

Review of Performance Assessment; Concepts, Dimensions, Methods

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ABSTRACT

Measuring and assessing the operations are important due to their relationship with decisions concerning several various important organizations' factors. In today's era, amazing developments in knowledge management, stakeholders' changeable needs and rivals' effort for success, have necessitated the presence of performance assessment in a modern and inevitable manner. An assess performance is a systematic and comprehensive process about comparing organizations activities and process with achieved results based on an excellence model. In other words, performance assessment presents information system for organization to evaluate organization performance and excellence in quality. Assessing performance process allows organization to identify clearly strength points and designing plans for improvement. Hence, considering the importance of evaluating performance in today's world, we decided to study more than 50 articles in different fields of performance assessment to write a review article on the topic of " performance assessment; concepts, dimensions, methods " based on them, so that this article is consequent of most of them to discuss about performance assessment.

KEYWORDS: Assessment; Performance; Performance Assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

So far as the organizations put their effort for survival and require for involvement in national and global arena, they must centralize in the principle of continuous improvement that such thing does not come to realize unless the way is paved to access it through improvement of performance management. It can make improvement through getting feedback from environment and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities by means of employing performance measurement system [1].

The world in which we live is complicated and required for two major features of limited resources and unlimited needs. This has caused increasing attention to productivity that could support the growth program and provide opportunities for organizational excellence, yet improvement in performance will not come to realize without awareness from progress of organization, detection of challenges, information on extent of implementation of comprehensive policies and identification of the required factors for improvement, thus performance measurement is considered as a tangible need at any organization [2].

Any organization requires evaluation in order to be informed on the desirability extent in activities especially in complicated environments [3] and all the organizations including private and public organizations require a type of evaluation system for development and sustainability at competitive arena under which they enable to measure effectiveness and efficiency of programs, processes and manpower [4]. In this regards, achievement of governmental organizations' aims requires a suitable model for evaluation of performance, because achievement of aims is possible through a comprehensive model for evaluation and revision of programs, and governmental organizations cannot apply their effective management without attention to realities and results from activities [5].

2. Concepts

Without doubt, management and measurement of performance has been impossible without providing an accurate definition for it paying attention to this point that what must be evaluated, that it will remain vane if talking about performance measurement.

2.1. Performance

There are different points of view about concept of performance that Michael Armstrong has referred to many of them in the book "performance management: person, team, organization". A summary from viewpoints proposed in this book is as follow:

From point of view of Bernadin et al, performance can be considered as the results of job, because it has the strongest linkage with strategic aims of organization, customer satisfaction and financial revenues.

From point of view of Kane, performance is attributed to the record of personal successes and what the person recalls with record.

The definition for behavior instead of performance and differentiation of behavior from results refers to a point believed by Campbell, and the definition for performance as a multidimensional concept that encompasses results and behavior refers to what Bates & Holton have referred to it [6].

2.2. Assessment

Assessment can be defined as measurement of the extent to which performances adapt with policies, plans and the extent of their effectiveness in achievement of general aims of system, that such thing comes to realize with determination of standards and indicators of evaluation in a systematic operational process for responsiveness and modification of affairs [7].

2.3. Performance Assessment

Scholars have proposed a variety of definitions for performance assessment as follows:

Performance assessment refers to “how to engage in missions, organizational duties, and the results from them” [8].

Performance assessment refers to “complicated process of measurement, valuation and judgment about performance through the terms such as efficiency, effectiveness, significance and empowerment under the framework of principles and concepts so as to achieve organizational aims and duties” [9]. Further, performance assessment refers to “process of quantification of efficiency and effectiveness of operations” [1,10]. Performance assessment refers to a controversial management instrument in response to common problems for design and administration of systems [11]. Performance assessment refers to “evaluation of what has been accomplished in sake of quality, quantity and method during a certain period of time compared to the information on general status of task or the standard of task” [12]. Performance assessment refers to “official method of detection of characteristics of employees based on positive or negative feedback from results of individuals' performance on how to do their tasks” [13].

3. The History of Performance Assessment

Performance assessment has existed as an action since the creation of man and in nature and behavior of most living organisms, mentioned as the basis for innate and acquired behavior of the man. Religions have provided behavioral and ethical standards for humans, considered certain rewards under obeying the performance evaluation and certain punishments under neglecting it [14]. Studies indicate that the phenomenon of job division has constantly existed in formation of human communities among members of tribes, in which performance evaluation has been considered in a preliminary form resulting in promotion of position of successful individuals, yet implementation of performance evaluation has been dated back to the 19th century for the first time that evidences from evaluation at personal and organizational levels have been reported in Scottish textile industry in 1800 AD.

At Medieval period, European Guilds used evaluation system to grant craftsman certification to artisans and the early universities used evaluation system to evaluate a group of students; overview of history of ancient Iran has displayed inspection of performance, encouragement and punishment in the age of Achaemenid, Seleucid and Parthian period [15].

Evaluation in Iran was started in 1929 after Constitutional Revolution and Office of the Inspector General (OIG) was established in 1936 and then started to work. After The Islamic Revolution, with regard to article 174 of the constitution, office of the inspector general (OIG) was established under supervision of Iran's head of the Judiciary to inspect all the bodies. In addition, in executive and legislative branches and superior Cultural Revolution council, several boards and councils were established and started to work for inspection [7].

4. The Goals of Organizational Performance Evaluation

Evaluation is targeted in specifying the extent of adjustment, efficiency and effectiveness and emergence of feedback from it to influence, revise and modify the policies, programs, and especially performances and managements in different bodies.

Other major aims of performance evaluation:

- Development of proper targeting process
- Enhancement of permanent improvement process (kaizen)
- Improvement of affairs management and development of academic management
- Optimal use of resources especially human resources
- Improvement of ability to achieve aims
- Authorities' more accurate decision making
- Increasing community's cooperation with organization by means of awareness from organization's performance
- Increasing employees' cooperation and institutionalizing acceptance of change [16]
- Emergence of organization's accountability for the services which supplies
- Success or lack of success of staffs and organization
- Clarification of existing abnormalities in individuals, groups, structure, units and programs
- Detection of abnormalities before emergence as an unresolved problem [17]

3. Major Aims of Performance Evaluation

- enhancement of sense of planning, accountability, participation and transparency of performance
- detection of strengths and weaknesses

- continuous evolution and improvement of performance [18]

5. The Plan of Performance Assessment

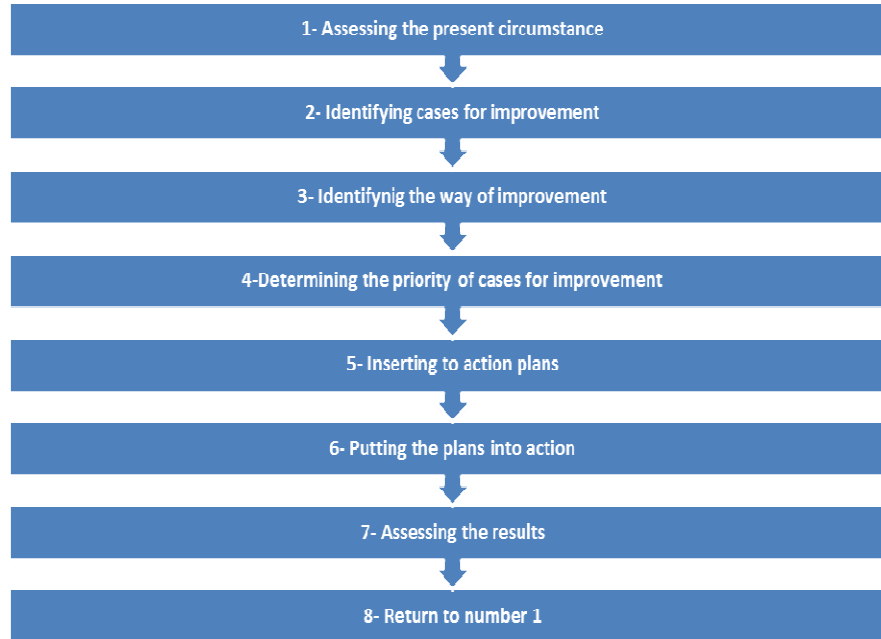


Fig. 1. Plan of performance assessment

6. Dimensions and Components of Performance Evaluation

6.1. Based on which are evaluated

Dimensions of evaluation systems are evaluated based on which they are evaluated and classified to three dimensions as: Trait-based evaluation, Behavior- based evaluation, Task outcome-based evaluation [20, 21, 22].

6.1.1. Trait-based evaluation

To evaluate the personal characteristics of staff with emphasis on person and their personal traits as well as little emphasis on what they do [20] and despite their popularity and prevalence, they are inherently subjectivism [22].

6.1.2. Behavior- based evaluation

These methods have considered behavior at workplace instead of personal characteristic [20] and have provided more practical information [22].

6.1.3. Task outcome-based evaluation

Instead of evaluation of behaviors, the results from job behaviors and the extent to which the job expectations have met have been evaluated [20], found with special popularity, because a huge emphasis has been put on the measurable results [22].

Different studies have not indicated selection of a special method among the methods, and indeed, there is little research information on it, yet an emphasis has been put on this necessity that firstly the organization's aims and expectations from evaluation must be specified [22].

6.2. Based on conceptual separation from evaluation levels

Dimensions specify the angle of view of evaluator. Performance evaluation of all the levels had been associated to each other affecting and being influenced of each other, for which it cannot represent an accurate separation(multi-level theory puts an emphasis on this point), yet if we intend to have a conceptual separation from evaluation levels, it can characterize their different types as follow:

Table 1. Dimensions of performance assessment [18]

| In terms of level | In terms of topic | In terms of sort | In terms of comprehensiveness |
|-----------------------|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - Strategic level | -Employee performance assessment | -Internal performance assessment | -comprehensive performance assessment |
| -Organizational level | -Manager performance assessment | -External performance assessment | -limited performance assessment |
| -Operational level | -Part of organization performance assessment | | |
| | -Organization performance assessment | | |

6.3. Based on who are evaluating

In point of view of C.M. Francis [12], dimensions of performance evaluation in point of view of evaluators include:

6.3.1. Heads

6.3.2. Individuals

6.3.3. Colleagues

those advantages and disadvantages of these dimensions have been mentioned.

6.4. Based on advantages of implementation

Performance evaluation system concerning advantages of implementation is examined from three dimensions:

6.4.1. To evaluate

helping for better understanding of his role, detection of strengths and weaknesses, making effort for increasing abilities based on reality, increasing motivation, improving job relations and so on.

6.4.2. To management

awareness from staffs' efficiency, the opportunity to prepare the staffs to accept higher responsibilities, detection of development and education needs, decision making based on evidences, building new ideas for improvement.

6.4.3. To organization

creation of a culture for continuous improvement and success, transfer of this message that individuals and their performance are valuable in the organization.

6.5. Based on Snell and Bohlander classification

Snell and Bohlander have introduced 5 approaches for performance assessment as: Comparative Approach, Attribute Approach, Behavioral Approach, Result Approach, Quality Approach [23].

6.5.1. Comparative Approach

the evaluator is required to compare individuals' performance with others' performance. This approach generally uses a comprehensive evaluation of a personal performance to rank individuals in a work group. There are three techniques in this approach which include: ranking, compensatory distribution and paired comparison.

6.5.2. Attribute Approach

an emphasis has been put on expansion of certain characteristics which are mentioned favorable for success of organization. The techniques which are used in this approach include a series of behaviors and characteristics including innovation, leadership, competitiveness and evaluation of individuals.

6.5.3. Behavioral Approach

an attempt is made to define the behaviors that a staff should engage in them so as to work effectively. Techniques of this approach require the manager to evaluate which staff expresses such behaviors from him. These techniques include five techniques: susceptible events, behavioral rating scales, behavioral observation scales, and organizational behavior modification and measurement centers.

6.5.4. Result Approach

an emphasis has been put on the measurable results of a job and work groups and the assumption has been grounded on this point that it can separate the individuality from measurement process, under which the obtained results will be the closest indicators of personal characteristics to organizational effectiveness. There are two performance management systems in this approach: aim-based management, productivity measurement and evaluation system.

6.5.5. Quality Approach

four previous approaches are considered as traditional approaches. Two major features of quality approach include: customer-orientation and prevention from error. Improvement of domestic and foreign customer satisfaction has been regarded as the early aim in quality approach [24].

6.6. Based on time

Performance evaluation issues can be examined from different perspectives that there are two views on them:

6.6.1. Traditional approaches

6.6.2. Modern approaches [1, 18]

Traditional approach is targeted in reminding performance and control of evaluatee mentioned with instructional style. This approach has centered at performance at a period in the past developed with the requirements in the past. Modern approach is targeted in educating, developing capacities, improving individuals and organization, making

motivation and accountability, developed based on detection of strengths and weaknesses. Origin of this view has lied on the requirements in contemporary age and the unit under coverage can be a unit, a process and staffs [1].

6.7. Other Classifications

Different classifications for performance evaluation:

- organizational evaluation: management, managers, staffs, processes, patterns and so forth have been considered in this classification.
- internal (by selected domestic team) and external evaluation (by selected foreign team).
- Comprehensive evaluation (including all functional dimensions of organization) and relative evaluation (the possibility for comparison of performances during a period of time or comparison of performances with rest of competitors) [8].

A variety of evaluation in another division:

- With regard to evaluation criteria
- With regard to issued duties and programs
- With regard to certain indicators and criteria
- With regard to evaluation attitudes
- With regard to traditional attitude
- With regard to academic attitude
- With regard to evaluation agent
- Intra-organizational evaluation
- Extra-organizational evaluation [7]

6-8 General model of performance assessment

General model of performance assessment in point of view of Noe et al and components of this model:

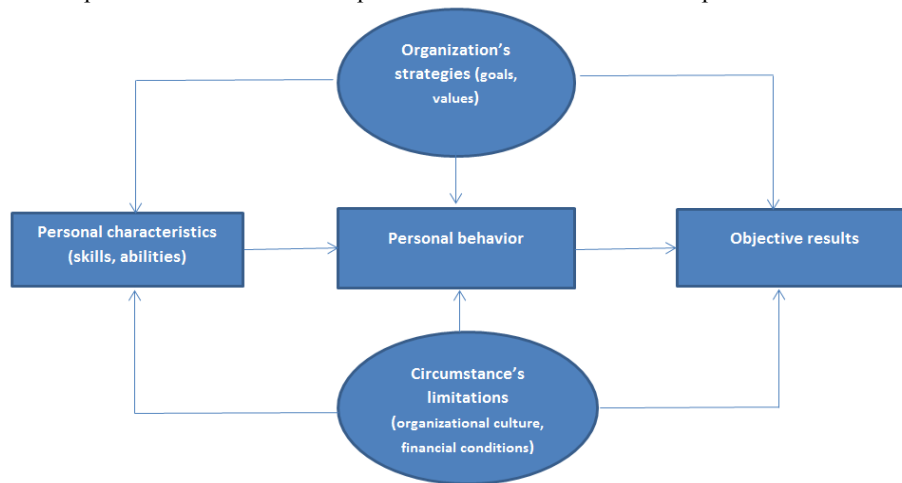


Fig 2. General model of organization's performance assessment

Noe et al have known performance arises from personal characteristics, skills and such things, that the personal characteristics have been transformed to objective results through staffs' behavior. Indeed, staffs with knowledge, skill, ability and other necessary characteristics can express their behaviors to engage in their job.

Strategy is another fundamental component in the model that almost the linkage between strategy and performance management is ignored. Ultimately, the model mentions that situational restrictions play a potential role in individuals' performance, that the staffs should have certain characteristics to engage in a series of behaviors and access to some results.

7. Common methods of performance assessment

7.1. Based on Snell and Bohlander opinion

Snell and Bohlander [23] have classified the methods of performance assessment into 3 categories, mentioning some advantages and disadvantages for each of them:

7.1.1. Trait-based assessment

- Graphic Rating Scales
- Mixed-Standard Scales
- Forced-Choice Method
- Essay Method

7.1.2. Behavior-based assessment

- Critical Incident Method
- Checklist
- Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS)
- Behavior Observation Scale (BOS)

7.1.3. Task outcome-based assessment

- Management by Objectives (MBO)
- Balanced Scorecard card (BSC)

7.2. Based on Tavallaei study

Tavallaei's study consists of most common models of performance assessment which an explanation into the most important methods in summary is as follow:

7.2.1. Management by Objectives (MBO)

Philosophy of this method and the area for emergence of it is based on the evaluation based on the extent of access to determined aims instead of evaluation of behavioral and certain characteristics. In this method, firstly, macro-aims are determined then the macro-aims are transformed to micro-aims through negotiation with managers and staffs. Ultimately, the individuals are evaluated based on the extent to which their micro-aims are come to realize regardless of how their aims come to realize [1].

Characteristics of method:

Aim-based management is more likely a result-oriented system, which grades performance based on staffs' access to the aims agreed by staff and manager [24].

7.2.2. Balanced Scorecard card (BSC)

Balanced scorecard method is one of the most prominent models for performance evaluation which has been developed and improved by Norton and Kaplan in 1992 and then expanded and improved, suggesting that it can use a series of balanced indicators to evaluate any organization so as to let the senior managers to have a general view on four important organizational aspects. These aspects pave the way for response to four major questions:

- how is outlooks to shareholders? (Financial aspect)
- at which areas, it should work out properly? (Domestic aspect of business)
- how is customers' outlook to us? (Customers aspect)
- how we can continue improvement and creation of value? (Learning and innovation aspect)

Balanced scorecard encompasses financial indicators which represent results of activities in the past. In addition, balanced scorecard completes the results of activities through considering non-financial indicators which are as the preconditions and stimulants for financial performance in future. Norton and Kaplan believe that the problem over increase of information through restricting the used indicators has removed by getting information on these four aspects; further managers will be obliged to focus on a limited numbers of critical indicators [26].

7.2.3. Quality Management (ISO)

Nowadays, ISO is not introduced as a system for comprehensive performance evaluation. This system considers the status of management of effective processes in quality and determines the requirements that should have been met to get certification. These requirements which have been drawn into attention in ISO include measurement of efficiency and effectiveness of processes. With regard to this standard, all the processes existing in the organization should have been detected in a systematic way and their effectiveness and efficiency should have been measured and ultimately analysis of these indicators should have resulted in improvement of processes [1].

7.2.4. Performance Pyramid

A clear relationship between performance indicators in hierarchical levels of organization is one of the needs at any evaluation system such that each of units put effort to achieve the same aims. Pyramid model of performance with the main purpose of building a relationship between strategy and operations of organization is a model which encompasses how to build such relationship. This evaluation system encompasses four levels of aims which indicate internal effectiveness and efficiency of organization. Indeed, this framework reveals the difference between indicators which consider the groups out of organization (such as customer satisfaction, timely delivery and quality) and the internal business indicators (such as productivity, time cycle and wastes).

The most important strength of this model is an attempt to integrate aims of organization with operational performance indicators, yet this approach has not represented a mechanism for detection of key performance indicators, that there is no concept for continuous improvement in this model [10].

7.2.5. Business Process

This model has been suggested by Mr. Bourne in 1996, that such model is practical as it represents the difference between input indicators, process, output and results. Bourne has used the example of cooking cake to describe his model.

According to this example, input indicators include amount of flour, quality of eggs and etc. process indicators include oven temperature and cooking duration; output indicators include quality of cake; indicators of results include eater's satisfaction. With regard to this model, inputs, process, outputs and results to determine indicators and evaluate performance include:

- Inputs: competent and motivated staffs, customers' needs, raw materials, capital and so on.
- Processing system: certification of products, production of products and delivery of products and so on.
- Outputs: products, services and financial outcomes and so on.
- Results: meeting customers' needs, satisfying customers and so on.

However this model can be accepted conceptually, it has been considered in a full continuum that has been extended from hierarchy-based frameworks to process frameworks; in other words, the hierarchy has been ignored in this model which is a weakness [10].

7.2.6. European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)

EFQM Excellence Model which was introduced in 1991 by European Foundation for Quality Management develops from 9 criteria that are classified to two categories of enablers and results. Enablers empower the organization to achieve results and results represent the achievements that the organization reaches to them at different areas [27].

Despite design of a model to receive the prize of European quality management, this model has been transformed to an instrument in the organizations and used to a large extent, under which the self-assessment process was developed [1].

8. Performance assessment in Iran

Evaluation has been of a great importance in Iran, considered in line with adherence to principle of 88, 94 and 174 of the constitution [7]. Further, to realize section 26 in article 198 of the Third Development Plan and adherence of all executive bodies to performance evaluation, despite importance of performance evaluation, challenges and problems are witnessed in different bodies [7].

A summary on characteristics of current evaluation system of organizations:

- evaluation system has been generally founded well suited with a functional structure with an emphasis on hierarchy, task-orientation and so on, resulting in a mechanical evaluation with an emphasis on personal processes.
- improvement system has been developed based on in a hierarchy depending on work experience, field of study and degree.
- promotion system well suited to task structure depends on the criteria of work experience and passing routine courses.
- Merit award system is exclusively based on evaluation of personal characteristics. In this system, intangible and qualitative concepts that their measurement is difficult are widely seen and the concepts such as responsibility, interest in job and so on which are not measurable and cannot be judged reduce motivation instead of increasing it.
- evaluation has lost its validity limited to uniform and similar forms.
- ignoring behavioral aspects and special characteristics of each researcher and no alignment between evaluation system and strategy and aims of organization.
- sentencing evaluation systems to common errors such as manager's dissatisfaction with staff in a special month affects evaluation in the rest of 11 months.
- no effect in result from evaluation of the aspects of improvement of performance and its feedback in job process.
- evaluation elements have not been quantitative depending on the personal judgment on evaluatee that can be different from a period of time to another period of time and from a place to another place [28].
- performance evaluation has been one of the major concerns for the managers, causing awareness from extent of progress in improvement of performance within organization especially service units; as a result the necessary motivation and opportunity will be built to improve quality of performance of service structures [2].

9. CONCLUSION

However, evaluation systems have existed with different names throughout the history and superior performances have been differentiated from inferior performances, design of official evaluation systems has been assumed as a modern approach to which a huge attention has been paid by authorities under expansion of human communities, complexity of systems and increase of dissatisfaction with fairness of payments.

A transient looking into evaluations in classical management indicates that evaluation has been assumed as a control in manager's duties and functions, yet it has been assumed as a dynamic, continuous and qualitative and mutual process between manager and staffs which has more application than granting reward, emphasizing on support from behavior and building communications and improving human resources.

Parallel works, working in a scattered way and relative weakness in monitoring processes as well as little attention to results of studies indicate the necessity for evaluation and the feedbacks pave the way to build a suitable area to resolve mistakes at organizations in addition to optimal notification which assists for building communications and improving human resources.

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