CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to present the results of the thematic content analysis conducted from the data gathered. The analysis was conducted based on the exploratory aims of the study. The aims of this case study of the South African call centre environment were to find answers to the three identified research questions.

The presentation of results is based on semi-structured interviews and takes the form of responses from the 27 participants. Results are presented according to the themes identified and where applicable sub-themes are identified. Quotations are included where deemed appropriate and each participant has been assigned a pseudo name identifying gender and race.

The discussion of emergent themes takes the form of two different types of explanations, verbal descriptions and the use of images to form descriptions. The presentation and discussion of results is the main aim of this chapter, this chapter will engage in the overall descriptions of performance management by employees, what they feel the point of performance management is, and each of the research questions will be discussed in detail according to emergent themes and sub-themes.

4.2. General descriptions of performance management

The use of images, specifically metaphors, was employed in order to determine people's perceptions of performance management within the South African call centre environment. Metaphors were chosen due to their purported ability to shed light, give insight into implied meaning and allow for different ways of

seeing. (Sackmann, 1989; Ricketts and Seiling, 2003; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; and Morgan, 1986).

The definition of performance management formed the largest part of all the interviews conducted as the main focus was to determine employees' perceptions of performance management and how they define performance management. It is to be noted that as a concept, performance management was deemed to be good and necessary by all participants, however the effectiveness and relevance of the chosen performance management system in their respective organisations was considered to be questionable by some. Numerous sub-themes emerged as to exactly what performance management is about and these descriptions were composed of both images and verbal phrases. Integrated in descriptions of how performance management is currently experienced by participants was a strong sense of what is missing in the current process and necessary aspects to achieve what may be considered a possible 'ideal'. The perceptions are to be described in further detail throughout the course of this chapter.

4.2.1. Positive perceptions of performance management: comments and metaphors

The overall perceptions of participants were that as a concept performance management is essential. Palesa (agent) viewed performance management as a tool to aid employees, as "*not everybody is so good…so if they are identified then the problem can be assisted.*" As stated by Fisher et al (2003) the idea behind performance management is that if well managed performance is likely to improve thus the importance of clarity, identifying problems, feedback and receiving support. Mariana's (supervisor) definition of performance management extends the idea of performance management being a tool; it forms a basic summary of some of the areas touched on. She expressed performance management as being "*a tool in which you are monitored or other people are*

monitored and it's a guideline to be able to achieve your goals. It should include objectives, should include career planning, and overall training needs and objectives." Various interesting quotes emerged which in themselves served as summation of peoples' perspectives of performance management. Sandile (agent) is quoted as having said "*everything needs to be managed*", other aspects of performance management emerged as crucial, David (agent) stated that, *"one thing that I am glad about, and also I support fully because without the training you wouldn't know if you are coming or going".*

The positive perceptions of performance management that emerged are to be explored further according to the sub-themes they fall under as well as the constructs that emerged. The first of these to be discussed is the performance management process as a whole.

4.2.2. The performance management process

What is undoubtedly a significant part of performance management is the performance management process, it would thus seem important that all employees be aware of and have knowledge of the performance management process, this was however not the case. There were differing views with regards to the performance management process; some participants could clearly describe the process whilst others were not certain as to what the entire process was. Aseem (supervisor) described the performance management process as follows, *"Basically it's taking a person, they act on what they do, and measuring them on that, and then you get feedback on the other parts of the business, and you look at what they have done for you and measure them (agents) on that… and then put together all the feedback again…if they are not good, you guide them on what they have to do, and where they are falling short. That is my understanding of it."* He was one of the few who had a clear view on the performance management process.

Whether or not participants knew the performance management process or agreed with it, they generally agreed that it was a necessity. Aseem (supervisor) went on to state that "*It's necessary to a certain degree, no it's always necessary. A lot of managers I think, they don't have the time to sit down with a person one on one…it's forcing you to sit down with a person and it's forcing you to tell a person, you know what this is the objective, this is how it should be, so in a way a person, a manager will hear I need that, I don't need that. I feel like I am doing well. So I think that is time spent with your team members…actually telling them where they are going wrong, otherwise I don't think they ever sit down.*"

Managing performance should be a continuous process, in order to meet, manage and ensure the consistency and relevance of strategic objectives (Lockett, 1992). The consistency and frequency of performance appraisals arose as an area of concern, in some cases there was uncertainty as to the frequency of appraisals. Kareshnee (agent) stated that "*I will like it to be regularly every quarter as they said it would be, because you know how you are working and it's informing. I am sure if any agent that knows that they are performing well, they will want their performance appraisal to be followed up on. If a person is fooling around, then I think they don't bother because I think if you don't have a performance appraisal on how you are working, and how things are going by every day, I think then nobody can say that, you know you have been poor performing or under performing or maybe I am taking a disciplinary action on you, because you are not performing…maybe your senior manager hasn't told you how you are performing, how would you know if you over perform or under perform? …That should give you some indication how you are working and how you want to work or how you want to buckle up*"

In relation to the idea and construct of an appraisal, very broad descriptions were used some containing very negative views in the detailed metaphors used such as those of being scrutinised, under attack and experiencing the appraisal process as a struggle. Some people were not sure exactly of the appraisal

process in place but based on previous work exposure and general knowledge they were able to refer to the idea of an appraisal. The negative perspectives held will however be explored in more depth later on.

In summation and to give a simple view of what the majority of participants who had knowledge on performance management and the process saw performance management as, the description used by Manesh (agent) is the most appropriate, describing it as "*Basically to see over a four month term how I am dealing with queries or my day-to-day activities. My areas of strength; what I feel is lacking…find solutions and solve through weakness…strength to maintain certain levels and trying to share my knowledge with others*" Some of these descriptions used were very literal, in delving deeper to understand the intricate perceptions held of performance management further metaphors and images emerged.

Interestingly enough the majority of employees were not averse to the idea of the performance management process, rather what emerged is the desire for the performance management process to be used as a tool to guide and aid performance rather than as a punitive measure. This thus perhaps illustrates the need for call centres to move away from solely relying on measurement (Miciak and Desmarais, 2001) or stressing its value yet leaving other critical components of performance management unrecognised. There is an emergent need for performance management to become more holistic in incorporating the other constructs used to define performance management in the process as contrary to perceptions there are positive views of performance management held by employees. The research of Marr and Parry (2004) indicate one alternative to focusing purely on measurement that still produces results.

4.2.3. Skills, abilities, growth and development

The most prominent idea believed to define what performance management is, which came as no surprise is that of level of performance, this notion of measurement was linked to other aspects such as growth and development. The relevance of growth and development was a recurring theme, for some participants it served to represent how they currently perceive performance management in their current organisation, whilst for others it formed a part of what they believed a good performance management system should incorporate. The majority of participants were in agreement with David (agent) who stated that performance management is used "*to determine what level you are currently performing at",* he went on to add what is closely linked to this, which is the fact that "*it also indicates your weak points, your strength, and your areas of improvement".*

Although participants noted that performance management is about determining ability, some felt that this aim was not always achieved. Mahendra (agent) understood performance management as "*how they check your skills, the way you handle queries, your efficiencies and so forth."* For Khanyi a few things came to mind, but essentially she felt performance management is *"just basically being rated really, being rated according to basically what you can do, what you are capable I guess its like capable of doing, really that's what it is although I feel that so it doesn't necessarily show exactly what your performance is really the way it is at times but yes performance management is just that, just how you are doing, how you are progressing in whatever you are doing."* According to (Fisher et al, 2003) job performance is about determining differences in performance levels for tasks and the job as a whole, thus linking to the notions above of being rated.

Merisha (agent) linked her description to the individuals' role within the organisation, as "*an assessment of who you are in the business, what you do and how you do it and how well you do it. Okay the quality of work that you*

provide, I think performance management is a stepping stone towards growth for yourself, it obviously identifies your strengths and weaknesses so you know what performance management is." Knowing where the individual fits in and their role is important, it allows for the determining of growth prospects and rewards and recognition as well as incentives based on performance, these factors can prove important when it comes to motivating employees as it is acknowledged that recognition in itself can prove to be a potent motivator (Robbins et al, 2001).

Continuing the theme of incentives, rewards and recognition, the importance of salary increases and development as a result of performance management was also an integral part of descriptions used, Tebogo (agent) described performance management as "*I think firstly for us in the company it's usually for salary increases, depending on where you are rated, and then secondly to feel where the person is lacking and where the company can improve or you know, develop skills."* The link to financial rewards based on performance was definitely recognised as well as the emerging potential for development.

The personal relevance and opportunity for development and personal improvement was a strongly recurring theme and was noted by a majority of participants, the following are such examples:

- Mahendra (agent): *"From the company's perspective I think basically to keep track of the improvements, your individual improvement. And you as an individual to sort of check your improvements or your advancement or lack thereof."*

- David's (agent): "*it's a guideline also you can use in order to improve yourself. Your performance as far as the job is concerned. I am all for it."*

- Ashley (supervisor): *"implemented and communicated correctly the point (of performance management) is to enhance the productivity performance*

of the person and to obviously close any gaps in the performance and really it's about developing the person to his or her highest potential."

- Camilla (agent): *"On a personal scale though it should be more geared towards developing you as a person, your skills what you can offer to the organisation because at the end of the day if you are up skilled then everybody else would benefit and a performance appraisal is a tool to help the business do that."*

- Mariana (supervisor): "*a tool used to help people grow in particular position…it is an aid, a type of aid to make sure that people understand where they are going, what they are doing how they performance are, you can give feedback, and also helps grow people. And if you have a little bit it plays two roles, I see it as playing two roles. Firstly to help a person, you know, give them a pat on the back, if they've done well let them know and if they haven't also let them know and also see what their strategies or their future goals are."*

- Camilla (agent): "*coaching, mentoring, up-skilling and guiding, that kind of thing."*

The perception of performance management as a tool for growth and development is a strong one as well as being significant in that it is identified by parties at all levels, the tool element suggests performance managements' role as a device to carry out the necessary functions (Allen, 1990). Performance management is also seen as a guide, illustrating that it is perceived as a source of direction to how things should be done, what the outcomes of actions should be and to gauge individual performance for development.

In order to achieve optimum performance and to have a pool of employees who are good performers, skill undoubtedly comes into play. For Merisha (agent) the

point of performance management related to agents and their job skills, *"Well they see where you are in the company, to see if you are equipped for your job, if not they obviously provide you with skills. If you are over qualified perhaps look for another position like you know with call centres it's a bit different because you work in the lines but then sometimes you get more experience and experience different fields in the call centre. Like we have got like four different divisions I think here to see where you are best suited I suppose and I think for your own personal growth they need to do that and I think it's standard with labour relations to do performance appraisals."* The perception reflected is that this assessment of skills may lead to the possibility of development where deemed appropriate and possibly the relocation and alignment of an individual to a position that more accurately suits their skills. This links the role and benefits of skills development to performance measurement illustrating the far reaching impacts the use and value performance management can have.

Development emerged as both a missing element in current performance management systems and a crucial part of any ideal performance management, Tebogo (agent) felt that what the current performance management system in place her organization was lacking was *"more focus on the individual, where can we take you, you know they don't focus on things like studies, what are you currently doing, they don't really consider it, it has got nothing to do with your performance management…"* Tebogo (agent) went on to state that in her opinion "*It is only focused on this, this and this, stats and things like that, so maybe if they could look at things like education, where do you develop an employee, things like training, things like pensions, what do you think we should change… And another thing maybe if it could be less figures oriented, because it's more of figures."* Sibongile (agent) shared Tebogo's (agent) sentiment, stating that a deficiency existed, particularly with regards to the following, *"in terms of learning, reading, education, how you can get there, those are the things that should be looked at here, and look at where you are, where you are headed, how you can get there…"*

Khanyi (agent) also perceived a lack of opportunity for growth and development, *"there is room but it doesn't necessarily mean that there are opportunities there. So there is room yes for progression but then, I mean you could be excellent, you could be real good but that doesn't necessarily mean that you will progress, you could still stay exactly where you are."*

The notion of a pyramid to describe performance management to describe possibilities for growth emerged according to the following descriptions:"

- Aseem (supervisor): *"a pyramid…you lay the foundation… you are building, as you reach the top, you know, you reach the goal to that. It's not the end; in the middle there is time that you need to grow. If not, there is something wrong with the foundation."* Further noted by Aseem was the need for training in order to obtain the necessary growth and development, stating, *"If you don't receive the proper training, you won't be able to do proper work."* Carrying on with the notion of growth up the pyramid, he stated, *"I mean if you, you start of as an agent, later on you maybe become a senior agent, who takes that calls, and then they become a team leader. Once you become a team leader, you can't go anywhere until someone leaves. Or someone dies."*

- Merisha (agent): *"…I think it's a pyramid…obviously at the ground you have got all your agents, your workers and obviously and so the hierarchy or the pyramid goes…for us to be the foundation of the pyramid we would need obviously all the skills and training necessary to perform our job which we basically have in order to uphold performance…"* She went on to describe ideal performance management as perhaps a shifting pyramid, whereby *"the agents would be your foundation because they are the ones that deal with the calls, maybe a shift…moving the agents up…"*

The need to grow in terms of moving to a more senior position due to performance management was noted, according to one of the managers, they described their current performance management as a stepladder, stating that *"You know you might start today at the bottom and end up at the top from climbing on the ladder, because we believe in making sure that we have employees improved. We don't believe in punishment but corrective measures. So I might be down there today, but if my manager is there to support me and my team, and there are resources, I can see myself going up the steps."*

Kareshnee (agent) who initially used the image of a pyramid also went on to describe performance management as a ladder, she believed that *"That is how I think it should be, if you will be able to climb up the ladder…everything can happen in the call centre."* She did however note that currently this ideal does not apply to the organisation as, *"I am here for two years, and I am sitting in the same place that I was in when I started."*

The pyramid and ladder metaphors strongly depict the idea of growth and development which emerged very strongly as a cause for concern. The changing nature of organisations means that no longer do individuals spend their entire careers in one organisation therefore the role of organisations has shifted from organisations taking complete responsibility to managing peoples careers to supporting individuals that take responsibility for their own future. The role of organisations is now therefore to ensure employees skills, abilities and knowledge is current and they are prepared for future tasks (Robbins et al, 2001). It is important therefore that the organisations provide the necessary training and development for agents to perform their current tasks and future needs, but also to provide support for those individuals managing their own careers and looking to develop if they are meeting or excelling on their performance requirements.

The notion of performance management as a living organism emerged in descriptions of performance management as either a plant or tree, according to Morgan (1986) part of the living organism metaphor emphasizes relations, the environment and growth. The notion of a living organism brings to light the fact that how an organisation copes with the demands of its environment will determine its success and whether it lives or dies, as well as the fact that one way of looking at the organisation is in terms of the developmental life cycle is (McKenna and Wright, 1965). According to Casey (agent) the ideal for her, "*should be a gradual growing just like a tree, gradual growing from one place to the other.*"

Mariana (supervisor) believed that in her current organisation it was already like a living organism, *"Maybe like a seed or a plant. Initially you get a person starting at a certain position. So they need to do a performance appraisal, and you say okay, you go the objective; this is what you are aiming for. So that person is just a little seed, and you give it some water, and the performance management, some training, and it helps them, aided by the water and sun, because he simply needs all that. And then obviously this plant is going to start growing. And with continuous performance appraisals that you use, the person grows more, or the plant just grows and becomes a big tree or wonderful plant. But with the aid, and I think performance appraisal is an aid to grow people and I know it sounds stupid, but initially when we start a new job, you don't, you don't know everything, you need to learn, you need to be valued in the right direction. And performance appraisal helps to do that."*

In describing what she thought would be the ideal performance management, Mariana (supervisor) stated that it would be the same image of a tree for her, as *"you can always improve on yourself, and in our industry, things always change… like that picture for example, it's a big plant, and in summer it blooms, but in our industry you get the fretful times and lots of folks coming in, demanding clients, so when autumn comes and those leaves start falling of, its up to you to*

strengthen yourself and pull yourself together and make sure that you bloom again. So I think it's, I would use the same picture, because it's not quite a unique for a plant, you need to water that plant. You need sun; all plants need sun to photosynthesise. The same with people and myself…That includes all of us, I think you need to be given the tools, you need to be able to speak your mind, in order to be the best that you can be and, with the constant change, things changing, task circulars. Things change, you need to say it, but you need to be given the clause, and also obviously take initiative, and learn for yourself. But it's the process; it's like the plant, and all the seeds. It's been summer, and things will change. It'll never, ever stay the same."

The notion of performance management as a tree was one shared by the majority of supervisors, Adrysha (supervisor) described her current performance management system as a living organism, "*right now it's a seed, it's just planted, and it needs to be watered and grown and nurtured… Communication is my key word…if we don't communicate that seed is not gonna grow… in order for us to carry on to keep growing to a plant, and for it to grow into a tree for that matter, we need to nurture it.*"

This theme was shared also by managers, of the three interviewed, two described it as a living organism, both managers Jade (manager) and Antjie (manager). For Jade (manager), *"it's a seedling that we've planted and we will make sure that we nurture it and grow it to be a big strong tree."* She went on to describe her ideal as a *"a big fir tree… we put down these strong roots; the roots are there and they're going to get stronger and stronger. We will ensure that we nurture it and we give it what it needs, and then we'll start to see it actually growing and honestly we're only as strong as the whole base and all the leaves and branches that are attached to it will point us in the right direction, where we need to be"* To nurture the tree to grow, Jade (manager) stated that they would give "*constant feedback, support, I suppose in some ways you even like make provision for the roots to actually extend and find the water so we would like to*

allow some sort of entrepreneurial (opportunity)…We'd like to again reward the branches or the leaves that are showing, and sprouting and showing the difference and making the difference."

In essence the living organism metaphor reflected the fact that by management the performance management system in place is in the early stages of development with room for growth. Notions of development extended also to the personal development of individuals, as well as to the growth and development of the organisation within industry.

Morgan (1986) explores 'Organisations as Organisms', stating that one can identify different species of organisation in different kinds of environment. The environment is considered to be key in order to understand the process and dynamics of any organisation with a strong emphasis placed on the fact that, "employees are people with complex needs that must be satisfied if they are to lead full and healthy lives and to perform effectively in the workplace" (p. 41). The human side of organisation is essentially emphasised, considering aspects such as work motivation and relations between individuals and groups, thus the "idea of integrating the needs of individuals and organisations is a powerful force" (pg. 42). The need for growth and development emerges as an important factor for satisfaction, accompanied by communication, feedback and reward, thus supporting Morgan's' view that needs must be met for employees to lead healthy live and perform well.

Motsabi (agent) currently experiences performance management as running hurdles for the following reason, *"I think maybe it's like running hurdles cause you run you run you run then you have to jump higher so I know if I do that I'm not gonna get anywhere so you run then you jump and you go higher you know…It's not like a barrier, it's something that I have to do cause I know if I jump over like there's something on the other side for me…You jump and you keep moving…. (There are) challenging patches yeah…I do get motivation…if*

you get a motivational supervisor it depends who you're with… You are an athlete and you have people saying go go go, it's like that for me, my supervisor pushes me cause I want to be good." From this image certain things emerge, firstly that performance requires the individual to apply themselves to achieving a set goal, there is the realisation that after each goal is reached the standard is raised as are the rewards, highlighting the requirement for constant improvement. The importance of motivation is also depicted as well as the role supervisors need to play as cheerleaders.

Motsabi's (agent) ideal performance management would be the same thing but with some significant differences, *"it would be not just the hurdles…I feel that you should be able to go up like when you jump again you should go higher. I don't know it's like I have to go higher you know but here there is no room… it's like I cant go higher than this…wherever you are you can't go higher than that unless you go to another position so I feel like even in the position that I'm in I should still be able to grow."* There is a perception of being limited emerging, that application and success in abilities and performance will not result in growth due to lack of opportunity as an agent.

It is evident from the positive descriptions and metaphors used that employees still value career planning as well as development even though their length of commitment and loyalty to one organisation may have changed (Robbins et al, 2001). Whether agents are permanent, contractors or temporary employees the desire and need for development was considered critical, suggested by Robbins et al (2001) is that the encouragement and guiding of employees by organisations in developing a career plan that is self directed can increase employee commitment and loyalty as well as satisfaction. Robbins et al (2001, p. 370) also suggested that "by clearly communicating the organisation's goals and future strategies, giving employees growth experiences, offering financial assistance to help employees keep their knowledge and skills current, and

providing paid time off from work for off-the-job training", illustrating the role employees can play in employee growth and development.

The notion of growth and development as a construct was a crucial one, especially in the call centre environment where opportunities for growth and development into a more senior position were perceived as being limited. It was considered to be essential in the ideal performance management system as well as in descriptions of current performance management and metaphors used. Development was viewed as essential by both supervisors and agents alike. For agents it was a strong need to know that through performance management individual development could be achieved, that the performance management could be used as a tool to identify strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement. Supervisors viewed performance management in terms of a seed or tree that would grow and develop. It was also viewed as a way for individuals to personally develop and for the organisation as a whole to use performance management to develop itself.

Overall the idea of skills, abilities, growth and development were very significant. In totality, most of the metaphors and descriptions given had overlapping ideas and meaning. Be it a possibility or not, up-skilling and development are viewed as one of the main contributors to performance management by not only agents but by managers and supervisors alike. The metaphors used by managers and supervisors were however more positive than those used by agents.

4.2.4. Company goals and direction

The benefits of performance management were recognised as not being only relevant at an individual level but at an organisational level in terms of being a guide for the business, illustrating whether or not company goals are being achieved. Tsepho (agent) linked performance management to the organisation in terms of a guide to determine whether the organisation is doing what it aimed to do and the role employees play, stating *"So that the company can actually know*

that they are meant to be doing is actually being done, to provide a better service and to make sure that they got them based on the people working for them… (To determine whether to) get other people or chuck out (poor performers) and get things to improve, things like that." As stated by Noe et al (2003) ensuring alignment with organisational goals is essentially the aim of performance management.

Kgomotso (supervisor) and Rebecca (agent) described performance management similarly to Tsepho, highlighting the relevance of organisational goals, each stating the following:

- Kgomotso (supervisor): *"the point, okay, is communication, and then targets…what is the company all about and then the goals, what are we aiming at. It's like now, we know what from now until April we are supposed to do for the company's goals…"*

- Rebecca (agent): *"you just have to find out are you reaching that target, or if we aren't why."*

- Khanyi (agent): *"it's to make sure you are accomplishing what you are supposed to accomplish, it's making sure you give them what you are supposed to give… it's basically just on the goal setting, goal set, goal to be reached, doesn't necessarily mean they are reachable but goals placed before you to reach."*

- Mariana (supervisor): *"to make sure that people know what is expected of them and to make sure that people are in the right job."*

- Rebecca (agent): *"meeting your target every day, or every week or every month, whatever the frequency of the target is that you need, you know. Letting me know about my strengths and weaknesses, in my job."*

- Diane (agent), having had experience with not only receiving but administering performance management, felt that as tool: "*I don't think it's as effective as required…it is a means of measuring performance…*" she touched on the fact that even if goals are indeed met they may not be beneficial to individuals' personal development, thus the maximum potential of the tool is not being realised.

The relevance of performance management to the achievement of overall goals and objectives came across very strongly in the descriptions of performance management. It was seen as a tool that if applied properly can be used to gauge whether or not the companies goals and objectives are being met. Once areas of improvement have been determined, the organisation can then work on development at an individual level as well as for the organisation as a whole.

Sibongile further elaborated the link between goals and performance management in that *"you have to sit down with your manager and he gets to see how you work"* from the individual set goals and team goals the supervisor is able to determine whether *"she thinks I am not performing the way she is expecting me to and whatever."*

The above definitions associated to organisational goal were somewhat linked to those relating to giving the company direction in that they too stressed the value of whether or not the company was doing what it was supposed to and whether or not it was going in the right direction, which seems logical to link the right direction to being that of achieving the set goals. According to Sandile (agent), *"you need performance management in order to get things done thoroughly or done in the right way. No matter where you are."* For Khanyi (agent) she related it to the need for the company to ensure employee effectiveness, "*I would think, I mean obviously the company needs to get somewhere you know they need to, they need to make sure that the people they have here are doing what they are supposed to do and besides…there are so many of us that its really difficult, it*

would be difficult to see if there wasn't performance management, it would be very difficult to see who is doing what they are supposed to be doing, who isn't, who is, you know what I mean. So in this case it is needed, it needs to be there because it's the only way of keeping track really of what's going on and how is this person doing? Even thought I still feel that nothing is done about in the end it's just so they know what you are doing what you are supposed to be doing."

One of the aims of leading organisations is the creation of an effective and efficient performance management system with the aim to "translate organisational vision into clear measurable outcomes that define success, and which are shared throughout the organisation and with customers and stakeholder" as is stated by (Amaratunga and Baldry, 2002).

Due to the nature of the call centre environment stressing the value of punctuality and time management which form part of what business unit goals and functioning require from employees, Tsepho (agent) described performance management as being *"on time. It's an important thing. And doing what the business requires of you. Whether you actually are doing what you are supposed to be doing most of the time. Not fooling around."* What is critical in one business unit may not necessarily be critical in another therefore the need for tailored and specific performance management, even within business units there can be significant variations hence the importance of fulfilling the specific need of ones job to contribute to the overall organisational strategy and goals.

The descriptions and metaphors employed did not specifically use the terms to "align with organisational strategy", but this was implied in descriptions whereby agents stipulated that performance management was about the organisation ensuring they are doing what they are meant to be doing and that they are indeed headed in the right direction. References were made to the achievement of organisational goals as a construct as well as individual roles within the organisation and individual contributions.

4.2.5. Customer satisfaction

The customer service industry is intrinsically linked to the idea of customer satisfaction as that if more often than not the drive and reason for having call centres in place. Some participants linked performance management to customer satisfaction in their descriptions which was not surprising and could not be ignored as call centre agents are at the forefront of serving customers. What was surprising however is the fact that only one agent and two supervisors stressed the relevance and direct link of customer satisfaction to performance management, whilst others merely touched on it in passing. According to participant Sandile (agent), *"in my own opinion, you need to start to meet the needs of the customers, because we are mostly dealing with customers. If I am able to delight customers in whatever problem or issue that they have, then at the end of the day they find themselves being happy, therefore I have met my goals…"*

Ashley (supervisor) holds the view that *"performance management…is when you win, when between you and the customer, the company and the customer. Performance management is about customer satisfaction, it's is about mutual respect, it's about putting the customer first be it internal external customers, it's about valuing our customers, so it's positive because you know if you have a happy customer you are doing something right and a happy customer is going to, whenever he or she is going to call here for service it's always going to be happy to call here, he is going to always commend you on your good service. He is not going to bad mouth you outside of the company to his or her friends and colleagues…all of those things are in our minds when we are servicing our customers and then the performance management has to meet all of those positives."*

Mark (supervisor) also linked performance management to customer satisfaction, from his perspective; it *"is to serve a customer at the best of our abilities. And in*

so doing make sure the staff perform at their best, and that is the way I believe that performance management is essential. Motivating staff, coaching, guiding, and helping staff along with that common purpose to satisfy our customers at the end of the day. So I think performance management is essential in terms of satisfying our customers ultimately. That is the objective. Staff motivation, is a huge part of it and you are also ensuring that people are disciplined accordingly."

it is interesting that the link between performance management and customer satisfaction does not dominate as ultimately this is one of the main functions the performance management process aims to achieve within the call centre environment.

4.2.6. Reward, recognition and motivation

The three factors reward, recognition and motivation were clearly linked to one another, this theme emerged earlier also in relation to growth. A crucial factor in any performance management system that Khanyi and others felt was missing but viewed positively was that of rewards in the form of incentives; she stated *"I would have incentives in there."* Tsepho (agent) shared this sentiment, adding that a "*salary increase is due annually, that is a fact…something that is lacking from this company, that could push people to maybe to do more, is maybe some sort of incentives. Like maybe say the top ten achievers for the month will be taken away to Durban for the weekend, something like that. Just something spontaneous, something you know, like this month will be taken to Durban, or whatever."* In Tsepho's (agent) opinion working towards good stats is a far off goal, thus incentives that would be realized sooner are lacking in the performance management system. Palesa also identified the lack of monetary reward.

Reward in a monetary form is not the only way to motivate however, David identified a lack in recognition, stating that "*It's nice when you have a job well done at the end of the day, you know, I always say that monitory compensation is*

not everything…complimenting on the job well done at the end of the day, can really motivate you so much, that you have a good week. And if that is done on a constant basis, imagine how many people you are going to have walking around with smiles on their faces." This supports the notion put forward by behavioural scientists that money is not the only motivator but rather that importance lies in the challenges of a job, the goals that are set, being able to participate indecision making, receiving feedback, being part of a cohesive work team and other such factors with no monetary value (Robbins et al, 2001).

Having identified motivation in various forms as being necessary in the opinion of agents, Mahendra (agent) identified a lack of motivation, which was an opinion shared with others, he noted that *"I do not think it occurs here, because I think you are not going to be motivated by anybody. The only time you get recognition is if like, you do something like I heard the phrase the other day, walking on water, and I think that, it should not be that way."*

In terms of motivation as a construct it emerged through the interviews as strongly desired and positively valued even though it did not emerge as a construct dominantly experienced currently. It was undoubtedly considered to be a significant factor in the descriptions of what an ideal performance management system would be. Motivation emerged as being considered to be linked to rewards and recognition, in that they are all necessary to achieve good performance as rewards and recognition may serve to motivate. Money alone was not perceived to be the only motivator; encouragement and affirmation for good performance on a daily basis were believed to be just as important, the supervisor would thus play an important role in this regard.

4.2.7. Agent-supervisor relationship

The perceptions of the agent-supervisor relationship are important as the supervisor plays a critical role in the performance management of agents.

The perceptions of various individuals of the agent supervisor relationship varied greatly, super visor Adrysha (supervisor) was not oblivious to the negative perceptions held by some agents towards performance management. She stipulated however that she personally felt that in her team, *"I am not a dictatorship. You're not there to dictate to the agents. It's a give and take, it's discussion. I think right now I play a very supportive role to my agents. I'm always there, I'm very accessible to them, whether it's a personal problem or whether it's work related. They know that they can trust me. They know that they can speak to me and I will give them advice. I mean not advice to do this, but 'these are the things to look at in this way. If you have a work problem come and speak to me', so I'm very open. I'm always there for them. So with me I'm very supportive."* This depiction illustrates the ideal, whether or not this is how the team perceives the relationship is another matter, what is important here is how the benefits and value add potential of a supervisor are articulated and the other elements of performance management are touched on, going beyond purely performance monitoring to being able to coach agents and serve as a support system to assist them to work towards improvement.

Merisha's (agent) description of performance management revealed the importance and role of the agent-supervisor relationship, particularly that supervisors should know their agents in order to allow for individual growth as well as evaluation of the quality of work an individual offers, stating *"Okay a good performance management system should have obviously objective management so whoever is going to be doing the appraisals they should be objective, I also think that they should know you as the person doing the job because in that case they would know… but management should be objective. I think they should mould you… obviously the value that you are giving so your calls should be monitored as well, not just the volume of work that you do, not just the quantity but the quality of service that you are actually giving the client over the phone."*

For supervisor Ashley (supervisor) the role of the supervisor emerged as crucial due to the influence of supervisors on agents, as for her the role of the supervisor is for *"Coaching, counselling and training…"* she described the agent-supervisor relationship as "*Open and honest communication, mutual respect right across the board, middle and senior managers shouldn't think that they are God and look down upon us and create a barrier you know likewise supervisors shouldn't create a barrier between them and the reps because we are all one here, you know nobody is above anybody else. If you think you have more knowledge than your colleague or your subordinate share the knowledge, starting with sharing the knowledge because when you share the knowledge you are empowering everybody around you. Communication, sharing of knowledge, empowering people, mutual respect I think that's a big one… you have autocratic middle managers and supervisors who interfere with the process and create unnecessary resentment amongst the reps you know in the lower ranks so you then get people saying 'I actually think she is too big for her boots' or 'she thinks she is a supervisor or a manager so she is you know bigger and better than I am', so its those type of things but generally speaking the company has got some wonderful, wonderful initiatives, processes, policies, guidelines, communication channels and if every thing is in place. I think it is we the individuals that interfere with it because that's our autocratic management styles or that we think that we are bigger and better than other people, our ego.*"

Khanyi (agent) introduced the idea of feedback into her description of performance management, stating that for her it is very important. She described performance management as a loop or channel of communication where agents are heard and they in turn hear others opinions thus serving as motivation. According to Khanyi, "*Yes, feedback and not just from the higher whatever their limit or whatever term you use, 'this is right okay you keep this, this is what we want you to do' but also them expecting feedback from you because the way it's set up right now there is, nobody asks you why, they will ask why aren't you performing? ...It should be where you are able to communicate also and say 'Hey*

help me out here' you know you are able to say 'Here the thing I am struggling with this, help me with this' and not where you get told 'no but you know that you are supposed to do this' because I mean that's what you get right now but, no that person is management says this is what you are supposed to do, this is what we want from you'…I need to be heard…"

Sibongile (agent) described the supervisor as someone who *"keeps monitoring about what we do, she is doing the performance management and she does her own work as well. But she basically sits and oversees that everything is working together. She is the counsellor of the whole team. Makes sure that everything is well, has planning skills and makes sure that everything is working well together. I think she does other things, and in fact I think she is bending back on her hands. She knows exactly what we're doing, I don't know what other things she does, but I think she is working. She gives the information that we need. She is there to support with anything I need, and she has always got the time, she makes the time. And she will tell you whatever she thinks you need more, and you can tell her how this kind of training should work."* Related to this notion of a team monitor, Mbali (agent) described supervisors as playing the role of a coach, *"I think you need a coach to coach you."*

Kareshnee (agent) described the supervisory role as that of motivator, as *"there should be some motivation; it's not all about the money. We should be given recognition of how we are doing, and it should be brought to our attention. If we are performing poorly, I also think it should be brought to our attention. Maybe we can work on it. I think it should be noted that the team leadership make it known to the staff that they are under performing or over performing."* Rebecca also viewed the supervisors' role as a *"kind of encouraging you and supporting you and letting you know if you are doing a good job, and letting you know if you are doing a bad job. Then you will know where to improve."* In relation to Sutermeister's (1976) assertion that people respond to motivation based on

perception this is supported in that beyond financial it's the perception of being valued and pro-actively managed to improve performance.

Performance management was ultimately viewed as a team interaction and the use of a team sport was a description employed by numerous participants. The commonality between the different teams was the coordination and synergy between individuals, relating to interaction, coaching and development. According to Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) organisational culture is likely to shape teamwork metaphors; therefore it is proposed that individualism decreases the likelihood of broad teamwork metaphors being used. The teamwork metaphors depicted below suggest that a more collectivist approach to performance management would be appreciated, this makes sense seeing as the agents are divided into teams within their work environment with supervisors playing the role of team leaders.

Tsepho's (agent) ideal performance management takes the form of soccer, *"a soccer player is performance managed by their coach. The coach will be there…he will always be checking, like watching games that the player performs, and he is always having a chat with the player, finding out if he has got any problems or anything, and how life is growing more or less, so its more personal, you know what I am saying. I know it is a lot difficult to performance manage everyone on a personal basis."* According to Tsepho (agent) a personal link, difficult as it may be, is required, *"it can't just be all 'are you doing your job'. I see you scored ten, while you scored ten goals in ten games, that is rather good, but you (supervisors) haven't watched the tape of it, you haven't had a chat with them, you don't know about the person's game. So there is no personal relationship there. You can't really performance manage that person and say, well this person is good enough to play on the team, you know what I'm saying."*

Also using the idea of a soccer team as an image to describe performance management was Mbali (agent). Both Mbali's (agent) current and ideal

experiences of performance management may also be depicted as a soccer team. She believed this image to be the best representation as *"it's got coaches, agents, players, you know, so that is obviously that whatever you do they are watching you. And I think you need to be coached. Like I said there is the players, that needs to be coached, and there is a team."* For Manesh (agent) performance management was represented by different sports, he viewed it as *"something that is level, a playing field. A softball ground, a football field, something like that. Something that there are rules and regulations that you need, but it's open for all, and it is fair for all."*

Keizer and Post (1996 as cited in Oswick and Montgomery, 1999, p. 504) argue that metaphors related to sport provide useful information related to aspects of organisational success and failure. Continuing with the theme of team coordination and synergy, Rebecca (agent) described performance management as, *"probably like cricket. There are a lot of people around, close to the action, and it affects them, and they affect it as well that is how important it is. The people who are directly affected are the call centre agents that are on the phone. And then the team leaders and the managers and so on. People on the outskirts? I would like to think of them as fans. Maybe in the end as coaches. I suppose because the call centre agents are in the line of fire, you know. There are people keeping score who are persistent".* For Rebecca this same image would apply for the ideal performance management, the only difference being, *"everything is more free with the company side really winning. Because the same kind of principles and ideals would be applied."* Rebecca (agent) related to her ideal being winning, thus it would be achieving success, with people and their respective roles being crucial, especially the coaching role of supervisors and the need for fans serving as motivators. Also mentioned was being in the line of fire illustrating that even though a positive perception exists, there was also a trace of a negative perception of being under attack and 'in the action'.

For Khanyi as well as Ashley (supervisor) and Aseem (supervisor) a different team came to mind, that of a team of friends. Khanyi identified with the team perspective in the sense that *"let it just be a team of people...make sure everybody is doing what they are supposed to be doing…"*

For Ashley the description and perspective were a little different, going into greater detail, for Ashley (supervisor) performance management should ideally be, according to what she experiences in her department*, "picture two friends having a telephone discussion…or an interaction…on a mutually respectful basis… they (parties involved) have something in common…they enjoy talking to each other…they respect each others opinions."* The essential view being that parties should feel, *"I am going to get what I am looking for from her, she is a trusted friend if I talk to her about my problems she will help me resolve it or she will give me some advise so that is how I would."* This illustrates the necessity for trust for a relationship to flourish as well as the desire for feedback, as well as a sense of knowing each other on a level so as they can be comfortable with one another.

For Aseem (supervisor) performance management is ideally like *"having all your people together in one room…you get everyone together sitting around one table, they all have got the same goals, your team members, because they are all doing the same work."*

For Diane (agent) performance management meant a performance appraisal which she likened to a playground, *"I am thinking of the way it should be…allowing you to work hard and yet play hard you know…Unfortunately the focus right now is just work work work okay but I am also confident that we will reach that stage where we can find that balance in terms of work hard, play hard, that's it."* There should thus be a balance and consistency between work and relaxation, the work life balance here is important in order for the agent to be able

to perform well when necessary. Hope still prevails though as the agent sees potential for balance in the future.

The above images depict the connectedness desired from the performance management system whereby all parties have their role to play and together through communication, guidance and mutual respect each party can perform well thus achieving their desired goal. In whichever way performance management had been experienced previously a strong sense of a personal ideal emerged from the images used.

4.2.8. Ideal performance management

To summarise an ideal performance management would be a formidable task, however based on the interviews from this research the participants have expressed certain components they would consider to be important. The following descriptions give a general overview of the crucial factors discussed:

- Asanda (agent): *"it should be communication it should be incentive, it should be training, development…satisfactory, above board, high expectations."*

- Casey (agent): *"growth and nurturing, developing, training."*

- Camilla (agent): "*more like a relationship like a hand in hand, encouraging, mentoring thing…the overall objective of a performance appraisal system should be to develop a business, to further the organisation, that's the strategic view but in order to do that you have to uplift your staff, you have to empower them, you have to skill them and the only way to do that is to pass on your knowledge, what you have passed on and a performance appraisal management system is a tool to do that because you can gauge where the people are and you can use it as a very hands on thing one on*

one to uplift people". Tsepho also highlighted the importance of growth, both personal growth and company growth.

Being aware of employees' negative perceptions of performance management does not dispel supervisors from having an idea of their ideal performance management, Adrysha (supervisor) described performance management currently as follows, "…*something like danger and people are always afraid to come into the meeting, and I've noticed that when you set up these appraisal meetings…they're willing to come in and listen to what you have to say, and others are like 'you know what I don't think it's for me, I know I'm performing, I know I'm under performing. You know what am I gonna get out of this?' And you try explaining to them, it's not a session to be de-motivated or for them to get uh, full-blown hair, you know hot headed and things like that".*

Ideally Adrysha (supervisor) would like to see performance management as follows, "…*surrender, not surrender in such a way that they must surrender to me, you know, we both must surrender to each other, you know and come to a compromise and say, you know, 'I'm performing, I'm not performing' is what management is all about. Not there to bring you down as an individual or to bring you right to the top where you're so uh, full-blown that you don't even care for your job any longer, no 'I'm too good for it' or you know things like that. It's there where we must both come to a compromise say it's either your performing or not performing, where, how do I help you. Or what do I do in order to bring you there? Or the person that is performing excellently, he needs to have a responsibility where he can teach other people, expand his knowledge to them you know, grow others."*

The above ideal descriptions in themselves encompass several of the necessary components illustrated in the images and perceptions expressed already; they also contain several elements related to the 8 constructs commonly used to describe performance management, namely the link to organisational strategy, training and development.

4.3. Negative perceptions of performance management: comments and metaphors

The negative connotations that have been attributed to call centre in past literature (IDS, 1997; Fernie, 1998; and Arkin, 1997 as cited in Armisted et al, 2002) were also evident in metaphors used to describe performance management. Negative views of performance management could not be ignored, one such person who did not hold a favourable opinion of it was Diane (agent) who stated the following, *"Quite frankly I think that it's just, I don't know if it's a piece of paper that is completed, personally I don't know if it's ever referred to, I very much doubt it because it is done and yes so I am not very positive about the performance management system, I am not."*

Casey (agent) too held a negative view, she believed that *"it's not the developing tool that it's supposed to be because it's performance management, so if you under perform you are supposed to you know during the time, between the 2 or 5 months or whatever the time the company has allocated. Between that time say if the one is November and the next one is in June and if you are lacking in a certain area it's brought to your attention in November and then you obviously need to, you know, have some action plan whereby you can be better than what you were in June but you don't find that is always the case because this is done, its finished November, or sorry June you will talk again. So as a result you go in there very negative and you come out of there negative where it could be a fruitful experience where you say you know what this is what I am gong to do for the next 3 months or 4 months when I do the other one."*

The combination of views held of performance management within participants' respective organisations as well as those from past experiences in other organisations were therefore not all positive. The idea of performance management as being a chore was proposed by Camilla (agent), likening it to

washing dishes as *"it's something that must be done, it has to be done, it's a real pain and once the dishes are washed it's all very nice and whatever for a while and then they get dirty again and they have to be rewashed, so it's not something that everybody loves to do."* Like a chore it is necessary that performance management be done consistently so as to maintain a healthy environment and effective functioning.

An aspect that came through strongly was the notion of actually being able to rely on performance management, as well as the ability the organisation has to actually obtain its desired outcomes. Sandile (agent) described the current performance management he was experiencing as *"something that you know is always fixed, but it keeps on breaking down... You have that will…you are trying the best to fix it, but it keeps on breaking down every time…They have an idea or picture on how to do things, and then when it comes to doing them, actually doing them, it fails."* To best articulate this opinion, Sandile (agent) turned to the image of a car, *"you know you love your car, you don't want to sell it to anybody, you wash it, you take it to service, do all the things that needs to be done to the car, but it doesn't want to go. Lets take for instance, let's, I think this is perfect, if you take the car out and you go 180 or 220 and you want to go more than 220, it cannot…."* The latter part of this illustration highlights the perceived desire in the current performance management system to achieve a goal that is not feasible based on the available resources.

Interestingly enough Sandile's (agent) metaphor touches on the fact that like a car the performance management system is made up of several components that need to be taken care of, maintained and managed, as well as the speed element in terms of efficiency and the smooth operation of the system overall, this relates to Morgan's (2001) metaphor of the machine. The implications of seeing performance management in a mechanistic manner implies setting up a

structure of clearly defined activities linked by clear lines of communication, coordination, and control as this for many people is almost second nature as a method to organize by. The strengths of mechanistic approaches emerge when structure, rigidity and routine are the norm and the desired outcome occurs; the limitations are reflected in the inability to adapt to change, be innovative and the overlooking of employees. (Morgan, 2001)

Being fairly structured in the way call centres measure performance and the performance management system as a whole does allow for the use of the machine metaphor, to be noted however is the flexibility and versatility that business requirements, company goals and the direction chosen may require.

4.3.1. Lack of goals and direction

Company goals and direction are the fundamentals that will ultimately drive business processes and influence the performance feedback required to ensure profitability is sustained and desired outcomes are reached, hence the critical role they play in guiding the performance management process. Khanyi (agent) likened the attainability of the desired goals to a mouse in a cage, as *"every now and then I feel like a little mouse running, there is -- you know that there is a prize you are working towards, there is a prize but you are not sure really if it's achievable, if it's obtainable, am I ever going to get this. You know it's there you are told it's there and there are people that tell you 'I am there I haven't gotten it yet you know you don't feel like you can get to it, I don't know maybe there is not enough motivation, nothing motivates you so you know there is a prize but then it doesn't necessarily mean that you would get to it."* This metaphor relays the notion of feeling trapped, controlled by others and of working for a seemingly unknown, unclear, unattainable goal, frustration and it also conveys the repetition perceived in running non-stop, illustrating the image of a mouse on a wheel

running with no end in sight. From the metaphor also emerges a voyeuristic element of being trapped and observed within the cage.

David (agent) used two different modes of transportation to describe what for him represents performance management, which link to a lack of clarity, order and goal direction. According to Marshak (1993 as cited in Morgan, 2001, p.7) metaphors that refer to moving, modes of transportation or sense of direction are more progressive than those of building. The first image relating to a mode of transportation referred to is that of a metro train; it reflects what David (agent) feels performance currently is, whilst the second image of a Boeing 747 reflects how ideally he thinks it should be:

- Metro train: *"at the moment I would say, a Metro Train comes to mind. It's over packed, and there are compartments but there is need for a bit of order. Each compartment serves its relevant purpose. But there is a need for order. You know it all boils down to that at the end of the day in order to achieve that purpose, that streamlined process, the train is moving and going in the right direction but there is order that needs to be in place. You need to add on more carriages in order to accommodate the whole crowd in terms of getting that streamlined process in order, and getting the train in the right direction."*

- Boeing 747: *"there is enough room for every body to be seated, there's order. You reach that point where you are going, there is order, and there is a seat for everybody on board the plane, no overcrowding. You know you're taking off now; you can achieve your outcome, your goals that you set. Because you have the set goals every year for the company. In order to get that streamlined goal, it's a winding road; we need to streamline that road. The only way to do that is if we make an effort internally from distant problems to the tools we use eventually to the atmosphere, you know the environment."*

The following can be gleaned from the images used by David (agent) above, the first image of a Metro train implies a mode of transportation that is somewhat limited with regards to its reach and service offering, the fact that it lacks sufficient space and order implies it's inability to effectively perform its required function or to accommodate the load required. The Boeing 747 on the other hand suggests greater speed, reach and service offering, it also implies a certain level of status, control and efficiency.

The description relating to confusion, a lack of direction and unclear goals extended to Asanda (agent), who likened performance management to a forest, justifying this by elaborating to say, *"there is no direction you don't know where you are going and as you go along you just pick up things you know, so you are in the forest as you go along you sort of see pathways where you are supposed to be going exactly like that yes. Okay you have an idea of where you want to go but you don't have direction on how to get there and on the way you make hiccups, like big hiccups you know because in the forest you can met a lion along the way, you know that's how I see it yes. It's not clear…you can see the light somewhere but its not -- you know you want to get there but getting there is a hell of a job, that's how I see it."* The use of the forest to describe the lack of direction is quite a strong one as the forest in fairy tales and cultural influences may be considered a dangerous plays with looming villains, hence the significance of possibly meeting a lion. This image to some extents implies a certain level of fear or caution felt by the individual.

The second image used by Asanda (agent) to illustrate what the ideal performance management should be was that of a good advert, *"lets take Coca-Cola adverts you know what they are selling, you know how to go about to get it and you know how it will satisfy you its exactly like that, that's how it should be. You should know your product, you should know what is expected of you, you should have the resources to do it and you should know how it is going to satisfy*

you." This illustrates simplicity, clarity and known expectations, it also hints at a sense of contentment and satisfaction as that is typically what may be associated with a Coca-Cola advert, thus tapping into the associations held by Coca-Cola itself.

In line with setting attainable goals and the ability to achieve them is consistency, which was depicted in the form of animal metaphors. Keizer and Post (1996 as cited in Oswick and Montgomery, 1999) assert that the use of animal metaphors allows for the contrast between weaknesses and strengths, as well as size and speed. Mark (supervisor) described the current performance management within his organisation as currently being like a tortoise as he believes it is *"slow, if you are given the entire organisation in terms of consistency and how people are performance managed. Getting a consistency across the board will take some time because you need certain people to think in a certain way. If everybody hasn't seen the picture in a certain way, it might take time to move forward faster."* The tortoise metaphor in itself says a lot about the perceived speed and progression of the performance management system, also implied is a certain level of vulnerability.

Mark's (supervisor) view of the ideal performance management system differed greatly from what he currently experiences, ideally he *"would like to see it moving like a lion or a cheetah so to speak, pretty fast and achieving because the environment that we are in is very dynamic and it's very fast…there is always new technology coming on board, new ideas. A very innovative environment, so things move fast. So the type of people that we are looking for is actually to move with that trend. So currently I would like to see it moving faster in terms of what we should be able to do."* This image highlights the role performance management plays in ensuring that employees and the organisation at large perform adequately so as to remain competitive. Mark's (supervisor) image portrays great strength, power and dominance, it gives the impression of

something sleek, fast passed and cut throat. The lion and cheetah image clearly embody the ideal perception held.

The findings of the current research support the assertions of Keizer and Post in that the initial metaphor of a tortoise used by Mark (supervisor) depicted the weaknesses he perceived with regards to speed within the organisation, as well as a lack of consistency. His ideal image on the other hand was that either of a lion or cheetah, both animals that reflect power, strength, agility and speed, which reflects the fact that he desires faster action and greater achievement.

Manesh (agent) also touched on the notion of consistency; however he used the image of a scale to describe how he has and is currently experiencing performance management, stating as *"you know you have your good and bad. Where you are trying to keep your scale level or either on the good side. Obviously it will give you your pros and cons. So this could be the perfect image for that right now. At the moment it's been consistently on the good."* This illustrates the balancing act between things going well and the bad elements that may occur, the scale image also serves to imply a certain level of uncertainty and room for fluctuations or change.

Clarity in terms of goals, actions, rewards and overall performance appear to be important aspects in order to motivate performance, thus avoiding employees working blindly in order to improve perceptions.

4.3.2. The untapped value of the agent-supervisor relationship

Having been exposed to the potential benefits that the agent-supervisor relationship holds now the current negative perspectives held and experienced are to be explored. Khanyi (agent) related the notion of the agent supervisor relationship to monitoring. This was directly linked to being spied on, she stated the following, *"right now its like there is us and there is the people that are sitting there watching…it shouldn't be like that it should be just where you see them as*

okay I know that person is management but he is just looking after me so that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing and at the same time they are going to report me for doing what I am doing so you know there are not just there to torment me." This perception doesn't allow room for the coaching and mentoring role that a supervisor should play in order to provide real value.

Mbali (agent) likened the interaction of agents and supervisors during the performance management process to that of children at school, believing that supervisors should aim at *"Just treat(ing) them like human beings".* Mbali (agent) advocated that supervisors *"don't treat them like children at school…You know sometimes they shout, I don't like that, but I think now that they have to be in control. Like for instance, where I am from, it is like that, they treat you like you are in school, you know. Treat them like an adult. You can understand, acknowledge the child. You know previously the management we had they don't run away in a office, if the manager doesn't like what you are doing, they can even shout at you, you know, I don't know, they have no right."* Mbali (agent) mentioned the disapproval she had for the previous organization she was in whereby she experienced constant monitoring & reporting in to use kitchen, toilet etc; this served to fuel the perception she has of performance management as being a treating of individuals like children and a lack of control over what occurs within the boundaries of the agent-supervisor relationship.

Bringing in the agent-supervisor relationship, Sibongile (agent) touched on the negative aspects, whereby supervisors are perceived as not being informed on what is occurring in their environment, she is quoted as having said in relation to her supervisor, "*she is there, but I know more of what is going on around us, than she does."* This reveals a lack of connectedness between agent and supervisor which may undermine their relationship. The skill of supervisors is also very important due to the management role they play, as stated by Armistead et al (2002) the critical part supervisors play in the performance management systems

requires certain abilities and skill. The perception held here implies that that critical element is missing.

The role of communication as a means of avoiding intimidation and a tool for meeting team goals emerged, according to Khanyi (agent) communication is necessary, "*Not just downward communication also upward communication also a whole lot you know…so nobody feels intimidated, no intimidation just knowing - - because as soon as you are told 'If you don't do this you will get a warning' then you are intimidated, already you are afraid so no intimidation there…to me it should be where you are able to work as a team helping each other and everybody to reach where they are supposed to reach, work achievable goals really and everybody getting there so nobody feels threatened or afraid of anything really.*"

For Sandile (agent) the input of staff was perceived as lacking, noting that communication is a problem as well as lack of agent involvement. Taking this idea of communication a step further, he also highlighted the deficiency he felt existed with regards to feedback, "*Look involve the staff members…we are really feeling that for how many months with no feedback…get the staff involved in whatever decision that they want to make, the other thing, look at incentives, that is most important…everybody can attest to this, here it's communication from upwards going down. There is no communication from down going up. That is where the problem is. Now it should be both ways.*" Sandile (agent) felt that communication was very important but not in isolation, rather in conjunction with respect. Kgomotso (supervisor) felt that in her role as supervisor learning about people, knowing them, understanding them and most importantly being able to communicate with them is crucial.

The agent-supervisor role is very important due to the level at which the two parties interact, a well as the fact that they undergo the performance

management process together, it thus needs to be nurtured, developed and respected accordingly.

4.4. Perceptions of performance monitoring

The nature of call centres has resulted in work environments where call lengths are measured constantly and compliance to precise operating procedures is enforced. In some instances the statistics generated are the only criteria used for assessing agents thus directly conflicting with agent's desire to deliver quality calls, there is also the fact that the requirements of scripts and compliance allow little room for failure (Holdsworth and Cartwright, 2003). All these factors therefore no doubt are part of the influencers to the perceptions mentioned here, although the measurement plays only part of the performance measurement process, it has emerged as a significant component.

For supervisor Aseem (supervisor), what came to mind when defining performance management was, "*basically measuring the performance of a person, and how they have done, and what can you do to understand them, you know, their strengths or weaknesses.*" Manesh (agent) took this idea a step further, stating that performance management is "*for someone to manage my past experiences, basically, looking at my past experiences, strengths, weakness and trying to share that knowledge with others… it is basically finding your pros and cons, looking for your area of expertise and weaknesses, trying to come to a common conclusion with your manager, find ways to better yourself…*"Manesh's description encompassed a greater more holistic description of performance, seeing it as not only a rating but a review of current and past performance to find ways of improvement.

The negativity towards performance management extended to the theme of monitoring, which emerged for three reasons: monitor employee performance; monitor outputs in relation to business needs; and monitor outputs in order to determine monetary distribution. Performance measurement systems are

generally considered as ways to monitor and maintain control (Nani, Dixon, Vollmann, 1990 as cited in Amaratunga, and Baldry, 2002). Morgan (1986) proposed the idea of 'Organisations as Political Systems' stating that politics arises due to a diversity of interests, conflicts and power. In the monitoring images described below the role of power is a dominant one, which brings into play the possibility of internal politics, as well as the possible conflicts of interest arising from conflicting interests and desires from agents, supervisors and managers.

Associated to monitoring was a strong sense of being constantly watched with numerous negative views being depicted in the emergent images associated with the idea of monitoring. Stress and decrease in job satisfaction have been linked to a lack of control previously (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980 as cited in Holdsworth and Cartwright, 2002); the constant monitoring that emerged from metaphors used may suggest that there is a strong sense of being controlled and thus lack of control for the individual.

In call centres, performance monitoring is essential, with the managerial perspective describing the process monitoring of performance as supportive and developmental (Armistead, Kiely, Hole, and Prescott, 2002); this is not however reflected in people's perceptions of being monitored. This does not argue that it is not, rather that that message is not being perceived.

The first emergent image used to describe the monitoring element of performance management was that of a policeman, Tebogo (agent) described it as follows, "*I am visualising a policeman with uniform and everything*" and *"it's all about monitoring the individual and if you don't do this right, it's like a punishment they give you, and if you do this you will be arrested. And if you do this you will stay out, but it doesn't mean that you necessarily have any benefits here along those lines."* This image illustrates the punitive associations held regarding

performance management in a traditional manner as the image of the policeman suggests a respected form of authority, in that it's is law and final.

Not very far from the policeman description was that of being watched from a distance, according to Tsepho (agent), performance management is like "*someone standing by with binoculars, on the beach side, looking at someone, let's say on Robben Island, someone from Cape Town looking at someone at Robben Island, with the binoculars. Doing something, something that is all foul. So now the person is now is monitoring the person from Cape Town at Robben Island, seeing if that person is farming property or not. Are they doing what is required of them? Yet, they have not been there to Robben Island to farm themselves.*" Once again a very punitive perception pervades this image, also the fact that Robben Island has its own historical connotations may imply other meaning related to being oppressed.

The negative connotations with regards to monitoring continued to persist throughout peoples views, Tsepho (agent) describe performance management as a fish eagle, *"watching out from above. So the only difference there would be is the fish eagle is watching to see how you are sitting, as opposed to what you are doing. It feels like they are there to get you."*, he then went on to relate it to Dracula, stating that "*I was just thinking of Dracula, like there is someone watching over you the whole time. Watching to suck blood out of the people, and like, suck your blood dry.*" He further went on to say, *"I am sucked dry working here…I don't like coming anymore."* The above images are very dark and have a strong sense of imminent harm pervading them, they in themselves are quite alarming.

This element of fear in association with monitoring even led to the likening of performance management to the word terrorist and the feeling of being terrorised. The negative perceptions were not a foreign concept to several agents; Casey (agent) described performance management as being like two

well known terrorists, *"like Osama…it's like cold like Hitler that kind of thing."* These descriptions were very personal and evoked much emotion illustrating the personal relevance and importance performance management has to these individuals.

Khanyi (agent) felt that in describing performance management Big Brother would best describe the pressure and expectation she experiences, stating *"I could only imagine how the people on Big Brother feel just sitting there but half the time you feel that way, you are thinking, 'Okay I really need to go to the loo', but you are afraid that if you are going to sign off somebody will be here asking why am I signing off…you feel watched the whole entire time so yes to me Big Brother".* This image once again brings into play the measurement aspect of performance measurement, the call centre industry itself lends itself to the consistently applied method of measurement and reliance on statistics for measurement.

In holding this Big Brother perception, for Khanyi (agent) performance management had both negative and positive connotations, however the negative perceptions dominated in that she stated as a negative point the fact that *"I think, the thing is you know maybe if I had an understanding as to what are they doing when they are sitting there watching…but right now I feel like they just sit there and they watch and they just assume, they are waiting to catch you up, as soon as you do something wrong, they zap you, you know what I mean that's what it feels like."* On the other had in an attempt to highlight performance management in a more positive light, the negative aspects once again emerged, she noted *"There is a positive to it obviously because I mean the place needs to be running, you know it gets the place to where its running normally and functioning so yes that's the positive aspect…I mean you have a bunch of people sitting there scared that, I am going to do this and its going to be wrong and they are going to get me. Sometimes you are speaking to a person on the line and you are thinking you say something to them and right after you have said it and they have*

gone you realise what I said wasn't necessarily true, 'Oh my word I made one mistake' but everybody is so scared because they think, 'Oh my gosh they are going to pick it up, I am going to be in so much trouble' so yes that's the thing."

Once again the punitive perception of the monitoring element of performance management is evident in the Big Brother metaphor, illustrating how the system in place aimed at quality assurance and evaluating performance to improve performance is seen in a totally different light. The Big Brother metaphor also illustrates the power of metaphors in that in that one term Big Brother so much meaning exists and it in itself elicits a vivid image of the intrusion of being watched at all times without a chance for privacy.

This idea of constantly being watch extends to Manesh's description, he saw it as*, "people are looked upon and you are monitored and…you have to abide by each and every rule and adhere to everything…Sometimes it is not necessary because we are not children, but it also depends on people. Sometimes you can take advantage of the situation and maybe that's why things go that way."* Linked to Manesh's (agent) description of performance management was the notion of growth and development, in the sense that he believed that, *"There is room for improving yourself, it also depends on the individual."*

Negative perceptions of performance management held by some participants had within them a sense of being under attack, Casey (agent) stated that for her *"performance management comes to mind where companies want to nail you or the company wants to nail you because instead of looking at the positive they look at the negative where by its obviously because your performance management depends on your history so during the year even, you know they might not do anything to improve you but that performance management it's like a feeling of 'now I have got you now lets see what you have'. It's not a matter of you know 'how can you improve from here' because that is what is actually supposed to be I feel. This is where you are at with the next one you go a little bit*

higher but because there is no consistency…this is where you are at this is the action plan, 2 months, 2 weeks, monthly progress whatever report that we will be doing with the next one you are back a t square one."

Ashley (supervisor), is aware that performance management "*does have a negative connotation because whenever you hear about performance management in this company it's always the manager, always saying 'You are having problems with the performance managed' so it seems to have negative connotations so we know that its not only about you know performance...*" She thus as a supervisor goes into the performance management process bearing this in mind.

Agent Camilla (agent) is an example of an employee who perceives performance management as having negative connotations; she sees it as *"an opportunity for management to rap you on the knuckles. The performance appraisals and performance management, they don't have much substance they are pretty much a standard merit document that asks for certain standard items that you get allocated a tenth of or a fifth of or however many people there are on the team they divide equally and you are rated according to those…"*

The metaphors of monitoring related to control which is one of the eight constructs identified, they highlighted the fact that agents are generally under the impression that they have very little control, that rather supervisors wield control over them by constantly monitoring.

The prominence and pervasiveness of monitoring in call centres as identified by Holman (2003) cannot be ignored as being monitored is understandable and necessary in the call centre environment, however not to the stage whereby employees' perceptions are extremely negative and are experiencing feelings of being terrorised. A balance needs to be found with regards to the necessary monitoring of the job. The pervading negative perceptions of persecution and

threat are concerning due to the degree and they are expressed and passion they evoke, these views are evidently not taken lightly by the individuals.

4.5. Contradictions between perceptions of performance management and performance monitoring

Contradictions emerged in relation to perceptions of performance management and performance monitoring. This was evident in the fact that although performance management as a whole was viewed positively and as beneficial to the organisation at large and to the individual despite how it had been experienced, performance monitoring was viewed negatively.

The notion of performance management was viewed as being fairly large in scope in the ability it holds for growth and development, motivation and achievement of overall goals whilst performance monitoring was viewed as one dimensional with predominantly negative views of being monitored and persecuted being associated to it.

The negative perceptions of performance monitoring are not surprising in the call centre environment due to the large value attributed to monitoring in the form of metrics, calls taken and abandon rates (Miciak and Desmarais, 2001; Holman, 2003). In this environment performance is key and monitored very closely thus explaining the metaphors used.

What is interesting is that despite the performance monitoring element the other components of performance monitoring are still identified by some participants highlighting the fact that monitoring forms a part of the larger scope of performance management.

It is also not surprising that for some performance monitoring encompassed their complete view of what performance management is based on how they currently

experience it. This brings to light the need to fully educate on what performance management is as a whole and to educate staff about if fully before implementing such initiatives. How staff experience performance management, their understanding of it and the views they have of it is likely to be impacted on by the role they play in the process, thus this leads to deciphering the differences in images/metaphors used based on the level the employee is on, i.e. agent, supervisor or HR/management.

4.6. Images/metaphors used by employees at different levels in the organisation

In their descriptions of performance management, various differences emerged between employees of different levels. These are now to be discussed in further detail for each level, starting from management, followed by supervisors and then the descriptions of agents.

Table 3: Level variation in perceptions

POSITION	METAPHOR CATEGORY
HR/MANAGEMENT	Growth and development
SUPERVISOR	Growth and development Coordination and synergy Consistency Goals Motivation Attack
AGENT	Growth and development Coordination and synergy Consistency Attack Monitoring Attainability Order Culture

4.6.1. Management

The role of management in performance management is identified as critical in that they need to ensure that organisational objectives are translated into action (Nash, 1983; 1985), this relates to performance management as it too needs to be aligned. The group of managers composed of two call centre managers and one human resources manager formed the smallest group, they were in the most senior position of all three groups. Their metaphors of performance management fell into one area, that of growth and development, but particularly into the image of a living organism.

This image used to represent a living organism was that of a tree, both Antjie and Jade used this description in terms of how they perceived the current organisation as well as using it as an ideal. Interestingly enough, their descriptions of performance management seemed to be very positive, highlighting the necessities of training and growth and development, as well as the inherent potential the performance management system has. Overall their descriptions highlighted their positive views to the current performance management and the future possibilities of growth.

An overview of perceptions by management shows an acknowledgement of possible negativities in performance management however these applied to others such as agents and not themselves, they did not touch on the darker descriptions and perceptions held, overall management saw performance management as positive with great potential. Having identified the fact that agents may be apprehensive regarding performance management and have negative views this in no way impacted on the benefits and good they perceived performance management to have.

4.6.2. Supervisors

Having been identified as playing a critical role in performance management as well meaning and interpretation (Armistead et al, 2002), the perception supervisors have is important. Ultimately supervisors manage the performance management process with their respective teams and can play a critical role in the way performance management is perceived and occurs. The group of supervisors had views that were distributed into several categories; these categories were growth and development, coordination and synergy, consistency, goals, motivation and attack. An overview of their metaphors shows that like managers the majority of supervisors showed a positive view towards performance management with only two negative opinions voiced.

The positive perspectives described performance management, like management, as a tree or plant that with training and development may grow and prosper. Descriptions of an ideal fell into the category of coordination and synergy whereby all parties involved in the performance management process would have the opportunity to sit down and have a discussion as friends, based on mutual respect, trust and a positive attitude. This view generally supposes that all parties are aware of and support the notion that they are all working together towards a common goal.

A view held of performance management is one of a motivator serving to keep individuals alert and focused but in a non-threatening manner. Interestingly enough this view in some ways corresponds to the essential aim of performance as identified by Fisher et al (2003) in that if performance is managed well performance is likely to improve, this view is very different from that inherently associated with call centres of being "sweat shops".

Supervisors did not completely ignore the negative aspects associated to performance management, although only two supervisors introduced negative

perceptions into their descriptions. The first view being that of describing the performance management process as a tortoise thus viewing it as slow and inconsistent, this view brings into question the value of the performance management in terms of is it occurring timeously enough to get by-in and add value, as well as the subjective component, does it allow for fair contribution from the employee as although contributions may be accepted, as highlighted by Simmons (2002) how much of an influence can the employee really have within organisational parameters.

The second negative opinion voiced was less direct, it was not the supervisor's view of performance management as having negative characteristics, but rather it was a stated awareness of the fact that certain employees enter the performance management process with negative feelings of possibly being under attack. A similar view was held by management therefore indicating an inherent awareness from both the management and supervisory level of the negative perspectives brining into question whether these negative perspectives are founded and also what has or is being done to alter these views or create correct awareness of performance management to elicit positive perceptions.

4.6.3. Agents

The last and largest group was that of agents, the perceptions gleaned from their metaphors went across the spectrum, falling into the majority of categories raised, the relevant categories being: monitoring, growth and development, attainability, order, coordination and synergy, consistency, culture and attack.

Unlike with supervisors, the converse applied to agents whereby negative metaphors and perspectives dominated, the most prominent negative perspective being that of being monitored. This is not surprising considering the large role that performance measurement and statistics play within the call centre environment. As identified by Cartwright (2003) pressures to achieve high levels

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of performance, reduce costs and improve customer service facilities has resulted in the greater use of technology. It is evident that the images used support the notion that these methods of monitoring are seen to be both intrusive and controlling with negative perspectives dominating and implying a lack of empowerment.

Moving away from a purely one sided view of performance management as focusing solely on monitoring the idea of growth emerged. The idea of growth and development was a perspective shared by a large portion of agents with both negative and positive views; this highlights the fact that the role of growth and development in the performance management process is recognised, however it is viewed as limited and not functioning as it should, brining into play the negative element. Another point of concern for some was that of consistency, this view is shared with supervisors and is in itself a concern as stated previously as this brings into question the effectiveness of the performance management in place, as stated by Lockett (1992) a critical part of performance management is consistency and relevance.

In choosing an ideal performance management system, the majority of metaphors used fell into the category of coordination and synergy. These metaphors took the form of sports teams, friends communicating and a need for feedback. Ultimately agents desired a safe environment characterised by respect, open communication and mutual understanding that would ultimately result in some form of feedback. The critical fact here is therefore that agents were not against the notion of performance management itself, rather they wanted to feel comfortable and informed throughout the process in order to afford them a kind of empowerment in the way their performance is managed overall.

4.7. Summary

The emergent trend in descriptions and metaphors of performance management was a strong need and importance placed on skills and development by agents, as well as very negative views in terms of monitoring. Supervisors were more positive but did however have their own reservations. Managers on the other hand tended to be more positive and have an optimistic outlook.

The importance of performance management was noted by all, with the agent-supervisor relationship, communication, feedback and clarity being important factors. An important observation is that some of the perceptions held were extremely negative and dark, however overall despite the negative perspectives held by some all three levels realised the value of performance management and had their own ideas of what good performance management is.

For the purposes of the current research, eight constructs were identified from definitions of performance management in literature as being the defining characteristics of performance management, these eight constructs are control; alignment with organisational strategies; the achievement of overall goals and objectives; rewards; training; development; appraisal and motivation (Fisher, Katz, Miller and Thatcher, 2003; Amaratunga, and Baldry, 2002; Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright, 2003). Performance management, as evidenced in the emergent metaphors, may have different meanings for each individual. From the emergent metaphors, comparisons were made to the selected eight constructs to determine if any metaphors used in peoples' own perceptions and definitions of performance management relate to definitions found in literature.

Links were made to the eight identified constructs in terms of control, alignment with organisational strategies, the achievement of overall goals and objectives, training and development, appraisal, rewards and motivation. The eight constructs were referred to be it directly or indirectly. Aspects such as training

that were not referred to explicitly, were indirectly referred to in terms of skills and development. Peoples' perceptions and definitions of performance management overall did fall into and encompass the eight constructs considered to be defining components of performance management.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has engaged in a presentation and discussion of the results obtained form the present study. It has reflected the fact that although in some regards agents and supervisors have differing views to performance management, they also have similarities and essentially they appreciate the concept of performance management, even if they may not agree with how they are or have experienced it in the past. An interesting part of metaphor that is not to be ignored is that in highlighting certain interpretations it tends to force others into a background role thus potentially creating distortions (Morgan, 2001)