A Study on the Problems and Countermeasures of China’s Government Performance Appraisal

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Abstract
Government performance appraisal is the important path that maintains the social order, improves the quality of service, improves the mechanism of public accountability and promotes the governmental cohesion. Beginning with an analysis on the important functions of performance appraisal in the Chinese government’s administration, this article pays its focus to some major problems in present performance appraisal of Chinese government, then comes to some concrete, overall and feasible countermeasures.

Keywords: Government, Performance appraisal, Problem, Countermeasure

1. Introduction
Government performance appraisal refers to the process and activity to evaluate the input, output and effect of a government’s management and to employ it to measure the government’s work as an important gist. It has “for the most part, contributed to much greater transparency in government, a major factor in improving performance” (Holmes and Shand, 1995, p.563). This kind of appraisal aims at cutting down the government’s expenditure and improving efficiency and effect in order to earn public confidence in our government.

With the development of China’s institutional reforms, more importance has been attached to government performance appraisal as a tool to guarantee innovation and effective management of our public management system. In the recent years, some achievements have been made in the research on the theories and methods of government performance appraisal and we have also got some experience in the practice of government performance appraisal.

However, due to the short-time development of performance appraisal in our country, it hasn’t been paid much attention to and applied widely. In addition, no standardized and institutionalized system has been formed in our theoretical research in this field. Based on the analysis on the functions of performance appraisal in the Chinese government’s management, this article explores the major problems in our practice in detail and further comes to some measures to improve our performance appraisal in order to promote its sound development in our government’s management.

2. The Main Functions of Government Performance Appraisal in the Chinese Government’s Management

As an innovative part in government management, government performance management plays an important role in improving our government’s performance, ameliorating our government’s work and establishing a system of public administration with “standardized behavior, harmonious operation, just and transparent management, probity and high efficiency”. Its functions are shown in the following 4 aspects:

2.1 An Institutional Guarantee to Fully Carry out Scientific Development Philosophy and Establish the Right View about the Achievements in the Official Career

Scientific development philosophy is an important strategic idea and guidelines in the development of our economic society. It is propitious to forming the right idea about the achievements in the official career in government departments and civil servants, realizing the combination of autonomy and heteronomy in our government’s practice of scientific development philosophy, establishing a scientific and reasonable baton to guide the governments at all levels to re-think what official achievements are, for whom to create official achievements and how to realize them and so on, hence promoting full, harmonious and sustainable development of our economic society.

2.2 An Urgent Request to Shift Governmental Functions

With the general adoption of the market principle, our government’s monopolization must be broken. In addition, govern-
mental functions should be shifted to return the rights of production and management to enterprises without any reservations, to carry out the reasonable division of power in the governments at all levels and exert the functions of social intermediaries and mass organizations, to establish and strengthen our government’s macro-control power. As Tang argues (Tang, 2006, pp.6), being the people’s government, our government must deal with its expenditure according to the proper process with the people’s consent; and public resources must be employed efficiently to achieve the anticipated effect. In order to carry out these public responsibilities, our government’s acts should be appraised to learn about exactly whether it has taken the public responsibilities it is up to.

2.3 An Important Measure to Improve the Methods of Government Management

As is shown in our practice, government performance appraisal has become an important link and an effective tool to reform our government management by introducing the application of a series of new performance-based, result-oriented management measures (Tang, 2006, pp.7). Actually, the wide application of performance appraisal and its measures has greatly pushed the improvement and development of the methods and skills of public management, resulted in the application of project appraisal, management information system, electronic government affairs and government online services and so on. Meanwhile, performance appraisal provides bases for the stimulation and restriction system of government departments and civil servants and promotes the constant efforts of our governments at all levels to improve their management effect.

2.4 An Important Path to Improve Our Government’s Credibility and Establish the People-Satisfied Government

Instead of procedures and rules, whether good results can be achieved and whether people can be satisfied seem to be more important. Performance appraisal provides a good opportunity for our government to show its achievements and to devote all its attention to people’s criticism and suggestions by attracting more people to participate. In this way, the relationship between the public departments of our government and people will be improved, the public’s confidence in our government’s public departments will be established and developed, and their rallying point and cohesion will get strengthened.


3.1 Lacking in the Legal System about Performance Appraisal

Currently, lacking in the relevant legal system, our government performance appraisal just relies on the local governments’ spontaneous acts. It has no scientific and stable appraisal contents and no system patterns about strategic planning, performance planning and performance reports. Therefore, this appraisal seems to be too random. Besides, short of a common leading institution and performance standard, comparative appraisal among different departments or regions cannot be carried out (RGCPAS, 2006, pp.15). The absence of an independent appraisal institution and systematic theory also results in our blindfold practice. In addition, the process of government performance appraisal has the characteristics of close and mysterious, and the appraisal results short of openness and transparency. So, the media supervision is not in the place.

3.2 Lacking in a Scientific Index System of Performance Appraisal

In our present performance appraisal, achievements in economic development are partially regarded to be the same as those in one’s official career. Performance is not appraised according to achievements and contributions but to whether rules have been strictly obeyed or whether the higher-up’s orders have been accomplished. Meanwhile, much emphasis has been paid to some quantity indexes, such as scale, volume, speed and so on, while the quality indexes such as profit, quality, structure, social equity, environmental protection and so on have been neglected. Output has been attached too much importance to with the costs being neglected. In addition, being not a part in market exchange, our government’s performance cannot be labeled by the market price (Zang, 2005, pp.854).

3.3 One-fold Entity in Performance Appraisal and Low Liability of the Appraisal Result

The multi-structure of entities in performance appraisal is a basic principle to guarantee the validity of our government performance appraisal (Zhuo, 2004, pp.17). Nevertheless, the appraisal within our government has taken up the major part in our current performance appraisal, especially the senior-to-junior appraisal. On the contrary, self-appraisal made by different departments seems to be insufficient and social organizations and people can hardly participate in the appraisal process, hence resulting in incorrect results, exaggerated achievements and hidden errors. Gradually, our government’s image will be destroyed.

3.4 Laggard Measures of Performance Appraisal

Being an uncultivated field in china, performance appraisal is lacking in some necessary supporting measures, such as appraisal materials, appraisal professionals and a support system (Chen, 2004, p.260). Moreover, the simple qualitative method, instead of the quantitative one, leads to the appraisal not depending on scientific analysis and authentic data but depending on experience, impression and feeling in many cases. Therefore, our results tend to be unscientific, unfair and non-objective.

3.5 Failing to Combine Performance Appraisal with Public Finance Management
In our country, the separation between performance appraisal and public expenditure and performance budget as well as the lack in separate performance audit has led to some problems, such as serious waste, emphasis on the input instead of the output and emphasis on efficiency instead of profit. Besides, with performance appraisal and encouragement and punishment not combined, a department’s performance will not influence the country’s input in it in the coming year. With such poor effect of our performance appraisal, it is not able to improve our government’s efficiency, ameliorate its methods of work and improve its service quality.

4. Some Countermeasures to Improve China’s Government Performance Appraisal

The development of our governmental reform, science and technology, and democracy and legal system has provided favorable conditions for our performance appraisal. Taking the above-mentioned problems in our present performance appraisal, our real situation and the long-term development of performance appraisal into consideration, we should take some efforts to facilitate the construction of our country’s government performance appraisal in the following 6 aspects.

4.1 Perfecting the Legislation for Government Performance Appraisal

Legislative support is the precondition and basis for government performance appraisal. Only when our reform achievements get solidified by the legal system can the execution be strengthened, the execution procedure be standardized, the government performance appraisal system be improved and its authority and independence be guaranteed (Hu and Jin, 2007, pp.108). Therefore, first, the important role of performance appraisal in government management should be clarified in legislation to enable it to be the basic link in public management. Second, some systems and regulations about performance appraisal should be issued, in which the appraisal contents and some relevant issues should be laid down to provide laws and rules for our appraisal (Chen, 2004, p.261). Finally, the departments in governments at all levels should lay down their long-term strategic goals according to the policies of our Party and our nation. In addition, performance appraisal should be conducted regularly to find shortcomings and omissions in order to improve our government’s administrative efficiency.

4.2 Confirming Scientific Entities of Performance Appraisal

4.2.1 The Internal Entities of Performance Appraisal

As Wu and Ran argue “The government must be responsible for its behavior, which is the foundation of responsibility government”(2006, pp.67). As the main body of the appraisal, our government can show the problems and difficulties in the appraisal objectively and fully and then put forward some countermeasures to solve them effectively with its advantages in institutional arrangement and familiarity with its operation rules. Therefore, the internal entities of performance appraisal should be included in a three-dimensional appraisal system, including the higher-up’s appraisal, self-appraisal, the appraisal among the administrative departments at the same level and the junior’s appraisal.

4.2.2 The External Entities of Performance Appraisal

Being the customers for whom our government provides service, main bodies outside the government should also be the entities of our government performance appraisal. However, it is worth mentioning that these customers must be endowed with independence, professional, authoritativeness, mature political sense and low appraisal costs and so on (Xie, 2007, pp.50-51). Generally speaking, the external entities mainly include Parties, state authorities, mass media, folk institutions, citizens and professional institutions for performance appraisal. Among the above ones, citizens’ strength should be exerted with more efforts because it is up to them to appraise the effect of their government’s behavior (Sun, 2006, pp.40).

4.3 Perfecting the Index System of Government Performance Appraisal

Carter, Klein and Day argue (1992, p.181) that “given different policy objectives, different kinds of performance indicator systems will emerge.” Great efforts should be taken to reconstruct the system of government performance appraisal guided by scientific development philosophy to change our traditional, ineffective and twisted performance appraisal (Wu, Zhang and Zhang, 2007, pp.97). Based on the situation of our country, an index system should be established to help to ameliorate our government’s organization and management, to adapt the operation flow, to pay attention to performance results and to embody the shift of governmental functions (Tang, 2006, pp.10).

4.3.1 Macro Performance Indexes

a. the quantity and quality of the service provided for our socioeconomic activities by government departments, including the quantity of basic facilities constructed with the government’s direct investment, the laws and regulations issued by the government and the degree of the government’s support for the leading industries and so on.

b. the achieved result of the government’s management goals, including whether people are sufficiently employed, whether the price stays stable, whether economy gets increased constantly, whether revenue and expenditure are balanced, whether resources are reasonably allocated and so on.

c. the equity degree of financial policies, such as total tax incomes, direct tax and indirect tax and so on.

d. the benefit of government management, including the percentage of the total tax revenue in GDP, the percentage of the
government’s expenditure in the total tax revenue, the situation of staff recruitment and so on.
e. the effect of the government’s management of the whole society, including whether people are confident in social equity and justice, whether they are satisfied with the extent to which their personal safety and that of their property are protected and so on...

4.3.2 Micro Performance Indexes

a. benefit indexes, such as the error rate, the punctuality rate, the eligibility rate, the excellence rate and customer satisfaction and so on.
b. the indexes about the rationalization level of public departments’ behavior, such as whether public decisions are scientific, whether democratic supervision is effective, whether our government is uncorrupted and efficient, the total amount of the government’s fixed capital, the government’s expenditure structure and so on.
c. the indexes about the efficiency of public departments, including whether they have reasonable and perfect systems, whether they exert their functions lawfully, whether they make government affairs public, whether their efficiency has been elevated and so on.

4.4 Improving the Technical Measures and Methods of Performance Appraisal

The process of government performance appraisal is a process of information collection, filter, processing, output and feedback, which requires establishing electronic information systems of government performance appraisal, publicizing some relevant information about our government on the Internet, collecting the appraisal information made by enterprises, social organizations and people. The series of measures are propitious to the improvement of efficiency, the alleviation of workload and the reduction of human interferential factors.

In government performance appraisal, the government’s input, cost, output and effect should be appraised in quantity and quality, which should rely on scientific and modern methods. Qualitative as well as quantitative methods should be combined organically and a comprehensive appraisal method should be employed. Benchmark management can be adopted for the indexes of which the input and the output can both be measured; for those indexes of which the input can be measured but the output cannot, performance appraisal should be conducted through budget restriction; for those indexes of which the output can be measured but the input cannot, goal management should be adopted with the perfection degree of the rules of law taken into consideration.

4.5 Building a Scientific Research Contingent and Establishing the Academic Platform

4.5.1 Building an Innovative Contingent

In order to deepen and strengthen our research on government performance appraisal, contingent construction is fundamental (Peng, 2006, pp.20). With the national social science fund projects, the national natural science fund projects and other significant projects as the fulcrum, we should try our best to attract and cultivate more excellent talents and make more high-quality achievements.

4.5.2 Constructing Research Bases

In this aspect, the construction of the research bases, disciplines and majors should be combined organically. In addition, our research bases and doctor stations should be employed to attract and cultivate more excellent talents.

4.5.3 Constructing a Performance Research Academy

This academy should rely on China’s Administration Management Society, the National Academy of Government Performance Appraisal and some relevant academies in different provinces or cities. In addition, being a place for researchers and practitioners in this field to get more knowledge and experience, this institution is expected to clarify research subjects, exchange research information and cultivate research talents.

4.6 Combining Performance Appraisal with Financial Budget

In the modern times, it is the core of government performance appraisal to enable our government to accomplish the best things with the least money. Due to the shortage of public capital, the governments at all levels are facing great pressure and challenge in their public budget. In this situation, we should try to combine performance appraisal with financial budget. In order to achieve this goal, the following measures can be taken: capital should be allocated according to the effect not to the input; in the execution of public budget, the effect should be attached to appropriation. Meanwhile, performance appraisal should be combined with encouragement and punishment measures. The appraisal result can be used as the basis to improve our government’s work, to encourage, punish, promote or demote civil servants and to evaluate the validity of our government.

5. Conclusion
China’s social transformation has provided favorable conditions for our government to renew its ideas, shift its functions and innovate its system. As long as we take our practice in the government management reform into consideration and carry out researches on theories and practices, we can not only solve the current problems but promote our government’s performance to be constantly improved.

In order to promote China’s government performance appraisal to develop constantly and become more institutionalized and law-based, we should sum up our practical experience carefully, explore and establish relevant laws and regulations, lead different areas to participate in the practice of performance appraisal and encourage the local governments to explore new patterns of performance appraisal. Meanwhile, our research on the theories about government performance appraisal should be strengthened to sum up the theoretical and practical achievements about government performance appraisal in and outside China. With the theoretical innovations bringing along the development of our practice, the goal to construct a government with high performance and customers’ satisfaction can be achieved.

**References**


