



SPANZ

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NAVIGATING THE REEFS IN PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL PRACTICE

A concern and a short survey

How do Principals get to be appraised, by whom and with what effect? These are some of the practical questions that underpin some concerns that exist around what should be a highly accountable and highly developmental process of performance management for a school leader. We know that the responsibility for Principal appraisal rests with the Board of Trustees and in practice it is the Board Chair who normally manages the process. So how good (or bad) does it get from a Principal's perspective?

In their book about appraisal, Eileen Piggot-Irvine and Carol Cardno (2005) have said this about the ethical aspects of appraising Principals.

Several Principals have spoken to us about their experience of the appraisal process over the last decade. Much of the comment is generally positive about the experience. But in terms of accepting it as an accountability mechanism, and being able to utilise its development function, there are several reports that are disquieting. These stories of 'appraisal that has gone wrong' from the Principal's perspective centre on the issue of data: how it has been assembled, who has contributed to it and the focus of the questions being of a personal rather than a professional nature. One Principal in particular noted that appraisal for her had been "a form of collective character assassination" rather than a learning process. Another Principal commented that his appraisal seemed to be an "open slather opportunity to slander the Principal". He was distressed because he had indeed agreed to wide-ranging surveys of several stakeholder groups facilitated by a consultant. (p. 95)

This scenario of appraisal extending into waters beyond the scope of evaluating a Principal's performance as a professional is obviously not unknown to many of us. It has certainly been well documented and I believe it is possibly not uncommon.

Considering the number of trained consultants who are available, to conduct the appraisal of a Principal (the Ministry of Education funds contract programmes for the training of Principal appraisers) we must question why some Principals are continuing to experience appraisal that gets shipwrecked on the reefs of surveys that focus on personality rather than performance.

I am concerned incorrect application of the 'popular' notion of 360 degree appraisal could be part of the problem. It is easy to assume that stakeholders might be in a position to provide feedback on

performance when, in reality, they have neither understanding of the relevant performance criteria nor access to evidence in making sweeping comments.

Appraisal can be a satisfying and rewarding experience and it is disappointing to hear that this is not always the case. I want to use this opportunity to capture some views about appraisal practice, especially in relation to data gathering that works well and achieves the purposes of appraisal *and* leaves the Principal feeling positive.

Please find 10 minutes to complete this brief survey, which could contribute to learning about and improving appraisal practices.

Reference

Piggot-Irvine, E. & Cardno, C, (2005). *Appraising performance productively: Integrating accountability and development*. Auckland: Eversleigh Publishing.

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