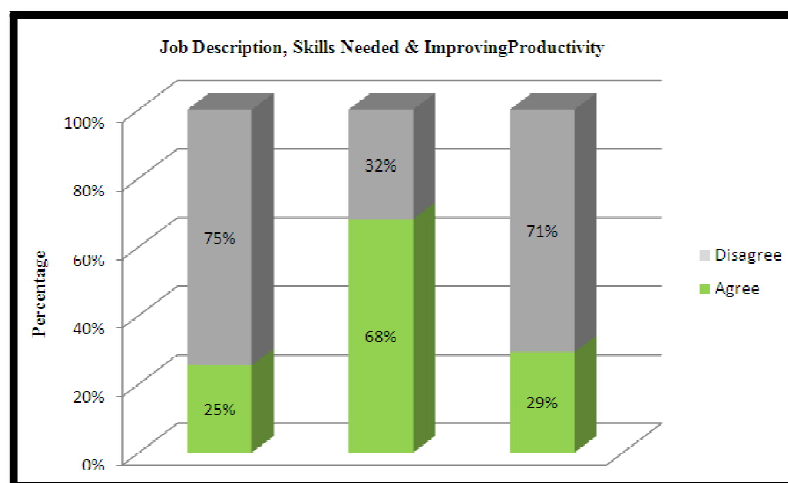


Figure 2: Perception of Performance Appraisal - Areas of Concern
Source: Field Data, (2018)

It is evident from figure 2 above that 75% of respondents believe the performance appraisal do not match with their job description and that only 68% believe that supervisors possess the relevant skills needed to achieve a balanced assessment on employee performance. Meanwhile, as many as 71% of respondents strongly disagree or disagree that the performance appraisal system helps in improving employee's performance and productivity on the job. According to Van, Bouckaert and Halligan (2015) employees who believe their organization is committed to providing them with developmental activities may feel an obligation to repay the organization through high work performance. This assertion indeed puts the Ghana Civil Service in danger in terms of provision of quality service delivery and productivity since employees believe their career development is not taken care of by their respective organizations.

4.2. Uses of Performance Appraisal Results

It has been revealed from the literature review that knowledge of the use of performance appraisals is important to human resource development (Busco and Riccaboni, 2010). and essential to its design since different types of information may be required for different purposes. Research has also shown that the use to which performance appraisal is put affects the rating process and results (Society for Human Resource Management, 2012). Based on this, respondents were asked to identify the uses to which performance appraisal results are put. Figure 3 indicates the responses.

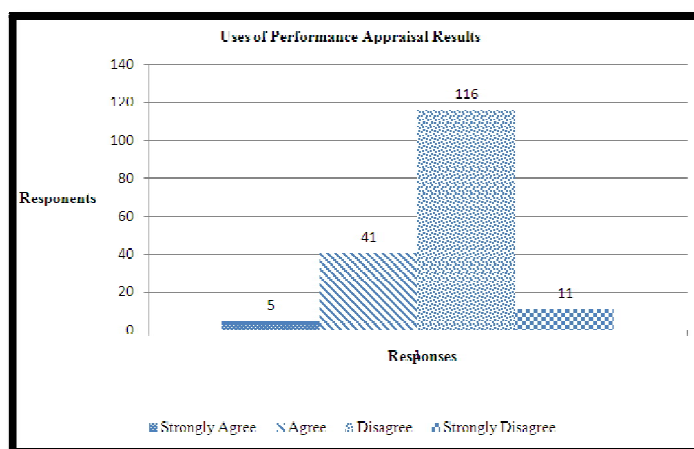


Figure 3: Uses of Performance Appraisal Results
Source: Field Data, (2018)

It is evident from figure that the majorities of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that performance appraisal reports are put to good use in the Ghana Civil Service. Averagely, about 75% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that training and developmental needs are identified and documented during the performance review process, and that they are NOT provided with required training such that they are in position to complete tasks effectively. Majority of respondents also believe that the current Performance Appraisal system does NOT encourage employees to prepare for greater responsibility in the future and performance discussions during the review process do NOT also emphasize personal development and growth. It is worth noting that, 91% of respondents believe that nominations for Civil Service training are often NOT based on Performance Appraisal reports.

To strengthen the views of the respondents on the uses of appraisal information, the study further requested respondents to identify the uses of appraisal report in the following areas: training and development needs, decision-making on promotion, demotion, transfers and nomination for training programmes based on appraisal reports respectively. The responses have summarized in figure 4:

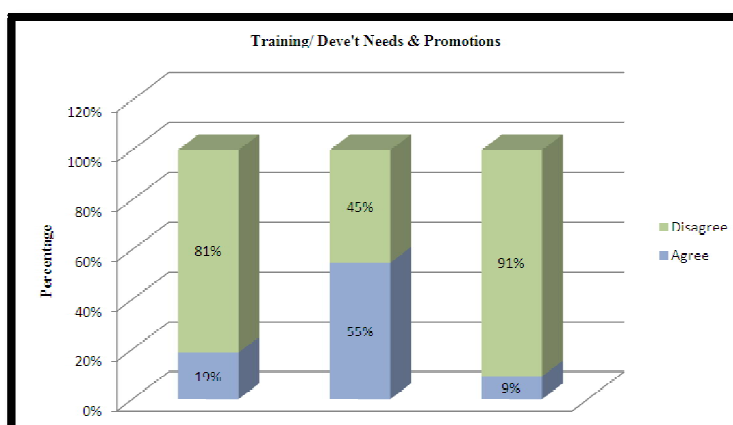


Figure 4 Uses of Performance Appraisal Results-Areas of Concern
Source: Field Data, (2018)

Based on figure 4 it is clear that majority of respondents (81%) are with the opinion that training and developmental needs are not identified and documented during performance review process. Furthermore 91% of respondents also disagree that nominations for Civil Service training are often based on Performance Appraisal reports. On the other hand, 55% of respondents agree that Promotion, demotions postings or transfers, and/or layoffs decisions are based on the ratings and content of performance appraisal reports.

4.3. Performance Appraisal and Employee Satisfaction

The Human Relations School (1930-mid 1950s) made the assumption that if employees were happy and satisfied; they would naturally work harder and thus increase their productivity (Shahzad, Rehman and Abbas, 2010). Employees

who believe their organization is committed to providing them with developmental activities may feel an obligation to repay the organization through high work performance (Sheridan, 2010).

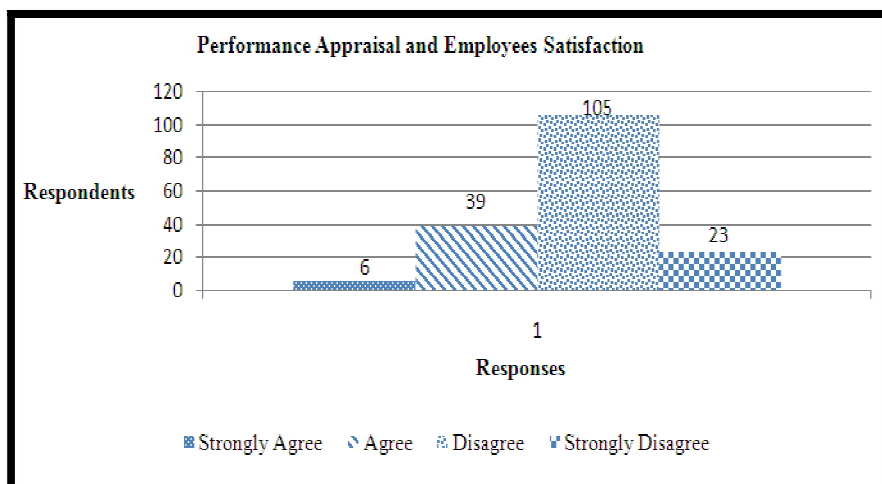


Figure 5: Performance Appraisal and Employees Satisfaction
Source: Field Data (2018)

Based on figure 5 it is evident that 128 out of 173 respondents representing 74% of total respondents are not satisfied with the current performance appraisal system of the Ghana Civil Service. According to Robinson and Pillemer (2007) reported findings indicate that dissatisfaction with performance appraisal influenced employees' intention to quit through reduced job satisfaction. The study further probed to investigate the areas of concern to employees on their satisfaction with the current appraisal system. These areas deal with whether the current performance appraisal system is a fair reflection of employees' performance, whether employees are satisfied with their job, pay, and the current performance appraisal system respectively. These have been summarized into graphical format and are recapped below:

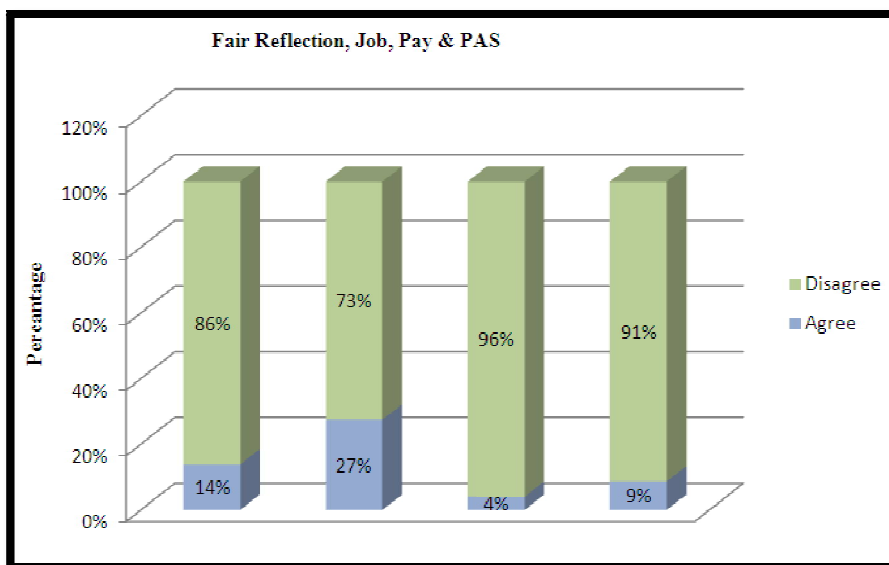


Figure 6: Areas of Concern on Employees' Satisfaction
Source: Field Data (2018)

From figure 6 it is evident that 73%, 96% and 91% of respondents are dissatisfied with their job, pay and the current performance appraisal system respectively. More also, 86% of respondents disagree that their performance assessment results are fair reflections of their actual performance. According to Silbert (2005) when employees perceive that their performance appraisal reports do not reflect with their performance and consequently their rewards, they tend to have quitting intentions.

4.4. Identified Challenges

As opined by Bianchi (2010) applying performance appraisal system to foster performance management comes with different types of challenges. These challenges, the author noted stem from socio-economic, political, institutional and organizational systems. To investigate the challenges of the performance appraisal system in the Ghana Civil Service, the study adopted a semi-structured interview to solicit the views of senior employees who have been part of performance appraisal exercise in the Civil Service. The identified challenges from interviewees included lack of resources to execute

duties satisfactorily, lack of logistics to effectively implement the appraisal system, inadequate education on the need for performance appraisal, ineffective supervision from appropriate authorities' lack of commitment due to the fact that the performance appraisal system is not linked to pay and rewards. In sum, lack of resources, inadequate education and ineffective supervision were believed to be major challenges confronting the Civil Service in implementing effective performance appraisal system.

5. Conclusion

The study sought to evaluate the performance appraisal practices in the Ghana Civil Service. The analysis of responses indicated that majority of employees have negative impression or perceptions about the appraisal system. The appraisal system practiced at the Ghana Civil Service did not match with the job description or relevant skills needed to achieve a balance assessment. It was also discovered that the uses of performance appraisal as identified in the literature were not being practiced in the Service. Moreover, most employees believe that the current appraisal system does not encourage specific performance. Though some of the employees agreed that issues with respects to promotions, transfers and demotions are based on the performance appraisal reports, it was identified that performance appraisal reports do not reflect the actual performance of employees.

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