

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND CIVIL SERVANTS' MOTIVATION

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## Abstract

The purpose of our study is to provide a comprehensive up-to-date analysis regarding performance appraisal in Romanian public institutions and to examine whether there can be established a connection between performance appraisal and the factors that motivate civil servants to achieve improved results in their professional activity.

The data analysed in our paper was collected from 120 civil servants working in institutions of the Romanian central, territorial and local public administration. The data was analysed and processed using quantitative methods and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Based on the collected data, the respondents were grouped into two internally consistent clusters depending on their performance appraisal experience (high and low quality performance appraisal experience) and the profiles of civil servants in each cluster were delineated.

Findings show that performance appraisal is not uniformly implemented in Romanian public institutions, 61,5% of our respondents perceiving it as an activity that lacks fairness and transparency, which does not contribute to their professional development. Another aspect achieved through our paper is the hierarchy of the factors that mostly influence civil servants work performance categorised into the two clusters: the ones satisfied and the ones dissatisfied with their performance appraisal experience.

Our paper brings into academic discussion the necessity to design and put in place an improved performance appraisal system for civil servants in Romanian public institutions, aligned with the practices and objectives of performance management.

**Keywords:** civil service, performance appraisal, motivation, job satisfaction, human resources research.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational efficiency is highly influenced by personnel efficiency as human resources represent the factor that can turn public sector into an efficient and sustainable system. Adapting public institutions to market economy and international environment implies profound changes in public management. Public institutions capacity to answer the urgent need to innovate and to implement the "new" depends on

public managers ability to identify, understand and admit the need for change, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to act towards its achievement (Androniceanu, 2010a).

In the context of the new public management, numerous European Union member states see performance appraisal as the means to foster technical and cultural changes in the public sector. The results of performance appraisal are increasingly and more consistently linked to performance agreements, performance-related pay, career development, promotions, job security. In addition performance appraisal is used consolidate managerial accountability and responsibility for action. With these changes, the instrument of performance appraisal has gained a central position in the human resource management system. However, increased significance of performance appraisal demands for an accurate, transparent and professional implementation of the entire management process.

The aim of our paper is to determine whether performance appraisal in Romanian public institutions represents a qualitative process and whether its results are connected to civil servants motivation. Our study is based on a survey conducted among Romanian civil servants regarding the main components of the appraisal process and the motivational factors that influence their work performance.

In the following sections of our study, we present the theoretical framework for the investigation, research objectives and methods, followed by the analysis of the research findings. The limitations of the study are also presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for government policy in the area of human resources management and the need for an improved performance appraisal system.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Armstrong (2000) defined performance management as a “strategic and integrated process that delivers sustained success to organisations by improving the performance of people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of individual contributors and teams”. McAdam et al. (2005) appreciate that performance management represents an integrated process as it creates a vertical integration consisting in the alignment of business, team and individual objectives and a horizontal integration by linking different aspects of cross cutting activities, to achieve a coherent approach to the management and development of people. New management methods improve teamwork, create connections among different categories of personnel, offer the possibility to quickly adapt to the changing environment, empower employees and transform public institutions into client-oriented organizations (Ristea, 2013).

Career development in the civil service represents a complex process which involves both the individual, who should set clear professional objectives and accurately assess their development potential, and the organization which should provide appropriate development conditions, adapted to individual's needs and expectations (Androniceanu et al., 2010b). According to Beardwell and Holden (2001), the performance appraisal system is part of the holistic process of performance management, which comprises the following interconnected elements: setting organization, department, team and individual objectives; reward strategies and schemes; training and development strategies; feedback, communication and coaching; individual career planning; mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of performance management system and interventions.

Armstrong (2009) considers that the formal review provides a focal point for the consideration of key performance and development issues. He appreciates that the five primary performance management elements agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue can be put to good use during the performance review meeting and lead to the completion of the performance management cycle by informing performance and development agreements. In Armstrong's opinion traditional appraisals are often no more than an analysis of where those involved are now, and where they have come from. The author considers that the true role of performance management is to look forward to what needs to be done by people to achieve the purpose of the job, to meet new challenges, to make even better use of their knowledge, skills and abilities, to develop their capabilities by establishing a self-managed learning agenda and to reach agreement on any areas where performance needs to be improved and how that improvement should take place. Adequate training and human resources development policies in public institutions lead to increased organizational capacity to satisfy citizens and business environment demands (Androniceanu, 2014).

Rolle and Klingner (2012) also consider that a well-functioning performance appraisal systems should contribute to communicating management goals and objectives to employees; motivating employees to improve performance. In addition, they perceive performance appraisal as a means to equitably distribute organizational rewards such as salary increases and promotions and to provide management with insights that can be used to enhance employees' productivity and job satisfaction. Rolle and Klingner (2012) appreciate that effective performance appraisal systems should answer the following requirements: objectives should be clear; the supervisor's role should be clear; supervisors should have opportunity, ability, and desire to evaluate accurately; employees should understand and accept the appraisal process; performance standards should be job-specific; evaluation should be oriented toward

performance improvement; administrative formalism should be low; the relationship between employees and supervisors should be positive.

Performance appraisals do result in increases in employee performance and productivity (Rodgers and Hunter, 1991; Schay, 1988; Taylor and Pierce, 1999). However, the capacity to achieve positive HRM outcomes depends on the quality of the performance appraisal experience. Brown et al. (2010) appreciate that performance appraisal is a complex process which allows for variation, particularly when the supervisor is required to make subjective judgments of employee performance which may be influenced by bias or distortion as a result of emotion, resulting in a reduced quality of the performance appraisal process. The critical leadership competencies identified by Androniceanu (2013), good understanding of the organization and its environment, building relationships and networks, managing change, influencing, motivating, developing, retaining talent and creative human resources, managing conflict and dealing with problems of employees, represent not only the baseline for promoting ethical behaviour within public institutions, but also for conducting highly accurate performance appraisals.

Azzone and Palermo (2011) appreciate that performance appraisal and reward systems are based on the assumption that employees' performance and motivation can be improved by establishing a clear link between efforts and reward through formalised and specified individual targets.

Through our paper, we intend to examine to what extent Romanian public managers employ performance appraisal to fairly distribute rewards and achieve employees' motivation, that would result in professional development and increased individual and organizational performance.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

High quality human resources activities and increased involvement of line managers in personnel development contribute to achieving improved individual and institutional performance (Androniceanu, Ciobanu, 2014), to building efficient public institutions and, consequently, to developing social trust. Our paper analyses the quality of civil servants' individual performance appraisal conducted in Romanian public institutions. Starting from the premises that assessments of quality typically require the involvement of stakeholders and that, in the context of performance appraisals, a critical stakeholder is the employee, our study is based on the perceptions of appraised civil servants regarding their performance appraisal experience. In the research sample have been included civil servants that work in institutions of the central public administration, territorial agencies and local public administration. The questionnaires were distributed both in electronic format, using <https://docs.google.com> platform, and in hard copies. 120 civil servants filled in our questionnaire.

In order to find out civil servants' opinion on how performance appraisal is conducted in public institutions we created an instrument that measures the overall performance appraisal experience by taking into consideration aspects such as the feedback provided by the manager, impact upon professional activity and remuneration level, characteristics of the process: formal and inefficient or equitable and transparent.

### **3.1. Research objectives and hypothesis**

The objective of our research is to provide a comprehensive up-to-date analysis regarding performance appraisal experience in Romanian public institutions and to examine whether there can be established a connection between performance appraisal and the factors that motivate public employees to efficiently and effectively perform their duties.

The quality of the appraisal process is assessed based on the opinion of the appraised civil servants. Employees perception of the performance appraisal is a sensitive indicator of the process quality variations as it produces a powerful influence upon employees' prospects within the organisation, promotion, termination of employment or remuneration (Brown et al., 2010).

In our paper we test the following hypothesis: There can be established a relationship between the quality of performance appraisal (high/low quality experience) and the factors that influence civil servants work performance (intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors).

### **3.2. Research measures and methods**

The data has been analysed and processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). We were interested to identify statistically significant associations among our research variables and tested the relationship between control variables, independent and dependent variables.

Control variables. There were 5 control variables included in the analysis to control for individual employee differences and differences in the work context: public institution administrative level, civil service position, highest academic qualification, civil service seniority, public institution dimension.

Dependent variable. Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation was analysed. Intrinsic motivation was measured using five items: the content of the performed activity, level of independence and responsibility, institutional impact on society, superior' s leadership style, results of the individual performance appraisal process. Extrinsic motivation was measured using the following five items: work environment and conditions, salary level, professional training opportunities, career development opportunities, workplace safety.

Each motivational factor has been evaluated by our respondents using a Likert scale from 1 to 9, where 1 - the factor does not influence at all my work performance and 9 - the factor influences significantly my work performance.

Independent variable. Our measure of quality of the performance appraisal process includes items that assess features such as the level of communication between the employee and their supervisor, efficiency and transparency of the process, its impact upon the appraised person's professional activity and remuneration level were included in our measurement instrument.

Items included in the instrument designed to measure the quality of the performance appraisal:

- a) communication between the employee and their supervisor - performance appraisal represents an opportunity to receive feedback from the superior regarding the results achieved during the previous year;
- b) communication between the employee and their supervisor - performance appraisal represents an opportunity to set, together with the superior the objectives for the next year;
- c) activity's impact upon the appraised person's professional activity - performance appraisal produces a significant impact upon civil servants professional activity;
- d) activity transparency - performance appraisal is a fair and transparent process;
- e) activity's impact upon the appraised person's remuneration level - performance appraisal results influences the salary level.

The items regarding the quality of the performance appraisal experience have been evaluated by our respondents using a five-point scale where 1 - total disagreement with the statement and 5 - total agreement with the statement.

The Cronbach's Alpha on these five variables is 0.841.

Using cluster analysis, we segmented our respondents depending on the quality of an employee's performance appraisal experience, based on the 5 characteristics of the performance appraisal mentioned above. Cluster analysis is used to find the representative members in a data set, to find natural groupings in data. It is a convenient method for identifying homogenous groups of clusters. Objects (or cases, observations) in a specific cluster share many characteristics, but are very dissimilar to objects not belonging to that cluster (Mooi and Sarstedt, 2011).

Before we started with the clustering process, we examined the variables for substantial collinearity. To determine this, we run a bivariate correlation analysis in SPSS and calculated the Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the 5 items used to evaluate the quality of the performance appraisal experience. The correlation matrix did not display values above 0.900, indicating no possible collinearity issues. Then there has been carried out a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method and applying Euclidean Distance.

### 3.3. Sample description

120 civil servants were included in our sample. The percentages of respondents from each administrative level (central, territorial and local), as well as other respondents characteristics, are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - RESPONDENTS' PROFILES

Variable	Characteristic	% within variable	Cluster 1 (%)*	Cluster 2 (%)*
Public institution administrative level	Central public administration	30.8	16.7	83.3
	Territorial public administration	8.3	22.2	77.8
	Local public administration	60.8	53.1	46.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>
Civil service position	Management position	10.8	38.5	61.5
	Executive position	70.0	45.9	54.1
	Special attribution position	19.2	13.6	86.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>
Highest academic qualification	High school degree	10	66.7	33.3
	Bachelor degree	30	63.6	36.4
	Master degree	49.2	36.4	63.6
	Advanced studies diploma	10	19.6	80.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>
Civil service seniority	Less than 3 years	20.0	27.3	72.7
	Between 3 and 5 years	11.7	30.8	69.2
	Between 5 and 10 years	24.2	44.4	55.6
	Between 10 and 15 years	25.0	37.0	63.0
	More than 15 years	18.3	52.6	47.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>
Public institution dimension	Less than 50 employees	5.2	83.3	16.7
	Between 51 and 100 employees	6.0	62.5	37.5
	Between 101 and 150 employees	7.5	33.3	66.7
	Between 151 and 300 employees	41.8	46.8	53.2
	More than 301 employees	29.1	15.8	84.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>

\*The percentages included in columns "Cluster 1 (%)" and "Cluster 2 (%)" represent percentages of total valid answers received as some of the persons included in the sample did not answer each item of the questions.

The questionnaire was addressed to civil servants, in general, persons who occupy either managerial, executive positions or who occupy a public manager position - civil servants with specific attributions in the area of public administration reform, according to the Romanian legislation in the area of civil service, and who have benefited from specialised training in this purpose.

The sample of our research was built using the random sampling technique. Any available civil servant was invited to answer the questionnaire especially designed for this stage of the research. As shown in Table 1, the persons who filled in our questionnaire occupy either management positions (10.8%), executive positions (70%) or are civil servants with specific attributions (19.2%). The majority of our respondents are working in public institutions of Romanian central and local public administration with a large number of employees: 29.1% of them are working in a public institution with more than 301 employees, 49.3% of them are working in a public institution with 101 to 300 employees. The other 18.7% of our respondents are working in a public institution with less than 150 employees. Their areas of activity are varied: budget, finance and public investments; public policy; human resources; European funds administration; organisational management etc.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Performance appraisal profiles

Using cluster analysis, we grouped our respondents into two internally consistent clusters. The first cluster brings together a homogenous group of 42 civil servants (38,5% of the valid answers) who are satisfied with their performance appraisal experience and will be referred to as "high quality performance appraisal experience". The second cluster is made up of civil servants who are less satisfied with their performance appraisal experience - 67 respondents (61,5% of the valid answers) will be referred to as "low quality performance appraisal experience". In order to get a better view of the results, we examined the cluster centroids - the mean values of the answers received for each statement used to evaluate the quality of the performance appraisal experience. The results are displayed by Figure 1 below.

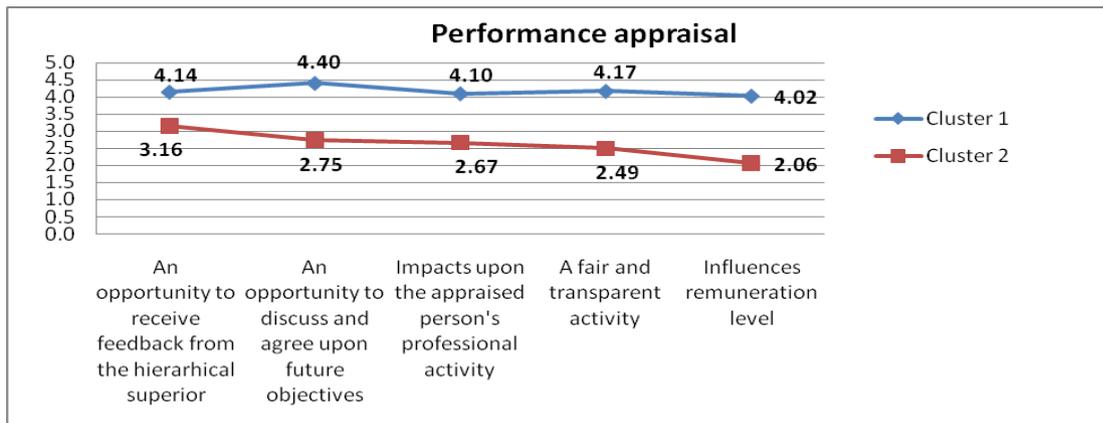


FIGURE 1 - PROFILES OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL EXPERIENCE

The descriptive statistics, presented in Table 2, show that the respondents in the first cluster agree and strongly agree with the fact that performance appraisal represents an opportunity to receive feedback from their superior regarding their activity (mean=4.12) and to agree on future objectives (mean=4.40). They consider performance appraisal an equitable, fair and transparent activity (mean=4.17), which impacts significantly upon their professional activity (mean=4.10), and remuneration level (mean=4.02).

TABLE 2 - DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Ward Method	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 PA represents an opportunity to receive feedback from the manager regarding work performance	42	3	5	4.14	.718
1 PA represents an opportunity to discuss with the manager and agree upon future objectives	42	3	5	4.40	.544
1 PA represents an activity that impacts significantly upon the appraised person professional activity	42	3	5	4.10	.726
1 PA represents a fair and transparent HR activity	42	3	5	4.17	.537
1 PA represents an activity whose result influences remuneration level	42	3	5	4.02	.780
Valid N (listwise)	42				
2 PA represents an opportunity to receive feedback from the manager regarding work performance	67	1	5	3.16	1.175
2 PA represents an opportunity to discuss with the manager and agree upon future objectives	67	1	5	2.75	1.064
2 PA represents an activity that impacts significantly upon the appraised person professional activity	67	1	5	2.67	1.021
2 PA represents a fair and transparent HR activity	67	1	5	2.49	1.064
2 PA represents an activity whose result influences remuneration level	67	1	5	2.06	1.229
Valid N (listwise)	67				

Even if the respondents in the second cluster chose answers that vary from 1 to 5 on our evaluation scale, the mean remains close to or well below 3. The salary level of the civil servants in the latter category is not influenced by performance appraisal as they disagree and strongly disagree with this statement (mean=2,06). Another important aspect signalled by the data in the table below is that the civil servants grouped in the second cluster, representing 61,5% of our respondents, perceive performance appraisal as a human resources activity that lacks fairness and transparency (mean=2,49), which does not contribute to their professional development (mean=2,67).

The profile of the respondents, divided into the two clusters, is shown in Table 1. Even if the number of the respondents included in the 2nd cluster - "low quality performance appraisal experience" is larger than the number of respondents included in the first cluster, we consider relevant the following aspects:

- at local public administration level, the percentage of civil servants who are satisfied with the quality of their performance appraisal experience is larger than the percentage of civil servants who are less satisfied with the quality of their performance appraisal experience, that is 53.1% of respondents included in cluster 1 compared to 46.9% included in cluster 2; the percentage of civil servants from central and territorial public administration who are dissatisfied with the quality of their performance appraisal experience is significantly higher compared to the percentage of civil servants from these administrative levels who are satisfied with their performance appraisal experience;
- with respect to the occupied civil service position, the number of civil servants with special attributions who are dissatisfied with the quality of their performance appraisal experience is significantly higher compared to the number of those who are satisfied with their performance appraisal experience, 86.4% of the civil servants with special attributions included in cluster 2 compared to 13.6% included in cluster 1;
- with respect to the highest academic qualification, civil servants who graduated high school or have a Bachelor degree are mainly satisfied with their performance appraisal experience (66.7% of those with a high school degree, respectively 63.6% of those with a Bachelor degree are included in the 1st cluster), while 63.6% of those with a master degree and 80.4% of the civil servants who graduated advanced studies are included in the 2nd cluster - "low quality performance appraisal experience";
- with respect to the civil service seniority, civil servants with less than 5 years within public administration expressed their dissatisfaction with their performance appraisal experience

(72.7% of those with less than 3 years in the civil service and 69.2% of those with 3 to 5 years civil service seniority are included in the 2nd cluster);

- with respect to the public institution dimension, the majority of the civil servants in smaller public institutions are satisfied with their performance appraisal experience, that is 83.3% of those working in a institution with less than 50 employees and 62.5% of those working in a institution with 51 to 100 employees; civil servants working in larger public institutions are mainly dissatisfied with their performance appraisal experience.

Based on the statements above, we can conclude that civil servants satisfied with their performance appraisal experience are working in small dimension local public institutions, occupy executive position, their highest academic qualification is high school or Bachelor degree, and have been working in the civil service for more than 15 years. The civil servants dissatisfied with their performance appraisal experience are working in large institutions of the central or territorial public administration, occupy managerial or special attribution positions, their highest academic qualification is Master or post-university advanced studies and have been working in the civil service for less than 15 years.

The statistical correlations established between the classification of the respondents into the two clusters and public institution administrative level, the highest academic qualification and public institution dimension respectively are statistically significant, with p-value < 0.005.

#### **4.2. Analysis of motivational factors through performance appraisal experience**

Comparing the answers provided by our respondents, divided into the two clusters, with respect to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, our analysis did not provide statistically significant results regarding the category of factors that mostly influence each group of respondents. However, by calculating the mean of each motivational factors, we can conclude that respondents in the first cluster perceive motivational factors to produce a higher impact upon their professional activity compared to the respondents in the second cluster who constantly position the motivational factors on a lower level on the 1 to 5 evaluation scale (Table 3).

Providing an appropriate work environment enhances civil servants' commitment to the organization and motivation to reach higher performance standards (Ciobanu and Androniceanu, 2014). In this context, we considered important to analyse motivational aspects for each group of respondents and to draw up the hierarchy of the factors that mostly influence the work productivity of the category of civil servants that are satisfied with their performance appraisal experience and of those that are dissatisfied with their performance appraisal experience.

TABLE 3 - THE IMPACT OF INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATIONAL ITEMS

	Motivational factor	Cluster 1			Cluster 2			Total		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Intrinsic	The content of the performed activity	42	4.43	.801	64	4.06	.833	106	4.21	.836
	Level of independence and responsibility	40	4.35	.802	66	3.97	.976	106	4.11	.929
	Institutional impact on society	41	4.15	.937	67	3.97	1.073	108	4.04	1.022
	Superior's leadership style	42	4.48	.890	67	4.31	.743	109	4.38	.803
	Performance appraisal result	39	4.05	1.191	64	3.81	1.283	103	3.90	1.249
Extrinsic motivation	Work environment and conditions	42	4.31	.897	67	4.27	.863	109	4.28	.872
	Salary level	42	3.88	1.152	66	3.47	1.292	108	3.63	1.250
	Professional training opportunities	41	4.02	1.151	67	3.78	.918	108	3.87	1.015
	Career development opportunities	42	4.02	1.093	67	3.54	1.078	109	3.72	1.104
	Workplace safety	42	4.38	.854	67	3.96	1.007	109	4.12	.969

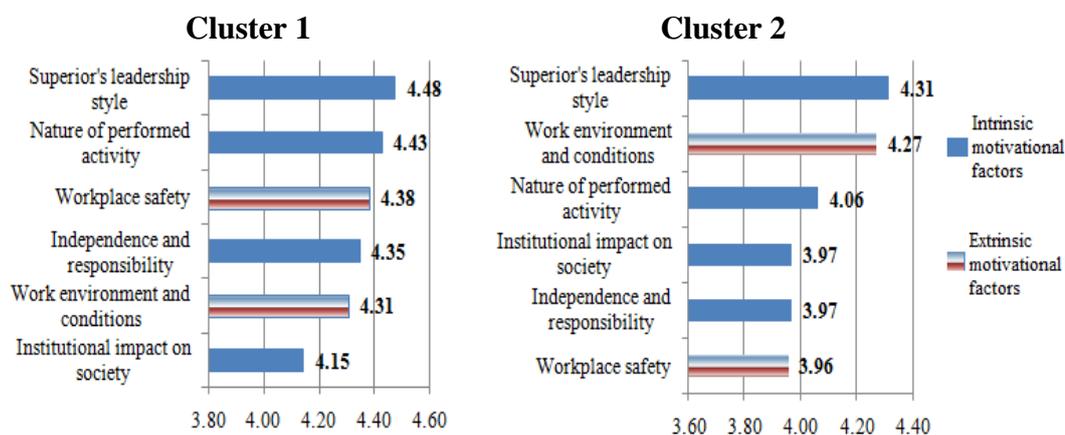


FIGURE 2 - COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE OVER THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CIVIL SERVANTS WORK PERFORMANCE

The graphs displayed above show that the questioned civil servants, grouped into the two clusters based on their perception regarding the quality of the performance appraisal experience, are differently influenced in their work performance by motivational factors. While superior's leadership style and the nature of the activity are important for both groups, the difference is given by extrinsic motivational factors. The group of civil servants that benefit from "high quality performance appraisal experience" are motivated in their activity by workplace safety and pay less attention to work environment and conditions. For the respondents in the second cluster, work environment and conditions are more stimulating than workplace safety.

Based on the quality of the performance appraisal experience, we have been able to identify 2 groups of civil servants and to delineate their profile. Consequently, we identified the factors that mostly influence workplace motivation and performance for each of the identified groups, thus confirming the hypothesis that there can be established a relationship between the quality of performance appraisal (high/low quality experience) and the factors that influence civil servants work performance (intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Performance appraisal, as well as other human resources activities, when conducted properly generates positive effects upon civil servants individual performances. However, as pointed out by numerous specialists in the area, low quality performance appraisal represents a continuing challenge for organisations (Heathfield, 2007; Merritt, 2007; Brown et al., 2010).

The results of our research display clear disparities in the way performance appraisal is conducted in Romanian public institutions. Through our calculations, we identified that the most important difference between the answers provided by the persons in the second cluster - "low quality performance appraisal experience" and the ones provided by the individuals in the first cluster - "high quality performance appraisal experience" concerns the impact of the performance appraisal results upon remuneration level. Given the fact that performance appraisal represents one of the mechanisms that can be employed by managers to equitably distribute rewards based on work performance, an important step towards improving both human resources practices in public institutions as well as performance and work results would be uniformly employing performance appraisal results in setting civil servants remuneration level.

However, in order to fairly distribute rewards among employees based on the results of performance appraisal, the following prerequisites need to be ensured: first of all, the managers should possess the necessary knowledge and abilities to perform a correct and equitable performance appraisal; secondly, there needs to be designed and implemented an efficient and transparent individual performance appraisal mechanism for the public sector.

An important achievement of our research is represented by the fact that we managed to delineate the main features of the civil servants based on their degree of satisfaction regarding their performance appraisal experience. We consider that, in order to be able to design an efficient individual performance appraisal mechanism, it is important to have a good knowledge of the needs, motivation and aspirations of its beneficiaries.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Qualitative assessment of the performance appraisal requires involvement of the main stakeholders: the appraiser and the appraised civil servants. A weak point of our research is represented by the fact that the analysis of the performance appraisal has been conducted based only on the opinion of the appraised person.

Another limitation of our study concerns the rather small number of civil servants involved in the survey. The research sample needs to be further extended in order to become representative for the Romanian civil servants population.

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