

# Individual Performance in Public Institutions: Between Administrative Formalism and Organizational Efficiency

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## Abstract

The paper analyzes satisfaction with performance appraisal in public institutions by examining its multidimensional structure among public employees in Romania. The study focuses on the extent to which satisfaction with performance appraisal can be understood as a construct composed of several interrelated dimensions, rather than as a single general perception. The research is based on a quantitative, cross-sectional survey conducted among public employees from county libraries and county councils in the North-West Region of Romania. Data were collected through an anonymous self-administered questionnaire comprising 12 items grouped into three theoretically defined dimensions: satisfaction with the most recent performance appraisal, satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, and satisfaction with the appraiser. Out of 230 distributed questionnaires, 214 valid responses were included in the analysis. The empirical analysis used exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to test and validate the proposed measurement model. The results indicate a clear three-factor structure of satisfaction with performance appraisal, supported by strong factor loadings, satisfactory reliability indicators, and acceptable model fit indices. The findings confirm that employee satisfaction with performance appraisal is a multidimensional construct, structured around the appraisal experience, the institutional appraisal system, and the relationship with the appraiser. The study contributes to the literature on public sector performance management by providing empirical evidence regarding the dimensional structure of satisfaction with performance appraisal in public institutions. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that improving performance appraisal systems requires not only formal procedures and standardized criteria, but also greater attention to fairness, feedback quality, managerial involvement, and the perceived usefulness of the appraisal process. The findings may support public managers and policymakers in redesigning appraisal systems that are more transparent, developmental, and aligned with organizational efficiency.

## Keywords:

Individual performance; public institutions; performance management; administrative formalism; organizational efficiency.

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## Introduction

Performance appraisal is one of the fundamental activities of the development function in public personnel management (Abu-Doleh & Weir, 2007), perhaps even the most important human resource (HR) system in an organization, according to some researchers (Aleassa, 2014) and this is also true for the private sector. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to examine the multidimensional nature of satisfaction with

performance appraisal among public sector employees and to test whether this construct can be empirically explained through several distinct but interrelated dimensions. More specifically, the study aims to validate a theoretical model of satisfaction with performance appraisal based on three dimensions: satisfaction with the most recent performance appraisal, satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, and satisfaction with the appraiser.

In order to achieve this purpose, the article pursues the following objectives: first, to review the main theoretical approaches regarding performance appraisal and employee satisfaction with appraisal systems; second, to operationalize satisfaction with performance appraisal through a structured set of measurable items; third, to identify the latent dimensions of this construct through exploratory factor analysis; and fourth, to confirm the validity and reliability of the proposed measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis.

The article is structured as follows. The first section presents the relevant scientific literature on performance appraisal, its purposes, and employee reactions to appraisal systems. The second section describes the research methodology, including the sample, questionnaire structure, data collection procedure, and statistical methods used. The third section presents and discusses the empirical results obtained through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The final section summarizes the main conclusions of the study, highlights its theoretical and practical contributions, presents its limitations, and suggests future research directions.

## 1. Review of the scientific literature

EP has a wide range of definitions, from those that emphasize only the basic elements or concepts, being seen as a process of evaluating or judging how someone performs” (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell & McKellin, (1993) or “a measurement system designed to evaluate the performance of each subordinate and reaching much more elaborate descriptions that combine more relevant characteristics than the basic ones, EP being considered, in this case, as “a mandatory process by which, for a specified period of time, the work performance, behaviors or traits of all or a group of employees are evaluated, judged or described individually by a person other than the employee being evaluated, and the results are kept by the organization.” (Grubb, 2007).

It should also be noted that this research focuses exclusively on the formal version of PE, although there are obvious organizational benefits that also derive from the informal version of the same process. Moreover, if the question of why formal PE systems exist is still relevant, one of the most logical answers is that they have replaced informal versions (Hair et al., 2017), although this answer is not entirely true or acceptable, since many of us can confirm the idea that informal and formal assessments coexist, rather than that one has completely replaced the other (Burlacu, 2022) that the new version of assessment has not replaced the old one, but rather evolved from it (Burlacu et al., 2023).

Very well recognized by their authors, the alternative definitions of PE mentioned above do not clarify the issue of the purposes of assessment, which is crucial for understanding the utility of the entire system or process.

The problems and controversies of EP originate early in the process, when goals and objectives are established or decided. McGregor (2006) identified three major purposes: administrative, informational, and motivational. Other researchers have proposed dividing the traditional annual formal EP process into two sessions.

The issue of satisfaction with the EP system and process has been most closely related to the last of the three fundamental approaches that have developed since performance appraisal became a widespread practice in the field of human resource management (Buzoianu et al., 2022).

The first two approaches were dominated by psychologists, who were interested in studying the psychometric aspects of the process, with the intention of determining the best format for performance measurement instruments, which should produce a significant reduction in errors and increased accuracy, as well as training raters, those individuals being considered a secondary source of errors and distortions (Ionita et al., 2009; Ismail & Rishani, 2018), but also to study opportunities to improve the cognitive processes of collecting, organizing, memorizing, reactivating and integrating information relevant to the EP process (Bretz et al., 1992; Ilgen et al., 1993). Although psychometric and cognitive approaches have undoubtedly made their own contributions to understanding and improving some major features of the EP process (Levy & Williams, 2004), they have been overly technical and too narrow in their attempt to precisely determine

the causes of various problems to satisfy the main priority of practitioners, that of improving the efficiency of assessment.

The social context approach, which opened a new research direction in the 1990's, through which the EP process was to be analyzed in a broader framework, has its origins in the contributions of Murphy and Cleveland (Judge & Ferris, 1993), who moved from defining EP as a measurement tool to understanding it "primarily as a social and communication process" (Kampkötter, 2017). The social nature of the EP process had already been recognized by Padgett (Ilgen et al., 1993), who argued that there are factors generated by the "social environment" in which the evaluator is placed and which significantly influence his assessments, factors that exceed the evaluator's capacity to produce precise performance measurements.

Keeping & Levy (2000) identified six distinct purposes that determine an equal number of EP functions: improvement, training and counseling, feedback and communication, compensation, recruitment and professional development, and dismissal and legal documentation. If we closely analyze the model of the six purposes and the one of the three purposes proposed by McGregor (2006), we can see that all these purposes can be divided into two major categories: administrative and developmental (the latter being very close in meaning to what Coens and Jenkins define as the improvement purpose).

These two broad categories of EP purposes are compatible with McGregor's (2006) idea, which highlighted an important issue regarding the roles that evaluators should assume: they should play both the role of judges and that of helpful advisors to the evaluators. He argues that the first type of role is unpleasant and unpopular among most supervisors, who do not feel comfortable in the position of "gods" of the evaluation process, while the second role, much friendlier in nature, requires special training that most supervisors do not have. Therefore, people who have the responsibility to provide EP are caught between two completely different roles, which, moreover, are incompatible by their nature.

Also, according to Buzoianu et al. (2022) if a manager or supervisor has to be critical in communicating with a subordinate about his or her work, the response will be defensive, with the employee rejecting some criticisms – even fair ones – and seeking excuses or justifications for unsatisfactory performance. This happens because the EP process has the potential to trigger several types of conflicts, in this case an intrapersonal conflict between the employee's desire for personal development and the intention to maintain self-esteem. People want to feel good about themselves, this being just one of eight inherent EP conflicts identified by Grubb (2007), some being intrapersonal, others interpersonal, some focusing only on employees, others on supervisors, and still others on the relationship between employees, between employees and supervisors or between them and the organization as an entity that has its own priorities regarding the evaluation process. The more we delve into the nature of EP goals, the stronger the conclusion that they are not only incompatible but also conflicting becomes (Profiroiu et al., 2020).

Further confirmation of this fact is provided by the issue of managerial tools, which are closely related to the initially established goals. Naji, Mansour & Leclerc (2015) have established that there are at least five types of multiple goals, depending on the categories of stakeholders we consider: evaluator, organization, evaluated, client/beneficiary and society. Unconventionally, this illustration of multiple goals takes into account not only intra-organizational stakeholders, but also extra-organizational ones, a variety that makes the idea of compatibility even more challenging (Tsai & Wang, 2012).

## **2. Research methodology**

As mentioned, the purpose of the research is to highlight the multidimensional nature of the concept of SEP (satisfaction with performance evaluation) (Burlacu, Gutu & Mateescu, 2022), by testing a theoretical model regarding SEP. It should be noted that the research was carried out through a sociological survey involving 230 public employees (librarians and civil servants) from four county libraries and three county councils in the North-West Region of Romania.

However, only 214 questionnaires were taken into account (16 questionnaires were empty or incorrectly filled in). We selected a mixed sample, consisting of public employees and librarians.

As a data collection tool, we used an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire, which included 12 items divided into three sections, strictly referring to the issue of satisfaction with performance evaluation. Each of these three sections included four items and covered the following aspects (Table no. 1):

**Table no. 1. Structure of the questionnaire regarding satisfaction with the evaluation of individual professional performances (no. of items)**

|                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Satisfaction with the most recent performance appraisal                                                                                         |
| 1.1. I am satisfied with the performance appraisal I received for my entire work over the past year.                                               |
| 1.2. My recent performance appraisal was fair.                                                                                                     |
| 1.3. My recent performance appraisal reflects what I have truly accomplished at work.                                                              |
| 1.4. My recent performance appraisal was accurate.                                                                                                 |
| 2. Satisfaction with the performance appraisal system                                                                                              |
| 2.1. Overall, I am satisfied with the performance appraisal system.                                                                                |
| 2.2. I am satisfied with the way the performance appraisal system is used to set my professional objectives for each appraisal period.             |
| 2.3. I am satisfied with the way the performance appraisal system is used to evaluate and grade my performance.                                    |
| 2.4. I am satisfied with the way the performance appraisal system helps me improve my work.                                                        |
| 3. Satisfaction with the appraiser                                                                                                                 |
| 3.1. I am satisfied with the way my appraiser shows interest in discussing my professional difficulties during each performance appraisal session. |
| 3.2. I am satisfied with the level of support and guidance provided by my appraiser.                                                               |
| 3.3. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of supervision I receive at work from my appraiser.                                                  |
| 3.4. My appraiser takes the performance appraisal process seriously.                                                                               |

The purpose of this research is to examine the multidimensional nature of satisfaction with performance appraisal among employees in public institutions. In order to achieve this purpose, the study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, based on the administration of a structured questionnaire and on the statistical validation of a theoretical measurement model.

The research does not include a qualitative component, such as interviews, focus groups, content analysis, or case-study analysis. Therefore, the methodological approach is exclusively quantitative and is based on the statistical analysis of survey data. This clarification is necessary in order to ensure consistency between the research methodology, the empirical results, and the discussions presented in the article.

The study was conducted through a sociological survey among public employees from four county libraries and three county councils in the North-West Region of Romania. A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 214 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. Sixteen questionnaires were excluded because they were either incomplete or incorrectly filled in. The final sample included both civil servants and contractual public employees, namely librarians and employees from county councils. From a socio-demographic perspective, 72.5% of the respondents were women, while 85.9% occupied execution-level positions.

The data collection instrument was an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire designed to measure satisfaction with performance appraisal. The questionnaire included 12 items, grouped into three theoretically defined dimensions. The first dimension measured satisfaction with the most recent performance appraisal and included four items referring to the perceived fairness, accuracy, and relevance of the latest evaluation. The second dimension measured satisfaction with the performance appraisal system and included four items referring to the overall functioning of the system, the setting of professional objectives, the grading process, and the perceived usefulness of the system for work improvement. The third dimension measured satisfaction with the appraiser and included four items referring to the appraiser's interest, support, supervision quality, and seriousness in conducting the appraisal process.

### 3. Results and discussion

The purpose of the method was to analyze and highlight the variability among the observed, correlated variables in terms of a potentially smaller number of unobservable variables, called factors (latent variables). In other words, we wanted to see whether it is possible that the variations of the 12 observable variables mainly reflect the variations of a small number of unobservable (underlying) variables.

Thus, we used this statistical method to discover the underlying structure of a relatively large set of variables – used to identify a set of latent constructs that underlie a battery of measured variables. Starting from the lack of an a priori hypothesis about the factors or about the models of the measured variables, we wanted

to see whether the 12 observable variables could be reduced to a small number of latent variables (which, in fact, constitute the latent dimensions of the construct).

Thus, to determine the optimal number of factors to be retained in the exploratory factor analysis, we calculated the eigenvalues for the correlation matrix and extracted three factors (for eigenvalues greater than 1 – Table no. 2). Practically, these three (latent) factors can be considered, in fact, as the optimal dimensions of the conceptual construct of satisfaction with professional evaluation.

**Table no. 2. Factor loading (rotated matrix of components)**

| Item                                                                                               | Component 1 | Component 2 | Component 3 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1.1. I am satisfied with the performance appraisal for the entire activity in the past year (D1.1) | 0.229       | 0.216       | 0.892       |
| 1.2. The recent evaluation of my performance at work was fair (D1.2)                               | 0.214       | 0.196       | 0.907       |
| 1.3. The recent evaluation of my performance reflects what I have really achieved at work (D1.3)   | 0.214       | 0.274       | 0.788       |
| 1.4. The recent evaluation of my performance was accurate (D1.4)                                   | 0.164       | 0.178       | 0.900       |
| 2.1. Overall, I am satisfied with the performance appraisal system (D2.1)                          | 0.095       | 0.903       | 0.232       |
| 2.2. I am satisfied with the way the system sets professional objectives (D2.2)                    | 0.051       | 0.933       | 0.191       |
| 2.3. I am satisfied with the way the system is used for evaluation and grading (D2.3)              | 0.066       | 0.917       | 0.250       |
| 2.4. The evaluation system helps me to improve my work (D2.4)                                      | 0.088       | 0.798       | 0.126       |
| 3.1. The evaluator shows interest in professional difficulties (D3.1)                              | 0.875       | 0.095       | 0.172       |
| 3.2. I am satisfied with the support and guidance provided by the evaluator (D3.2)                 | 0.936       | 0.043       | 0.197       |
| 3.3. I am satisfied with the quality of supervision received (D3.3)                                | 0.884       | 0.080       | 0.267       |
| 3.4. The evaluator takes the evaluation process seriously (D3.4)                                   | 0.918       | 0.089       | 0.133       |

The fitting procedures used to estimate the factor loadings and the unique variances of the model (the regression coefficients between items and factors and the measure of the influence of a common factor on a measured variable) were based on the “principal component analysis (PCA)” method. The parameters used to extract the factor loadings were based on the “eigenvalue greater than 1” rule and the Varimax rotation method (with Kaiser normalization – Table no. 3).

**Table no. 3. Parameters of the exploratory factor analysis model**

|                                                    |           |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer measure of sample adequacy            | 0.878     |
| Bartlett test of sphericity-Approximate Chi-square | 2.579.928 |
| Df                                                 | 68        |
| Sig.                                               | 0.000     |

If in exploratory factor analysis we simply try to explore and provide information about the number of (latent) factors needed to explain the number of observable variables, in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) we test a hypothetical measurement model we have constructed, a model that concerns the number and construction of latent factors. In other words, through this analysis we wanted to see to what extent the theoretical model of latent factors we have constructed fits and is confirmed or rejected by the data obtained through the survey.

To test the exploratory factor solution, we applied a confirmatory factor analysis. The theoretical model we tested is a hypothetical model of factor structures (of a set of 12 observable variables regarding satisfaction with the evaluation of individual professional performances) and takes into account the results of the exploratory factor analysis presented above. In particular, the theoretical model starts from the idea (assumption) that the 12 variables (observable / measured) can be reduced to a number of three latent factors (unobservable factors).

To test the theoretical model we constructed, we relied on several statistical tests to determine the fit of the model to the data – the “goodness of fit” test. More precisely, the acceptance or rejection of the model was based on the interpretation of the values of the following fit tests indices: RMR, GFI, TLI, RMEA (Table no. 4).

**Table no. 4. Matching test results**

| Matching tests | RMSA  | GFI   | CFI   | TLI   | RMR   |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Values         | 0.024 | 0.962 | 0.998 | 0.997 | 0.022 |

Thus, considering the values of the goodness of fit tests indices (Table no. 4) and the critical value requirements for this type of tests:  $RMSA < 0.06$ ,  $GFI > 0.90$ ,  $CFI > 0.90$ ,  $TLI \geq 0.95$ ,  $RMR < 0.08$  (Hair et al., 2017), the model meets the “goodness-of-fit” requirement, since the values of these indices respect the established critical thresholds.

On the other hand, the reliability and validity of the hypothetical factorial model were evaluated. In fact, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were verified with regard to: unidimensionality (1), composite reliability (2) and convergent validity (3).

In this sense, the factor loading value (standardized regression weights) was used to evaluate the unidimensionality of the model.

**Table no. 5. Reliability and validity of the model items**

| Items            | Factor loading | The value of p | Average variation extracted | Composite fidelity |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>S1</b>        |                |                | <b>0.7983</b>               | <b>0.940</b>       |
| D.1.1            | 0.95           | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 1.2            | 0.96           | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 1.3            | 0.77           | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 1.4            | 0.88           | ***            |                             |                    |
| <b>S2</b>        |                |                | <b>0.7934</b>               | <b>0.938</b>       |
| D 2.1            | 0.919          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 2.2            | 0.958          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 2.3            | 0.957          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 2.4            | 0.704          | ***            |                             |                    |
| <b>S3</b>        |                |                | <b>0.8154</b>               | <b>0.946</b>       |
| D 3.1            | 0.842          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 3.2            | 0.963          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 3.3            | 0.908          | ***            |                             |                    |
| D 3.4            | 0.895          | ***            |                             |                    |
| *** p-value, 000 |                |                |                             |                    |

According to (Table no. 5) the obtained factor loading values, unidimensionality was achieved, since the factor loading values exceed the threshold of 0.6. Composite reliability and convergent validity were assessed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). It should be noted that the required levels for AVE and CR should be equal to or greater than 0.5 and 0.6, respectively. As a conclusion, we can state that the hypothetical factor model (measurement model) is acceptable. In other words, we can accept the model as an adequate explanatory theoretical model of the hypothetical factor structure.

## Conclusions

This study examined the multidimensional nature of satisfaction with performance appraisal among employees in public institutions. Based on survey data collected from civil servants and contractual public employees, the research tested and validated a three-dimensional model of satisfaction with performance appraisal, structured around: satisfaction with the most recent appraisal, satisfaction with the appraisal system, and satisfaction with the appraiser.

The empirical results confirm that satisfaction with performance appraisal should not be interpreted as a single, general perception, but as a multidimensional construct. The exploratory factor analysis identified three distinct latent dimensions, while the confirmatory factor analysis supported the validity and reliability of the proposed measurement model. These findings show that employees' perceptions of performance appraisal are shaped not only by the formal evaluation result, but also by the way the appraisal system functions and by the quality of interaction with the evaluator.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature on public sector performance management by providing empirical support for a multidimensional understanding of satisfaction with performance appraisal. The research highlights the importance of distinguishing between satisfaction with the appraisal

process, satisfaction with the institutional appraisal system, and satisfaction with the appraiser. This distinction offers a more precise analytical framework for understanding employee reactions to performance appraisal in public institutions.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that public institutions should approach performance appraisal as more than a formal administrative procedure. Improving employee satisfaction with appraisal requires transparent criteria, clear professional objectives, accurate and fair evaluations, constructive feedback, and active involvement from appraisers.

Public managers should also strengthen the developmental role of appraisal systems by linking evaluation results to training, career development, employee motivation, and organizational improvement.

The study also has several limitations. First, the research was based on a sample of employees from county libraries and county councils in the North-West Region of Romania, which limits the generalizability of the findings to all public institutions. Second, the study used a cross-sectional design, which captures perceptions at a single point in time and does not allow conclusions regarding changes in satisfaction over time. Third, the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may involve subjective perceptions and response bias. Finally, the study focused on the validation of the measurement model and did not examine causal relationships between satisfaction with appraisal and other organizational outcomes, such as motivation, performance, commitment, or employee retention.

Future research could extend the analysis to larger and more diverse samples of public institutions, including central administration, local administration, education, healthcare, and other public service organizations. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted in order to observe how satisfaction with performance appraisal evolves over time and how it is influenced by institutional reforms. In addition, future studies could test the relationship between satisfaction with performance appraisal and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, employee engagement, perceived fairness, professional development, and institutional performance.

Overall, the study demonstrates that a sustainable and effective performance appraisal system in the public sector depends not only on formal procedures, but also on fairness, clarity, feedback quality, managerial support, and the perceived usefulness of the evaluation process. By addressing these dimensions, public institutions can transform performance appraisal from a mainly administrative requirement into a meaningful managerial tool that supports employee development and organizational efficiency.

### **Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement:**

ChatGPT (version 5.0) was responsibly used for language improvement. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article.

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