Thoughts on Improving Performance Assessment of Civil Servants in China

LI Liqin
Xi’an International University, Xi’an, 710077, Shaanxi, China

ABSTRACT: There are a number of defects in the current assessment mechanism of civil servants’ performance in China. These defects exist in various aspects of the assessment mechanism, such as objects, contents, criteria, indicators for performance appraisal, methods, results and feedback. In this study, scientific performance assessment mechanism was discussed on the basis of innovative performance assessment model, developed by Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce. KEYWORDS: performance assessment; civil servant; innovation

1 INTRODUCTION

Performance assessment of civil servant is important not only theoretically but also practically. It influences the evaluation efficiency of government officials, performance of government departments and satisfaction degree of the public for government performance.

2 CURRENT CONDITION OF CIVIL SERVANT PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT IN CHINA

Performance assessment of civil servants in China has appeared since 1990s. There was no unified assessment system at first. Under the instruction of the Interim Provisions on National Public Servant Appraisal, government departments in different areas conducted assessment based on their specific situations [1]. More policies about public servant performance assessment have been issued after that during the assessment process. The Notice of Problems about Performance Assessment System of National Civil Servants was issued by Ministry of Personnel of the People’s Public of China in 1994; Supplementary Notice of Problems about Performance Assessment System of National Civil Servants in 1996; Opinions on Further Strengthening the Performance Assessment of National Civil Servants in 2000. There were still other implementation advices given by local governments and departments. These documents had formed a complete system of civil servant performance assessment by regulating principles, contents, criteria, methods, procedures and the application of outcomes. Performance assessment of civil servants has been listed in Civil Servant Law of the PRC in 2006. It defined that performance of civil servants should be assessed comprehensively in morality, ability, diligence, performance and integrity. Among those indicators, working performance assessment was mostly emphasized. The initially established performance assessment system of civil servant in China has been improved in practice. However, there are a series of problems in objects, contends, criteria, indicators, methods, results and feedbacks in the performance assessment system. Thus many assessments were mere formality without expected outcomes. Instead of motivating civil servants to improve working efficiency, it has become a burden of work management. Civil servant performance assessment system is discussed to solve those problems based on the innovative practice of Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce in this study.

3 INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM OF CIVIL SERVANT PERFORMANCE OF NANCHANG ADMINISTRATION FOR INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

The industry and commerce administrative system in China has cancelled the individual business administrative fee and marketplace administrative fee since September 1, 2008 [2]. Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce had to adjust to the new situation. Based on deep thoughts,
the administration decided to transform from a fee-
charging administration to a service-providing
administration, emphasizing primarily on providing
supervision and service to the market. There were
improvements of performance assessment mechanism
to deal with problems emerging in practice.
According to this, Nanchang Administration for
Industry and Commerce issued the Primary Level
Sub-office Assessment Criteria of Nanchang
These assessment criteria have been implemented in
the municipal bureau since 2011 to establish a
performance assessment system throughout the
industry and commerce administrative system in
Nanchang. At the same time, the administrative made
a performance assessment plan of leading group and
leading cadres in county bureaus and departments.
The performance assessment system was further
improved in 2012 and 2013. The performance
assessment system of civil servants in Nanchang has
obtained remarkable achievements and attracted high
attention from scholars, experts and governments of
other cities and provinces. The following section is an
introduction of the main contents and innovations of
the assessment model of civil servant performance.

3.1 Combining assessment objects of individual civil
servant with departments objects

There are 16 county and district bureaus and 92
primary level sub-offices under Nanchang
Administration for Industry and Commerce. To
enhance the working efficiency of the whole
administration system, Nanchang Administration for
Industry and Commerce changed the assessment
model [3]. It distributed the department assessment
indicators to individual workers evenly based on
position responsibilities and abilities of civil servants
in the administration departments. Moreover, the
assessment system connected the assessment results
of departments and individuals [1]. According to this
practice, assessment results of individual workers
were determined by not only their own work but also
the performance of the department they work in. For
example, in a primary level sub-office there was a
hark-working civil servant. Since the department
assessment result lagged behind in an annual
assessment, the assessment result of the civil servant
was negatively influenced. Even his/her qualification
to be evaluated as an excellent civil servant was
cancelled consequently. Therefore, civil servants
should pay attention to both their own work and the
overall performance of their departments. Hence,
civil servants were encouraged to positively contribute
to innovation of working methods and efficiency to
enhance the overall development of their
departments. An “all for one, one for all” culture was
developed in the departments consequently.

3.2 Designing targeted indicators of performance
assessment

It was hard to develop a unified set of assessment
indicators due to the various positions, responsibilities
and levels. Therefore Nanchang Administration for
Industry and Commerce has developed specific
assessment indicators targeted to different
departments and positions. In line with Civil Servant
Law of the PRC, Nanchang Administration for
Industry and Commerce conducted assessment from
five perspectives, namely morality, ability, diligence,
performance and integrity. The 126 indicators in 21
items of the assessment contents could be divided into
3 categories—general indicators, business indicators
and administration indicators. Indicators were
measured by scores, in which 80% scores were about
business indicators, 10% about general indicators and
another 10% about administration indicators. 92
primary level sub-offices share 83 indicators, while
bureaus and departments have specific assessment
indicator sets for their own. Although the practice of
“specific assessment indicator for each individual”
was relatively hard to be implemented, it was more
effective to provide specific results for individuals [2].

3.3 Enhancing operability by quantifying indicators
of performance assessment

Nanchang Administration for Industry and
Commerce combined quantified assessment
indicators with work responsibilities to reduce impacts
of human factors and enhance the fairness of
assessment results. Key elements of assessment
system were clarified such as contents, weights,
scores, setting basis, data resources, grading standards
and people in charge. Every indicator could be
evaluated in scores and verified with related materials.
In bureau offices, staffs needed to complete their own
work and cooperate with colleagues as many tasks in
bureau offices were correlated with each other. In
light of this, responsibility weights were added to
indicators in assessment system for bureau office
staffs. Responsibility weight factors for indicators of
staffs were generated automatically based on scores of
indicators and responsibilities taken by those staffs.
Scores of certain individual staff were positively
related to responsibility weight factors. Meanwhile,
the former equalitarian assessment model was
changed by the adoption of workload factors. The
quantities and difficulty degree of work (very large,
large, normal, small and very small) were quantified
as 1.0, 0.9, 0.8, 0.7, 0.6, respectively. The
assessment systems were thus very effective by
improving the operability of cross-sectional
comparison and appraisal [3].
3.4 Combining general assessment with annual assessment

Performance assessment for civil servants was generally held at the end of each year. The long period of assessment could hardly stimulate working enthusiasm for long. In order to cope with this problem, Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce conducted assessment monthly, half-yearly and yearly. This normalized administration models were based mainly on monthly assessment. Monthly assessment was held in the first five workdays every month by bureau offices. Bureau leaders evaluated office performance in the previous month online with grades as excellent, good, moderate and poor. No more than 30% of offices under the charge of certain bureau could be evaluated as excellent. After the monthly assessment, offices made comments on the performance of the offices and individuals in the previous month to make improvement. Half-yearly assessment, including quantified assessment and online appraisal, was organized by municipal bureau in July this year and January of the next year. Quantified assessment was based on grading standards while online appraisal for each bureau was conducted by representatives of bureaus, offices, deputy to the NPC and costumers. Monthly and half-yearly assessment results of bureaus were connected to the assessment results of individual civil servants. Annual performance assessment results of bureaus and individuals were weighting calculated on the basis of monthly and half-yearly assessment results of bureaus and individuals.

3.5 Informationization assessment methods

Construction of information platform was necessary for a scientific performance assessment system. “Performance Assessment Management System of Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce” was developed in cooperation with the Public Performance and Information Research Center of Fudan University. This high-efficient and convenient system effectively facilitated the civil servant performance assessment in primary level sub-offices. There were three platforms in the administration center of digital performance assessment, namely execution platform, command and monitor platform, and satisfaction degree platform. Administrators could easily manage the assessment process from planning, monitoring and assessing to feedbacks collecting. Execution platform was responsible to conduct monthly and quarter assessments. Satisfaction degree platform consisted of work showing section, social supervision and appraisal section and complaint processing section. Command and monitor platform is established to process data, procedures and relevant materials of assessment. The responsibility of data center is administrating assessment results and generating annual results and ranks of primary level civil servants. There were three sources of data. Firstly, a part of data were automatically collected from exist regulating systems, on which basis assessment results were calculated. Secondly, some data were obtained through field collection of assessing staffs. Those data were unchangeable once entered into the system. Thirdly, functional departments also collected data during daily work.

3.6 Combining assessment results with rewards and penalties of civil servants

In most cases, assessing staffs did not talk to civil servants about their assessment results. Thus the lack of feedback significantly diminished the stimulating function of assessment. Regulation on Rewards and Penalties based on Performance Assessment of Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce was issued and implemented to deal with this problem. Assessment results effectively stimulated working enthusiasm of staffs by fully utilizing the results and strictly implementing rewards and penalties. Thus the performance of civil servants could be evaluated and assessed fair and square.

The practice is combining assessment results with appraisals of bureaus and civil servants, material rewards, and penalties. For instance, the person in charge of an advanced bureau in certain year was assessed as excellent. The bureau at the top of the table could have 30% of its staffs to be excellent civil servants instead of 15%. It is also a great advantage for the leader of the bureau for future promotion. The top two individual civil servants of the bureau were listed reserve cadres. Bureaus made suggestions of staff performance assessment grades on the basis of the individual result ranking. The improvement of performance assessment mechanism effectively stimulated the working enthusiasm of civil servants.

4 CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the performance assessment model developed by Nanchang Administration for Industry and Commerce is a good example to be followed in many aspects. Performance assessment of civil servants should combine individual assessments with department assessments. Targeted assessment indicators should be designed and quantified. Annual assessments should be combined with general assessments while assessment results combined with rewards and penalties of civil servants. This study is intended to establish a fair, scientific and high efficient assessment model of civil servant performance.
REFERENCES

