

ABSTRACT

The call centre environment has become an interesting new venue for research into organisational issues, having grown extensively both internationally and in South Africa, thus playing a crucial role in most industries. In call centres where high value is placed on the meeting of targets and metrics, performance management is crucial. There are numerous differing definitions when it comes to what exactly performance management is, what these definitions have in common however is that they include one or more of the following eight constructs: 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). Perceptions and definitions of performance management may vary between agents, supervisors and managers. In order to determine what perceptions employees at different levels held of performance management in call centres, the exploration of metaphors was employed as they are thought to provide a basis for uncovering perceptions, attitudes and feelings which were previously subconscious or not articulated. The aim of this research was thus to determine: what images employees use to define performance management; what similarities and differences exist in the images and definitions used by employees from different levels within the organisation; and how the images and definitions relate to constructs used to define performance management in the literature. Interviews were conducted with 18 call centre agents, 6 supervisors and 3 managers. The results revealed that employees used both negative and positive images to describe performance management, some of the images did relate to some of the eight constructs, and perceptions of performance management differed according to organisational position with supervisors and managers using more positive images to describe performance management.