Teachers Performance Improvement in the New South Wales Public Schooling Contexts: Evidence and Experience

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Introduction

This paper begin the analysis of performance management in public schooling context with a review of the development of performance management in the public sector. It considers both the broad details of these practices and the relevant research findings and debates. It explores the objectives and the rationale behind introducing performance management schemes in the public sector based on prior studies, and considers the evidence on the effectiveness of such schemes. It also describes how performance management was instituted in the public education sector and examines the particular issues arising from its implementation. It further investigates how and why public sector unions have been involved in the negotiation and operation of performance appraisal. Here, it investigates the role of the unions in monitoring the operation of these schemes and considers the extent to which public sector unions have shown greater willingness to embrace performance appraisal.

Literature Review

A prominent feature of the 'New Public Management' has been a drive by management to assume greater control over standards and activities that were previously the domain of professionals. In the public sector, this has occurred, in particular, via the implementation of formal individual performance appraisal and pay schemes for both administrative staff in public service agencies and education employees. Seen as a means by which organisations can measure employees' performance, assess the contribution of individual

staff members and motivate them to reach higher standards of performance (Lawler, 2003; Becker, 1988; Murphy and Cleveland, 1995:1), performance management has been embraced as a significant tool by most OECD public service sectors (Fairbrother and O'Brien, 2000; Seddon, 1997).

Performance management 'provides a means to improve organisational performance by linking and aligning individual, team and organisational objectives and results. It also provides a means to recognise and reward good performance and to manage under-performance' (Management Advisory Committee, cited in O'Donnell and Shields 2002:436). Performance management comprises human resource activities including performance appraisal and evaluation, individual goal-setting and development planning (Cherry, 1993). Performance appraisal is intended to facilitate discussion between the supervisor and the employee relating to the subordinates' performance. However, this process can take many different forms.

Ideally, during the performance appraisal discussion, employees are provided with feedback on their current performance and counselling in relation to any areas identified as requiring remediation. This, in turn, assists in determining training needs, and preparing employees for specific career paths (Becker, 1988 and Murphy and Cleveland, 1995). Thus, it may assist employees by reviewing and developing work plans or providing development opportunities which utilises the employees' abilities and interest better (Gomez-Mejia, 1989:27) or training supervisors who conduct appraisals (Kavanagh, et al., 2007).

Whilst appraisals are intended to facilitate discussion between the supervisor and the employee regarding the latter's performance (Gomez-Mejia, 1989), in order for the

appraisal system to be effective, it needs to be accepted and supported by both sides (p.133). Thus, a central requirement is the perception of fairness which will influence employees' confidence in and acceptance of the system (Kavanagh, et. al:133; Takleab,et.al. 2005; Jawahar, 2007). In this regard, supervisors play a significant role as they are generally responsible for setting performance objectives, providing formal and informal feedback, and for rating the employees' overall performance. Supervisors' neutrality, combined with the knowledge and skills they display during the appraisal process, have a significant influence on whether it is seen by employees as positive and fair (Kavanagh, et. al:133).

According to Huber (1983), senior officers in the public sector have focused on performance appraisal as a way of influencing and controlling employee behaviour in order to increase motivation and productivity. In the context of human resource management, it serves several purposes, most notably: evaluation, training and development, and employment security. Where performance-related pay is instituted, evaluations are needed to determine salary increases and promotion (Huber, 1983:262). McGregor (cited in Townley, 1997) points out that when performance appraisal is used for the development of employees, its focus is on identifying employees' strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of developing and enhancing their skills and abilities. McGregor (ibid.) also notes that when performance appraisals are used to increase the flow of communication and reduce mistrust, employees are more likely to consider the processes to be fair.

However, when performance appraisal is focussed solely on evaluating and judging employees' performance, it places the organisation's concern for control and centralising information to the forefront. While documentation generated during the appraisal process are accessible to central administration they can be used for compensation, promotion,

organisational change, and the retention of ‘high calibre’ staff (Nankeris, et. al. 2006), it may equally be used for initiating disciplinary action and dismissals (ibid.; McGregor, 1972; Cheng, 2014).

Apart from its obvious links to performance standards and merit pay, performance appraisal can, according to Meyer (1975 cited in Gaertner and Gaertner, 1985), lead to performance improvement if this is the focus of the evaluation. However, Gaertner and Gaertner (ibid.) argue that appraisals focussed only on past performance tend not to help the employee understand what behaviour might be appropriate for performance improvement. Cascio (1978:4) states that the development function of performance appraisal should be more employee-oriented and aim to increase not only employees’ efficiency but also their satisfaction. Other researchers (Latham and Wexley, 1981; Cummings and Schwab, 1973) note that by identifying areas of concern, remedial action plan such as training can be developed and offered to the employee.

Conducting performance appraisal requires the allocation of considerable organisational resources especially in regards to the training and development of staff to support the process. Since it is an inherently subjective process, the supervisory monitoring and behavioural judgment required in appraising service work is prone to problems of invalidity, unreliability and perceived unfairness (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995; Smither, 1998). Gabris and Ihrke (2000) argue that the effectiveness of performance appraisal may be influenced by the notions of ‘procedural fairness’ and ‘distributive justice’. ‘Procedural fairness’ refers to the employees’ perception of the programme’s overall process equity, whereas ‘distributive justice’ is linked to perceptions of the fairness of associated rewards and recognition outcomes, including performance-related payments.

There is a solid body of evidence to suggest that for many Australian public sector employees, the experience of appraisal, especially supervisory appraisal, has been far from positive (O'Donnell, 1998; O'Donnell and Shields, 2002) and that there are a number of shortcomings associated with the application of performance appraisal schemes in public sector contexts. Common causes of failure are the lack of established management objectives for the scheme and the absence of clearly defined performance criteria on which to base judgments. Such shortcomings stand to compromise assessment accuracy. Other weaknesses relate to perceived unfairness. Some of the weaknesses identified in the implementation of performance appraisal include: lack of performance criteria and validity; lack of fairness in the implementation of the performance schemes; lack of performance feedback; lack of accountability; lack of support for employees identified as having difficulties meeting performance targets; and lack of appeal mechanism. (Daley, 2008; Wood and Marshall, 2008; O'Donnell and Shields, 2002; O'Donnell and O'Brien, 2000). The paper now turn to examine each of these areas of possible dysfunction in more detail.

Performance criteria and validity

In situations of high task interdependence it may be difficult – if not invalid - to seek to compare the contributions of individuals working in jobs of varying complexity (Lawler, 2003; O'Donnell, 2000). Moreover, O'Donnell (2000) argues that quantifying job outcomes is particularly difficult in the public sector where the inherent requirements of the positions, such as in the provision of welfare, education and environmental protection services, do not readily allow the measurement of performance.

As well as the challenge of identifying job outcomes when specific indicators are not linked to standards, there is the difficulty of consistently observing and reliably assessing

employee behaviour. Drenth (1998:68-69) argued that validity is one of the important requirements for effective performance management. He also argued that validity has to do with whether the standards are identified and whether the specific indicators themselves accurately reflect or capture what is achieved in relation to desired standards. Accordingly, it is important to focus on the specific and representative indicators of job performance (both outcomes and behaviours) rather than on selective individual behaviour.

Fairness

A major concern raised by employees regarding performance appraisal is perceived procedural fairness and particularly managers' or supervisors' ability to accurately assess their performance. Subjectivity and inconsistency are frequently seen as undermining the validity of performance ratings. Further, Gomez-Mejia (1989:27) argues that the ethical and legal dimension of performance appraisal may also come into play when negative appraisal is seen to be related to the individual's race, sex and age rather than their work performance (ibid.:27).

Wood and Marshall (2008) contend that one of the major problems lies in appraisers' inability to accurately rate an individual's performance due to not fully understanding the person's job context and/or context. They suggest that lack of training in the use of the rating scales, and relying on hearsay rather than clear evidence, often leads to inequitable ratings. However, Woehr and Huffcutt (1994) point out that an appraiser's capabilities and training will not always translate into greater accuracy or more effective appraisal review unless accompanied by a sense of personal mastery (Woehr and Huffcutt, 1994) and the ability to manage associated difficulties and problems as they arise (Bandura, 1997).

Regarding the perception of performance ratings, O'Donnell and Shields (2002:449) found that employees harboured considerable suspicion that personality differences accounted for some part of the distribution of ratings; and that ratings could be manipulated by the supervisor without explanation such that initial ratings might even be moderated downwards for budgetary reasons in order to limit the overall cost of the performance management scheme.

The supervisor's inability to assess subordinate performance accurately is very likely to impact the way ratings and rewards are allocated. As Shields (2005:58) argued, distributive justice is particularly important in employees' perception and feeling of fairness during the appraisal process. It is also argued that felt unfairness is usually strong when ratings and rewards are not commensurate with the effort or contribution made by the employees in comparison with other employees in the organisation. Shields (2005) further argued that felt-unfairness is stronger when ratings and rewards are allocated inequitably; and that this has high potential to lead to a sense of lack of distributive justice and thus, a breach of the 'psychological contract'.

Overall, then, the integrity in the appraisal process, particularly in the allocation of ratings and rewards depends critically on the skills and subjectivity of those who are conducting the appraisal process and their ability to accommodate the complexity of this human resource practice.

Feedback

A further issue raised in O'Donnell and O'Brien's study (2000) was employees' concern regarding the inability of supervisors to provide quality feedback. Marshall and Wood (2008) confirm that, when appraising underperformers, managers will often minimize

negative feedback to staff for fear of possible confrontation with the subordinate. Moreover, a study by O'Donnell and Shields of the Australian Department of Finance and Administration found that supervisors would only raise concerns about performance during the performance interview or in the lead up to performance review instead of raising the concerns with the employee immediately so that performance issues might be remedied in a timely manner. (O'Donnell and O'Shields, 2002:448). According to Gomez-Mejia (1989:21):

> Feedback is a crucial stimulus that affects motivation and performance since behaviour that is rewarded (eliciting positive feedback) tends to be repeated, while behaviour that is not rewarded (eliciting negative, irrelevant, or no feedback) tends not to be repeated. The nature of the feedback given to the employee can lead to three possible performance outcomes: relatively stable performance, a drop in performance, or improved performance.

Yariv (2006) warns that providing negative feedback is one of the most sensitive, anxiety-provoking encounters between supervisors and subordinates; one which is directly comparable to the ordeal of communicating bad news. Travers and Cooper (cited in Yariv, 2006) found that female teachers were more prone to suffer from stress relating to performance appraisal than were male teachers, whilst primary teachers were more prone to do so than secondary teachers.

Wood and Marshall (1998) point out that successful provision of feedback will often require perseverance in the face of emotional obstacles and a sustained effort to overcome the information gaps, interpersonal conflict and misunderstandings that might impede on the appraiser's professional judgement. Wood and Marshall (ibid) found that appraisers with strong efficiency beliefs are more likely to possess the resilience needed to cope with conflicting work demands in a complex working environment (such as the health system) and that they are more likely to make difficult judgments and communicate effectively with staff who receive lower than expected ratings and conduct constructive appraisal reviews.

Gomez-Mejia recommends that supervisor feedback for performance enhancement must fulfil certain conditions. It must be: job-related such that the employee can compare his/her performance level to the performance benchmarks; a dynamic process of interactions between the employee and the supervisor; explicit, supportive and critical so as to enable the employee to concentrate on the areas that need improvement; and able to assist the supervisor to provide alternatives and recommendations to the employee on how to improve (1989:22). Huber (1981) argues that employees should not only receive feedback on their current performance but also be provided with assistance and support e.g. training to remedy any identified performance gaps. Bridges (1992) claims that poor performers are often neglected and overlooked as dealing with the issue presents one of the toughest challenges a supervisor may face.

While feedback is normally provided by the supervisor, as a way to increase all-round accountability, employees may also be required to provide critical feedback on their supervisor's performance. However, in the absence of anonymity, employees are often reluctant to provide such feedback for fear of retribution (O'Donnell and O'Brien, 2000).

Accountability

Gioia and Longenecker point out that supervisors' accountability for how the appraisal process is conducted and for the ratings they award plays a significant part in system felt-fairness and effectiveness. Accountability refers to the specific expectations and mechanisms by which managers are called to account for their conduct of appraisals and outcomes. They indicate that lack of accountability has been shown to influence an appraiser's decision during the performance reviews so as to distort their evaluation (Gioia and Longenecker, cited in Mashall and Wood 2000).

Marshall and Wood (1998) suggest that accountability can be increased by requiring managers to justify their ratings to their staff or by providing them with feedback on how the distribution of ratings compare with the distributions of other managers. Further, accountability processes may include mechanisms for enforcing organisational norms, procedures and rules as well as legal prescriptions and restraints.

Addressing poor performance

Interventions designed to remedy performance difficulties are commonly non-existent or markedly deficient. A study by Daley (2008:49) at the US Merit Systems Protection Board revealed that only one-third of federal supervisors had reported any performance difficulties amongst subordinates and that in less than half of the cases studied (N=253) had action been taken to address the performance problem. Further, only 11 per cent of those interviewed reported that the introduction of appraisal had led to improved performance. Daley's research revealed that supervisors finding it difficult to identify and address poor performance are more likely to neglect underperformers (Daley, 2008.). By contrast, those demonstrating adequate training in how to supervise and assist underperforming employees feel a sense of effectiveness in being able to develop a performance improvement and training plan for staff (Daley, 2008.).

Riccuni and Wheeler (cited in Selden, 2006) argue that the implementation of positive discipline requires a shift in responsibility from the supervisor to the employee, with less top-down communication and more collaboration between the supervisor and the employee. At the heart of the process is a shift from the supervisors' role of neglecting to one of counselling, coaching and training the employee. According to Riccuni and Wheeler, a developmental approach along the latter lines will help to foster a culture that identifies inadequacies in employee performance and remedies these in a supportive way.

Selden asserts that any standardisation of practice relating to how poor performance should be remedied is likely to create conditions with high levels of procedural justice that protect the rights of employees and may deter supervisors from utilising dismissal as a management strategy (Selden, 2006:344).

Appeal mechanisms

O'Donnell and O'Brien (2000) note the existence of appeal mechanisms embedded into performance management schemes but find that employees were either unaware of how to proceed with an appeal or were reluctant to do so because it might affect their prospects for career development. Even in a situation where employees were aware of the appeal mechanism, employees doubted that use of the appeal system would cause senior management to take their appeal seriously.

As shown above, performance appraisal schemes, including those applied in public sector organisations, are vulnerable to a range of shortcomings that stand to compromise system validity, reliability, felt-fairness, trust and, hence, effectiveness. Some of the most critical areas of potential weakness are: lack of clear and valid performance criteria; lack of perceived procedural and outcome fairness; lack of performance feedback; lack of accountability; lack of adequate counselling and support for employees experiencing difficulties with their performance; and lack of an understood and trusted appeal mechanism.

Performance management in public education

The pressure for workplace reform has also been felt in public school teaching where the issues of teachers' professionalism and development have been brought to the forefront of the political agenda. As this section demonstrates, though, the efficacy of teacher

performance management systems are susceptible to a range of organisational and individual weaknesses, including problems along the lines of those considered in the previous section.

Across the western world, the nature of the teaching profession has changed dramatically during the last ten years and the challenges and expectations of greater professional accountability facing teachers today have meant that issues relating to teachers' professionalism and development are being contested at both policy level and in workplace practice (Sachs, 2001). During recent years, teachers, unions and bureaucrats have struggled to find new meaning in the teaching profession, to define what constitutes a 'teacher' and how a teacher should work, and to determine appropriate forms of accountability that promise to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching.

According to Ball (2003), the management of teacher performance requires the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures or categories of judgment. He argues that educational reform policies are not simply the mechanisms for technical and structural change within organisations but are also the mechanisms for reconstituting teacher professional identity and for changing what it means to be a teacher. This entails struggles over control of the field of judgment and its values, such as who is to determine what is to count as valuable, effective or satisfactory performance, and what measures and indicators are considered valid?

Middlewood (2001) insists that performance appraisal must be seen as an integral part of a move to improve educational quality in general, not just individual teachers. Middlewood argues that having highly skilled teachers is not the only determinant of a good school, or the means by which to improve education. Critically important factors here are leadership

and management, shared values, consistency in approach to external relations and collaborative culture. Both Ercuji (2000) and Middlewood (2001) maintain that there is no point in focusing on a teacher's performance unless national clarification as to evaluative and developmental appraisal is made and supervisors are given full training and support. Such problems have been particularly evident in teacher performance management initiatives in the UK.

Evidence from the UK shows that problems may arise where performance management is combined directly with decisions relating to teachers' pay and promotion. In the UK, annual appraisal has been a statutory requirement for primary and secondary government school teachers since 1992 (Ironside et al., 1997:123). Wragg et. al. (2003) report that 97 percent of teachers who initially applied to cross a threshold were successful. However, Brown's (2005:477) study of the implementation of performance management in 30 English primary schools found that decisions to allow a teacher to cross a competency threshold were frequently not related to their performance; rather they amounted to a de facto retention strategy. Teachers were represented as being underpaid and deserving of an 'across the board' pay rise. Even teachers who were not considered to be deserving of a pay rise on performance grounds still received one. This illustrates that, in practice, performance-related pay can also be used not solely for the purpose of rewarding high performers but also for attracting and retaining teachers.

The UK experience also highlights the problems that may arise where inadequate attention is paid to the possibility that even experienced teachers may have difficulties with their teaching performance (Blair 2000:1-4). When it was initially introduced, one of the UK system's stated objectives was to assist in improving the professional development of teachers. However, Brown's (2005) study revealed that although an individualised

professional development plan had in fact been developed for teachers, it had not been implemented due to a shortage of time or resources. The study also revealed that the individualised professional development plan was not seen as being useful in improving the professional development of teachers because many teachers simply claimed to already be aware of their own particular strengths, weaknesses and developmental needs (p. 476).

Another problem identified by Brown's study was in regards to measuring teachers' performance. Brown noted that the performance of students was defined in very narrow terms and that when assessment of their performance was based on their final year examination results alone there was a tendency for the school to devote less attention to students experiencing learning difficulties (2005). Further, Brown found that schools spend an excessive amount of time coaching students in examination techniques and narrowing down the curriculum to selected disciplines such as English, Maths, and Science which are central to students' assessment. Brown also questioned the validity of any such results since, in the absence of data on a students' previous performance, they are seen out of context. Brown further noted that the more affluent schools are likely to experience relatively fewer economic and social problems and to consequently also report better results in the school league tables publicised on the Internet (2005, pp. 474-475).

Middlewood (2001) suggests that performance appraisal only becomes effective when it is managed as an integral part of the move to reform. Thus, in Britain, where it was seen simply as an 'add-on', it was fated to lose importance the minute schools and teachers were faced with more pressing needs (ibid.).

Comparable problems have also been evident in teachers' performance management initiatives in other countries. Since the mid-1980's, an increasing number of district schools throughout the USA have also implemented processes to give all teachers ongoing, systematic feedback on their performance (Ingravson and Chadbourne, 1997). However, here too, providing feedback on teachers' performance was not deemed sufficient and performance-related pay was introduced to monitor teachers' performance.

As in other western countries, schools in New Zealand were also subject to widespread systemic reform in the drive to make teachers more accountable for their performance. One of the most contentious aspects of the New Zealand system has been the requirement that teachers are only eligible for a pay increment after undertaking prescribed professional development. The agreement negotiated between the New Zealand Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Teachers' Union requires that all teachers participate in professional development for up to ten days a year during the non-teaching period. A specific clause in their contract states that schools can call teachers back for up to five days per annum during term break to participate in professional development (ibid, 2000).

While the New Zealand Ministry of Education argued that the ongoing professional development of individual teachers was a critical factor in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools, teachers themselves remain sceptical of placing such emphasis on the role of pay in professional development initiatives (Ministry of Education cited in Middlewood, 2001).

In sum, as shown above, performance appraisal has been applied not only to administrative staff in public service agencies but also to those employed in public school teaching. In countries such as the United Kingdom, USA and New Zealand, performance

appraisal has become a requirement for public school teachers. However, experience of the appraisal process has certainly not been uniformly positive, with teachers expressing negative views about key aspects of the process.

Methodology

With a view to gauging continuity and change over time under the performance management system, the study has drawn on two phases of interviewing conducted in 2003-4 and 2008-9 and focused on a sample of case study schools in metropolitan and regional areas. This approach has enabled longitudinal analysis of system impact. The rationale for longitudinal study is to gauge the extent of outcomes and of the teacher performance management system and its human resource implications since the first round of interviews in 2003-2004. The interview-based investigation has been framed around depth case studies of four schools. Two schools were located in a metropolitan school district and two in a non-metropolitan district within the jurisdiction of DET. During the first phase of the study, In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of individuals from key stakeholder groups: senior union officials, senior DET management, union organisers and local union representatives, principals, school executives and rank-and-file teachers. Where the initial participants were no longer available, comparable stakeholders were identified and approached. Table 1 and 2 in *Appendix A* summarises the details of the first phase of the interviews undertaken for the study.

Findings

The post-2000 performance management system has not been without short-term or enduring shortcoming. As shown in this paper, the implementation of performance management for teachers and school executives in the NSW public education system has

resonances of those weaknesses reported in studies of performance management in public sector employment generally and in public school teaching in other jurisdictions.

The post-2000 partnership in performance management has undoubtedly faced many challenges. The appraisal process has been characterised by a range of problems common to the performance appraisal systems in public and private sectors. These include the lack of uniformity in the implementation of Teacher Assessment Review Schedule (TARS), lack of support and direction in goal setting, lack of sufficient training and development, absence of adequate feedback, lack of support for teachers, lack of perceived fairness and a perception that the appraisal process itself was an overly time-consuming activity.

Interview evidence suggests some deficiencies in TARS process, particularly in inconsistency of its implementation. The principal of a city high school expressed the view that inconsistency remains one of the major issues in the annual performance review.

> I think you will find there are inconsistencies in the way that it's done. I know it's difficult to spell out, you will do this for the TARS, this is the process, [but] you've got to have flexibility but to me at the moment it is far too broad. (Interview 06/09)

According to a local union representative in a city school, consistency in the implementation of TARS continues to be an issue across different schools:

> At some schools there were findings that people were just being signed off. I think it is kind of open interpretation and at some schools you've got people being made to jump through hoops. (Interview 12/09).

As one of the teachers in the country school recently pointed out:

> I think it needs to have some sort of consistency...it needs to operate not just at Glenroi but at Orange…I am sure lots of people fly under the radar and we've got them, they'll move on and other people will have to deal with these that are not competent. (Interview 19/09).

Thus, inconsistency in the administration of the appraisal process is one of the major concerns raised by interviewees. It is also evident that there is significant variation in the implementation of the appraisal process across different schools and there are no appropriate monitoring mechanisms on how it is being conducted in schools.

In some instances, the issue may be that the school executive is young and inexperienced and has difficulty in dealing with older staff:

> I think people who are teaching for a long time can find it confronting. They can come up against a brick wall if you're trying to deal with a young executive that's working with people that might be 20 years older or more…I think that's a big deal. (Interview 20/09)

However, others have reported that at times it is a case of teachers not recognising that there is an issue with their performance.

> In many cases inefficient teachers are often difficult people. And difficult people don't become less difficult because you monitor and supervise them more. They become 'more' difficult because you're demanding more of them in terms of meeting timeframes and requirements and accepting feedback and accepting often feedback [that] is negative. (Interview 01/09)

There is thus some evidence that teachers who need support may be neglected due to time constraints and lack of confidence on the part of inexperienced principals. Equally, it appears that there is also an issue of denial on the part of those teachers who need support.

Evidence from the first and second phases of interviewing revealed an absence of proper performance benchmarking, particularly for experienced teachers and school executives, the absence of duty or role statements for permanent teachers, insufficient training for school executives, insufficient support for equity groups, lack of consistency in the implementation of the policy, and increased workloads for school executives and union officers.

Absence of clear and detailed performance standards

There were no agreed formal performance standards for teachers prior to 2003 (Auditor-General Report, 2003). The absence of role statements had been of longstanding concern to senior officers within the Department, who had relied on section 1.2.3.8 of the *Teachers Handbook* to justify the performance assessment of teachers *(Teachers Handbook,* 1996). As pointed out by a senior officers from the Department:

> …we don't have role statements for classroom teachers and I think that's a real problem. It does make the judgments at the school level very subjective about what a good teacher's supposed to do. (Interview 01/03)

It was not until 2003 that steps were taken towards setting agreed performance standards in NSW via the establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers. A *Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce* was established to advise the government on the key issues involved in the development and implementation of a national framework for teaching standards. The consultation process revealed a significant stakeholder consensus in support of the establishment of an Institute of Teachers.[1]

> …we have certainly been working on, and I know both at a State level and also nationally through the Australian Education Union, on trying to identify the appropriate standards for beginning teachers, and I think it's been easier to reach agreement on what's beginning teachers', but also working on experienced teachers'. But I think…government's taken such punitive attitudes towards teachers in recent memory, you're sort-of wary. So, I guess what you could say with these clauses, they are minimalist clauses designed to, I guess, ensure that in terms of Award provision you're focusing on the teachers who are most in need. *(*Interview 01/04)

According to the same interviewee, the Federation was also of the view that:

[1] As part of the process, a conference was convened involving representatives from all States and Territories, from employees in the public and private sector, from the teachers' union, teachers' professional associations, principals' associations, and academics (Department of Education and Training 2002).

> ….in terms of the setting of teachers' professional standards, that's something that should be owned by the profession, that it's not politicians who should be coming in. (Interview 01/04)

Although the Institute of Teachers has formulated a set of detailed professional teaching standards covering seven key elements of teaching practice, initially it was only beginning teachers who began duty after October 2004 who were the subject to its provisions. As such, the absence of professional teaching standards for experienced teachers posed difficulties in assessing the performance of these teachers. According to one experienced teacher:

> It would cause a lot of anger I think. That's what it would cause because if I've been teacher for let's say fifteen, twenty years and suddenly I've got to be held accountable to some standards, well then that suddenly says well what I've been doing for twenty five years you haven't recognised. So there's an issue there. (Interview 07/09).

While the parties have concurred on the need for professional performance standards, there has nevertheless been considerable tension surrounding the determination of such standards, and about how and by whom they should be administered and reviewed.

Views from the respondents of the success of the establishment of NSW Institute of Teachers remain mixed. For some teachers, the Institute sets standards that teachers can aspire to:

> I think it's good because it's giving the standards that we need to get to. The process of having to report and write to those standards and send samples of work, it's just an extra thing that we need to do. (Interview 07/09)

The phase two interview evidence highlights that the absence of transparent performance criteria for TARS remains a significant issue; one with industrial implications. Although teachers have strong expectation as to what TARS should involve, there are still no explicit criteria for judging teacher performance. As one DET Senior Officer conceded:

> Why don't we have real criteria for TARS? This is still a very touchy industrial issue. Even though we got the Union to agree that this is an agreed process as soon as the school tries to establish specified criteria to start judging teachers, they do run to industrial issues. (Interview 01/09)

A country high school principal noted that there is no provision in the TARS process to acknowledge outstanding teachers, since all teachers are graded as either 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory':

> I've got teachers here that are outstanding, high quality teachers that I ever worked with in my whole career… I wish I could be ticking outstanding teacher instead of just satisfactory. (Interview 17/09)

This sentiment is echoed by the principal of one of the city primary schools:

> There are some teachers here who do an amazing job… One young teacher, the best I've ever seen in my entire career and you can see that in the first three minutes in a classroom. She's is just outstanding. (Interview 10/09)

Lack of support and direction in goal setting during the Annual Performance Review

A related area of concern, particularly for teachers in the annual performance review, is lack of a participatory approach to goal setting. Evidence of concerns includes the commitment of support to goal setting by the supervisors and allocation of organisational resources needed for the development and support of the appraisal process. As demonstrated in teachers' responses, goal setting is often left to the teacher with minimal input or follow-up from the supervisor. As a result, teachers are often left to their own devices in working out the strategies and support to be put in place into achieving their goals.

A teacher from a city primary school experienced a similar issue in terms of the lack of direction on how she might achieve her goals. She stated:

> … a lot of it is left up to the teacher setting their own goals. If you're working with a supervisor that you haven't worked with before – they don't [know] you very well. They have not seen what you've done before. And that's not a lot of direction for you when you're trying to take that next step specially you've been teaching for a long period of time. (Interview 11/09)

Concerns were also expressed by a country high school teacher about the lack of discussion regarding the strategies of implementing and meeting their goals:

> …I set my goals…then I go and source - I go and seek other people to help out. So that's coming from me because I think I'm still a motivated teacher who wants to go out and improve the quality of stuff. But I can see someone who is a bit tired, a little bit lacking motivation, they won't be proactive in going out and doing this stuff. (Interview 14/09)

Similarly, another country high school teacher recently remarked:

> I am a bit sceptical about the fact that you have goals but in many cases the school does not help you meet them for various reasons mainly to do with not enough funding from the government. (Interview 15/09)

Echoing findings in the wider literature on the potential for performance appraisal to degenerate into an annual ritual, one high school teacher contended that there is a need for the TARS to be an ongoing process rather than a summary event:

> I feel that TARS at the moment is quite ineffective. Your TARS meeting at the end of the year have actually targeted, the motivation of students in the classroom and targeting different learning styles. If that's one area, you want to work on and develop, then there should be some sort of a structure put in place. (Interview 08/09)

Research around goal-setting has stressed the importance of agreed goals that are jointly set by the employee and the supervisor (Locke and Latham, 2002). It is quite clear from interviewee statements that this is one of the areas of enduring weakness that awaits remedy.

Inadequate assessor training

The extant literature highlights the importance of assessor training as a means of addressing fairness shortcomings. However, the evidence shows that TARS procedures have, from the outset, been compromised by inadequate training provision.

Whilst school principals were afforded considerable training opportunities during the initial policy roll-out, funding constraints meant that others received less rigorous training.

According to one DET Senior Officer:

> There have been some people who's training we've thought has been less than perfect who've used the procedures in a way that we didn't think they were designed for. I would have liked to have seen more executives engaged in training. The cost factor obviously great in training. (Interview 02/03)

As revealed in the study, schools in the non-metropolitan area were more likely to deal with underperforming teachers informally. Despite the training provided to principals on how to deal with underperforming teachers, the strategies used in supporting teachers differ from school to school. For the most part, however, the management of support strategies is normally delegated to line supervisors, thus posing a problem in so far as they have not been the ones who have receive training.

The second phase interviews indicate that training remains a major problem. The Senior Officer from the Teachers' Federation believes that more training on TARS was required for school administrators and executives (Interview 03/09). This view is shared by a Teachers' Federation's country area organiser:

> Often a supervising teacher is left to the junior level of leadership and really you become a head teacher or an AP [Assistant Principal] and you're given very little, as I understand, training on how to deal with the difficult teachers. (Interview 05/09)

For a DET Senior Officer, training is an area in which the Department continues to experience difficulties, partly because of the sheer operational scale involved:

> Unfortunately, I think we're not so good at that. I think we're developing training schemes to explain performance management and then subsequent performance improvement programs, but because the organisation is so large, I think one of the difficulties is actually getting to principals across the State... We go out and do a heap of training, but it tends to be on an as-required basis because we could never meet the level of training that would be required to do it consistently around the State. (Interview 02/09)

Although school personnel are now required to go through a performance management process, most of those interviewed had received no formal training in performance management. Perhaps as a result of this, interviewees sometimes appeared to have very limited understanding of whether the processes adopted to formulate and measure their goals where appropriate. Teachers who were interviewed during the second phase of the study believed that there is a need to train school executives in managing staff, although they are also of the view that time constraints pose additional challenges here. As stated by one city High School teacher:

> In terms of managing people I honestly don't think there's much training at all in that. Mentoring people skills, communication skills, effective leadership skills. As I said, a lot of it comes back to the time constraints - that have been placed on Head Teachers. (Interview 08/09)

This view was shared by a country primary school teacher:

> They need to give training to our executive[s] so that these people are aware of what they should be looking at, should be aware of how to follow through I know that [the] executive take on roles that is usually because of experience that they've had, but I don't know if they actually even have any formal training in management of personnel. (Interview 19/09)

In sum, the lack of training provided has contributed to several instances of teachers feeling de-motivated and/or demoralized owing to the belief of the lack of understanding about the performance management. There is evidence of concerns amongst the participants that the Department lacks the resources to provide adequate training across the State.

Lack of quality feedback

The literature highlights the centrality of quality feedback to performance appraisal efficacy. For instance, Gomez-Meijia (1990) argues that the quality of feedback provided to staff by supervisors is pivotal to the success of the appraisal process. Research conducted in the Australian Public Service by O'Donnell and Shields (2002) also highlights the high value

employees place on regular, timely and detailed feedback. The interview evidence for this study points to ongoing dissatisfaction over the quality of feedback provided to teachers about their teaching performance.

In both interview rounds, interviewees indicated that detailed feedback is valued but often not given. As stated by a Federation country organiser:

> A young, retrained teacher came to a school, he was there two terms and he contacted me… She [the principal] never, in the two terms, said one positive thing to this young teacher. He would ask her for written feedback and her response was, you take notes while I'm speaking to you. My advice to that young teacher was to cut your losses and get out of that school as quickly as possible. (Interview 05/09)

As a Federation city organiser had herself experienced first hand, the lack of feedback during the TARS process could be very problematic:

> …I know as a teacher myself for some time I wasn't aware that I was being ticked off, every year, and no positive or negative feedback [being] provided. (Interview 04/09)

Similarly, a city high school teacher decried the absence of adequate feedback:

> TARS doesn't really give us scope for giving teachers feedback and yet we're expected to give our students feedback which we do all the time. (Interview 08/09)

The same interviewee added:

> I think that's something that TARS is very deficient in…having just that one TARS at the end of the year I believe is a major let down for a lot of teachers because not a lot comes out of it. You're looking at possibly a maximum one hour session. What on Earth can you cover in one hour that you've been, addressing the entire year. (Interview 08/09)

Another city primary teacher commented:

> I think there's not so much done on the individual basis… it's more for teachers coming to supervisors when there's an issue and when there's a problem… But as a supervisor normally they're talking to the group not necessarily individually. (Interview 11/09).

For country teachers, however, the experience with feedback appears to have been more positive:

> I personally have a very good supervisor and the feedback that I get is not so much through the formal process, but the feedback I get is constant. So, we've got an extremely good working relationship and so if there is anything that I need or she feels that I need to do, the[n] she'll talk to me about that. It's nothing formal, but the feedback that I get from her is immediate, it's effective and it's articulated very well. So, I personally believe that I've got a wonderful supervisor who does the TARS very well. (Interview 14/09)

As shown above, there has been ongoing dissatisfaction with the way feedback is provided by the supervisor. The unwillingness or inability of the supervisor to provide feedback was a commonly cited problem, particularly in city schools. However, the interview evidence also shows that where good feedback is forthcoming and accepted the effects are invariably positive.

Under-recognition of the needs of equity groups

A further weakness was the fact that the new procedures afforded insufficient recognition of and support for the needs of equity groups. For example, teachers from a non-English-speaking background (NESB) necessarily require more support during the early stages of their employment. As the deputy principal of a country high school observed, failure to identify and address the particular challenges faced by such teachers stood to consign them to long-term performance disadvantage:

> The current procedures are set to fail the equity groups, or it certainly doesn't assist them. So I think it increases the barriers to them performing satisfactorily. I can think of a couple of cases of people who became very good teachers but the first couple of years were horrendous for them and they got no support at all and they just - usually through economic necessity - stuck at it, and at the end became very good teachers. (Interview 9/03)

The Teachers' Federation was clearly aware of this equity problem. In the minutes of its Executive meeting of 15 September 2001, the Federation supported the continued

recruitment of overseas-trained teachers but called on the Carr government for additional support programs for this group of teachers.

However, not all interviewees agreed that the disproportionate number of NESB teachers were experiencing difficulties with their performance reflected any shortcoming in the system of performance management itself. According to one DET senior manager, the chief cause of the difficulties faced by NESB teachers lay elsewhere:

> There may be a disproportionate number of people from non-English-Speaking Backgrounds on programs and that could be through different expectations and classroom management, and different expectations of what kids do. I don't think the answer's found in the procedures for these things but probably in entry qualifications and training before entry. (Interview 02/03)

Whilst the system has become increasingly reliant on overseas-trained teachers, the challenges that these teachers face are often overlooked. For instance in a country school, where teachers from non-Anglophone cultures are rare, it is much more difficult to support these teachers. One country school teacher remarked that:

> We have two members of staff who are from other countries and sometimes I've heard the kids say that they can't understand them. I don't have trouble with it. Possibly in the classroom they speak a bit too quickly. I don't know how many teachers from other ethnic backgrounds this school has had five years ago but I pretty much suggest it was zero. (Interview 15/09)

A country local union organiser provided a similar insight into the problems associated with the appointment of overseas trained teachers in the rural and isolated towns and communities:

> When teacher apply to teach in the public school system in NSW and they get accepted, they get given a number, sadly then they are just a number. And often overseas trained teachers get appointed to rural and regional isolated towns and communities and it just falls over. Interview 05/09)

The challenges facing overseas trained teachers were also highlighted by a city high school principal:

> With overseas trained teachers, there's been lots of problems. One, the process and style of education in Australia is very different from the process and style in China, India, Fiji, I'm just thinking of the ones that come to my mind, Vietnam, even England, believe it or not. People forget just because they speak English, it doesn't mean that everything is okay, it's not. There not a process for those people to see that it's really different and what happens is it creates problems down the line…Nobody had been through a process with them, which said, this is not teaching anybody to do that, you've got to look after your management of the classroom, you've got to work with students, you have to be engaging. (Interview 06/09)

Other interviewees pointed to comparable difficulties faced by female teachers who had not taught for a number of years whilst caring for their children. As the principal of a metropolitan primary school noted:

> [I]n today's world the system has changed from a syllabus point of view – it has changed dramatically. In the last five years, we have had huge syllabus changes…if you have been out of the system then you will have absolutely no idea what they're talking about. And when you're trying to fit into a school, fit into a mandatory system, and you've got no syllabus knowledge, then you're up the creek. (Interview 04/03)

Likewise, the principal of a country primary school observed:

> It's not only people – and I'm talking about qualified people coming from all over the world. It's difficult for them to fit in so there needs to be some sort of a system – it's ladies, particularly, that have gone back to teaching after having a family… It's men, women who choose to leave teaching for some reason to be involved in another occupation whether it be business or another specialty. You've only got to spin around and you've lost touch. Some teachers lose touch while they're in the system. (Interview 17/03).

Thus, there is some evidence that under the TARS procedures, insufficient account has been taken of the circumstances and special needs of particular equity groups, including NESB teachers and working mothers.

Some of these weaknesses clearly persist. Interview evidence gathered during both phases of the study identified a number of weaknesses in the implementation of

performance appraisal. Teachers and union officials, in particular, were very concerned about the lack of clarity as to the purpose of the performance appraisal process, the absence of clear performance standards, lack of support and direction for goal setting, lack of quality feedback, inadequate training for the supervisor on how to conduct performance appraisal, insufficient support for equity groups, and inconsistency in the implementation of the performance system.

Conclusion

The findings arising from this study also offer senior management insight into some of the shortcomings of the current performance management procedures. The first issue identified is the lack of consistency in the implementation of the annual performance appraisal. As noted in the study, the strategies used in supporting teachers differed from school to school. For principals, this posed a problem in that the management of support strategies was normally delegated to line supervisors who have little understanding of the current procedures. Schools in rural areas were more likely to deal with underperforming teachers informally rather than placing them on the formal program. Furthermore, the phase one interview evidence shows that there was inadequate training for school executives in how to conduct the annual performance appraisals, how to undertake goal setting, how to provide feedback on performance, and how to deal with teachers experiencing major performance difficulties.

As shown in this paper, the Teachers' Federation played a consultative and participative role in both the negotiation and implementation of annual performance review. The Teachers' Federation continued to emphasise the relationship between professional development and the annual performance appraisal and eventually succeeded in

ensuring that any teachers assessed as experiencing difficulties with their teaching performance would be strongly supported through a development or improvement program.

The longitudinal evidence gathered for this paper highlights areas of ongoing difficulty that teachers experience and the numerous factors that impact on their performance. It adds to the body of research providing practical and policy implications for management in addressing the areas of difficulties experienced by teachers. The findings in relation to system limitations also stand to assist in the areas of training and development, recruitment and retension policy and equal employment opportunity.

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Appendix A

Table 1 and 2 summarises the details of the first phase of the interviews undertaken for the study.

Table 1 Interviewee Details, Phase One

Organisation	**Position**	**Date of Interview**	**Interviewee Code No**
Department of Education and Training	Senior Officer	10 October 2003	01/03
	Senior Officer	16 March 2004	02/03
NSW Teachers Federation	Former Senior Officer and current Executive Member	30 January 2004	01/04
	Former Senior Officer and current Executive Member	3 March 2004	02/04
District	**Position**	**Date of Interview**	**Interviewee Code No**
City High School	Superintendent	10 October 2003	03/03
	Principal	23 September 2003	10/03
	Head Teacher	23 September 2003	09/03
	Local Teachers' Fed. Representative	23 September 2003	11/03
City Primary School	Principal	24 September 2003	04/03
	Deputy Principal	24 September 2003	05/03
	Asst Principal	24 September 2003	07/03
	R/Asst Principal	24 September 2003	08/03
	Local Teachers' Fed. Representative	24 September 2003	06/03
Country High School	Superintendent	25 September 2003	14/03
	Principal	26 September 2003	13/03
	Deputy Principal	26 September 2003	12/03
	Local Teachers' Fed Representatives	26 September 2007	15/03
Country Primary School	Principal	25 September 2003	17/03
	Deputy Principal	25 September 2003	16/03
	Local Teachers' Fed. Representative	(Withdrew from participation)	

Table 2 Interviewee Details, Phase Two

Organisation	Position	Date of Interview	Interviewee Code No
Department of Education and Training	Senior Officer	19 December 2008	01/09
	Senior Officer	07 April 2009	02/09
NSW Teachers Federation	Senior Officer	03 April 2009	03/09
	City Organiser	25 March 2009	04/09
	Country Organiser	27 February 2009	05/09
	Local Union Representative (City High School)	18 December 2008	09/09
	Local Union Representative (City Primary School)	12 December 2008	12/09
	Local Union Representative (Country High School)	15 December 2008	16/09
	Local Union Representative (Country Primary School)	2 March 2009	20/09
District	**Position**	**Date of Interview**	**Interviewee Code No**
City High School	Principal	18 December 2008	06/09
	Teacher	18 December 2008	07/09
	Teacher	18 December 2008	08/09
City Primary School	Principal	12 December 2008	10/09
	Teacher	12 December 2008	11/09
Country High School	Principal	15December 2008	13/09
	Teacher	15 December 2008	14/09
	Teacher	15 December 2008	14/09
Country Primary School	Principal	02 March 2009	17/09
	Teacher	02 March 2009	18/09
	Teacher	02 March 2009	19/09