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Innovative Management Model for Performance Appraisal: The Case of the Palestinian Public Universities

by *Grace C. Khoury* and *Farhad Analoui*

Abstract

Appraisal is recognised as a crucial step towards the development of human resources and their performance. This article proposes an integrated, innovative model for managing the performance appraisal process of full-time faculty members at the Palestinian public universities in the West Bank. The integrated model SOFIA is a result of an empirical study of the impact of performance appraisal process on faculty members in five major universities. In constructing this model, several issues including setting a clear institution's strategy, participation in goal setting, coaching, two-way communication between faculty members and their superiors, feedback, developing and rewarding faculty members have been emphasised. Also, it is recommended that external factors that may influence faculty members' performance, appraisers' training and top management support and ownership of the process must be seriously considered. The obstacles to the application of the proposed performance model and possible solutions have been explored. In light of the above, relevant conclusions have been reached.

Keywords: Appraisal, Faculty Members, Palestine, Management, Sofia, West Bank

Introduction

While more organisations are recognising the value of performance appraisal to organisations and employees, there is much confusion about what appraisals are and how they should be conducted and managed. Performance appraisals lose much of their value if they are not done effectively (Bird, 1998; Analoui, 2002). Performance appraisal is the process of evaluating how well employees are performing their tasks relative to the work performance standards and providing feedback to employees with the aim of eliminating performance deficiencies, motivating and developing employees (Jackson & Mathis, 1994; Mondy, et al., 1996; Dessler, 2000).

Writers emphasise the importance of performance appraisal to effective human resource management and organisational productivity and effectiveness (Latham & Wexley, 1981; Bird, 1998; Mendonca & Kanungo, 1990; Analoui, 1999; Dessler, 2000). The appraisal process should provide information with which to assess employees' training and development needs in order to assist those employees to improve their current performance and productivity. Further, the appraisal information can be used to re-

ward employees, identify employees with potential for promotion and to improve job satisfaction. In addition, performance appraisal results can be used for organisational and manpower planning, for research purposes and to help in reviewing and setting future objectives. Therefore, performance appraisal has an administrative/evaluative function and a motivational/development function (McGregor, 1960; Landy & Farr, 1983; Klatt, et al., 1985; Makin, et al., 1989; Swan & Margulies, 1991; Sheal, 1992; Fletcher, 1993; Anderson, 1993; Handy, 1993; Williams, 1994; Bird, 1998; Analoui and Fell, 2002).

Although performance appraisal has several uses and objectives to any organisation, in practice it has disappointing and unsatisfactory results. There seems to be a negative attitude and considerable dissatisfaction from both employees and managers of the appraisal systems (Oberg, 1972; Latham and Wexley, 1981; Philp, 1983; Fletcher, 1993; Grint, 1993; Williams, 1994; Heathfield, 2000). Some of the most common problems cited for the failure of an appraisal system include lack of employee's participation and involvement in the process especially in establishing their job targets which may turn out to be unclear, unfeasible or non-existent. Another source of appraisal failure is the lack of feedback and performance review sessions with employees (Sheal, 1992; Somerick, 1993; Lucas, 1994). Moreover, poor appraisers' training can be another area of ineffectiveness in some organisations (Smith, 1990). Ineffective appraisals can also be a result of having weak communication and a lack of coaching relationships between superiors and subordinates (Sheal, 1992; Lucas, 1994; Cadwell, 1995; Valerie, 1996). In summary, many performance appraisal systems fail as a result of lack of managing the system effectively or lack of top management support.

The Role of Performance Appraisal in Performance Management

Writers like Bowman (1994) call for abandoning performance appraisals. The author claims that performance appraisal focuses on assessing and changing individual behaviour. In contrast, it is suggested that Total Quality Management (TQM) ought to be adopted as an alternative to performance appraisal. This concept stresses improvements in work processes rather than in the employees' performance. According to Bowman, performance appraisal is a barrier to TQM because it considers performance a result of factors that fall under the employee control. Therefore, the focus should be on the process rather than the end result and management should play a major role in managing the resources, which constitute the process including labour, equipment and methods. TQM assumes that variation is natural and reducing it will lead to better quality and productivity. Management can reduce variation through training, more resources and learning from high performers instead of relying on performance appraisal.

On the other hand, Antonioni (1994), Boudreaux (1994), Lawler (1994) and Analoui (1999) argue that it is not practical to abandon performance appraisals because managers need a way to evaluate employees work related behaviour. Instead, these authors suggest that performance appraisal should play a major role in performance management in today's quality-oriented and team-oriented environments. Performance management involves more than evaluating employees' performance at regular intervals. It should be an ongoing process that includes goal setting, worker selection and placement, compensation, training and development, career management, coaching, giving feedback and performance appraisal. In other words, performance management includes all human resource management tasks that influence an employee's performance (Swan & Margulies, 1991; Graham & Bennett, 1995).

Authors like Antonioni (1994) applied the TQM principles, which emphasises on maximising customer satisfaction through continuous improvement to designing TQM-based appraisals. According to his model, the needs of three stakeholder groups should be met: the organisation, work groups and the individual. Each of these groups needs to know its customers and how to satisfy them. The author introduces a four-phase model to performance management. Each phase requires a separate session throughout the year. These phases include planning, implementing, reflecting and compensating.

After examining Antonioni (1994) TQM-Based Appraisal Model and several other performance management models such as, Beer and Ruh (1976); Swan Approach to Performance Management, Lambert (1979); Performance Management System (PMS), Latham and Wexley (1981); Performance Management Process Model, Swan and Margulies (1991); Behaviour Observation Scales (BOS), Philpott and Sheppard (1992); Due-Process Method, Bowman (1994); Human Performance System and the Anatomy of Performance, Taylor, et al. (1995) and Performance Management System, Rummler (1996). It is recognised that there are several common elements in all models. For example, all of the reviewed models emphasise that superiors should play the coach role when they deal with employees. This means that they should provide help and services to employees through having a two way communication process.

All models also recognise the importance of providing feedback to employees. Feedback should be given to employees based on an on-going basis and that is why most models suggest the use of the critical incident technique that is based on the on-going recording of employee positive and negative behaviour. This is in addition to the formal feedback sessions that should take place after a formal evaluation process of employees' performance. All models emphasise the importance of developing and empowering employees. Some models suggest the use of self-appraisal to let the em-

ployee participate in evaluating their performance and recognise their development needs.

Most models recognise that poor performance is not always the fault of the employee, it can be caused by other factors in the system. Therefore, a wider approach is needed in order to analyse performance and suggest improvements. Moreover, most models point to the need to evaluate employees' performance by concentrating on employees' behaviour and end results or pre-established goals, although goals should be flexible and may be subject to change at any time. Participation between superiors and subordinates in setting goals and development plans is also recognised by most models. The last important element that the models recognise is management ownership or top management commitment to the appraisal process. Top management should accept the responsibility to appraise employees' performance for the benefit of employees, their superiors and for the improvement of organisational performance.

The Scope of the Study

A two-year study was carried out amongst the faculty members of five public Palestinian universities. The objective was to explore the perception of the faculty members of the process of appraisal as it was utilised in their institutions. Since in these institutions a distinction is made between the faculty members and those employees who are engaged in administrative tasks, the study focused on the former who were actively involved in teaching and research as opposed to undertaking supportive administrative duties in departments such as personnel and finance.

To optimise the results, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. The 'triangulation' approach implemented meant that researchers could depend on not one but several sources of data (Churchill, 1995). The methodology therefore consisted of gathering data through various tools including personal observation, literature review, survey and personal semi-structured interviews (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992).

The study commenced with the revision of several sources of the literature. This included the literature available on general management, human resource management and performance appraisal models, approaches and other related materials. In addition, other secondary data sources were visited as a part of the research exploratory stage such as the Higher Education Ministry and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

The literature review provided an insight into the development of the topic under study, whilst the preliminary analysis of the secondary data led to better understanding of the context in which performance appraisal has been attempted. The insight and understanding gained enabled the researchers to design a comprehensive questionnaire which was piloted at one of the

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five public institutions, Birzeit University, that the researchers felt would provide a typical setting from amongst the five fields.

* Mean age (years)	42.8
* Respondents' gender (% male)	86.3
* Mean of respondents' teaching experience at a university level (years)	12.28
* Mean of respondents' teaching experience at the current university (years)	9.99
* Respondents according to university participation in (%):	
- Birzeit University	28.0
- Bethlehem University	11.1
- An-Najah University	23.8
- Al-Quds University	29.9
- Hebron University	7.3
* Respondents according to department participation in (%)	
- Science & Technology	20.6
- Art	28.5
- Engineering	9.1
- Medicine	1.2
- Commerce & Economics	14.2
- Agriculture	.8
- Islamic Studies	5.9
- Health Profession	7.1
- Education	8.7
- Law	2.8
- Hotel Management	.4
- Graduate Studies	.8
* Respondents' highest level of education in (%):	
- Ph.D.	56.0
- Master	37.5
- Higher Diploma	1.9
- Bachelor	4.6
* Respondents' professional university position in (%):	
- Professor	6.6
- Associate Professor	15.1
- Assistant Professor	34.7
- Lecturer	25.5
- Instructor	18.1

The primary data was, therefore, collected by applying a cross-sectional method using survey questionnaires (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992; Churchill, 1995). In all, four hundred and fifty one (451) questionnaires were distributed to faculty members, according to a directly proportional random sampling procedure. Two hundred and sixty five were received

back and analysed statistically using mainly the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. The effective response rate of the survey is 59%.

To generate richer qualitative data (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992), it was decided to also include a sample of interviews to ensure the highest rate of response rate, as well as allowing for clarification of possible ambiguities related to the questions asked (Churchill, 1995). Thus, in addition to administering a survey questionnaire, twenty-five semi-structured interviews were also carried out with faculty members at the five institutions (See Table 1).

The Perception of Faculty Members at the Palestinian Public Universities

On the whole, faculty members' perception regarding the effectiveness of managing their performance appraisal process at the five Palestinian public universities can be described as towards dissatisfaction. Their perception is the same irrespective of gender and the academic title of faculty members. All members of the faculty (respondents) prioritised the criteria of measuring their performance in a similar manner regardless of their title or highest academic degree. However, there exists no relationship between faculty members' point of view and management point of view regarding prioritising faculty members' performance appraisal criteria according to importance from the perspective of faculty members.

Elements that respondents dislike	% of Respondents
Unclear standards	33.6
Too much emphasis on students' evaluations	51.5
Secrecy and lack of feedback	32.6
Inflexible standards	12.1
Top management routine and irresponsibility for the appraisal process	34.8
Timing	10.6
Other	11.4

Several factors emerged from the dissatisfaction with the appraisal process. These included having traditional appraisal approaches, methods and sources. In addition, heavy emphasis was placed on students' evaluations, the lack of awareness of performance standards and superior's expectations, the lack of appraisers' competency, poor feedback and lack of

appraisal interviews, failure to apply appraisal results to various administrative decisions and poor top management commitment to faculty members' appraisal. It is expected that all these issues will definitely influence faculty members' level of satisfaction and motivation at work even if most respondents do not have the intention to leave their current job (see Table 2).

The most desirable appraisal process for faculty members can be described as the one that consists of clear standards of performance, provides formal and informal feedback that would lead to their development, and where appraisers are trained and multiple appraisal systems are implemented.

A Proposed Integrated Model to Performance Appraisal Management (SOFIA)

Based on the findings of the study, in order to improve the performance appraisal management process and directly influence faculty members' work satisfaction and motivation a five-stage model, SOFIA is proposed. These stages are: **S**etting the ground rules-standards; **O**n-going informal appraisal; **F**ormal appraisal; **I**nterview and **A**ction.

I. Setting the ground rules-standards

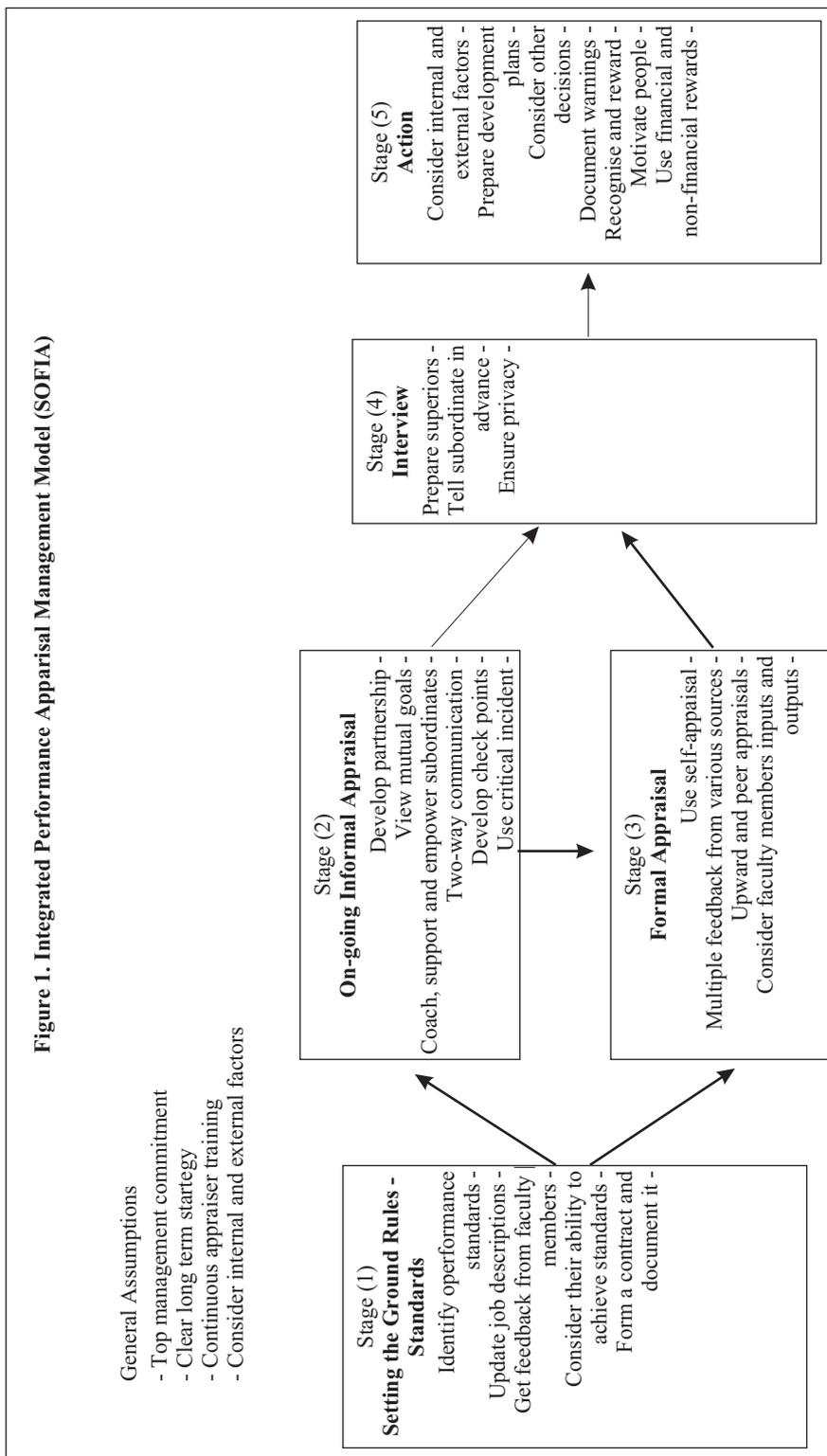
The first stage begins with each superior (chairman or dean) identifying performance standards and ensuring that these standards are communicated clearly to the faculty members, upon recruiting a new member and regularly at the beginning of each academic year. As one respondent explained:

“It is not enough to read the job description to the faculty member. Here superiors should get a faculty member's agreement on their job description taking into consideration that job descriptions must be regularly updated.”

The superior has to ask faculty members to comment and provide their feedback regarding any change employees would like to see in the job description and performance standards. It is also important to consider faculty members' ability to achieve these standards. During this stage, faculty participation and agreement on the criteria against which their performance will be evaluated is vital. Superiors have to form a contract (written agreement) that should be documented and placed in the file of each faculty member. “This ensures that the contract will remain although the superior may change or leave his/her position.”

II. On-going informal appraisal

This stage constitutes an on-going process of informal appraisal. This process does not have a specific start or end point, hence it is important to establish a partnership between both superior and subordinate. Both should view the mutual goals. Superiors should maintain a coaching and support rela-



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tionship to develop and empower their people. They should be willing to assist at any time throughout the year. A head of department commented:

“Maintaining this close relationship and an on-going channel of communication between superior and subordinate, helps in the early discovery and correction of performance related problems.”

We suggest that there ought to be at least two check-points, one in each semester ‘to put things on track’ before the official or formal appraisal stage takes place. Appraisers must provide feedback continuously to faculty members in an informal way to give them a chance to adjust their performance according to the pre-set agreement or contract. Appraisers can use the critical incident method to record all positive and negative incidents of each faculty member throughout the year.

III. Formal appraisal

The third stage is the formal appraisal process, which may take place before the end of the second semester. It should begin with self-appraisal activity where each faculty member is given an opportunity to review their workload, activities undertaken and achievements or otherwise throughout the preceding year and record systematically strengths, weaknesses and any problems that may influence performance. This formal process should depend on gathering information about faculty members from various sources or what is often referred to as multiple feedbacks (360 degree process). Thus, evaluations would come from different sources including a faculty member’s direct superior (chairman), indirect superior (his/her superior’s superior such as a dean), students and peers in the same department. In addition, faculty members should be given the opportunity to evaluate their superiors’ performance (chairman or dean).

The basis for appraising faculty members’ performance should be both the input they invest in their job and the output achieved by them. Their input on the job can only be known through reviewing the information collected throughout the year about the effort and behaviour of each member especially through the critical incident method. The output is the end-result that has been achieved by each member at the end of the academic year taking into consideration the previously agreed upon objectives.

IV. Interview

The fourth stage is the interview where each member should receive feedback from his/her superior during a formal session. It is assumed that superiors are well prepared for that session through participating in a training course conducted by top management on how to run a successful appraisal interview. The individual faculty member should also be told in advance about the time and place of the appraisal interview to allow them time to prepare all related documents required beforehand. Moreover, Heads of De-

partments (appraiser) should ensure confidentiality to achieve a successful interview.

V. Action

The last stage is the action stage where superiors should make decisions based on the results obtained from the formal appraisal process and after sharing the results with the faculty members concerned. The performance of the faculty member can be satisfactory and matching the standards, dissatisfactory or below the standards and extraordinary or above the standards. It is important to understand all the internal and external factors that may have had an influence on the individual performance of each faculty member. Internal factors within the organisational control are, the organizational culture, the organisation financial position, management and the decision making style. External factors may include the economic and political situation of the country that influences the performance of the institution and thus the individual performance of a faculty member.

If the performance of the individual is below the acceptable standards and it becomes known that the weakness is not influenced by external or internal factors other than the faculty member, then a remedy action should be sought. If the individual performance can be corrected, management should be responsible for establishing a joint development plan. A weak performer has to be given an opportunity to improve through coaching and/or training. Therefore, an action plan documented with the agreement of the faculty member ought to specify the steps to be taken before a final decision is made.

However, should the individual performance be regarded as satisfactory, his/her direct superior should be informed and able to recognise the individual effort and encourage and motivate towards even better performance. Regarding the extraordinary performers, the university should recognise their achievement and reward the employees for their effort accordingly. In cases where financial resources are scarce or are limited, other rewards of a non-financial nature should be provided. These may include performance recognition letters, advancement and promotion opportunities, scholarships and sabbatical leaves.

Assumptions

The proposed SOFIA model (see Figure 1) is based on the following basic assumptions:

- (a) Institutions have to determine their long term strategies and performance goals. As for higher education institutions, they have to decide whether they wish to be research oriented or academic oriented or both, hence this will influence the criteria used to determine individual performance standards.

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- (b) Top management commitment to the importance of performance management is crucial for the success of the process.
- (c) Annual appraisal training programmes should be conducted for all superiors (appraisers) who are involved in appraising others and the employees to be appraised. New and old superiors should participate. These sessions should be conducted before the formal appraisal process. The training should cover and explain the appraisal methods (system) to be employed and highlight the problems and the types of bias, which may cause ineffective appraisals.
- (d) Management should consider all the factors in the external and internal environment, which may influence the performance of the individual faculty member.

The proposed SOFIA model is based on using the principles of MBO, critical incident and essay methods of appraisal (Dessler, 2000). It also considers the TQM concept and the model of Antonioni (1994). In addition, it encourages two-way communication between superior and subordinate. Furthermore, it requires feedback about faculty members' performance from several sources that are familiar with his/her performance. Finally, this model is an integrated model that combines several characteristics of other models. If appropriately followed, the appraisal process is expected to be more meaningful, effective and its benefits may exceed its costs.

However, it must be noted that SOFIA derives from Western performance management models and performance appraisal concepts that may be more suitable for Western rather than the Middle East cultures. Application of this model for the management of the performance appraisal process of faculty members at the Palestinian public universities may result in the emergence of certain problems. This is due to having differences in cultural characteristics and environmental factors. Therefore, the SOFIA model requires further testing before use. The expected obstacles in applying SOFIA model at the Palestinian public universities are discussed below.

Obstacles in Applying the SOFIA Model

There are several constraints within the Palestinian context, which may hinder the application of the proposed performance appraisal model effectively. These can be classified into three main categories:

1. Cultural characteristics
2. Turbulence of the environment, and
3. Lack of financial resources

It is stated that developing countries' cultures are characterised by high uncertainty avoidance, low individualism, high power distance, low masculin-

ity and low abstractive thinking (Mendonca & Kanungo, 1990; Schneider & Barsoux, 1997; Blundel, 1998).

These cultural characteristics of developing countries are expected to hinder participation, coaching, employee's initiative, following problem solving approaches and future planning. Hofstede (1991) position Arab-speaking countries on his cultural map where they have high power distance (acceptance of hierarchy) and strong uncertainty avoidance (the desire for formalised rules and procedures). He describes organisations in Arab countries as mechanistic or bureaucratic. Thus, cultural constraints will contribute to having a management philosophy and climate that have a negative influence on applying the SOFIA performance appraisal management model. Greenberg states that:

“people from various countries differ regarding several key variables in the performance appraisal process, such as how willing people are to be direct with others and how sensitive they are to differences in status” (2000:66).

Furthermore, the unpredictability of the Palestinian political and economic environment is another major factor that may not encourage goal setting and participation processes at several institutions. The political situation in Palestine is not stable. This would heavily influence the economic situation. Many organisations lack the needed resources for development. These include the universities in the West Bank who lack financial resources. Evidently, these factors have a negative influence on funding faculty members' development programmes, appraisers' training programmes and the reward systems required to effectively apply the SOFIA model.

In short, the cultural constraints, the unpredictable political and economic environment and the lack of financial resources are the major factors which may hinder Palestinian public universities in the West Bank from realising the full benefits of managing faculty members' performance effectively. However, the research results indicate that there is a need to revamp performance appraisal systems for better organisational effectiveness, to increase productivity and provide opportunities for faculty members' growth and development.

Recommendations

Development of faculty members must be at the heart of the responsive and creative universities, which Palestinians need today, in order to ensure the vitality and health of higher education. Therefore, Palestinian universities need to establish a cultural fit to be able to apply an effective performance appraisal management model. In addition, these universities need to learn how to deal with an unpredictable environment and improve their financial situations.

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What remains certain, in the foreseeable future, is that any improvement to the present ineffective performance appraisal process of the faculty members must take place within the existing conditions of Palestine. The Palestinian authority, the Ministry of Higher Education, the universities' top management, the Palestinian community, faculty members and students must realise the value of human resources, namely the faculty members and their unique contributions to the Palestinian higher education. Thus, Palestinians must take the responsibility of enhancing higher education and contribute to increasing educational funds and the improvement of faculty members' living conditions in order to prevent their immigration out of Palestine.

In order to build a cultural fit that is appropriate to apply the SOFIA performance appraisal model, training programmes are needed for both faculty members and managers or superiors. Top management of these universities is responsible for creating the pre-conditions and climate necessary for effective performance management. They ought to identify the universities' mission statements clearly and communicate it to all. They should recognise that faculty members are vital resources, whose behaviour, aspirations and talents will affect the productivity of universities. Therefore, spending time and money on their development should be considered as an investment.

Formal training seminars should be provided for managers and department heads. These seminars should stress the importance of goal setting, coaching, upward appraisals, interpersonal skills, empowerment, participation, and feedback and recognition of good performance. Davies (1995) confirms the necessity of providing systematic training to department heads in managerial areas in order to supplement their existing expertise in academic areas. Moreover, faculty members should receive technical training in their area of expertise, training in organisational policies and procedures and how to develop partnership culture. These programmes are important to faculty members to encourage their participation and empowerment. Top management should also be enabled to motivate and praise effective performance of individuals and units. They should adjust performance standards and the selection and promotion criteria. Top management should also encourage students to appraise faculty members fairly and objectively.

In order to help universities fund the needed training programmes and better performance under uncertain political and economic situations, the assistance of the Palestinian National Authority is required (PNA). The PNA should allocate the needed resources for improving the general conditions of higher education. Special attention should be given to the improvement of faculty members' living conditions to ensure equal salary levels and benefits packages that are at least equal to what other faculty members in other Arab countries receive. One policy that may be implemented is the re-

quirement of a higher education tax from the Palestinian community. This will support these public universities and reduce their reliance on external support, especially considering the fact that several donor countries have not completed their obligations to support the PNA.

However, the economic and political situations and the type of peace agreement made with Israel influence the development of higher education in Palestine. In addition, privatisation of some public universities has to be considered to improve their financial situation. These public universities are not allowed to become private because they play a major role through offering inexpensive higher education to Palestinians under occupation. At the same time they are not considered governmental. Therefore, it is important for the PNA to determine the type of ownership of these so-called public universities.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) must implement a comprehensive strategy for evaluating and developing faculty members' performance, which should be consistent with the future goals of higher education in Palestine. The MHE should develop a clear vision of its mission and the future of universities in Palestine. It should assist universities in dealing with the unpredictable environment by reinforcing and building links among the universities in Palestine to generate cooperation and reduce uncertainty. Cooperation and sharing resources will lead to better performance, less redundancy and economies of scale. MHE should work on helping universities develop links with universities in developed countries to help faculty members in joint research opportunities and access to technology. The MHE must play a major role in helping universities develop resources to reduce their dependency on external sources of funds. MHE may form a committee of experts representing each university to discuss, diagnose and agree on a unified appraisal method taking into consideration cultural differences. The committee may hold a conference on performance appraisal sponsored by the MHE where experts can provide recommendations and suggestions to help improve the management of the appraisal process.

Conclusion

In most developing countries, although it is acknowledged that performance appraisal is the way forward towards more effective management of human resources and achieving higher effectiveness and efficiency, still there is much confusion about what appraisal is and how it should be conducted and managed. What is certain is that unless performance appraisals are conducted properly, they lose much of their value. In the case of the Palestine Universities the inadequate appraisal process resulted in low moral, demotivation and dissatisfaction.

This study proposes an integrated model (SOFIA) for effective performance appraisal to reduce the dissatisfaction evidently observable among faculty members. Undoubtedly, there will be several constraints in

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the way the model can be applied effectively. These include cultural, political and financial factors within the Palestinian context.

It is, therefore, recommended that all stakeholders (parties) namely, the universities top management, the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE), the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), faculty members themselves, students and the Palestinian community in general should be involved in improving the situation in order to establish the pre-conditions necessary for faculty members' performance management and to conduct a better effective appraisal process.

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