

DISSERTATION TITLE

‘A review and exploration of the introduction and expansion of performance management in the Irish civil service, as part of the adoption of Human Resource policies, functions and practices across the organisation’

Author:	Iain Power
Student ID:	10205349
Coarse of Study:	Masters in Human Resource Management
Supervisor:	Bronwyn McFarlane
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On Spine:	Iain Power 2011 MA in HRM

Abstract

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The history of administrative reform in the Irish Civil Service can be thought of as a roller coaster of success and failures. The human resource function of the organization essentially mirrors this journey. Recent reform efforts have focused on performance management as a driver of change. Although it was first identified by the Devlin Report over 40 years ago, it was not until the *Strategic Management Initiative (1994)* and the *Delivering Better Government (1996)* reform programmes that a performance management system was fully implemented (PDMS). In the body of work below, the literature surrounding performance management has been reviewed and in addition to this, the story of reform and innovation in the context of the Irish Civil Service is explored. In an attempt to complement this research, a quantitative survey was undertaken in Department ‘X’. The combined research confirmed that many positive steps had been taken, however, it highlighted implementation issues surrounding training, continuous feedback, engagement with the system and continual revision to the system.

AUTHORSHIP DECLARATION

This work is solely the work of the author and is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the MA in Human Resource Management. Any work taken from others has been cited and acknowledged within the text.

Signed: _____
Iain Power

Date: 21 August 2011

Student Number: 20105349

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Chapter One:
LITERATURE REVIEW

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore and map the introduction and expansion of performance management across the Irish civil service. In order to achieve this, one must understand how the move performance management fits into the Irish administrative reform landscape. The story of reform in the Irish civil service, with specific regard to performance management, can be told by following the progression from a service focused on personnel processes to one that embraces HRM principals. This can only be achieved by understanding the theoretical move from personnel management to human resource management in addition to knowing what exactly is meant by the term ‘performance management’. The sections below aspire to do just that.

1.2 The Development of Personnel Management

It is essential for the purpose of this research project to understand the difference between personnel management and human resource management, as the Irish civil service’s attempt to move from the latter to the former will be a central component of this piece of research. Traditional Personnel management as it is defined by guest (1987), can be seen as the precursor to what is currently referred to as human resource management. Personnel management has its beginnings in the nineteenth century social reform programmes, often initiated by altruistic employers concerned for the welfare of their employees. This concern for employee welfare became manifested in the establishment of a new personnel management role; the welfare officer (Banfield& Key, 2008). The golden age of personnel management

began in the post-war welfare state era (Niven, 1967).this era was characterised by high levels of employment and stable market conditions. In a broad developmental overview of the traditional personnel management system, one can say that it developed partially from societal movements derived from the nineteenth century reformist tradition, partially from organisational developments and perhaps most influentially, the emergence of scientific management, and its early proponents Taylor and Henry Fayol, as a way of enhancing the performance of employees (Smith&Boyns, 2005). It was the move to scientific management (Taylorism) and the rationalisation of management practices in general which has left a lasting mark on the organisation of work, and those who engage in it. Scientific management helped to leaned a scientific justification to the management of employees, it emphasised the measurement of work and helped to develop systems aimed at standardising work practices and improving performance (Gunnigle et al, 1997). Crucially scientific management linked management activities and control s to efficiency and the bottom line (Banfield& Key, 2008). Subsequent to the dawn of Taylorism, a movement none as behavioural science was to make a lasting contribution to the academic and practitioner knowledge of personnel management and its later manifestations. This movement was underpinned by studies of worker productivity; it highlighted flaws in Taylorism such as monotony and low levels of moral. Perhaps the most lasting influence of this movement was introduction of behavioural science into the arena of work and its ascertains that motivation and needs affect performance levels in addition to working conditions and pay as identified by performance management (Collins et al 2007). In addition to the

theoretical movements that have developed within the personnel discipline, there have been developments arising from external and internal pressures and changes. A developmental change brought about by the aforementioned pressures, was the rise in significance of industrial relations. This development was to enhance the profile of personnel management and focus its activities. Industrial relations in one form or another, have been a feature of the manager employee dynamic since the industrial movement, however it gradually came to the fore of personnel activity when management was reluctantly recognised the legitimacy of unions employee representatives at the bargaining table. By the 1960's, union membership in both manual and white-collar economic sectors had dramatically increased, shifting power dynamics in the workplace and creating friction between employees (unions) and management (Storey 1992). The 1970's -1980's saw an increase in conflict between employers and unions in the face of global economic down turns such as the oil crisis, and neo liberal policies coming from right leaning governments.

In the international context, generally speaking, industrial relations were conducted on an individual organisational basis with some third party intervention in the form of government regulation and some legal procedures. In the Irish context there was a move towards a more centralised, with national wage agreements (1970-82), this drew on Ireland's the catholic corporatist tradition and was to prove extremely influential to the development of personnel in Ireland, particularly to the public sector (Cochrane, 2001). That being the case more parochial issues continued to be negotiated at plant (individual organisation) level (Gunnigle et al, 1997). With the

removal of wage bargaining from the organisation level, negotiations at this level often hinged around performance issues. This development ensured that industrial relations remained a priority for the personnel function. In addition the adversarial nature of the employment relationship from the nineteen sixties to the end of the seventies gave the industrial relations under the personnel management function a central place in the management structure.

Since its conception, the personnel system progressed and adapted to new challenges and developments, defining itself as a distinct management practice, underpinned by theoretical research and experience. However, changes in the internal and external environment in the nineteen eighties were to impact considerably on the traditional personnel management system (Walton 1999). A combination of economic factors compelled companies to operate in a more competitive and depressed business climate, this was to have a huge effect on personnel practices. In addition to this, tough economic conditions combined with restrictive right leaning government policies throughout much of the world (E.g. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government), was to significantly weaken trade unions. These conditions compelled personnel to pursue more cost effective policies, seeking to squeeze competitive advantage from the organisation's human capital. These factors were to lead to the emergence of a new facet of people management Human Resource management (Gunnigle et al 2011).

1.3 Human Resource Management

As the section above demonstrates by the 1980's personnel management in its traditional form was becoming increasingly ineffectual, unable to adapt to the pressures from both internal and external sources. This was particularly true in the context of the Irish civil service (Collins et al 2011). Theorists' opinions as well as much of the management and personnel literature began to shift in focus towards aligning personnel practices with the overall guiding strategy of the business or organisation (Armstrong 2009). This movement can be translated into the early emergence of human resource management. HRM became an extremely popular term by the 1990's, that being the case there is still no definitive consensus on what human resource management actually encompasses (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). In the generic sense, Human resource management can be often used to describe any and all practices employed by managers to control and utilise their human capital (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). This ambiguity around what exactly is entailed under the HRM umbrella has led to a great number of theorists developing their own interpretation of the field (Beardwell & Claydon 2007). Even in its more specific context, Theorists differ in what it specifically entails, strategic utilisation of human capital to achieve competitive advantage linked to corporate strategy (Buchanan & Hucynski, 2005), or a exploiting personnel practices together with cultural and structural systems to develop and maintain a competitive advantage through committed and affective staff (Storey, 1995). Both Guest (1987) and Storey (1992) sought to clarify the sometimes divergent explanations of the term by breaking them down into 'Hard' HR and 'Soft' HR. As a general overview 'soft'

HR refers to all HRM practices which are used to enhance the employee's commitment, flexibility and professional capabilities (Guest 1987). 'Hard' HR acts as a counter point to soft HR; it focuses less on the individual employee and more on the guiding business strategy. This approach sees the firm's human resource as the same as any other resource such as Capital, and that it should be utilised as such (Torrington et al 2005). That being the case 'hard' HR can be interpreted as a combination of HR practices that focus on cost minimisation and an intensification of work practices focused around lean production. This approach can encompass a range of systems and practices, which are often seen as severe, such as tight managerial controls and minimal training. Hard and soft HR can be seen as theoretical polar opposites, however in reality this is not always the case, as companies often pursue a HR strategy which contains aspects of both poles of HR theory (Armstrong 2004). HRM theory and practices is in a constant state of flux, because of this, old assumptions are constantly being challenged and established theories reworked, as well as new ideas around the science of work being developed. Examples of this include the emergence of strategic HRM built on 'hard' HR principals; high commitment management built on its counterpoint, 'Soft' HR, and importantly for the purposes of this research project; high performance work practices (HPWP) (Sung & Ashton 2005). Sung and Ashton (2005) broadly describe HPWP as an assembly of work practices often instigated by the HR function, which can be broken down under three general headings "high employee involvement practices", "human resource practices" and "reward and commitment practices".

1.4 Contrasting Human Resource Management with Personnel Management

Much of what is supposedly new about human resource management can be gleaned by comparing it to its previous incarnation; personnel management. Fundamentally the HRM differs from personnel in its traditional form in the way it integrates into the wider organisation, traditional personnel is often accused of being “issue Specific” in contrast to HRM which is fully into the strategic functions of the firm (Gunnigle et al, 1997). In addition to this HRM, is seen as a proactive management practice centred on the long term needs of the firm, this is in marked contrast to traditional personnel which is accused of being reactive and short term in its outlook (Gunnigle 2011). Torrington et al see a fundamental difference between traditional personnel management and Human resource management as being the way in which they interact with management and employees. HRM can be said to be management oriented, centred around the needs of the business and utilises the human resources of the firm in line with strategy. Personnel management in contrast treads a finer line between the needs of the business and a strong employee focus. An example of this is that personnel managers had to explain and justify management actions to employees as well as “satisfying employee’s work-related needs” (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

1.5 Performance Management

Performance Management in its broadest meaning is a human resource process which has been developed in order to improve and develop the performance of

individuals, teams and the wider organisation, and is a component of the overall reward system in its most general sense (Armstrong, 2009). The application of performance management in the work place scenario can be one of the most challenging roles of any manager or leader, as the process's and systems involved in implementing a performance management initiative can be interpreted differently by each individual it impacts upon, and therefore the outcomes of these process's and systems can difficult to accurately predict (Gunnigle et al, 2011). It can be said that all organisations large or small have a performance management system, of some sort or other, the sophistication of these systems depends on the performance culture of the organisation as well as how far managers are prepared to go in order to assess employees with regards to their individual contribution to the overall success of the team, section or wider organisation (Ghorade, J. & Chen, M. 1995). Whatever the performance management policy pursued by the senior management cadre, it can be asserted that from a HR point of view the success of any organisational endeavour hinges on the performance of all individuals inside said organisation throughout all strata of the organisation.

1.6 Defining Performance Management

It can be asserted that the practice of performance management, where this is understood to mean effort (performance) on the side of labour and control (management) on the side of capital, has its roots in the formative years of the industrial movement. Managers have long sought to manipulate the employment relationship through the use of various instruments with the intent of extracting

higher performance levels from their employees. An increase in performance is seen as a potential source of competitive advantage and as such a need to extract greater performance levels from employees (Beardwell & Clayton,2007).

Due to the varied and disparate forms that a performance management system can manifest, it can be useful to define what exactly the author means when he speaks about a performance management system or indeed performance management in its general sense. This can be a challenging exercise, as just as performance management can be interpreted differently by employees, it is often seen in different ways by theorists also.

Armstrong sees performance management, as a systematic process whose guiding aim is the improvement of organisational performance through the development of the individual employee in addition to team based development. His approach to performance management emphasizes a collaborative approach, and sees the performance management systems operating within an “agreed framework of goals standards and competency requirements (Armstrong, 2009).

Sparrow and Hiltrop (1994) view the performance management less as an exercise in shared ownership and a means of achieving mutually beneficial goals, then as a strategic management tool and a means through which business needs and objectives can be more closely aligned with individual’s actions and targets.

Wiess and Hartle (1997) echo Armstrong's characterisation of performance management as a collaborative activity, stating that it is "a process for establishing a shared understanding about what is to be achieved and how it is to be achieved, and an approach to managing people that increases the probability of achieving success.

Hitchcock (1992) echoes previously mentioned characteristics of performance management in his understanding of the concept however he explicitly makes reference to reward as a powerful device in the performance management arsenal. Beardwell and Claydon (2007) agree with this statement, and expound the view that reward, in its various forms (performance related pay, etc...), has long been a key term in the performance management lexicon. Historically, managers have long sought to control the effort (performance) aspect of the employment agreement by the use of monetary stimulus. This manipulation of the employment agreement was for the most part an attempt to create performance gains which could lead to a competitive advantage.

Sashkin (1981) maintains that reward is essential to the success and continued effective progression of a performance management system as it ensures that managers at all levels contentiously execute their duties with regards to the day to day running of the system. The inference here is that with a financial consequence managers will be far more likely to adhere to and satisfy their responsibilities as the vanguard of the performance management system.

Performance management as a HRM activity is concerned with aligning personnel activities to the organisational strategy and is the responsibility of management (Lowry, 2002). As such Armstrong (2009) states that performance management systems share some fundamental characteristics, these characteristics can help to ground performance management in the real world, outside the theoretical debate mentioned above. Armstrong believes these “primary elements” are ‘agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialog’ (2009). This is essentially backed up by Beardwell and Claydon (2007), however they give a more comprehensive outline of what is involved. They maintain that; the general theoretical consensus is that performance management is comprised of a formalized system, which measures and reviews how well the process of reconciling the goals and needs of the business with those of the employee is progressing. In it could be argued that performance management has developed the aim of integrating the management of performance levels of the employee to that of the business (Williams, 1998). . It is this integrated form of performance management which has become the focus of administrative reformers in the Irish case, as such warrants more in-depth exploration in this research project.

1.7 Performance Management Systems

In an effort to address the challenges thrown up by attempting to reconcile and integrate the management of performance levels of the individual to that of the overall business, HR theorists have developed conceptual frameworks which

include concepts which HR practitioners seek to utilize in an attempt to generate organizational advantage.

As mentioned in the text the definition of performance management differs greatly across the academic spectrum, the same could be said of what constitutes a performance management system and indeed what constitutes a well-structured performance management system. Derher and Dougherty (2001) lay out a structured list of the requisite constituents of a performance management system. They stress that the components are interdependent and sequenced and if the stages are not followed or incomplete there will be a systemic failure across the entirety of the performance management initiative. Their stages order as follows:

- a. Performance planning
- b. On-going performance communication
- c. Data gathering, observation
- d. Performance appraisal and feedback
- e. Performance diagnosis and coaching

This type of highly structured performance management system is not advocated by all theorists. Although the basic principles of communication, leadership, measurement and evaluation are recognized as the back bone of any performance management system, often a more flexible approach is required. It is often down to managers themselves to initiate a culture of performance from senior management

down to line management and employees; this approach is promoted in the public service by new public management and its more recent incarnations.

1.8 Performance Management Sequence

There have been a number of conceptual skeletons designed by different academics in the HRM field most notable are Cave and Thomas's performance management sequence (1998) and Armstrong's performance management framework. The basic conceptual thread held by most structures is that performance organizational, individual or otherwise is guided and propelled by corporate strategy which cascades down through the organizational hierarchy to spearhead departmental and team strategy and objectives in various forms (Gunnigle, 2002). Armstrong's framework details how this cascade from the management to the individual level is supposed to happen in reality:

- Mission and Values↓
- Objectives ↓
- Performance Agreement ↓
- Continuous Performance management↓
- Preparation for Review↓
- Performance Review↓
- Development and Training → Performance rating
→ Performance related Pay

1.9 Performance Management Cycle

The rationale for the cycle's structure is that performance in the workplace is directed by a number of business strategies and objectives and that these in turn are translated into aims and objectives at each key rung of the organizational hierarchy. The cycle outlines that a performance contract should be drawn up delineating the competencies, skills, knowledge and tasks that are required to fulfill the aforementioned aims and objectives. The cycle states that there is a necessity for continuous feedback on performance, with interim reviews being a possible way of achieving this. In addition to these interim procedures, formalized review mechanisms are recommended on an annual or bi-annual basis. These reviews represent an opportunity for managers and employees to evaluate performance in a positive manner and construct a new performance contract collaboratively (Maybe et al, 2001). Inextricably linked to the PM Cycle is the commitment to training and development, whether taking the form of a formalized learning or informal forms of support such as coaching or mentoring. The review stage of the model represents an ideal time to identify skill gaps and ways in which they can be addressed. The cycle has two remaining aspects, namely performance rating and performance related pay. It is these aspects of the cycle which have been called into question by some theorists (Armstrong, 2009). That being said it as previously stated reward has been a central component of performance management since the early stage of personnel management. It must be noted at this point that the performance management cycle under discussion in the above paragraph is based upon the cycle described by Armstrong (2009). There are other cycles defined by other theorists such as

Ainsworth and Smith (1994) however the Armstrong appeared to be the most up to date and relevant for the purposes of this study.



(Leadership & Management, 2009)

1.10 Monitoring and Appraising of Employee Performance

The business of performance management is a continuous exercise, and demands much from both the manager classification as well as the employee. Employees engaged in the performance management program must be monitored at regular intervals, and need engagement from their line managers, either in a guidance capacity as a mentor or as the initiator of training and development (Fowler, 1990). It must be noted at this point that it is not only the employee that may need these facilities managers may need training in order to full partake in their role in the PM system. This is particularly the case where the performance management system has been introduced to the firm and managers have to adapt to newly defined responsibilities.

Armstrong (2004) seeks to address this possible development he warns practitioners that performance management is not something to impose on either managers or job holders, initiators should shy away from treating performance management as a requirement set from above but a natural development of management.

The performance management system may include a formal performance review stage, though this is an important and necessary element of a successful PM initiative, and should be undertaken once or twice yearly, as stated above evaluation and feedback should be undertaken in addition to this (Armstrong 2009).

Mello (2011) questions the use of line managers as the primary source of performance review and evaluation which has often characterized performance management systems a primary level, he highlights the potential for problems to develop. As previously stated immediate line managers may not poses the requisite skills to review and evaluate employees accurately and appropriately, they may not have access to the right information, in addition to these potential challenges there is also the potential for bias, whether they are negative or positive, such as halo effect, stereotyping, contrast error, central tendency error and leniency or strictness. In addition to this the more considered ‘error’ of applying organizational politics to the process of performance management may have the potential to emerge. These challenges have lead on to the development of different methods of appraising employees which can be utilized by a performance management system.

1.11 Types of Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal is defined by Coens and Jenkins (2000) as “the process of evaluating and judging the way someone is functioning”.

There are numerous types of performance appraisal, ranging in formality, structure and the demands they make of the employee and the supervisor. Some of the most popular include: Rating, Ranking, Paired Comparison, Critical Incident, Freeform, Performance of Objectives Orientated System, Assessment Centre as Well as Self-Assessment (Banfield & Key, 2011).

For the purposes of this study the rating system is the most appropriate and the most worthy of more in-depth study as the system which is utilized by the Irish civil service.

1.12 Performance Rating System

The performance rating system is an extremely popular form of performance appraisal. It can take a number of forms and these can vary in how they operate, and to what level of appraisal they aspire. It often takes the form of a rating scale, which is set against the agreed upon outcomes and competency development. It is often seen as a convenient and easily comparable form of appraisal. (Armstrong, 2009)

That being the case it consistently comes in for criticism for being too simplistic in its analysis and can be subject to bias (Gunnigle et al, 2006).

As stated above they can come in a number of forms including objective based rating scales and points based scales. The objectives based rating scale, involves the presetting of performance objectives and subsequently measuring how well these objectives are completed throughout the appraised period. It has the advantage of reducing the scope for bias by the appraiser and being easily linked to the actual performance of the individual.

Points based rating scales are another form of performance rating. This involves the performance of the individual being assessed against a number of criteria and allocating a number for how best they meet these criteria.

Generally speaking, the more objective and less open to bias the performance appraisal system the more affective it is. The more complex the system is and the more factors it attempts to measure the more time and effort it will demand of all those involved in it (Banfield & Key, 2008).

1.13 Conclusion

In conclusion performance management is essentially a management tool which can be utilized in an attempt to marry the objectives of the organization to that of the individual employee. The process is undertaken with the desire on the part of management, to improve the performance of the organization and as a result gain an organizational advantage, by improving the performance of the individual.

As shown above there are a range of ways that the company may seek to achieve this.



Chapter Two:
THE CIVIL SERVICE

2. THE CIVIL SERVICE

2.1 Introduction

Throughout the history of civil service, intended reforms have often proven to be ineffectual, in particular the human resource aspect of these modernisation initiatives. They have repeatedly fallen short of their intended outcomes (O'Connell, 2004). Nevertheless, the structures, systems and hierarchies of the old civil service have undergone fundamentally transformative reform programmes, these reforms have affected both the way in which the civil service operates day to day, and in how the organisation is understood by civil servants (Dooney & O'Toole, 1998). In the Irish experience of administrative reform, the most recent era of strategic change is perhaps the most far reaching, as it specifically seeks to address the way in which the organisation interacts with the individual (Humphreys & Worth Butler, 1999).

Human resource management has been central to the government's strategic management initiative and its action report 'Delivering Better Government'; it focuses on changing the core values and institutional norms of the entire organisation (O'Connell, 2004).

In order to fully appreciate the numerous strides forward which have been achieved through the culmination of reform efforts, particularly in the area of performance management and similarly recognise the challenges which currently face the

organisation with regards to performance, we must first explore where the service has come from and plot its drive to modernise.

2.2 The Organisational Background of the Civil Service

The civil service can be defined as the organization responsible for carrying out the public administration for the government and citizens of a state and is in theory accountable to the cabinet (McNamara, 1995). In the Irish context owes its structure and existence to the highly influential and reformative Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 (Hughes, 2003).

Membership of the 'civil service' excludes the legislative, judicial, and military branches of the public services. Members of the civil service have no official political allegiance and employment is usually based on competitive examination, in addition to this the organization is not generally un-affected by changes in government and non-political in nature (Hughes, 2003).

The Irish civil service is heavily based on the Whitehall model of civil service administration, owing to its continuity after independence, as previously stated (Halligan,2003). This template of public administration contained a strong bureaucratic and strict hierarchical structure. The civil service make up reflects the general adoption by the Irish state of the Westminster model of democratic representative politics (Rhodes & Wanna, 2009). The Irish system of administration also advocates a strong centralised state another characteristic it shares with its

Whitehall counterpart (Halligan, 2003). Nonetheless, the Irish civil service remains a distinct system for unlike its British counterpart the Irish civil service remained untouched by reform up until demand grew in the 1960's (McNamara, 1995).

Since the foundation of the modern state, the Irish civil service has held strictly to the old administrative norms and traditions of its original bureaucratic structure. It could be assumed that it was this state of affairs which led to a stagnation of ideas and innovation across the organisation. This fossilisation of management systems and structures was particularly evident in the Human Resource Management function, which was more closely aligned to personnel in character than to HRM, in its modern sense, as evidenced through the Roche discussion paper of 1998. Ireland is unusual in this, as many of the comparable administrative arms of European and international governments had attempted to instil HRM principals well before the Irish civil services first concerted attempt in the 1990's (Hardiman & MacCarthaigh, 2008).

2.3 Personnel Management in the Irish Civil Service

As stated above, before the more recent modernisation attempts such as the SMI (1994) and the DBG (1996), the Irish civil service had a traditional system of personnel management. The traditional view of personnel management that existed in the civil service adhered quite rigidly to the teachings of Max Weber in its bureaucratic form and its function (Collins et al, 2007). This system advocated that civil servants typically carried out administrative functions and the policy directives

of the minister, internal managerial functions were undertaken on a purely personnel basis, this approach was typically light on performance management and high on direct managerial controls and systemic rigidity (Hughes, 2003).

Progression through this system was often based on service and seniority and, not on merit, a central element of Weber's theory of bureaucracy (Gerth & Mills, 1970). Performance was not a consideration for bureaucrats seeking to ascend the organisational hierarchy and as such performance management was not an essential component of the administrative personnel system (Hughes, 2003). This was also asserted by Collins et al (2007), they stated that the personnel functions (in the traditional system) were unconcerned with many roles perceived as fundamental in a modern interpretation of the HRM system. Performance is a strong example of this, the measurement and evaluation of the performance of the individual employee and/or the team or department is a cornerstone of modern HRM systems. The absence of this cornerstone in the personnel method meant that other HR objectives such as administrative responsibility or accountability could not be fully evaluated and consequently improved (Collins et al, 2007). As the civil service itself, was very hierarchical, the personnel department worked in extremely limited operational parameters. With this heavily regulated and structured system of internal management, criticism began to emerge, asserting that it was rigid, inflexible and not responsive enough for the needs of the public or the government (Collins et al, 2011). The personnel function of the civil service came under pressure from certain quarters under the accusation that the service on occasion,

lost talented and valuable employees because they became frustrated with the established views in government departments and their stifling rigidity and hierarchy (Barrington, 1980).

As previously stated the civil service was slow to adapt to the international move from personnel management to the more progressive and proactive human resource management, it did eventually move in that direction (Collins et al, 2011).

2.4 The Move to HRM

As previously stated the Irish government had been consistently behind in its reform initiatives with regards to its personnel. Although there had been attempts to reform the civil service as far back as the Devlin report none had significantly altered the way by which the personnel section of the administration operated.

The most promising steps towards modernisation came in the form of the strategic management initiative. Most significant among factor of this reform initiative in a personnel context was the beginning of a move towards a full adoption Human Resource Management as the norm within the organisation (O'Dowd & Hastings, 1998).

HRM comes with the inherent benefit of brining a more strategic, proactive and integrated approach to the way in which staff are managed within an organisation (Torrington et al, 2005).

Fundamentally the system is different to that of personnel management, as it is founded in a corporate strategy that is it seeks to obtain a commitment towards common organisational aims from its employees, as opposed to demanding their compliance through hierarchical commands (Fleming, 2000).

The stated principal aims of the SMI were to significantly reduce the amount of bureaucracy in the Irish civil service and move towards a more customer centred approach to administering government services (SMI, 1994).

These aims were strengthened by subsequent reforms in particular the Delivering Better Government report. It was in this report that it was concretely evident that the old personnel system was unsuitable and would need to be substantially altered if the aims of the SMI were too be achieved (DBG, 1996).

In an attempt to facilitate the move to HRM the DBG report made three main recommendations:

- ✓ Firstly the report was to realign the focus of the personnel management function to a more strategic direction. In practical terms this meant that more responsibility for HR was granted to line managers, a significant and systematic devolution of authority thus eroding some of the rigid hierarchical structure of the service, and the retaining of staff in order to facilitate these changes (Department of the Taoiseach, 1996).

- ✓ Secondly the report recommended the introduction of a performance appraisal system an essential part of the new HR approach. It was hoped that this would translate into enhanced performance across all areas (departmental, individual and team) of the organisations service provision.
- ✓ Lastly was a proposal to legislate for change in the powers allocated to Secretaries-General. The report advocated for increased authority with regards staff, essentially in the areas of appointment, dismissal and discipline, all
- ✓ important functions of HR.

In actuality, this was wholly indorsed by the introduction of the Public services management act (1997) which granted secretaries-general the powers recommended in the DBG report. The act also made provision for the delegation of many of their powers in the area of HR, with the exception of the authority to dismiss staff, to other senior civil servants.

The changes in the introduction of HR to the Irish civil service were broadly welcomed, and have ushered in renewed waves of modernisation in this area (Boyle et al, 1997).

As mentioned above the SMI recommendations as well as those made in the DBG report were welcomed and supported by both political and administrative sections of the executive, and because of this, there have been significant developments in the areas outlined by them(Collins et al,2007).

2.5 Early Attempts at Reform

As eluded to in the last section, administrative reform was not on the civil service or executive agenda until more than half way into the twentieth century. The so-called Devlin report (the Public Service Organisational Review Group Report 1966-1969) was to challenge this status quo. The report highlighted the failings of the incumbent practice of promotion by seniority. Although a Weberian bureaucratic principal, this form of movement through the hierarchy institutionalised mediocrity and stunted organisational performance (McNamara, 1995). The review offered the opinion that promotion through the ranks of the administrative arm of the state should be based on merit and as such a method of appraising staff should be developed. It was recognised that some mechanisms for appraisal existed (such as a probationary report on new recruits to the service) but stressed that they were insufficient in number and in probity (Devlin, 1969). These findings were part of a much wider review of the entire service and were cutting edge for their time, however as is the want of administrative reform in the Irish circumstance, a lack of political and administrative will prevented any great changes taking place (Murray, 1990).

Although reform of the civil service has very much been on the agenda of successive governments since the publishing of the Devlin report, change and modernisation has been a slow process. Indeed the significant and incite full Devlin report commented that “a serious feature of the present system is built in resistance to change” (Devlin, 1969).

This report was extremely progressive for its time; it challenged the organisational status quo by recommending a fundamental restructuring of departmental decision making systems. This recommendation represented a direct challenge to the bureaucratic Whitehall public management paradigm (Dooney & O'Toole, 1998). The aim of this restructuring proposal was to add a more strategic approach to the organisations activities as it would have liberated senior civil servants from more routine activities enabling them to concentrate their efforts on more long term aims and goals (Devlin, 1969).

However the reforms proposed by the report were to a large extent not implemented at the time. A lack of political support has been blamed for the non-implementation of the reports recommendation whilst others have cited a shift in focus from these reforms to Ireland's accession to the EEC and its changing social and economic circumstances as a reason why the report seemed to fall on deaf ears (McCarthy,2005).

The Devlin report was by no means the last time that seemingly appropriate and forward-thinking reform recommendations were largely ignored by the government whilst being largely welcomed at the time when their findings were published. In 1985 the government white paper, serving the Country better, was published and again emphasised the need for greater administrative accountability and performance. Its recommendations were also largely unimplemented at the time. However the paper is seen as the first steps the Irish government had made towards

a more customer centred public service and served as stimulus for subsequent reports and recommendations in this vein of thought (Boyle & MacCarthaigh, 2011).It represents the first time a cohesive and forcefully articulated government policy with regards civil service reform was published. Whilst the report recognised what the service did well, noting the organisations emphasis on fairness and error minimisation policy, it reflected the reform movement of the time recommending that a results focus be introduced as well as better utilisation of assets , echoing the new public management movement mentioned in the previous sections of this text(Collins et al, 2007).

2.6 Social Partnership

The social partnership model was to be a central component of the Irish social and economic process since its beginnings in the 1980's. It was born out of the economic difficulties and civil and social strife in the form of demonstrations and strikes. The first social partnership agreement was agreed between government, trade Unions and employers groups in 1987(Taylor, 2005). There were to be six farther social partnership agreements ratified subsequently, a move which was to have major ramifications for Irish organisations, including the Civil Service.

The 1994 social partnership agreement programme for competitiveness at work explicitly set out a means for increased performance levels in the civil service by rationalising structures, hierarchy and practices, in return monetary incentives where utilised. The 2000 partnership agreement called for the introduction of a new

performance management system to be set up in the civil service in order to facilitate increased levels of flexibility and performance (Partnership, 1996).

The programme for prosperity and fairness (2000) saw the echoing of the call for performance and flexibility to be improved in the civil service. What sets this apart is its clear demand for affective use of HRM policies and a performance management system (Performance Management and Development Systems).

Sustaining progress (2003) laid out a goal of integrating PDMS with all other HRM policies and functions as well as the development of affective feedback channels in order to facilitate improved assessment. Subsequent to this review the social partnership agreement towards 2016 was agreed upon and a number of factors affect the HR function of the civil service. The agreement allowed for communication throughout government departments around strategic goals and objectives, a renewed commitment from the civil service to improve efficiency and quality levels, that the interests and rights of employees must be considered when management make decisions which affect them and commitment to work together both management and employees to the benefit of the work environment and the individual (HRWG, 2008).

2.7 Modern Reform Initiatives

2.7.1 Strategic Management Initiative

A serious step in a positive direction came in the form of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI). This programme of reform has been extremely influential within the civil service as it has had an impact on all subsequent initiatives of this type, and set in motion a fundamental change in Irish public sector culture (Collins et al 2007). This cultural change was to centre on reforming the civil service's interaction with the public at large. The reform put an emphasis on producing a high quality service and providing it to the public in an efficient and effective manner. The SMI (1994) was a noted departure from other reform efforts as it supported a programme of modernisation and beneficial change within the civil service. It was also unusual in the history of Irish reform as it had enthusiastic support from politicians and perhaps more importantly civil servants, and was begun in a timely manner.

2.7.2 Delivering Better Government

The next programme of modernisation to be undertaken by the government in relation to the civil service was the Delivering better government report (1996). This report was in response to the government mandate given to the group of co-ordinating secretaries as a result of their follow-up report on the SMI. It was submitted in 1996 and it drafted a plan for increased reform of the civil service. The fundamental aim of the DBG report was to ensure that the civil service would be flexible, innovative and responsive to the growing needs of the commercial and

economic sectors, whilst at the same time serving the societal needs of an ever changing and divers modern complex society.

The DBG set out seven clear areas in need of reform if Ireland was to attain the vision of a modern civil service to which the programme aspired. This aspiration has been brought closer to fruition through the development of HRM Quality customer service, management information frameworks, regulatory reform and E-Government.

These goals, it was recognised early on, could not be achieved without the support and co-operation of staff within the service at all levels. A significant number of administrative and statutory tools were initiated in order to imbed the notion of reform across the civil service, as part of a cascade affect (Boyle, 1996).

Frameworks to achieve these goals were implemented in addition to the Coordinating group of secretaries (known as the Implementation Group of secretaries-General), these included interdepartmental working groups with specific areas of reform to initiate. Existing structures, such as Management advisory committees, were also utilised in an effort to implement the service wide elements of DBG and SMI at a day to day level.

2.7.3 Performance Development and Management System

The 2000 social partnership agreement allowed for the drawing up of a performance management system to be subsumed by the Irish civil services management structures. The Hey Consultancy group was to lead an investigation of the civil service and develop an appropriate system for its needs. The Hey group saw a number of issues facing the civil service as an organisation.

As they saw it the organisation faced growing demands from an ever more sophisticated internal and external customer, to respond proactively to the need for greater efficiencies and flexibility as well as to modernise in line with the most recent developments in the human resources and public sector reform fields. Hey saw the service as needing certain requirements met in any performance management system introduced to the civil service, in order for it to be a success. Hey's approach does not differ greatly from the performance management literature, but rather it tailors the general performance management theory to the specific organisation that is the Irish civil service. Hey saw a need for strategic objectives to be driven down through the superstructure and for performance management to be seen as a continuous function at all management levels. In addition to this hey thought that any system should be employee focused as well as strategic. The consultancy also points to the need for systemic changes to be implemented to insure that good and desirable behaviour is rewarded throughout the organisation and that potential and actual challenges are handled appropriately

and affectively (Hey report, 1997). The initial responses, to the proposed introduction of a formalised performance management system, from all levels within the organisation, were positive according to a survey undertaken by the consultancy group, as part of their initial investigation for the 1997 report.

The actual system was made up of three stages, performance planning, on-going management, annual development and performance review. The system focused on competencies as key component of the structure, with Hey developing a list of seventeen competencies grouped under four headings. They were designed to be relevant to the range of positions occupied by employees across the organisation. The key actors in the system were; the individual job holder, the process manager and the reviewer, each actor had a set number of responsibilities. Importantly the Hey consultancy group had five criteria they judge would have to be met if PDMS was to be a success:

Unambiguous objectives, that each staff member was clear about their role in the organisation and the skills and competencies needed to fulfil it, that senior bureaucrats must assume a leadership role, and that all staff members are trained in the new system and that they are assisted in taking ownership of it. In accordance with these recommendations staff members were given a five day training course by Hey consulting themselves (Hey 2002).

The PDMS was altered in 2002 to introduce ‘upward feedback’. It was proposed that this mechanism would allow individual employees the opportunity to comment on how they were being managed and was woven into the existing fabric of the feedback process. It was introduced by the General council on the 10th of January 2002.

By 2004 an evaluation on how PDMS was proceeding was commissioned as part of Sustaining Progress (2004). Mercer Human Consulting conducted the review. The review conducted by the firm through the issuing of questioners to every department throughout the civil service. This survey initially confirmed the preceding findings by Hey Consulting, and found that staff were, largely in favour of the system, however those surveyed did highlight some concerns. These concerns centred on the linkage between performance management and training and development. Mercer found that PDMS would need to be altered to better integrate the HR process to those of PDMS, and better link training and development to outcomes of the performance management process.

There were a number of specific areas which Mercer felt needed to be specifically addressed in their 2004 report:

1. Leadership – leaders must be visibly proactive and involved throughout the process
2. Process efficiency – it is essential that those involved in the process know and understand their roles within it.
3. Communication and feedback

4. Cultural support and organisational practices – this involved using all mechanisms to ensure employees take ownership of the process and engage it, such as mentoring etc....
5. Training and development
6. Assessment and rating – refinement of the process into two sections; display of relevant competencies and performance rating.
7. Linkage – linking the information gained through PDMS to other HR activities such as pay and promotion through the superstructure.

2.7.4 The Croke Park Agreement

Subsequent to the performance management reforms explored above, developments in the external economic and social environment were to have huge implications for the civil service, for its structure, its staffing levels and finally its performance levels linked to ‘value for money’ (McCarthy, 2011). Due to the austerity which swept through the country in light of successive financial crisis, the issue of civil service reform and in particular, performance became emblazoned on the public agenda (Breadun, 2011). The pressure, for radical and immediate change was such that the government initiated a process, subsequently known the Croke park agreement, to agree upon money saving measures, with civil service unions and representatives. The eventual document called for many changes to the way the service operates and performs (Boyle & MacCarthaigh, 2011). The Agreement states that the Civil service makes a commitment to be “smaller, leaner, integrated and more technology driven. It goes on to say that the organisation will be high

performing and effective and efficient, as well as operating within a reduced cost band. The goals set out in the document are to be achieved by building on the HR developments initiated through other reforms (The Croke Park agreement, 2010-2014).

The transformations, which are required by the adoption of the agreement, are grouped under two umbrella headings: (a) Greater Flexibility and (b) Better Business Processes.

Broadly speaking ‘greater flexibility’ translates into a series of commitments to rationalise practices and restructuring of some civil service functions. It is stated that this could involve redeployment and will require flexibility from the workforce as to the nature of the work they carry-out and where. All the various interests commit themselves to attaining a civil service which is “modern, efficient and customer focused”. The most interesting measure in relation to this project are those relating to performance. The agreement stipulates that actions would be taken to ensure the organization became increasingly high performing and productive and that promotion will be merit based and competitive as the rule and reiterated a commitment to open government at all levels. Specifically the agreement obliges the civil service to improve the performance development and management system significantly. The agreement states that:

“Performance Management and Development will be strengthened with promotion and incremental progression linked to performance and the

implementation of appropriate systems to address under performance, including, where appropriate, training or, where necessary, through disciplinary procedures”.

(The Croke park agreement, 2010-14)

The Croke park agreement was by no means accepted without complications, at one point some of the parties even threatened industrial action (Wall 2011). In addition to this, there was a change in government subsequent to the drawing up of the agreement. With a new government will come a new policy and a new political agenda. Boyle and MacCarthaigh (2011) view the civil service’s most recent crises as perhaps the most pressing it has ever faced. That picture was radically different when in 2008 the OECD published its report on the Irish public service. It assured its readers that all though the Irish system needed improvement and would face challenges it was by and large providing a good service comparative to other nations and was well placed to address the afore mentioned challenges. With the financial crisis, and Irelands disastrous economic performance the criticism of the civil service reached its zenith and fundamental change in the form of the Croke park agreement has been vehemently thrust upon the organization by the political class. In the desperate scramble for economic recovery, the civil service is seen by some analysts as an asset which must become more efficient and affective organization and the croke park agreement is the vehicle to drive the required reforms through (Boyle &MacCarthaigh, 2011). The pain though not over would appear to be paying dividends with government sources already claiming savings of over 260 million euro as of July 2011(Wall, 2011)

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, nearly every facet of the civil service organization has gone through one change or another. Furthermore, there has been a conscious and far reaching shift towards an organization guided by HRM; principals, policies and practices addition to this; there has been a new management tool added to the repertoire of the civil service which has and will continue to have, far reaching affects. This management tool is performance management in the form of PDMS. This system is changing not only the way in which the civil service operates but also the way by which the organization interacts with its members, civil servants themselves.

There is no questioning, based on the research above, that the reform initiatives that have exerted the greatest influence on the Irish system of administration have been the Strategic Management Initiative and the Delivering Better Government Report. These reports have been the driver of the significant change and modernization that the service has experienced over the last two decades. That being said it is important to acknowledge the early reform initiatives and attempts such as the Devlin report. Those programs laid the ground works for the introduction and the results of all future initiatives of change.

Additionally, the research found that the traditional structures through which the Irish civil service operates has been modernized and adjusted fundamentally. The old bureaucratic ethos with a strong emphasis on structure and process with no real direction, in terms of personnel management, is gradually being supplanted by a

new dynamic approach to human resources. This new approach is focused on achieving the best results by utilising personnel to the best of their abilities. That being said the Croke park agreement paves the way for more reforms HRM performs with a strong focus on performance. It is still too early to estimate the eventual impact of the changes proposed by the agreement but if it is anything like the other recent reforms, it will be far reaching and sweeping.

The research project above was intended to give an insight into the workings of the Irish civil service, how it has developed in terms of performance management and where it stands today and going into the future.



Chapter Three:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research under taken in this project is focused on an aspect of HRM within an organisation and as such is built on the business research discipline. Business research is in part influenced by the real business world developments and practices, however it is also moulded by the methodological traditions and conceptual frameworks associated with business research, as a component of the social sciences. These philosophical ideas should be understood so that the business researcher can recognise the impact they have on research and help them view reality in a social scientific context. The understanding which can be gained through this process can assist the researcher in chose the right research path for him/her and help justify this choice. In an attempt to do this many of the main ideas and conceptual frame works are explored bellow as well as the methodological approach utilised by in this piece of research.

3.2 Epistemology

Essentially epistemology refers to “acceptable knowledge in the field of study” (Saunders et al, 2007). What is acceptable ‘knowledge’ comes down to how one views their role as a researcher, whether one views one’s role as resembling that of a natural scientist, which Saunders et al refer to as the “resources” researcher (Appendix), an analyser of facts or a where one is more concerned with attitudes and feelings which they say can be identified as a ‘feelings’ researcher (2007). The researcher can identify which category they loosely fall under by matching their

research philosophy to one of the above categories. For the approach that resembles that of a natural scientist reality is represented by tangible things, real-world object, such as a car, a phone, surgical equipment for instance. This approach can be seen to be more objective than others as it deals with things which are external to the researcher's existence and unlikely to be tainted by 'bias'. As a consequence, this type of researcher would see data collected by 'feelings' researchers as being little more than social phenomena, divorced from the sphere of independent reality. Feelings represent an intangible set of emotional responses to a resources researcher, unlike the tangible objects which they are concerned with (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Conversely, 'feelings' researchers view feelings as important data worthy of study which can be collected measured and analysed, often statistically. It is this statistical analysis which represents objectivity to the feelings researcher. This position can be open to scrutiny as some researchers argue that statistical representations of intangible data is as open to bias on the part of the researcher as the same data represented in a narrative form (Cameron & Price, 2009).

The afore-mentioned types of researcher take diverging attitudes to the development of knowledge the 'feelings' researcher takes an interpretive view, while the 'resources' researcher takes a positivist view.

3.3 Positivism

The positivist stance is given to the creation of definitive theories (Collis & Hussy,2009), “law like generalisations” (Reymenyi et al, 1998). The theoretical beginnings of this paradigm have their roots in the natural sciences, and as such assert that knowledge is ascertained through empirical research and can be proven to be a Fact (Walliman, 2001). This approach follows a step by step process, known as a research strategy. Through a review of existing data the researcher is likely to develop a hypotheses, this is then tested and confirmed or disproved, entirely or partially. The result of the test stage will then go on to help form other hypotheses to be proven or disproven. The guiding principal of this approach to academic research is that research should be undertaken in an impartial manner free from personal assumptions and prejudices, and deal exclusively with fact independent of individual interpretations. It is also thought in from the positivist point of view, that as the ‘resources’ researcher is external to the phenomena that he/she observes that, he/she cannot affect the essence of the actual data being collected.

Proponents of the positivist stance criticise the ‘feelings’ researcher for being unable to remove herself from the from the data collection process, that said researcher cannot approach each candidate in exactly the same way (the framing of questions etc..), and maintain a value free interpretation of candidate responses(Jankowicz, 2005).

The assertion of intense impartial and value free collection and presentation of data by ‘resource’ researchers can be debated on a higher philosophical plane. It could be argued that in choosing to approach research in a value free fashion researchers are guilty of approaching research from a value laden perspective. In practical terms it can come down to what the ‘resource’ researcher chooses to designate a phenomena worthy of study, what data to measure and quantify and how to go about it (Saunders et al, 2007).

The positivist researcher is thought to make use of a highly structures methodological system in order to ensure ease of replication (Gill & Johnson, 2002). Linked to this assumption is the assumed likelihood of said researcher being primarily focused on quantifiable observations and data collection which facilitate statistical analysis, a propensity to quantitative research. The approach can be criticised in this regard as this highly constrained and rigid form of research design can warp results to a certain extent and lead researchers to overlook relevant outcomes (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

3.4 Realism

Realism can be categorised as being in the same epistemological spectrum as positivism, as it characterises objects as being an entity unto themselves, existing independently of the human mind (Saunders et al, 2007). It is this assumption which directly affects the collection of data and its analysis.

There are two forms of realism ‘direct realism’ and ‘critical realism’. Direct realism says that the impression of the world we ascertain through the use of our senses is reality. In contrast, critical realism says that what we are actually receiving through the use of these senses is our interpretation of reality. We are seeing shadows or pictures of reality, and these representations can be distorted depending on how they are perceived. Bhaskar (1989) identifies with critical realism as the most appropriate form of business research and analysis, as it recognises that the phenomena under direct scrutiny is only a fraction of the wider equation, and that there have been social circumstances which have given rise to the afore mentioned phenomena . He goes on to say that we can discover what is not at first perceived through the use of practical and theoretical process developed in the social sciences.

Additionally, in contrast to direct realism, critical realism recognises that study and research can be conducted on a multi layered basis, with each layer offering new insight to the researcher, as well as reality being a changing conception instead of static and unchanging world

3.5 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a response to the perceived inadequacies of positivism to appropriately address the needs of social scientific research. In essence this approach to research in the social sciences, highlights that human subjects are inherently different to other ‘objects’ and should therefore be treated as such by research and researchers. It also recognises that social reality is highly subjective

and is influenced all but entirely by the individual's perceptions. The researcher interacts with the subjects and as such is a social actor, the researcher cannot extract him/herself from the social world as the social world as they see it is derived from their own perceptions. As a social researcher, and as a social actor, he/ she interpret the social roles of others with a set of prescribed meanings which they themselves have attached to them.

As such it can be argued that the act of studying social phenomena can affect them, as found in scientific management. Interpretivism "focuses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining interpretive understanding" (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Interpretivists adopt a range of research methods in order to find and describe the meaning behind social phenomena rather than the frequency at which they occur (Van Maanen, 1983).

3.6 Ontology

Ontology is deals with what is termed the 'nature of reality' (Saunders et al, 2007). Essentially ontology raises questions about the assumptions researchers hold in relation to the nature of the world and how strongly they hold them. Ontology can be divided into two distinct categories Objectivism and subjectivism.

3.7 Objectivism

Objectivism deals with positions as they exist in social reality independent of the individuals which inhabit them. The point of this approach

3.8 Subjectivism

Those who prescribe to the subjectivist view of social phenomena, see the formation of said phenomena as being derived from the actions of social actors which are based on their own perceptions of reality. This process in turn is locked in a perpetual cycle, with social interaction ensuring that social phenomena are in a constant condition of change.

3.9 Pragmatism

The defining of epistemology and ontology inevitably deteriorates into a debate on the merits of one over the other. It also emphasises that a choice on which is superior is an imperative when one begins research. However social researchers are by no way in a consensus that this need be the case, some researchers maintain that the choosing a valid research question is by far the most pressing aspect of the process by which a research philosophy is chosen. They state that it should be the research question which dictates which one should be adopted. That being said pragmatism emphasises that it is far from certain that one must be chosen instead of the other at all, as they can be married to best address the challenges highlighted by the research question. This can be linked quite successfully to the use of mixed methods in one's research project. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) recognise that the merits of pragmatism are clear, they allow the researcher to ignore the tedious exercise in discerning what is truth and what constitutes reality and instead focus on the demands of the research project itself.

3.10 Axiology

Essentially Axiology is concerned with “judgments about values” (Saunders et al, 2007). The notion of values and how they interact with the research process is of central concern to anyone undertaking serious academic research. Simply put one must reflect on one’s own values and how they could impact collection and dissemination of research, and be mindful of outcomes particularly in relation to credibility and bias. Heron(1996) takes an interesting stance on the subject, espousing the opinion that researchers, by the fact that they are human bring their value system to bear in all fields of endeavour and as such show great ‘axiological’ aptitude in judging how to accomplish relevant and credible research. He expounds this theory by stating that every aspect of the research process is value laden and the researcher’s choices in this regard can reveal their values (1996). This view of the research process is designed to allow researchers to explore their own assumptions and values and take them into account throughout the process; Heron goes as far as to support the insertion of a values declaration at the beginning of research, but notes that this could be more relevant in some research fields than others.

3.11 Research Paradigms

A research paradigm can be viewed as a technique through which a researcher can examine social phenomena and can attempt to gain an understanding of said phenomena as well as attempt to develop an explanation. Saunders et al (2007) recommend the explanations of research paradigms offered in Burrell and

Morgan's 1979 text as being particularly clear and helpful. They developed a highly influential diagram which seeks to explain and clarify the four paradigms; Radical Structuralist, Interpretivist, Functionalist and radical humanist. These four paradigms are purposefully arranged around four corresponding conceptual elements. The Subjectivist view point as well as that of the structuralist approach have been explored previously in this chapter and do not warrant further explanation for the purposes of this section. However the elements of the illustration listed A and B below do:

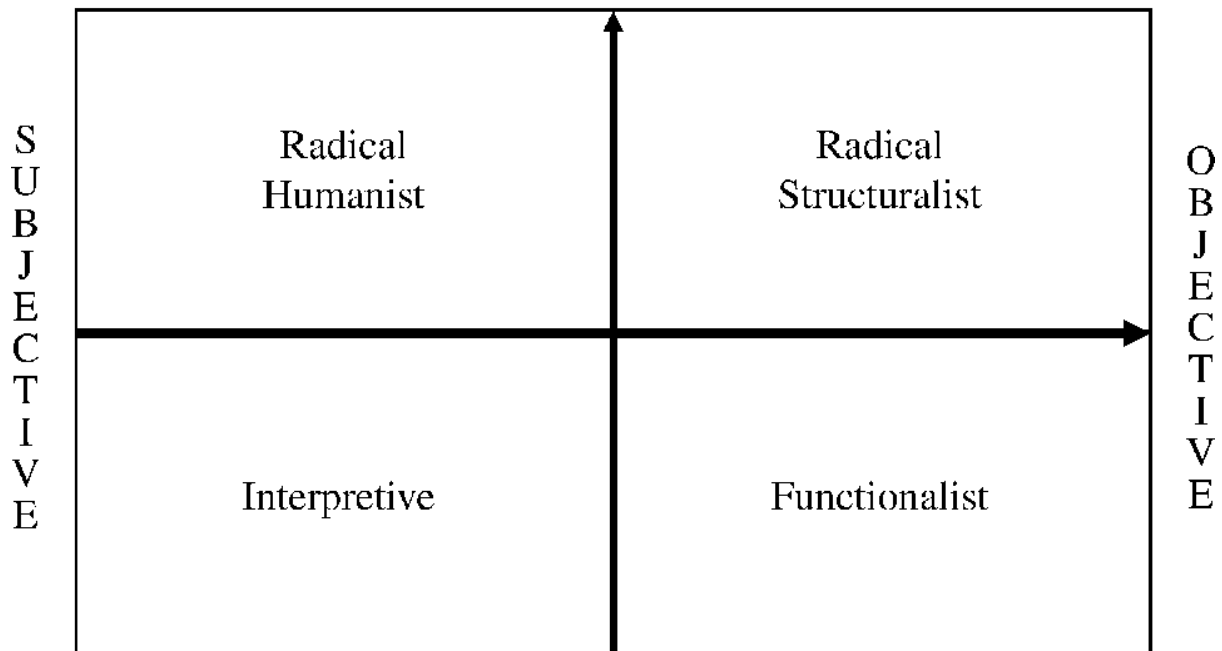
A. Radical Change:

This focuses on the structures of organisations and draws an opinion on ways on which these structures could be altered with the aim of achieving elemental changes in the organisation's modus operandi.

B. Regulatory Perspective:

This approach is to a certain extent less severe in its outlook than radical change and focuses on how processes and systems could be pragmatically altered to create real gains within the constraints of existing structures.

The Sociology of Radical Change



The Sociology of Regulation

The diagram above perfectly illustrates the sociological research paradigm and how they interact. Burrell and Morgan (1979) best give the rationale behind the diagram:

- I.** It enables the researcher to uncover their own assumptions about the nature of science and society.
- II.** It gives the researcher some insight into how other researchers may go about interpreting their work depending on which viewpoint they subscribe to.
- III.** It also aids the researcher in planning his/her progress through their research project, engaging with all the possible routes and deciding upon one.

The functionalist portion of the diagram is plotted between the objectivist and regulatory dimensions. If the researcher is operating along the lines of this paradigm he/she will most likely be an ontological position akin to objectivism. Regulation will come to bare in that, the researcher will most likely seek to gain a rational explanation of the phenomena under study and seek a solution in keeping with the existing organisational structures.

The researcher who operates with the interpretive paradigm is essentially dealing with the way humanity seeks to gain an understanding of the world in which they exist. The researcher would be seeking to understand primary meanings around organisational life. The researcher would be seeking primarily to understand and explain what is happening within the life of the organisation instead of striving to change it.

The radical humanist paradigm is sandwiched between the subjectivist and radical change conceptual dimensions. The researcher who adopts this paradigm is concerned with the critical evaluation of phenomena and would seek to alter the status quo as they found it.

The radical structural paradigm supports research which is structured around the concept of affecting fundamental organisational change based on an in-depth analysis of organisational phenomenon. The structuralist paradigm is primarily driven by how structural relationships operate in a work environment and how there

interactions may lead to anomalies. It makes use of objectivist perspective because it is concerned with objective entities as opposed to the subjective favoured by other approaches.

3.12 Deduction

Essentially deductive research entails the formation of a theory which is then subjected to rigorous testing. This approach links back to the earlier discussion on a researcher and how his/her views owe much to the natural science and the creation of all-encompassing laws.

Robson identifies five sequential steps through which those who indulge in deductive research will progress;

- i. The first step involves the development of a hypothesis born out of a previously conceptualised theory, proposing a relationship between two or more variables or concepts.
- ii. The next stage advocates the unambiguous articulation of the hypothesis (operational hypothesis), indicating how the a-for mentioned components of the hypothesis is to be measured.
- iii. Test the operational hypothesis
- iv. Analyse the outcome of the testing stage, it will confirm the hypothesis or demand that it be modified to take account of new information.
- v. Modify the hypothesis if demanded from previous stage.
- vi.

The deductive method can become more of a cycle if the hypothesis is not proved true initially as once it is modified it begins again at the first stage. Although at first one might be forgiven for assuming that quantitative data may be more conducive to deductive research, qualitative data may also be analysed in this fashion.

3.13 Induction

Inductive research is utilised to produce theory by observing empirical reality. This approach allows the researcher to draw out generally applicable conclusions from specific cases. It is the deductive method inverted, in that it moves from the particular to the broad, from proof to general rule. The method is often twined with the qualitative method of gathering data.

It is especially apt in the study of the social sciences where the experiences and impressions of the individual is of academic value and also as it allows a more flexible methodological structure often seen as essential in the study of human experience.

3.14 Combining research approaches:

As is often the case in the study methodological principals approaches and methods things are not as clear cut as at first they appear. To all intents and purposes deduction and induction are in opposing philosophical veins, incompatible in any field of study. Of course this is not the situation in reality, it is quite possible to

combine aspects of both approaches successfully, and some researchers recommend it as a beneficial exercise.

3.15 Introduction to Quantitative and Qualitative data

Collis and Hussey (2007) apply the terms qualitative and quantitative to refer to data rather than paradigms. They justify this stance by explaining that data collected in positivist study can apply to both quantitative and qualitative. This is in contrast to research undertaken under the interpretivist paradigm. Additionally some researchers enmesh the two approaches to such an extent that it is extremely difficult if not impossible to distinguish them from one another. However this view is not held by all theorists and researchers as can be evidenced bellow:

3.16 Quantitative

Quantitative data selection is a process by which data is collected on the frequency of occurrence of a phenomenon or variable, as such quantitative data is numerical. A quantitative variable is a numerical attribute given to either a variable or an object. To attain a quantitative variable, a measuring tool is needed, this is simple enough for variables with existing measurements in use, however some variables do not have such an excepted measurement and it may be necessary to create a measurement for the purposes of the project. Quantitative variables can be further differentiated into discrete quantitative variables and continuous quantitative variables. The discrete variables can only take one of a range of values, contained within a scale. A continuous variable differs distinctly from this because it can take

any value contained within the beginning and ending of a scale. Another factor which differentiates Quantitative research methodology is that mathematical tasks can be applied to the data collected in this fashion (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Quantitative research has its own distinct epistemological stance as well as its own ontological stand point and as previously stated is grounded in the realm of the natural sciences. It is especially suited to subjects which can be measured and quantified. A number of criticisms have been levelled at this type of research most of these centre around the fact that natural science cannot wholly reconcile itself with the impressions opinions and experiences of human experience and that analysis of human activity can be cold and emotionally removed, no matter how precise and accurate it may be (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

3.17 Qualitative

“A qualitative variable is a non-numerical attribute of an individual or object”. That is, conclusions are not reached through the interpretation of statistical data or any additional mathematical formulae. At its most simple, qualitative research can be used to divide people or objects into groups. A more complex form of qualitative methodology uses variables to both divide and order, these variables are known as order qualitative variables. The two techniques, qualitative and quantitative, hold different standpoints on research objectives and viewpoints about knowledge. The fundamental distinction between the qualitative and the quantitative is in their general configuration and in the purpose and focus of the analysis. Researchers routinely conduct interviews and observations when combining and analysing data

for qualitative research and indeed in some instances data may be quantified but the analysis of said data can be qualitative (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). One of the advantages that qualitative data holds for any analyst or researcher is that many of that approaches to data collection and analysis contained under this umbrella term are not tightly defined, giving said researcher a certain amount of flexibility in how he/she undertakes his/her research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). Fundamental to the basis of qualitative research methods are their understanding of the link between theory and research, that is that theory is derived from research (Bryman& Bell, 2003). In epistemological terms qualitative methods of research are grounded in the researcher gaining knowledge of the ‘social world’ through the examination of the interpretation of that world by those that engage it (Bryman&Bell 2003).



Chapter Four:
RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

4. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 The title of this piece of research is:

‘A review and exploration of the introduction and expansion of performance management in the Irish civil service, as part of the adoption of Human Resource policies, functions and practices across the organisation’

The research aims and objectives of this project are listed below:

1. To review the theoretical underpinning of performance management as a human resource concept.
2. To review the system of performance management which operate within the Irish civil service, in the context of Irish administrative reform.
3. To ascertain the effectiveness and appropriateness of the performance development and management system (PDMS) that is currently in operation across the organisation.
4. To analyse the data collected on the effectiveness of the performance development and management system; In order to facilitate the development of recommendations, around improving the current system.

The research Questions hinge around the research aims and objectives listed above:

- A. Is the civil service PDMS considered affective and appropriate by those who engage it?
- B. Can the PDMS be improved across the organisation and if so how?

4.2 Research Approach

4.2.1 Quantitative Data Collection

On a preliminary study of the Mercer Human Resource consultancy group's survey of 2004, into the initial implementation of PDMS as well as a study into account of the Croke Park agreement and taking into the knowledge gained through the completion of the literature review, I formulated a survey which sought to address the research objectives listed above. This quantitative technique was undertaken in order to gather quantifiable data which could be statistically analysed. This approach allowed the researcher to take an inductive approach, a concept which is explored in the methodology chapter of this text. The survey also enabled the researcher to conduct independent primary data collection within the allotted time frame.

The quantitative survey was conducted in department X; said department is a central administrative department within the Irish civil service. The survey was circulated throughout this department in numerous functional divisions and sub sections. In total the survey was distributed to 25 employees of department X with 10 respondents. This corresponds to a 40% respondent rate. The number of respondents allowed me to analyse the data and draw possible conclusions which could be applied across the civil service, in line with inductive reasoning. The survey was produced and analysed with the aid of surveymonkey.com an online software package. The survey was anonymous and was handed out in various sections to staff members across the hierarchy.

In its make up the survey consisted of 11 questions, designed to gain usable information for the purposes of this dissertation. The survey was kept relatively short to avoid respondents becoming disinterested with the subject, and therefore increasing the likely hood of it being filled out. The questions were kept concise and closed to facilitate timely analysis, subsequent to collection.



Chapter Five:

RESEARCH RESULTS

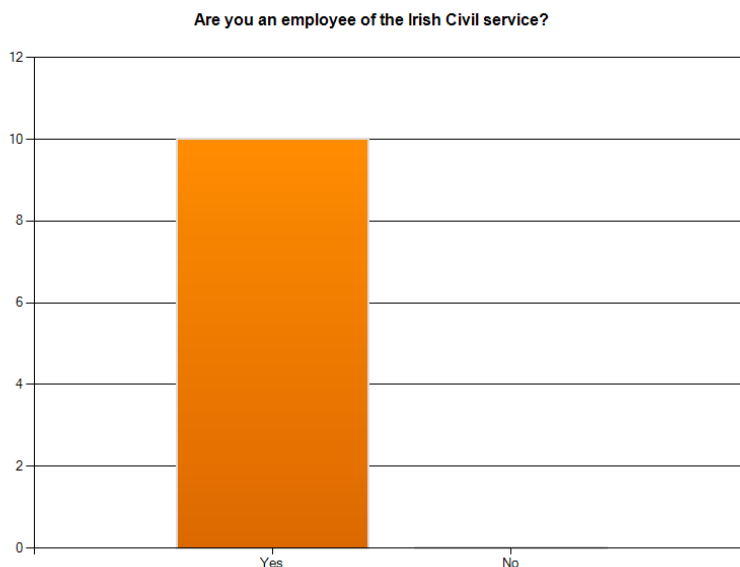
5. Introduction

As previously stated in the preceding chapter, a Quantitative survey was undertaken in department X as part of this dissertation. The data collected was analysed with the use of software on surveymonkey.com. The results of this analysis have shown results of, in the author's opinion, academic interest and significance. The information will be displayed in the sections bellow with the use of bar and pie charts in order to facilitate the reader.

5.1 Results of Quantitative Survey Analysis:

Analysis of Questions 1 and 2

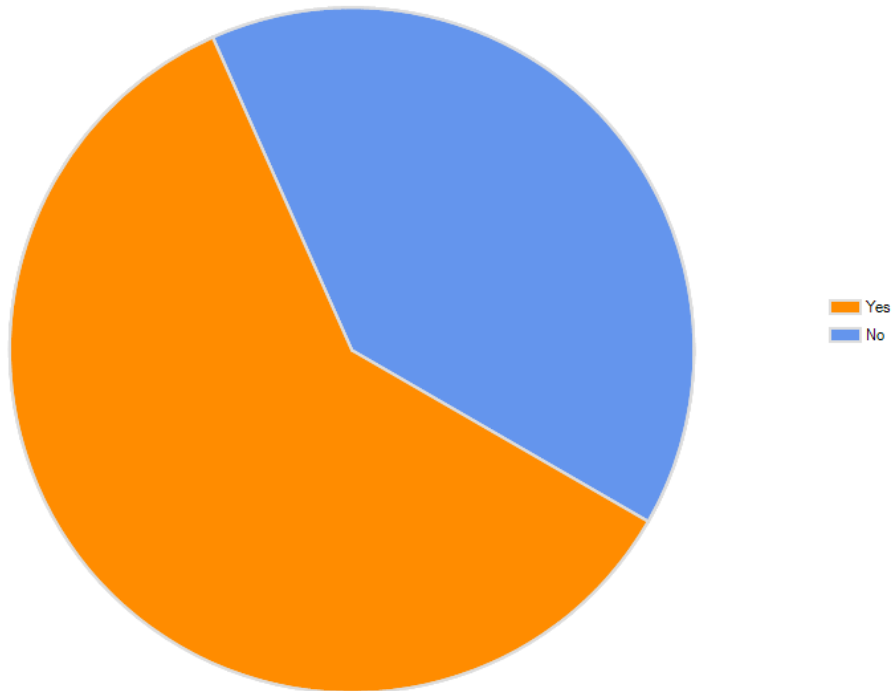
The first two questions answered by the participant in the survey indicated that of the 10 respondents a hundred per cent had interacted with the PDMS system and all of those who engaged in the survey were employed by the civil service at the time of its issuance and collection.



Analysis of Question 3

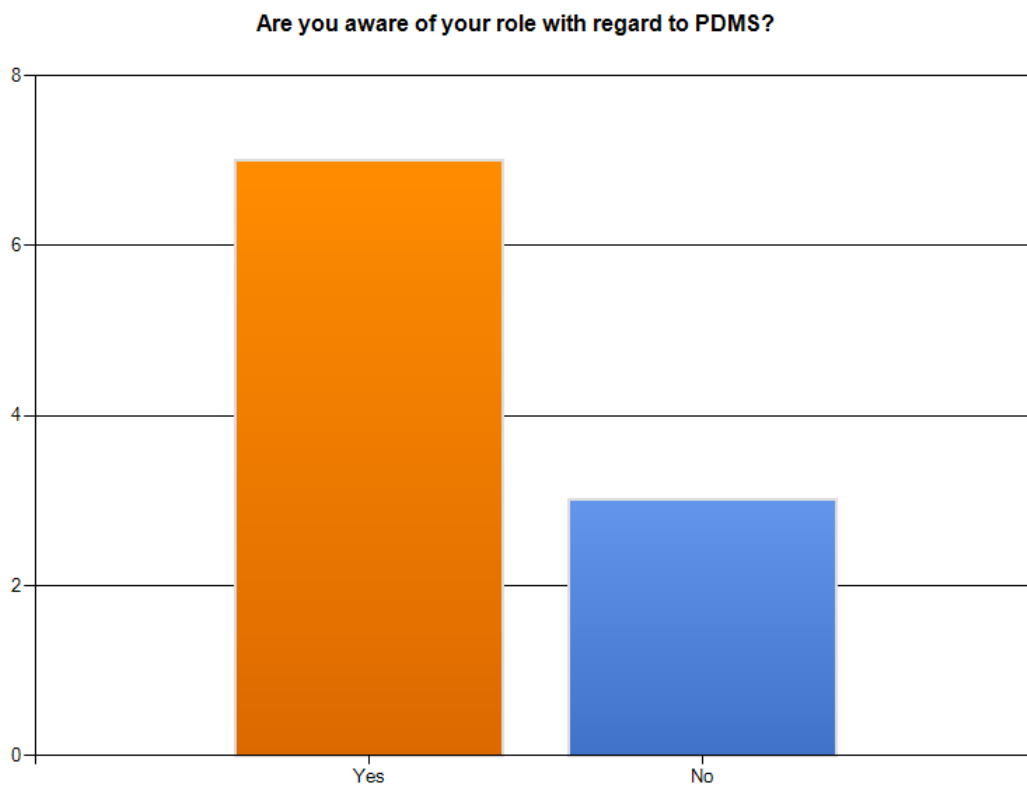
The next question highlighted a difference between the recommendations of the Hey initiative and the actuality in a civil service department. Of those surveyed, 60% had undergone training in the civil service performance development and management system. This meant that 40% had not attended training on how to use PDMS, a system with which they all interacted to some degree on at the very least an annual basis.

Have you recieved training in how to engage with the system?



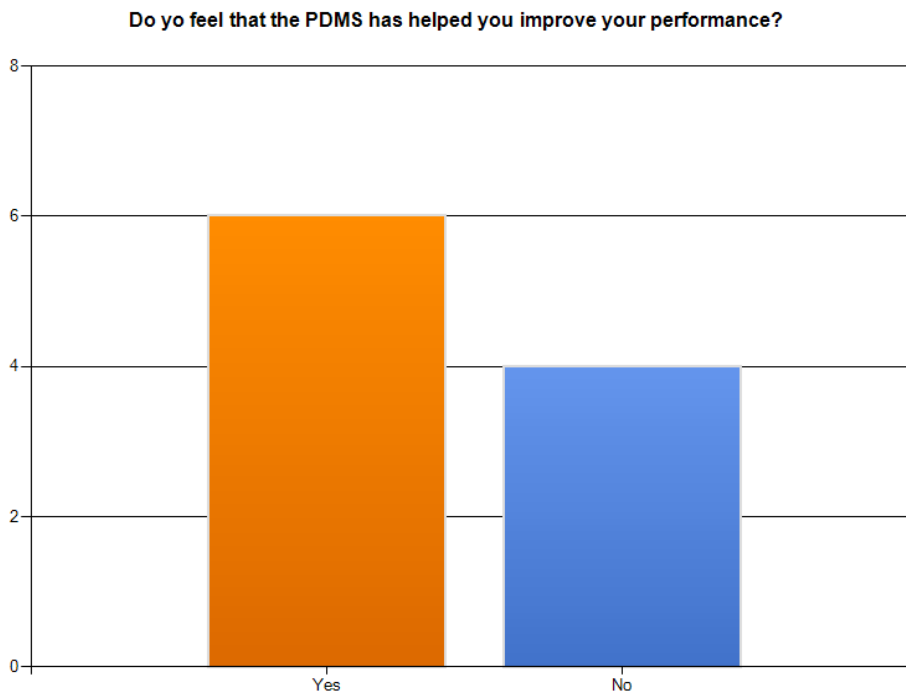
Analysis of question 4

In light of this information discovered as a result of the last question, it is perhaps surprising that 70% of those surveyed in department X felt that they understood their own role with regard to the system. This could suggest an informal training or mentoring system, or at the very least a shadowing exercise, which allowed participants to feel as if they understood their role with regard to the performance management system. Of course the analysis also reveals that thirty per cent of those engage in some way with PDMS do not understand their role within it.



Analysis of Question 5

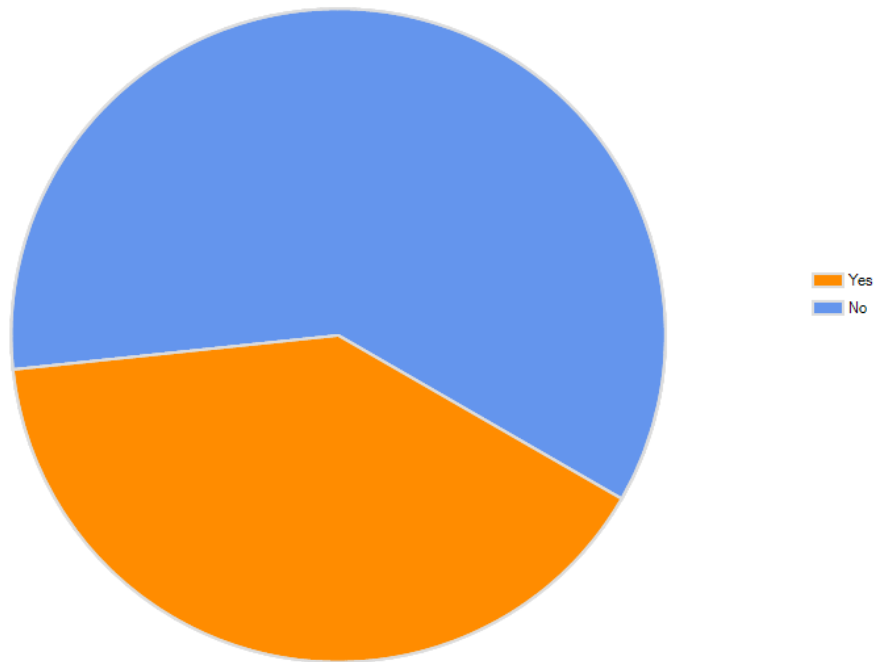
As the Survey progressed it emerged that 60% of respondents felt that the system allowed them to improve their performance in the work place. It is interesting to note that this correlates to the percentage of those who engaged in training in some form or other in how to engage with PDMS. It could therefore be argued that training in how to interact the system could be linked to an improvement in performance levels of employees who use PDMS. It must be noted that 40% of respondents did not feel that the performance management system in operation in department X helped them to improve their performance levels in their place of work.



Analysis of Question 6

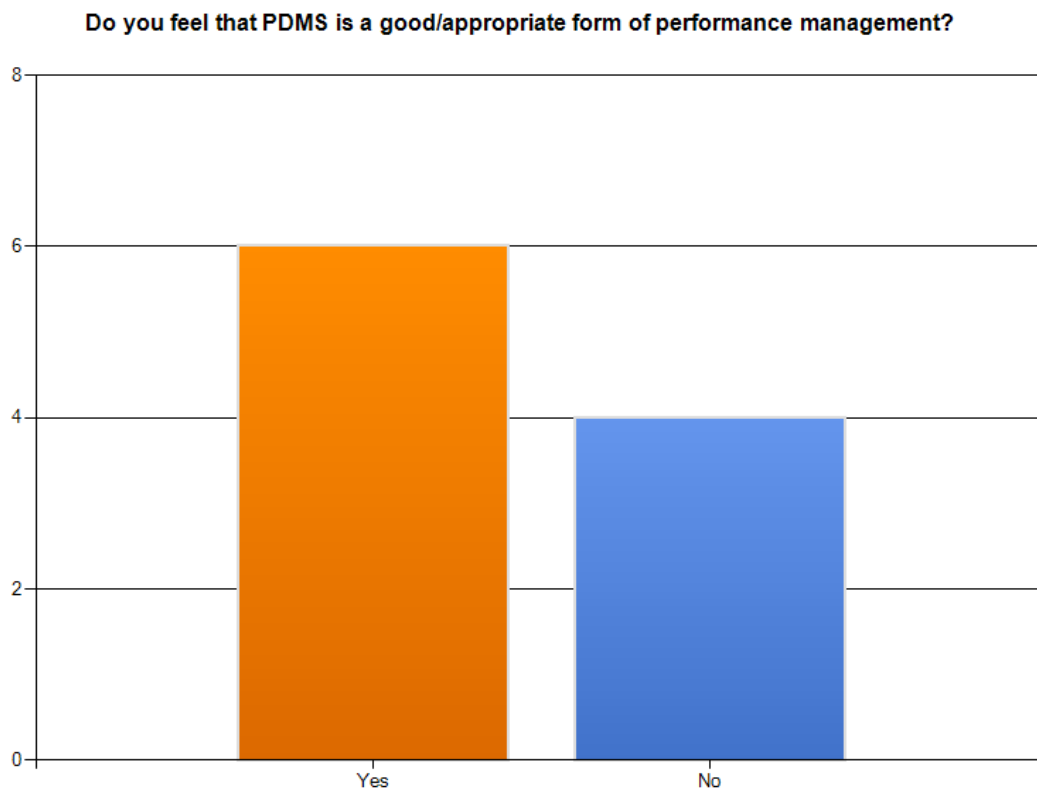
Interestingly, the previous trends were turned around when it came to the question surrounding continuous feedback from supervisors. Just 40% of those polled stated that they received regular feedback from their supervisor as part of PDMS. This meant that 60% stated that their only form of regular feedback was their formal review process which takes place on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Do you receive regular feed back on your performance in addition to your performance review?



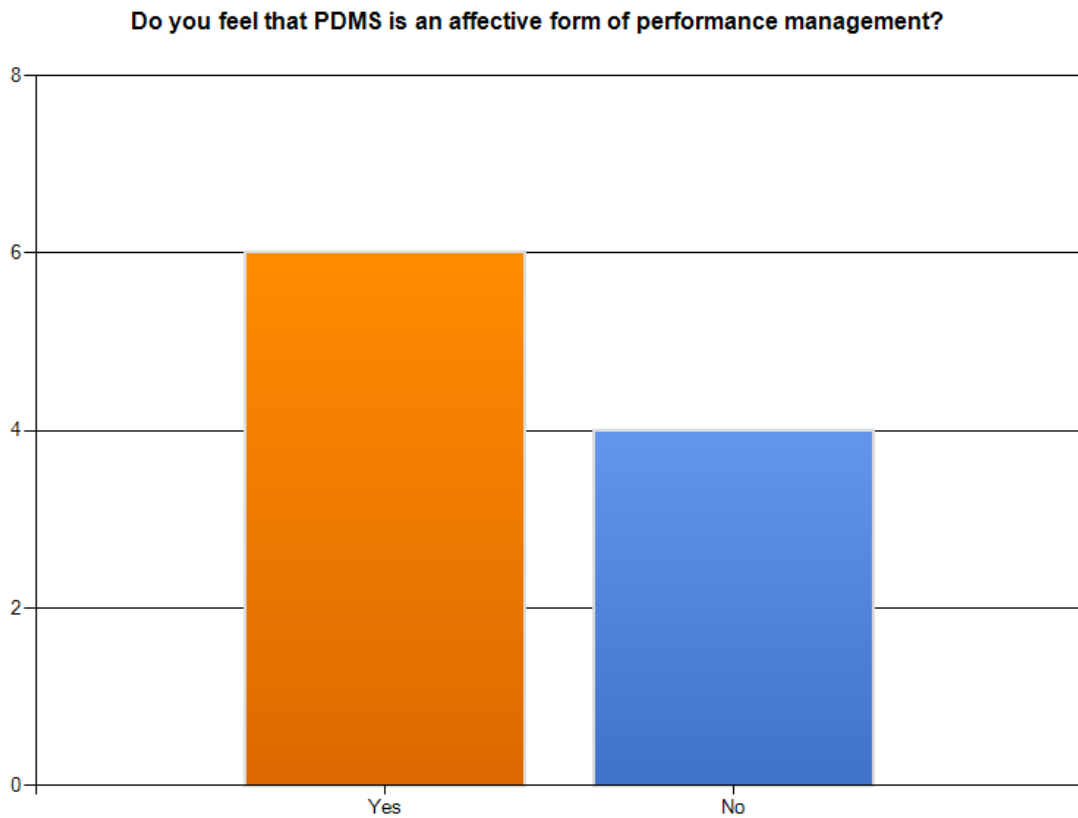
Analysis of Question 8

IT reveals extremely interesting information in the context of this dissertation. The survey asked participants did they feel that the PDMS was a good/appropriate performance management system, in the context of department X. Again the results reflected the rate of those who engaged in training, with 60% of those surveyed stating that they did feel that PDMS is a good performance management system and appropriate for the needs of department X. Of course that meant that 40% of respondents believe that PDMS is not appropriate to the needs of department X, and that it is not a 'good' form of performance management.



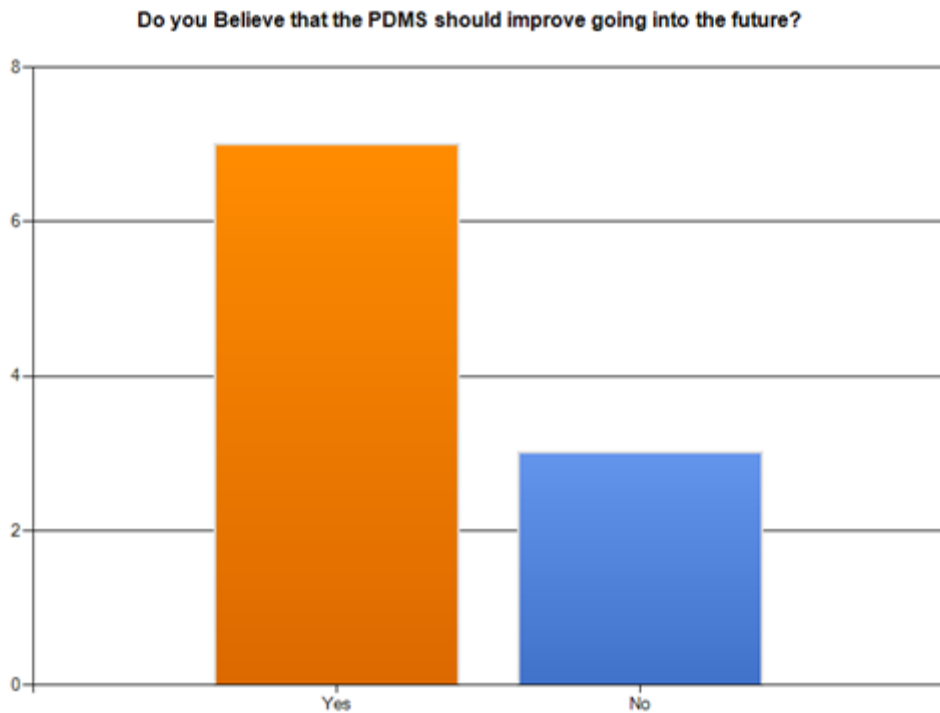
Analysis of Question 9

60% of those polled felt that the performance development and management system was an effective form of performance management, a result which would seem at first glance at the very least to agree with the rest of the data collected throughout the process. 40% of respondents felt it was ineffective, again correlating with data collected through other questions.



Analysis of Question 10

Interestingly, 70% of those who answered the survey felt that the system should improve going into the future a statistic which seems to go against the 60% who felt that PDMS was an effective performance management system as well as the 60 % of respondents who stated that they believed that PDMS was a good performance management system and appropriate in department X. 30% of those polled felt that was satisfactory as it was and did not need to change going into the future.

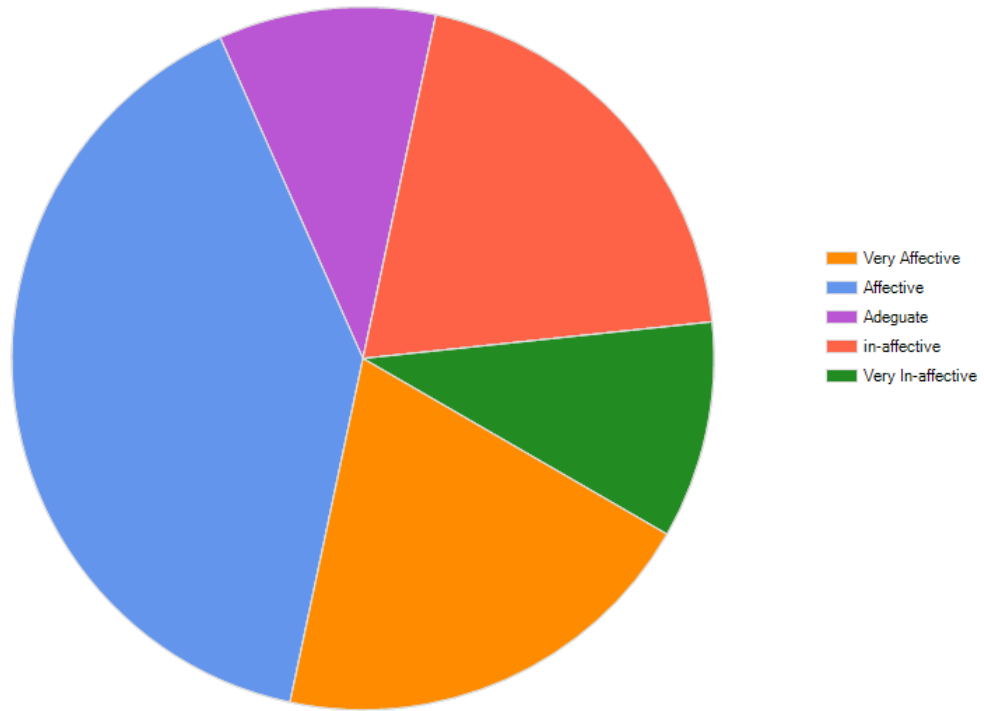


Analysis of question 11

Question 11 sought to break down exactly how civil servants actually felt about PDMS, as such respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of PDMS as a performance management system. They could choose their responses from a list of five possible answers which ranged from 'Very effective' right the way to 'Very In-effective'. The result showed that the vast majority of respondents felt that PDMS was adequate too very affective with only thirty per cent answering ineffective or very ineffective. The results are broken down bellow:

1. Very effective – 20%
2. Effective – 40%
3. Adequate – 10%
4. In-effective – 20%
5. Very In-effective – 10%

Based on your experience of interacting with the system,how would you rate PDMS in terms of its effectiveness in the civil service?





Chapter SIX:
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Findings and Recommendations

The guiding aims of this dissertation was to ascertain whether or not the performance development and management system is affective and appropriate form of performance management for the Irish civil service, in the context of continuous administrative reform and the more recent moves to expand and integrate human resource management across the organisation in its entirety.

In order to achieve the aims outlined above, the literature surrounding personnel management, human resource management and the move from one to the other were all explored. This exploration of literature was undertaken in an abstract manner with little reference to the Irish civil service context. Performance management was also explored as a human resource concept as a component of this part of the study, a greater effort was made to ground this part of the study in the performance management processes of the Irish civil service. It should be noted that the overall path of literature review was guided by the performance management processes adapted and implemented by the Irish civil service, and as such some theory and research was explored in a more in-depth nature than others. The literature review was completed in an attempt to garner the opinion and considerable knowledge of experts and theorists in the field of human resource management and performance management in particular, to facilitate a greater understanding of how performance management developed, the rationale behind it and how it manifests in organisations today. It was hoped that by completing the

process both the author and the reader would have a better understanding of performance management, and be better equipped to understand the processes at work in the Irish civil service.

On completion of this part of the literature review the author felt that the civil service as a unique organisation with its own nuances deserved closer examination especially the reform process with particular reference to performance management initiatives. It was also thought that this would help ground the dissertation in a real world scenario. This process involved a review of the various reforms which have been implemented across the organisation's long history, and as outlined above, the focus of this review was on reforms which were of most interest to the field of performance management.

On completion of the literature review stage of the research process initiated a method of primary research data collection, this process was initiated in order to collect first hand data on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the performance development and management system as it currently exists in the Irish civil service. The primary research in question took the form of a quantitative survey. This survey was conducted in administrative department of the Irish civil service, department X. The research process involved the collection and analysis of the opinions of a number of civil servants who at the time of the survey held positions at various levels across the organisational hierarchy. The following section will

focus on what conclusions could be drawn from the research outlined above and what recommendations could be made on consideration of these conclusions.

6.1 Conclusions and Recommendations Drawn from the Research

Performance management as a concept cannot be nailed down any definitive interpretation or theoretical framework. The literature review undertaken as part of this dissertation revealed that performance management means different things to different theorists; this realisation can be superimposed onto the individual that is performance management means different things to different employees and that performance management systems differ from organisation to organisation. The performance management system adopted as part of the civil services move to fully integrate HRM across the organisation is known as the performance development and management system. At the origin of the system lies a reflection of the most progressive and up to-date theory and developments from industry, however as is often the case in civil service reform the implementation of this system has proved to be less than straight forward. Where the system falls down is the implementation. The primary research undertaken highlighted the fact that the aim stated aim training employees how to interact with PDMS does not always occur, 40% of those surveyed said that they did not receive training as in the use of the performance management system. This, in the opinion of the researcher had a knock on effect with the same number of respondents claiming that they did not find the system effective or appropriate for the purposes of the department. What this would suggest is there is a direct correlation between employees being trained

in how to engage PDMS and how employees view the system in terms of its effectiveness and appropriateness.

Interestingly, although 60% of respondents found the system to be both effective and appropriate only 40% saying it did not help to improve their performance in the work place, 70% of those polled believed that the system should improve going into the future, this could perhaps be put down to the ever changing nature of the organisation, or more likely a recognition of the increased pressure for value for money and performance increases from external and internal stakeholders.

The survey in conjunction with a review of the literature helps to highlight that; there is much to be proud of in relation to PDMS as a performance management system. However the central components of the system are in need of review and change, 30% of respondents no when asked did they know their own role in relation to the performance management system in operation in their department. In addition to this 60% of those polled did not receive regular feedback on their performance from their supervisors, in addition to their performance review which could only be an annual event.

6.2 Recommendations

In light of the conclusions drawn above the recommendation made here may seem straight forward. The literature makes the point that in order for a performance management system to be successful it should be systematic in its approach. This gives a theoretical underpinning for the recommendation that performance feedback

should be continuous and systematic in nature in order to ingrain the system throughout the department.

Perhaps the most easily implementable recommendation that could be aimed at the Irish civil service in relation to improving PDMS and how it operates on a departmental basis, is that training in how to interact with the performance management must be given to all employees as the primary research indicated that this impacts on many aspects of the system, particularly whether the system is seen as effective by those who engage in it.

Finally it is the opinion of the author that PDMS should be reviewed as a whole on a regular basis, and that it should undergo fundamental changes as a result of these reviews. The data collected as part of the survey conducted in Department X would suggest that a continuous process of modernisation would be broadly welcomed by the vast majority of employees as 70% thought the performance management system should improve going into the future. That being the case the challenges encountered during the adoption of the Croke park agreement would suggest that a consultative approach would be the best way to go about such modernisation initiatives.

6.3 Scope for Future Study

Due to a number of factors this dissertation could be expanded by future studies. The time in which the study was to be completed necessitated the researcher to

confine the quantitative survey to a small number of employees within the Irish civil service. In addition to this the time of year in which it was conducted meant that this number was further reduced as many people had taken their annual leave, further reducing this number. Future studies could seek to expand the aims of the project and look to expand the survey to those in other departments across the Irish civil service.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the Irish civil service has undergone much change throughout the history of administrative reform in Ireland. The organisation is virtually unrecognisable from the creaking bureaucracy the Devlin report first sought to change. The rate of change significantly increased by the nineteen nineties and none of these modernisations was to be more progressive than the introduction of PDMS to the Irish administrative system. That being the case, changes and reviews will be needed to be implemented to the system in order to keep pace with the social and economic pressures which can be represented by the Croke park agreement.



Chapter Seven:
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