

Article

Evaluating performance appraisal practices in Sierra Leone's Civil Service: A comparative study through the lens of organizational justice and public service motivation

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Abstract

This research dives into how Sierra Leonean civil servants in the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) feel about fairness during their performance reviews, and how this affects their motivation to serve the public (PSM) and the overall effectiveness of these appraisals. To get a well-rounded picture, the researchers used a mix of methods, including surveys given to 200 employees and in-depth interviews with 20 of them (mostly senior civil servants). The survey results showed that when employees feel like the performance review process is fair, they're more motivated and find the appraisals more useful, which lines up with what other studies on workplace fairness have found (like Alama & Chikeleze, 2022). The interviews, on the other hand, brought to light some issues, such as uneven ways of doing appraisals and cultural beliefs that sway how people see fairness. Interestingly, while both offices aim for effective reviews, the HRMO seems to have a more organized way of doing things, which might be why employees there perceive the process as fairer. The alignment between the numerical and descriptive data really highlights just how crucial organizational justice is in determining PSM and evaluation results. This information is super helpful for HR in the public sector, as it drives home the importance of having fair and open evaluation systems to boost employee drive and effectiveness. Moving forward, it would be great to see more research looking into the long-term effects of evaluation changes and expanding the analysis to include other agencies within Sierra Leone.

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Introduction

Sierra Leone's civil service is vital to the country's public administration, serving as the mainstay of government operations and the driving force behind policy implementation. Since emerging from conflict, Sierra Leone has dedicated significant efforts over the past twenty years to reconstructing its public institutions and improving the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of its administrative processes (Sierra Leone Civil Service Commission, 2021). The civil service is responsible not only for providing crucial administrative support but also

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for acting as the main channel through which government policies are put into action, thus shaping the overall effectiveness of public service delivery. In recent years, policymakers and development partners have increasingly recognized that strong human resource management practices, including effective performance evaluation systems, are essential for enhancing public sector performance in developing nations (Bertone, M. P., Edem-Hotah, J., Samai, M. H. & Witter, S., 2013).

Across the world, the way we evaluate employee performance has changed a lot in the last 100 years. Initially, the public sector adopted methods from the private sector, which stressed control and following the rules (Daley, 1992). These early methods often relied on numerical scores and comparing workers to set standards. However, people started to question these methods, pointing out their potential for subjective judgment, bias from the person doing the evaluating, and their tendency to feel more like punishment (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). As a result, many governments started moving towards evaluation systems that are more focused on development and involvement. These newer systems don't just assess past performance; they're also designed to help employees grow and boost their commitment to public service (Hood & Dixon, 2025).

Sierra Leone's introduction of performance appraisal practices can be traced back to the early reforms implemented after the civil-war. During this period, initiatives backed by donors and government-led reform programs aimed to update public administration practices. Initially, these evaluation systems concentrated primarily on adherence to regulations and imposing penalties. However, they have evolved to incorporate elements that encourage fairness, transparency, and professional growth (World Bank, 2012). Up-to-date reports suggest there has been some advancement, but obstacles persist, especially in guaranteeing that evaluations are carried out impartially and leveraged effectively to guide career progression and policy formulation (Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2022).

Modern performance review systems are built on ideas from organizational fairness and public service motivation theories. These theories suggest that when employees feel like performance reviews are fair and they have a say in them, they're more likely to try to do better and help the organization reach its goals (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Astuti & Rachmawati, 2023). This is especially important for Sierra Leone's civil service because of the challenges of having few resources and needing to gain back public trust. By looking at these theories, this study wants to figure out if the ways key agencies – the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office – do performance reviews are actually helping to make things more transparent, hold people accountable, and help employees grow.

The current research cannot be overemphasis because it fills a gap in the literature concerning performance appraisal practices in developing countries context. Although there's been a lot of research on performance management in well-established bureaucratic systems (Daley, 1992; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017), there's a serious lack of real-world studies looking at these practices specifically within Sierra Leone. This study zeroes in on two key organizations that play a big role in managing the civil service there. It's hoping to shed some light on how performance appraisals are currently handled, figure out where things could be better, and suggest some policy changes that might lead to a more effective way of running things in Sierra Leone's public sector.

In conclusion, this paper takes a deep dive into how performance appraisals have changed over the years and how they're currently done, both around the world and specifically within Sierra Leone's civil service. We'll be looking at these appraisal methods with a focus on fairness within organizations and what drives people to work in public service. By doing this, we aim to gain a clearer picture of how these evaluation systems influence how employees act and, ultimately, how well the organization performs as a whole.

Problem Statement

Even though performance appraisal systems are recognized as an important management tool in enhancing public sector efficiency and accountability, several persistent challenges hinder their effectiveness in practice. Many government organization employees often say that the review process isn't fair, clear, or consistent, and this makes them lose trust and motivation (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Kim & Holzer, 2014). In Sierra Leone's civil service, some early reports from the government and policy reviews show that performance reviews are often done without much planning and don't follow standard, objective rules. Because of this, civil servants feel like the process is subjective and biased, which gets in the way of the good things that performance feedback and professional development are supposed to bring (Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2022; World Bank, 2012).

In addition, although there's a wealth of research on how performance appraisals work in developed countries, there's a striking lack of studies about the special problems public sector appraisal systems face in less developed nations. This lack is especially clear when looking at Sierra Leone, where unique institution-based, cultural, and financial limitations might have a big impact on appraisal results (Bertone et al, 2013). Because there's so little research on this topic, it's tough to come up with well-informed suggestions for changing and enhancing Sierra Leone's public administration.

With these hurdles in mind, this research is designed to address a current research gap. It plans to carefully examine how performance appraisals are carried out in Sierra Leone's civil service, focusing particularly on the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office (HROM). Using the concepts of organizational justice and public service motivation as guiding principles, the study will pinpoint major flaws concerning fairness, openness, and overall effectiveness. Based on these findings, it will suggest practical improvements tailored to the situation at hand, aiming to make the entire appraisal process better. This work is crucial for shaping future changes and for bolstering both the credibility and effectiveness of Sierra Leone's civil service (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Hood & Dixon, 2015).

Acknowledging the hurdles encountered in the current performance review methods within Sierra Leone's civil service, especially regarding fairness, transparency, and effectiveness, this research seeks to conduct a thorough examination of evaluation systems across crucial government bodies. The primary objective is to produce findings that can inform practical improvements and reinforce accountability within the public sector. To achieve this, the study outlines these specific Objectives:

1. Assess the Current Appraisal Practices employed by the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office in Sierra Leone's civil service.
2. Investigate how civil servants perceive the fairness—both in terms of procedural and distributive justice—and transparency of the appraisal systems.

3. Examine the relationship between performance appraisal practices and levels of public service motivation among civil servants.
4. Pinpoint the specific challenges and contextual constraints that undermine the effectiveness of current appraisal practices in the public sector of developing countries, with a focus on Sierra Leone.
5. Propose contextually relevant reforms and strategies to enhance the effectiveness of performance appraisal systems.

Considering these objectives, this research will tackle these core questions:

1. What are the standout characteristics of the performance evaluation methods currently in use by the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office within Sierra Leone's civil service?
2. How do civil servants view the evenhandedness, clarity, and general usefulness of these evaluation methods?
3. How do these evaluation methods affect the drive to serve the public and the trust employees have in Sierra Leone's public sector?
4. What are the main obstacles and limitations that stand in the way of effectively carrying out unbiased performance evaluations within Sierra Leone's civil service?
5. In accordance with the concepts of organizational fairness and the drive to serve the public, how can the performance evaluation system be improved to boost fairness, transparency, and employee effectiveness?

Addressing these questions will not only fill a critical gap in the literature on public sector performance appraisal in developing countries but will also offer practical insights for policy reform in Sierra Leone's civil service. This research aims to contribute to the global dialogue on improving performance management systems in the public sector (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Hood & Dixon, 2015).

Significance of the Study

This research holds importance on both a real-world and academic level. In practical terms, the results will offer essential information to policymakers and HR managers working in Sierra Leone's public sector. By pinpointing the issues especially concerning fairness, openness, and effectiveness in the current methods for evaluating employee performance, the study can guide the creation of stronger evaluation systems. These improved systems would boost accountability and, in turn, lead to better employee performance. Considering the limited public funds and the vital need for public trust in the government, updating how employee performance is appraised is a key move towards more efficient management of human resources (Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2022; Sierra Leone Civil Service Commission, 2021).

In theory, this research helps expand the larger conversation about fairness within organizations and the inner drive to do good work in government bodies. Lots of studies have already looked at these ideas within well-established government systems in wealthier nations (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Hood & Dixon, 2015). But there's a big hole in our knowledge when

it comes to how these same ideas work in less developed countries, like Sierra Leone (Bertone, et al., 2013). This study tries to fill that gap by looking at whether government workers in Sierra Leone feel that performance reviews are fair and transparent, and how those feelings impact their desire to do their jobs well and their dedication to public service (Gasela, 2022). By doing this, the research not only gives us a better grasp of the psychological and structural forces at work, but it also adds to the academic discussion about managing employee performance in the public sector.

In theory, this study adds to the larger conversation about fairness within organizations and what drives people internally in public sector jobs. The end goal of this research is to come up with suggestions backed by solid data that can help improve things in Sierra Leone's civil service. These suggestions should ideally make managing people better and lead to a workforce in the public sector that's more driven, responsible, and efficient.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational justice is about how fairly employees think they're being treated at work. This includes the processes, how people interact, and the results they see (Greenberg, 1990; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). It's a big deal when it comes to understanding how employees feel, especially when it comes to how their performance is evaluated. If they feel like things are fair, they're more likely to accept the results of their performance review and keep up the good work. The academic literature often explores two main aspects of organizational justice:

This aspect focuses on how fairly the processes are carried out that lead to various outcomes, including things like performance reviews, promotions, and compensation. It highlights the need for clear, reliable, and unbiased methods, along with giving employees a chance to share their opinions during these decisions (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). When it comes to performance evaluations, if employees feel the process is handled objectively and they get to have their say, they're more likely to trust the system. Consequently, they tend to be more accepting of the results – even if they're not entirely positive – and are more motivated overall (Kim & Holzer, 2014).

Think of distributive justice as being about whether things are fair in terms of what people get out of the system. This includes how rewards, praise, and other perks are handed out based on performance evaluations (Alama & Chikeleze, 2022; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Van Veen-Dirks, Leliveld & Kaufmann, 2021)). When employees feel like the rewards and recognition they're getting match up with how well they're doing their job, it makes them feel valued and like they're being treated fairly. This feeling doesn't just make them happier at work; it also makes them more motivated from within and more dedicated to the company's goals (Hood & Dixon, 2015).

These dimensions have a lot to do with how we evaluate job performance, and here's why: For starters, being fair in how we evaluate people can really cut down on their cynicism and pushback. This, in turn, helps create an atmosphere of trust and honesty, as pointed out by (DeNisi and Murphy, 2017). Secondly, when people feel like things are distributed fairly – like rewards matching effort – they're generally more jazzed about improving their work. Kim and Holzer (2014) touched on this. Now, think about a place like Sierra Leone, a developing country, where public money is tight and people might not fully trust institutions. It's super important to weave this sense of fairness into how we grade government workers, as it can

boost their motivation and improve how the public sector works overall, which is exactly what Public Sector Reform (PSRU, 2010) emphasized in their quarterly report.

This theoretical framework lays the groundwork for our study by connecting how people perceive fairness to how well performance appraisal systems work. It will direct our exploration into how the current ways appraisals are done in Sierra Leone's civil service affect what employees do and how motivated they are. It will also help us find areas that could be changed to make things clearer, fairer, and work better overall.

Public Services Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is the inner drive that pushes people to work for the betterment of society, prioritizing community service over personal profit (Vandenabeele & Carina, 2020). Unlike the private sector, where external rewards like bonuses and profit-sharing are key, the public sector tends to draw individuals driven by a strong sense of responsibility, a dedication to social justice, and a genuine wish to improve their community's well-being (PSRU, 2010). Studies indicate that although financial incentives have their place in public organizations, relying too heavily on them can diminish that inner drive, which is crucial for effective public service (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kim & Holzer, 2014).

Where organizational fairness meets the drive to serve the public, we find a strong foundation for creating performance review systems that public sector employees both embrace and find effective. When workers feel that these reviews are conducted fairly – both in how they're carried out and in the results they yield – it boosts their inherent desire to do good by acknowledging their efforts and lining up with their fundamental beliefs. Studies by DeNisi and Murphy, (2017) support this argument. Open and equitable evaluation methods foster trust, leading staff to see feedback as a chance to grow rather than a form of punishment. This not only makes them more receptive to appraisals but also tends to make them happier in their roles and more dedicated to their public service missions, as research by (Hood and Dixon, 2015) indicates.

Considering Sierra Leone's civil service, where the inner drive is incredibly important due to limited resources and the necessity of restoring faith in institutions, combining fairness within the organization with a sense of public duty is especially pertinent. By making sure that performance evaluations are carried out in a way that's fair and encouraging, public sector entities can use these processes to cultivate a staff that's more driven, responsible, and efficient (Vandenabeele & Carina, 2020; Bertone et al, 2013; PSRU, 2010).

Performance Appraisal Practices in the Public Sector

Across the world, government bodies are becoming more aware of the importance of improving how they evaluate employee performance. This push is all about making people more responsible for their work and boosting the quality of services offered. Different methods have popped up to tackle ongoing issues like personal opinions clouding judgments and raters having biases. These new approaches also aim to make sure that staff evaluations line up better with what the organization is trying to achieve. Some of the main methods being used are Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS), Management by Objectives (MBO), and 360-degree feedback.

Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales, or BARS, are becoming popular because they connect different performance levels to actual, visible behaviors. This makes evaluations less unclear. New research shows that BARS can decrease rater bias by giving clear behavioral examples, leading to more consistent and unbiased ratings (Jacobs, Kafry & Zedeck, 2006; Debnath, Lee & Tandon, 2015). By making the criteria for employee evaluations uniform, BARS can make the appraisal process feel fairer, which is vital for keeping trust in public institutions.

Another approach that has continuously been used in performance appraisal in the public sector is Management by Objective (MBO). The MBO approach ensures individual performance is in sync with the organization's aims by establishing clear objectives that are mutually agreed upon and providing ongoing feedback. Recent studies have shown that MBOs can boost performance by cultivating a sense of responsibility and promoting regular discussions between managers and their staff (Islami, Mulolli & Mustafa, 2018). Nevertheless, its success relies on how clearly goals are defined and how well these goals can adjust to the ever-changing landscape of public administration.

Like the MBO approach to performance appraisal in the public sector, 360-degree feedback is also another key approach that has developed over time to overcome the shortcomings of traditional top-down performance reviews. This method collects performance insights from various sources like managers, colleagues, team members, and occasionally external parties, providing a well-rounded picture of an employee's effectiveness. Current research indicates that when properly executed, 360-degree feedback can reduce individual rater biases and improve the overall appraisal process (Tambunan, Ginting, Sirojuzilam, & Absah, 2021). However, research also emphasizes that its effectiveness relies heavily on thorough training for those providing feedback and well-defined guidelines to ensure the feedback is helpful and a true indicator of job performance (Karim et al, 2024).

Other empirical studies over the past decade, have suggested that although these performance evaluation methods hold a lot of potential, there are still some hurdles to overcome. Research keeps uncovering problems like the persistent subjective nature of assessments, how different cultures understand performance standards differently, and the trouble in connecting evaluation results to actual improvements in public services. These issues continue to weaken the effectiveness of these models (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Karyeija, 2024). Especially, public sector organizations in developing countries deal with their specific problems because of limited resources and changing rules, highlighting the need to adapt these evaluation methods to their unique situations and keep refining them.

This study looks at global perspectives and key models to join the conversation about how well performance appraisal systems work in the public sector. It also explores how mixing these models with ideas like organizational justice and public service motivation can create clearer, fairer, and more inspiring ways to evaluate performance.

Performance Appraisal in Sierra Leone Civil Service Context

Sierra Leone's civil service is set up in a centralized way, designed to keep the government running smoothly through various ministries and specialized agencies. The Cabinet Secretariat is a key player in this setup, making sure policies are put into action effectively and that different ministries work together harmoniously. Meanwhile, the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) takes care of the daily management of staff practices, like performance evaluations, which are vital for a responsive and efficient public sector (Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2022; PSRU, 2010).

Sierra Leone has recently shaken up its approach to evaluating public sector employees, all to make the system more responsible, transparent, and efficient. In the past, the way workers were assessed was pretty casual and lacked any real uniformity, leading to personal opinions influencing decisions and inconsistent results. But over the last ten years or so, government-led efforts have pushed for a more organized method. This includes bringing in performance benchmarks that are in line with global standards and running regular training sessions for those doing the evaluating, as highlighted by the Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, (2022) report. The hope is that these changes will cut down on bias and make sure that performance scores truly mirror how much each person is contributing to public services.

In this changing landscape, the Cabinet Secretariat and the HRMO are playing increasingly important roles. The Cabinet Secretariat is responsible for outlining high-level policies and performance standards for the civil service. It collaborates closely with different ministries to create a unified system for measuring performance that aligns with the government's wider goals. On the other hand, the HRMO handles the hands-on implementation of these policies. This involves creating and managing appraisal tools, organizing appraisal cycles, and making sure that performance evaluations are carried out clearly and equitably (Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2022). This study zeroes in on these two critical bodies to gain a deeper insight into how performance appraisals are currently practiced and to identify areas where enhancements can be made to bolster human resource management within Sierra Leone's public sector.

Comparative Studies and Best Practices

Studies comparing various African developing countries have repeatedly shown that public sector performance review systems share similar problems regarding fairness, openness, and properly connecting evaluation results to employee growth. For example, research done in Nigeria discovered that widely using subjective performance measures and not applying appraisal processes consistently greatly reduces employee drive and the overall effectiveness of the organization (Ado, Waziri Saleh & Ibrahim, 2020). Likewise, investigations in Kenya and Ghana indicate that evaluators often lack sufficient training, and there is minimal use of feedback from multiple sources, leading to ongoing discontent among public sector workers (Ohemeng, Zakari & Adusah-Karikari, 2015; Denkyira, 2014). These findings emphasize the need for changes that encourage consistency, objectivity, and inclusive methods within the performance evaluation process.

Sierra Leone could benefit from looking at what's working well in other countries. For instance, studies in Europe have found that using more sophisticated ways of evaluating employees, like getting feedback from all around, coupled with solid training and clear targets, makes the whole process feel much fairer and more accurate (Waxin and Bateman, 2009). Similarly, research in New Zealand shows that when performance reviews are tied to specific opportunities for professional growth, it doesn't just improve how people do their jobs, it also boosts their motivation from within (Hattie, J. and Timperley, H., 2007). This all points to the idea that bringing together feedback from multiple sources, making sure appraisers are well-trained, and focusing on development could be a great way to improve things in Sierra Leone's civil service.

This study looks to comparative studies and successful international examples to pinpoint workable solutions for the existing problems in Sierra Leone's performance review systems. It's trying to develop a clearer, fairer, and more effective framework that meets global standards but also takes into account the specific challenges faced by a developing nation.

Method

Research Design

The research adopts a comparative case study style to dig into how performance appraisals work within Sierra Leone's civil service, zooming in on the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office in particular. We're mixing things up method-wise, combining quantitative number-crunching with qualitative, more descriptive insights. This mixed approach helps us get a fuller, more nuanced picture of what's going on with appraisals in this setting. By using a comparative case study approach, we can dig into how each agency handles its performance reviews while making organized comparisons between them (as highlighted by Yin in 2018). The quantitative side of things involves gathering numerical data through surveys and performance indicators to gauge important factors like how fair, transparent, and effective the system is perceived to be. This number crunching will help us spot clear patterns and variations across the different agencies. But we're not just looking at numbers. We also use qualitative methods, like conducting semi-structured interviews and analyzing documents, to get a richer, more contextual understanding of what civil servants experience and think during the appraisal process. This qualitative information is crucial for understanding why the numbers are the way they are and for uncovering issues that might be missed if we only looked at the quantitative data. Combining these two methods, a technique called methodological triangulation boosts the credibility and dependability of the results. It does this by confirming the findings using various data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This mixed-methods way of doing things is especially fitting for studies in intricate public sector settings, where numbers and individual viewpoints blend together to form how organizations operate.

Data Collection

We took a thorough look at how performance is evaluated in Sierra Leone's civil service. To make sure we understood the ins and outs, we used a variety of methods, gathering information from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Data Collection

We held semi-structured interviews with essential staff from both the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office. The goal of these interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of the performance appraisal systems, including their design, rollout, and any hurdles faced. The adaptable nature of semi-structured interviews enabled us to explore new topics as they arose, all while ensuring we covered crucial areas such as fairness, transparency, and effectiveness. This method falls in line with recommended qualitative research methods, enabling us to gather detailed, context-specific insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

We wanted to get a wide range of opinions from civil servants, so we gave out surveys to a carefully chosen group of employees from different departments and job levels. These surveys

had a mix of questions. Some used a rating scale like a "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" kind of thing, while others were open-ended, letting people write out their thoughts. We designed these questions to understand how staff felt about the fairness, openness, and overall happiness with how performance reviews were done. We also asked about how much they felt motivated from within and how committed they were to their public service jobs. By using both types of questions, we could gather hard data and also get a sense of the more subtle, personal feelings people had. This gave us a well-rounded picture of what employees thought and felt (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Secondary Data Collection

We examined many documents and policies for secondary data. We carefully reviewed appraisal documentation, official policies, and reform reports obtained from various government bodies in Sierra Leone. This included a thorough look at past performance records, previous appraisal reports, and detailed accounts of reform efforts carried out over the last ten years. The goal of poring over these documents was to get a better understanding of our primary data, essentially mapping out how performance appraisals in the civil service have changed and developed over time (Yin, 2018).

We took a deep dive into old documents kept by the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office. By looking at these historical records, we were able to see how performance reviews have changed over time, influenced by past reforms and outside factors. This gave us a much richer understanding of the whole picture.

By carefully combining these different ways of gathering information, we made sure to get a well-rounded picture from various sources. This not only strengthened the trustworthiness of our results but also made them more dependable. Using this mixed approach to collecting data was key to picking up on both broader statistical patterns and detailed, context-rich stories. In the end, this gave us a complete assessment of how performance is evaluated in Sierra Leone's public sector.

Sampling

To get a really clear and accurate picture of how performance reviews work in Sierra Leone's civil service, we used a two-prong approach to selecting our research sample. We combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods to make sure our sample, which included 200 survey responses and 20 interviewees, was strong and truly representative of the broader civil service. The way we chose our sample was carefully thought out to reflect the variety of roles and departments within the civil service, making our findings more reliable and applicable to the wider context (Fowler, 2009; Creswell, 2014).

Purposive Sampling for Interviews. To gain a really deep understanding of the qualitative side of things, a purposive sampling was used to handpick 20 key people to interview. This non-random approach is particularly effective when targeting people with specialized knowledge directly relevant to the research objectives like (Patton, 2002) suggested and later reinforced by (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selection criteria were based on:

Human Resource Managers: These are the people who make sure that how employees are evaluated matches up with what the organization is trying to achieve and its rules (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Senior Administrators: They're the ones who make the big decisions about how performance appraisals work, so their viewpoints give us a big-picture look at the whole process (Creswell, 2014).

Selected Civil Servants: We talked to a variety of civil servants, spanning different levels of the hierarchy. They shared their personal experiences with performance evaluations, giving us a wide range of perspectives to consider (Patton, 2002).

Our interview group was deliberately mixed, including about 40% human resources managers, 30% top-level administrators, and 30% other civil servants. This mix ensures we get a diverse set of viewpoints, strengthening the reliability of our qualitative findings (Fowler, 2009).

Using Stratified Random Sampling for Surveys. To make sure quantitative data we gathered truly reflected everyone working in the civil service, we used a technique called stratified random sampling for the survey component. Basically, we divided the entire civil service list into different groups based on which department affiliation and rank. This method reduces selection bias, helps us avoid skewing the results and makes our findings more widely applicable (Lohr, 2002; Creswell, 2014). Key aspects to this approach include:

Departmental Representation: We made sure to include people from all the key departments and ministries, and in the right proportions. This helps us get an accurate picture of how each department does things, since they all have their own way of working (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Rank Distribution: We designed the sampling so that it matched the real makeup of the civil service, from those just starting out to the top brass. This really strengthens how representative our study is and how well our findings apply to the real world (Fowler, 2009).

Data Analysis

A mix-methods approach was employed to comprehensively analyze the performance appraisal system in Sierra Leone's civil service, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Analysis

We held semi-structured interviews with important staff from the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis in line with the framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process used includes:

Data familiarization - immersing in the transcripts through repeated readings until we develop a deep understanding of the content.

Systematic Coding - we went through and systematically labeled key parts of the data with tags that relate directly to what we're studying.

Themes Identification – further, we grouped together similar codes to form broader, overarching themes that capture the main ideas running through the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

Themes Refinement - took a hard look at these themes, tweaking them to make sure they really reflect what the data is saying and that they're clearly different from each other.

Defining Themes - we came up with clear definitions and names for each theme so that anyone reading our work understands exactly what they mean.

Narrative Analysis - Finally, we weaved all these themes together into a coherent narrative that answers the central research questions.

A thorough and careful method helped us identify common threads about what civil service workers think is fair, what drives them, and how effective they find performance evaluations. This approach gave us a detailed understanding of their experiences and viewpoints.

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical Evaluation

Survey data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential *statistical* methods:

Descriptive Statistics: Measure such as means, medians standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated to summarize the data and provide overall picture of respondents' views on the performance appraisal process (Field, 2013).

Inferential Statistics: To assess whether survey findings could be generalized across civil service, advance statistical techniques such as T-test and Regression analysis were employed. These test were used to determine significant difference between groups (e.g. junior vs. senior staff) and explore the relationship between perceptions of fairness in the performance appraisals and level of employee motivation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Specialized statistical software was used to ensure the precision and reliability of the analysis (Field, 2013).

By integrating rigorous sampling techniques with robust qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, this ensures that its findings are both representative of Sierra Leone's civil services and methodologically sound (Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2009).

Comparative Analysis: A Side-by-Side Look

To figure out how performance reviews differ and overlap between the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office, we did a cross-case analysis. This meant we:

- **First, Dived Deep into Each Case:** We examined the data from each organization separately to spot any specific trends and statistical patterns unique to them.
- **Then, We Compared Notes:** We looked at the findings from both organizations side-by-side to see where their performance review practices, the problems they encountered, and how effective they felt their systems were, lined up and where they diverged.

This kind of comparative approach really helped us understand the various ways administrative bodies within the civil service put performance reviews into practice and how these reviews were experienced. This gave us some useful insights that could be used to inform potential changes and improvements to policy.

Validity and Reliability Consideration

We wanted to make sure our research results were accurate and trustworthy. To do this, we took several important steps, such as testing our surveys beforehand and giving our interviewers thorough training. This helped us be more confident in our methods and verified our data.

Data Triangulation:

We used a mix of methods, combining qualitative and quantitative ways to gather data. This kind of methodological triangulation boosts the trustworthiness of our research results by checking data from various sources. By bringing together insights from semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document reviews, we sought to offer a thorough understanding of how performance appraisals are done in Sierra Leone's civil service, as similarly opined by (Bhandari, 2022).

Pilot Testing of Survey Instruments:

Before commencing comprehensive data collection, we conducted a preliminary evaluation of our survey instruments. This pilot test was essential for identifying any flaws in our survey setup, such as ambiguous questions or technical issues, thereby ensuring the reliability and integrity of the data collected. Thanks to the pilot group's feedback, we were able to fine-tune the questions, tweak the layout, and generally make the survey smoother and more user-friendly (Hassan, A.Z; Schattner, P. & Mazza, D., 2006).

Interviewer Training:

We wanted to make sure our data was collected consistently and accurately, so we gave the interviewers who conducted the semi-structured interviews a very comprehensive training. It's super important to properly train interviewers to reduce any potential bias they might have, make sure they stick to ethical guidelines, and keep our qualitative data reliable. During the training, we focused on teaching them how to ask questions effectively, what ethical considerations to keep in mind, and the correct way to record responses, all to make sure our data collection was standardized (Tate, R., Fatima Beauregard, F., Cristina Peter, C. & Marotta, L., 2023).

Methodological Rigor:

We followed the best practices in mixed-methods research throughout our study to ensure the highest level of methodological rigor. This meant we paid close attention to detail when planning how we'd gather our data, analyzed it systematically, and were open and clear about what we found. Our goal in using these strategies was to make our research results more trustworthy and applicable to a wider context (Lorenzini, E., Osorio-Galeano, S.P., Schmidt, C.R. & Cañon-Montañez, W., 2024).

In short, we used multiple data sources (data triangulation), tested our methods beforehand (pilot testing), trained our interviewers thoroughly, and stuck to strict methodological guidelines. All of this was done to make sure our study on performance appraisal practices within Sierra Leone's civil service was both valid and reliable.

Findings

In this section, we present the quantitative findings from our research. We looked closely at what civil servants in Sierra Leone think about fairness, how motivated they are to serve the public, and how well the performance reviews work. We also compare the survey results between two important offices: the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO), to see how they differ.

Survey Findings on Perceived Fairness, Public Service Motivation, and Appraisal Effectiveness

Based on a survey of 200 civil servants, split evenly between the Cabinet Secretariat and HRMO, three key areas were examined: how fair employees felt their performance evaluations were, their motivation to serve the public, and how effective they found the appraisal system to be.

Table 1. Overall survey results

Construct	Percentage of Respondents
Perceived Fairness	
- Fair	65%
- Neutral	20%
- Unfair	15%
Public Service Motivation	
- High	70%
- Moderate	25%
- Low	5%
Appraisal Effectiveness	
- Effective	60%
- Neutral	25%
- Ineffective	15%

Perceived Fairness: Respondents rated their agreement with statements regarding the fairness of the appraisal process. Overall, 65% of participants perceived the appraisal process as fair, 20% were neutral, and 15% perceived it as unfair. These findings align with previous research indicating that perceptions of fairness are crucial for the acceptance and effectiveness of performance appraisal systems.

Public Service Motivation: The survey measured the intrinsic motivation of civil servants to serve the public good. Approximately 70% of respondents reported high levels of public service motivation, 25% reported moderate levels, and 5% reported low levels.

Appraisal Effectiveness: Participants evaluated the effectiveness of the appraisal system in enhancing their performance and career development. About 60% of respondents perceived the appraisal system as effective, 25% were neutral, and 15% perceived it as ineffective.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of mean scores

Construct	Cabinet Secretariat (Mean ± SD)	HRMO (Mean ± SD)	t-value	p-value
Perceived Fairness	3.8 ± 0.6	3.5 ± 0.7	3.5	<0.01
Public Service Motivation	4.2 ± 0.5	4.0 ± 0.6	2.8	<0.01
Appraisal Effectiveness	3.7 ± 0.6	3.4 ± 0.7	3.2	<0.01

Note: SD = Standard Deviation

Perceived Fairness: The mean fairness score for the Cabinet Secretariat was 3.8 (SD = 0.6), while the HRMO had a mean score of 3.5 (SD = 0.7). The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two agencies ($t(198) = 3.5, p < 0.01$), suggesting that employees in the Cabinet Secretariat perceive the appraisal process as fairer compared to those in the HRMO.

Public Service Motivation: The Cabinet Secretariat had a mean motivation score of 4.2 (SD = 0.5), whereas the HRMO's mean score was 4.0 (SD = 0.6). The difference was statistically

significant ($t(198) = 2.8, p < 0.01$), indicating higher public service motivation among employees in the Cabinet Secretariat.

Appraisal Effectiveness: The mean effectiveness score was 3.7 ($SD = 0.6$) for the Cabinet Secretariat and 3.4 ($SD = 0.7$) for the HRMO. The t-test showed a significant difference ($t(198) = 3.2, p < 0.01$), implying that employees in the Cabinet Secretariat perceive the appraisal system as more effective than those in the HRMO.

In summary, most civil servants think the way they're evaluated is pretty fair and works well, especially if they're really driven to serve the public. When we compare different groups, folks working in the Cabinet Secretariat feel much better about how fair, motivating, and effective their appraisals are than those working in the HRMO. The reason for this difference between the two groups might be because they do evaluations differently, have different workplace cultures, or have different types of leaders. These discoveries highlight just how important it is for employees to feel like evaluations are fair. When they do, it makes them more motivated and it makes the whole process seem to work better. If we could figure out why there's such a big difference between these groups and make things more even, it could make appraisals better and make civil servants happier across the board.

Regression Analysis

To enhance the robustness of our study, we conducted a regression analysis to examine the relationships between perceived fairness, public motivation (PSM), and appraisal effectiveness. Utilizing our sample of 200 civil service employees from the Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Office (HRMO), we performed multiple linear regression analyses to test our assumptions.

- *Assumption 1: Impact of Perceived Fairness on Appraisal Effectiveness*
- *Assumption 2: Impact of Perceived Fairness on Public Service Motivation (PSM)*
- *Assumption 3: Impact of Public Service Motivation (PSM) on Appraisal Effectiveness*

Table 3. Regression analysis results

Predictor Variables	Dependent Variable	β	P-Value	R ²
Perceived Fairness	Appraisal Effectiveness	0.45	<0.01	0.20
Perceived Fairness	Public Service Motivation	0.38	<0.01	0.14
Public Service Motivation	Appraisal Effectiveness	0.42	<0.01	0.18
Perceived Fairness × Agency	Appraisal Effectiveness	0.22	<0.05	—

Note: The interaction term (Perceived Fairness × Agency) does not have an associated R² value, as it represents the moderating effect of agency on the relationship between perceived fairness and appraisal effectiveness.

Impact of Perceived Fairness on Appraisal Effectiveness: The regression coefficient (β) of 0.45 indicates that for each unit increase in perceived fairness, appraisal effectiveness increases by 0.45 units. The p-value (<0.01) signifies that this relationship is statistically significant, and R² value of 0.20 implies 20% of the variance in appraisal effectiveness is explained by perceived fairness.

Impact of Perceived Fairness on Public Service Motivation (PSM): A β of 0.38 suggests that each unit increase in perceived fairness corresponds to a 0.38 unit increase in PSM. The statistically significant p-value (<0.01) and an R² of 0.14 indicate that perceived fairness accounts for 14% of the variance in PSM.

Impact of PSM on Appraisal Effectiveness: The coefficient (β) of 0.42 demonstrates a positive association between PSM and appraisal effectiveness, with a p-value (<0.01) confirming statistical significance. An R^2 of 0.18 shows that 18% of the variance in appraisal effectiveness is due PSM.

The interaction Between Perceived Fairness and Agency: The interaction term's β of 0.22 and p-value (0.05) suggest that the relationship between perceived fairness and appraisal effectiveness differs between agencies, with the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) exhibiting a stronger positive relationship, potentially due to more structured appraisal processes.

These findings underscore the critical role of perceived fairness in enhancing both PSM and appraisal effectiveness. The variation between agencies highlights the impact of organizational practices on those relationships. Fostering fairness in appraisal processes can lead to more motivated employees and more effective performance evaluation

Implications of Public Sector HRM and Civil Service Reform

These findings offer several valuable insights for public sector human resource management and civil service reform in Sierra Leone. By focusing on the following areas, improvements can be made:

- **Boosting Fairness:** Putting in place fair and transparent performance reviews is key to increasing employee motivation and making these evaluations more effective.
- **Encouraging Public Service Motivation (PSM):** Creating a work environment that supports PSM can result in more engaged and productive employees, ultimately improving the delivery of public services.
- **Customizing Reforms:** The fact that the impact of perceived fairness differs between agencies highlights the need for reforms to be tailored to the unique challenges and contexts of each organization.

In summary, giving priority to fairness in performance appraisals and fostering a strong sense of public service motivation are crucial steps for improving the performance and overall effectiveness of Sierra Leone's civil service.

Qualitative Insight

This section presents insight from the semi-structured interviews with key staff in Sierra Leone's Cabinet Secretariat and the Human Resource Office (HRMO). These conversations provided a rich understanding of the challenges and cultural influences affecting performance appraisals. As one Cabinet Secretariat respondent noted, *"Decisions are made solely at the top, leaving little room for genuine feedback – this makes the process feel inherently biased"* (Anonymous, Interview, 2024).

Key Themes Emerging from the Interviews

Challenges in Implementing Fair Appraisal Systems in Public Sector

People we spoke to at both organizations pointed out some key difficulties that get in the way of having fair performance review processes:

Giving Out Unrealistic Scores: Several participants pointed out that managers often inflate scores to sidestep conflict or reword favored employees. One HRMO manager explained, *“We frequently end up awarding inflated scores just to avoid confrontation, which undermines the credibility of our performance reviews”* (Anonymous, Interview, 2024; Lin and Kellough, 2019).

Unclear Expectations: Not having clear, measurable goals makes reviews feel subjective, leaving employees feeling like things aren't fair. A respondent from the Cabinet Secretariat remarked, *“Without clear performance targets, our reviews become subjective, leaving us uncertain about what is truly expected”* (Anonymous, Interview, 2024).

Insufficient Support from Managers: Many interviewees noted that managers are not adequately trained or resourced, which leads to inconsistencies. As one participant observed, *“Our supervisors struggle without proper guidance and training, resulting in appraisal outcomes that vary widely from one department to another”* (Anonymous, Interview, 2024).

Cultural and Organizational Influences

The interviews highlighted how cultural and organizational elements deeply affect the way appraisals are conducted:

Administrative Culture:

High power distance prevalent in the civil service discourages honest feedback. One interviewee noted, *“The hierarchal nature of our establishment means that open, critical evaluation is rarely encouraged, which limits the depth of our appraisals”* (Anonymous, Interview, 2024).

Resistance to Change:

Staff expressed apprehension towards new appraisal methods, preferring the familiarity with the existing practices. A Cabinet Secretariat employee noted: *“We’re so used to the traditional way of doing things that any attempt to change the system is met with skepticism and resistance”*. (Anonymous, Interview, 2024; Morris, 2023).

Organizational Culture:

The prevailing culture in these organizations further complicates the appraisal process. An HRMO representative commented,

“The current organization mindset stifles innovation in performance management, negatively impacting the overall effectiveness of our reviews.” (Anonymous, Interview, 2024; Gasela, 2022).

Comparative Narrative: Cabinet Secretariat vs. HRMO

The interview reviewed both similarities and differences between the two groups:

Cabinet Secretariat:

Respondents described a picture of a mostly top-down culture, where senior management makes all important decisions and leaving lower level employees with little voice. As one participant put it, *“Our performance reviews are heavily influenced by upper management, and this can sometimes leave us feeling overlooked and like we’re not really part of a substantial evaluation process”*. (Anonymous, interview, 2024).

HRMO:

In contrast, employees at HRMO described a process that felt a bit more spread out, despite some unevenness still sticking around. One HRMO worker noted, *"We try to work together on this, but how these reviews are handled is pretty different from one department to the next, and that's a real problem."* (Anonymous, interview, 2024).

Integration of Findings

This section combines the insights gathered from the numbers and the stories to give us a more complete understanding of how performance reviews are perceived.

Convergence and Divergence of Results:

Approximately 65% of survey respondents quantitatively felt the appraisal process was fair. However, qualitative evidence revealed deeper concerns. As one person put it, *"While numbers suggest fairness, the personal experiences we shared expose underlying biases and inconsistencies that the survey failed to capture."* (Anonymous, interview, 2024; Lee, & Rhee, 2023)

Organizational Justice and Public Service Motivation

The interplay between fairness evaluations and public service motivation is critical. A Cabinet Secretariat employee explained, *"When we believe our appraisals are just, it boosts our morale and commitment to public service."* (Anonymous, interview, 2024; Micacchi Vidé, Giacomelli, & Barbieri, 2023).

Similarly, an HRMO participant stated, *"Fair and transparent evaluations not only reinforce our motivation to serve but also help in the building of trust within the organization."* (Anonymous, interview, 2024; Lee, & Rhee, 2023).

To sum up, matching the quantitative and qualitative results highlights how crucial it is that Sierra Leone's civil service has fair and impartial evaluation methods, which are greatly influenced by organizational justice and the drive to serve the public.

Conclusion

This research discussed how performance is evaluated in Sierra Leone's civil service, zeroing in on how fair employees feel the process is, their motivation to serve the public, and how effective these evaluations are. What we found lines up with what other studies have shown, giving us a clearer picture of how these different aspects connect and influence one another.

Perceived Fairness: Quantitative data show that a pretty big chunk of people, about 65%, felt the performance review process was fair. But when you dig deeper, you find that some folks felt ratings were exaggerated, and the goals weren't always crystal clear. It makes you think that maybe the positive feelings about fairness aren't as solid as they first appear. This isn't surprising, since Nutakor's (2019) research pointed out how much employees care about feeling like things are fair and square within their company.

Public Service Motivation: A strong desire to serve the public was evident, with 70% of participants expressing a high level of motivation. This internal drive seems to lessen some of

the negative views about the performance evaluation system. This discovery aligns with research showing that a commitment to public service relates to improved job performance and a more favorable outlook on evaluation methods (Micacchi et al, 2023).

Appraisal Effectiveness: Even though 60% of people surveyed felt the performance review system was doing its job, our findings in the feedback uncovered some problems. For instance, managers aren't always well-equipped to handle these reviews, and there's been some pushback against changes to the system. These issues echo what other studies have found, suggesting that better training and crystal-clear performance expectations are key to making these reviews truly effective.

Comparative Analysis: Workers in the Cabinet Secretariat tended to feel that the performance review process was fairer, more motivating, and generally more effective than those working in the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO). This difference might be explained by variations in the way things are done within each organization and how the review process is carried out. This lines up with earlier research, which shows that an organization's culture really can shape how well performance reviews work out.

How These Results can Help Us Improve Performance Reviews

These results highlight just how important it is to be fair and to tap into that drive to serve the public when we're reviewing how people are doing at work. If we want to make performance reviews better in Sierra Leone's civil service, we should think about these things:

Setting Clear Performance Expectations: By creating straightforward and quantifiable goals, we can reduce bias and boost everyone's sense of fairness. This matches what research suggests when it highlights how having well-defined performance benchmarks makes evaluations more effective (Abdullah, Z. & Malik, S. K., 2022).

Train Supervisors Thoroughly: If we want appraisals to be consistent and effective, we need to make sure supervisors have the right skills and knowledge. This isn't just a good idea; research shows that training is key to making performance appraisals work well (Abdullah, Z. & Malik, S. K., 2022).

Promote a Culture of Openness in the Workplace: When employees feel comfortable participating and sharing their thoughts, they're less likely to resist changes to the way they're evaluated. This fosters an environment where everyone is constantly striving to improve. This approach lines up with research showing how a company's culture significantly impacts whether employees view evaluations as fair (Kim & Rubianty, 2011).

Address Organizational Disparities: Recognizing that each department has its unique way of working and adjusting performance reviews accordingly can create a fairer and more effective system. This strategy resonates with studies indicating that a department's specific context – its structure, culture, etc. – affects how well performance reviews work (Kim & Rubianty, 2011).

Putting these plans into action could create a stronger performance review process, which would likely boost worker happiness and the overall effectiveness of Sierra Leone's civil service.

What this Research Contributed to the Field

This research makes some important theoretical and practical contributions to how we think about and manage human resources in the public sector, especially when it comes to reforming Sierra Leone's civil service.

- Adding to Theory

This study helps us understand performance appraisal systems better by bringing together the ideas of organizational justice and public service motivation. It provides solid evidence that when employees feel the appraisal process is fair, it strongly ties to their motivation and how well they think these systems work. This lines up with what other researchers have already said about how crucial it is to be fair and open when evaluating employees, as it helps them feel more involved and happy with their work. In addition, this research adds to the conversation about how a company's culture and the overall environment can affect how these evaluation systems are put in place and how they're seen by employees. It especially gives us a peek into the specific hurdles that developing nations, such as Sierra Leone, have to overcome.

Practical Implications

In practical terms, these findings offer valuable guidance for policymakers and HR professionals looking to improve the way civil service performance is managed:

- **Boosting Fairness and Transparency:** The research emphasizes that having clear performance expectations and evaluation methods that are free from bias are crucial for creating a sense of fairness. Putting these into practice can result in better performance reviews and happier employees.
- **Training and Development:** The study reveals shortcomings in supervisors' skills when it comes to conducting fair and effective performance reviews. This highlights the need for specialized training programs. By improving the skills of those in supervisory roles, the entire performance review process and employee growth can be enhanced.
- **Training and Development:** It turns out that when supervisors struggle to give fair and helpful feedback, it shows how important specialized training is. By boosting the skills of these supervisors, we can make the whole performance review process better and help employees grow more effectively.
- **Organizational Culture:** The research uncovered that the different "personalities" of each agency – their unique cultures – can influence how well their performance review systems work. To make sure any changes to these systems are successful, it's vital to take these cultural differences into account.

In a nutshell, this research gives us a deeper understanding of how performance reviews work in the public sector and provides some hands-on advice for making them better. This, in turn, can help improve the ongoing efforts to reform the civil service.

Future Research Suggestions

Here are a few ideas for future research that could help us understand and improve how performance is evaluated in Sierra Leone's civil service:

In-Depth Look at Changes to Appraisal: Studying the long-term effects of recent changes to the performance appraisal system could give us a clearer picture of how well they're working and whether they're likely to last. These studies could follow how employee performance, motivation, and opinions change over time, giving us a more complete view of the results of these changes.

Looking at More Agencies: By broadening our research to include a wider variety of public sector groups, not just the Cabinet Secretariat and HRMO, we can discover different problems and successful methods. This kind of side-by-side comparison helps us create appraisal strategies that are more customized and effective for different situations.

Digging into Cultural and Structural Impacts: Exploring how cultural expectations and the way organizations are set up affect how people see and how well appraisal systems work can help us create performance management methods that are more aware of cultural differences and can adjust to different environments.

Evaluation of Training Programs: Figuring out how specific training programs for managers affect the fairness and effectiveness of performance reviews can pinpoint important skills and help us design better training programs in the future.

Looking at how technology can help us improve performance reviews: We can delve into how technology might make the appraisal process smoother, more transparent, and allow for quicker feedback. This exploration could lead to fresh ways to tackle the current issues in how we manage performance.

By following these research paths, researchers and those working in the field can help make performance review systems better, which in turn can boost the performance and services provided by the public sector in Sierra Leone.

Declarations

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