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The role of appraisal: accountability or autonomy? A case study in the English Independent sector

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Research Question

How can Independent Schools most effectively use an appraisal process to balance individual and institutional goals?

Background

The appraisal of teachers is increasing in global importance, with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reporting that 23 out of 29 countries reviewed have policy frameworks in place regulating it.

Appraisal is a legal requirement for schools in the state sector in England but is not mandated for independent (fee-paying) schools. Although there has been significant research into appraisal within education, very little has been based within the independent sector.

Appraisal itself is often considered as something that is done to teachers, with summative processes based in standards-based evaluation holding employees accountable. However, it has also been described as ‘a process that translates the mission, aims and values of an organisation into individual objectives’, which comprises a ‘series of inter-related tensions’.

This study will consider what role appraisal serves within the independent sector in England, why it is considered important within these institutions and how an appraisal system can balance the goals of the organisation and the individual.

“it should be something that we have a certain level of input into, rather than just being imposed on us”

Methodology

Encompassing a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemological position, the research is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm.

A holistic multiple-case study allows for data collection via qualitative surveys, semi-structured interviews and documents.

Reflexive thematic analysis will enable the researcher to engage with theory, data and interpretation.

“‘We have a moral obligation to ensure that they are being given a voice and an opportunity to develop themselves.”

Implications for practice

The research aims to provide a better understanding of the process of appraisal, providing potential frameworks for schools designing new systems or looking to improve existing ones.

References


“Talking head” quotes from data collected for MEd dissertation ‘The Reconciliation of Stakeholder Perspectives in the Development of an Appraisal System for Visiting Music Teachers’ (Stevens, 2019)

Each tension brings benefits but simultaneously creates challenges for both organisation and individual, with the success of any system being dependent on how the process balances these tensions.