

# AN INTEGRATED AND EMPIRICAL MODEL OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT. A CASE STUDY

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*In this paper we present a new and competitive personnel assessment procedure, developed and tested on the General Social Care and Child Protection Department of Bihor County. The procedure is based on behavioral anchors evaluation scales and has a seven folded structure, completed by the employee and the hierarchical coordinator. The evaluation of this scale proved valid and also revealed the fact that in assessing the professional performances we cannot use only the self-evaluation, which is under the risk of subjective influence, but in the same time we cannot use only the evaluation of managers because they don't capture specific aspects of behavior on the workplace.*

*Key words: performance assessment, personnel evaluation strategies.*

*Cod JEL: M00, M1, M52, J39*

## **Performance assessment between theory and practice**

The efficiency of organizations can be analyzed also in terms of the efficiency of its personnel: to what cost and with what results a certain activity can be carried out, how can one improve the results obtained, and how does each individual contribute to the achievement to the organization's goals are important questions. In the dynamic of labor markets and theories as well as practices of human resources, the role of assessment of goals, of structures and as people became an important dimension of evaluation of a given organization. Having efficient employees is a key element in both public and private organizations.

In an organizational structural, the appreciation of professional performances represents a goal which focuses mostly on an objective measurement of results. This activity is based on self evaluation as well as on a received feed-back regarding personal achievements. Nonetheless, personnel assessment can offer a starting point in stimulating performance, a method of correction deficiencies related to work results, as well as the foundation of human resources management strategies.

Romania is one the first countries that regulated this activity through the Law no. 12/1971 and then consequently in 1998, 1999 and 2001 (Laws no. 154/1998, 188/1999 and Governmental Regulations no. 775/1998 and 1084/2001) through which there was initiated a personnel assessment system first for public employees and then for other categories of personnel (Pitariu, H., 2003, p. 113-115).

Professional performance assessment represents a complex activity based on a synthetic analysis of previous activity undertaken by a person. This procedure starts from establishing the objectives of assessment, continues with the investigation of the situation and the construction of assessment instruments, data gathering and analysis, interpretation of results, description of performances and the creation of a strategy.

“Personnel assessment can be defined as a set of processes through which critical judgments are issued on the personnel, considered individually, as employees in a concrete position, with the aim of revealing the key elements of the way objectives are achieved, concrete actions are carried out and the responsibilities and competences are practiced, as well as to set the retributions, define the training strategy in terms of qualification improvement needed and elaborate the promotion perspectives”. (Nicolescu, O., Verboncu, I., 1995, p. 324)

It is a complex process, often controversial. In order to ensure the correct measurement of results it is important to correlate this activity with an advanced evaluation technology which can offer logically set criteria, realist performance standards, as well as the use of adequate evaluation instruments and methods. In this context the evaluation procedures should correspond to the firm's vision regarding the way activities are organized and coordinates personnel, the procedures being standardized to avoid biases induced by the evaluator. Standardization is ensured through training of evaluators, use of written forms and audio-visual materials. More, the information used should be reliable to avoid errors in the results (Byars, L., Rue, L. W., 1991, p. 311-343).

Analyzing the way organizations assess personnel performances one can draw the conclusion that there is no ideal procedure, the methods and techniques used being the result of several factors such as: organization culture, the size of the firm, domain of activity, strategic trends, objectives, the employment methods, remuneration and promotion system, etc. (Mathis, R. L., Nica, P. C., Rusu, C., 1997, p. 162). In this context it is crucial to set several methodological and organizational standards for the assessment of personnel;

- the assessment criteria should be differentiated on the nature of jobs, the potential of the organization and its objectives;
- assessment should be unitary,
- assessment should be relevant, conducted during a longer period of time,
- assessment methods should focus on the characteristics of each separate jobs,
- assessment should be based only in correct information which can be verified,
- assessment results should be communicated to the persons evaluated, along with necessary recommendations. (Burloiu, P., 1997, p. 157)

The elaborated models of personnel assessment, as opposed to the empirical ones (Pitariu, H. D., 2003), are determined on criteria, concepts, methodologies and evaluation standards based on scientific knowledge. These models target the performance analysis of managers and personnel on the following elements: the structure of personality and specific experience, process related mechanisms of professional behavior, and the product of professional behavior.

Another relevant aspect of the characterization of performance assessment systems is represented by the social actors involved in this process. Thus, depending on the organizational structure and culture, one can find only the involvement of the employee and its direct coordinator, or we can find also the involvement of: colleagues and collaborators, subordinates, internal or external clients, or even external evaluators (Abrudan, M., 2009). In this sense, it is worth mentioning that participative managerial styles promote an assessment procedure in which the assessed person is actively involved sometimes even at setting sanctions and personal developmental plans.

### **Professional evaluation scales**

One way of assessing the professional performance refers to the use of behavioral scales. They proved to be the most effective types of performance appraisal systems, mainly due to their reliability, high validity and the possibility to reduce systematic errors compared to other evaluation methods. In this category are included the behavioral anchors scales (S.E.A.C) and the mix standard evaluation scales (SEMS) (Codoban et. all, 2003, p. 46). The evaluation scales that are focused on behavior are continuous assessment techniques in which the items used for classification are possible examples of conduct relating to a specific job. This kind of scales measures the specific level of performance for each dimension of the job. The evaluation scales based on behavior reveals concrete conducts, observable and measurable corresponding to the target job. Using behavioral anchor scales in the professional performance evaluation process we can obtain specific information about the persons which are evaluated. The first step in this technique is to establish the criteria that need to be followed in the evaluation process, and further to award grades for each criterion (Pânișoară, G., Pânișoară, I., O., 2007, p. 154). The starting point for the elaboration of a assessment system such as the behavioral anchor scales is the idea that the assessment errors can be avoided if the assessor is actively involved in

the grading process, objectively filling up the evaluation form. Also, is extremely important to involve the assessor in the elaboration of the scoring system (Pitariu, H. D., 2003, p. 153).

The logic of the scales with behavioral anchor S.E.A.C. (Landy, F. J., Trumbo, D. A., 1980, p. 276) is that the anchors are explanatory statements that can accurately distinguish a good from a weak one employee. These types of scales meet three important criteria: professional success factors are defined with great accuracy, anchors describe with precision the positional categories of each job dimension, and the grading process is based on specific instructions for operating the scale.

The construction of an expectation evaluation scale implies the involvement of specialist in the elaboration process (Smith, P. C., Kendall, L. M., 1963, p. 149-150). In the initial phase, specialists establish the dimensions of a certain sector. Subsequently, to each dimension are assigned professional performance behaviors: superior, medium and inferior. These examples of behaviors are then selected using a group of experts whose task is to eliminate those behaviors that cannot be properly framed in the dimensions. The selected items will represent the final scale used in this research.

### **Data and measure**

To measure the job performance recorded by the social workers from the General Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection Bihor, we used an evaluation scale with behavioral anchors, based on the model of behavioral anchors scales SEAC. The scale was build using the support of professionals operating in the institution in order to capture specific aspects of the activity from this type of institution. We note that the scale with behavioral anchors used in this study was not validated before.

The research was conducted with the participation of 50 social workers and 8 head of services, employees of the Directorate of Social Work and Child Protection of Bihor. For the construction of the scale we involved the 8 head of services. Using the information gathered from them and the legal information regarding the performance criteria used in the individual performance evaluation of employees in public institutions (Order no. 13 012 of 13 November 2007), together with the experts, we drawn the items and the description of each item from the scale. This form was examined by a number of 7 experts (sociologists, social workers, psychologists), who were tasked with the discussion and the selection of the items included in the final scale. This evaluation scale uses professional performance criterion for the social workers who work directly with the beneficiaries of social services.

The scale is built on 7 dimensions (see Table 1). For each item, the assessor can give grades rating from 1 to 9, where 9 represents exceptional performance, 5 represents average performance and 1 represents poor performance.

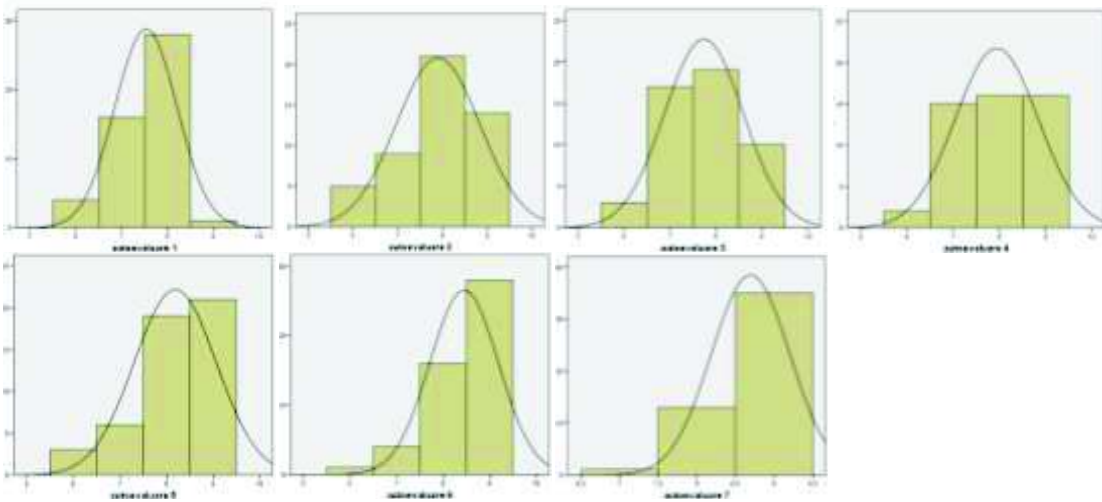
One of the objectives of the study is the validation of the scale, both for the self-evaluation and for the evaluation by the manager. The research also sought to capture the difference between the self-evaluation scores and the evaluation scores.

### **Results**

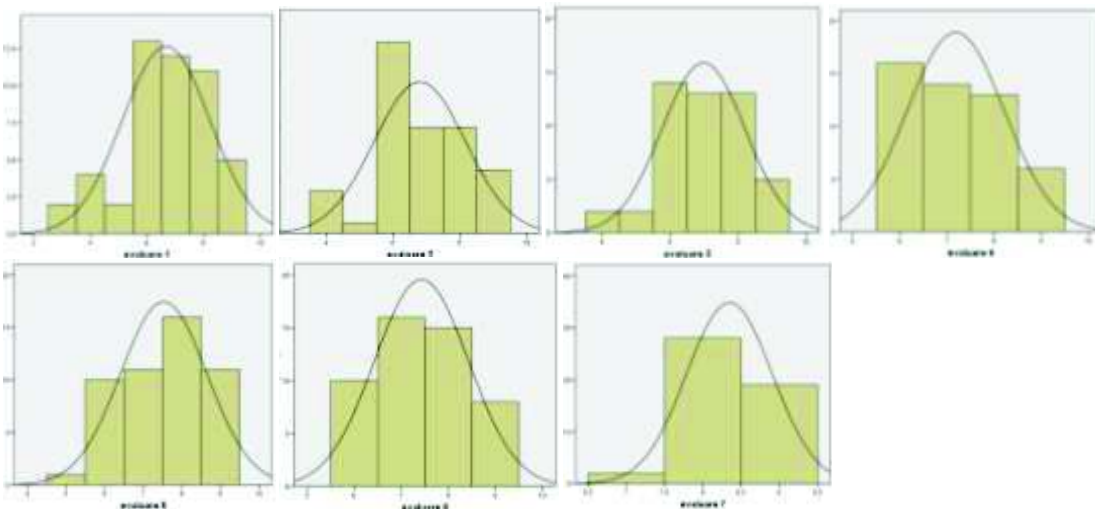
As presented in the table below, results show differences between the scores obtained through self-evaluation and scores obtained through evaluation by directors. Also the graphic representations of the distribution of scores for each dimension reveal us differences regarding the normal curve. The graphics implies higher Kurtosis values for the distribution of scores from the evaluation scale, compared to the self-evaluation scales. This means that managers more frequently use values from the two poles of the scale, compared with employees who have a tendency to use central values for the self-positioning on the scale. For each dimension of the evaluation scale, employees obtained lower scores from the directors, compared to the values given by themselves.

**Table 1. Mean values for each dimension**

	SELFEVALUATION		EVALUATION	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
D1. Theoretical and practical competences	7,53	0,680	6,67	1,546
D2. Professional interest, self-evaluation	7,90	0,941	6,80	1,369
D3. The ability of problems solving	7,73	0,861	6,98	1,233
D4. The ability of organization and planning	7,94	0,899	7,18	1,034
D5. Interpersonal relationships and communication abilities	8,18	0,882	7,53	1,120
D6. Compliance with labor discipline	8,45	0,738	7,43	1,000
D7. Ethic behavior	8,69	0,508	8,35	0,561



**Figure 1. Distribution of the dimensions from the SELF-EVALUATION scale**



**Figure 2. Distribution of the dimensions from the EVALUATION scale**

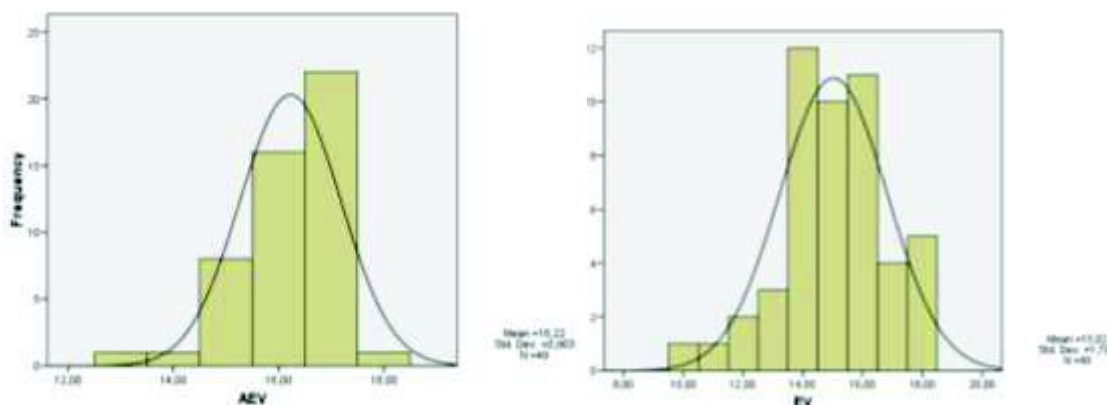
Further analyses reveals significant statistical differences between all the dimensions used in the evaluation scale ( $p < 0.001$ ). The test results suggest that the directors significantly gave lower grades to

their employees, compared with the values given by the employees for themselves. In this sense we draw attention to the subjective issues that may arise in the process of self-evaluation.

**Table 2. Differences between the mean values of each dimension from the Self-evaluation scale (SEV) and Evaluation scale (EV)**

SEV-EV	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
D1	0,857	1,620	,231	,392	1,323	3,703	48	,001
D2	1,102	1,279	,183	,735	1,469	6,033	48	,000
D3	0,755	1,315	,188	,377	1,133	4,018	48	,000
D4	0,755	1,283	,183	,386	1,124	4,119	48	,000
D5	0,653	1,267	,181	,289	1,017	3,607	48	,001
D6	1,020	1,108	,158	,702	1,339	6,444	48	,000
D7	0,347	0,663	,095	,156	0,537	3,663	48	,001

The professional evaluation scale we tested is valid: for the self-evaluation scale, Cronbach alpha=0.827 and for the Evaluation scale, Cronbach alpha =0.908. The mean value for the EV is lower, compared to the SEV mean value. The scales register a normal distribution (see figures below).



**Figure 3. Distribution of SEV scale and EV scale**

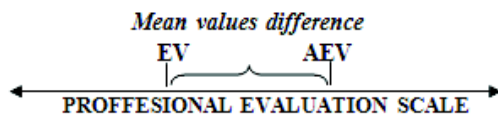
Test results show significant difference between the mean value of the self-evaluation scale and the mean value of the evaluation scale. The more objective evaluation by the directors places employees lower on the scale. This situation provides us a segment on the scale that refers to the difference between self-evaluation and evaluation.

**Table 3. Differences between the mean values of the SEV and EV**

SEV-EV	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
SEV-EV	1,20408	1,84819	0,26403	0,67322	1,73494	4,560	48	,000

## Discussion

In our study we tested a professional evaluation scale based on the behavioral anchors evaluation scales (S.E.A.C.). Our scale turned out to be valid, and thus we reinforced the conclusion that it is crucial that evaluation systems should be based on scientific knowledge, with the contribution of experts in this area, adapted to the characteristics of job description and should also be based on behavior.



**Figure 4. Proposed model for the professional evaluation**

Also the analyses revealed significant differences between self-evaluation scale and the evaluation scale. In assessing the professional performances we cannot use only the self-evaluation, which is under the risk of subjective influence, but in the same time we cannot use only the evaluation of managers because they don't capture specific aspects of behavior on the workplace. Using both types of evaluation, and measure the final score based on the difference between the two values obtained, it provides higher fidelity for the evaluation process.

Consequently, an assessment procedure should include at least the appreciation of self and the appreciation of a direct coordinator, yet it would be interesting to evaluate the extent to which the assessment of others in the organization (subordinates and colleagues) as well as assessments of external clients can contribute to a more valid result. In further activities in this area we propose such an approach.

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