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## EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: AN EXPLICATORY REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*Employee performance appraisal is a focal aspect of human resources management. It analyzes employees' performance and ensures that employee performs at the desired level to achieve organizational objectives. This paper examined issues of performance appraisal and career advancement in Nigerian public organizations. The paper adopts a qualitative research method. It depended on secondary data from scholarly journals and Management by Objective theory as a framework of analysis. The study observed that performance appraisal does not only promote organizational performance but provides potency in determining employee capacity, skills acquisition, and experience for career advancement. The paper concluded that Nigeria's public organizations' performance appraisal systems have been inundated with scores of challenges, and that the current appraisal systems negates the assumptions of MBO. The inaccurate rating system used on Nigeria's public organizations to appraise employees does not provide adequate data that would identify high-potential employees for advancement into managerial positions. They paper recommends that, for personnel performance appraisal to be potent, the full support of management and staff must be solicited, that an appraisal format must be designed specifically to address areas of concern to top echelon of public organizations in other to address the haphazard approach used by managers to appraise employees. The paper further recommends that comprehensive training programmes should be developed for managers responsible for conducting performance appraisals in ministries, department, and agencies of government.*

**Keywords:** Career advancement, confidential appraisal, employee performance appraisal, open appraisal, open-secret appraisal

### INTRODUCTION

Employee performance appraisal is an aspect of human resource management that assesses the productivity or level of performance of individual employees (Dinna & Michal, 2015). Performance appraisal is a working procedure that creates a system where organizations recognize not only employees' level of efficiency, but also the areas where they need performance improvement, in order to provide for optimum use of employees in an organization (Atimo, 2000).

Performance appraisal is a requisite for the achievement of organizational success. The success of any organization is hinged on their ability to appraise and manage the performance of employees. Performance appraisal is thus a pertinent aspect of career advancement that entails regular review of employees' performance (Caruth & Humphreys, 2008).

Obisi (2011) suggests that inability of firms to design and implement effective performance appraisal mechanisms hampers the achievement of organizational objectives and competitive advantage. Without regular appraisal, employees may exert effort without the realization of key areas in their performance that needs modification. Hence, a good appraisal system should by and large review employees' performance, and ensure that all facets of their job description are evaluated (Asadu et al., 2020).

Employee performance appraisal is thus a core aspect of organizational operations, operating as the mechanism that determines employee's career advancement, and paying attention to the identification of employees' developmental needs for enhanced performance (Obisi, 2011). Performance appraisal is all-encompassing; it involves identifying, evaluating and developing employees' work aptitude, so as to improve organizational performance. It is an imperative to attainment of organizational objectives, and benefits employees in terms of recognition, receiving feedback, catering to work needs, and offering career guidance (Seniwoliba, 2014).

Performance appraisal is an ongoing process of analyzing employees' performance and effecting necessary changes to ensure that individuals perform at the desired level to satisfy organizational requirements (Johnson, 1988). In Nigeria's public organization, an employee's annual appraisal is executed based on the instrument of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) which every employee is required to fill out yearly. The APER form is used as a benchmark to assess employees' efficiency and career progression. APER is further explicated as the process of receiving, recording, assessing, and analyzing information about the worth of the employee performance (Hassan, 2013).

According to Ajayi (2001), performance appraisal in Nigeria's public organizations is a routine task in which employees' job-related actions are evaluated with the expectation that such exercise will bare employees' current performance on the job and how much performance can be improved on the future. Ajayi (2001) posits that the merit system index in performance appraisal which is supposed to be implemented is being jeopardized as a result of ethnicity, nepotism, favoritism, and bribery. The need to regularly interact with employees' performance through the mechanism of an effective appraisal system that focuses on the strengths, skills, weaknesses, potentials, and areas of required employee development for improved performance has been a huge challenge in public organizations in Nigeria (Dyaji et al., 2020).

The appraisal system in Nigeria's public organization is hinged on supervisors' exclusive role and opportunity to reward loyalty and punish those considered rebellious, and this repels objectivity in assessing employees' actual level of performance (Obiorah et al., 2021). Scholars argue that the appraisal system in Nigeria's public organizations is a mere ritual because it does not reflect the essence of conducting it; let alone engender productivity (Tukur, 2013). This accounted for the various civil/public service reforms from the 1934 Hunt Commission to the 2012 Oronsaye's Public Service report (Ibietan, 2019), which seems not to have impacted positively on public sector productivity in Nigeria.

To support this assertion, Watkins (2007) reported that some public agencies in Nigeria place less emphasis on performance appraisal review and do not see it as a tool for improving performance in both private and public sectors. It is on this premise that this paper seeks to explore employee performance appraisal and its role in fostering career advancement in Nigerian public

organizations. The paper adopts a qualitative research method. It is contextual, drawing its argument basically from secondary data which includes journal articles, government and agencies reports, and related online materials. The study employed descriptive analysis to examine the issues and challenges confronting the Nigerian public organization concerning employee performance appraisal and career advancement. The paper is organized as follows: Apart from section one which is the introduction, section two reviews literature on theoretical foundation of the study and literature related to the key constructs under review (performance appraisal and career advancement). Section three considers the theoretical framework, and the final section is the conclusion and recommendation.

## CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL EXPLICATION

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is premised on management by objective (MBO) theory (Drucker, 1995). MBO is one of the most popular modern management techniques that permeates all management schools of thought. It is seen as an attempt to evolve a new management theory as a synthesis of various management theories (Ngu, 1994). MBO theory is based on concrete performance targets, which are usually jointly established by superiors and subordinates. MBO describes a method of performance management which is based on setting clear and measurable objectives, and using those objectives is to evaluate and review performance. The principle behind MBO is to make sure that everybody within the organization has a clear understanding of the objectives of the organization, and are aware of their roles and responsibilities in achieving those objectives (Oborlah et al., 2021).

According to Udoji (1974), MBO provide that superiors and subordinates in the organization identify objectives in the major areas of responsibility in which employees will work. An action plan on how to achieve the expected results in those areas is then designed and performance standards set for acceptable work. It is on that basis that actual result is measured against those projected plans and standards through an appraisal system. This links performance of managers to objectives of their units, and through them to the goals of the organization. In this way, all managers in the organization work towards the same objectives: their activities are designed, directed, and monitored toward meeting common objectives.

In a nutshell, MBO commences with problem identification, and following MBO principles, the participants must be directly and actively involved right from this stage to enable them appreciate the problem and the goals to be met. Every participant in MBO programmes is then encouraged to use their initiative and skills with total commitment towards attaining not only personal but also overall objectives. Similarly, every participant is encouraged to evaluate themselves about overall evaluation both periodically and finally within the specified periods (Ngu, 1994).

### **Performance Appraisal**

Several scholars have attempted to provide a conceptual explanation of performance appraisal. Fisher et al. (2003) describe performance appraisal as the part of performance management process in which employees' roles in the organization during a definite interval is evaluated. Ijewereme (2013) posits that performance appraisal is a method through which an organization identifies the drawbacks and potency of its employees in order to invigorate them and improve their weaknesses for the advancement of the employees and the organization. Azelama (1995) averred that

performance appraisal is a recurrent and complete assessment of employees' effectiveness on the job for the sole purpose of determining their efficiency, skills, potential, and weaknesses to extract information for human resources development decisions and policies.

The process of performance management involves identifying shared goals of the firm and the employees being appraised. These objectives may be linked to general organizational goals. When conducted effectively, it increases employee productivity and output quality (Davis, 1995). Armstrong (2006) notes that in performance appraisals, accuracy and fairness in measuring employee performance is pivotal. A performance appraisal system assists the organization to identify three key factors: performance standards, core competences, and communicating the standards and competences to employees (Longenecker, 1997).

Performance appraisal in an organization is considered a key human resource management practice for measuring effectiveness and efficiency (Redman et al., 2000). Folger et al. (2002) indicate that a due-process appraisal system involves the requirement for organizations to publish, distribute, and explain performance standards to employees, discuss how and why such standard must be met, and provide regular and timely feedback on performance. Fair hearing necessitate formal review meetings in which employees are primed for the assessment of their performance.

Feedback involves the appraiser providing the appraisee, with information on the appraisees' performance from time to time. Positive feedback refers to on work done well, while what needs to be improved is communicated to the employee through constructive criticism. Murphy and Cleveland (1995) assert that supervisors and employees should converse regularly on how performance can be advanced. Employees' and managers' reactions to appraisal systems are necessary for achieving at least three purposes of the appraisal - employee development, reward allocation, and legal documentation.

There are different types of performance appraisal systems that organizations can chose from, depednding on their suitability, goals to be achieved and how well they enable the organization to enhance employees' productivity. The different performance appraisal systems are open appraisal, confidential appraisal or open secret appraisal. Each appraisal systems has its merit and demerits, but the adoption would require the need to take cognizance of objectivity, fairness, and equity in the evaluation of employees' performance.

Open appraisal according to Asadu et al. (2020) produces a path where employees' strengths and weaknesses are disclosed through the appraisal process. The employee's achievements and shortcomings are relayed to them during performance counseling interactions. Asadu et al. (2020) accentuates that the information obtained by employees about the assessment has considerable effect on their self-esteem and work efficiency. Conveying a good report is considerably less difficult for both the appraiser and the employee than when performance leaves much to be desired. An open appraisal system reveal and create self-consciousness which is a process of giving insight into one's performance. It helps the employee become more reflective and objective about themselves and future planning, which establishes an action plan for the coming year in terms of fixing targets, activities, and responsibilities (Boswell & Boudreau, 2000).

Confidential appraisal is one under which, employees that are appraised are not allowed to be part of the appraisal process. Mathias and Johnson (2010) states that, in the confidential appraisal, the

appraisee is not drafted in the appraisal exercise; and the appraisal outcome is not communicated to them. Confidential appraisal leaves appraised employees in doubt about their performance level and does not create room for future improvement in case they performed below expectation. Some managers may not want to give feedback to their subordinates particularly when performance is poor for reasons such as creating disharmony in the workplace, causing employee turnover, putting employees under stress, and discouraging workers.

The open secret or semi-open and semi-secret appraisal system entails having the appraisal procedure open at the beginning and later confidential. The open secret appraisal necessitates employees to fill out an assessment form, thereafter, the manager rates the employee and returns their rating to them to respond and append their signature. However, the employees appraised, will not be given feedback about the outcome of the appraisal (Asadu et al., 2020).

### **Career Advancement**

According to Robbins and Coulter (2002), a career is a progression of roles filled by individuals during their work life. Yalcin (1994) posits that career is the unceasing progression, knowledge, and skill attainment of employees in an explicit job role. Even though a career, in the general sense, is defined as the totality of the job a person undertakes throughout their work life, it has a meaning beyond this definition. The career of employees is not only the occupation they maintained but the training and skills developed over the years in justifying the expectancy of their job function. (Kaynak, 1996).

Career advancement, therefore, is one's view of the likelihood of development and growth within an organization (Osawe, 2015). Smit (2007) defined career advancement as an enhancement in the status of employees who exert effort to gain the requisite skills and advance their performance. Career advancement entails an apparent path of progression through the positions in an organization. It is centered on merit without regard for race, gender, age, or ethnicity. Deserving cases become eligible for advancement. When employees have the knowledge that each of them has equal chance of accomplishment, it culminates in exerting efforts to achieve their best (Ijewereme 2013).

Weng and Hu (2009) notes that employee career advancement could be captured by four factors: career goal progression, professional development, promotional speed, and remuneration increase. This multi-dimensional conceptualization implies that career advancement is both a function of the employees' efforts in making progress toward their personal career goals and acquiring new skills and the organization's efforts in rewarding such efforts, through promotion and salary increases. This multi-dimensional view of career advancement can also be construed as a fulfillment of promises on the part of the employer, which in turn is positively related to employees' organizational commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006).

### **Employee Performance Appraisal and Career Advancement**

Employee performance appraisal is a strategic tool for growth and sustenance of any organization. It is believed that performance appraisal creates a system where organizations recognize how well employees are furthering the accomplishment of the overall strategic objectives of the organization (Arowolo, 2012). In any thriving organization, the major thrust for stemming the tide of low turnover is the prospect of career growth. Dialoke and Paschal (2017) aver that career advancement accords the opportunity for long-term achievement, pay rise, job security, and job satisfaction. A

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commitment to career advancement pushes for a well-motivated workforce and a performing organization.

However, career advancement for employees is a broad spectrum of human resources management in modern organizations. Obisi (2011) notes that information emitted from employee performance appraisal is dominant because of its expediency in every functional aspect of human resources management. According to Obi (2002), employee performance appraisal relates to career advancement. Performance appraisal provides an organization with data required for present and future human resource planning. Appraisal also creates a performance management system that promotes manpower planning. Obi (2002) notes that data obtained from appraisal identifies potential employees for advancement into managerial positions. Consequently, making provision for management development.

To support the assertion of Obi (2002), Grote (2002) opines that a good appraisal system provides far-reaching information on manpower strengths and weaknesses to validate succession planning in the organization. This elucidates that the commencement of career advancement for employees in any organization stems from effective appraisal systems. Effective appraisal systems therefore, helps to uncover capacity, skill, and experience that employees have attained over the years; and their aptitude for the next position in the organization.

It is noteworthy that training and development are pivotal to career advancement in organizations. According to Davies (1995), training and development provide the surest path for employees to acquire skills identified during appraisals; and that training prepares employees for opportunities for career progression. Asadu et al. (2020) posits that effective performance appraisal bares skill deficiency that negatively affects employees' performance.

In other words, deficiencies detected during appraisals can be remedied through specialized training and development. For instance, Arugu and Chigozie (2020) assert that there are agencies in Nigeria public organizations that are responsible for coordinating training efforts. Each department of a ministry or agency of government is responsible for identifying training needs and selecting candidates for training and development programmes. Some training institutions such as the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), The Institute of Policy and Strategy Studies, the Centre for Management Development (CMD), and the Civil Service Institute are in collaboration with agencies of government to address issues of training needs.

Asadu et al. (2020) notes that although appraisal systems do not guarantee proper training and development of employees, determining training and development needs is more clear-cut when appraisal information is utilized. Based on the foregoing, effective performance appraisal can be described as the link between training and development and career advancement in an organization. This implies that performance appraisal processes identify skill gaps in employees, and notes the fact that such employees can be trained to acquire the requisite skills and then, positioned for advancement in their career; and to contribute substantially to the growth of the organization.

Performance appraisal review also have direct implications on career development, this can be achieved through informal appraisal systems. According to Ngu (1994), informal performance appraisal can take place through informal discussions between employees and their supervisors usually in informal meetings. The implication is that through this medium, supervisors exchange

ideas about the qualities or habits of their subordinates. This method enables management to collect data that can be used for career advancement.

### **Bottlenecks to Effective Performance Appraisal in Nigerian Public Organization**

Studies show considerable bottlenecks to effective performance appraisal in Nigeria's public organizations (Obisi, 2011; Obi, 2002). Performance appraisal create conflict between supervisors and subordinates, and leads to dysfunctional behaviors (Lawler, 1994). If the performance assessment system is not properly designed or not properly executed, employees will be afraid of appraisal. Managers have displayed a dislike to attitude to the time, paperwork, difficult choice, and discomfort that often accompany the appraisal process. Going through the process affects managers' high-priority workload and the experience may be distasteful when appraised employee, perform poorly (Arugu & Chigozie, 2020).

Asadu et al. (2020) states that another challenge bedeviling effective performance appraisal is the issue of objectivity. In the rating scale method, normally measured factors such as attitude, personality, and appearance are subjective factors that are difficult to measure. This happens when managers let individual differences influence their assessment. These range from favoritism, stereotyping, and hostility. In this case, exceptionally high or low assessment is given to only specific employees based on the appraiser's inclination toward the employee. Gender, race, age, and friendship are instances of personal bias that shroud the appraisal process.

Krattenmaker (2009) added that inaccuracy in the appraisal system also constitutes a challenge to appraisal systems. An employee may erroneously be rated near the average or middle of the scale. The attitude of the evaluator is to play safe. This safe-playing attitude arises from reservation and apprehension expressed by evaluators. This practice may be emboldened by some rating scale systems that expect the evaluator to explain in writing for extremely high or low assessment. With such a system, the appraiser may shun probable disapproval or controversy by rotating around the average score. The evaluator use a such expressions such as satisfactory or average to depict the performance of workers. When a manager award an underachiever or overachiever an average rating, it hinders the opportunity for career advancement (Krattenmaker, 2009).

Asadu et al. (2020) posits that a manager's perception of an employee might affect the appraisal process. This happens when the manager's evaluation is influenced by previously held beliefs. Summer (2008) added that leniency or severity on the part of raters make appraisals subjective; and this obliterates the purpose of performance appraisal. Leniency entails giving unmerited high rating to a worker. This is common when performance criteria are highly subjective and the appraiser is anticipated to review the evaluation result with an employee (Obi, 2002).

The issue of political patronage acclaimed to be one of the yardsticks in public service recruitment process in Nigeria poses a challenge to effective performance appraisal. In public organizations, professionalism requires basic skills, training, and experience and when these variables are jeopardized during the recruitment process, managers are faced with the problem of managing and appraising unqualified personnel in the service, since such an individual was engaged based on political patronage Arowolo (2012).

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has provided insight into the role of employee performance appraisal systems in career advancement in Nigerian public organizations. The paper concludes that performance appraisal does not only promote organizational performance but provides potency in determining employee capacity, skills acquisition, and experience for career advancement. Nigeria's public organizations' performance appraisal systems have been inundated with scores of challenges; and their current practices of appraisal negates MBO theory. Inaccurate rating system does not provide adequate data that would identify potential employees for advancement into managerial positions in public sector organizations. In addition, the defective appraisal systems makes it difficult to detect employees skill deficiencies, and affects the identification of appropriate training needs. It is on these bases that the following recommendations are proffered.

First, it is pertinent that for employee performance appraisal to be potent, the full support of management and staff must be solicited. An appraisal format must be designed to specifically address areas that are of concern to top echelon of public organizations. In other to address the haphazard approach of managers in rating employees in public organizations, organizations must develop and support comprehensive training programmes for managers responsible for conducting performance appraisals in ministries, departments, and agencies of government.

Secondly, such trainings should include written and verbal information regarding rating scale interpretation, job description development, and modification, performance documentation, providing effective feedback, and conducting the performance appraisal interview. The training programme should be ongoing rather than one-off. This will give managers the opportunity to discuss problems and receive feedback concerning rater bias. In addition, it will allow for continuous reinforcement of corporate training goals of consistency, accuracy, and fairness.

Also, employees should be provided with information that will help them understand the process and rating definitions. They should be provided with up-to-date job description, informed on procedures for modifying job descriptions as appropriate, and encouraged to take active part in performance appraisal discussions. Such discussions should allow for two-way communication and exchange of information relevant to job expectations, performance criteria, objectives, and/or performance ratings.

In addition, in order to be effective and influence behavior of employees, relationships between behavior and reward must be clear and perceived to be fair by employees. From an individual development perspective, performance appraisal systems should identify areas of improvement, necessary for individual growth that would enhance their career. To do this, it must be sensitive to individual differences and provide a format for outlining each individual's strengths and weaknesses (Charles & Fredrick, 1984).

Finally, in order to ensure that objectivity and fairness are achieved in performance appraisal in Nigerian public organizations, it is pertinent that the recruitment process should uphold the principle of meritocracy.



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