

Performance Appraisal in the Indian Civil Services: A means of ensuring greater effectiveness

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I. Introduction

The term 'civil servant' in India is generally used to denote members of the permanent bureaucracy¹ inducted through an annual competitive all-India examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. These are categorized into All-India Services, i.e. the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFoS) wherein members are recruited by the Union and serve both the States (in respective cadres) and the Union; and the Central Services, i.e. that exclusively serve the Union government like the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) or Indian Revenue Service (IRS). The history of the modern civil services dates back to the late-eighteenth century when the East India Company, to facilitate collection of revenue and perform attendant functions of administration, policing and justice, created a cadre of civil servants. The Macaulay-Trevelyan reforms in the mid-1850s were responsible for the creation of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) into a meritocratic cadre that was described by British Prime Minister Lloyd George in 1922 as the 'steel frame of the British Raj'. However, Nehru was very critical of the ICS and in 1934 remarked that "no new order can be built in India till the spirit of the Indian Civil Service pervades our administration and our public services" and considered it "quite essential that the ICS and similar services must disappear completely".

Post-Independence, the threat of balkanization and Hindu-Muslim rioting triggered by the Partition, made the nascent Indian state opt for continuity rather than change with the IAS and IPS replacing the ICS and Indian Police (IP), a case of old wine in new bottles. As the Indian economy took a more socialistic turn in the 1960s and 70s, the bureaucracy became more intrusive and a 'license-permit raj' came to obtain in the country. The dismantling of this 'statism' was initiated in the economic reforms ushered in by the New Economic Policy of Dr. Manmohan Singh in the 1990s. The consequential rise of the private sector in India and the influence of the New Public Management² soon triggered questions on the functioning of an ostensibly meritocratic civil service. In the last decade, the need to infuse greater professionalism and accountability in the IAS and other civil services has gained currency. It is in this context that this essay examines the system of performance appraisal in the Indian civil services as a means of ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in their functioning. It focusses on the IAS, the country's premier civil service, and uses the comparator of the Singapore Civil Service to draw key lessons that may inform civil service reform in India.

The essay is divided into seven broad parts. Section A provides a short account of the rise of the modern civil service in India and more specifically of the IAS. Section B provides an introduction to performance appraisal and outlines the research question. Section C provides a descriptive account of the system of performance appraisal as it obtains in India and Singapore. Section D brings out the shortcomings in the current performance appraisal system of civil servants in India. The next section undertakes a brief review of the literature on performance appraisal. Section F lists out the reforms that are required in our performance appraisal system. The last section summarizes the key ideas and outcomes of the essay.

¹The term bureaucracy is derived from the French word *bureau* (desk) and the Greek word *kratos* (to rule) and forms the basic organizational principle. Its early champions included the political sociologist Max Weber who viewed it as a hierarchical and professional rule-bound entity. A more critical account of bureaucracy is given by Michel Crozier in *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (1964) wherein he characterises it as evoking '...the slowness, the ponderousness, the routine, the complication of procedures, and the maladapted responses of 'bureaucratic' organisations to the needs which they should satisfy...'

² New Public Management is a term used to denote the application of institutional economics and business-type managerialism to government that began in the 1980s to introduce greater efficiency and professionalism in government functioning.

II. Performance Appraisal and Research Question

Worldwide, efficiency and effectiveness of the bureaucracy is measured and checked through the process of performance appraisal. Simply put, performance appraisal may be defined as the process of assessing and recording an employee's performance³ over a period of time, typically a year, with the aim of enhancing output, efficiency and work quality. In organizations, such appraisals perform three important functions, i.e. first, feedback to the employee on contribution; second, identification of development needs; and three, helping determine salary and bonuses. Thus, performance appraisals help discern the relative effectiveness of employees and are an important means of human resource (HR) development as well as are linked to career progression. In India, performance appraisals are carried out at the end of the financial year in government and are a means of collecting basic inputs to assess the performance of officials, to be used for determining their subsequent professional advancement.

However, the present system of performance appraisal of IAS officers through the annual Performance Appraisal Report (PAR) does not appear to be effective in incentivizing higher performance and may be beset with certain shortcomings that inhibit high performance from an otherwise meritorious cadre of civil servants. This leads to the research question which is as follows:

Why is the performance appraisal system, which is a means of measuring the effectiveness of civil servants, more effective in Singapore than that followed in India? What are the reforms that are needed in the Indian performance appraisal system to improve the functioning of the civil service?

This paper thus seeks to compare the performance appraisal systems in India and Singapore to examine how an exercise of annual appraisal can result in very different outcomes for a nation's senior civil service and its impact on overall governance. Drawing lessons from the systems prevalent in Singapore, it then proceeds to propose some reforms in the present Indian system of performance appraisal.

C. A Tale of Two Systems

The IAS and the Singapore Civil Service have a multitude of factors in common. They trace their ancestry from the British civil service as both were British colonies and even today, they remain part of the British Commonwealth. Thanks to the common ancestry, many systems and procedures currently in place are quite similar. Singapore and India follow a not-too-different pattern of performance appraisal of its officials. In Singapore, officials are graded on their performance annually with A being the best grade, and E being the worst. In India, the appraisal system for officials of the All-India Services ranks their performance on a scale of 1 to 10. The objective of conducting performance appraisals in both countries is to help officers develop and improve their work performance. The only difference in appraisals in Singapore is that its purpose is also to reward officers, who have performed well during the appraisal period.

The Indian System

In India, as mentioned earlier, the performance of the civil servants is evaluated through an Annual Performance Appraisal Report (PAR), which provides the basic input to assess the performance of the official and her suitability for further advancement in her career on occasions like confirmation, promotion, selection for deputation, selection for foreign assignment, etc. It is typically a three-stage process with appraisal by the immediate Reporting Officer, a review by the Reviewing Officer who usually supervises the work of the Reporting Officer, and acceptance by the Accepting Authority. The Reporting Officer is required to set certain targets in the beginning of the year, after deliberating with her reportee. While fixing the targets, certain tasks are prioritized after carefully considering their nature and area of work. The Reporting Officer and the reportee are also required to undertake a mid-year review on achievement against the targets and to revise them, wherever necessary. The report is initiated by the reportee through a self-appraisal which provides a brief description of her duties; specifies the targets set for her (wherever available) and achievements against each target; shortfalls, if any, and constraints encountered; and finally, areas of exceptional performance leading to savings in resources. At the end of the appraisal period, the Reporting Officer grades the performance of her reportee on a numerical scale of one to ten, as a means of assessing the quality of officers' performance (2nd ARC Report, 2008). The PAR contains specific grading on quality of output as well as personal attributes, exceptional achievements, and also contains certification of the reportee's integrity and a descriptive pen picture capturing attributes not covered by numerical grading. The PAR also contains the reportee's self-assessment of developmental needs as well as his evaluators assessment and recommendations for training and further specialization. In short, the system of appraisal is justified to be not a fault-finding process but a developmental one.

³According to the AMO framework of Appelbaum et al (2000), performance is described as a function of ability, motivation and opportunity.

The Singapore System

Unlike India, civil servants in Singapore are assessed on the basis of Currently Estimated Potential (CEP). In a reply to a Parliament question in February 2017, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in-charge of the Civil Service stated that at the entry level, officers are remunerated on the basis of their 'assigned job responsibilities and demonstrated qualities, which include leadership and relevant experience'. However, once in job, it is 'performance and readiness for bigger job responsibilities that matter'. Government agencies use Currently Estimated Potential (or CEP) as a means of assessing officers for their 'readiness for bigger job responsibilities'. CEP is 'assessed based on demonstrated "AIM" qualities, which stand for (1) Analytical and Intellectual Capacity; (2) Influence and Collaboration; and (3) Motivation for Excellence'. Thus, starting educational qualifications do not influence CEP which is entirely dependent on 'assessments of whether the officer has demonstrated the qualities required for jobs with larger responsibilities'. Alongside this system of judging the officials, it is mandatory for the reporting officers to meet with the appraisee at least twice a year to set targets, based on which they would be judged, monitor the progress made before the meeting and give feedback to each other on the work done. This provides the reporting officers a responsibility, and even freedom, to guide their appraisees on their shortcomings and gauge a plan to improve their performance. In such a system, where mandatory meetings are held at least bi-annually, the element of surprise about performance at the end-of-the-year for the appraisee is eliminated and she has a real chance of improving during the period before the final appraisal report is written.

The process of performance appraisal is very formidable for the appraisers and appraisees in Singapore because of the strict systems in place in Singapore that lay great emphasis on effectiveness and performance. Furthermore, the system of meritocracy that is followed in Singapore incentivizes the civil servants to strive hard for performing to the best of their capabilities since the lowest-ranked officials are at the verge of losing their jobs. Thus, performance appraisals are taken much more seriously, thereby increasing in the process the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service, which plays an integral part in governance.

III. Shortcomings in the Indian system of Performance Appraisal

Not too long before his untimely death in May 1964, Nehru asked what he regarded as his greatest failure as India's first Prime Minister. He is reported to have replied, 'I could not change the administration, it is still a colonial administration'. Given the experience of seven decades post-Independence, it has come to be regarded that civil service reform in India has served to enhance neither efficiency nor accountability of the civil service. S.R. Maheshwari, a well-known public administration expert commented, 'India's efforts at reform have amounted to 'correction slips to the inherited administrative system'. A similar sentiment is echoed by M. Veerappa Moily, Chairman of 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission, who writes in his foreword to the Report on Personnel Administration, 'the Indian civil service reform efforts were not even correction slips – they were more in the nature of endorsement slips'.

The current system of appraisal of civil servants in India, designed to measure their efficiency and effectiveness and aid in their professional development, seems to fall short on both counts. It is generally regarded that hierarchy and inequality seem to characterize the Indian appraisal system which lays great emphasis on, workers considering their ties with their supervisors more important than the requirements of their tasks (Dauda, 2018). This makes reporting either biased or constrained. The changes that were introduced through the PAR system for the All-India Services in the early 2000s still have many limitations, which are as follows:

1. The appraisal systems provide generic formats and generalized indicators that may fail to effectively assess the performance of officials working in completely different departments/ agencies.
2. The element of subjectivity, when it comes to assigning numerical grades to different attributes of an officer, is still present in the current PAR system.
3. The appraisal does not lay enough emphasis on the development and improvement dimensions and instead focuses more on rating the performance of an officer, thereby negating the broader purpose of the performance appraisal exercise.
4. It does not adequately assess the potential of an officer to hold higher responsibilities and underplays the need for performance improvements as a career growth intervention.
5. The Accepting Authority, being too distant, is often not well placed to re-evaluate and appraise an officer.
6. The focus continues to be on ratings and evaluation rather than on performance planning, analysis, review, development and improvements which ultimately enables employees to achieve superior performance.

The gaps which exist between the present and desired performance appraisal system are depicted in the following diagram.

Present	Desired
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Rankings	<input type="checkbox"/> Process
<input type="checkbox"/> Appraisal	<input type="checkbox"/> Joint-review
<input type="checkbox"/> Periodicity- annual	<input type="checkbox"/> Periodicity- more periodoc
<input type="checkbox"/> Output	<input type="checkbox"/> Output/ Outcomes
<input type="checkbox"/> Performance & pay not related	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance related pay
<input type="checkbox"/> Top-down	<input type="checkbox"/> Ratings- Consultative
<input type="checkbox"/> Directive	<input type="checkbox"/> Supportive
<input type="checkbox"/> Monolithic	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible

(Source: Adapted from the 2nd Administrative Reforms Committee Report, 2008)

IV. Review of literature on Performance Appraisal

A paper by the World Bank⁴ is instructive in its analysis of performance management in higher civil services, what it calls 'senior public service' (SPS). It claims that performance orientation sets the SPS apart from the larger mass of government servants; hence, 'performance – its appraisal and centrality in career management – is an integral part of SPS management'. In Commonwealth countries that embraced New Public Management, performance appraisal is quite transparent and objective. It typically entails agreement on responsibilities, objectives and performance indicators between the officer and supervisor which is then reviewed at the end of each performance cycle. After discussion, the supervisor rates the performance as per agreed indicators and scales. Further, the paper also treats customer orientation as an important part of the civil service performance. Here, it showcases Canada's Public Service 2000 initiative and Singapore's Public Service for the 21st Century initiative as exemplars 'designed to improve government managers' relevance and responsiveness, and include these in officials' assessment'. In contrast, it states that 'India's IAS officers are evaluated on their responsiveness towards disadvantaged groups in society'. In Singapore, SPSs are ranked according to laid down criteria, and those who demonstrate higher performance move further and faster via what is locally termed 'helicopter movement'. In India's IAS, only those officers who have demonstrated high performance in the first 20 years of their careers cross a major career hurdle to be empanelled for promotion as Joint Secretary.

Appraisal and Career Progression

Appraisal lies at the heart of any good performance management system. In Britain, the Senior Civil Service's Performance Management architecture comprises of three key aspects: performance planning, performance review and assessment, and performance differentiation. In UK and Canada, high performing officials are identified for training and development and subsequent promotion into SPS. Such high potential officials are consciously developed and groomed to occupy high leadership positions within government. The procedures and systems followed in Singapore truly focus on overall performance of the government and civil service, which has resulted in exceptional performance by the officers and the government as a whole, in developing Singapore and achieving targets and goals efficiently and rapidly.

⁴ Accessed from <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/epublishdocs/SPS%20note%201216.pdf>

Performance Appraisal and Managerial Control

Performance appraisal systems are often regarded as instruments of management control for achieving organizational goals and improving performance. A useful theoretical construct to understand the mechanisms that enable performance appraisal systems is provided by Rebecca S. Ayers in her 2015 paper *Aligning Individual and Organizational Performance: Goal Alignment in Federal Government Agency Performance Appraisal Programs*. She explores two main aspects of alignment of goals in an organization: one, what relates to “embedding of organizational goals in performance plans (plan alignment)”; and two, “employees’ knowledge of how their work relates to the agency’s goals and priorities (employee alignment).” Her research reveals that employee alignment impacts organizational performance unlike plan alignment.

V. Improving the Performance Appraisal System

The 10th Report of 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (2008) titled *Refurbishing of Personnel Administration – Scaling New Heights* posits that “a good employee performance appraisal system is a pre-requisite for an effective performance management system”. It also provides useful recommendations for strengthening the existing performance appraisal system for senior civil servants, which are as follows:

- Making performance appraisal formats job-specific with three sections i.e.
 - ‘a generic section that meets the requirements of a particular service to which the officer belongs,
 - another section based on the goals and requirements of the department in which he/she is working, and
 - a final section which captures the specific requirements and targets relating to the post that the officer is holding.’
- Making performance appraisal round the year with detailed work-plan and mid-year review; currently this is more in precept than in practice, both in the States and in the Centre.
- Formulating guidelines for assigning numerical grading along with proper training modules for reporting and reviewing officers as part of performance management system.
- Expanding the scope of the current performance appraisal system to performance management system. PMS must be designed in view of the strategic framework of the Department/ Organisation linking individual achievements with its strategic objectives.
- Signing of Annual Performance Agreements between the Minister and departmental Secretary specifying the work to be done which would be subject to third-party assessment by a central authority.

A related aspect that requires to be addressed is the near absence of organisational performance appraisal and over-emphasis on individual performance appraisal. Individual performance must be better aligned with overall organizational performance, i.e. a more useful way of judging individual performance is by assessing how their organizations function and achieve the set targets. Even though the concept of Action Plans and Performance Auditing was introduced by the LK Jha Commission on Economic Administration Reforms (1982), institutionalization and wholehearted adoption of strategic plans and performance management matrices is largely missing, leading to middling individual and organizational performance. I would strongly argue that organisational appraisals must be conducted alongside individual performance assessments. The result of the organisational assessment should also have direct consequences on the performance appraisal of officers; for if they fail to achieve the stated organisational goals, it must reflect inadequate performance on their part.

Alongside this, it is very important to setup Performance Review Committees in all departments and organisation at the central and state level to ensure the recommended reforms are implemented. These committees should have the following functions:

- To ensure that appraisees meet their appraisers at least twice a year and once meet their accepting officer.
- To make sure that organisational targets are set in the beginning of the year by the minister and departmental secretary, which are subject to review by a designated external authority.
- To mandatorily hold performance review meetings with civil servants and review the progress made on both individual and departmental goals and targets.
- To provide answers for questions that arise during the appraisal period and also to clarify ambiguities.
- While being advisory, the committee would have the power to demand explanation from officers who do not follow due procedure while doing performance appraisals.

The binary of plan alignment – employeealignment given by Ayers (2015)also provides a useful prism to understand the ineffectiveness of performance appraisal system in India. Despite ‘plan alignment’ through preparation of work plans and deliverables for each officer, results continue to be sub-optimal. As per Ayers’ thesis, this may be explained by lack of any attempt to also secure ‘employee alignment’, i.e., the clarity and knowledge among civil servants how their work fits into the government’s goals and priorities. Clear

articulation of how each employee becomes an important part of a government's goals and priorities is lacking in the Indian context and may, therefore, be inhibiting bureaucratic performance.

VI. Conclusion

The fast rise of Singapore from an under-developed economy in the 1960s to among the most developed nations in the world is attributable in large part to good, effective governance. The Singapore Civil Service forms an integral part of this high-performance governance architecture. It is regarded as competent, professional and possessing high ethical standards. An effective system of performance appraisal has undoubtedly played a key role in shaping the Singapore Civil Service with right incentive structures that reward high performance, both financially and through 'helicopter' career progression. On the other hand, India has sought to implement right ideas but the lack of alignment between individual and organizational goals has precluded proper achievement. Further, PAR remains essentially a reporting exercise and fails to focus on its more important role of developing civil servants. Notwithstanding Singapore's first-world status economically, the lessons from the reform of its civil service are very useful in the Indian context. As is axiomatically remarked: a good appraisal system is a necessary but not sufficient condition for good civil service; a bad appraisal system is a sufficient but not necessary condition for bad civil service. The Indian government should eschew the hitherto half-hearted measures and follow the Singapore exemplar by putting in place a comprehensive performance management system. It is an idea whose time has come.

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