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REFRAMING PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL THROUGH EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM THE ALBANIAN BANKING SECTOR

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Abstract: The Albanian banking sector is facing growing challenges in attracting and retaining skilled employees, making the effectiveness of performance evaluation systems increasingly important. This study investigates how banking employees perceive the current appraisal practices and identifies the main factors that influence their views. To achieve this, a quantitative research design was employed, using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 182 banking professionals across various institutions and roles. To assess the strength and significance of the predictors influencing employees' views on appraisal relevance data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The analysis revealed that clarity of evaluation criteria ($\beta = 0.443$), objectivity of indicators ($\beta = 0.342$), and linkage to rewards ($\beta = 0.268$) emerged as the key drivers explaining 56.6% of the variance in employees' perceptions of performance appraisal system effectiveness. In contrast, the frequency of evaluations and the quality of the feedback process demonstrated a comparatively weaker influence on employees' perceptions of appraisal system effectiveness. These results suggest that improving the transparency, consistency, and developmental value of performance evaluations could play a crucial role in enhancing employee satisfaction and retention. Strengthening appraisal practices may, therefore, represent an important step for Albanian banks aiming to build a more satisfied, engaged, and resilient workforce.

Keywords: Evaluation, performance, employees, perception, feedback.

1. INTRODUCTION

In light of recent developments in the Albanian labor market, recruiting and retaining qualified employees has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges for many organizations. These difficulties have exposed longstanding dysfunctions in human resource management practices. While some of these problems are tied to wider economic and global

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trends, many are internal—such as the lack of well-structured performance appraisal systems, limited training opportunities, and insufficient incentives to keep employees motivated and engaged. The banking sector, in particular, is one of the sectors that has been affected hard, especially after the pandemic. Staff turnover has led banks to offer higher salaries to new recruits, which in turn has created demotivation among long-standing employees who often feel undervalued. These developments raise important questions about how performance is currently evaluated and whether the existing systems are truly fair, consistent, or effective. Employee performance is defined as the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees fulfill their job responsibilities (Dziuba et al., 2020). Raj et al (2023), in their study on performance appraisal noted that performance evaluation is the survey and assessment of the employee presentation during a time period and it is used to comprehend the capacities of an individual for additional development and advancement. This process assists the process of evaluating the development and advancement of employees and also give grounds to representatives to identify and present areas of improvement and give direction to employee's turn of events. Therefore, performance evaluation gives prize to better execution.

This concept is also related to employee satisfaction, where several studies enhance that higher levels of job satisfaction can lead to better performance. On the other hand, employee performance is essential to the success of any organization as it directly impacts productivity, operational efficiency, and overall competitiveness (Nguyen et al., 2020). Employees that are high-performing not only impact reaching organizational objectives, but they also create a positive work environment and reduce turnover (de Waal et al., 2023).

Performance assessments have an impact on both employee growth and improvement of the overall performance of the organization. As for banking sector, performance evaluation is critical for the bank's performance due to being a labor-intensive industry. Banks generally involve official evaluation of the employee's job performance over a fixed period to provide constructive feedback and as well notice strengths and areas for improvement for the employee. These reviews aim to help employees reach their career goals, while they help banks to retain top people and achieve their strategic goals (Dachner et al., 2021). Furthermore, the linkage between performance evaluations and tangible outcomes, such as promotions and rewards, is considered essential for reinforcing employee motivation and organizational commitment (Khan & Almahdi, 2024). Recent studies also highlight that the developmental aspect of feedback—rather than its mere frequency—plays a more decisive role in shaping positive employee perceptions of appraisal systems (Ghani et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings underscore the need for transparent, objective, and development-focused evaluation practices. Despite being noted the importance of performance evaluation in the banking system, and considering that it is one of the most well-regulated and formal sectors in Albania, the area of performance management remains out of standardization leading to different tools and methods used by each bank. Furthermore, banks on their annual report do report activities and training on other human resources practices, however there is little to no studies considering the employee perspective on these matters, especially to performance management. The shortage of skilled professionals in Albania, combined with widespread job opportunities across banks and industries, has made employee turnover increasingly common, leading to substantial organizational challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to examine employee perspectives on the effectiveness of existing performance appraisal methods. Understanding employees' views will offer valuable insights into whether current evaluation practices are perceived as fair and effective, and will help identify specific areas in need of improvement. Enhancing the performance appraisal process is anticipated to foster a better working environment, increase employee satisfaction, and ultimately strengthen organizational performance within the banking sector. This study examines banking employees' views on the effectiveness and relevance of current appraisal systems, focusing on the factors that shape their perceptions. By integrating employee feedback, banks can refine their evaluation practices, foster a more supportive work environment, and strengthen both employee loyalty and organizational performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Performance evaluation plays a critical role in shaping employee development and organizational effectiveness, particularly in service-oriented sectors such as banking. It involves the systematic review of an employee's performance over a given period and serves multiple functions: identifying individual strengths and development areas, setting goals for improvement, and determining eligibility for promotions, salary adjustments, or training opportunities (Brundin et al., 2021). Earlier literature often used the terms performance evaluation, merit rating, and performance appraisal interchangeably to refer to structured assessments of individual job performance (Bhattacharjee & Karmaker, 1989). Beach (1965) defined the process as a formal evaluation of an employee's contribution and growth potential, while Douglas et al. (1985) emphasized the importance of linking observed job behaviors to performance criteria. Performance evaluation holds particular importance in the banking industry, given its labor-intensive structure and strong reliance on human capital as a primary driver of organizational performance. As a sector where employees directly affect service delivery, risk management, and customer satisfaction, fair and accurate performance assessment is essential. Banks typically rely on a combination of tools such as manager assessments, 360-degree feedback, and behavioral rating scales to monitor employee progress. These processes aim to assess whether job-related goals are achieved, highlight performance gaps, and initiate developmental feedback loops (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Despite their utility, traditional evaluation systems are not without criticism. Davydenko et al. (2017) note that biases and lack of communication often undermine the integrity of appraisal outcomes. The fairness and transparency of these systems, or lack thereof, can significantly influence how employees engage with the feedback they receive. Ghani et al. (2022) stress that well-executed evaluations foster employee satisfaction, commitment, and alignment with organizational goals, while poorly designed systems may erode morale and increase turnover.

Modern approaches to evaluation increasingly emphasize the importance of continuous development and employee engagement. For instance, Mishra (2024) highlights a shift toward continuous feedback models, which replace infrequent appraisals with regular conversations and real-time performance tracking. These methods such as the Balanced Scorecard provide a more agile, employee-centered framework that supports continuous improvement and rapid adaptation, while maintaining a strong focus on organizational strategy (Abdullah, 2020)**.**Additionally, self-assessment and peer reviews have gained traction as tools for fostering accountability and reflective practice.While these approaches promote open communication and employee ownership, their effectiveness depends on organizational culture and safeguards against bias (Bucăţa & Rizescu, 2017).

The 360-degree feedback system is another widely adopted tool, involving input from supervisors, peers, subordinates, and sometimes external clients (Kuzulu & Iyem, 2016). This method is particularly valued for its holistic perspective and ability to minimize evaluator bias, especially in team-based or customer-facing roles. According to Baroda et al. (2018), anonymity and diverse perspectives encourage honest assessments, making 360-degree feedback a preferred tool in large institutions.

Management by Objectives (MBO) remains a foundational approach, especially in departments where outputs can be clearly quantified. Here, employee performance is measured against mutually agreed-upon goals, ensuring alignment between individual and organizational priorities (Francis, 2019). Similarly, Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS) have proven effective in standardizing performance criteria by linking them to observable behaviours, particularly in customer service and operations roles (Martin-Raugh et al., 2016; Hamidi et al., 2011).

In conclusion, although numerous performance evaluation methods are available, their effectiveness largely depends on contextual elements—particularly the clarity of performance objectives, consistency in implementation, and the extent to which the process is perceived as fair by employees. For the banking sector in Albania, where organizational structures are evolving and staff turnover is a pressing concern, tailoring these tools to local needs is essential.

2.1. Employee perception of performance evaluation

The effectiveness of performance appraisal systems has been extensively studied in human resource management literature, with scholars emphasizing key dimensions such as clarity of objectives, fairness, consistency, and their role in fostering employee development (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In the banking sector, effective performance evaluations have been shown to support employee development, enhance performance and engagement, and strengthen alignment between individual and organizational goals (Khan & Almahdi, 2024). Erdogan et al. (2001) argue that transparent and objective evaluation processes are essential for building employee trust and encouraging engagement, whereas poorly implemented systems—characterized by vague criteria or perceived biases—tend to lead to dissatisfaction and demotivation (Davydenko et al., 2017).

In Albania, banks do not follow a unified approach to performance evaluation; often, different methods are used even within the same institution. Although the literature does not prescribe a single best practice for performance evaluation in banking or other sectors, employee dissatisfaction with existing appraisal processes is evident. Differences between organizational expectations and employee experiences negatively affect job satisfaction, work quality, and ultimately contribute to increased staff turnover.

Effective appraisal systems can help employees identify their strengths and weaknesses, set personal development goals, and create action plans for skill enhancement and career advancement (Yesmine et al., 2023). In this context, establishing fair, objective, and transparent evaluation procedures is essential for promoting employee growth. Research highlights that when feedback, coaching, and developmental opportunities are integrated into the appraisal process, continuous learning and improved performance are more likely to occur (Boachie et al., 2012).

Studies consistently show a positive relationship between performance appraisals and employee development. Performance reviews provide critical feedback, guide employees in identifying areas for improvement, and help align their career goals with organizational objectives. Moreover, effective evaluations enable organizations to identify high-performing individuals and invest in their advancement through targeted training and career development initiatives (Yesmine et al., 2023; Khan & Almahdi, 2024). Paes De Faria et al. (2020) emphasize that banks often assess employee performance based on job-related skills, productivity, and communication. Employees are assessed under certain criteria that reveals strengths, weaknesses and growth prospects. These assessments boost their development and satisfaction at work. Clearly defined evaluation criteria help employees better meet performance expectations, thereby supporting skill development and enhancing job satisfaction. As Alti and Almuhirat (2021) suggest, setting evaluation standards that align with both job requirements and employee career aspirations is critical for fostering sustained professional growth within the banking sector.

2.2. Factors Influencing Employee Perceptions of Performance Evaluation Effectiveness

Employee perceptions of performance evaluation systems are inherently subjective and often shaped by personal experiences (Seotlela & Miruka, 2014). Research suggests that employees who possess a clear understanding of performance objectives and the functionality of appraisal methods are more likely to perceive evaluation processes positively (Onyango, 2013). Similarly, Erdogan et al. (2001) highlight that awareness of the criteria used for goal setting and evaluation fosters greater openness and trust in appraisal systems. Structural inconsistencies within performance evaluation frameworks—particularly the lack of standardized criteria across institutions, and even within departments of the same bank—are perceived by employees as sources of unfairness. This perceived inequity may contribute to higher turnover rates and moderate satisfaction levels reported in the sector. As Paes De Faria et al. (2020) argue, establishing clear evaluation criteria and well-communicated performance expectations can significantly enhance job satisfaction and perceived fairness, ultimately supporting higher employee retention and commitment.

Communication between management and employees plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of performance evaluation. Effective communication regarding organizational goals, objectives, and evaluation standards increases employee understanding of the appraisal process and fosters a more positive attitude towards it (Brand & Pretorius, 2003; Khan & Almahdi, 2024). Moreover, involving employees in the performance evaluation process—particularly in defining performance criteria—has been associated with higher goal accomplishment rates and stronger commitment to the organization (Rahim & Islam, 2019; Lines, 2004). However, many banks fail to involve employees meaningfully in setting evaluation goals and targets, especially in short- and medium-term planning. This exclusion can undermine employees' perceptions of fairness and relevance, reducing their motivation to achieve organizational objectives. Given the evolving dynamics of the Albanian labour market, particularly the high turnover and shortage of skilled professionals in the banking sector, understanding employee perspectives on performance evaluation systems has become increasingly important. This study aims to explore how employees perceive current appraisal practices and to identify the main factors shaping their views. By addressing these issues, the research seeks to contribute to more effective human resource management strategies aimed at improving employee satisfaction, retention, and overall organizational performance.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do bank employees perceive the relevance of the current performance evaluation system?

RQ2: What are the main factors influencing employee perceptions of performance evaluation effectiveness?

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine employees' perspectives on the performance evaluation process within the Albanian banking sector. Specifically, it seeks to identify the key factors that shape employee perceptions of appraisal effectiveness and assess the extent to which widely recommended practices from the literature—such as feedback sessions, goal-setting for future evaluation periods, and the linkage between evaluations and rewards—are being implemented in practice. By doing so, the study provides valuable insights into how performance management systems are experienced by employees and where improvements may be necessary to enhance fairness, clarity, and impact. This study employs a quantitative research design to examine employee perceptions of performance evaluation practices in the Albanian banking sector. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to bank employees across various institutions and roles providing a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, experience, and department. As per last publication by the Albanian Association of Banks (2024) the number of employees working in the banking sectors amounts at 7,154, while this questionnaire is completed by 182 employees making 2.5% of the entire population. To ensure anonymity and encourage honest responses, participants were not asked to disclose their bank or hierarchical position, though data on experience and job function were collected. The questionnaire assessed six key dimensions: clarity of criteria, objectivity of indicators, frequency of evaluations, quality of feedback, linkage to promotions, and overall appraisal relevance. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed in two phases. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic and response distributions, offering a general overview of trends. Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was applied to identify which factors significantly predict employees' perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of current appraisal systems.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive results

The demographic composition of the sample (N = 182) reflects a workforce dominated by female employees (64%), which is consistent with broader employment trends in the Albanian banking sector. Male respondents constituted 36% of the sample. In terms of job function, 74.7% of the participants held back-office positions, while 25.3% were employed in front-office roles, including customer service and direct client engagement.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Category	Subgroup	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	66	36%
	Female	116	64%
Age	18–23	18	10%
	24–29	82	45%
	30–35	22	12%
	36–41	32	18%
	42–47	18	10%
	Over 47	10	5%
Job Role	Front-office	46	25.3%
	Back-office	136	74.7%
Experience	< 0.5 years	14	8%
	0.5–1 year	14	8%
	1–2 years	40	22%
	2–5 years	52	28%
	5–10 years	32	18%
	Over 10 years	30	16%

Most respondents were between 24–29 years old (45%), and a significant portion had between 1–5 years of experience (50%), which reflects a relatively young and early-career population.

4.2. Perceptions of Performance Evaluation Relevance

When asked whether they considered the current performance appraisal system relevant, 39% responded affirmatively, while 26% disagreed, and 35% remained neutral. This indicates that a substantial portion of employees either question the utility of current practices or remain undecided—posing a potential risk of disengagement if reforms are not undertaken.

Table 2. Current performance appraisal relevance

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	39.02%
Neutral	64	35.16%
No	48	25.82%

4.3. Performance appraisal system key dimensions

To assess which elements of the performance appraisal system most influence employee perceptions, the questionnaire included six key dimensions, presented in the below table.

Table 3. Dimensions of performance appraisal system

Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Relevance of the performance evaluation indicators	3.14	0.874	182
Clarity of evaluation criteria	3.05	1.001	182
Promotion and other benefits are related to performance evaluation	3.44	1.053	182
Frequency of the performance evaluation	4.55	0.818	182
Coherence and objectivity of indicators	3.78	1.049	182
Feedback received during performance evaluation process	3.54	0.702	182

While frequency of evaluations received the highest mean score (M = 4.55), further analysis indicated that clarity of criteria, objectivity of indicators, and rewards linkage were more influential in shaping employee perceptions of appraisal relevance. This finding underscores that quality and fairness in the evaluation process matter more than how often it occurs. These insights suggest that while evaluation is a regular practice in Albanian banks, there are significant gaps in transparency and perceived fairness. Employee perceptions appear to be shaped more by how clearly expectations are communicated and how equitably performance is rewarded, than by the sheer frequency of reviews. Therefore, HR managers in the banking sector should prioritize the objectivity, clarity, and developmental impact of performance evaluation systems to enhance their effectiveness and employee trust. From the descriptive statistics presented above it is indicated that employees working in banks reported high mean values for the considered factors taken into account, while further analysis is needed in order to determine which of these indicators have the main impact in the employee perception. This, should be taken into considerations by the banks operating in Albania whenever they decide on certain policies that affect the above-mentioned factors.

4.4. Regression and Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis revealed that three key factors had the strongest associations with employees' perceptions of the relevance of performance evaluations. The objectivity and coherence of indicators showed the highest correlation (r = 0.61), followed by the clarity and intelligibility of evaluation criteria (r = 0.577). These results indicate that while evaluations may be conducted regularly, their perceived fairness, clarity, and impact on rewards are far more influential in shaping employee attitudes than frequency or feedback alone.

Table 4. Model Summary (Regression Output)

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of Estimate	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.760	0.578	0.566	0.576	48.138	3	176	0.000

The multiple regression analysis produced a strong correlation coefficient ($R = 0.760$), suggesting that the independent variables (clarity, objectivity, and promotion linkage) collectively explain a substantial portion of the variation in how employees perceive the relevance of performance evaluations. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.566 indicates that approximately 56.6% of the variance in employee perception can be explained by the model. The overall model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the predictive power of the included variables.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.270	0.319	—	0.846	0.399
Clarity of evaluation criteria	0.386	0.047	0.443	8.310	0.000
Objectivity and coherence of indicators	0.285	0.052	0.342	5.478	0.000
Promotion and benefits linkage	0.223	0.044	0.268	5.076	0.000
Feedback received	0.137	0.063	0.106	2.175	0.031
Frequency of performance evaluations	0.028	0.069	0.021	0.406	0.685
Relevance of performance indicators	0.041	0.059	0.034	0.695	0.488

From the standardized beta values and significance levels, the most influential predictors were: the clarity of evaluation criteria with the most significant impact on employees' perceptions ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$), followed by the objectivity of indicators ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$) and the association with promotion and benefits ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.001$). All three predictors were statistically significant at the 0.001 level aligning with prior research emphasizing the role of transparent and merit-based evaluations in fostering employee trust and motivation (Yesmine et al., 2023; Khan & Almahdi, 2024). Likewise, Erdogan et al. (2001) found that intelligibility of evaluation procedures enhances trust and perceived fairness in the system. In contrast, the frequency of evaluations and the feedback mechanism during the evaluation process appear to have limited influence on employee perceptions. While literature often emphasizes the importance of continuous feedback in enhancing engagement and development (Mishra, 2024), our findings suggest that in the Albanian banking context, structural and procedural clarity outweighs the frequency of appraisal discussions. This might reflect the formal culture of the banking industry or point to a lack of meaningful feedback even when evaluations are conducted frequently.

These findings suggest that employees in the Albanian banking sector perceive performance evaluations as moderately relevant, primarily due to deficiencies in transparency, fairness, and consistency. The absence of clearly defined criteria and perceived inequities in reward structures may contribute to employee dissatisfaction and, consequently, higher turnover. Therefore, enhancing the objectivity and clarity of evaluation systems, along with better aligning appraisals with developmental outcomes, could significantly improve the effectiveness of performance management practices in the sector.

4.5. Limitations

This research faces certain limitations; however, it serves as a laying foundation for further research in performance evaluation process in banking sector. Main limitations are related to the sample size as the questionnaire is distributed in all the banks, while the model explains 57.8% of variance in perception, caution is warranted in generalizing results beyond the sampled institutions. Given the anonymity and lack of hierarchical differentiation in the survey, future studies should explore if perceptions vary across management levels or organizational units. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single point in time, which restricts the ability to capture temporal changes in employee perceptions or evaluate the impact of evolving HR practices over time. Yet, this research is expected to incentivize different institutions to put more focus on performance assessment practices in different sectors and have a more considerate approach of the employee's perspective. Considering the raising issue of lack of competent and trained human resources in different sectors and the recent warning from the Bank of Albania regarding this issue it would necessary to prudently review current human resources practices in the market.

5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of research on performance management by offering a comprehensive view of how employees in the Albanian banking sector perceive current appraisal systems. Drawing on data from 182 banking professionals, the findings underscore a central question: while performance evaluations are regularly conducted, many employees view them as lacking in clarity, consistency, and fairness. This disconnect between the purpose of performance appraisal and its perceived implementation weakens its intended role as a tool for motivation, development, and retention. Statistical analysis confirmed that the most influential factors shaping employee perceptions are the clarity of the evaluation criteria, the objectivity and coherence of performance indicators, and the degree to which performance is linked to tangible outcomes such as promotions and benefits. These findings are consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of transparency and fairness in appraisal systems. Notably, other aspects—such as frequency of evaluations and feedback delivery—were found to have less impact in shaping employee perceptions, suggesting that the quality of the process matters more than its frequency. Given the persistent challenges in talent retention and the evolving demands of the labor market in Albania, particularly within the banking sector, these insights carry significant practical implications. Human resource management departments must revisit existing appraisal practices with a focus on standardization, employee involvement, and alignment with individual and organizational goals. A more structured, transparent, and development-oriented approach to performance evaluation can serve not only to improve employee morale but also to strengthen institutional capacity in a highly competitive sector. In conclusion, enhancing performance management systems is not merely an administrative necessity—it is a strategic imperative. By embedding fairness, clarity, and accountability into the evaluation process, banks in Albania can foster a more engaged workforce, reduce employee turnover, and ultimately improve their long-term performance and resilience.

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