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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION – THE GREAT DIVIDE

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ABSTRACT
Performance management in universities has been introduced increasingly throughout the 1990s as a response to political ideology, higher education policy, fiscal conditions and the industrial relations environment. Through an examination of Australian universities EBAs in this research, we can see the different views of, and approaches to, performance management. The framework used in this paper has summarised performance management approaches in four ways and raised questions centred on the linking of the performance management system to strategic goals, the types of feedback mechanisms used, the contrast between its use as developmental or monitoring and control tool, and the integration with other HRM policies. There are a number of interesting findings. Although strategic objectives are clearly stated in the majority of performance management statements, the use of performance management as a developmental or control tool is less clear. In addition, universities are increasingly using the performance management system to reward academic staff in ways that were traditionally considered standard working rights and conditions. In this vein, the linking of performance management to what has been considered ‘normal’ work practices such as increments and study leave can be considered as part of managerialism attempts to control, even though motherhood statements in relation to strategy and developmental approaches may be also be made.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s higher education in Australia has been the focus of major restructure and reform in a search for greater efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. These reforms have included managerialism and New Public Management, Dawkins’ higher education policy reforms and the National Training Reform Agenda. These policies were designed to increase efficiency and reduce costs through amalgamations, downsizing and changes in delivery, and increase the accessibility to and scope of education.

A key component of higher education reform both in Australia and overseas has been the search for improved quality assurance and management and within that context a focus on academic accountability. Universities in Australia formally introduced the concept of measuring academic performance in 1991 with the introduction of ‘performance appraisal for development purposes’ (Lonsdale, 1998). Since that time a number of reviews and audits have highlighted the central role of performance management of staff in achieving...
good quality outcomes. Running parallel with these policy and management changes in higher education were changes in the industrial relations arena which have encouraged an emphasis on efficiency and productivity through decentralisation and bargaining at the enterprise level. More recently government industrial relations policy includes a greater focus on the individual and individual agreement making (Bray, Deery, Walsh & Waring, 2005).

These parallel changes in the Australian university environment have major implications for the work of academics yet it is surprising that since the early 1990s there is a paucity of research on the performance management (PM) of academics. This paper explores the development of performance management by examining the current Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) for 36 Australian universities. First we outline the key issues in the literature and the background to performance management in Australian universities. Secondly, we explore similarities and differences in the EBAs using the PM literature and recommendations from the Hoare Report as an analytical framework (1995). Finally we draw some conclusions and point to further areas for research.

2 DISCUSSION

2.1 BACKGROUND

Performance management can be defined as a mechanism to improve organisational performance by linking and aligning individual, team and organisational objectives and results (ANAO 2004-5, p.13). Critical success factors of performance management systems include their alignment with the organisation’s strategic goals, their credibility within the organisation and their integration with other HRM functions such as reward systems, learning and development and career progression and promotion (ANAO 2004-5 p14). De Cieri and Kramar (2005) suggest that performance management has three major purposes, a strategic purpose – which includes the articulation of how the goals are to be linked, a developmental purpose with a focus on the individual and an administrative purpose which includes decision making. Performance management consistently emerges as one of the key components in the research into high performance or high commitment work places (Zacharatos, Barling & Iverson, 2005; Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg, 2001; Godard, 2004). This research suggests that when performance management is aligned, integrated and credible it can contribute to improved organisational performance.

One significant tool of performance management of the individual is performance appraisal, a process that allows for the assessment of the individual in the achievement of organisational goals and improved performance (De Cieri and Kramar 2005, p.325). Performance appraisal usually contains a process of individual review that includes some aspect of measurement or evaluation of the work done. Hence the tool can be viewed by those reviewed positively as a developmental experience or negatively as an exercise in monitoring and control. Research suggests that despite its promise many practitioners and employees in a wide range of industries are dissatisfied with and cynical about performance management processes. Their dissatisfaction often focuses on the application of the performance appraisal tool and the often judgemental process of review (Parker, 2003).

In Australian universities historically the focus has largely been on performance appraisals of individual staff rather than performance management per se. Performance appraisals were introduced into Australian universities in 1988 under an Industrial Award of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC). Considerable debate ensued as to their underlying purpose and whether it was for the developmental of academic staff or for managerialist reasons ie for greater monitoring and control of academic staff (Ryan
As Lonsdale (1990, p.101) suggested, “Much needs to be done to ensure that their application in the higher education context occurs in a manner which is sensitive to the unique characteristics of the academic enterprise”. In 1990 it was decided by the AIRC that an amendment to the Award should be made which saw performance appraisals, designed for developmental purposes, incorporated into the University Industrial Award. However, despite the AIRC determining that performance appraisals for academics should have a developmental focus (as opposed to a managerialist focus) Ryan (1991, p.91) notes, “...the term developmental appears in the rhetoric and methods advocated by managerialists and developmentalists alike [and] often obscures the different ideologies and intentions guiding the two approaches”.

Lonsdale (1998) argues that the development of performance appraisals and performance management in universities internationally has occurred through successive generations. The first generation reflected a narrow performance appraisal approach which involved formal assessment by supervisors and feedback provided to subordinates. This approach was usually authoritarian in nature, individualistic, non aligned to strategic goals and reflected a monitoring and control oriented approach to staff management. He suggests however, that the approach surrounding the introduction of performance appraisal into higher education in Australia was a ‘second generation’ approach with two clear characteristics. The first was that the key objective of staff appraisal was for developmental purposes, and second, appraisal schemes needed to be consistent with the values of the scholarly purposes of the university (National Steering Committee on Staff Appraisal, 1995). Clearly a more strategic approach to performance management was beginning to occur. However, this approach was underpinned by some assumptions, first, that staff appraisal is the appropriate mechanism for identifying the needs of academic staff and is effective in doing so, second that the identification of developmental needs leads to successful development activity by academic staff and third that staff development activity leads in turn to improved performance (Lonsdale 1998, p.305). From the results of a two year national study on the outcomes of performance appraisals Lonsdale (1998, p.305) concluded that, “staff appraisal for ‘developmental purposes’ turned out to be unsuccessful”. He suggests that the failure of performance appraisals to deliver the expected performance improvements and subsequent organisational outcomes compelled universities to re-consider their previous approach to performance management.

The findings of the Higher Education Management Review Committee (Hoare, 1995) and the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy (West, 1998) suggested that universities needed to urgently respond at both the systems and institutional levels to the turbulent change being experienced in the environment.

It also needs to be kept in mind that in the late 1980s with the advent of New Public Management, the managerialist paradigm arose across the public sector both domestically and internationally with discourse centred on efficiency, cost reduction, and responsiveness and accountability (Dunford, Bramble & Littler, 1998, p.386). Funding cut backs, amalgamation of instrumentalities and services, including universities, deregulation and decentralisation were tools of this approach. Universities have had to operate within this ideology and adapt to the changing focus of government in areas including ideology, and the fiscal and industrial relations environment.

Hence universities set about changing their performance management systems to be more closely aligned to their strategic direction. Since that time there has been increasing evidence that universities are attempting to do this by enhancing staff productivity and organisational effectiveness through changes to their performance management system via their enterprise agreements (Lonsdale, 1998). Lonsdale (1998) describes this as a ‘third generation’ approach and suggests that it is reflected in a central recommendation in the Hoare Report which states that the aims of any performance management system should not only be ‘based on agreed performance and
developmental objectives for the individual’ but also should be to based on key principles. These principles include first, the need to have a clear relationship between the performance of an individual staff member and the strategic direction of ‘the relevant department, school or faculty, or where appropriate, the university’. Secondly, ‘to inform and provide feedback to staff on the level of their performance and skill development within that strategic context’. This feedback could include comment from supervisors, colleagues, staff, students or other appropriate persons. Thirdly, to ‘identify areas of future development for staff and formulate action plans for fostering their career development’; and finally ‘to generate data for making decisions on matters such as probation, increments, tenure contract renewal, and the management of diminished or unsatisfactory performance. As far as possible, the consideration of these matters, currently undertaken in a disparate manner, should be brought to together’. (Hoare, 1995 cited in Lonsdale 1998, p.307)

Clearly the stated purpose has moved from a narrow focus on performance appraisal to recognition for the need to develop performance management systems in universities that are strategic, developmental and administrative and are also aligned, integrated and credible within the organisation.

The development of Enterprise Bargaining throughout the 1990s has provided a mechanism for individual universities to develop their own performance management systems suited to their own needs. University Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) have been negotiated collectively at the local level by the National Teachers Education Union (NTEU) since 1994. Since that time the academic sector has had four bargaining rounds in which academic performance has been a key component. This new industrial environment has given universities an opportunity to determine their own form of performance management. Despite the fact that it has been the covert policy of the NTEU to engage in pattern bargaining and if possible have similar clauses in agreements across universities, it is possible that these systems can vary considerably between universities.

So a number of questions concerning the current status of performance management in Australian universities emerge. These include, what do performance management systems look like in Australian universities today? Are they linked to strategic goals if so how and what kind of feedback mechanisms do they include? Do they have a developmental focus or they more concerned with monitoring and control? Are they becoming more integrated and streamlined with other HRM policies? Importantly are there different types of performance systems emerging in universities with different foci? One way to begin to answer these questions is to explore the role and status of performance management in Enterprise Bargaining Agreements. As EBAs are legally binding documents the inclusion of performance management clauses and how and where they are expressed can give valuable insight into the importance that the university places on PM systems and the approach that the university takes to the performance management of its staff. This paper examines the Enterprise Bargaining Agreements of Australian universities to identify similarities and differences in the approach that Australian universities are taking in the performance of their academic staff.

### 2.2 BACKGROUND

First, we accessed 36 EBAs directly through the university websites. As EBAs are public documents we could have accessed them through the relevant industrial relations agencies however, those universities selected had their agreements readily accessible. The documents were analysed by identifying the section headed “Performance Management” or the most similar nomenclature. It needs to be noted that several universities chose to separate or spread elements often regarded as coming under the umbrella of ‘performance management’ across the EBA. It did not always appear as a discreet section, however, where possible the information was gleaned from the
introduction to the section in general and/or the section related to performance management. Two universities chose to write only one and two lines respectively on performance management in the EBA, and in doing so refer the reader to relevant university policies for more detail. Those policies were not accessed for this analysis.

The clauses on performance management were analysed using the Hoare Report (1995) as the framework. These included four major areas as stated previously. First the links between organisational and departmental strategic objectives and staff performance; second, appropriate feedback mechanisms; third, a focus on staff development and career progression; and finally data being used for other matters including reward, dealing with unsatisfactory performance, and integration of policies.

Strategic objectives and staff performance: This key area was examined in two ways. First, to see if there was a relationship identified between the work of the individual and the organisation's strategic focus and second, to examine the nature of that relationship.

Feedback mechanisms: This area was explored by first ascertaining if EBAs stipulated any element of feedback and if they did was it at the level of performance and skill development or just one of the two. The analysis did not look at the mechanisms EBAs used to glean this information which are more likely to be part of the performance management tool and not articulated in the EBA.

Staff development and career progression: This major area was examined using two criteria; did the EBA include future development of staff and if they did, did they include action plans or mechanisms to facilitate this development?

Data for making decisions on other matters including reward, performance improvement and integration of policies: To explore this area all of the EBAs were examined to ascertain if, in their purpose or introduction they identified any of the following five areas contained in the Hoare Report (1995), probation, increments, tenure, contract renewal and the management of underperformance. In addition the EBAs were examined to see if there were other uses identified for the data. Finally we looked for integration and linkages between key areas.

2.3 FINDINGS

Strategic objectives and staff performance:

An examination of the thirty six EBA's was undertaken to see if they identified the link between the performance management of staff and the strategic direction of the university. This commonly included a statement such as:

"...The Performance Development Framework supports staff to develop to their full potential to achieve personal and professional goals congruent with the strategic and operational objectives of the university".

"...ensure that the professional development policy and practice within the University is directly linked to organisational development and the realisation of the University's vision, mission and goals; and give strategic guidance to providers of professional development activities".

Table 1: Link between performance management and strategic direction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Relationship</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seventy-two percent (26) universities could be said to link individual performance with organisational performance in the sense that their EBAs had a clear statement with this intent. However, twenty-eight percent (10) of university EBAs made no mention of strategic links.

The second part of this analysis examined the nature of the relationship and whether the relationship between the employer and the academic could be loosely described as ‘developmental’ or ‘managerial’. Examples that we considered ‘developmental’ included:

“A performance development and review program encourages the development and maintenance of a culture of continual improvement within a productive, positive and harmonious work environment where staff and supervisors work in partnership to achieve personal and professional goals aligned with the university’s strategic and operational objectives”; and

“The university’s development as an innovative scholarly and global university meeting the needs of the 21st century is inextricably linked to the development of all of the university staff.” and,

“Both the university and academic staff members accept the responsibility for performance enhancement and career development.”

‘Managerial’ responses included: “All staff members are requested to participate in performance planning and monitoring as required in the university’s policy”; and

“All academic staff employed on a full-time or part-time basis...will be required to undertake a performance review on an annual basis”; and

“The Career and Performance Development Scheme … is the formal and periodic setting of that staff members performance objectives and the assessment of performance and development needs.”

Other similar statements included “The university will continue to use the performance appraisal scheme as one mechanism for individuals to contribute to organisational productivity and performance.”

Table 2: Nature of relationship between employer and employee exhibited by the performance management system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Relationship</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerialist</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using these definitions of the thirty six universities analysed, we categorised fifty-six percent (20) as having a developmental focus and forty-four (16) as having a managerialist approach.

Table 3: Matrix identifying links between performance management and strategic direction and relationship between employer and employee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strategic link</th>
<th>No strategic Link</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerialist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the twenty universities which we categorised as having a developmental focus, nineteen of them also identified a strategic link between organisational directions and staff performance. Of the twenty six universities who had a clear statement of strategic links, nineteen also had a developmental focus. There were nine universities which had neither a strategic nor developmental focus identified in their EBA. And of the ten
universities with no statement of strategic link to performance management nine of these also were categorised as having a managerialist approach.

**Feedback mechanisms:**

Staff feedback mechanisms were identified in the performance management systems of seventy-eight percent of university EBAs (28 out of 36). As staff feedback is a key component of performance management this is hardly surprising. Also of the other eight, such mechanisms may have been contained in internal performance management policy. Of these twenty eight EBAs, two provided feedback only on performance with no mention made of any skill development.

**Table 4: Performance management’s provision of feedback on level of skill development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide feedback on level of skill development</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Staff development and career progression:**

Of all four items in the Hoare report’s recommendations this section was the most strongly reported. Sixty-seven percent (24) of universities identified the need to identify future development for staff in their EBAs. However, only twenty-nine percent (7/24) of that group mentioned, in the broadest interpretation possible, any form of action plan to put this into operation. Although one university specifically identified that the development of staff should be in the teaching area.

**Table 5: Performance management system used to identify future development needs and action plans to do so**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify future development</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mention action plans</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data for making decisions on other matters including reward, improvement and streamlining and integration of policies:**

An examination of the EBA’s revealed that universities used the data collected from performance management systems for a variety of uses including five key criteria identified in the Hoare Report. Table 6 shows these.

**Table 6: Major uses of performance management data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USES FOR DATA</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract renewal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of diminished or unsatisfactory performance</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two universities specifically stated that performance management data was not to be used for the management of poor performance or for disciplinary reasons. Interestingly, not one university included all five of these criteria but two universities included four out of the five listed above. Also twelve universities had none of the five criteria and six universities only had one of the five listed. The most popular usage of the data was management of diminished or unsatisfactory performance (44%).

2.3.1 Other Uses for the Data

Some universities offered several other uses for the data other than those listed in the Hoare report. These included; promotion (12), rewards (13), including bonuses and loadings (3), performance-related pay (1) and unspecified rewards (9); Outside Study Program and study leave (4), conference attendance (2), conference travel (1), secondment (2), leave without pay for developmental purposes (2), research grants (2), fellowships (1), special studies (1), work priorities (1), scholarship (1), internal recognition (1), staff exchange (1), job rotation (1), job evaluation (1), VC Awards (1). Some EBAs include both academic and general staff so it is likely that some uses relate specifically to general staff and some to academic staff.

2.4 DISCUSSION

The findings from this study clearly show that the majority of Enterprise Bargaining Agreements in Australian universities express a strategic focus to performance management. This means that individual academic performance is increasingly being linked to organisational goals. What we do not know is how well this sits with a workforce that traditionally guards its right to practice its ‘academic freedom’ that is, to seek and find new knowledge in many different directions. The increasing strategic focus could be seen by some as an organisational straightjacket that must be resisted.

It is also clear that although most universities appear to have a developmental approach to performance management there are a number that have a narrower focus with an emphasis on monitoring and control. We have not explored the reason for this. Is it due to the ideology of the university or council? Does it represent the weakness of the NTEU in the bargaining process? What cannot be ignored is the managerialist focus of successive governments in the federal arena and their increasing control over universities alongside what we could call ‘negative’ pronouncements on academic work, research and freedom. This is likely to be even more significant due to the direct involvement of government into industrial relations in the higher education through the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements placing restrictions on the content of Enterprise Agreements and university policies in order to access a funding pool of $260 million (Barnes 2006). How this influences the performance management approaches stated in the EBA clauses is worth further exploration.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this research project is the range of issues emerging in the sections regarding how performance management data is used for decision making. It is clear that this data is increasingly being used by universities as a basis for reward. This is hardly surprising - any performance management system needs to encourage maximum performance and this can be done by providing a range of rewards that are valued by the workers (DeCieri & Kramar, 2005). However, while only one EBA specifies performance related pay, in a number of EBAs performance is clearly linked to promotion, bonuses and loadings, and other unspecified rewards. Many of the rewards emerging in this project are in areas such as increments, study leave and OSP, conference leave and conference travel which have often been seen as ‘rights’ rather than rewards. We do not know whether academics have accepted this different approach to what could be seen as the necessary tools of the trade.

Reward is a contentious area in education. The Karpin Report (1995) suggested management schools should manage the performance of staff by the use of key performance indicators, 360 degree feedback and developmental plans for academics. This would then be linked to an incentive scheme and performance bonuses. This was supported also by the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy discussion paper.
(1997, p 36) which stated “The most direct incentives for good teaching are to pay gifted teachers more or provide them with other benefits in the form of enhanced conditions of employment”. However, despite the move to enterprise bargaining which ostensibly would give universities the freedom to introduce performance related pay systems little appears to have been done formally. This could be due to the strength of the academic union which in principle opposes the use of performance related pay (PRP) (Heneman, 1992) and supports existing formal salary structures in universities as a means to limit administrative discretion and perceived favouritism. This desire for similar treatment is often articulated as an attempt to preserve worker unity, maintain good morale and a cooperative workplace (Lazear, 1989). Or it could be that the financial restrictions and constraints that universities work within, including restrictions on fees and student places, make pay restructuring and the uncertainty that accompanies it undesirable and risky.

Instead of an overhaul of the payment structures in academia what we might be witnessing is management seeking greater discretion over a range of rewards some linked to salary in an attempt to improve productivity and to motivate academics. Grant (1998) argues that many Canadian universities have merit plans as part of their formal salary structure including things such as conditions and criteria for tenure and promotion, market supplements, equity funds to remedy salary anomalies and non-salary benefits. While it might not be possible for Australian universities at this point in time to introduce merit pay, it might be possible through the use of these ‘other’ uses of performance data to achieve the same end. It appears that Australian universities are endeavouring to reward staff through a range of measures.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The framework used in this paper has summarised performance management approaches in four ways and raised questions centred on the linking of the performance management system to strategic goals, the types of feedback mechanisms used, the contrast between its use as developmental or monitoring and control tool, and the integration with other HRM policies. This paper has used an examination of universities EBAs to explore such questions and uncover the importance that the university places on PM systems and the approach that the university takes to the performance management of its staff. Although strategic objectives are clearly stated in the majority of performance management statements, the contrast between the use of performance management as a developmental or control tool is less clear. The introduction of performance management systems per se can be regarded as an outcome of managerialism with its emphasis on efficiency and control, and individual appraisals at the expense of collective negotiation. In this vein, the linking of performance management to what has been considered ‘normal’ work practices such as increments and study leave can be considered as part of managerialism attempts to control, even though motherhood statements in relation to strategy and developmental approaches may be also be made. Whist the majority of performance management systems stipulate feedback as a tool this is hardly surprising. What is interesting is how performance is judged and by whom, and what type of skill development is seen to be applicable for academics? Similarly, the development of staff is a clear priority of the majority of performance management systems. This raises questions as to how it is to be funded, and who judges the development needed and in what areas?

The next steps in the research need to revisit ANOA’s (2004) assertion of the importance of alignment, integration and credibility to performance management techniques. Alignment has been broadly explored in the relationship between EBA clauses and statements of strategic intent and this has been found to be quite favourable. However, further research is warranted in how these EBA clauses are implemented in universities. A statement of strategic intent in itself may simply be rhetoric. The questions that require addressing are: how performance goals are linked to strategic objectives and what objectives are they linked to? This is important in addressing Hoare’s (1995) assertion that appraisal schemes needed to be consistent with the values of the scholarly
purposes of the university. The appraisal process and the performance objectives are clear indicators of such values.

The importance of process is linked to credibility. Again this needs further research. Questions in this regard that come to mind are: Is the system accepted by academics? Are the individual goals negotiated and accepted by staff? Is the ranking of performance performed objectively? In regard to integration the research can be expanded to examine performance appraisal’s links to human resource planning, recruitment and selection, and succession planning. Through an examination of Australian universities EBAs we can see the different views of and approaches to performance management. The increasing use of the performance management system to reward academic staff in ways that were traditionally considered standard working rights and conditions has been an important point uncovered in this research. Even though universities, in general, state that they link performance management to strategic objectives, and that performance management is developmental, and involves feedback on performance and skill development, the next stage of the research will attempt to match such pronouncements to practice.

4 REFERENCES

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