Giving sense and changing perceptions in the implementation of the performance management system in public sector organisations in developing countries

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Abstract

Purpose – Change in public organisations has become inevitable in modern times. Yet, implementing change continues to be problematic, especially the attempt to introduce performance management (PM) in the sector. The purpose of this paper is to examine how HR managers are using sensegiving processes to attempt to institutionalise PM in public organisations in Ghana.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper utilises the mixed methods approach to examine the process of sensegiving. In using this method, the authors used focus group, as well as individual interview techniques and a quantitative survey of some selected organisations in the public sector.

Findings – The results of the study show that, four main activities, i.e. workshops, seminars and training, one-on-one communication, and unit meetings are employed in the process. The analysis indicates that these activities have become quite effective in the quest to change perceptions about PM in the sector.

Research limitations/implications – The research was limited to a few organisations. Hence, it will be necessary to expand it, if possible to the entire public sector to see if the same results will be obtained.

Practical implications – It shows that reformers must be cognisant of the views of employees in developing and implementing reforms that focus on changing both individual orientations and organisational and culture.

Originality/value – This is the first time such a study has been done in Ghana. Furthermore, studies on PM institutionalisation and implementation have either been qualitative or quantitative in nature. Studies using the mixed methods approach are rare, with those we know coming mostly from the Western World. Thus, this paper is one of the few to examine this issue using the mixed methods approach and more so from a developing country’s perspective.

Keywords Performance management, Ghana, Developing countries, Sensegiving, Human resource managers

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In modern public sector organisations introducing and implementing change to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness seems to have become the order of the day. Nevertheless, employee resistance continues to make exactly how to introduce and implement such changes a conundrum for change agents (Jones and Van de Ven, 2016; Kuipers et al., 2014). It has been argued that such resistance stems from lack of understanding and personality issues, the relentless pursuit of improvements, as well as the top-down nature of the reform process, which can affect employees incapacity (Armenakis et al., 1993; Glinka and Hensel, 2017; Oreg, 2006). To overcome this problem some scholars have advocated that change agents must understand the affect, cognition, and behaviour of employees (Jones and Van de Ven, 2016; Oreg, 2006), adopting techniques and leadership styles that will work, and
communicating well with employees, who are the targets of the change (Armenakis et al., 1993), because “positive employee attitudes are often vital to achieving organizational goals” (Weber and Weber, 2001, p. 291).

One technique capable of producing such an impact is sensegiving (Hong et al., 2016). Sensegiving generally deals with how leaders communicate and persuade employees to accept planned change by using every available opportunity to appeal to their values (Foldy et al., 2008). It is about the different mechanisms for getting them to see that the intended change is necessary and beneficial to both the individual and the organisation through effective communication between managers and employees (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Kraft et al., 2015). Through sensegiving, managers can strengthen the commitment of organisation members to their organisation’s goals, and spur them to strike out in new directions with enthusiasm (Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Foldy et al., 2008, p. 514).

A change that has become difficult to effect in both developed and developing countries is implementing performance management (PM) in the public sector (Andrews et al., 2006; Fryer et al., 2009; Gerrish, 2016; Kroll and Moynihan, 2015), and Ghana is no exception (Ohemeng, 2009). Since the early 1990s the Ghanaian Government has, on a number of occasions, attempted to introduce a PM system (PMS) into the sector with a view to changing its bureaucratic orientation to a greater focus on results. These attempts were unsuccessful; in 2013, however, the Public Services Commission was able to introduce a PMS that seems to have been accepted in the public sector (Allotey, 2013).

One of the reasons for the failure of the previous attempts is employees’ negative perception of the system and the failure of managers to address it through sensegiving. Numerous researchers have identified how employee behaviour—which may be based on how they perceive issues, or the meaning they attach to such issues based on the informational cues available in the organisational environment—can seriously promote or undermine organisational change (Stirpe et al., 2013). There is, though, a lacuna in the literature on how employee perception influences the development and institutionalisation of PM and what managers can do to limit their impact on such changes (Sharma et al., 2016). The little that has been generated so far has been confined to performance appraisal, a component of PM (Kim and Holzer, 2016; Kim and Rubianty, 2011; Latham et al., 2007).

Thus, based on this dearth in the literature on PM and employee perception, the present paper uses the sensegiving framework developed by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) to examine how middle level managers continue to give sense to employees, and how they have enabled these employees to change, their perceptions, if they had any, of PM. Using this framework will help us understand how the change process may work in practice. As noted by Bartunek et al. (1999), the framework is a useful tool for thinking about how a leader understands and communicates strategic change (p. 39).

The paper asks the following questions:

**RQ1.** What are the main processes middle managers are using in giving sense about the PM to subordinates in their organisations?

**RQ2.** How are these processes helping organisational members to be aware, understand, and meet the expectations in the PMS?

In short, how do employees view these processes? These questions are important as we attempt to see whether the process of sensegiving is the same in different environments, the behaviours managers exhibit in the change process, and how successful they have been.
Using a mixed methods approach we examine the process of sensegiving in some public service organisations. We argue that managers and supervisors can address those perceptions of employees that make them engage in counterproductive work behaviours through sensegiving. The goal of this paper is thus to highlight the need for managers to focus on the process of giving sense through effective communication with employees with the view that doing so may help change the “cognitive perspective” of employees in the institutionalisation and implementation process.

We are concerned about the sensegiving process because it has been noted that “56 per cent of PM projects end in failure” (de Waal, 2007, p. 211), and this failure continues to be placed at the feet of middle managers (Hope, 2010), defined as those who occupy the position in organisational hierarchies between the operating core and the apex (Harding et al., 2014), because of their inability to effectively communicate with their subordinates about PM (Pulakos and O’Leary, 2011; Saks and Gruman, 2011). In spite of this, studies of change management seem more preoccupied with the content than the process of change (Kuipers et al., 2014).

The study contributes to knowledge in a number of ways. First is the organisational change literature: in particular, on the public sector. Over the past four decades public sectors across the globe have undergone tremendous changes in the name of administrative reforms, including the introduction of PM. Unfortunately, our knowledge about the institutionalisation and implementation of PM is dominated by the literature from the developed world (Gerrish, 2016; Kroll, 2015), with a paucity of research on developing countries. This paper helps to close that gap. Second, it contributes to the literature on sensegiving itself, and on the role of middle level managers in the public sector. While there is a significant literature on sensegiving, it has focussed on the private sector at the expense of the public (Hong et al., 2016). Third, at the same time, there is little that uses the theory to examine the change process, especially the role of change agents, in developing countries with different cultures. Hence, despite the numerous examples of research on it, “the study of sensegiving lacks an explicit account of context” (Kraft et al., 2015, p. 309), although giving and “making sense […] is not accomplished in a vacuum and it is not just context-free networking” (Taylor and van Every, 2000, p. 251 – cited in Kraft et al., 2015).

The paper proceeds as follows: first we review the literature on sensegiving, and then discuss the framework of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991). Next we focus on the methodology of the study, and follow that with a brief overview of the public sector and the PM framework in Ghana. We then go on to analyse, using the data collected, the processes and strategies middle level managers are using to give sense about the new PMS to other employees. We conclude with implications, limitations, and issues for future research.

**Sensegiving in an organisational setting**

The sensegiving literature is booming. Fortunately scholars seem to agree that sensegiving consists of a process that some (leaders or superiors, in particular, transformational leaders) use to influence how others (in most cases, subordinates) make sense, especially during change management in organisations (Bartunek et al., 1999; Foldy et al., 2008; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Sensegiving is, therefore, an important activity for leaders because it helps them shape employees’ attitudes to some definitions of organisational reality, inasmuch as the processes facilitate acceptance, enthusiasm, and energy for changing practices (Filstad, 2014; Foldy et al., 2008; Risher, 2016). For instance, Hill and Levenhagen (1995) show how leaders must give sense to employees through the development of mental models, which will help such leaders communicate the vision and direction of their organisations to their employees in such a way as to gain their support in meeting the organisation’s objectives (see also Foldy et al., 2008).

There is consensus among scholars that sensegiving is a process that a leader uses to influence the cognitive perception of others (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014): or, as explained
by Bartunek et al. (1999), “how they (leaders) attempt to inculcate a particular point of view” (p. 41). Elaborating on this, Foldy et al. (2008) say that sensegiving is the “process of disseminating new understandings to audiences to influence their ‘sensemaking-for-self’” (p. 515). Drawing upon various previous definitions, Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) argue that “sensegiving is an interpretive process in which actors influence each other through persuasive or evocative language, and it is used both by organizational leaders and other stakeholders, including middle managers, directors, and other employees” (p. 57). This definition is important because of its focus on the “interpretive process”. How, for instance, subordinates understand a manager’s direction may force that leader to change the way he or she communicates with employees. From the perspective of the leader, this change can then influence how employees perceive and understand their world at the workplace. It is thus not necessarily a one-way phenomenon.

Smerek (2009, pp. 135-145) has identified five aspects of sensegiving. These are: priority setting; framing; setting for an inspiring future image; constructing crisis; and re-labelling and re-organising. He explains priority-setting as the process of creating a boundary of attention, identifying the things to which people will attend, and fixing the context in which people will focus their efforts, while framing is about organising experience and setting the bounds through which activity is interpreted. This is the same as vision setting for the organisation. On the other hand, setting for an inspiring future image is about looking at where the organisation is supposed to be in the future. It is thus a vivid picture of the organisation in the years to come, and helps the organisational members make sense of what is expected of them (Ericson, 2001). Fourth is constructing crisis, which is about disturbing the present equilibrium in order to create awareness of the need for change or a new way of doing things so as to be able to achieve the objective of the organisation. The final part is relabelling and re-organising, which comprises symbolic action, images, and other influence techniques (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014).

Bartunek et al. (1999) have identified four strategies that leaders use to give sense in the organisation. These are: making the message appears logical and reasonable; using sanctions and rewards; appealing to the values and norms of the receiver; and demonstrating the credibility of the sender. The idea of Bartunek et al. (1999) is based on the notion that sensegiving is a persuasive adventure in which the leader uses language to persuade members to participate in organisational change. Sonenshein (2006) similarly accepts the importance of language as a means of influencing organisational members; this language is based on how the issues at stake are crafted. Thus, sensegiving is “the way managers (or others) attempt to “sell” a message and gain influence on how others make sense” (Degn, 2013, p. 3). In all, “sensegiving is an attempt to intentionally alter how people attribute meaning, with no assurance that the intended meaning is adopted” (Smerek, 2011, p. 80). Stirpe et al. (2013), however, believe that these strategies may only succeed as a result of contextual factors, such as support from both top management and supervisors, which promote employees’ positive attitudes in accepting the change (p. 3807).

The processes of sensegiving: Gioia and Chittipeddi’s framework

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) presented a simple but powerful framework that can be used to understand how organisation members, especially those in authority, can give sense in times of change. Although the framework combines sensemaking and sensegiving, our interest, especially in the role of middle managers in the sensegiving process, leads us to be particularly interested in the sensegiving aspect, bearing in mind that “sensegiving is a constitutive part of sensemaking” (Degn, 2013, p. 4).

In this framework Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) defined sensegiving as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). They outlined how sensegiving takes
place in the organisational setting. In their model they indicated that sensegiving is a top-down approach in which leaders who have developed strategies for change inform organisational members about the strategies and what needs to be done to bring about the needed change. Although this top-down approach has been criticised, whether one likes it or not sensegiving does begin at the top. Only thereafter can there be reciprocal sensegiving (a bottom-up one) (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). This top-down approach is necessary because, according to the authors, organisational change strategies actually “reflect the values of top managers” (p. 434).

In the model the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving consist of four stages or steps. The first step is the envisioning stage, which is mainly a process of sensemaking: the leader tries to make sense of the situation that needs to change in order to move the organisation from its present state to another. As they note, at this stage the leader seeks to make sense of the new situation by creating some guiding vision (p. 443). The next stage is signalling, which is the first stage of the sensegiving process itself. In this case the leader attempts to communicate the vision to stakeholders so that they can make sense of it. This is important, since the vision will only be accepted if the stakeholders do so. The third step is where the stakeholders attempt to make sense by trying to figure out the meaning of the proposed vision, and revising their understanding. They call this stage re-envisioning; again, it is sensemaking. The fourth stage is the sensegiving effort by the stakeholders to respond to the proposed vision and attempt to influence its realised form. This stage is marked by the emergence and communication of an organisation-wide commitment to action on the vision. They therefore refer to this stage as energising. Overall, Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) framework reflects attempts by management to give employees a “viable interpretation of a new reality”, and influence them “to adopt it as their own” (p. 433). Here management expects that through this process employees will be on the same level of thinking and understanding about the “new reality”, and how this reality will benefit not only management, but the employees as well.

We are interested in the efforts of middle level managers to give sense in terms of the new PMS to colleagues and subordinates; the first three stages have already taken place, with the development of the new PMS by the PSC, which involved different stakeholders: i.e. the Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS), the Public Sector Reform Secretariat (PSRS), and the Fair Wages and Salary Commission (FWSC). Furthermore, the PSC has already embarked upon its own process of giving sense to these middle level managers through various steps and mechanisms, and is expecting the latter to also give sense to other employees in their organisations. In short, these middle level managers have already “made sense” of the new system, and are, therefore, ready to energise their employees through sensegiving and meaning making for the effective implementation of the system (Figure 1).

It is expected that in this way the embedded notion of PM will change. It will not just be “praise singing” (Bawole et al., 2013), or “much ado about nothing” (Ohemeng et al., 2015), but an acceptable system that will help change the culture of the service over time. We believe that the “desired outcome of the sensegiving process [i.e.] a cognitive shift, is a change in thinking or perception” (Foldy et al., 2008) among personnel, enabling them to understand the essence of PM and how this understanding will make it possible for them to undertake the necessary behavioural changes that will lead to the institutionalisation of PM, as well as realising its objectives in the sector.

**Contextual background**

Ghana is the first country south of the Sahara to gain independence from colonialism. At the time of independence it had one of the best, if not the best, public services in Africa, with better human resources than the now well-known Asian Tigers (Werlin, 2003). At independence there were thus high hopes for Ghana’s development. By the early 1980s, however, the economy was comatose. Its public service existed only in name (Herbst, 1993; Hodder-Williams, 1984). What accounted for this state of affairs?
The first nine years of independence under the Nkrumah government witnessed the expansion of the public sector, with the creation of more public service institutions, including state owned enterprises and other institutions parallel to the civil service. Unfortunately, these new institutions were not matched by the necessary human resources. Consequently, some in authority in the service did not have the qualifications or the knowledge to manage them. Another problem was politicisation, which at one point saw the purging of even the most qualified personnel for political reasons. These issues undermined it so badly that by 1965 the once touted public service of Ghana was in steep decline, instilling serious institutional despondency (Ayee, 1991). It was in these circumstances that the government was overthrown by the military in 1966.

The government that came to power, the National Liberation Council (NLC), decided to reform the public service with a view to enhancing its ability to perform its functions efficiently and effectively. It thus created the Mills-Odoi Commission, and charged it with formulating a programme that would lead to effective reform. In its final report the Commission made a number of recommendations, including the amalgamation of some of the parallel institutions, as well decentralisation of personnel to local government, with substantial powers. In this way it was expected that the civil service would be trimmed and enabled to focus on its core function of advising the government on national development.

The NLC could not implement the recommendations made by the Commission because in 1969 it decided to hand over power to a new civilian government. It expected the new government, the Progress Party (PP), to do the implementing. Unfortunately, the PP became preoccupied with the economic predicament that had been imposed by the world economic recession of the early 1970s. When it did attempt to implement some aspects of the reform, it ignored the decentralisation recommendation, leading to a politicised public service. They could not go any further, as it was overthrown in early 1972 by – again – the military, which set up the National Redemption Council (NRC).
The NRC governed from 1972 to 1979, a period, which can be described as the darkest one in the history of the Ghanaian public service. By 1979 its performance had plummeted to the point where it could not discharge basic functions. Corruption was rife, with large-scale absenteeism and moonlighting. The cream of the personnel left for the private sector, or left the country (Ayee, 2001). The service’s numbers nevertheless continued to swell, especially the lower ranks, so that it suffered from “bureaucratic elephantiasis” (Goldsmith, 1999). The bureaucratic web had no focus on results.

The same culture persisted until the last day of 1981, when the Provisional National Defence Committee came to power and, in 1983, initiated a structural adjustment programme (SAP). The first part of the SAP focussed on righting economic wrongs. Any success was quite limited, and blame was placed on the bureaucracy. In 1988, seeing the slowness of reform, the government, with support from the World Bank, turned its attention to public sector reform. This reform was in two parts: the civil service, and the larger public service, including SOEs.

The latter reform involved privatising non-core SOEs while improving the core ones sufficiently to enable it to perform its basic functions. A civil service reform program (CSRP) aimed to reduce the number of civil servants and incentivize other officials. While the non-core privatisation went quite well, the core one’s performance continued to be a source of embarrassment. Similarly, the CSRP was able to reduce the number of civil servants, but could not change its bureaucratic culture. The reforms inadequately attended to capacity building and attitudinal changes. They focussed on cost reduction, with little or no attempt at identifying output constraints, such as out-dated missions, work plans, and performance measures. The absence of an effective PMS rendered the public service bereft of accountability, teamwork, and productivity.

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) democratically elected in late 1992 then undertook a second round of public sector reforms, called the National Institutional Renewal Programme (NIRP). As the name implies, the NIRP dealt with institutional strengthening and the introduction of a performance-oriented culture in public sector institutions. A core aspect of this renewal programme was the introduction of PM in the civil service and SOEs, as well as other public institutions, consistent with global public management thinking underpinned by the new public management (Domfeh, 2004).

In the Civil Service the new reform was labelled the Civil Service Performance Improvement Plan (CSPIP). The objective of the CSPIP was the development of a culture of results through performance orientation, providing value for money in all endeavours, achieving a higher level of efficiency through cost effective methods, innovation, market/customer sensitivity, and transparency and accountability, and enhancing the culture of good governance (Antwi et al., 2008).

A new approach was also developed to re-orient and restructure core SOEs rather than subjecting them to the vagaries of privatisation. Management was to be given some autonomy, encouraging them to be commercially oriented by allowing them to operate as a business rather than as political tools (State Enterprises Commission, 1993). Thus, since 1994 PM has become a powerful instrument for managing the public sector. Nevertheless, institutionalising a meaningful PM continues to elude the government. In his study Ohemeng (2009) summarised the main issues: societal culture, lack of incentives, personnel turnover, incomprehension of PM, and institutional fragmentation. Others have identified the absence of political will on the part of political authorities to implement what may be considered difficult programs (Ohemeng and Ayee, 2016).

It was the understanding of these problems and the persisting belief in PM that led the NDC government (2009-2016) to instruct the PSC to develop a new PMS; one that has been described as a paradigm shift (Allotey, 2013). In taking the lead, the PSC used a collaborative governance approach whereby key stakeholders, such as the OHCS, the FWSC, the PSRS, and the SEC discussed and developed the system. It was believed that the
institutional fragmentation that earlier had led to turf war could be overcome. Views expressed by some officials show that the process is becoming arduous, however. The issue is how employees can perceive PM differently to understand and accept it, and it is to this that we now turn our attention. This understanding of PM is necessary, since sensegiving are “always performed in the face of a perceived audience” (Degn, 2013, p. 4).

Methods and data collection technique
To answer the research questions the study employed a number of methodologies. The first is the mixed method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques in one single study (Johnson et al., 2007; Molina-Azorin et al., 2017). We began the research with the qualitative phase, which took different forms. First was a focus group interview with some public servants undertaking graduate studies in public administration at the Department of Public Administration and Health Services Management at the University of Ghana Business School and the School of Governance and Public Services at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. We selected these schools and students for the sake of convenience. These groups were used because we wanted to understand what is happening before moving on to talk to officials at their organisations. Two focus group interviews were held, with one individual from each school. In total, 15 students from both schools participated. With the information obtained we were able to formulate a number of questions that we intended to ask HR directors and managers in the organisations, as well as in the quantitative survey. Each focus group interview lasted about an hour.

After the focus group interview, we sent letters to 19 of the then existing 23 ministries and three other public service institutions[1]. We intentionally excluded the ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Attorney General and Interior due to the difficulty in obtaining permission to interview their personnel. This was the second phase of the qualitative process. We focussed on these managers because, as noted by Maitlis and Christianson (2014, p. 80), they “work at the boundaries between senior management and the rest of the workforce, [where] their role may involve continuously responding to the dual demands of sensemaking and sensegiving”. It was, however, the most difficult phase of the research, as not all the organisations responded positively to our request for interview. We believe that the failure was attributable to the impending elections; HR directors were being cautious about whom they talked to, especially when the outcome of the election was still unknown. We thus had to adopt the snowball sampling technique, as well as the use of personal contacts (connections) to get these HR directors and managers. These approaches were the most productive, because they enabled us to contact as many people as possible for the interview, as well as helping with the quantitative aspect of the research.

Based on this approach, we were able to interview officials from five ministries in addition to that of the OHSC. We also interviewed HR managers from three other public service institutions. These institutions were randomly selected from ten organisations for personal, one-on-one, interviews with, at least, the HR director, a manager of HR, and two employees. In all, 21 interviews were conducted from nine organisations.

In the interview we adopted the narrative approach, because it allowed the interviewees to express themselves freely, telling us their stories, including their experiences of making sense of PM and, in turn, communicating and influencing subordinates on the subject (Vaara et al., 2016). At the same time they were able to provide candid information about how things are being done and whether those processes would lead to the ultimate objective of institutionalizing the system in the service. The interviews were then transcribed and used in the qualitative section.

The second phase of the research was the quantitative data collection. Here, a questionnaire was administered to solicit views on the methods being used by managers and their efficacy in shaping the understanding or the sensemaking of employees.
It comprised 30 questions. In all, 310 questionnaires were handed to the various HR officials in the eight of the nine institutions identified above[2]. Using these officials had a number of advantages. First, it helped us reach more respondents than we would have with other means, raising our response rate. Second, it allayed the fears of employees that the research had been sanctioned by the government of the day and that the results would be shared with it and, possibly, used against it. This was important for us, as it has become awfully difficult to reach this population in view of recent clandestine activities of some journalists to reveal corruption in the sector. Finally, it saved us much time, as there was one point of contact for each organisation. Of 310 questionnaires distributed 181 were returned, representing 58.4 per cent response rate.

The processes of sensegiving and the effect on changing perceptions

In this section we will examine how managers are engaging in sensegiving in their organisations in the context of the new PM. As already noted, we aspire to understand the various ways employed by these managers in the sensegiving process, in order to help organisational members understand and meet the expectations of the PMS.

Throughout the interviews four main activities in the sensegiving process were emphasised. These are the traditional workshops; training and seminars; unit meetings; and one-on-one communication with superiors. All four activities focus on managers communicating the new PMS to their subordinates. This is not surprising since the key element in sensegiving is the ability of leaders to communicate effectively to persuade subordinates to achieve a “cognitive shift” (Foldy et al., 2008) of these employees in order for them to accept what is being implemented. Furthermore, for PM to work effectively, more attention needs to be devoted to “improving manager-employee communication” (Pulakos and O’Leary, 2011, p. 148), rather than just the introduction of a formal PMS.

Of the four, workshops have been found to be one of the most common forms of sensegiving in organisations (Iveroth and Hallencrentz, 2016). According to interviewees, two kinds of workshop were held to help organisation members understand PM. The first focussed on directors and deputy directors. This type of workshop is ongoing, and a way of reminding or constantly talking to these directors and their deputies of what needs to be done with respect to the PM programme. One interviewee from the OHSC, for example, noted: “We have had series of workshops for the various directors and their deputies. Here at the office of the Head of Civil Service, for instance, we had a two-days workshop geared towards training officials to understand the program”. The second type focusses on the general organisational members, is held once or twice a year, and is led by HR officials. The purpose of this workshop is to discuss the general development of the organisation, and HR officials use some of their time to discuss PM.

A second way of enhancing sensegiving is through seminars and training; this is the most common form of sensegiving at the organisation level. Kroll and Moynihan (2015) have identified training as an important tool in the implementation of PM. To the two, training is positively associated with reform implementation, especially reforms dealing with PM, and argued that managers who received more training on PM also paid more attention to performance data and strategic goals when making decisions.

Our interviewees highlighted the importance of training in the institutionalisation and implementation process of the new PMS. According to some officials, seminars and training are held every month for the various managers. One interviewee noted:

It is a document we have to live with. So we have taken the time to train people. We take officials through the document step by step, and allow the various units and sections to use their work schedule to feed into the discussion to try and set targets on their own, which we supervise. So at the end of each training session, we expect that they (unit and section leaders) go back well educated on it.
Another remarked: “We had hands-on-training here, especially when my subordinates wanted to start the process. They came here, and we discussed the program, and with that they understood it better”. Similarly, one explained how an additional training session had to be organised for the unit and section heads when some of them proved unable to fully grasp the programme. The interviewee noted that after the first training members were evaluated to discover their level of understanding. The person remarked: “After the evaluation, we realised it (the training) did not go well with people, so they came back for another training session”. At these seminars and trainings, emphasis is placed on the essence of the PM for both individual and organisational improvements. Furthermore, how to achieve one’s objectives and rewards and incentives are also discussed, says one official.

A third aspect of the process was one-on-one communication with superiors. It mostly dealt with how to embed the appraisal system in the PM. In general, officials have been encouraged to have at least three one-on-one sessions with subordinates, notwithstanding the expectation that they be continuous. Officially, the programme identifies three components of one-on-one meetings: the planning stage, the midyear review, and the end of year assessment. Said an interviewee from the OHSC: “We undertake an exercise across the civil service to ascertain how well officials are complying with the use of the new instrument, and our monitoring reports are then given to the Head of Service for further action”. One official clearly illustrated how things are done at the unit:

We do it (sit down) with our superiors and go through everything. So we decide on the targets and everything. So we don’t have any instance of you going to decide and you bring it to them to review for you. The process is that at the beginning of the year, the superior and subordinate must have a meeting for the former to brief the latter about the sector’s goals and what is expected of them. It’s good that we keep on reminding ourselves […]

Here, the focus is more on individual goal setting and appraisal, the incentive structures, as well as the training needs, equipped one HR manager.

A fourth activity is the unit meetings. Similar to the one-on-one, the unit meetings are undertaken not by the HR officials, but by unit heads, who have been trained by their respective HR officials. In this process officials are given the flexibility in determining how many such meetings should be held and what needs to be discussed, as long as it falls within the parameters of the programme, says one official. An official explained that they held weekly unit meetings with her subordinates, and this had been extremely helpful to her because she better understands the needs of her subordinates. Through this, according to her, we are able to determine the training needs for the unit (rather than an individual person), if any, and recommend these to HR for further action. Another official noted the importance of this sort of meeting: “As it’s been said in most circles, the most important thing in organisation is the interaction between the boss and the subordinate. The interaction that goes on is what is more important. If we make it (manager-subordinate interaction) part of the management culture of the service then people will get to know what we are both doing in the course of the year by the midyear”. Another highlighted the importance of how continuous interaction can lead to personal relationship, which bodes well for one to effectively communicate while at the same time managing the relationship. The official said: “[...] Apart from that personal relationship is important. The informal thing is very key to help people understand anything in the organisation”.

**Views of employees on the processes and the impact on PM**

This section uses quantitative data to assess the efficacy of the processes used by managers to give sense to their subordinates. Before these issues are examined, we will look at the characteristics of the respondents in this study. Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table I.
Table I makes it clear that there are more male \((n = 95)\) than female \((n = 86)\) views: whereas 52.5 per cent of respondents are males, 47.5 per cent are females. These proportions are not far apart, which means that results will not be biased towards a particular gender. Respondents are also from all age groups, 25 years to 60 years. More than half (58.6 per cent), however, are earlier career workers aged between 25 and 35 years \((n = 106)\); 24.95 per cent of these respondents are aged between 36 and 45 years of age. The remaining 30 respondents are 46 years or older. Regarding their academic qualifications, more than half (59.1 per cent) hold at least a bachelor’s degree. The next largest academic group are those with a master’s degree (25.4 per cent). There are PhD holders among the respondents. Only a few hold other academic qualifications, like high school certificate. Respondents therefore possess the necessary academic qualifications to have given thoughtful responses.

These respondents have long years of experience working in the public sector. Only 66 (36.5 per cent) have done so for five years or less; the remaining 63.5 per cent have had between six and over 20 years of experience. Finally respondents’ current positions in the organisations were also asked. Most respondents, 37.6 per cent, were middle level management. Together, however, senior and upper middle level management numbered about 92 respondents, representing 50.8 per cent. Only a few, 3.3 per cent, were lower level management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristics of respondents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 above</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest academic qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of experience working in the public sector</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years and above</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current position in the organisation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper middle level</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle level</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle level</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On sensegiving activities, the first point of assessment was issues of awareness of the PMS developed by the PSC for the public sector, and whether this knowledge was associated with experience with a current PM. This was examined using cross-tabulation or a contingency table and a \( \chi^2 \) test of independence, results of which are presented in Table II. From Table II, 115 respondents, or 65.9 per cent, are aware of such PMS having been developed. The remainder were either unaware (\( n = 49, f = 27.2 \) per cent) or uncertain about their knowledge of PMS (\( n = 16, f = 8.9 \) per cent). On how long they have known the current PM, whereas 38.3 per cent (\( n = 69 \)) of respondents have had less than a year’s experience with current PM, 35 per cent (\( n = 63 \)) have known it for about two years. The remaining 26.7 per cent have three years’ experience with the current PM.

Of respondents with less than a year of experience with the current PM, few are aware of the PMS developed by the PSC for the public sector. Whereas 49.3 per cent of these were aware of such PMS, more than 50 per cent were either unaware or uncertain of their knowledge. For people with two or even three years of experience with current PM, the majority answered “Yes” to the question about knowledge of PMS developed in the public sector. This indicates an association between experience with current PM and knowledge. It seems that persons with more experience are more likely to be aware of the PMS developed by the PSC for the public sector than persons with less than a year’s experience. This is interesting but hardly surprising. In any organisation, new employees may have hardly any time to accumulate knowledge about the organisation[3]. This view is confirmed by the results of the \( \chi^2 \) test of independence, with a Pearson \( \chi^2 \) test statistic of 16.45 and \( p \)-value of 0.0020, which is lower even than a 1 per cent significance level. It can be concluded that there is an association between length of experience of current PM and awareness of the PMS developed by the PSC for the public sector. More experienced respondents are more likely to be aware than persons with less experience. To better understand the knowledge of respondents concerning the PMS in the sector, they were asked about their sources of information. In other words, we were interested in how they obtained their information on the PMS through the process of sensegiving. Their responses are presented in Table III.

A primary source of knowledge on the PMS is through workshops organised by departments for staff. As many as 77 respondents, representing 61.1 per cent, indicated this to be their source of information, and the occasion when PM was explained to them. This is not surprising, since the PSC had already undertaken their own sensegiving strategies with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long have you known the current PM (experience)</th>
<th>Less than a year</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you aware of the PMS developed by the PSC for the public sector (Knowledge)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Knowledge (Yes) given Experience</td>
<td>29.60</td>
<td>38.30</td>
<td>32.20</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Experience given Knowledge (Yes)</td>
<td>49.30</td>
<td>69.80</td>
<td>77.10</td>
<td>63.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Knowledge (No) given Experience</td>
<td>61.20</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Experience given Knowledge (No)</td>
<td>43.50</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>27.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Know. (Don’t Know) given Exp.</td>
<td>31.20</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Exp. given Know. (Don’t Know)</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>12.70</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>8.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Knowledge given Experience</td>
<td>38.30</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>26.70</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Experience given Knowledge</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 ) test of independence Pearson ( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>16.446</td>
<td>0.0020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Cross-tabulation of knowledge and experience with manager.

Performance management system
HR directors and managers, who are in turn supposed to give sense to their organisations. Unit meetings organised by department heads (n = 17, 13.5 per cent) and workshops organised by the PSC (n = 16, 12.7 per cent) are also relevant sources of information. Direct supervisors do not seem to be effective sources of such information, since few respondents indicated this to be their source. Perhaps some supervisors do not understand the system, or are not interested in implementing it, and thus do not care about it. If so, this is of grave concern, since such supervisors are supposed to be at the forefront of implementing the system in their units by periodically establishing and evaluating targets for subordinates. Something may need to be done by the PSC; otherwise, like previous attempts, the system will be either praise singing or much ado about nothing.

To get an understanding of how managers are engaging in sensegiving about PM in their organisations, respondents were asked to give their views on a five point scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest. A score significantly higher than 3 means that respondents agree or strongly agree that the issue under consideration is relevant in the public sector. On the other hand, a score significantly lower than 3 shows that respondents do not agree that the issue under consideration exists. Additionally, a score not significantly different from 3 shows that respondents are uncertain whether the issue under consideration exists in the public sector. Results are presented in Table IV.

From Table IV, ten issues relating to sensegiving and PM in the public sector are presented. For all items respondents scored the current state of affairs as significantly larger than the median score of 3. Respondents therefore agree or strongly agree that the issues presented are prevalent in the public sector. The highest scored item is management's ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop organised by the PSC</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop organised by my department for all employees</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through my unit head at a meeting of all those in the unit</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One on one with my supervisor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Sources of information about PMS in the public sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Performance of employees is evaluated every year</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.118 11.835</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Performance management links individual objectives with organisational objectives</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.988 16.701</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Performance management motivates employees in the workplace</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.204 7.653</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Information received in performance management is of value</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.09 12.203</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Employee receive formal feedback on their performance</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.321 4.332</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Employee receive coaching about their performance</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>1.323 4.72</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Procedures for evaluating performance management is open and fair</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.375 5.512</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) Performance management is used as a support mechanism for organisational change</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.233 8.196</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Performance management ensures effective accountability of employees</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.192 10.351</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) PM management helps to align employees and organisational goals</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.089 13.86</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *Test value = 3. Scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree
to link individual objectives with organisational ones. Evidently, respondents strongly believe that management in the public sector is effective at linking them ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.988$). The next highest ranked item is management’s ability to align employee and organisational goals ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.089$). Goal setting is consequently an important way for management to create a sensible environment in which to help organisation members understand and meet the expectations of the PMS. Other highly rated items include management’s willingness to provide valuable information on PM ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.09$); management’s efforts towards annually evaluating employees ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.118$); and accountability from employees in PM ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.192$). Indeed, all items were highly rated.

To understand the effect of the sensegiving processes on employees, we used a number of indicators to capture employee awareness and acceptance of PM in the organisations studied. Due to possible high correlations between the indicators, principal component analysis (PCA) was employed to reduce them into few dimensions so as to be able to measure employee awareness and acceptance of PM. PCA helps to reduce majority of the variance in a data set into a few components (Guyon and Andre, 2006; Smith, 2002), and thus “yields a (sub)set of synthetic, uncorrelated features called principal components, which contain the most important aspects of the original features” (Dodge et al., 2009). The result of the PCA using varimax rotation is presented in Table V.

After the 16 items were subjected to dimension reduction, 4 informative components were obtained. These four components had eigenvalues greater than 1 and cumulatively accounted for 55.63 per cent of the total variance in the original data set. Additionally,
the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of 0.842 is above the 0.6 threshold. The Bartlett’s test of sphericity is also statistically significant indicating that data are appropriate for dimension reduction.

For the components extracted, component 1 comprised six items with loadings ranging from 0.478 to 0.845. These items pertain to employees’ perception of PM in the sector, which generally captures the progressive dimension of the PM process[4]. Year by year performance evaluation, recognition of hard work from previous performances, ability of PM to have a positive impact both on the individual and organisational performance and the recognition that PM is a continuous process, all have a progressive viewpoint towards PM. Components 2 and 3 comprised four items each. However, whereas component 2 captured the purpose of PM[5], component 3 captured the use of PM in the organisation[6]. The final component comprised two items with loadings of 0.715 and 0.678. These two items captured the importance of PM[7].

To better understand the effect of sensegiving on employee awareness and acceptance of PM, a logistic regression analysis was undertaken. This was necessary because awareness and acceptance are measured as categorical binary variables with 1 for awareness or acceptance and 0 otherwise (Kupek, 2006). For the predictors, the four dimensions of PM extracted through the PCA were used. The result of the logistic regression analysis is presented in Table VI.

From the results, both models were subjected to Hosmer and Lemeshow tests, with the $p$-values greater than the 5 per cent significance level and indicating goodness of fit. For the Omnibus test, whereas Awareness had a significant test statistic, the $p$-value of the Acceptance was not. This shows that for Awareness, the explained variance in the data is significantly greater than the unexplained one. The same cannot be said of Acceptance. Acceptance of PM is based on how employees perceive how the system is used or may be used in achieving the organisation’s objective. In short, if employees see PM as an instrument for individual improvement, then the probability of its acceptance will be high. Unfortunately, many employees see a disconnection between the espoused use of PM as a tool to improve individual employee’s skills, as well as achieve strategic outcomes and its actual implementation within organisations, and thus affecting their acceptance in the organisation. Furthermore, some employees may not accept PM especially if they see PM as management control system or “stick” to beat them. Thus, as argued by Mizrahi (2017, p. 58) “rather than using the importance some emphasis ours data as a stick with which to beat employees, managers would be better served by using the information to talk with employees about how their performance could be improved”. Other employees have reservation about the appraisal system of PM and deem it as restricting creativity, generating mountains of paperwork, time consuming, and serving no real purpose (Cappelli and Tavis, 2016; Levy et al., 2017). However, there can be significant effects in circumstances where the omnibus test is not statistically significant. This is why the Hosmer and Lemeshow test is important to explain the differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Awareness ($n = 181$)</th>
<th>Acceptance ($n = 181$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive performance system</td>
<td>1.437</td>
<td>0.022**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance system is seen as important</td>
<td>1.275</td>
<td>0.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance system is merit based</td>
<td>1.179</td>
<td>0.205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance system is employee-centred</td>
<td>1.410</td>
<td>0.031**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnibus tests</td>
<td>13.238</td>
<td>0.010**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosmer and Lemeshow test</td>
<td>7.234</td>
<td>0.512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI. Results of logistic regression analysis of PM awareness and acceptance

Notes: Exp(B): Odds Ratio. *$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.001$
For the effects of PM on awareness and acceptance, odds ratios – $\text{Exp}(B)$ and $p$-values – $\text{Sig}$, are reported. The odds ratio explains the chances of being in one category of the dependent variable when the independent variable increases by one unit. In other words, if the odds ratio is greater than 1, then increase in the predictor will lead to higher likelihood of success, and vice versa. Beginning with the Awareness, it was seen that all four dimensions of sensegiving have odds ratios greater than 1; however, only progressive performance system (PPS) and performance system is employee-centred (PSE) are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. This means that for both PPS and PSE, increase in the levels of the sensegiving processes will lead to a higher likelihood of employee awareness of the new PM. This means that the more progressive the PM is or the more importance management attach to such PM, the higher likelihood that employees will be aware of such a system. Importance, however, has a higher effect on the probability of awareness than progressive PM. The results indicate that some dimensions of PM have the likelihood of leading to increase employee awareness of PM practices in their organisations.

The acceptance model reveals something quite different. None of the dimensions is significant at the 5 per cent level. The closest is importance dimension, which is significant at the 10 per cent level. By implication, sensegiving does not significantly predict employee acceptance of PM practices. But only time can tell if this will always be the case.

Conclusion

In the last couple of decades, change in the public sector, manifested in the form of administrative reforms, has become inevitable, due to the perceived crisis of the administrative state. This crisis has even led to the questioning of the legitimacy of the state (Wallach, 2016). Thus, to some scholars, there is the need to tame the administrative state, or reform it to make it responsive to the needs of the citizens (Kuipers et al., 2014). One key measure adopted to meet the reform objective is PM. PM has become so pervasive in the public sector that politicians of all stripes have embraced it in one-way or another (Fryer et al., 2009; Kroll, 2015; Moynihan, 2013). It is believed that through PM, reformers will be able to bring significant change management to a sector considered not malleable to change. Unfortunately, this belief seems to have become a mirage despite the development of various strategies and models in the public and change management literature on how such changes can be undertaken (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006), partly as a result of employees’ lack of understanding and resistance to such changes.

The objective of the paper was thus to contribute to this literature in finding ways to effectively understand what reformers can do to implement successful change in the sector by appealing to the cognitive dimension of employees, which are always the targets of change. To this end, we utilised the sensegiving literature to understand how reformers can help employees change their perceptions about such changes and help minimise their resistance. We thus looked at the processes of sensegiving and assessed the efficacy of these processes and how they may be leading to changing perceptions with respect to the introduction and implementation of PMS in the public sector in Ghana.

The paper was motivated by the insight that without effective sensegiving processes, i.e. effective communication of the ideals of the system, which will lead to better explanations of the new PMS, attempts to change attitudes and organisational culture will not yield the desired result. We thus argued that sensegiving processes undertaken by HR directors and managers are the best way to overcome the bureaucratic inertia and resistance that characterised earlier attempts to introduce PM in the sector. Such an approach can help employees see value in the PMS for themselves rather than as something imposed from HR. Furthermore, engaging employees in discussing about the philosophy and use of PM… builds ownership in and value for the system (Pulakos and O’Leary, 2011, pp. 154-55).

Methodologically, we used the mixed methods approach because we wanted to learn from HR directors and managers what they have been doing to give sense to their colleagues...
and subordinates. At the same time we wanted to assess the efficacy of these sensegiving processes and how they are helping to change perceptions of the new PM from the perspective of the employees.

The results of the study show that HR directors and managers have used four main methods or activities in the sensegiving effort. These are workshops, seminars and training, one-on-one communication, and unit meetings. Our analysis indicates that these have become quite effective tools in the quest to ensure that employees are aware of the PM, with the hope that such awareness will eventually lead to change in perceptions about PM in the sector, which augurs well for the institutionalisation and implementation of PM in general. A key element of the reform process, which should not escape reformers, is the continuous use of training for both old and new employees. This confirms what Kroll and Moynihan (2015) highlighted in their research. Without such training, it will be difficult to make employees aware of the PM, give sense, and help change the mindset of employees.

Our conclusion is based on how surveyed employees see the processes and the system as important vehicles for changing their understanding of PM. We therefore believe that this change in perception of PM bodes well for the programme’s implementation, despite some of the challenges, such as the lack of monetary incentives for achieving performance goals. Consequently, we believe that management, especially HR directors and managers who have been entrusted with continuing to give sense about PM, must continue with these methods, but must at the same time adapt them to the changing environment. In this way they can continue to engage employees, especially new employees, in making them aware of the PM and the needed changes to their perception of PM and the appraisal system, which to some had consisted simply of praise singing or much ado about nothing.

Notes

1. Names of these institutions and personnel interviewed have not been disclosed to ensure anonymity. Currently, there are 34 ministries in Ghana with all the new ones: Aviation; Business Development; Fisheries and Aquaculture Development; Inner City and Zongo Development; Monitoring and Evaluation; National Security; Parliamentary Affairs; Railways Development; Regional Re-Organisation and Development; Special Development Initiatives; and Water Resources and Sanitation were created in 2017.

2. We did not collect quantitative data from the OHSC. This office is the HR management of the Civil Service and is supposed to aid the ministries in the implementation of the new PMS.

3. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out to us.

4. Dee Kohler (2014) sees a progressive PM as one that focuses on employee actions/behaviours and their effect on key performance indicators and the customer; time access to personal results with comparisons to targets, the team and the center; dialogue between employees and supervisors to emphasise incremental behaviour adjustments to enhance performance; and up-to-date dashboards and scorecards displaying actual results compared to goals, including employee access to coaching forms, best-practice tools, workflows, etc.

5. The main purpose of a PM system is to gauge and improve individual and organisational performance, and thus the overall government effectiveness. It is based on this purpose that there are both individual and organisational levels assessments in the new PMS by the PSC.

6. In terms of usage, PM is expected to help decision makers obtain vital information about a programme, as well as coordination purpose. The information about performance accumulated through such a system is supposed to be used in practice to gauge the effectiveness of otherwise of a programme, help policy makers in policy-making processes, as well as managers in their decisions within organisations. It can also be used as a management control system. For more on this, see Ferreira and Otley (1999).

7. The importance of PM deals with how it can be used for accountability purposes, as well as allocating scarce funds to essentially needed programs through key performance measures or indicators.
References


Wallach, P. (2016), The Administrative State’s Legitimacy Crisis, Centre for Effective Public Management, Brookings Institute, Washington, DC.


Further reading


About the authors

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