

EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Delia Bekesi, Claudia Bacter

*Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
georgianabekesi@yahoo.com
claudianbacter@gmail.com*

Abstract: *Based on the theoretical grounds presented in the first part of the work, we intend to analyze the way in which evaluation of professional performances in a public institution from Oradea municipality is carried out, both in terms of the management and of employee representatives. The main objectives of the study were to identify the relevant aspects of the professional performance evaluation process, to highlight the perception of management and employees representatives on the usefulness of this process, and to identify suggestions for improving the evaluation activity of professional performance in the institution. Therefore, we performed a qualitative research, a sociological investigation based interviews, and the research tool used was the interview guide, structured on 2 dimensions. The first dimension of the interview guide analyzed data on the procedure for the evaluation of professional performance within the institution, and the second dimension followed the perception of staff on the usefulness of the performance evaluation procedure and the identification of suggestions for improving it. The results of the research revealed that the institution undergoing the research performs the evaluation activity of the employees' professional performances, and the most important stages are the completion of the professional performance evaluation report, the interview and the countersigning of the report. The evaluation is based on a form concluded pursuant to law no.188 / 1999, and among the performance criteria are: the capacity to implement, the ability to solve problems efficiently, the ability to assume responsibilities, the ability to self-improve and to value the acquired experience, ability to analyze and synthesize, creativity and spirit of initiative, planning ability and strategic action, ability to work independently, ability to work in a team, skills in the management of assigned resources. Moreover, most employees claimed that they are satisfied with the way in which the performance evaluation activity is carried out in the institution in which they operate, assigning positive reference to this activity.*

Keywords: *performance evaluation; civil servants; rewards; responsibility; manager; promotion.*

JEL Classification: *J23; J24.*

1. Introduction

Performance evaluation is considered an official system which evaluates the quality of the performance of an employee. However, evaluation should not be considered a purpose in itself, but rather as "an important process in a wider context of the performance management system which links: organizational objectives, daily performance, professional development, rewards and incentives" (Faseeh Ullah

Khan, 2013: 66). This means that the process is useful on one hand for the organization, and information regarding employee performance is necessary to take decisions about motivating employees, planning and organizing training courses, promoting them, restructuring staff, and also organization of work and supervision. On the other hand, feedback is given to employees through the process, which has a "stimulating role" if it is positive or "mobilizing" when it is negative. Moreover, it can also help the employee in developing his or her own career (Popa, 2008: 59-60). An especially important aspect of the performance evaluation process is that it has to be considered "in a direct connection with the whole activity of the employees as a process known and understood by them and as a motivator for the future performances that they can prove" (Pânișoară and Pânișoară, 2007: 146). Considering the points mentioned in the present paper we intend selected public institution from Oradea municipality and analyzed the way in which evaluation of professional performances is carried out, both in terms of the management and of employee representatives. This is why we decided to answer the following questions on which our endeavour was based: What is the way in which the evaluation of professional performance in a public institution is carried out? How do managers and staff perceive this process? What is the usefulness of evaluating professional performance within such an institution? What are the positive and negative aspects of the process and the proposals regarding the improvement of the procedure? The reason for selecting such an institution lies in the fact that there are differences in the status of civil servants and the regulations on which their activity is based as compared to other types of institutions / organizations / companies, which can bring additional information in the field.

2. Theoretical reasons regarding the evaluation of professional performance

Professional performance evaluation is an activity with a widespread area of knowledge, with an increasing evolution over time with regard to the increased number of evaluation methods, attempts to objectively quantify performance and even reduce measurement errors, the necessity to evaluate the performance of human resources being imposed "by the accelerated pace of scientific and technical development, by the implementation of new technologies and the internationalization of the competitive market" (Chraif, 2013: 324).

In our country there were past concerns regarding the performance evaluation of the staff, being among the first countries that legislatively regulated the endeavours through the field through: Law no. 12/1971 and then by Law no. 154/1998, Law no. 188/1999, respectively Government Decisions no. 775/1998 and 1084/2001, which tried to implement a system of staff appreciation in the first stage of civil servants, and then to other categories of staff (Pitariu, 2003).

Performance evaluation is an important human resource management activity that aims to "determine the degree to which company employees efficiently fulfil their tasks or responsibilities" (Lefter, Deaconu and Manolescu, 2012: 198).

The evaluation of human resources actually means evaluating behavior, evaluating potential and the ability to evolve, as well as evaluating the performance acquired. The evaluation of behavior, potential and the ability to evolve directly targets the results acquired by the job occupant, and the performance evaluation reflects the quality of the previous operations (Mathis, Nica and Rusu, 1997).

Professional performance evaluation is a complex process, which is often controversial. In order for the results of this process to be accurate, it is necessary to connect this activity with an advanced evaluation technology which means the establishment of logic-based evaluation criteria, the establishment of realistic performance standards as well as the use of appropriate evaluation methods. In this context, evaluation procedures should comply with the company's vision of how it organizes its activities and guides its staff, the procedures being standardized so as to avoid problems caused by the evaluators, standardization being provided by training evaluators, the use of written documents and audio-visual means. Moreover, in order for the evaluations to be accurate, reliable information will be used to avoid distorting the results (Byar and Rue, 1991).

Manolescu (2001) identifies the following objectives on which performance evaluation is based: appropriate performance of specific human resources activities: promotions, transfers, relocations, dismissals, fair rewarding of employees, identification of training needs and professional development, increasing employee motivation, improving manager-subordinate relationship, discussing the strategy and goals of the employees' careers, improving communication and focusing on collaboration between managers and superiors and subordinates, and applying the principle of equal opportunities.

An important dimension unfolded in the literature for the classification of evaluation techniques relates to the degree of objectivity: objective criteria and subjective criteria. Objective evaluations are usually performed without the consent of the evaluated or the evaluator's intervention, the main advantage of which is the ability to quantify. Here are certain methods of performance: documentary records, meaning capturing objective professional performance data according to specific work process information (e.g. direct productivity estimates or personal data evaluation, etc.) and automated performance evaluation, which involves the registration of some relevant aspects related to the conduct and professional performance of staff with the help of computers (Popa, 2008). Subjective evaluations are based on the appreciation of the superior, colleague, beneficiary of the activity, etc. Specific to this type of evaluation is that it can be done by one or more evaluators. The main methods of evaluation in this category are: evaluation scales, which can be graphical, multiple steps or points; comparative hierarchy systems or person comparison systems, including the "Merit order hierarchy system, pairs comparison system, forced distribution system", "Zapan objective evaluation method", the "feedback 360" method or the "multisource / multi-valuator", "scoring code" method etc. (Pitariu, 2003: 136, Popa, 2008: 68-69)

With regard to the responsibility for designing and implementing evaluation programs, it is the responsibility of the human resources department in most companies. In terms of the position in the organizational structure, in practice we encounter several choices such as: evaluation by direct superiors, evaluation by direct subordinates, evaluation by colleagues from equal positions, evaluation by evaluation committees, self-evaluation and computer evaluation (Stanciu et al, 2003).

In the process of evaluating performance, errors and imperfections of different evaluation methods and techniques inevitably occur which may lead to alteration of results and may lead to adverse consequences for the company, among which: the "halo" effect, the anticipation effect, the "gentle" effect, the central trend error, the constant individual error, the effect of the subjective-selective standards, the

similarity effect, the contrast effect, the logical error (Pânișoară and Pânișoară, 2016).

Performance evaluation activity should be well managed so as to bring benefits to the company. Therefore, it is necessary to meet certain principles aimed at improving the way in which this activity is carried out. The first principle refers to the fact that the evaluation must put the emphasis on employee performance but also on the success they contribute to achieving the company's objectives. According to the second principle, evaluation should focus on how well the employee performs the tasks involved in the job, and not on the subjective impressions of the evaluator on how the evaluated person works. The third principle considers that the two parties, the evaluator and the employee must agree that the evaluation activity has advantages for both the company and the employee, and the last principle refers to the fact that performance evaluation work must represent a basis for improving work productivity within the company (Certo, 2002).

3. Study regarding the evaluation of professional performance in a public institution in Oradea

3.1. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study were the following:

1. Identifying the relevant aspects of the performance evaluation process.
2. Highlighting the perception of management and employee representatives regarding the usefulness of this process.
3. Identifying suggestions for improving the work performance evaluation in the institution.

3.2. Methodology of the study

The study was based on a qualitative methodology; the method used being the individual structured interview. The questions which comprised the instrument used for data collection - the interview guide - were structured on 2 dimensions: (1) *data regarding the procedure for evaluating the professional performance within the institution*; (2) *staff perception regarding the usefulness of the performance evaluation procedure, as well as suggestions for its improvement*. Two interview guides, one for management representatives and the other for staff, were used. The structure of the two guides was similar; the only difference consisted in asking different questions to the two categories of respondents regarding the appreciation of the usefulness of the evaluation process.

3.3. Participants to the study

The study was attended by 13 specialists: 3 management representatives and 10 employees (11 women and 1 man) aged between 35 and 60, performing activities in a public institution from Oradea municipality.

All participants are graduates of higher education (bachelor, master or doctorate level). The accumulated service in their institution is between 2 and 23 years, the total accumulated service being between 10 and 36 years.

The sampling was theoretical, the number of interviews made taking into account achieving theoretical saturation.

3.4. Results and discussions

Interpretation of the results was based on the thematic analysis of the respondents' answers and targeted each dimension.

(1) Data regarding the procedure for the evaluation of professional performance within the institution

Within this dimension, the questions addressed to the participants in the study mainly aimed the means of organizing the professional performance evaluation activity, the meaning of this process, the tools used, the important aspects (relevant items) considered in the evaluation of the professional performances as well as the purpose of the evaluation.

With regard to the period in which the evaluation process takes place in the institution, both management representatives and employees accurately indicated that the activity is "*annua*", usually in January, and relates to the activity performed by the employee in the past year.

The person responsible for the evaluation of professional performance is the "*hierarchical superior*", "*the department responsible or coordinator*", "*the public civil servant who coordinates the department where the civil servant is working*".

Taking into account that it is a public institution, the process is regulated by the legislation in force. Therefore, the forms used in the evaluation process are set out in Addendum 6 of "*Government Decision no. 611 of June 4, 2008 for the approval of the rules regarding the organization and development of the career of the civil servants*", where we also find all the methodological aspects regarding the evaluation process.

The evaluation of professional performance consists in appreciating the fulfilment by employees of "*individual objectives and performance criteria*". These issues are evaluated on a scale from "1 to 5", "*the rating expressing the appreciation of the fulfilment of the performance criterion in achieving the individual objectives set*". The stages of the evaluation process that the interviewees referred to are the legislative ones, namely: "*completing the evaluation report by the evaluator, interviewing and countersigning the evaluation report*".

As performance criteria for civil servants, the study participants among the employees indicated "*creativity, effectiveness / efficiency, communication ability, planning ability, independent / teamwork, skills in managing assigned resources*." Those highlighted by the management representatives are added, namely, "*the ability to efficiently solve problems, the ability to analyze and synthesize, the spirit of initiative, the ability to self-improve and value the experience acquired*".

The answers of all participants to the study on the purpose of the evaluation made reference to two important aspects, namely: "*professional performance evaluation is carried out in order to set the degree of fulfilment by the employees of the professional objectives, related to the duties provided in the job description, as well as performance criteria, but also to set training needs and individual objectives for the year following the assessed period*." Moreover, the evaluation activity "*records the outstanding results, the objective difficulties encountered by the employees during the evaluated period and any other notes considered relevant*". In the interview, one of the management representatives highlighted that it is "*a legal requirement*", but also that the process "*provides a motivational system by rewarding civil servants who have achieved outstanding results so as to increase the individual*

professional performance or that results determine the participation in future promotions. "Promoting / relegating" are issues that have been discussed in this context by one of the employees.

Another relevant piece of information acquired during the interview is the transparency of the evaluation process. All participants to the study highlighted that the results were delivered to them and that they received a copy, signed by both parties.

With regard to the way the results acquired can influence the staff decisions, the representatives of the management of the institution claimed that this is possible in two directions: the development of the employees' career, respectively the designing of the training / improvement strategy. They motivated the answer by the fact that, on one hand, the results of the evaluations *"are the basis of the design of the employees' career"*, *"the career development of civil servants is conditional on them"*, and on the other hand, *"the human resources department can suggest the management of the institution to use the results in order to train and improve the staff"*.

(2) Staff perception regarding the usefulness of the performance evaluation procedure and suggestions for improving it

The questions addressed to the study participants mainly referred to the way in which the results of the evaluations may contribute to changes in income and promotion, but also to the degree of satisfaction with the way in which the performance evaluation is carried out. Moreover, they were required, starting from identifying the positive and negative aspects of the process, to make proposals to improve this activity.

In this context, the representatives of the management of the institution were required to appreciate, based on the feedback received so far from the employees, the degree of satisfaction with the procedure of evaluating the professional performances. Their answers were *"satisfied," "they are largely satisfied"*. The opinion of the employees participating in the study on this question was similar to that of the management representatives. They claimed they were satisfied motivating the answers. Here are some of the answers: *"I think I was accurately evaluated, the rating I received was Very Good"*; *"Yes. I know the hierarchical superior's view regarding the activity I perform"*; *"Yes, it helps me improve my professional skills"*; *"Yes, because the criteria are clearly established"*; *"Yes, because the evaluation criteria and the process itself is transparent, based on the attributions in the job description"*.

We notice from the information that the evaluation process is transparent, that the activity is analyzed taking into account the specific attributions of the jobs. Moreover, it is also relevant that employees appreciate the evaluation activity positively by being able to receive feedback from the superiors, but also because it can help improve professional skills.

Asked if the results of the evaluations can lead to changes in terms of wage, the participants' answers focused on the legislation in force. Therefore, *"the income is only influenced by the promotion in higher professional status than the one previously detained"*. If the evaluated clerk acquires the *"unsatisfactory" rating in the evaluation of the individual professional performance, the dismissal from the public position by administrative act for the professional incompetence shall be ordered"*. A similar question focused on how the evaluation result can influence the promotion in

the institution. And this time the answers focused on the legislation in force *"only in the case of promotion to a higher professional degree;... according the legal provisions regarding the career of civil servants"*.

From the point of view of the institution's management, the positive aspects of the professional performance evaluation process are the following: *"the objectivity given by the standard structure of the evaluation report; support in inventorying your own training needs; identification of improvement requirements; efficient distribution of tasks"*.

The other participants in the study referred, in addition to the issues highlighted by management representatives, to the way in which the performance criteria, self-evaluation compared to other employees, or the ability to compare their own results, but also to other relevant aspects can be found in the evaluation report: *"I believe that the performance criteria are very well established;... the ability to know where you are on the value scale within the company; comparing past and future performance with company standards; the evaluation report records the outstanding results of the civil servant, the objective difficulties encountered by the civil servant during the evaluated period and any other notes considered relevant"*.

With regard to the negative aspects of the evaluation process, the representatives of the institution's management identified the following: *"possible suspicions regarding the objectivity of the evaluator; in the event of a modest rating, the possibility for the civil servant to advance in professional grade or salary level is limited; are associated with a so-called "blacklist" in the event of staff cuts, often evaluation is a source of dissatisfaction; the possibility of subjective aspects in the evaluation of staff"*. To these are added those identified by the staff members: *"comparing the people among them not taking into account the performance standards; sometimes the professional performance evaluation has a formal look, not all stages are completed"*.

One of the questions addressed to management representatives referred to the errors identified in the selection process. Therefore, they highlighted two types of error, one attributed to the evaluator and the other methodology itself: *"the tendency of the evaluator to avoid presenting negative aspects that may affect the image of the institution and the preoccupation to prevent recording the poor performance of the employee becoming part of permanent unfavourable appreciation as well as the fact that there may be errors in determining the correct performance indicators or correlating them with the set objectives"*.

In the last part of the interview, all participants in the study were required to identify solutions for improving the evaluation activity. Unlike management representatives, other participants were reserved in giving answers. Therefore, their proposals referred to informal evaluations and the need to improve communication and collaboration: *"Informal evaluations that mediate the inconsistencies between the rigid structure of the report provided by the law and the specific needs of the institution; improving collaboration and communication between employees"*.

4. Conclusions

Professional performance evaluation is a very important process in human resource management, representing a requirement for all institutions, regardless of their type. Generally, the process of evaluating the performances of the employees provides feedback to the management of the institutions, and further steps can lead to improved performance.

If in some companies, organizations etc. the evaluation process is a flexible one, the tools can be permanently created / improved to serve the proposed goal, we can see from the study performed in the present paper that the evaluation activity within the selected public institution is regulated by the legislation in force, the methodological norms being very clearly set. The highlighted strengths of such procedures are the following: the transparency of the process, the possibility of objective performance evaluations according to the criteria established on the basis of job-specific tasks, the possibility that it offers for the design of the necessary training courses for the assignment, but also for the development of employees' careers. In the same time, however, it is perceived as a procedure that can raise some suspicions about the evaluator's objectivity or the correctness of the evaluation by the fact that some negative results are not presented in order to keep a positive image of the institution.

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