Enhancing Public Sector Service Delivery through Contextualized Performance Appraisal Frameworks: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

The performance appraisal systems for civil service employees help improve public value. Nonetheless, there is often a deliberate misplacement when standard performance tools generally used in the private sector are applied in complex public administrative systems without sufficient attention to the prevailing local socio-political processes. This systematic literature review studied the public sector personnel literature published from 2017 to 2025 to assess the impact of evaluation clarity and organizational fairness on worker productivity. The study utilizes the Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence (ABC) framework and looks at custodians; political patronage, rigid centralization, severe fiscal constraints, and high-power distance cultures as moderating effects. According to the review, set targets are not effective in improving institutional outcomes in the absence of administrative action, or when such actions are perceived to be unfair. To fill this gap, it develops a contextualised performance framework fit for the governance requirements and data-collection sensitivities of constitutional oversight bodies such as the Office of the Ombudsman. Finally, the paper offers a few policy suggestions about decentralising authority over human resource and shielding evaluation from politics.

Keywords: Performance Appraisal, New Public Management, Organizational Justice, Constitutional Oversight, Bureaucratic Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the last four decades, public sector organizations all over the world have been actively pursuing organizational reforms directed toward greater administrative efficiency, enhanced accountability, and improved public service. Traditional public administration, which stems from the classical Weberian bureaucratic model and which emphasized the existence of a strictly defined organizational hierarchy, formal procedures, and rule-based compliance, has been characterized by operational inflexibility, insensitivity to the needs of the citizens, and a lack of performance-related incentives. The latter, however, was largely mitigated with the emergence of New Public Management (NPM) doctrines, which, in the late twentieth century, began to export a new paradigm for public administration. NPM doctrines promoted the importation of a set of private-sector market mechanisms, competitive allocation of public resources, and a decentralized and corporatized public sector human resource management.

The most recent set of reforms of civil services has placed value on public sector Employee Performance Appraisals (EPAs) within a broader range of Individual Performance Management Systems (IPMS). Taking into account that an appraisal system is not a one-time, annual system, and that in theory it is a strategic HR system, the incorporation of an appraisal system aims to create a direct link between an employee’s day-to-day functions and activities, the employee’s skills, and the organization’s missions and goals. When incorporated effectively, an EPA is a dynamic, continuous system/based communications system. In an EPA, staff performance is benchmarked against identified, measurable, and time-bound standards. It encourages frequent two-way feedback, identifies the staff training and development needs, and facilitates objective and fair staffing actions (e.g., promotion, transfer, reward, corrective, etc.).

Open, participatory performance appraisal systems are becoming a crucial part of national development and public sector modernization in developing democracies and sub-Saharan African nations. Civil services in this region use formal performance appraisal systems to shift their organizational culture from a passive, process-oriented bureaucracy to an active, results-oriented network. The assumption is that the large-scale public delivery of services (health care, education, infrastructure, and administration) will improve from the increased productivity and accountability of individual public service employees.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Though modern performance appraisal systems have been developed and performance management policies have been put in place, many public organizations in developing nations are still unable to achieve the intended improvements in performance and service delivery (World Bank, 2021). It has been found that in developing countries, modern performance appraisal systems are implemented in a way that is inconsistent, ineffective, and confronted with a myriad of difficulties (Oladipo & Abdullahi, 2021; Shava et al., 2025). Poor performance appraisal systems have resulted in a routine, bureaucratic practice which, in many cases, does not have any connection to the improvement of performance of employees and effectiveness of the organization. Appraisal systems are often disconnected from the operational realities of the organization, a situation widely known as “decoupling” (Khan et al., 2024; World Bank, 2022).

The existing gap can be attributed to the failure to tailor performance appraisal systems used in the private sector to fit the context of the public sector (Karyeija, 2012; Norman, 2001). Private organizations tend to focus on profit and market-driven performance. On the other hand, public organizations tend to operate in complex environments with bureaucratic systems, insufficient resources, politics, and the need to balance different stakeholder interests (Mzumbe, 2025; Thusi et al., 2022). The complex environments in which public organizations operate make it difficult to implement private sector performance management systems in public organizations.

There are other challenges within many developing countries, such as political interference, clientelism, limited managerial autonomy, and poor accountability, that make performance appraisal systems even less effective (Oladipo & Abdullahi, 2021; Shava et al., 2025). In these contexts, the results of performance appraisal systems are dictated more by the political environment and personal relationships than by performance. This tends to negatively affect employee morale and the overall workplace environment (Wang & Sui, 2021). These effects poison the interactions of employees and degrade the quality of services delivered to the public (Brown et al., 2019; Scielo, 2024).

Given the above problems, there are valid reasons to be skeptical regarding the effectiveness of public sector performance appraisal systems in achieving the desired outcomes for the organization and the employees. The above problems call for more studies that are focused on the actual performance appraisal systems in various public organizations.

The significance of this topic is especially relevant to independent public entities such as the Office of the Ombudsman and constitutional oversight organisations. The outcomes of line ministries can frequently be assessed by tangible deliverables such as schools built, roads built, or medical supplies distributed. The oversight bodies are responsible for addressing the same types of issues as the above-mentioned line ministries but because they deal with issues that are not often seen, the oversight bodies are just as important. In addition to tangible deliverables, oversight institutions also deal with issues such as maladministration, unfair treatment, delays in the provision of public services, misuse or abuse of authority, and injustice arising from administrative action (Ladi, 2011). Their effectiveness is determined by many subjective factors, including the quality of investigation, adherence to a code of ethics, impartiality of decision-making, and responsiveness to complaints made to them by members of the public, specifically by members of vulnerable and marginalized populations (Fowlie & LaHatte, 2020; Khan et al., 2024).

As a result, using traditional performance assessment models to (primarily) evaluate oversight institutions by way of measurable output will not provide an accurate overall picture of oversight institution performance. Various (e.g., assessment tools) used to evaluate the performance of oversight institution employees must take

into account the nature of accountability, fairness, professionalism, and trust in the public sector. Unfortunately, there is still not much research available that provides insight into how the performance assessment process impacts employee behaviour and delivery of service performance in oversight institutions. Equally lacking is a comprehensive framework to reflect the unique operational environment of oversight institutions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of this investigation is to query these identified shortfalls about the following research questions:

1. What are the structural and behavioural elements that affect performance appraisal processes' function in public sector entities?
2. What implications, if any, do employees' views concerning fairness and organizational justice in the appraisal system have on how they perform?
3. To what extent may performance appraisal processes facilitate improvement in public service delivery systems, as well as provide accountability for the performance of the organization?
4. How may the present performance appraisal systems be modified to reflect the unique operational challenges within constitutional oversight organs such as the Office of the Ombudsman?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this systematic literature review is to explore the relationships across performance appraisal systems, employee performance, and service delivery in public sector organizations.

To accomplish this objective, the study shall do the following:

1. Provide a synthesis of empirical evidence available for performance appraisal systems, employee performance, and public sector service delivery with respect to appropriateness in public sector organizations.
2. Explore the relationship between performance appraisal systems and employee behaviour based on the antecedent-behaviours-consequence (ABC) learning model.
3. Identify the organizational, political, cultural, and structural factors that will either support or detract from the successful implementation of the performance appraisal systems in resource-constrained settings.
4. Produce a conceptual framework that takes into account contextually relevant accountabilities and performance requirements of constitutional oversight institutions within developing countries.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research presents a significant contribution to theory and practice, with specific attention to human resource management and public management. The theoretical contribution addresses a gap within the human resource literature with respect to performance appraisals. Thus, instead of just providing a simple, descriptive overview of the issues surrounding performance appraisal, this research brings together multiple theories, providing an integrative multi-theoretical synthesis of the micro-behavioural elements in the ABC Model, along with the structural components in both the Goal-Setting and Organisational Justice theories. Collectively, these three perspectives explain how performance appraisal systems influence the psychological reactions and behaviours of civil servants.

From a practical and policy perspective, this research provides a useful framework for public sector managers, organisational leaders and human resource practitioners throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The research identifies the key drivers of appraisal decoupling; thus, the findings provide actionable recommendations to facilitate reform in the management of performance management systems, improve the accuracy of performance appraisals, and strengthen fairness within the management of consequences. Additionally, this research offers a customised framework for independent constitutional oversight bodies such as the Office of

the Ombudsman, thereby facilitating an approach to addressing the continual challenge of measuring and managing the qualitative aspects of governance. This contributes toward eliminating administrative inefficiencies, enhancing public trust, and advancing sustainable national development.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

The study involves a systematic review of the literature and a narrative synthesis of the existing body of knowledge published from 2017 to 2025. This period of time was selected to encompass the most current information about digital transformation, reform of public management, and recent empirical evidence regarding the performance of the civil service in developing countries.

The geographical scope of this review consists of studies in the public sector of developing nations; the focus for the majority of the research is in sub-Saharan Africa. The emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa allows the authors to better understand the realities within different local contexts and how they impact public sector delivery of services and performance management systems.

With respect to the institutional scope of the study, it will primarily include information from various individual performance appraisal tools, employee perceptions of fairness, supervisor-subordinate feedback mechanisms, and all of these elements' relationships to accountability and the outcomes of service delivery. The review will purposely exclude any studies based on private sector performance measurement systems, or those that are associated with profit-oriented entities and/or financial performance indicators, in order to provide a clearer understanding of the unique challenges associated with governance of the public sector.

METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

The framework for this research uses a critical realist philosophy. It acknowledges that human resource policies and performance management systems are present and observable in public institutions, but they are shaped by humans through interpretation and organisation, as well as socio-political dynamics that exist within the institutions.

To take into account these complexities, the researcher has chosen a systematic narrative synthesis design that allows for the integration of evidence from a variety of different kinds of research methodologies — quantitative research (such as structural equation modelling), qualitative case studies, and mixed-methods research. The systematic narrative synthesis approach provides researchers with a deeper and more context-sensitive understanding of the way performance appraisal systems work in practice than does a purely quantitative meta-analysis approach.

The study employed a multi-stage, comprehensive literature search strategy using the following five databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, PubMed (to capture cross-sector public management perspectives, particularly those related to health systems), and Sabinet African Journals (to ensure adequate representation of African scholarship). To create a more precise search with less bias, the search strings were developed using structure, Boolean operators (AND, OR), truncation, and exact phrase matching. The search strategy was divided into four thematic cluster areas.

- **Cluster 1: Appraisal mechanisms:** Performance appraisal OR Performance evaluation OR Performance management system OR IPMS OR “individual performance targets
- **Cluster 2: Institutional context:** Public sector OR Civil service OR Government bureaucracy OR Public administration OR Ministry

- **Cluster 3: Key outcomes:** Service Delivery OR productivity OR institutional effectiveness OR accountability OR public responsiveness)

- **Cluster 4: Geographic focus**: Africa OR sub-Saharan Africa OR developing countries

In addition to database searches, the study used manual citation tracking (snowballing) to identify influential studies referenced in key papers. Grey literature was also reviewed, including reports from institutions such as the World Bank and other international public sector oversight bodies, to ensure a broader and more policy-relevant evidence base.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1: Study Selection Matrices and Verification Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Temporal Range	Published between January 2017 and December 2025.	Published before 2017 (unless a foundational classic theory).
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and rigorous institutional evaluation reports.	Editorials, short opinion pieces, unverified blog posts, and conference abstracts lacking full text.
Language	Published exclusively in the English language.	Non-English publications.
Institutional Scope	Focuses directly on public sector personnel, civil servants, and constitutional oversight architectures.	Focuses entirely on private corporate firms, commercial banking, or manufacturing industries.
Core Variable Focus	Investigates individual performance appraisal processes linked to employee output or service delivery.	Focuses on macro-economics, public financial accounting, or purely technical engineering projects.

Screening, Data Extraction, and Synthesis Protocol

Initial database search results resulted in an abundance of citations that went through a structured multi-stage process of being screened. Screening included: identifying duplicates across the databases and removing them via the reference management software; Screening the studies that remained at the title and abstract level against pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria; and conducting full-text reviews of each article to determine its conceptual relevance, methodological rigour, and relationship to the objectives of the study.

Following the final set of selected studies, a standardised extraction matrix was used to extract data from the studies to obtain the following key information from each study:

- Publications complete bibliographic information - author, year, publication source
- The geographic context and public sector sub-sector that was studied - e.g., local government, healthcare institutions, oversight bodies
- The theoretical framework applied - e.g., Goal Setting Theory, Organisational Justice, ABC Model
- The methodological approach including sample size and data collection
- Study key findings including: mediated, moderated variables, reported impacts to public service delivery

The data that was extracted was subsequently analysed by way of thematic synthesis. The results of the analysis were organised around three interdependent dimensions: structural inputs (antecedents), behaviour and task-related responses (behaviour), organisational outcomes/feedback mechanism (consequences). This structure provided a coherent, behaviourally grounded basis for developing the integrated conceptual framework presented in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

Historical Evolution of Performance Appraisal Paradigms

Essential to understanding the changing complexity of the performance appraisal system in public organisations is how such systems have developed over time through various human resources management processes. Traditionally, the public sector has had a closed, confidential and highly punitive administrative system for performance evaluation (i.e., “confidential character reports”). The primary focus of these reports, which were used to evaluate performance, was more on providing supervisory control, adherence to rules, and subjective assessments of an individual’s personal characteristics than on developing measurable performance outputs and competencies.

The traditional "bureaucratic model" used by public institutions, in which performance evaluations were completed entirely top-down, made it difficult for employees to know the outcome of their evaluations. In most cases, employees had little or no opportunity to appeal, respond, and or engage with these evaluations. Therefore, performance evaluations were more frequently used as an administrative discipline rather than a means to foster professional development.

The role of Behavioural Science has played an important part in supporting the New Public Management (NPM) movement, which has helped to transform the traditional model of performance appraisal away from being a closed, punitive administrative practice toward being an open, web-centric developmental approach, which focuses more heavily on performance and less on administrative evaluation. Today's performance evaluation is viewed much less as an annual event and much more as a continual cycle of goal setting, ongoing feedback, capability building, and strategic alignment.

The traditional approach to evaluating employee performance has moved to a much more contemporary way of thinking about how performance is based not only on the employee’s personal effort, but also on many other factors, such as management style, culture of work, production process, and organisational service delivery. In response, many public institutions have adopted Integrated Individual Performance Management Systems (IPMS) in an effort to shift from process-driven bureaucracies toward more results-oriented and accountable service delivery systems.

- **Traditional paradigm:** Confidential character reports; top-down control; trait-based and punitive assessment; emphasis on rule compliance
- **Contemporary paradigm:** IPMS; transparency and two-way feedback; developmental focus; alignment with strategic objectives through MBO and CIT

The Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence (ABC) Framework

This research uses the Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence (ABC) model as its primary analytical framework for determining how appraisal systems impact civil service performance. Based on behaviour psychology and organisational behaviour theory, the ABC model posits that workplace behaviours are not random; rather, they occur in response to the environmental stimuli that trigger them and are reinforced through institutional responses.

Antecedent (A) refers to the structural and procedural conditions that exist before performing work; for example, policies, performance standards, job descriptions, and formal goal-setting processes. In well-functioning public sector institutions, antecedent often consists of Management by Objectives (MBO) systems and such tools as the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), as they clarify expectations, reduce role ambiguity, and align individual responsibility to broader institutional goals.

Behaviour (B) is the actual behaviour demonstrated by employees and their level of effort in completing their

job. These behaviours can include both task performance (the performance of activities required to execute the core activities of the job) as well as those behaviours that occur in relation to one's job but not directly connected to task performance, such as organisational citizenship behaviour, professional conduct, and ethical behaviour.

Consequences (C) represent the result of performance and the types of feedback mechanisms that occur following performance. They consist of:

1) Performance feedback;
2) Promotion decisions;
3) Financial or non-financial rewards;
4) Training opportunities; or
5) Corrective disciplinary actions. In effective systems of performance-based appraisal, consequences will consistently connect to performance.

One critical element that the ABC model shows is that many public sector systems over-emphasize the design of antecedents-that is, prescriptive appraisal templates and policy manuals-while under-protect the steady implementation of consequences. If how well and how badly people do is equated, the rewards cycle collapses. This results in motivation, accountability, and cynicism erosion.

Goal-Setting Theory and Management by Objectives (MBO)

Aiming to understand a little more about how antecedents relate to ultimate performance behaviours, the study relies on the well-established Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2013). The theory states that performance is elevated under the presence of clear, specific and challenging goals combined with participation in goal-setting. Goal-Setting Theory can most often be seen implemented in the public sector in Management by Objectives (MBO). Here, managers and employees set performance objectives together at the start of the appraisal cycle. These are related to organizational goals and follow the SMART rule Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based.

Through translating complex institutional mandates into specific individual duties, the application of MBO minimizes role ambiguity and conflicting expectations frequently observed in large bureaucratic institutions. As each staff knows the purpose of its own work in achieving development goals or delivery objectives, it will improve its motivation and accountability, which in turn enhances overall institutional performance.

Organisational Justice Theory and Perceived Fairness

Organisational Justice Theory. Although Goal-Setting Theory is useful in providing information about the role of the structural mechanisms in performance motivation, Organisational Justice Theory is concerned with the psychological and affective processes involved in a person's decision to comply with or oppose a performance system. As such, this theory is concerned with an individual's perceptions of fairness of organisational procedures, interactions and outcomes. During performance appraisal, organisational justice can usually be understood as three sub-dimensions,

Distributive justice involves the degree to which the employee perceives that the appraisal results (performance rating, scores, promotion, or reward, etc.) are equitably allocated based on effort, contribution, and performance. Distributive justice ratings fall when employees feel that the one who performs at the highest level is not reflected in the reward, or when political or 'who you know' influences reward decisions, leading to a lowered perception of distributive justice.

Procedural justice -the degree of perceived fairness of appraisal methods and procedures- reflects whether performance appraisals are conducted with transparent procedures, are systematically implemented for all employees, are conducted using accurate and valid information, and provide employees a procedure for rejection or appeal. Perceptions of procedural injustice diminish employees' belief in performance appraisal.

Interactional justice refers to how individuals are treated by those with whom they interact in the context of the appraisal process. Specifically, it involves the manner in which supervisors communicate feedback to subordinates (Martins, 2012). For interactional justice to be perceived as fair, the communication must be honest, considerate, and respectful. Fair interactional justice results in less resentment toward appraisal outcomes, while poor interactional justice leads to disengagement and resentment.

Empirical findings of field studies have shown that employees in the public sector attend to and evaluate their organizational contexts for fairness. They react with psychological withdrawal and low performance, more stress, lack of trust in the administration, increased turnover intentions, with media denouncement, and the perception that a political party influences the appraisal system when they perceive high levels of organizational injustice within IPMS (e.g., appraisal systems as symbolic in a bureaucratic context, politically driven, targeted by favoritism). Thus, after a long period of time, even excellent performance systems can lose their efficiency.

Performance Appraisal and Employee Performance

Enhancing Task Performance Through Role Clarity and SMART Objectives

Task performance: Tasks are the basic technical duties and responsibilities defined as part of formally established job descriptions; they help to delineate the scope of an individual employee's work. Task performance plays a vital role in public administration because it makes service delivery more efficient, improves administrative response times, and ensures adherence to statutory and regulatory obligations. There is a large body of evidence that links a high-quality performance appraisal system with high task performance in civil service organizations.

A central factor driving this link is role clarity. Organisational roles are often ill-defined, obsolete, or duplicated within developing country bureaucracies, and this phenomenon manifests itself in confusion, duplication, and demotivation. Institutions that put in place a clear and explicit performance appraisal system based on specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based (SMART) objectives are in effect telling their members what they expect over a specific period of time.

Specific targets for the quantity, quality and timeliness of output-established in a SMART-based appraisal system-help to clarify roles and enable staff to concentrate on delivering their most important contributions. Since SMART targets should be monitored through ongoing performance review cycles rather than solely through the annual performance appraisal interview, staff can better adapt their short-term performance in response to operational pressures and other demands on service delivery.

Fostering Contextual Performance and Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs)

While task performance deals with the specified duties the job requires, "the performance of the job in a complete manner depends on contextual performance," termed by Organ as Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs). Such discretionary behaviours are quite critical for enhancing the efficiency and responsiveness of the organisation and strengthening the organisational cohesion and stability.

In public sector environments, OCBs include:

- Voluntarily mentoring junior colleagues
- Consistently showing a strong ethic of professionalism and integrity
- Offering more support to disadvantaged or excluded populations.
- Mode of providing inventive perspectives on the enhancement of administrative procedures

Performance appraisal systems that are well-designed can thus help to promote and develop them further. We know from this discussion that many forms of discretionary effort will go unnoticed by general trait methods of appraisal, which form the basis of many traditional systems of appraisal. Systems that employ structured techniques like CiT are more likely to record and reward the employee's discretionary effort.

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The CIT requires each supervisor to document certain specific examples of employees' especially successful or poorly displayed behaviour in critical situations at work. For example, an employee successfully helping to break an important obstacle to delivering service or professionally and kindly solving a situation involving a citizen complaint or some other "critical incident" is separately documented. Formalising these behaviours provides incentives for individuals to transcend their minimum duties, shaping a culture of accountability, co-operation, and service provision

Table 2: Perceived Organizational Justice Behavioural Paths

Perceived Justice Level	Core Behavioral Response (ABC Model)	Long-Term Workplace Impact
High Organizational Justice	Elevated task focus; High goal commitment; Proactive OCB participation.	Sustainable productivity gains; Strong institutional trust; Lower turnover intentions.
Low Organizational Justice	Psychological withdrawal; Active/passive resistance; Cynical compliance.	Performance restriction; Higher staff turnover; Deep-seated institutional distrust.

(Source: Author's Design 2026:2)

Mediating Pathways: Perceptions of Fairness and Systemic Legitimacy

The empirical link between performance appraisal systems and favourable employee behavioural consequences is not guaranteed. It is significantly mediated by employees' perceptions of fairness and the system's perceived legitimacy. A performance appraisal structure with complex evaluation criteria will certainly not affect individual behaviour positively if employees believe the system is unfair, corrupt, and political.

In numerous developing democracies, performance management is considered to be corrupted by political manipulation, patronage, and cronyism among the civil service. If promotions, study grants, bonuses, or career progress are believed to be under the control of political or personal favor, a record of "relatively poor" employees, then how performance appraisal systems function is questionable. In this situation, performance management becomes chronic or, in some cases, symbolic or even for "witch-hunting" employees.

As soon as mere measurement of performance proves insignificant to real career events, perceptions of procedural and distributive justice collapse, leading to important behavioural effects of counter productivity, increased anxiety, disengagement, and a trend of leavers. "Over time, the most capable workers, the ones deemed most valuable to the system, will likely be the ones to leave, leading to the erosion of talent in the public sector known as 'brain drain'".

To make performance appraisal systems work, public organizations would need to develop an organizational justice framework including processes shielded from politicisation, managerial competence in reducing subjectivity effects, and securing the relationship between appraisal and concrete HR decisions.

Performance Appraisal and Service Delivery Outcomes

Macro-Institutional Pathways and Public Value Creation

In the field of public administration, the entire value added of a system of internal management can only be judged ultimately in terms of what it provides directly to the citizen-and his or her family-as a tangible, quantitative element of value. Private organizations compare to, and are judged by, their financial performance based on factors like profit, market share, and reputation, whereas public bodies are judged according to Standards of efficiency, justice, market responsiveness, and accountability.

The translation of individual performance into aggregated performance of the system as a whole in service provision is constructed on proper institutional arrangements. Once the performance assessment system is not reduced to checking procedures, but rather turns into a tool of strategic management, it can translate individual effort into state purposes. Goal alignment is the core; a coherent IPMS is a cascading mechanism that cascades national priorities through to departmental objectives down to individual performance expectations. The MMIS minimizes the fragmentation of effort and allocates manpower and monetary resources to the delivery of key priority services.

Findings from empirical research indicate that organizations adopting comprehensive, data-oriented performance measurement systems tend to be more efficient and encounter fewer delays in administrative procedures. Defining accountability for individual results mitigates bureaucratic inefficiencies and boosts responsiveness of public agencies.

Operationalising Accountability and Citizen Responsiveness

In contemporary public sector reforms, a stronger focus on delivery of greater accountability and responsiveness to citizens has tended to be a second step. Performance management systems are critical to delivering on this aspect by working as a behavioural tool for setting clear performance standards throughout the civil service.

The quality of performance standards set can also act as a catalyst for public service managers to better observe output, unwanted practices, and account for people who underperform for negligent service delivery. Further embedding of these citizen-focused indicators- including citizen satisfaction surveys, service charter compliance, and time to resolve complaints- in individual performance agreements solidifies this accountability environment. As career advancement and performance appraisals are explicitly tied to customer service levels, staff are encouraged to be more attentive and professional.

Such alignment over time is also likely to contribute to reorienting public institutions from mostly inward-oriented bureaucracies that were concerned with rules and procedures to outward-oriented providers of services responding effectively to the community's needs. On the other hand, traditional symbolic or modestly compliance-based assessment may reinforce the deadlock where public institutions do not connect with the community.

Context-Specific Application: Performance Dynamics in Constitutional Oversight Institutions

Line ministries like health, education and infrastructure are often assessed against quantifiable targets in the form of technical output (for example, service coverage rates, infrastructure development or patient numbers). By contrast, constitutional oversight institutions are subject to very different performance dynamics. Institutional ones like the Office of the Ombudsman are responsible for protecting citizens from maladministration, abuse and injustice no matter where it occurs in the public sector.

Consequently, the use of rough quantitative measures as the sole basis of performance review within institutions does not work. For instance, rewarding staff for closing the highest number of cases runs the risk of promoting rushed and superficial investigations, and thus undermining legal quality and Substance. An effective appraisal framework for oversight institutions must therefore incorporate multi-dimensional performance indicators, including:

- Quality, legality, and systemic impact of investigations
- Fair treatment-adherence to ethical norms, impartiality, anonymity, and confidentiality.
- Timeliness and clarity in communication with complainants, especially vulnerable groups
- Contributions to institution-building and outcomes against corruption

In the context of performance appraisal systems, the institutionalization of the above dimensions by oversight bodies is crucial because it guarantees the existence and use of internal control systems that protect them from violating their constitutional role in the governance process. This, in turn, contributes greatly to reinforcing the

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rule of law, enhancing the efficient use of resources, and rebuilding public confidence while minimizing corruption, particularly in developing democracies.

Moderating Factors in Public Sector Contexts

Political Interference and Patronage Networks

Contemporary performance management theory presumes that management is performed within a rational and rule-based system. In practice, this presumption rarely holds when the system in question is the management of human resources within public service organizations. This is because when recruitment, promotion, and rewards for public officials are determined by political allegiances rather than documented performance, the appraisal system's perceived legitimacy diminishes considerably. When this happens, it soon becomes apparent that strong performance, per se, cannot secure career advancement within such systems, thereby breaking the Motivational Logic underlying the ABC model of motivation at the consequence stage of motivation with negative effects for work effort and accountability.

Centralised Systems and Limited Managerial Autonomy

Many developing country governments have developed centralised public human resource management (HRM) systems that often leave managers with very limited managerial autonomy to appraise, develop and reward staff. Modern performance appraisal theory assumes that managers do have considerable managerial discretion to award or punish performance outcomes, but this often has been constrained in many developing countries, and many managers find themselves with less discretion to reward or reprimand. For example, despite its benefits, many public service systems have the ability to monitor performance outcomes through systems like the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), but managers are often unable to take any action on the results of appraisals, either to reward or reprimand performance outcomes. This typically means that many awards, reprimands, and promotions still have to pass through long and politicized processes. This is one cause of a considerable disconnect between performance behavior and organizational rewards.

Fiscal and Budgetary Constraints

Modern performance management systems rely heavily on adequate financial support, including funds for performance-incentive schemes, training of staff in appraisal and management, and computerized systems. Many developing countries suffer from ongoing budget shortfalls or fiscal instability, and there may simply not be sufficient funding for a fully operational system. This situation might manifest in several ways. For example, many countries may have appraisal systems that identify the training needs of their staff but may be unable to resource these training programs. As one might expect, when appraisal systems do not allow managers to actually help staff and support them after poor appraisal ratings, it further decreases the system's legitimacy. In addition to this, when managers make promises for pay increases and then cannot actually deliver on them, the consequence component of the motivation system breaks down once more as individuals' perceptions about what they can receive in exchange for their hard work are suddenly nullified, leading to reductions in morale.

Bureaucratic Culture and Power Distance

As many studies on comparative management would suggest, cultural variations must be considered. Indeed, it could be argued that organizational culture, and the concept of 'power distance' and its accompanying political behavior are very important modulating factors. It is often the case in the public services of many developing countries that, on account of strong hierarchies and high power-distance values, communication is very often quite inhibited during performance reviews. High power-distance means that supervisors might try to maintain a comfortable working environment by avoiding telling subordinates they are doing badly, while subordinates might feel it would be rude to challenge their supervisor's comments, so, in fact, nothing much is said about actual work outcomes in a review. As a result, performance reviews are more a formality than a learning activity.

Technical Capacity and Digital Infrastructure Gaps

A final set of very important constraints relates to the technological and technical capacities within organizations. Historically, the collection of performance review information in developing countries was paper-based and contained information confidential in closed individual records. Today, the move to sophisticated, often computerized and online systems has required, and benefits from, particular skills and technological investment. Public sector organizations in many countries lack training in using objective appraisal systems, leading to inconsistent or biased reviews and, consequently, they have less of the required information and systems to analyse the data derived from appraisals to monitor workforce productivity and manage human resources efficiently and strategically.

DISCUSSION AND CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of Empirical Findings

The review of public-sector performance literature published between 2017 and 2025 offers evidence of a complex and highly mediated relationship between performance appraisal systems and service delivery. Findings confirm that employee performance appraisal (EPA) cannot be treated as a magic bullet, automatically stimulating the generation of efficiency or improved institutional performance. Their effectiveness depends on internal psychological processes and external institutional conditions. When examined through the Antecedent–Behaviour–Consequence (ABC) model, many public sector systems may be labelled as performance management decoupling (Khan et al. 2024:2285415; World Bank 2022:15). When entities utilize great resources in crafting detailed antecedents(A), for example, appraisal forms, performance contracts, laws, but don’t manage to provide consistent transparent and enforceable consequences (C).

Aguinis (2021:14) mentions that if performance management systems work as intended, the consequence phase is central. Nonetheless, in many public institutions, officials notice that high performance is not sufficiently rewarded but low performance remains unpunished. Such actions detract from the reputational strength of government institutions, including the police, and diminish perceptions of organisational justice and trust in the system (Wang & Sui 2021:458).

Organizational Justice theory suggests that a low sense of procedural and distributive fairness leads to either passive compliance or active resistance (Thurston and McNall, 2010:201). In such settings, performance appraisal functions as a procedural exercise, rather than an incentive to work harder or positively impact actual behavior. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that those Private Sector PA Models, brought in via NPM reforms were badly fitted to developing countries' real institutional conditions (Karyeija, 2012:163 and Norman, 2001:68). In stark contrast with companies, the state, on the other hand is characterized by stringent institutional regulation and bureaucratic controls, narrow managers’ managerial prerogatives, a fiscally tight environment, and substantial political interference (Mzumbe, 2025:48 and Thusi et al, 2022:45). Reform is, therefore about the contextualised use of relevant tools and not importation of externally constructed ones designed to meet compliance criteria. A Customised

Framework for Constitutional Oversight Institutions

To fill this gap, a bespoke PA framework should be developed for the institutions in the category of constitutional oversight bodies, like the Office of the Ombudsman. Unlike line Ministries, which need to measure their technical achievements through quantifiable outcomes, the raison d’etre of these institutions is to hold to account all actors within public administration through investigating the issues of poor governance, abuse of power, and procedural injustice (Ladi, 2011:314). Consequently, their tasks are inherently quality-sensitive and legally, as well as morally, complex. Applying the ABC framework to this context gives the following context- and role-specific framework:

Antecedents (A): There is a need to move from a generic instrument of performance evaluation to context-relevant and co-constructed Management By Objectives (MBO) systems which would suit the investigatory and legal roles to be fulfilled by oversight bodies. Caseloads with strict deadlines and defined standards for registering a complaint, analyzing it, and the timely delivery of reports, for instance, should be used to define objectives for individual casework investigators. It should also be ensured that these targets are reflected in the digital-based case management system of the institution in order to enhance tracking, minimize role ambiguity, and coordinate employee work within institutional priorities (Khan et al., 2024:2285415).

Behaviours (B)

The qualitative nature of oversight requires solidifying behavioural measurement using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Instead of relying on the end-of-cycle rating process, supervisors must describe (document) situations in which employees demonstrate behaviours that should be considered as 'critical incidents' in relation to the critical investigative commitments (e.g., maintaining neutrality when investigating politically sensitive cases, ensuring confidentiality of complainants, demonstrating empathy for vulnerable complainants). By systematically recording critical incidents, the evaluation of the employee will include both technical competence and ethical behaviour (Pulakos & Mueller-Hanson 2021:148).

Consequences (C)

In order to avoid the decoupling of performance appraisals, there must be a direct and transparent connection between appraisal results and the associated human resource actions. Assessment of performance gaps should result in an automatic triggering of structured, fully funded developmental interventions (Shava et al. 2025:5). In addition, high performance should result in merit-based promotions, professional recognition, and/or access to advanced learning opportunities. Continued low performance should result in clear, formal, administratively defined sanctions. This closes the behavioural loop and provides reinforcement for accountability within the system.

By implementing these mechanisms in combination with ensuring that individual performance contributes to achieving the institutional mission of protecting the public from maladministration (Ladi 2011:315; World Bank 2022:18).

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Gaps in Current Public Administration Literature

Several of the more recent empirical and theoretical production studies highlight some of the gaps and limitations of the literature published between 2017 and 2025. Research on large service delivery ministries and oversight agencies has been the predominant focus of most studies examined; e.g., ministries of health and education or the municipal governance system (Makwero et al., 2024, p. 4007; Shava et al., 2025, p. 7). This dominance in studies on these governance structures is likely due to the ready availability of quantifiable data on 'outputs' pertaining to these sectors. Due to this predominant focus, research studies have

not disproportionately examined the effectiveness or efficiency of constitutional oversight institutions (e.g., Ombudsman, Human Rights Commissions, Anti-Corruption Agencies) relative to quantitative measures of outputs. Many of these institutions operate under an established set of laws and have distinct mandates; thus, assessing their effectiveness will require the use of evaluation frameworks that emphasize legal quality, ethical compliance, and just procedures as opposed to volume of output (Fowlie & LaHatte, 2020, p. 92).

Finally, the majority of the studies examined treat the public sector as a single entity, overlooking many of the structural differences among revenue-producing entities, service-providing entities, and accountability institutions. As a result, most of the performance models developed and used in these studies will not be valid for application in similar contexts that require work that is primarily investigative, interpretive, and long-term oriented.

Therefore, there is a clear need for additional research focused on developing context-appropriate appraisal frameworks that balance the demands for efficiency versus those that require procedural and substantive justice.

Methodological Opportunities and Future Directions

Methodologically, there is still reliance on cross-sectional survey designs and descriptive policy analyses, such as those used by Fatile (2014) and posted in SciELO (2024). While they provide useful means to identify relationships, there is little supportive evidence that these methods can effectively evaluate behaviour change over time or the cumulative impact of many cycles of appraisal.

As part of future research, it is recommended that researchers use the following methodologies:

- Longitudinal designs - to track civil servants through many cycles of appraisal to determine if their performance improvements are sustained or if there are behaviours of symbolic compliance over time.
- Mixed-methods case studies - to combine quantitative performance data with qualitative interviews to seek a better understanding of how institutional culture, power distance and political patronage impact upon the outcomes of appraisals.
- Comparative cross-country studies - to explore the variance of performance management systems across sub-Saharan African countries in an effort to identify adaptively superior best practices and lessons about institutional design.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on this systematic review of literature, performance appraisal systems can be seen as more than an administrative function; they are complex behaviour systems, which impact the delivery of public service via multiple psychological and institutional pathways. Additionally, results of this study show that the success of an appraisal system relies on more than the presence of well-defined antecedents; in particular, transparent feedback systems and credible consequences are necessary to ensure that the cycle of behaviour reinforcement remains intact.

Despite this, performance management systems in many developing democracies are constrained by political patronage, centralised control, fiscal restrictions and hierarchical cultures. These scenarios hamper organisational justice, diminish employee motivation and impair system effectiveness.

According to the study, generic corporate performance models do not suit constitutional oversight institutions well enough. These organizations need specialized frameworks with multi-dimensional capability to measure technical performance and governance outcomes. Qualitative contributions can be duly captured from it through a known technique called the critical incident technique (CIT). In the end, a performance appraisal system enhances service delivery only if it is perceived as fair and consistently applied with consequential links to careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report recommends four main policy directions based on findings

Prevent political interference with appraisal systems.

Performance appraisal processes of government must be insulated from nepotism, political interference, and clientelism. Promotions, training, and rewards must be made strictly based on verified performance data sourced from connected digital systems to restore organisational justice and retain high-performing staff.

Broaden Human Resource Power Authority.

Civil service commissions should enhance the authority of institutional managers to conduct consequence management. To restore the link between performance and outcome, it is essential to empower supervisors to take actions that initiate rewards, recommend sanctions, and trigger development interventions with minimal delay at the centre.

Enhance Budgetary Commitment to Capacity Development.

Performance management isn't an administrative cost; it's a strategic investment, not an administrative cost. Governments should provide necessary funding for all training and capacity-building programmes identified through appraisal systems to fill skill gaps and enhance service delivery.

Implement Multi-Dimensional Metric Design for Oversight Institutions

Supervisory bodies should establish customized evaluation systems to assess quality, ethics, and citizens' responsiveness to investigations. To ensure individuals' performance is aligned with institutions' mandates, CIT must be embedded as a behaviour-based tool.

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