

**The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the  
training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the  
process within the Irish Public Sector**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector**

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This study explores the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the Performance Management and Development System within the Irish Public Sector. Previous research has identified a correlation between the implementation methods of managers and the success of performance management systems. This study seeks to address a neglected area of research by assessing whether public sector managers in Ireland have been equipped through training and support to effectively implement the PMDS process and to identify if there is any correlation between the implementation methods of managers and the reported inability of the PMDS to operate as an effective performance management tool within the Irish Public Sector.

In order to address the aims and objectives of this study, a qualitative research approach was applied in the form of ten semi-structured interviews conducted with managers responsible for the implementation of the PMDS process within the public sector. Snowball sampling was used to identify participants across five various public sector Departments/Agencies.

Findings revealed that there is a large amount of discrepancy between the levels of formal training among participants, the use of documented PMDS policies and procedures is not promoted and there is insufficient informal support for managers. This study has found significant evidence that Irish public sector managers are failing to implement PMDS consistently and effectively. The findings heavily support a link between the reported inability of PMDS to act as an effective performance management tool and the poor implementation methods of managers. This study presents a strong case for the provision of training and support in order to equip public sector managers with the necessary tools to facilitate the success of the PMDS.

# Declaration

## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DBIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skill
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PA	Performance Appraisal
PM	Performance Management
PMDS	Performance Management Development System
PMS	Performance Management System
SM	Senior Manager

## Chapter One - Introduction

As the Irish Economy gradually began to emerge from recession in late 2013, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published its second public service reform plan for 2014-2016 with a focus on improving services and increasing efficiency (DPER, 2014a). In an attempt to achieve this, the Civil Service Renewal Taskforce engaged with public service workers in the largest internal consultation exercises conducted within the public sector, asking them ‘If you could change one thing to make the civil service more effective what would it be?’ (CSO, 2014, p.1).

Despite the relentless cutbacks and increased workloads inflicted on these employees in recent years, results from this process has highlighted underperformance and dissatisfaction with the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) as being the most problematic area requiring improvement within the civil service (CSO, 2014). The survey results also highlighted dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities, training and development, skill matching processes and career mobility (DEPR. 2015a; CSO, 2014). With pay and conditions featuring fourteenth on the list, this report echoes findings from throughout the literature and powerfully reiterates that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are harnessed through a myriad of non-monetary incentives. Increased responsibility, reward and recognition, role clarity, effective communication, opportunities for development and career advancement are strong contributors to improved employee satisfaction, engagement and performance (Caillier, 2014; Siltala, 2013; Thompson et al, 2007; Gunnigle et al, 2006; Truss, 2001).

The introduction of the PMDS in 2000 aimed to facilitate such incentives for public servants through training and development, role profiling, and competency frameworks while allowing for continuous monitoring, appraisal and candid communication between managers and jobholders (Department of Finance, 2000). However, many of the recent government-conducted evaluations acknowledge that the PMDS is not acting as an effective tool for performance management within the public sector (DEPR, 2015a; 2014a; 2014b; CSO, 2014; IPA, 2014; Dept. of Finance, 2010). Despite multiple reforms since the initial introduction of the system, the PMDS has continuously fallen short of expectations and, as highlighted by recent government surveys, continues to feature prominently as an aspect of public sector management that requires change (ibid.).

Upon publication of the full Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey in 2015, it was revealed that just 12 per cent of civil servants agreed that ‘poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Department’ and merely 28 per cent agreed that their ‘Department measures job performance to ensure all staff are achieving results’ (DEPR, 2015a, p.39). These results reiterate findings from previous studies, highlighting that reforms implemented in the interim have failed to identify and resolve the issues leading to the demise of PMDS across the Irish civil service (IPA, 2013; DEPR, 2013; 2011).

Other countries have experience similar challenges in relation to their public sector Performance Management Systems (PMS), and have conducted research to examine the link between various organisational factors and the effectiveness of the PMS (Baird, Schoch and Chen, 2012; Chubb, Reilly and Brown, 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004). Among the findings, one factor was consistent; there is a positive correlation between providing managers with PMS related training and the effectiveness of PMS implementation. In a recent Australian report, research collected from 450 Australian local government agencies showed that ‘PMS related training is positively related to the effectiveness of PMSs’ (Baird et al., 2012, p.166) and concluded that for PMSs to increase their effectiveness, employees must be provided with ‘adequate training, both in the design and implementation of PMSs’ (Baird et al., 2012, p.175). These findings are in support of decades of literature surrounding the topic of PMS, which emphasises the importance of training managers to ensure they have the understanding and ability to implement the PMS effectively (CIPD, 2014; DBIS, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Goodhew, Cammock and Hamilton, 2008; Jackson, Atkins, Fletcher and Stillman, 2005; Chan, 2004; Pulakos, 2004; Da Waal, 2003; Lawler, 2003; Arvey and Murphy, 1998; Sims and Heninger, 1987; Davis and Mount, 1984).

In addition to advocating the importance of formal training, literature also acknowledges the necessity of on-going support for managers responsible for conducting the PMS process (CIPD, 2014; DBIS, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Chan, 2004). Such support promotes and provides access to PMS resources such as well-documented policies and procedures, offering unambiguous guidance for strategic objective-setting, performance measurement, provision of feedback, identification of development needs and management of underperformance (Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004). Literature also emphasises the requirement for informal support where managers can obtain guidance and advice from

those with greater PMS experience and expertise (Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Pulakos, 2004).

Despite such findings, further research by the Irish government on the provision of training and support to effectively equip PMDS managers, has been somewhat neglected. The need for such research is audible, as the feedback from public servants indicates that the failure of PMDS to act as an effective tool for performance management has an association with the way in which the process is implemented and suggests there is a lack of training and support provided to ensure the effective, consistent and credible implementation of PMDS (DEPR, 2015a; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

The aim of this research is to investigate the training and on-going support received by public sector managers who are tasked with implementing PMDS. The first objective is to assess the level of formal training received by managers conducting PMDS. The second objective is to determine whether managers are supported by the Department/Agency through the provision of PMDS related policies and procedures. The third objective is to explore the informal PMDS guidance and support available to managers on an on-going basis.

This study will take the following structure. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature surrounding the origin of PMDS, the effectiveness of performance management systems and the role of the manager in implementing the process. The chapter will also assess the literature surrounding the importance of equipping managers to effectively implement PMS through formal training and on-going support. The chapter will consider the reported ineffectiveness of PMDS as set out by numerous public service surveys and conclude with a discussion of the literature, highlighting that an assessment of the training and support received by public sector managers has been neglected (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014). Chapter Three will establish how this study proposes to address this area of neglect, clearly detailing the aims and objectives required to do so. Chapter Four details the methodological approach taken by the researcher in order to address the aims and objectives of the research. Following a thorough analysis of the data, Chapter Five presents the findings from the study with reference to the literature. Chapter Six critically discusses the findings from this study in relation to the literature. Chapter Seven provides conclusions and recommendations in relation to this study as well as highlighting areas for future research.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

This literature review will begin by focusing on New Public Management (NPM), the concept from which Performance Management Systems (PMS) have originated, leading to the development of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) within the Irish public sector (Gultekin, 2011; Department of Finance, 2000). The section will detail the impact that NPM has had on public sector administration. The following section provides a more specific analysis of the literature surrounding the effectiveness of PMSs, which will highlight the link between accurate implementation and the success of the system (Becker, Antuar and Everett, 2011; Biron, Farndale and Paauwe, 2011).

The third area concentrates on the role of the manager in relation to Performance Management (PM) and assesses the impact of devolving Human Resource (HR) related roles to middle management (Beattie, 2006; Gibb, 2003; Cunningham and Hyman, 1999; Heraty and Morley, 1995). In particular this section focuses on Performance Appraisal, often one of the most challenging aspects of PMSs for management, and reviews both the positive contribution and negative implications of the process as highlighted by the literature (Lawler, Benson and McDermott, 2012). Section four considers the importance of equipping managers with the necessary skills and knowledge in order to effectively implement the performance management system. This section focuses on the role of formal training in facilitating the provision of required skills. Section five assesses the need for the continuous availability of guidance in the form of documented policies and procedures. Section six analyses the importance of the availability of informal guidance within the managers Department/Agency (Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

Section seven will discuss the various government assessments and resulting reforms applied to the PMDS since its introduction in 2000, focusing on the inability of such reforms to improve the effectiveness of the system. The section will highlight the failure of these reforms to focus on implementation practices rather than the structure of the PMDS system (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; IPA 2014; Dept. of Finance, 2010). This will be followed by a discussion, whereby an analysis of the literature will support the need for further research on the training, support and guidance received by public sector managers who face the task of implementing the PMDS (Baird et al., 2012).

### ***New Public Management and the Origin of PMDS***

With origins firmly rooted in New Public Management (NPM), this section serves to provide a backdrop for the formation of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) and the purpose of its introduction to the Irish public sector. NPM is the concept of modernising the public sector and improving State efficiency by applying private sector management methods to public administration (IPA, 2014; Fabian 2010; Hood, 1991;). Hood (1991, p.4) has identified a number of principles or ‘doctrines’ of NPM within OECD countries, some of which include; organisational competitiveness, decentralisation, goal-clarity, cost-focus, result-emphasis, performance measurement and private sector management methods (Christensen and Yoshimi, 2001; Johnsen, 1999; Hood, 1991). These doctrines have been the framework around which NPM literature has developed (Siltala, 2013; Gultekin, 2011; Fryer, Antony and Ogden, 2009).

NPM and the impact that it has had on public sector performance management has been the subject of extensive debate throughout the literature (IPA, 2014; Gultekin, 2011; Pollitt 2011; Hood and Peters 2004). Much of this debate centres on the academics’ scepticism of NPM success, questioning how effectively such reforms have been implemented and whether or not private sector management methods are applicable to public administration (Cutler, 2010; Levy, 2010, Riccucci, 2001; Johnsen, 1999). Pollitt (2013, p.407) states that recent research has shown NPM reforms to be ‘routinely successful’ but ‘frequently problematic’. While NPM has been subject to a litany of criticism, Osborne and Gaebler argue that the introduction of a less bureaucratic approach to public sector management can be attributed to the influence of NPM on the reform of public administration (cited in Denhardt, 2000). This is reiterated by Pollitt and Beouckaert, who suggest that such reform has resulted in movement away from a ‘Weberian culture’ of hierarchy and rigidity, the effects of which have facilitated the advancement of public administration (cited Rhodes and Boyle, 2012, p.42).

However, literature also raises the issue that NPM is self-contradictory in practice. Gultekin (2011) emphasises this by questioning whether the government can be customer focused if it is, in effect, owned by the citizens, posing the juxtaposition of whether citizens are owners or customers. Riccucci (2001) also focuses on the illogical nature of NPM stating that it is the role of the Government is to provide for its citizens and therefore cannot operate in a profitable manner, which is inconsistent with the principals of NPM. Many claim that the cultural clash between private sector practice and public

sector objectives portrays that the ethos of private sector does not fit public sector reality, making NPM an inappropriate and unfeasible concept (Gultekin, 2011; Tummers, 2011).

Despite whether or not NPM is an entirely pragmatic concept, it is broadly acknowledged that NPM has been a significant contributor to the public administration revolution that has swept the globe (Fabian, 2010; Padovani, Yetano and Orelli, 2010). It is undeniable that NPM has influenced a 'new way of thinking to government' and has encouraged efficiency and promoted a performance-focused environment (Gulekin, 2011, p.351). As a result, it is one of the most widely referenced models for the litany of public sector transformations that have taken place in the last 35 years (IPA, 2014; Hood, 2011; Haque, 2007; Johnsen, 1999).

Ireland lagged significantly behind many of its OECD counterparts, with its first significant step towards the reform of public administration taking place in 1996 under the government publication of *Delivering Better Government* (Department of the Taoiseach, 1996). It was recognised that effective performance management was central to achieving the aims and objectives of the initiative. This led to the implementation of a performance management system for public servants in 2000 (Department of Finance, 2000). The aim of the system, known as PMDS, is to provide 'a framework where the strategic goals are translated into action through the business planning process and related to individual and team objectives' (ibid., p. 6).

In order to achieve this aim, the implementation process for PMDS requires public sector managers to set strategic objectives for their staff at the beginning of each year. Managers are expected to monitor their performance and cater for development needs throughout the year (DEPR, 2013; Department of Finance, 2000). The PMDS process requires that two appraisal meetings be held between the manager and each member of their staff during the year, including a six-month and end-of-year review. This is to facilitate the honest communication of performance related feedback between managers and their staff and to cater for development and career progression. The manager is required to appraise and rate the staff members' performance at the end-of-year review based on that standard to which they have met their objectives (ibid.). Despite the introduction of a structured PMS, many of the recent government-conducted evaluations acknowledge that the PMDS is not acting as an effective tool for performance management within the public sector (DEPR, 2015a; 2014a; 2014b; CSO, 2014; IPA, 2014; Dept. of Finance, 2010)

### *The Effectiveness of Performance Management Systems*

On introducing the PMDS, The General Council Report defined Performance Management (PM) as ‘a process for establishing a shared understanding about what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, and an approach to managing and developing people that increases the probability of achieving success’ (Department of Finance, 2000, p. 3).

The principals of this definition are echoed throughout the literature. Analysis of the literature shows that effective PM is composed of two objectives; firstly, the explicit communication of objectives in order to clearly define the strategic aims of the organisation, secondly, the thorough assessment of performance against these objectives in order to provide unambiguous, honest feedback for the purpose of facilitating continuous improvement (McCracken and Wallace, 2000; Guest, 1997; Ulrich 1997).

The effectiveness of PMSs put in place by organisations in order to achieve these objectives has been cause for debate throughout decades of literature (Lawler, et al., 2012; Becker, et al., 2011; Biron, et al., 2011; Padovani, et al., 2010; Melkers and Willoughby, 2005; Furnham, 2004). Some critics have argued that PMSs actually hinder progress, highlighting that systems are often so problematic and ineffective that the cost-benefit analysis of design and implementation indicates poor value for return (Furnham, 2004). Despite such findings, and indeed without an alternative performance management tool, PMSs continue to be widely used across both the private and public sector in an effort to manage employee performance in line with organisational objectives (Lawler et al., 2012). As a result, much research has been conducted to identify the ingredients required for the creation of successful PMSs (Agarwal, 2014; CIPD, 2014; Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Tung, Baird and Schoch, 2011).

While some findings focus on the importance of PMS structure and design, there is a resounding message throughout the literature highlighting the link between implementation methods and system success (Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Arvey and Murphy, 1998; Sims and Heninger, 1987). Research shows that where implementation is supported and promoted by senior managers and organisational leaders, the PMS is significantly more effective (DBIS, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009). Findings have also emphasised

managements' ability to implement the system appropriately based on their skills and understanding of the PMS (Baird, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008). Additionally, where there is inconsistency or perceived unfairness of the implementation phases, the system loses credibility and merit, impacting the jobholder's commitment to performance (CIPD, 2014; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Cook and Crossman, 2004).

According to the literature, PMSs can be effective when implemented correctly, accentuating the need for adequate training of managers (Baird, 2012; Becker, et al., 2011; Whitaker, Dahling and Levy, 2007; Waal et al., 2003; Ulrich, 1997). Provision of PMS training and guidance for managers has been proven to endorse the support of senior management, promote a clear understanding of the system, facilitate the required implementation skills and encourage consistency of approach among managers (Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004). As those responsible for facilitating a learning environment, it is essential that managers possess the necessary competencies and attributes required to do so successfully. The efficacy of management, and the sincerity with which they support and implement the PMS, is critical to the success of the system (Lawler et al., 2012; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Garavan et al, 1999; Heraty and Morley, 1995).

## *The Role of the Manager*

### Devolution of HR roles to the manager

Devolution of Human Resource Management (HRM) involves the transference of specific HRM roles and functions from HR professionals to the line managers (Bainbridge, 2015; Conway and Monks, 2010; Ruona and Gibson, 2004; MacNeil, 2003). The introduction of PMSs has brought with it an increasing trend in the delegation of PM related tasks such as strategic objective setting, performance appraisal, feedback delivery and the identification of development needs, to the line manager. Much of the literature surrounding the devolvement of these tasks debates whether or not the delegation of HR responsibility makes for a positive change (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Watson, 2007; McConville, 2006; Heraty and Morley, 1995).

Research has shown that managers inheriting responsibility for the training, development and appraisal of subordinates proves to be a more natural, practical process due to their direct involvement and expertise in the area (Conway and Monks, 2010; McConville, 2006; Guest et al., 2003; Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002). However, it has been argued that line managers often face time constraints which inhibit their ability to complete such tasks effectively and that the hazy division of responsibility between the manager and HR practitioner can be problematic (Goodhew, et al., 2008; MacNeil, 2003).

Moreover, such roles are assigned to managers without the support of relevant training. As a result, managers find themselves with HRM responsibilities that they do not have the knowledge, confidence or experience to effectively implement (Bainbridge, 2015; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew et al., 2008; Cunningham and Hyman, 1999; McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles and Truss, 1997; Heraty and Morley, 1995).

Research has highlighted significant discrepancy in how the manager may view their performance management skills in comparison to how they are actually perceived by the jobholder (CIPD, 2014). In a recent CIPD (2014) survey, it was found that 81 per cent of managers claimed to discuss training and development needs with their employees, where as just 36 per cent of employees agreed that their managers had fulfilled this requirement. Similarly, 81 per cent of managers maintained that they provided their employees with performance feedback, a statement supported by just 44 per cent of employees.

Such discrepancy indicates that managers are either unaware of their inability to conduct these tasks effectively or are not prepared to admit they are failing to carry out their responsibilities to the necessary standard. As a result, literature emphasises that managers must be afforded the opportunity to gain the required skills through thorough training and on-going support (Bainbridge, 2015; CIPD, 2014; Lawler et al., 2012; Posthuma and Campion, 2008). Additionally, literature has found that the provision of training reiterates the importance of conducting such tasks effectively, sending a message to both the manager and the jobholder regarding the importance and value of the process (DBIS, 2012; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004).

### Performance Appraisal

One of the most controversial aspects of performance management is the performance appraisal process. The process faces severe criticism throughout the literature, with even proponents of appraisal condemning the implementation methods and the capability of appraisers to ensure fairness and accuracy (Javad and S. D., 2015; Lawler et al., 2012; St-Onge, Morin, Bellehumeur and Dupuis, 2009; McGuire, Garavan and O'Donnell, 2006).

According to research, managers are reluctant to give extreme ratings, and in particular are unwilling to award low scores, which subsequently lead to the provision of average marks to all employees (Schleicher, 2009; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Fletcher, 2001). The failure to provide critical feedback and address underperformance has serious consequences for both the individual and the organisation whereby the jobholder is denied the required training and development opportunities, while the organisation struggles to meet targets and objectives in line with strategic aims (Lawler et al., 2012; Thompson, 2007; Whitaker et al., 2007; McGuire et al., 2006). Additionally, excessive average marking can be disheartening and demoralising for high achievers whose diligence, dedication and ambition is overlooked and unrecognised when awarded the same rating as those who are less committed to achieving their targets (Javad and S. D., 2015; Taylor, 2008; Fletcher, 2001).

While managers may distribute average ratings in an attempt to avoid confrontation, such an approach highlights the system as being unfair and inconsistent, compromising the credibility of the process (St-Onge et al., 2009; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Cook and Crossman, 2004). Employees will pay little heed to a practice lacking sincerity and merit. Research accentuates the importance of 'distributive

justice' in order to support the integrity of the process and facilitate an effective PMS (Posthuma and Campion, 2008, p.50).

Emphasis has also been placed on the influence of non-performance related factors on the appraisal process (Lawler et al., 2012; Taylor 2008; McGuire et al., 2006; Schleicher, 2009; St-Onge et al., 2009; Woehr and Huffcutt, 1994; Pearce and Porter, 1986). Research shows that the relationship between appraiser and appraisee can significantly influence the feedback that the appraiser provides and the manner in which it is communicated. It may also have an impact on the rating that the appraiser chooses to award (Schleicher, 2009; Taylor, 2008; Cook and Crossman, 2004).

Ratings and feedback influenced by these factors significantly diminish the accuracy and consistency of the appraisal process, compromising its credibility (Whitaker et al., 2007; Fletcher, 2001; Fried, 2000). Research has found that training can be used to help managers overcome such biases, raising awareness of subconscious influences, providing them with the skills to counteract prejudice and teaching them of the importance of accurate appraisal (St-Onge et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2005; Boswell and Boudreau, 2000; Woehr and Huffcutt, 1994;).

The adverse effects of performance appraisal are discussed by numerous authors, highlighting the fact that critical feedback can be upsetting and demoralising for employees (Lawler et al., 2012; Schleicher, 2009; McGuire et al., 2006; Pearce and Porter, 1986). While lenient appraisal ratings detract from the accuracy and sincerity of the process, insensitively delivered feedback can be counter-productive causing employees to feel demotivated, disheartened and frustrated, further inhibiting their performance (Taylor, 2008; Fletcher, 2001).

Despite decades of denunciation by academics, performance appraisal continues to be a key tool in most organisational PMSs (Javad and S. D., 2015; Lawler et al., 2012; Whitaker et al., 2007; McGuire et al., 2006; Cleveland and Murphy, 1992). According to the literature, this can be attributed to the fact that communication through appraisal feedback has often been identified as the most important aspect of PM and the primary method for enabling improvements in performance. It is essential for providing employees the opportunity to address weakness and for aligning employee performance with organisational objectives (Javad and S. D., 2015; Whitaker et al., 2007; Williams and Johnson; 2000).

While academics continue to debate the effectiveness of the appraisal process, literature strongly emphasises the necessity to ensure managers are sufficiently equipped to take responsibility for implementing tasks that were previously recognised as HR roles. Thorough training and support for managers is essential in order for the performance management process to avoid the damaging consequences of ill management, and instead as intended, have a positive impact on both the jobholder and the organisation (Javad and S. D., 2015; Lawler et al., 2012; Teague and Roche, 2012; Tung et al., 2011; Hite and McDonald, 2008; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Jackson, 2005; MacNeil, 2003; Truss, 2001).

### ***Formal Training for Managers***

According to research, there is little evidence of the provision of formal training for managers assuming HR related duties, such as managing the performance and development of jobholders (Conway and Monks, 2010; Goodhew et al., 2008; MacNeil, 2003). Disturbingly, many organisations presume that the manager's work experience affords them the skill and ability to effectively manage the performance of the jobholder (McGuire, Stoner and Mylona; 2008; MacNeil, 2003). For managers with little competency in these areas, this can result in damaging consequences for both the jobholder and the organisation (Purcell and Hutchinson 2007). Additionally, even where managers do possess sufficient skills, in the absence of formal training and official organisational procedures, maintaining consistency in management methods is impossible (Bainbridge, 2015; Goodhew et al. 2008; Purcell and Hutchinson 2007; De Waal, 2003).

### **Consistency, Fairness and Credibility**

Literature strongly supports the need to formally train employees fulfilling people management roles (Becker et al., 2011; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Goodhew et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; Pulakos, 2004; McGovern et al., 1997; Woehr and Huffcutt, 1994). According to McGovern et al. (1997) the failure to provide training will inevitably lead to inconsistencies in the way that organisational policies are implemented. This lack of uniformity can be perceived as unfair treatment, negatively impacting the jobholder's motivation and commitment to the process (Rowland and Hall, 2010; Goodhew et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; McGovern et al., 1997).

Irregularities and flaws in the implementation of the PMS will cause the process to lack credibility. As a result the system will obtain a negative reputation and be viewed by jobholders as a futile, burdensome practice (CIPD, 2014; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Cook and Crossman; 2004; McGovern et al., 1997). According to a study by Cook and Crossman (2004), the perceived validity of the appraisal process, as part of the PMS, and the apparent fairness of the manner in which the process is implemented by managers, contributes significantly to the satisfaction of appraisees. Unless the jobholder perceives the design, implementation and outcome of the process to be fair, the individual will view the system as unconstructive, harming the value of the PMS and having negative consequences for performance (CIPD, 2014; Cook and Crossman, 2004).

Literature also argues that the provision of mandatory formal training reinforces the message that the organisation acknowledges the significance and value of effective performance management (Chubb et al., 2011; Pulakos, 2004). This is a vital contributor to creating a culture within which the importance of the PMS is considered by the manager and, as a result, the jobholder (CIPD, 2014; Chubb et al., 2011; De Waal, 2003; Fryer, Antony and Ogden, 1999). A manager's lack of commitment to the PMS causes the process to be perceived and treated as a *paper-filling exercise*. For the jobholder, such an approach is palpable and loses all credibility (CIPD, 2014; Chubb et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

### Skills, Ability and Confidence

Decades of literature surrounding the topic of performance management has emphasised the requirement for formal training in order to ensure that managers have both the capability and the confidence to implement the PMS correctly and effectively (CIPD, 2014; DBIS, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; Chan, 2004; Pulakos, 2004; Lawler, 2003; Arvey and Murphy, 1998; Davis and Mount, 1984). Sims and Heninger (1987, p.40) identified the training of managers as 'invaluable', stating that such training provides managers with the 'confidence in their ability' to manage performance effectively. This finding continues to be echoed throughout more recent literature (CIPD, 2014; DBIS, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011).

Research has also highlighted the damaging consequences for the jobholder in the event of an untrained manager conducting tasks such as performance measurement, appraisal and feedback as well as objective setting and identification of development needs (CIPD, 2014; Lawler, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; McGuire et al., 2008). The mismanagement of such an important process can leave the jobholder at a significant disadvantage, denying the individual of the development opportunities needed to advance their career and achieve their full potential (Chubb et al., 2011; McGuire et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2005; Arvey and Murphy, 1998).

Additionally, feedback delivered insensitively can have a dire impact on the jobholder's level of motivation and commitment to the organisation (CIPD, 2014; Chubb et al., 2011; Pulakos, 2004; Boswell and Boudreau, 2000). Studies have revealed that a poorly conducted performance review is

significantly more damaging than failing to conduct a review (CIPD, 2014; Lawler, 2012). Despite the fact that effective performance is detrimental to the success of an organisation, according to the literature, many organisations are failing to see the vital importance of investing in training for managers to conduct these tasks effectively (Chamberlin, 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008).

#### Correlation Between Formal Training and PMS Effectiveness

The majority of studies have proven that there is a positive correlation between providing managers with PMS related training and the effectiveness of PMS implementation (Baird, Schoch and Chen, 2012; Chubb, et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Sims and Heninger, 1987). However, there have been studies that have found formal training to be insignificant to the success of performance management. According to Biron et al. (2011), findings provided limited support for formal training, highlighting that performance management success could be attributed to informal guidance, clearly communicated performance objectives and senior management support.

Other studies have found that formal training can in fact have a negative impact on aspects of management and have provided evidence of rater-distribution training leading to decreased accuracy and rater-error training resulting in increased leniency (Woehr and Huffcutt, 1994). Further research has argued that these findings are likely to be the result of an inappropriate training approach, reiterating the importance of appropriate training styles and techniques. This highlights the debate surrounding the extent to which formal training can resolve PMS implementation flaws (ibid.).

Despite this, for the most part, research has found a clear correlation between providing managers with training and the effective implementation of the PMS. In a recent Australian study, research collected from 450 Australian local government agencies showed that ‘PMS related training is positively related to the effectiveness of PMSs’ (Baird et al., 2012, p.166) and concluded that for PMSs to increase their effectiveness, employees must be provided with ‘adequate training, both in the design and implementation of PMSs’ (Baird et al., 2012, p.175).

This was reiterated by Tung et al. (2011) who found that the support of top-level management and managerial training are the two most significant organisational factors associated with the effectiveness of PMSs. Additionally, a study conducted on public sector organisations within an American

jurisdiction validated the ‘importance of training as a determinant of a successful PMS’ (Emerson, 2009, p.4). These findings are echoed by Cavalluzzo and Ittner (2004) who found that inadequate training significantly inhibits successful implementation of PMSs.

Where studies have failed to concentrate specifically on the need for managerial training, it has been found that the implementation stage of the PMS is the most significant to the success of the system and results have emphasised that the understanding and attitude of managers towards the PMS are key contributors to effective PMS execution (Da Waal, 2003). These are aspects that research has proven to be positively affected by formal training (Baird et al., 2012; DBIS, 2012; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004; Sims and Heninger, 1987).

#### Refresher Training

A study conducted within the Lithuanian public sector also determined the need for managers to receive training to facilitate the effective management of staff performance and development. This study also advocated periodic screening of management to continually ensure they are equipped to effectively manage staff performance (Siugzdiniene, 2008). Literature surrounding the topic of training highlights the correlation between how recently training has been received and the level of information retained from the course, emphasising that the greater the length of time the further the deterioration in the ability of an individual to recall the information (Buckner, Hindman, Huelsman and Bergman, 2014; Swartz and Lin, 2014; Pollitt, 2007).

Studies have shown that refresher training for managers can promote PM consistency through increasing awareness of procedures and creating a renewed focus on the importance of effective implementation (Pollitt, 2007). According to Pollitt (2007, p17), a refresher-training course with 26 managers, who were sceptical of the need for additional training, provided immediate results whereby managers became more confident in their skills and passionate in their desire to effectively measure performance within the prescribed standards. This study further illustrates the positive impact of additional training for managers.

### ***Supportive Organisational Policies and Procedures***

In addition to advocating the importance of formal training, literature also acknowledges the necessity of on-going support for managers responsible for conducting the PMS process (DBIS, 2012; Biron et al. 2011; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Chan, 2004). Literature stresses the importance of establishing clearly defined frameworks and practices in order to avoid idiosyncratic people-management (Bainbridge, 2015; Fitsimmons, 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010; Rowland and Hall, 2010). Explicit policies for managing underperformance, procedures to cater for training and development needs, unambiguous competency frameworks and structured appraisal processes should be established by the organisation in order to empower managers and facilitate fairness and consistency of people-management (Bainbridge, 2015; Fitsimmons, 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010; Goodhew et al., 2008).

However, Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) also argue that while such policies offer the potential for uniformity and effective management, they are worthless if the line manager does not possess the skills or desire to implement these well-designed practices. For example, a PMS case study conducted by Goodhew et al. (2008) found that just one-third of managers could adequately describe the official protocol for dealing with poor performance. This reiterates the point that while organisational policies and processes are essential for consistent, well-structured people management, these alone are not enough. The selection of appropriate managers along with the provision of training to equip managers with the necessary skills to accurately implement these processes is vital (Baird et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010; Emerson, 2009; Goodhew et al., 2008; McConville, 2006; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Davis and Mount, 1984).

Additionally, these managerial resources should be easily accessible, regularly referenced by senior management and promoted by HR practitioners (Lawler et al., 2012; Tummers, 2011; Emerson, 2009; Pulakos, 2004). Again, as with the provision of formal training, where senior management are seen to encourage the continuous use of PMS supporting documentation, the process of PM is perceived to be one of importance, creating a culture whereby PMS is valued and great effort is required to ensure effective implementation (Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Biron, et al., 2011; Tummers, 2011; Emerson, 2009; St-Onge et al., 2009; Melkers and Willoughby, 2005).

## *Informal Guidance for Managers*

### Continuous Informal Support

Literature also emphasises the requirement for informal support where managers can obtain guidance and advice from those with greater PMS experience and expertise on an ad hoc basis as required (Biron et al. 2011; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Pulakos, 2004). The extent to which informal guidance is encouraged depends on the culture of the organisation and its ethos towards workplace learning (Gunnigle et al, 2006; Taylor, 2008).

In recent times, literature surrounding the topic of workplace learning has begun to focus on the importance of blended learning, highlighting informal and experiential learning styles as the most productive (Gunnigle et al, 2006; Taylor, 2008). With the development of learning initiatives recommending that 10 per cent of organisational learning should be formal and 90 per cent informal, there has been a clear shift towards the promotion of continuous learning environments and knowledge sharing (Gold, Holden, Steward and Beardwell, 2013; Kew and Stredwick, 2010). Informal learning comprises of experiential, or 'on the job' learning, as well as feedback, mentoring and coaching (Garavan et al., 2011; Hart, 2012). Therefore, a working culture that fails to recognise the significance of informal learning may result in insufficient support and guidance from HR practitioners and senior management, stifling the managers' ability to learn and develop (Garavan et al., 2011; Gunnigle et al., 2006; Hart, 2012; Taylor, 2008).

As previously highlighted, managers often feel they manage performance more effectively than they do in reality (CIPD, 2014). This emphasises the need for informal guidance in the form of feedback, mentoring and coaching to afford managers the opportunity to develop their skills and to ensure they are held accountable for their performance as a manager (CIPD, 2014; Garavan et al., 2011; Hart, 2012).

A study carried out by the Society of Human Resource Management Foundation acknowledges the benefits of providing informal guidance in the form of a 'performance management hotline' for managers who have PMS related questions or concerns (Pulakos, 2004, p.27). According to research conducted by Emerson (2009), the introduction of a PMS lunch-and-learn facilitated an informal setting that allowed for regular conversation and knowledge sharing, providing the opportunity for managers to learn from those with more experience and address any queries or concerns. As proven by

the study, this contributed to the success of the system, clearly highlighting the link between improved managerial competency through informal guidance and effective PMS implementation (Emerson, 2009).

#### Senior Management Support

Research shows that where implementation is supported and promoted by senior managers and organisational leaders, the PMS is significantly more effective (DBIS, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004; Fryer, et al., 1999). Studies emphasise that an organisation with a CEO who promotes the importance of the PMS and clearly defines management expectations, has a higher level of PMS success than organisations without such senior support (DBIS, 2012; Biron et al. 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004). This may be due to the fact that such support ensures that performance management is recognised as an important and worthwhile process, increasing the commitment and effort with which it is approached by managers responsible for its execution (Biron et al., 2011; Becker et al., 2011; Melkers and Willoughby, 2005; Pulakos, 2004;). The efficacy of management and the sincerity with which they support and implement the PMS, is critical to the success of the system (Lawler et al., 2012; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Garavan et al, 1999; Heraty and Morley, 1995)

### ***PMDS Reform***

Since its introduction in 2000, the PMDS has been subject to a litany of reforms. In 2004, Mercer Consultants conducted an evaluation of PMDS on behalf of the government's Sub-committee of General Council (Mercer, 2004; Dept. of Taoiseach, 2003). Mercer (2004) identified seven areas requiring improvement in order to sustain and progress PMDS.

- Leadership
- Process Efficiency
- Communication and Feedback
- Cultural Support and Organisational Practices
- Training and Development
- Assessment/Rating System
- Linkage

Mercer (2004)

Mercer (2004) recommended the provision of managerial training and/or support in relation to all seven of these categories in order to facilitate the improvement of PMDS implementation. Following on from this evaluation, the PMDS Subcommittee of General Council introduced an 'Integrated PMDS Model' in 2005 (Dept. of Finance, 2005, p. 9). The PMDS model focused on the introduction of an assessment cycle with one interim review, a five scale rating system, rating descriptions and the linkage of ratings to increment and promotion eligibility. While it was proposed that training and information materials would be developed centrally, no direction was provided for managerial training as recommended by Mercer (2004). Recommendations to offer training and mentoring programmes to provide 'coaching for managers to acquire and adopt management styles and practices that are suitable for on-going PMDS implementation and progress' were omitted from the new approach to PMDS (Mercer, 2004, p.28).

In 2009, an evaluation of the revised PMDS model was conducted by the PMDS Subcommittee of General Council by means of a survey (Dept. of Finance, 2010). The responses highlighted that, in the majority of cases, PMDS was not being implemented effectively by management. It was emphasised that, for the most part, managers were not managing underperformance, were neglecting to hold

conversations around motivation and career progress, failed to set objectives to facilitate development and were unsuccessful in linking staff skills to the overall business strategy of the Department/Office (ibid.).

Figure 1

**Exhibit 5: Questions where favourable response rates are less than 30%**

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Ave % agreed for all grade groupings</b>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	58. I feel that my Department/Office tackles underperformance appropriately.	16%
<b>Feedback</b>	28. As a result of my PMDS, my manager and I talk about my motivation and development.	27%
<b>Training and Development</b>	44. I am getting developmental assignments that support my development and career growth.	28%
<b>Linkage</b>	24. The information from PMDS is used in matching the skills and experience of staff to the current business needs.	19%
	46. PMDS is used to inform decisions about future career development and work assignments.	23%

(Dept. of Finance, 2010, p. 14).

The survey also revealed that just 38 per cent of staff felt that their Department ensured ‘performance standards and ratings given to employees were consistent and fair for all employees’ (Dept. of Finance, 2010, p56). Feedback from managers suggests that there is a lack of training and support provided by the Department to ensure accuracy and maintain credibility of PMDS. For example, it was found that just 39 per cent of managers agreed that their Department had ‘set consistent and fair performance and rating standards for managers to apply to their staff’ (Dept. of Finance, 2010, p39). Overall, the result from the evaluation presented that, in the majority of cases, there was a decrease in the percentage of staff that felt positively toward the PMDS process when compared to the findings from the evaluation in 2004 (Dept. of Finance; Mercer, 2004).

Figure 2

**Exhibit 8: Average Percent Agreed for Favourable Responses for Survey Statements under each Evaluation Criteria**

<b>PMDS Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Ave % agreed for all Groups 2004</b>	<b>Ave % agreed for all Groups 2009</b>	<b>Difference 2004 to 2009</b>
Implementation	64%	54%	-10%
Process	61%	57%	-4%
Effectiveness	55%	42%	-13%
Feedback	48%	46%	-2%
Training and Development	52%	47%	-5%
Fairness and Consistency	59%	53%	-6%
Assessment	60%	55%	-5%
Linkage	33%	49%	+16%

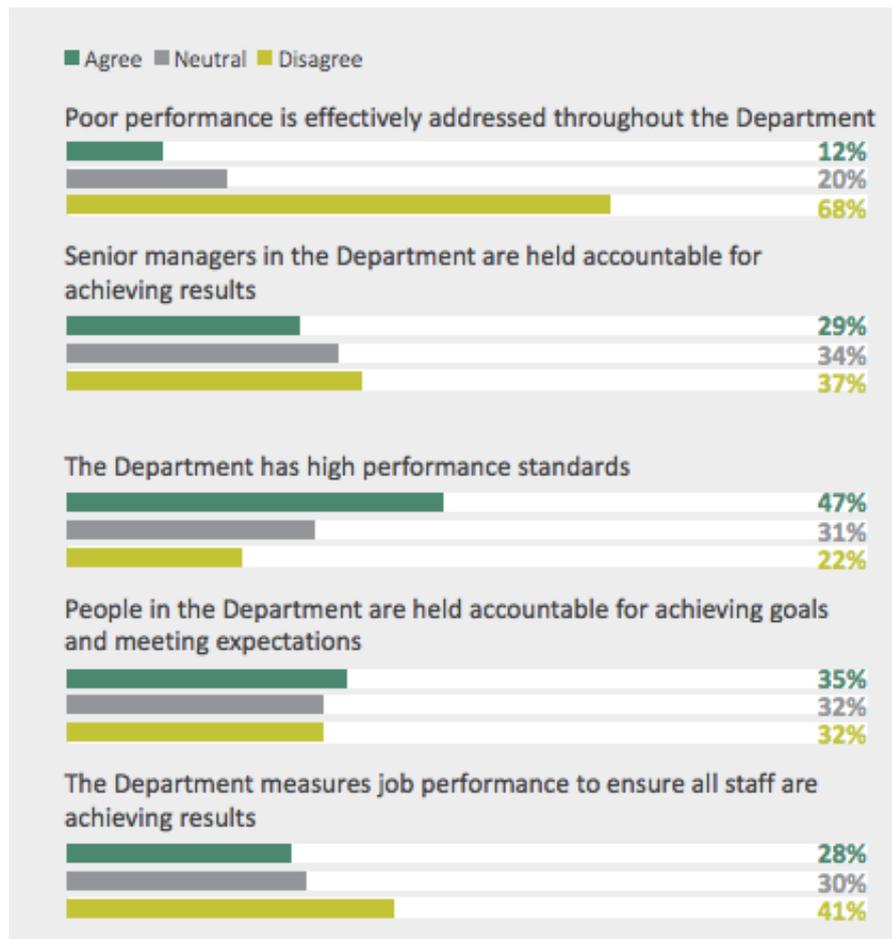
(Dept. of Finance, 2010, p. 17).

As a result of the evaluation, in 2012 the PMDS was subject to reform. The changes, which were to be established over the course of two years, focused on increasing the increment eligibility rating, improving the rating descriptions, a new grade-based competency framework and the introduction of calibrated reviews for performance rating (DEPR, 2013). Within the report, managers are advised to meet with their staff to discuss goal achievement, provide feedback, consider areas for development and address underperformance. Despite detailing these requirements, no further direction is provided for managers responsible for these tasks. Again, contrary to the recommendations determined by Mercer (2004) and irrespective of feedback from public servants highlighting ineffective implementation of PMDS, the reform neglects to address whether managers have been equipped to conduct these tasks effectively (CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2015a).

In 2014, the minister for Public Expenditure and Reform initiated the Civil Service Renewal Plan as part of the public service reform for 2014-2016 (CSO, 2014; DPER, 2014a). This saw the Civil Service Renewal Taskforce engage with public service workers to ask 'If you could change one thing to make the civil service more effective what would it be?' (CSO, 2014, p1). The results from the process highlighted underperformance and dissatisfaction with the PMDS as being the most problematic area requiring improvement within the civil service (CSO, 2014).

Upon publication of the full civil service Employee Engagement Survey in 2015, it was revealed that just 12 per cent of civil servants agreed that ‘poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Department’ and merely 28 per cent agreed that their ‘Department measures job performance to ensure all staff are achieving results’ (DEPR, 2015a, p.39).

**Figure 3**



(DEPR, 2015a, p.39)

Whether in respect of managers lacking the skills and training that they need, or managers failing to identify and address the training and development needs of their staff, only 45 per cent of staff felt that they received the training required to do their job well, while 44 per cent felt they received training to keep them ‘up to date with developments’ (DEPR, 2015a, p.35).

**Figure 4**



(DEPR, 2015a, p.35)

Following on from these results, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform applied further amendments to the structure of PMDS, abolishing the five-point rating scale in favour of a two-point system (DEPR, 2015b).

While there have been multiple reforms since the initial introduction of the system, the PMDS has continuously fallen short of expectations and, as highlighted by recent government surveys, continues to feature prominently as an aspect of public sector management that requires change. This emphasises that amendments implemented in the interim have failed to identify and resolve the issues leading to the demise of PMDS across the Irish civil service (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; IPA 2014; DPER, 2013; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

Feedback from public servants support findings in the literature and highlight that the issues with PMDS have a clear association with the way in which the process is implemented. Despite the findings, further research by the Irish government on the provision of training and support to effectively equip PMDS managers, has been neglected (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; IPA 2014; DPER, 2013; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

## ***Discussion***

The literature review has sought to provide the context for this proposed area of research. The PMDS has been subject to a litany of reforms since its introduction in 2000. These reforms have continuously focused on the restructuring of the process. Despite numerous attempts to form an effective performance management system across the Irish Public Sector, the PMDS has failed to meet expectations and has been highlighted by public servants as the number one area requiring improvement and change within the civil service (CSO; 2014).

Literature places great emphasis on the importance of managers possessing the skills and ability to effectively implement performance management systems and processes (Chubb et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Chan, 2004; Pulakos, 2004; Lawler, 2003; Arvey and Murphy, 1998). There is much discussion around the necessity for organisations to ensure that managers are fully equipped, through training and support in order to manage performance consistently, effectively and in line with the organisation's PMS requirements (CIPD, 2014; DBIS, 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; McGuire et al., 2008; McGovern et al., 1997; Sims and Heninger, 1987).

Despite the abundance of literature reiterating its importance, analysis of the training and support received by public sector managers for performance management purposes, has been neglected (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; IPA, 2013; DEPR, 2013; 2011; 2010). As a result, this research aims to assess the training, support and guidance received by public sector managers tasked with implementing PMDS.

While the aim of the study is to assess the PMDS related training & support experienced by management, it is also to establish whether the training & support received has equipped managers to implement PMDS effectively. This study will be assessed to determine if the results echo the findings in the literature which emphasise the contribution of managerial training & support to PMS success, by exploring whether there is link between the reported ineffectiveness of the PMDS and the training & support provided to equip Irish public sector managers for PMDS implementation (DEPR, 2015a; CIPD, 2014; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

## Chapter Three - Research Question

### *Background*

*The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector.*

In recent years, surveys have been conducted across the public sector, highlighting the failure of PMDS to act as an effective performance management tool (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014). While the system has been subject to multiple reforms, the PMDS has continued to fall short of expectations (CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; IPA, 2014; Dept. of Finance, 2010). A review of the literature surrounding PMSs has repeatedly highlighted the significant link between implementation methods and PMS success. More specifically, the literature has emphasised the importance of management's capability to execute the process effectively and consistently (DBIS, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004). Research focusing on the devolution of HR roles to managers stresses the crucial importance of ensuring that managers have been provided with sufficient training and guidance to implement the PMS accurately, highlighting the damaging consequences for failing to do so, such as demotivating staff, compromising the credibility of the system, failing to set strategic objectives and neglecting to address underperformance (Baird et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010; Rowland and Hall, 2010)

Despite the echo of this resounding message throughout the literature, there has been no effort made by the Irish government to assess the training and support received by managers responsible for the implementation of PMDS within the Irish public sector (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; IPA, 2013; DEPR, 2013; 2011; 2010). This study seeks to address this area of neglect, which has been unjustifiably overlooked in Ireland. The aim of this research is to investigate the training and on-going support received by public sector middle managers who are tasked with implementing the PMDS. The first objective is to assess the level of formal training received by managers conducting PMDS. The second objective is to determine whether managers are supported by the Department/Agency through the provision of PMDS related policies and procedures. The third objective is to explore the informal PMDS guidance and support available to managers on an on-going basis.

## ***Aims and Objectives***

The key aim of this study is ‘*The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector*’. This will be addressed by considering the relevant objectives and sub objectives.

### **Objective 1:**

**To investigate the formal training provisions for managers conducting PMDS.**

*Sub-Objective 1.1: Do managers receive formal training to facilitate PMDS implementation?*

*Sub-Objective 1.2: Are managers and their co-workers sufficiently trained to implement the PMDS effectively and consistently?*

### **Objective 2: To investigate the PMDS policies and procedures offered by the Department**

*Sub-Objective 2.1: Are managers provided with PMDS related policies and procedures to which they can refer?*

*Sub-Objective 2.2: Do managers feel that the Department/Agency provides sufficient documented policies and procedures to support the effective and consistent implementation of PMDS?*

### **Objective 3: To investigate the informal support available to managers conducting PMDS**

*Sub-Objective 3.1: Do managers have access to informal support from HR practitioners or more experienced/senior colleagues?*

*Sub-Objective 3.2: Do managers receive sufficient guidance and feedback from their managers to ensure they are implementing the PMDS effectively and consistently?*

*Sub-Objective 3.3: Do managers feel that effective PMDS implementation is supported and championed by senior management?*

## **Chapter Four - Research Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

*The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector.*

This study seeks to assess the training and support received by public sector managers responsible for the implementation of the PMDS within the Irish public sector. While the objective of the study is to assess the PMDS related training and support experienced by management, it is also to establish whether the training and support received has equipped managers to implement PMDS effectively. A review of the literature has highlighted a distinct correlation between provision of PMS training & support for management, and the successful implementation of a PMS (Baird et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; Jackson, et al., 2005; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Chan, 2004; Lawler, 2003; Arvey and Murphy, 1998). This study will be assessed to determine if the results support the findings in the literature by exploring whether there is a link between the reported ineffectiveness of the PMDS and the training & support provided to equip managers for PMDS implementation (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; IPA, 2014; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

### ***Research Philosophy***

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of the participants in relation to PMDS training and support, and gain insight into whether managers feel they have been given the necessary tools to implement PMDS effectively. As a result, the philosophical underpinnings of this research are both constructivist (or subjective) and interpretivist in nature due to the fact that this study seeks to consider and interpret the opinions and perceptions of the participants (Saunders et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2011). The ontological perspective of constructionism considers 'that social phenomena develop in social contexts and that individuals and groups create, in part, their own reality' (Quinlan, 2011, p.96), while the epistemological position of interpretivism 'requires the researcher to seek to understand the subjective reality and meanings of participants' (Saunders et al., 2003 p.480).

This philosophical approach is in stark contrast to that of positivism, which assumes that ‘there is one objective reality’ and that ‘reality is singular and separate from consciousness’ (Quinlan, 2011, p.96). A positivist approach to research seeks to prove theories and expose truths in an objective manner. Such an approach does not seek to depict the experiences of individuals, failing to allow for further insight into participants opinions and why they maintain such views (Saunders et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2011). Due to the fact that the aim of this research is to achieve these detailed findings through the exploration of individual managers’ perceptions, it can be clearly determined that the philosophical foundation of this study is both constructivist and interpretivist in nature.

### ***Research Approach***

This study aims to explore the opinions and perceptions of the participants in an attempt to identify and extract common themes from the data provided. Due to the fact that research seeks to collect and analyse data in order to build and develop theoretical conclusions, this study is inductive in nature (Saunders et al., 2009). As qualitative research is ordinarily inductive, constructivist and interpretivist in its approach, the aims and objectives of this research are more suited to a qualitative method of research (Quinlan, 2011).

Quantitative research is usually deductive in nature and ordinarily focuses on the compilation of numeric data (Saunders et al., 2009). In contrast to the approach of this study, quantitative research is said to fall within the boundaries of positivism (Quinlan, 2011). While many of the studies surrounding the topic of PMSs have taken a quantitative survey approach resulting in the collection of interesting and important data, this research strategy cannot facilitate a deeper understanding of the findings (Saunders et al., 2009). On the contrary, the objective of this research is to achieve precisely that through the exploration of individuals’ experiences, opinions and perceptions of the training and support received by Irish public sector managers responsible for implementing PMDS (Cooper and Schindler, 2013).

According to Anderson (2009), qualitative research provides the opportunity to conduct a more thorough analysis of results and findings obtained through quantitative research. As a result, this research poses the opportunity to utilise qualitative research in an attempt to further explore the themes that have emerged from the reviewed survey-based data as well as findings from studies with a similar

focus (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; IPA, 2014; Baird et al., 2012; Tung et al., 2011; Dept. of Finance, 2010; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

Baird et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study throughout 450 Australian public sector agencies to assess the impact of organisational factors on the effectiveness of the PMS. While it was found that there was a clear positive correlation between training managers and the effectiveness of the PMS, it was recommended that future studies ‘incorporate alternative methodologies such as interviews to further investigate the hypothesised associations’ (ibid., p.176). This study shows that while there is undoubtedly an association between equipping managers to implement the PMS effectively and the success of the system, there is a need for more in-depth analysis of this hypothesis (ibid.).

A large number of studies with a focus on PMS implementation have taken a qualitative approach. Goodhew et al. (2008) used qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews to assess the consistency in approach for managing poor performance. Padovani et al. (2010) used interviews to determine the factors effecting implementation of PMS within four public sector departments, as did Conway and Monks (2010) when researching the impact of training on managers assuming HR roles. Similarly, Cohanier (2014) took the same approach to develop a greater understanding of the PMS within a highly successful organisation. Biron et al. (2011) also conducted semi-structured interviews to assess performance management effectiveness in world-leading firms, while Emerson (2009) used focus group interviews to assess the impact of introducing a training programme on performance measurement within public sector agencies. Likewise, St-Onge et al. (2009) utilised semi-structured interviews when exploring the motives of management to evaluate jobholders accurately, while Becker et al. (2011) availed of the same research approach when investigating the effective implementation of PMS in a non-profit organisation. These researchers have taken a qualitative approach in order to provide greater insight into their study through exploring the opinions, experiences and perceptions of the relevant individuals Cohanier, 2014; Teague and Roche, 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Biron et al. 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010; Padovani et al., 2010; Emerson, 2009; St-Onge et al., 2009; McConville, 2006).

## ***Research Design***

This exploratory study has adopted a single method approach in the form of qualitative interviewing (Cooper and Schindler, 2013). It has been acknowledged that many studies focusing on PMSs effectiveness have taken a case study approach (Cohanier, 2014; Becker et al., 2011; Biron et al. 2011; Padovani et al., 2010; Goodhew et al., 2008;). However, it was felt that due to time constraints this research could facilitate a more thorough analysis of a single method approach. Additionally, the recently conducted civil service surveys have provided strong findings in relation to the ineffectiveness of the current PMDS, therefore it was felt that rather than repeating such research, it would be more beneficial to delve further into these findings using a qualitative approach (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; IPA 2014; DPER, 2013; Dept. of Finance, 2010). The objective of this research is to further explore elements of these findings in order to investigate whether there is a link between the training & support provided for managers and the reported failure of the PMDS to meet desired expectations.

This study used qualitative research in the form of non-standardised, semi-structured interviews. As with similar studies on PMS implementation, conducting interviews has allowed for a greater understanding of the type of training and support received by public sector managers, and to explore whether managers feel they are sufficiently equipped to conduct the PMDS process effectively, consistently and confidently (Saunders et al., 2009). This approach provided participants with the opportunity to elaborate on the support required in order to successfully conduct PMDS with their staff while allowing the researcher to further probe interesting responses (Quinlan, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were constructed using a list of main questions based on the theme of the research objectives, which were derived from thorough analysis of the literature. This approach allowed the interviewer the flexibility to vary the questions slightly from interview to interview, providing the opportunity for new findings where participants raised interesting points. The flexibility of the semi-structured interviews also facilitated the opportunity for the researcher to adjust the structure of the interview to cater for each individual participant (Saunders et al., 2009).

### ***Research Sample***

Interviews were conducted with a sample of ten public sector managers responsible for implementing PMDS. To ensure that consideration was given to any potential variation in approach across various public sector bodies, interviews were conducted within five public sector Agencies/Departments to ensure that findings were reflective of a broad range of public servants and their organisations. In order to achieve this diversity, snowball sampling was selected as the most appropriate sampling method to identify members of the desired population (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher identified two suitable participants and requested that these cases provide contact details for managers responsible for conducting PMDS within another public sector Department/Agency. Similarly, these managers were asked to provide contact details for further participants and so on, thus, expanding the snowball sample. Saunders et al. (2009) suggests that snowball sampling is a suitable technique for researchers having difficulties identifying suitable participants within the desired population. However, an additional incentive for this approach was to allow the researcher to avoid any potential bias when selecting participants. It was felt that using another type of non-probability sampling technique such as judgemental or convenience sampling would not facilitate the alleviation of bias when identifying participants (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore it was felt that removing the researcher from the process of participant selection contributed to the reliability and validity of the data collected.

### ***Data Collection***

Interviews were conducted with ten public sector managers responsible for implementing PMDS. In all cases, and for purposes of consistency, interviews were carried out at the workplace of the participants. Each interview was held in an office where participants were afforded the privacy to speak candidly without interruption. Interviews ranged from 28-46 minutes and averaged 32 minutes. Interview questions were based on the research objectives, which were derived from completing a thorough analysis of the literature (Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Becker et al., 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher the opportunity to probe interesting responses and delve into findings from recently conducted civil service wide surveys. Interviews were recorded having previously obtained the participants' consent; therefore note taking was not required. This

allowed the research to give complete focus to the participant while ensuring data was accurately recorded. Interviews were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis can be defined as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.78). Such an approach ‘provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data’ (ibid.). Braun and Clarke (2006, p87) identify six phases of thematic analysis. These phases include;

1. Becoming familiar with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

While many of the studies referenced in the PMS literature do not explicitly state that they have conducted thematic analysis to determine findings from the data, this approach is often implied, for example ‘the content analysis of the qualitative data was done around the recurrent and dominant themes’ (Maxwell and Farquharson, 2008, p. 309), ‘the research question was investigated by applying pattern matching’ (De Waal, 2003, p.693), analysis shows ‘the main theoretical perspectives with respect to performance management that can be retained to summarize manager’s opinions and answers’ (St-Onge et al. 2009, p275). Based on this assessment of similar qualitative studies using an inductive analysis approach, thematic analysis is used to analyse the data collected for this study. The process of applying Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases analysis to this study is detailed below.

#### **1. Becoming familiar with the data**

Each of the recorded interviews were cautiously transcribed by the researcher. The ten audio recordings were listened to multiple times in order to become familiar with the tone in which the information was delivered. Each of the transcripts were read numerous times to allow the researcher to become familiar with the data and to note initial thoughts.

## 2. Generating initial codes

Transcripts were then re-read and coded, which involved the recording of all interesting aspects of the data on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each of the codes were recorded with reference to the participant and transcript page on which the information was located. Due to the fact that the study is inductive in nature, theme development was ‘data-driven’ rather than ‘theory-driven’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.89). This involved objectively coding of all data within the ten transcripts to allow for the emergence of unexpected themes rather than the identification of specific features of the data.

## 3. Searching for themes

Each of the codes were then collated into initial themes which were also recorded next to the relevant code on the spread sheet. Once this stage had been completed, 23 initial themes had been identified. However, when analysed, many of these themes were similar or closely related, for example ‘the lack of PMDS support and guidance’ and ‘the need for PMDS support and guidance’.

## 4. Reviewing themes

Each of the 23 initial themes were reviewed, organised and grouped into five main overarching themes. The codes were checked against these main themes to ensure they had been appropriately assigned.

## 5. Defining and naming themes

The five main overarching themes were analysed and appropriate theme names were determined in order to accurately reflect the body of data represented by each theme.

## 6. Producing the report

Pivot tables were created using the data in the Excel spreadsheet in order to identify the transcript page where participants provided information in support of the themes. This allowed for the extraction of participant quotes from the transcripts as supporting evidence for each theme. The research findings are presented in the following chapter under each of the five main themes.

### ***Validity and Reliability***

Saunders et al. (2003, p.254) emphasises the key measures for overcoming bias in qualitative interviews. Each of the following elements were considered when preparing for and conducting interviews with each of the participants;

- Your own preparation and readiness for the interview.
- The level of information supplied to the interviewee.
- The appropriateness of your appearance at the interview.
- The nature of the opening comments made when the interview commences.
- Your approach to questioning.
- The impact of your behaviour during the course of the interview.
- Your ability to demonstrate attentive listening skills.
- Your scope to test understanding.
- Your approach to recording information.

Saunders et al. (2003, p.254)

In all cases the researcher ensured sufficient preparation for the interview by setting up recording devices in advance, bringing a copy of the required questions and consent form and allowing sufficient time to conduct the interview. Each participant was emailed a copy of the consent form in advance of the interview as it detailed the purpose of the study and the background of the research. For purposes of consistency, this was the only information provided to participants prior to the interview. The researcher also brought copies of the consent form to the interview to allow the researcher to read and sign the form having had the opportunity to ask any questions.

As the researcher was meeting the participants in their various workplaces during office hours, regular office attire was worn for each of the interviews. Each of the participants were interviewed in a private office where they were free from interruption and had the opportunity to speak openly. Ahead of each interview the researcher reassured the participants that all information would remain anonymous, as would all participants and their associated Departments/Agencies.

Having confirmed the participant's willingness to participate, the researcher asked that the participant speak as honestly and as candidly as possible when responding to questions. A mixture of open and closed questions were used during the interview. The researcher ensured that there were no leading questions or any indications of bias. To demonstrate attentive listening skills, the interviewer often repeated a statement from the participant before asking them to discuss it further. The research also ensured a clear understanding of the information being provided by confirming this with the participant.

All recording devices were set up prior to the interview and placed to the side of the participant so as not to distract them or deter them from providing honest responses.

### Pilot Study

Research shows that conducting a pilot study will provide the researcher with the opportunity to 'test the data gathering instrument designed for the research' in order to assist with 'improving the rigour and the validity of the research' (Quinlan, 2011, p.273). For these reasons a pilot study was conducted as part of this research to examine the strength and suitability of the interview questions for the purposes of this study. The pilot study identified that two of the questions posed by the researcher were very similar and caused some repetition.

It was also highlighted that the participant felt more comfortable when the recording device was not placed directly in their eye-line. Feedback on the clarity of the questions and style of the research was sought from the pilot study to ensure that there was no ambiguity surrounding the posed questions and to confirm that the participant felt comfortable responding honestly. Some minor amendments were made to the two questions causing repetition and it was noted that the recording device would be placed to one side of the participants for all interviews.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Prior to taking part, participants were fully informed of the nature of the research, the requirements for taking part, their right to withdraw from participating at any time and the methods by which the data would be collected and reported. All participants were made aware that their associated Departments/Agencies will remain anonymous and that confidentiality will be afforded to participants

at all times. All participants were asked to read and sign a consent form prior to agreeing to participate in the research interview.

### ***Limitations***

Due to time constraints, it was not feasible to take a case study approach to this research. While such an approach may allow for a broader analysis of PMDS through focusing on a variety of data sources, it was decided, given the time allocated to this study, a single method approach of qualitative interviews could facilitate a more thorough analysis of manager's opinions and perceptions in order to address the research aims and objectives of this study. Additionally, it was felt that rather than repeating the quantitative research of the recently conducted civil service wide surveys, it would be more beneficial to delve further into these findings using a qualitative approach (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; IPA 2014; DPER, 2013; Dept. of Finance, 2010).

It has been acknowledged by the researcher that due to the sample size of participants, results are not guaranteed to be representative of the entire public sector population. This is another limitation of taking a qualitative approach to this research (Saunders et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2011). Despite this, the researcher has conducted interviews with managers across five different Departments/Agencies in an effort to identify common themes, which are potentially reflective of the training and support received by public sector managers responsible for implementing the PMDS process.

## Chapter Five - Findings

### *Introduction*

Data was collected by conducting ten semi-structured interviews with public sector managers who are responsible for implementing PMDS. The interview questions were developed targeting each of the research objectives, which were derived from an analysis of the literature. The interview process was concluded once it was clear that the research had reached 'saturation point' (Quinlan, 2011, p.214). The aim of the interviews was to elicit responses from the participants that would answer the research objectives under consideration in order to address the key aim of this study – *The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector*.

The research objectives are to investigate the level of formal training received by managers conducting PMDS, determine whether managers are supported by the Department/Agency through the provision of PMDS related policies and procedures, and to explore the informal PMDS guidance and support available to managers on an on-going basis.

The use of thematic analysis facilitated a detailed exploration of the data collected, allowing for the identification of several strong overarching themes. These themes are as follows;

- Management's failure to conduct PMDS consistently and effectively
- Management's need for formal training on PMDS
- Management's need for provision and promotion of PMDS policies and procedures
- Access to informal guidance on PMDS
- Lack of genuine support from senior management

This section will present the key findings, based on thorough analysis of the data, with reference to where these findings are situated in the literature.

### ***Management's failure to conduct PMDS consistently and effectively***

The participants presented significant evidence of management's failure to conduct PMDS consistently and effectively. The main areas highlighted were manager's failure to provide critical feedback and manage underperformance, the lack of effort and sincerity with which managers implement the PMDS process and the inconsistency in the approach of managers when rating performance.

#### Failure to manage underperformance

It was acknowledged by the majority of participants that managers avoid giving critical feedback to staff and therefore fail to address underperformance. These findings echo those in the recently conducted Employee Engagement Survey (2015), which revealed that just 12 per cent of civil servants agreed that 'poor performance is effectively addressed throughout the Department'.

Several of the participants admitted that they themselves were uncomfortable providing their staff with critical feedback regarding their performance. *'I don't honestly know how you would [give critical feedback], you can broach the subject with certain people but you can't with others. There's sensitivities and all involved'* (Participant 7). It appears to be a common issue that managers are concerned about how critical feedback will be received by staff and the impact it could have on their working relationship. *'Everybody [managers] just wants to give everybody [staff] the same, to create harmony in the office or to keep things ticking along as is, but not everybody is the same'* (Participant 6).

Findings show underperformance is often overlooked and staff can be denied the necessary training and development, *'Some staff may have been given a very acceptable rating because it's easier and necessary to fill in the blanks but the staff probably haven't been trained properly and maybe they aren't as capable as they would appear to be on paper'* (Participant 10). This supports the findings in the literature, which highlight the implications of providing average ratings to all employees and failing to address underperformance (St-Onge et al., 2009; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Cook and Crossman, 2004).

It was also clear that many managers did not feel that they had been given the necessary tools to confidently deliver critical feedback and address underperformance, *'Maybe somebody else should do*

*it. It's not fair like'* (Participant 8). Participant 6 reiterated this point, *'some people just don't feel as though they are properly equipped to write about somebody that's close to them, that's sitting beside them'*. This finding also correlates with literature's emphasis on the need to ensure managers possess the confidence and the ability to manage performance (Bainbridge, 2015; Tung et al., 2011; Goodhew et al., 2008; Cunningham and Hyman, 1999)

#### Manager's apathetic approach to PMDS

The lack of importance with which managers view the PMDS process has a distinct impact on the effort applied to the process and the resulting quality of PMDS implementation. Managers find the annual objective setting to be a burdensome process, *'I think it's cumbersome, I think people think it's cumbersome'* (Participant 1). The participants admit that objectives set for staff are generic rather than specific to the individual and are simply copied and pasted from the previous year, *'it's largely done as a tick the box exercise and when I was doing it for 2016 I largely copied stuff that I did in 2015'* (Participant 2). Participant 8 echoed this approach *'Ah last years will do, I might change one or two things but I don't even know why I'm changing them'*.

Some of the participants admitted that they did not hold mid-year or end-of-year review meetings with their staff to discuss performance or development opportunities. Participant 6 stated *'So basically, I would say to my staff that report directly to me "listen, how's things, if you've a problem we'll sit down and we'll have a chat, if you're happy enough we'll sign off on your PMDS"'*, creating an office culture whereby reviews between managers and their staff are not considered to be the norm. Similarly Participant 8 stated *'we don't even have these meetings, you know these meetings you're supposed to have, we don't even do that'*. This finding highlights the possibility that many staff within the Irish public sector are being denied the opportunity to discuss their progress and career development with their managers.

The failure for management to view the PMDS process as a priority is evident in the claims that managers regularly miss the annual PMDS deadlines for completion of objective setting and reviews, *'Since it [PMDS] came in maybe 15-18 years ago, they [managers] have never met the deadlines for setting objectives. It's always been pushed out. Even the end of year reviews aren't done on time'* (Participant 4). Participant 9 reiterated *'I noticed an email that went out the other day [June] that there*

*are over 40 per cent still not compliant with the completion of objectives*'. He continued *'everyone else prioritises actual jobs before the PMDS and then the PMDS comes when you have a weeks down time to actually do it'*. These finding support the literature, emphasising that management's lack of commitment to a PMS compromises the credibility of the system and causes the process to be perceived and treated as a purposeless exercise (Chubb et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

#### Lack of consistency among managers

According to the participants, another significant challenge for PMDS it that of inconsistency in the approach of managers. The participants admitted that staff performing to the same standard might receive different ratings depending on the manager involved in the review process. The participants highlighted that the ratings given to staff were completely subjective and exposed to the biases of each manager. *'It varies a lot by manager. I think some managers decide to take the easy route and will go for the higher ratings, 3's or 4's just to make life a bit easier for themselves, I don't think there is a uniform standard across the board, so I might give someone a 3 and someone else might decide to give that person a 4 for exactly the same standard'* (Participant 3). Such discrepancies have been found to have demoralising effects on staff. Participant 4 stated *'It depended on your manager and what they thought was a 4. Some people were getting 4's, other people who were doing equally if not as good a job were getting 2's so its very subjective and it can be very demotivating [for staff]'*.

The impact of managerial biases was also raised by participants. *'Is it more likely that I get a 4 than someone who might not have as good a relationship with the manager but be just as good a worker. I don't think that's fair either'* (Participant 9). Such bias behaviour leads to inconsistencies, highlighting the PMDS as lacking in credibility. This has contributed to the strong sense of apathy and disregard for the process, which emanates from the data. This issue was highlighted in the literature with Posthuma and Campion's (2008, p.50) emphasis on 'distributive justice' in order to ensure the performance management process retains merit, credibility and value.

Some of the participants admitted that they themselves were unsure of what level of performance warranted a particular rating. *'Is it if they get 7/10 things done well...or 6? I don't know. It needs to be distinguished as to what is satisfactory and what isn't'* (Participant 9). *'We weren't told this sort of behaviour constitutes a [rating of] 3, this sort of behaviour constitutes a [rating of] 4'* (Participant 2).

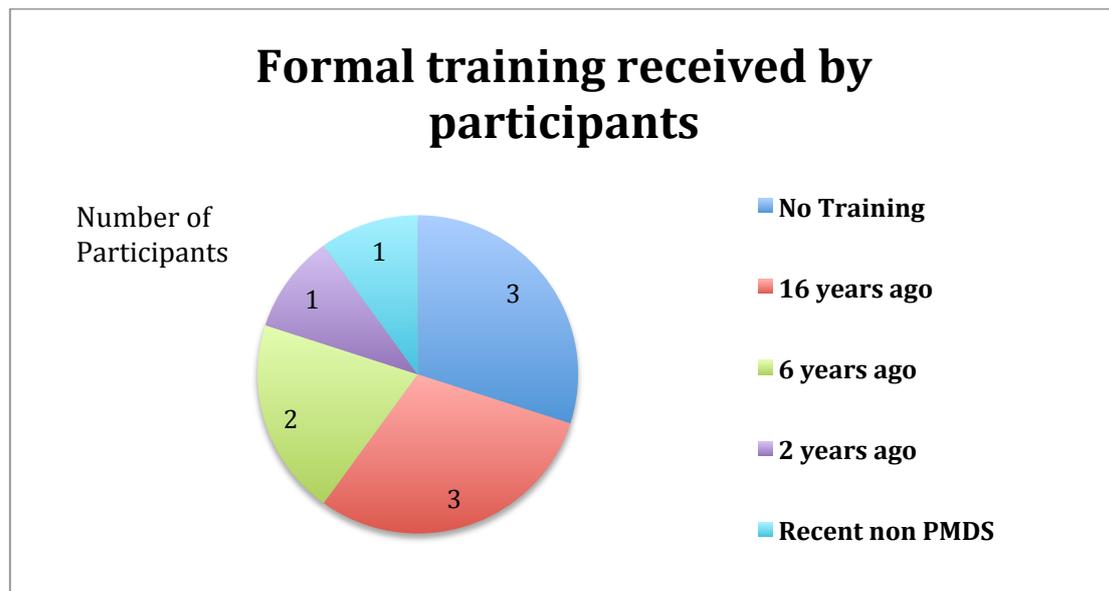
The lack of clarity surrounding the rating of performance guarantees a significant level of inconsistency among managers, leaving staff disheartened and disengaged with the process, '*Staff members just want to get in and get out and get it over with*' (Participant 6). This supports the findings in the literature whereby an unstandardized approach to performance management has a negative impact on the jobholder's motivation and commitment to the process due to its lack of credibility (Rowland and Hall, 2010).

## Management's need for formal training on PMDS

### Lack of formal training for managers

It was found that there was variation in the levels of training received by the ten participants. Additionally, findings highlighted disparity between the participants and their colleagues.

**Figure 5**



Of the ten participants, only Participant 4 had received formal training for PMDS within the last 24 months whereby an external consultant provided a one-day course for a group of managers. The participant could recall the topics addressed during the PMDS training which included rating performance, setting objectives, providing feedback and managing underperformance. The participant was asked *'Do you feel it was beneficial for you as a manager and the way you approached PMDS?'*. The participant replied, *'Yeah, oh absolutely. Particularly because underperformance is something that is quite difficult to deal with if you don't know how to do it and I supposed you don't want to totally demotivate somebody'*.

Although based in different public sector Agencies, Participants 1 and 3 both received formal training for PMDS in 2010. Their recollection of the training contents was less detailed as that of Participant 4. The PMDS training *'was more or less about objective setting, what objective setting was all about'* (Participant 1). *'It was about how to have that difficult conversation, how to give constructive feedback,*

*how to give developmental feedback*' (Participant 3). While Participant 3 partially attributed effective implementation to experience, both participants acknowledged that the training they had received was beneficial. Participant 1 provided an example of how she had effectively managed a challenging performance review, *'That would have been something that I learned at the training and I found very, very useful'*. When asked how newer managers have learned how to implement PMDS, Participant 1 responded *'This is the issue, the new staff aren't told anything'* and continued, *'A number of Clerical Officers have been promoted to Executive Officers over the last 12 months and there has been no formal training for them'*. Participant 3 stated, *'there was training provided to managers, you had to request it'*. However, manager's apathy towards PMDS and failure to view the process as a priority means that it is unlikely that managers will have any desire to improve their implementation skills or seek training, *'They have to go looking for it and they probably think "ah well I'm not going to bother doing a training course in PMDS because I don't believe in it and I don't think its worthwhile or relevant or practical or a priority"'*(Participant 6).

While not a training course specifically for the implementation of PMDS, Participant 6 attended a general performance management course in May 2016. The participant did not feel the training allowed him to effectively implement PMDS as he believed it had failed to address how to deliver critical feedback, *'You go to these training courses and you deal with everything other than underperformance. How do I actually have that discussion and what do I do?'*. Despite this, the participant demonstrated a strong understanding of how to manage performance, detailing the importance of providing staff with regular feedback and setting realistic targets to help monitor the progress of staff members who are underperforming. The participant acknowledged *'I would know now how to do that, but direct line managers to the staff probably wouldn't be aware of that'*. The participant admitted that due to his role he was *'in an enviable position'* whereby he has the opportunity to receive formal training that the majority of other managers in the Department would not. When asked, ***'Do you feel it is necessary for all managers to have training for carrying out PMDS?'*** the participant answered *'Oh definitely, yeah, definitely. And they probably don't realise they need it themselves because they probably aren't thinking about it too much'*. This reiterates the findings in a recent CIPD (2014) survey, which highlighted the discrepancy between the manager's belief in their ability to manage performance and how they are actually perceived by the jobholder.

Participants 7, 8 and 10 recalled that training was last provided when the system was introduced sixteen years ago. *'I think when PMDS was introduced in 2000, 16 years ago, it was introduced with a level of fan fair and certainly there would have been training for everybody. But PMDS has progressed since then, it has changed since then'* (Participant 10). Participant 8 had little recollection of what the training involved *'Oh well it was a long time ago! 16 years ago and I can't remember'*. Worryingly, Participant 8 confirmed that any manager who has joined the office since 2000 has received no training for PMDS *'They've got no training on it. No, nobody has'*. This was reiterated when Participant 10 was asked how newer managers would know how to implement PMDS, *'He will be told by way of information', 'but he will not be given any formal training'*. Participant 7 echoed this, *'There isn't any [formal training], I have never had any training whatsoever in this department with regards to PMDS'*.

Participants 2, 5 and 9, managers in three separate public sector Departments, have received no formal training for implementing PMDS. *'I was never given any formal training'* (Participant 5). *'Evaluating PMDS and doing actual PMDS reviews with staff members, there's no actual formal training done. There's no way to know what way you go about it. It is a shot in the dark'* (Participant 9). It is apparent from each participant's account that they were required to familiarize themselves with the process through a limited amount of informal guidance from their own managers or colleagues. *'I have a manager myself and I would look at how my own PMDS is treated and basically copy and amend based on that'* (Participant 2). *'She [my manager] gave me instructions on what she had done but it was informal. It was just in the process we worked it out'* (Participant 5). All three participants felt that they would be able to implement PMDS more effectively if they were provided with formal training. *'Yes, definitely, it would be a lot easier to be able to hit targets, hit objectives and speak about them in a review so definitely yes'* (Participant 9).

#### The need for regular formal training

Interestingly, and despite the fact that only Participants 4 and 6 had received some form of performance management training within the last 24 months, all participants felt that managers should receive formal training on appointment to the role and should receive refresher training every 12-24 months there after. *'It should be the first thing that you get. And then a refresher course every two years'* (Participant 9). Participants highlighted that without regular refresher courses managers would not be reminded of the importance of PMDS and encouraged to engage with the process. *'Well if they*

want it done right, it should be every year or two. If they want to sell it and do it right' (Participant 8). Participant 4 who received training in 2014 was asked if she felt that refresher courses were necessary for managers who had received formal training for PMDS, *'Yeah, absolutely. I suppose every two years or even a year and a half maybe because it is important that if it's going to be used properly that people are trained on how to use it'*. This is supported by the literature which highlights that refresher training can promote managerial buy-in and consistency (Pollitt, 2007).

#### The need for formal training to assist with consistency

The participants emphasised the need for all managers to receive standard formal training in order to assist with consistency in the way the PMDS process is implemented. This correlates with the findings in the literature (Goodhew et al., 2008; McGuire et al., 2008; McGovern et al., 1997). Participants were asked if formal training would assist with consistency among managers, *'Oh definitely, I think anyone that's got staff, or has to manage staff, should do formal training, the same for everybody across the board'* (Participant 6). *'Most definitely, if everyone was given the same training then everyone is going to have the same way of completing PMDS reviews and completing objectives'* (Participant 9).

Participant 3 highlighted that while each manager has their own style of interacting with staff, providing managers with a structured approach to follow will assist with consistency *'Everyone has their own communication style so they are always going to approach it [PMDS] differently but once you have the basic fundamentals in place I think that would definitely help'*.

#### The need for formal training to equip managers with the necessary skills and understanding

The participants stressed the need for training in order to equip managers with the necessary skills and confidence to implement the PMDS process effectively. This supports the findings throughout the literature (Baird et al., 2012; Chubb et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008). When asked why managers should receive formal training for PMDS the participants discussed the need for managers to possess the skills and understanding to conduct various aspects of the system successfully. *'It is important that if it [PMDS] is going to be used properly that people are trained on how to use it'* (Participant 4). *'In order to be able to evaluate someone's performance, managers need to be confident that they know what they are saying and doing. Objective setting, giving feedback, constructive feedback, evaluating performance, that's why they need training'* (Participant 9).

### The need for formal training to promote the importance of PMDS

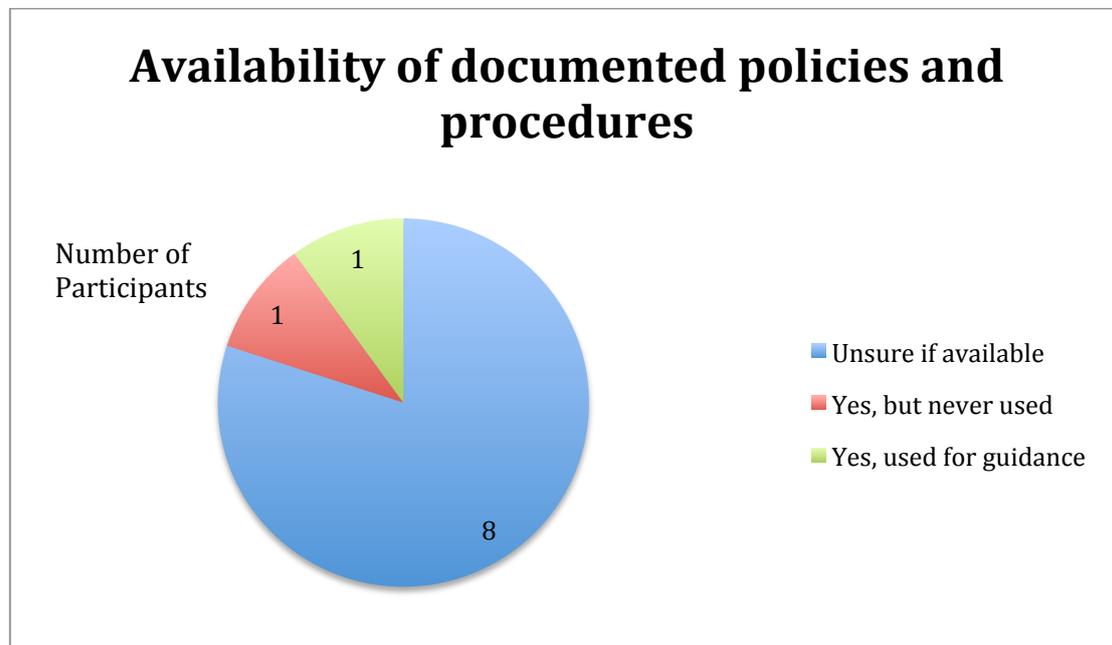
While the participants portrayed a clear need for managers to receive regular formal training in order to facilitate the effective implementation of the PMDS process, some presented a clear sense of scepticism that training could change the nonchalant approach taken by the majority of managers. When asked ***'Do you feel you would be able to implement the PMDS process more effectively if given the opportunity to receive formal training?'***, Participant 8 responded, *'Probably, yeah probably would, but then again I go back to the thing that a lot of managers in small offices aren't going to bother because you have to be interested in it and it has never been sold properly, like staff aren't interested, managers aren't interested'*.

However, some participants highlighted that providing regular formal training would emphasise the importance of the system and help combat the apathy with which PMDS is generally viewed. Participant 10 stated training would ensure *'there was an emphasis put on PMDS and an emphasis put on staff welfare and progression and achievements'*. Participant 2 reiterated this point, *'If PMDS is important then allocate the training to it on an annual basis'*. This echoes the findings in the literature, which emphasise that the provision of mandatory formal training for management demonstrates that the organisation acknowledges the importance and value of effective performance management (Chubb et al., 2011; Pulakos, 2004).

### *Management's need for provision and promotion of PMDS policies and procedures*

The intention of the research was to assess whether or not Irish public sector Departments/Agencies support managers through the provision of documented guidance for PMDS. However, the response from eight of the participants was that they were unsure if there are PMDS policies and procedures available, *'Not to my knowledge'* (Participant 7), *'I am not aware of anything but that is not to say that they are not available'* (Participant 3), *'No, not that I am aware of'* (Participant 4), *'I'm not sure on that. I don't think there is'* (Participant 9).

**Figure 6**



It was believed by nine of the participants that documented guidance would help to provide managers with a clear understanding of the process and assist with consistent and effective implementation, *'It would give consistency across the organisation if everyone was coming from the one guide and one set procedure for filling in the PMDS or completing PMDS reviews'* (Participant 9). This is in support of the literature, which also stresses the importance of establishing clearly defined people-management practices (Bainbridge, 2015; Fitsimmons, 2011; Conway and Monks, 2010).

Despite this, the vast majority of the participants had never sought to consult with official policies. *'I think there are, on our computer system. To tell you the truth I've never looked into them'* (Participant 8). According to the participants, the availability of PMDS policies and procedures, nor the importance

of their use, has been promoted within their Departments/Agencies. Participant 1 spent some time searching the Agency intranet and found a PMDS manual that she had been unaware of, *'We have a booklet which I have just noticed, never knew we had, we have a booklet!'*. Having never previously used the assistance of PMDS policies, Participant 10 admitted that she had searched for documented guidance on PMDS ahead of the interview and found it difficult to locate, *'It wasn't easy to get into'*.

The findings highlighted, even where PMDS policies and procedures are available, such support is not promoted, managers are not informed where it can be located nor are managers encouraged to consult with the guidance. As highlighted by the participants, the failure to promote and facilitate easy access to documented guidance clearly portrays the lack of importance attributed to the PMDS and sends a distinct message to managers with regard to the insignificance of the process, *'I am looking at the home page of our intranet and there's nothing there about PMDS. So therefore, the message to me its that it's not really important'* (Participant 1). *'It should be reiterated on an on-going basis how important it is'* (Participant 7). In general, participants felt that their HR Departments should be responsible for provision and promotion of documented guidance and many suggested that a link to the guidance should be provided when managers are emailed with reminders to complete objective setting and reviews. This finding supports the literature, which emphasises the need to promote the continuous use of documented guidance (Lawler et al., 2012; Biron, et al., 2011; Tummers, 2011)

While the participants confirmed that there is a need for PMDS policies and procedures for managers to refer, none of the participants feel that documented guidance alone is sufficient to equip managers for the effective implementation of PMDS. All participants maintained that regular formal training is also required. This finding is in support of the literature (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). According to Participant 3 *'They definitely need something more, like I said, it depends on how people prefer to learn but I think most people prefer not to have to go through reams and reams of documents'*.

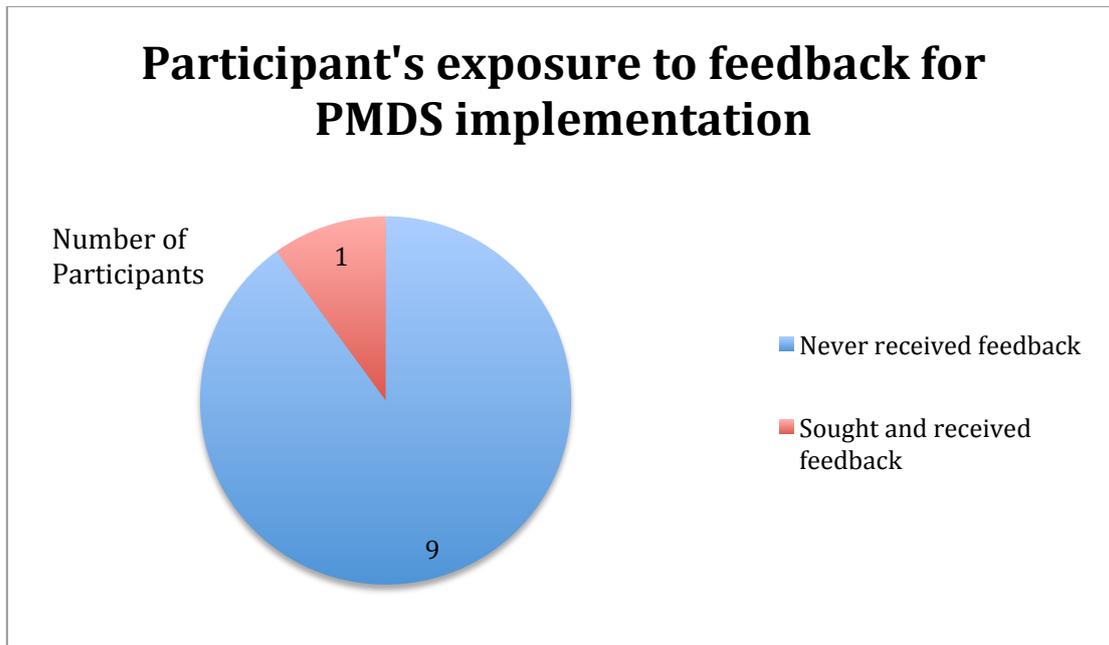
### ***Access to informal guidance on PMDS***

For the majority of the participants, informal guidance from managers and colleagues is the main or only form of support. All participants confirmed they are comfortable approaching either a manager or colleague for informal guidance on PMDS, *'I would just ask my line manager, she's very good'* (Participant 2). However, as argued by Participant 9, this often results in the spread of poor practice and bad habits from one untrained individual to another, *'I probably should ask HR but I ask my direct manager. But at the end of the day who's to say my manager is doing it right either. So I should ask HR but I don't'*.

Many of participants would not approach HR for assistance nor do they view HR as a facility for seeking guidance on the PMDS process. This is mainly due to the fact that HR do not promote their assistance with regard to PMDS. When asked ***'Does HR encourage you to contact them with PMDS questions?'*** Participant 8 responded, *'No, no, not encouraged. It's kind of like, PMDS came in and that's it, paddle your own canoe, off you go, do what you like with it'*. This is highlighted in the literature where it has been identified that insufficient support from HR practitioners can stifle the managers' ability to learn and develop (Garavan et al., 2011; Gunnigle et al., 2006; Hart, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Some of the participants suggested that managers should have access to a specialist or help desk for support and emphasised that such guidance should be promoted and encouraged. Participant 10 stated, *'I think what you need to have is somebody in that area who is very experienced, very well trained up, specialized. Somebody who has sufficient knowledge of PMDS'*.

While it was found that all participants felt comfortable approaching a colleague or manager for guidance, nine of the participants had never received feedback from their managers on how effectively they conduct the PMDS process. Many of the participants emphasised that when managers complete the process of setting objectives and signing off on performance reviews, the quality of the content is unmonitored. When asked ***'Are you provided with feedback from your manager on how effectively you are implementing the PMDS process?'*** Participant 10 responded *'No, no. It's "have you done PMDS" and that's it'*.

Figure 7

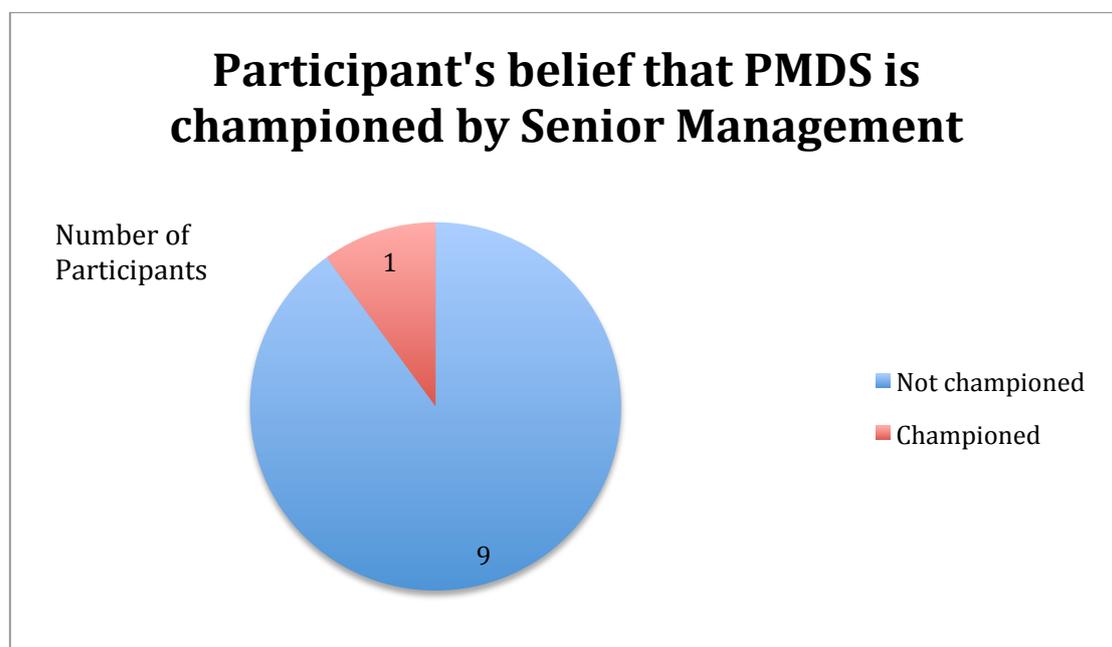


The findings highlighted that the lack of accountability for how effectively the PMDS process has been implemented contributes to the culture of managerial apathy toward the process. According to Participant 2, there is no need for him to improve the standard to which he conducts PMDS, *'I can do it without going to a Lunch & Learn or I can get it done to a satisfactory manner'*. Participant 10 felt managers should held accountable for their ability to effectively implement PMDS, *'We will all get away with it if we can'*. This finding is in support of the literature, which emphasises the role of informal feedback in holding managers responsible for their performance and facilitating their development (CIPD, 2014; Garavan et al., 2011; Hart, 2012).

### ***Lack of genuine support from senior management***

The interviews revealed that nine of the participants do not feel Senior Managers (SM) within their Departments/Agencies champion the PMDS process. Many of the participants emphasised that this is having a detrimental impact on the significance with which staff and managers view the process. *'You'd have to have an organisational belief in this process and I don't believe it's in this organisation and I don't believe it will be because it doesn't come from the top down* (Participant 4).

**Figure 8**



Some of the participant's highlighted that SMs also view the process as cumbersome and often fail to meet the required deadlines themselves. *'They don't take it seriously at all'* (Participant 9). Generally, SMs neglect to mention performance management throughout the year. *'You don't tend to hear about PMDS that often apart from that one time of year when it has either been reviewed or when the forms are going'* (Participant 3). It was also found that SM's promotion of the process appears to be disingenuous, *'I would have no doubt that many Senior Managers in the department feel PMDS may not be worth the paper it's written on. Staff [all employees] can see through that. If someone is trying to sell you something and you can see through that they don't believe it themselves, you're not going to take it on board'* (Participant 6). This supports the findings in the literature, which highlight the impact

of SM commitment on the effectiveness of PMS implementation (Becker et al., 2011; Biron et al. 2011; Emerson, 2009; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

Only Participant 3 felt that PMDS had been actively championed by SMs within an Agency where she had previously been employed. She reported that very few managers missed PMDS deadlines as it was not considered to be acceptable in the culture of the organisation, *'Agency X was pretty much 100 per cent across the board and if managers were late there was kind of a shame list'*. This finding supports the literature which emphasises the link between the support of SMs and success of the PMS (Biron et al. 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004).

## Chapter Six - Discussion

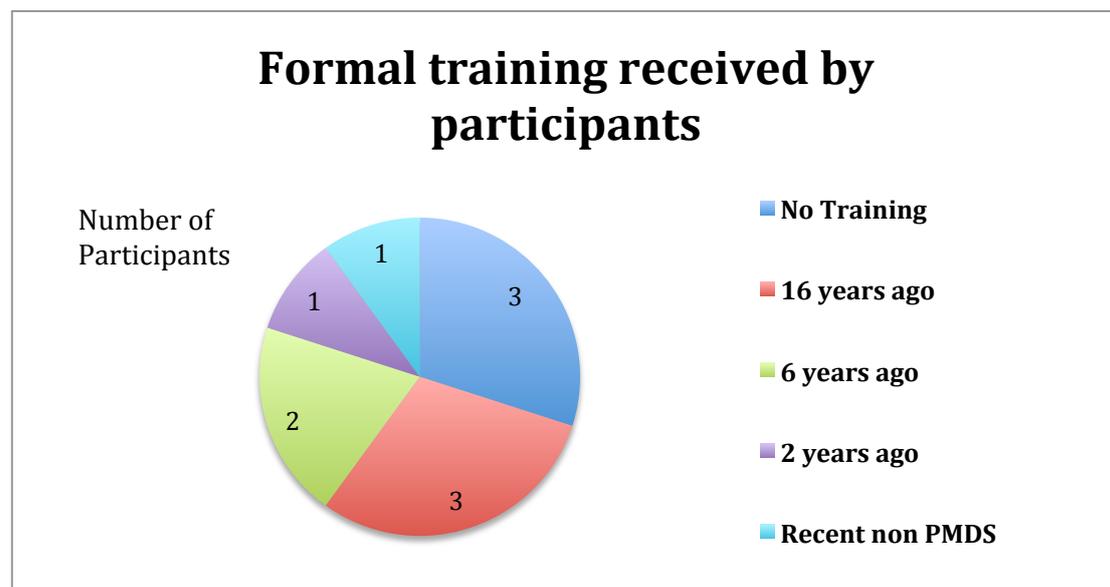
Chapter Five presented the themes identified through conducting an in-depth analysis of ten exploratory interviews with public sector managers responsible for the implementation of PMDS. The chapter also highlighted where the identified findings were situated in the literature. This chapter will provide a critical analysis of these themes, discussing their stance in relation to previous research highlighted in the literature. In order to achieve this, the findings of this study will be discussed relative to the research objectives, which have been derived from a detailed review of the literature in order to address the key aim of this study – *The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector.*

### **Objective 1: To investigate the formal training provisions for managers conducting PMDS**

#### **Do managers receive formal training to facilitate PMDS implementation?**

This study has investigated a neglected area of research and highlighted the discrepancy in the level of formal training received by public sector managers responsible for the implementation of PMDS. As depicted in the previous chapter, the participants' exposure to formal training for PMDS ranged from having received training within the last 24 months to none at all.

**Figure 9**



Findings also highlighted that even within the various Departments/Agencies, training levels differed greatly. For the most part, where participants had received training a number of years ago, managers who had since joined had not been provided with formal training for PMDS. While not specifically related to training for PMDS, the recently conducted public sector survey revealed that just 45 per cent of public servants felt that they received the training required to do their job well (DEPR, 2015a, p.35). The findings from this study correspond with those identified in the survey, highlighting a pattern of failure to equip Irish public sector managers to conduct their role effectively.

As highlighted by the participants, there are significant inconsistencies in the approaches taken by managers conducting PMDS. Such irregularities can most clearly be seen through the participant's examples of inconsistent performance-rating allocation. Participants feel that the provision of regular, standardised training would assist with consistency in the implementation methods of managers. Such findings are in support of the literature which has found that even where managers do possess sufficient skills, in the absence of formal training and official organisational procedures, maintaining consistency in management methods is impossible (Bainbridge, 2015; Goodhew et al. 2008; Purcell and Hutchinson 2007; De Waal, 2003). Moreover, participants felt that PMDS training should be received by all managers on appointment and every 12-24 months thereafter. Other studies have also highlighted the ability for managerial refresher training to assist with consistent and effective performance management through increasing the managers' awareness of procedures and creating a renewed focus on the importance of effective implementation (Pollitt, 2007).

The participants emphasised the lack of relevance attributed to the PMDS process as having a distinct impact on the effort invested by managers implementing the process. Some of the participants were sceptical the provision of training and support could counteract the nonchalant approach of management. Other participants supported findings in the literature and argued that allocating formal training to the process would promote the system as important and assist with the eradication of the apathetic culture toward PMDS (Biron et al., 2011; Becker et al., 2011).

The findings in this study highlight the need for a standardised approach whereby all managers are afforded the same opportunity and equally equipped to manage staff performance. This is supported by research conducted by Bainbridge (2015, p.861) whereby the concept of ‘large group training formats’ allowed all managers to approach the task of performance management with the same understanding and objectives. Many of the participants feel that formal training should be obligatory due to the fact that the majority of managers do not consider the process important enough to voluntarily attend training. This is also supported by Chamberlin (2011, p.20), who advocates mandatory training for all managers to ‘ensure that everyone is on the same page’.

### **Are managers and their co-workers sufficiently trained to implement the PMDS effectively and consistently?**

Notably, the participants who had most recently received training had a clearer, more descriptive recollection of the training in comparison to the other participants who had exposure to training. This finding is in support of the literature, which advocates the need for refresher training and highlights the correlation between how recently training has been received and the level of information retained from the course (Buckner, et al., 2014; Swartz and Lin, 2014; Pollitt, 2007).

The participants who had received training within the last six years claimed that they had found training to be beneficial in their implementation of PMDS. This supports the findings in an Australian study which identified a positive correlation between managerial training and PMS implementation, highlighting that training improved managers’ understanding of the PMS and how it should be implemented (Baird et al., 2012). Participants who had not received training in 16 years or who had never received training showed a significantly higher level of uncertainty and/or apathy towards the process. According to Baird et al. (2012) without training, managers perceive the PMS to lack importance, again, supporting the link between the managerial apathy and the lack of training found in this study.

The participants presented significant evidence that, in general, managers are failing to effectively and consistently implement the PMDS. Interviews held with the participants uncovered that multiple Departments/Agencies fail to meet the annual PMDS deadlines for objective setting and performance reviews. Some of the participants admitted that they and their colleagues neglect to hold performance

appraisal meetings with their staff due to the fact that PMDS is not perceived to be important. Whether for reasons of disregard for the process or the lack of confidence in their skills, participants reported that many managers avoid giving critical feedback, therefore failing to address underperformance. Participants also reported a lack of consistency in the way various managers rate staff performance, which may be attributed to the lack of guidance, deficiency of skills or the apathetic approach taken by many managers. Results from a recently conducted government survey highlighted underperformance and dissatisfaction with the PMDS as being the most problematic area requiring improvement within the public service (CSO, 2014). The findings in this study provide significant evidence that the failure of PMDS to operate as an effective performance management tool within the Irish public sector can be attributed to ineffective implementation methods. This would support the resounding message throughout the literature highlighting the link between effective implementation and the success of the PMS (Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004).

The participants provided evidence that the ineffective and inconsistent implementation of PMDS has compromised the credibility of the system, providing examples of the apathy with which the process is viewed and claiming that the process is perceived to be a fruitless exercise by both managers and jobholders alike. Literature also supports that irregularities and flaws in the implementation of the PMS will cause the process to lack credibility. While literature mainly focuses on the impact that a flawed system will have on the jobholder, this study has found that the PMDS is viewed as a futile, burdensome practice by both jobholders and managers alike (CIPD, 2014; Rowland and Hall, 2010; Cook and Crossman; 2004). This may be due to the fact that managers implementing PMDS are also subject to appraisal through the same unreliable process.

## **Objective 2: To investigate the PMDS policies and procedures offered by the Department**

### **Are managers provided with PMDS related policies and procedures to which they can refer?**

Based on the study, there was insufficient evidence to determine whether or not managers are provided with PMDS policies and procedures to which they can refer. Interestingly, this is due to the fact that eight of the participants were unsure whether there was any form of documented guidance to assist managers with the implementation of PMDS. This unexpected finding uncovered that, regardless of

whether PMDS policies and procedures are available, Department/Agencies are failing to promote and encourage the use of such documents. Participants felt that managers would be more likely to consult with documented guidance if it was regularly promoted by HR and senior management, as well as being presented in a clear, concise and user friendly manner. Some of the participants felt that reading such policies and procedures should be mandatory for managers required to implement the process. Literature supports the importance of promoting and encouraging the use of policies and procedures (Lawler et al., 2012; Tummers, 2011; Emerson, 2009; Goodhew et al., 2008; Pulakos, 2004). A study conducted by Goodhew et al. (2008) highlights that simply providing policies and procedures is not enough to ensure they are adhered to by managers. It found that within an organisation with a clearly defined performance management process, the majority of the managers could only describe various aspects of the procedure for managing poor performance. Similarly, as portrayed by the participants in this study, the failure to promote and facilitate easy access to documented guidance for PMDS depicts the system as unimportant and sees procedures disregarded by managers.

**Do managers feel that the Department/Agency provides sufficient documented policies and procedures to support the effective and consistent implementation of PMDS?**

Again, while the findings were not sufficient to answer this sub-objective, the vast majority of the participants felt that referring to PMDS related policies and procedures would assist managers with implementing the process more effectively and consistently. Literature has emphasised the role of documented guidance in supporting structured and coherent performance management practice (Bainbridge, 2015; Fitsimmons, 2011; Emerson, 2009). A study conducted by Emerson (2009) saw the introduction of a PMS for public sector managers within an American state, which proved to be effective. Part of the process involved providing the managers with documented guidance and reference material as support. While such guidance contributed to the success of the PMS, the study emphasised that documented guidance alone is not sufficient to equip managers for effective PMS implementation and argued that formal training is also required. Similarly, the majority of the participants in this study felt that, while policies and procedures would assist with PMDS implementation, such guidance would not be enough to support managers and reiterated the need for regular formal training to assist with consistent and effective implementation of PMDS.

### **Objective 3: To investigate the informal support available to managers conducting PMDS**

#### **Do managers have access to informal support from HR practitioners or more experienced/senior colleagues?**

Many of the participants highlighted a distinct reluctance to approach HR for PMDS related assistance. In the majority of cases, participants agreed that HR do not promote their assistance and therefore many managers do not view HR as a support for PMDS related queries. A review of the literature surrounding the devolution of HR roles to managers clearly emphasises the need for support and guidance from HR practitioners (Bainbridge, 2015; Conway and Monks, 2010; Ruona and Gibson, 2004; MacNeil, 2003). Conway and Monks (2010) argue that, where HR roles are inherited by managers, the relationship between both parties should be one of collaboration whereby HR practitioners work closely with managers and invest in management development as opposed to disassociating themselves from the devolved tasks. Again, despite the recommendations in the literature the participants have highlighted that, in the majority of cases, HR have failed to provide the necessary support. Some of the participants suggested having a well-promoted helpdesk or PMDS specialist who could provide continuous assistance as and when required. A study conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management Foundation supports this suggestion and acknowledges the benefits of providing a helpdesk for managers who have PMS related questions or concerns (Pulakos, 2004).

All participants claimed they could approach either a colleague or manager for PMDS related assistance. In the majority of cases, this is the only form of PMDS related support or guidance available to managers. Much of the literature promotes informal guidance, such as coaching, mentoring and feedback, as one of the most significant learning methods (Gold, et al., 2013; Kew and Stredwick, 2010). However, as raised by the participants, due to the lack of consistency in the approach of managers at all levels, seeking informal assistance from managers and colleagues who may not have received training themselves, has failed to promote consistency and has potentially proved to be more damaging than if new managers sought assistance from documented policies and procedures. Therefore, this appears to contradict the findings in the literature surrounding the benefits of informal guidance (Gunnigle et al, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Despite this, it must be acknowledged that informal guidance may prove to be more beneficial if all those providing such support are effectively trained.

**Do managers receive sufficient guidance and feedback from their managers to ensure they are implementing the PMDS effectively and consistently?**

An additional factor that may have contributed to the apparent ineffectiveness of the informal support is the questionable quality of such guidance. The interviews revealed that nine of the participants had never received feedback on the standard to which they implement PMDS. According to the literature, feedback has often been identified as the most important aspect of PM and the primary method for enabling improvements in performance (Javad and S. D., 2015; Schleicher, 2009; Fletcher, 2001). Literature has also highlighted the discrepancy between how effectively managers feel they manage performance in comparison to how they are perceived to manage performance (CIPD, 2014). Despite this, the standard to which the PMDS process has been implemented is unmonitored, meaning that managers are not held accountable nor are there consequences for the quality of their performance management, thus contributing to the apathy with which the PMDS process is viewed. As highlighted by the literature, ineffective performance management has damaging consequences for jobholders causing them to become demotivated and disengaged with the process (Schleicher, 2009; Posthuma and Campion, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Fletcher, 2001). The participants in this study provided evidence of this when discussing the impact of inconsistent rating leading to demoralised staff.

As with the provision of feedback to jobholders, feedback is equally essential for providing managers with the opportunity to address weaknesses (Javad and S. D., 2015; Schleicher, 2009; Fletcher, 2001). A study conducted by Siugzdiniene (2008) advocated the importance of periodic screening of management to continually ensure they are equipped to effectively manage staff performance. Such an approach was supported by some of the participants who admitted managers will '*get away with*' poor implementation of PMDS if they are not held accountable for the standard of their performance management (Participant 10).

**Do managers feel that effective PMDS implementation is supported and championed by senior management?**

Interviews revealed that nine of the participants do not feel that the PMDS process is championed by Senior Managers (SM). The participants provided evidence that SMs also take an apathetic approach to the PMDS process, stating that SMs themselves miss the deadlines for objective setting and

performance reviews. It has also been exposed that, in general, SMs are merely concerned with completing the process and have little regard for the quality with which it is implemented. As revealed by the participants, such disingenuous support for the system is palpable and has a distinct impact on the level of disregard with which the managers and staff view the process. The correlation between SM support and PMS effectiveness is emphasised throughout the literature (DBIS, 2012; Biron et al. 2011; Tung et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004). One of the participants, who had previously worked in an Agency where PMDS was supported by SMs, echoed the findings in the literature which highlighted that organisations with supportive SMs have higher levels of PMS success than organisations without such support (Tung et al., 2011; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Pulakos, 2004).

A study conducted by Tung et al. (2011, p.1301) found that while SM support is a 'critical success factor for PMS effectiveness', SMs need to continuously advocate and personally commit to the PMS process in order to ensure success. Many of the participants admitted that managers and staff are more likely to value the PMDS process if genuinely championed by SMs. Participants proposed that the culture of apathy must be tackled from the top down. According to literature, the sincerity with which a PMS is implemented is critical to its success (Lawler et al., 2012; Posthuma and Campion, 2008). The participants in this study have provided significant evidence that the PMDS is not championed by SMs, is perceived by managers to be an unimportant process and, in the majority of cases, fails to be implemented in a sincere and efficient manner.

### ***Methodological Limitations***

Using a single method approach of qualitative interviews, the focus of this study is on the managers alone. As a result it is not feasible to compare the perspectives of senior managers and HR practitioners, which would be useful in order to develop a broader view of the PMDS training and support available.

## **Chapter Seven – Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has found significant evidence that public sector managers are failing to implement PMDS consistently and effectively. The findings strongly support a link between the reported inability of PMDS to act as an effective performance management tool and the poor implementation methods of managers. This study has investigated a neglected area of research by assessing the training and support provided to equip public sector managers with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to conduct the PMDS process successfully.

### **Objective 1: To investigate the formal training provisions for managers conducting PMDS**

Findings have highlighted the discrepancy in the level of formal training received by managers, leading to both inconsistent and ineffective implementation of PMDS. This study has clearly identified the need to provide all public sector managers with standardised, regular training to facilitate consistent and effective implementation of the process. This research has highlighted that the ineffective execution of PMDS has compromised the credibility of the system, further adding to the level of disregard with which it is viewed by managers. Findings have indicated that the provision of regular training would promote the importance of the process and could potentially counteract the culture of apathy towards PMDS, which according to the findings, has stifled managements desire to effectively implement the process.

### **Objective 2: To investigate the PMDS policies and procedures offered by the Department**

The majority of participants proved to be unsure about whether PMDS policies and procedures are provided by their Department/Agency. Nine of the participants had never referred to any form of documented guidance for PMDS. As a result, neither the availability nor the standard of such documentation could be determined by this study. Despite this, and perhaps even more interestingly, it is clear that Departments/Agencies are failing to promote and encourage engagement with documented procedures designed to facilitate effective and consistent implementation of PMDS among managers.

This study has emphasised the need, not only for the provision of easy access to clearly defined policies and procedures, but also for the regular promotion and encouraged use of such guidance.

Additionally, the findings in this study emphasises that while the provision and promotion of policies and procedures could assist managers with the successful implementation of PMDS, this support alone is not enough. The study highlighted that documented guidance should be used as a supplement, rather than an alternative, to regular formal training.

### **Objective 3: To investigate the informal support available to managers conducting PMDS**

While literature has highlighted the importance of HR's involvement in the devolution of HR roles to managers, this study has emphasised the lack of PMDS related support promoted by HR and the resulting reluctance of participants to seek guidance (Bainbridge, 2015; Conway and Monks, 2010). Findings in this study endorse the need for HR to promote their assistance as well as regularly providing managers with access to documented guidance.

While all participants had access to informal guidance from a colleague or manager, the quality of such guidance was found to be questionable. The vast majority of participants had never received feedback from their manager with regard to how effectively they implement PMDS. In the absence of feedback, managers are neither provided with the opportunity to address areas of weakness nor are they held accountable for the standard of their performance as a manager. This study stresses the need for managers to receive feedback on the quality of their PMDS implementation.

This study has revealed the lack of PMDS support from Senior Managers (SM). The majority of participants felt that SMs failed to champion the process and many perceived their support to be disingenuous. Findings highlighted that SM's failure to advocate the process has portrayed PMDS as unimportant and contributed to the apathetic approach of managers. This study promotes the need for SM to genuinely and continuously champion the PMDS process with emphasis on the importance of effective implementation.

***The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector.***

Following a thorough analysis of the literature, interviews were conducted with ten public sector managers in order to assess the training and support received by those responsible for implementing the PMDS process. Having conducted an in-depth analysis of the data, it was found that managers are not being provided with sufficient training and support in order to equip them for the consistent and effective implementation of PMDS. Varying levels of formal training, the failure to promote the use of PMDS policies and procedures as well as insufficient informal guidance has led to the inconsistent and ineffective implementation of the process.

The objective of PMDS is to manage staff performance in order to ensure high levels of efficient productivity in line with strategic objectives, to engage and motivate employees through personal development and to facilitate succession planning through the cultivation of future leaders (Caillier, 2014; Siltala, 2013; Thompson et al, 2007; Gunnigle et al, 2006; Truss, 2001). For these reasons, an effective PMS is invaluable to any organisation. Literature strongly emphasises the correlation between managerial development, effective implementation and the success of the PMS (Baird, 2012; Lawler et al., 2012; Chamberlin, 2011; Chubb et al., 2011; Goodhew, et al., 2008; Cavalluzzo and Ittner, 2004). The findings in this study strongly support a link between the reported inability of PMDS to act as an effective performance management tool and the poor implementation methods of managers (DEPR, 2015a; CSO, 2014; DEPR, 2014a; 2014b; Dept. of Finance, 2010). This study presents a powerful case for the provision of training and support in order to equip public sector managers with the necessary tools to facilitate the success of the PMDS.

***Summary of Recommendations***

As detailed above, in order to assist consistent and effective implementation of PMDS and facilitate the success of the system, this study recommends;

- All public sector managers are provided with standardised formal training every 1-2 years.
- Clearly defined PMDS policies and procedures are easily accessible and regularly promoted.
- HR promote their assistance and support in relation to PMDS

- Managers are provided feedback on the quality of their PMDS implementation.
- Senior Management continuously champion the PMDS process with emphasis on the importance of effective implementation

***Implications of findings (CIPD requirement)***

For the majority of these recommendations, implementation would incur little financial cost. For example, PMDS policies and procedures should be drafted centrally to ensure all Departments/Agencies are provided with the same guidance. This documented guidance can be circulated regularly by email from HR/Senior Management to encourage managers to adhere to the required guidelines. Again, HR can promote their assistance via email reminders. It is unlikely that additional HR practitioners would be required to cater for the assistance that may be sought by managers, especially where managers have also been equipped with regular formal training and access to documented guidance. However, in the event that the promotion of HR assistance generates a large volume of enquiries, there may be a requirement for additional HR personnel, which would incur a financial cost.

The recommendation for SMs to champion the PMDS process would again incur little financial cost. As with the provision of HR assistance, the main cost incurred would be the allocation of time to the PMDS process. Championing the process would require SMs to promote the PMDS process and emphasise the importance of effective implementation through staff presentations, facilitating formal training and taking time to effectively complete the process themselves. In a busy working environment it is difficult to justify allocating time to a process where results are often intangible. While such actions may not have any significant financial bearing on Departments/Agencies, the challenge is to overcome the apathetic culture towards PMDS, which has become ingrained in the Irish public sector. The change in culture must be tackled from the top down, therefore SMs must also be educated on the significance of PMDS and the potential benefits of successful implementation in order to generate a genuine following from the leaders who hold the greatest influence within the Departments/Agencies.

While no additional cost is incurred from providing feedback to managers with regards to their quality of PMDS implementation, such a task requires that the appraiser possesses the necessary skills to do so. This further solidifies the requirement for all public sector managers to receive standardised, regular training and have access to supporting policies and procedures. This would allow managers to monitor the performance of their subordinates in line with clearly defined criteria to ensure the PMDS process is being implemented to a satisfactory standard.

Providing standardised, regular training to all public sector managers would incur both labour and monetary cost. All managers would be required to spend a number of hours attending training on appointment to the role followed by refresher training every 1-2 years. Additionally, the cost of providing such training must be considered. It would be advisable for the Irish government to establish a centralised body of trainers to provide the service throughout public sector Departments/Agencies on a continuous basis, rather than each Department/Agency incurring large financial costs through the ad hoc contracting of external consultants.

With the exception of providing standardised formal training, the remainder of these recommendations could be implemented immediately. Administering training across the entire public sector could take a number of years depending on the size of the body of trainers tasked with providing PMDS courses to Departments/Agencies. While it has been acknowledged that these recommendations are not without labour and monetary costs, by facilitating the development of a highly productive, engaged and skilled workforce leading to reduced levels of turnover and absenteeism, it can be argued that the benefits would undoubtedly supersede the costs.

#### ***Limitations and Recommendations for future research***

The main limitations of this study were the time constraints. The researcher felt that taking a case study approach would allow for a broader analysis of PMDS through focusing on a variety of data sources. For example, conducting interviews with jobholders and senior managers may have added some interesting insight to the PMDS process. Such an approach was not feasible due to the timeframe of this study and is therefore a recommended approach for future research in this area.

Additionally, having identified the need for regular refresher-training for managers conducting PMDS, future studies could focus on the most cost effective and flexible methods for ensuring refresher training is completed by all managers on a regular basis, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of online training courses or tutorials could be compared to the more traditional classroom training environment.

## Appendices

### *Appendix 1 – Personal Learning Statement (CIPD Requirement)*

Completing this study has been a challenging, yet rewarding experience, involving a steep learning curve, the valuable lessons from which I will be sure to apply to future tasks, projects and challenges.

#### **Set realistic short-term goals – and stick to them!**

Planning and commitment is vital when undertaking the challenging task of completing a research dissertation. At the beginning of the process I set deadlines for each phases of the study. Throughout the process, while it was often tempting to defer deadlines, I adhered to my short-term goals as much as possible. As I approached the deadline I was grateful that I had used my time appropriately and this is definitely a lesson that I will apply to future projects.

#### **Never assume the length of a process for which you have no experience**

When establishing short-term goals, I set what I assumed were generous timelines for each phase of the study. I have now learned that allowing time for the unpredicted is essential. Having never completed tasks such as transcribing interviews and coding findings I soon established that what I had considered to be generous timelines were in fact challenging goals to meet. Over-estimating and seeking advice on timeframes is important when completing a new task.

#### **Organisation is key**

Successfully completing a Masters degree while working full time requires excellent organisation skills. With just evenings and weekends to complete the challenging task, effective use of this time is essential and staying organised is the key. Thankfully, this is a lesson I learned early in the process and something that I will apply to future tasks and challenges.

#### **Never try to predict the outcome – the findings will speak for themselves**

While many aspects of the process are within the researcher's control, the results from the research are not. Participant's opinions and responses cannot be predicted and the findings from the data may offer

unexpected findings. The inability to control or predict research findings is something that this process has taught me to embrace.

**The value of family, friends and colleagues who offer their time, assistance and support**

The support and encouragement of family, friends, classmates and colleagues are invaluable when completing the challenging, and often isolating, task of a thesis. This is something I will never take for granted.

*Appendix 2 – Participant Consent Form*

***The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the support and training received by Public Sector managers responsible for implementing the process.***

The aim of this research is to investigate the training and on-going support received by Public Sector managers who are tasked with implementing the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).

Interviews will be conducted with middle management from various undisclosed public sector Departments and Agencies. Interviews will be recorded for ease of analysis and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. All participants will remain anonymous. All obtained information is accessible by the researcher alone and is strictly confidential. Partaking in the study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any time.

Should you have any further queries, contact details for the researcher are as follows;

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Supervisor : Evelyn Murphy ([Evelyn.Murphy@ncirl.ie](mailto:Evelyn.Murphy@ncirl.ie))

I understand the above and agree to participate in the study.

Participant signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### *Appendix 3 – Interview Questions*

#### PMDS

1. How do you feel about the PMDS process?
2. How do you think other managers feel about the PMDS process?
3. How is the PMDS process supported by senior managers?
4. Are there any problems with PMDS? (If so) Tell me about them.
5. What do you think are the benefits of PMDS?
6. In this Department/Agency, how do new middle managers learn how to complete PMDS tasks such as objective setting, delivering feedback, rating performance and managing underperformance?

#### **Objective 1:**

#### **To investigate the formal training provisions for managers conducting PMDS.**

7. Have you been provided with formal training for PMDS?

If 'No'...

- a. Do you think managers should receive formal training for PMDS?
  - b. Why?
  - c. If so, what should it cover?
  - d. Do you feel you would be able to implement the PMDS process more effectively if given the opportunity to receive formal training?
  - e. How often should formal training be conducted?
  - f. Do you think that formal training would assist with consistency in the way various managers approach the PMDS (then go to Q 15)
8. Who provided the formal training?
  9. How often do you receive formal training and when was it last received?

1. What aspects of the PMDS process did the training cover? (objective setting, feedback delivery, accurate rating, managing underperformance)
2. When the PMDS process is subject to reform/change, are managers provided with formal training?
3. Do you feel confident that the formal training received has equipped you to carry out PMDS effectively?
4. Do you feel that the formal training ensures that each manager takes the same approach?
5. Do you feel it is necessary for middle managers to have more or less formal training for carrying out PMDS?

**Objective 2:**

**To investigate the policies and procedures put in place by the Department/Agency to facilitate PMDS implementation.**

6. Are there clearly defined policies and procedures set out by the Department/Agency detailing how managers should conduct the PMDS process? What do these policies cover?
7. Has the Department/Agency established competency frameworks and role profiles to support performance monitoring and appraisal?

If 'No'...

- a. Do you think there is a need for supportive documentation
- b. Why? What would be the advantage/disadvantage?
- c. If so, what should it cover?
- d. Do you feel you would be able to implement the PMDS process more effectively if given access to clearly documented policies and procedures (then go to Q 23)

1. Where can you find this information? Is it easily accessible for managers?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages to having documented PMDS policies and procedures?
3. In general, do you avail of this form of support? How often?
4. Is the use of documented PMDS policies and procedures promoted by senior management/HR?
5. Do you feel confident that documented PMDS policies and procedures equip managers to do their job effectively?
6. Do you feel it is necessary to have more/less guidance in the form of documented policies and procedures?
7. Do you feel that documented policies and procedures (would) ensure that the PMDS process is consistent and fair throughout the organisation?
8. How could managers be encouraged to consult with such documentation?
9. Are written policies and procedures enough to support managers with PMDS? If no, what else is needed?

**Objective 3:**

**To investigate the informal PMDS guidance and support available to managers on a continuous basis.**

10. If you needed some guidance around the PMDS process, who would you ask?
11. Do you feel comfortable seeking informal guidance on the implementation of the PMDS process? Why do/don't you?
12. Do you have access to informal guidance from HR practitioners?
13. Are you provided with feedback on how effectively you are implementing the PMDS process?

1. Do you have access to an experienced colleague/senior manager who can provide advice or mentoring on the PMDS process?

If 'No'...

- a. Do you feel you would be able to implement the PMDS process more effectively if given access to informal guidance when required?
2. Do you feel that effective implementation of the PMDS process is championed by senior managers?
3. Can you suggest any informal methods of PMDS guidance that you would like to see introduced?

*Appendix 4 - Submission to Norma Smurfit Library*

**Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland**

**Student name:** Aoife Moloney

**Student number:** 14102773

**School:** NCI School of Business

**Course:** MA HRM (part time)

**Degree to be awarded:** MA in Human Resource Management

**Title of Thesis:**

The Performance Management and Development System: An assessment of the training and support received by managers responsible for implementing the process within the Irish Public Sector

**One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access. I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.**

**Signature of Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**For completion by the School: The aforementioned thesis was received**

**by** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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