

Employees' Fairness Perception of Performance Appraisal System: A Comparative Study of Indian Banking Industry

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Abstract

With the help of a structured questionnaire administered on 600 employees of Indian banks, this study examines the level of employees' perception towards their current appraisal system. Frequency distribution and "t-test" were applied to examine the perceived fairness and to identify the differences between perception of employees belonging to private and public banks. Employees perceived their appraisal system to be moderately fair and, did not appear to be highly satisfied with the system. Significant differences were found among perceived fairness and satisfaction of two sets of respondents. Overall findings of the study call for substantial improvements in existing appraisal practices.

Keywords: Performance Appraisal, Employees' Fairness Perception, Organisational Justice, Employees' Reactions, Banking Industry.

Introduction

The performance appraisal system has become a significant practice in the area of human resource management. Fletcher, 2001 defines performance appraisal (PA) as "a generic term for a variety of activities through which organisations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards. An effective appraisal system is a vital tool for organisations which helps to attract, motivate and retain talented employees (Farth et al., 1991). Though, the effectiveness of appraisal system depends upon various features, i.e., relevant job dimensions, adequate notice of expectations, appropriate performance standards and its communication, knowledge and training of appraisers, communication of feedback, application of appraisal results and strong appeal system, yet it is also felt that even a well-structured and perfectly executed system may not deliver desired results if it is not accepted by appraisee and appraisers both. Time and again, researchers have highlighted the importance of employees' reactions as critical mediating variable in generation of performance appraisal system satisfaction and ultimate productivity (Cawley et al., 1998; Roberts, 1992). They emphasised that the success and effectiveness largely depend upon employees' reactions towards the system, that are often measured through perception of fairness towards the system (Keeping & Levy, 2000). Fair and equitable treatment is one of the most prevailing calls in the organisational realities (Singh et al., 1981). So, along with the sound system design which duly

considers individual growth and development aligned with the organisational goals, perceived fairness of the system and process is indispensable (Rowland and Hall, 2012).

Perceived fairness is a function of organisational justice. Konovsky (2000) used two words 'justice' and 'fairness' interchangeably which are concerned with employees' ability to differentiate between procedures and policies used to determine the performance appraisal score (Greenberg, 1986); amount of compensation employees receive (Folger R., 1977); and quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive from their managers during the enactment of organisational procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986). Historically, justice has been categorized in to three forms: distributive, procedural and interactional fairness (Smither, 1988). Of late, Colquitt (2001) explored the dimensions of organisational justice and provided evidence for a new component of justice. He divided interactional justice into two components- interpersonal and informational justice, along with procedural and distributive justice. This four-factor model of justice provides more information than two and three factor models. Though, theoretical and empirical evidences confirm that employees' perceptions have important implications, nevertheless, there is paucity of research which solicits PA as one of the most researched topics. However, there are considerable gaps in existing appraisal justice literature which are as follows:

Majority of researches have focussed on two dimensions of fairness i.e. procedural and distributive justice. Another important dimension i.e. interactional justice has received less attention. Hauenstein et al. (2001) suggested that further studies should broadly undertake the justice research and bridge the gap by taking all the components of justice into account.

Less attention has been paid to appraisal justice research in Indian management context so far. Except a couple of recent studies (for instance, Gupta and Kumar, 2013; Shrivastava & Purang, 2011), majority of work focuses on comparing appraisal practices in different cross sections of Indian industrial sectors (Raman et al., 2007; Budhwar and Boyne, 2004; Budhwar and Khatri, 2001; Budhwar and Sparrow, 1998; Budhwar P. S., 2003; Budhwar et al., 2006; Sita et. al., 2000; Amba-Rao, 1994). These studies have focused on the organizational viewpoint and did not assess the employees' perspective. Though the study conducted by Shrivastava & Purang examined employees' perception towards PAS but the data collection was restricted to two banks. So, in order to generalize the findings to the Indian banking industry, there is a need to extend the research to other banks. In view of aforementioned gaps in existing literature, the present study aims to examine the level of

employees' perception in Indian organisational context.

Besides, the nature of businesses and evidence of appraisal practices also advocate the differences among firms' approaches towards PA (Rao, 2007); different business organisations are likely to follow different appraisal systems. Therefore, in order to control for the content of appraisal, the study should be focussed upon those employees who are not undergoing the diverse appraisal systems (Gupta and Kumar, 2013). The present study is therefore directed to gain understanding of perceived fairness of participants from single Indian industry i.e. banking industry.

Along with distinct appraisal practices across the businesses, substantial differences exist between practices of public and private organisations which are likely to be instrumental in differences among perception of individuals' belonging to two sectors. So, the study also aims to analyse the differences between employees' perception of and the level of satisfaction with PAS across two types of banks.

The selection of banking industry for the present study is motivated by the importance of fair appraisal practices in such an industry. Banking is one of the fastest growing services in India. In India, banking sector is growing vertically and proved to be a potential impact factor for the growth of its economy. Moreover, banking is people intensive business where the way people are managed determines the success of the business. Introduction of liberalization encouraged the entries of foreign and private banks in India, resulting in intense competition between Indian and international banks (Kennedy, 2007). People driven organisations in such a competitive and challenging environment demand human resource specialist to develop, motivate and involve their workforce. HR specialists are required to strengthen the capabilities of their workforce in order to survive in this challenging environment posed by the economic reforms (Rao, 2007). Therefore, a fair, transparent and objective appraisal system is a 'must to do' for all banks.

Research Methodology

The study was designed to investigate employees' fairness perception of their current performance appraisal system – procedural fairness, distributive fairness, interpersonal and informational fairness.

To address the aforementioned purpose of study, the following research questions were formulated:

Question 1: How do employees perceive about their current performance appraisal system?

Question 2: Does employees' perception of performance appraisal system differ across two types of banks - public vis. a vis. private sector banks?

Objectives

The main objectives of the study were

To examine the level of employees' perception of performance appraisal system and their satisfaction with the appraisal system.

To analyse the difference between public and private sector banks with respect to employees' fairness perception of appraisal system and satisfaction with the system.

Hypothesis

H1: There are significant differences in employees' perception of fairness between public and private banks.

H2: There are significant differences in employees' satisfaction with performance appraisal system between public and private sector banks.

Study population

The banking employees' who are evaluated under performance appraisal system served as the population of the study. The respondents were selected from the below mentioned population.

Table-1: Study population

	<i>Scheduled commercial banks</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Public sector banks</i>		<i>Private sector banks</i>			
	<i>SBI and associates</i>	<i>Nationalised banks</i>	<i>Old private banks</i>	<i>New private banks</i>	<i>Foreign banks</i>	
No. of banks	6	20	13	7	43	89
No. of offices	21301	54478	6283	9718	334	92114
No. of employees	293965	507694	66208	203733	25384	1096984
No. of officers	107766	225805	35964	169365	23572	562472
No. of Clerks	135675	184855	21987	33921	1332	377770
No. of sub staff	50524	97034	8257	447	480	156742

Compiled by the authors; source – www.rbi.org.in (estimates 2013)

Sampling design

With a cross-sectional approach, a total of 600 individuals were selected from three public and three private sector banks. The selected banks are among the leading banks in their respective sectors, having geographical coverage all over India. Respondents namely officers other than clerical staff and sub staff, were selected as sample respondents from total population size of 562472 (Table 1). The

respondents were randomly drawn from the pool of training and development centers from northern region of India. To collect required study information, formal or informal approvals were taken from training centers of the banks. Selection of banks was made on the basis of the approval granted by their respective training centers to collect the data. Table 2 describes the respondents' profile i.e. socio demographic and work-related characteristics.

Table-2: Socio-demographic and organizational characteristics of the respondents

<i>Bank type</i>		<i>Gender</i>	
Public	326 (54.3)	Male	440 (73.3)
Private	274 (45.7)	Female	160 (26.7)
<i>Age (In years)</i>		<i>Education</i>	
20-30	239 (39.8)	Graduation	216 (36.0)
30-40	218 (32.3)	Post-Graduation	256 (42.7)
40-50	48 (8.0)	Professional Degree	114 (19.0)
>50	95 (15.8)	Professional Diploma	14 (2.3)
<i>Organizational level</i>		<i>Tenure</i>	
Scale I	227 (37.8)	1-7	375 (62.5)
Scale II	204 (34.0)	8-14	85 (14.2)
Scale III	114 (19.0)	15-21	24 (4.0)
Scale IV	43 (7.2)	22-28	34 (5.7)
Scale V	12 (2.0)	29-40	82 (13.7)
<i>Income</i>			
20,000	33 (5.5)	40,000-50,000	105 (17.5)
20,000-30,000	98 (16.3)	50,000-70,000	138 (23.0)
30,000-40,000	157 (26.2)	70,000	69 (11.5)

Note: figures in parentheses are percentage

Data collection procedure

A structured questionnaire was designed to solicit individuals' responses on perception of appraisal fairness and their satisfaction with the system. The questionnaires were distributed to the employees during their training programs. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement that best represented their point of view.

Measurement

On the basis of review of literature, a large number of constructs were developed to measure procedural, distributive and interactional justice and their satisfaction with the system. Multi-items scale was developed to measure each construct in order to obtain greater reliability. Unless otherwise noted, all items were scaled on four-point Likert scale. A few items were also rephrased to make it context specific.

Procedural justice was measured by twelve items - four items were selected from Colquitt et al., (2001) and eight items were selected from Erdogan & Kraimer (2001). From the work of Colquitt et al. (2001), three items were selected to measure the distributive justice and, four items were selected to measure informational justice. Four items measuring interpersonal justice were also selected from Colquitt et al. (2001) and, summarised into three item scale, since, two items 'supervisor treats with dignity' and 'supervisor treats with respect' from were merged to form 'supervisor treats with dignity and respect'. Except two items, responses on all the items were gathered on four-point Likert scale. Responses on four items of procedural fairness and all the three items of distributive justice were obtained on a scale of 'to a large extent - not at all'. However, another three items of procedural justice and, four items of interactional justice used the scale ranging from 'strongly agree to strongly disagree'. Out of the twelve items the other three items of procedural justice and all the items of interpersonal justice were obtained on a scale ranging from 'always to often'. One item of procedural justice was operationalized on nominal scale i.e. "I believe my supervisor really tries to conduct a fair and objective appraisal".

Statistical tools and techniques

The data was analysed using the latest version of statistical package for social science (SPSS 22.0). Utmost care was taken to select the test and, underlying assumptions were duly considered. Frequency distribution was employed to provide a description of essential information into various defined categories of interest. An independent sample "t-

test" was used to determine the difference between means of two sets of scores i.e. to analyse the difference in perceived appraisal fairness of employees belonging to two types of banks: public vis. a vis. private sector banks. The t-test was also extended to examine the differences between employees' level of satisfaction with appraisal system.

Construct validity

Confirmatory factors analysis was performed to confirm the underlying structure of measures of justice perception and satisfaction. Barlett test of sphericity was significant and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.894 i.e. far greater than 0.6. Scale reliability was estimated by calculating the internal consistency of each multi-item scale as indexed by Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Cronbach's alpha for all dimensions was as follows: informational justice = 0.812, distributive justice = 0.777, interpersonal justice = 0.566, rater procedural justice = 0.727, system procedural justice = 0.592. Drawing from the justice literature base, the authors of this study proposed the measures of both procedural justice and interactional justice as two-dimensional constructs. Principal factor analysis also clarified the structure of justice, and offered support for five-factor justice perception model. The obtained structure supported interactional justice as two-dimensional constructs. So, all the justice items loaded on five factors were titled as – system procedural justice, rater procedural justice, distributive justice, informational justice and interpersonal justice. Overall, as a result of principle factoring, the system-originating fairness and leader-originating fairness remained distinct (Marion & Fortin, 2008), which infer that individuals can distinguish between the organisational and supervisory source of procedural and interactional justice.

Table-3: Rotated component matrix^a (Justice Variables)

	Components				
	1	2	3	4	5
Supervisor takes time to carefully explains my performance	.815				
Those outcomes are justified given your performance	.779				
During appraisal, your organization explains the procedures thoroughly	.728				
I believe my supervisor really tries to conduct fair and objective appraisal	.684				.359
Treats me with dignity and respect	.413	.340			
Details were communicated to you in timely manner		.838			
Treats me in polite manner		.812			
PAS being used in our bank is fair		.717			
During appraisal, your organization has been candid in its communication	.350	.537			
Have you been able to express your feelings during the procedures		.447			
Have the procedures been based upon accurate information			.806		
Appraisal system is able to differentiate between performers and non-performers			.806		
Those outcomes are appropriate for the work I have completed			-.557	.326	
The organization tailored its communication on individual basis	.417	.324	.494		
Outcomes of appraisal reflect the contribution I have put in to work			.493	.317	
Have the appraisal procedures used been applied without bias				.839	
During PA, my supervisor evaluates my				.836	
PAS being used in our bank is objective				.681	
My supervisor uses PA to punish the employee he/she		.367		.367	
My supervisor uses the PA as a mean to threaten the employees					.728
My supervisor uses the PA to reward the employee he/she likes	.304				.580
Refrains you from improper remarks and comments					.562
Have you been offered the chance to appeal the outcome		.318			.411

Extraction Method: Principal Components Analysis.

Rotated Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.a

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Results

The results of descriptive statistics (Table 4) show the level

of employees' perceptions of fairness and satisfaction with their current performance appraisal system (objective I).

Table-4: Descriptive statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>
Informational justice	2.66	0.68
Distributive justice	2.82	0.80
Interpersonal justice	2.72	0.98
Rater procedural justice	2.85	1.05
System procedural justice	2.65	0.71
PAS satisfaction	2.66	0.73

From the Table 4, mean scores of five components of PA justice perception ranged from 2.65 to 2.85 which indicated average perception of employees towards their current PAS. In particular, employees' perception of rater procedural justice was the highest ($M= 2.85$, $SD= 1.05$) amongst all, followed by distributive justice ($M= 2.82$, $SD= 0.80$) and interpersonal justice ($M= 2.72$, $SD= 0.98$). The level of perception regarding two components: informational fairness ($M= 2.66$, $SD= 0.68$) and system procedural fairness ($M= 2.65$, $SD= 0.71$) were the lowest amongst all the studied dimensions. From the above analysis, it is noted that respondents indicated fairer perception regarding their rater source of appraisal fairness as compared to organisational source of fairness. With respect to satisfaction with system, the results indicate that employees appeared to be moderately satisfied with their appraisal system ($M= 2.66$, $SD= 0.73$).

Further, the results of independent t-test are presented that show the mean differences pertaining to employees' perception of current PAS and their level of satisfaction between two sets of employees. First, Levene's test was used to test for equality of variances. If this test is found to be significant i.e. $p < 0.5$, variances are assumed as unequal, so, unequal variance estimates are interpreted in such cases. If the test is found to be non-significant i.e. $p > 0.5$, then it is assumed that there are no significant differences in variances of the two groups, so equal estimates are interpreted in such cases. The estimates for t-value, degrees of freedom and two tail significance are reported in Table 5 on the basis of Levene's test. The resulting output shown in

Table 5 and Table 6 revealed significant differences in perception and satisfaction level of employees belonging to public and private sector banks. From the output in Table 5 three (informational, distributive and interpersonal justice) of those five justice perception dimensions have significant mean difference 0.222, 0.212, 0.279 with corresponding t-values 0.273, 2.596, 3.436 and alpha level less than 0.5. These findings indicate that there are differences in employees' perception of informational, distributive and interpersonal aspect of appraisal fairness between public and private sector banks, with private banks' employees having fairer perception of their appraisal systems (Table 6). Thus, the findings provide enough support for hypothesis 1. However, there were no differences found in other two dimensions i.e. rater and system procedural justice perception across two categories of banks.

Further, significant differences were also found with respect to employees' satisfaction with appraisal system ($Md= 0.284$, $t= 3.185$, $p < 0.01$) that provide support for hypothesis 2. Employees from private sector banks have a more favourable attitude towards current PAS. Significant p-value ($p < 0.05$) and higher values for mean in case of private group indicate that private sector banks' employees are more satisfied with their current appraisal system.

Table-5: Independent samples t-test

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>			<i>Df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>					
Informational justice	4.118	0.043	$T 2.726^{\square}$	598	0.007	-0.222	0.082
Distributive justice	0.152	0.697	2.596*	598	0.010	-0.212	0.082
Interpersonal justice	1.768	0.184	3.436 [#]	598	0.001	-0.279	0.081
Rater procedural justice	0.963	0.327	0.213	598	0.831	-0.018	0.082
System procedural justice	2.514	0.113	0.059	598	0.953	0.005	0.082
PAS satisfaction	1.176	0.279	3.185 [□]	497	0.002	-0.284	0.089

Note: #p≤0.001, □p≤0.01, *p≤0.05

Table-6: Mean differences among two banks

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Bank</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Informational justice	<i>Public</i>	326	-0.101	0.931	0.051
	<i>Private</i>	274	0.121	1.060	0.064
Distributive justice	<i>Public</i>	326	-0.097	0.985	0.054
	<i>Private</i>	274	0.115	1.007	0.061
Interpersonal justice	<i>Public</i>	326	-0.127	1.030	0.057
	<i>Private</i>	274	0.152	0.942	0.057
Rater procedural justice	<i>Public</i>	326	-0.008	0.990	0.055
	<i>Private</i>	274	0.010	1.013	0.061
System procedural justice	<i>Public</i>	326	0.002	0.975	0.054
	<i>Private</i>	274	-0.002	1.031	0.062
PAS satisfaction	<i>Public</i>	273	-0.128	1.015	0.061
	<i>Private</i>	226	0.155	0.961	0.064

Discussion of significant findings

The findings indicate that the employees of Indian banks perceived their PASs to be moderately fair, that advocates the necessity for improvements in existing PA practices. Overall, employees' perception of rater procedural justice was the highest amongst all, followed by distributive and interpersonal justice. Whereas, employees' perception of two components: system procedural fairness and informational fairness was the lowest amongst all dimensions of justice, the study results also showed that the perceived fairness of employees of private sector banks was significantly different from their public counterparts.

In-depth analysis of perceived fairness of PA procedures demonstrates that PASs in Indian banking industry are routinely administered. Instead of an on-going continuous process, it is largely a one-time year-end exercise. A considerable section of employees perceived their PAS as unfair and objectiveless. In both the sectors, the information obtained from appraisal is primarily used for taking 'promotion' related decisions. The salary determination stands at third after second major objective of 'recognition of individual performance'. Employees also perceived that the information obtained from appraisal is rarely used for distributing rewards, determining transfers, retention or termination and identifying training needs.

The assessment of perceived informational fairness reveals that the PASs currently being practiced in Indian banks are based on subjective judgements, and largely not able to differentiate between high and poor performers. Employees' did not appear to be well-acquainted with the criteria against which their performances (task performance and behavioural aspect) are judged. Though, it is the responsibility of the organisation to communicate the appraisees about what is expected of them and how the appraisal would be conducted. Yet, the selected organisations do not seem to exert organised efforts to explain the procedures thoroughly, timely and openly (indicated by more than one third of participants).

The findings further indicate that employees' perceptions of rater procedural justice and interpersonal justice were reasonably fair, nevertheless, essentially suggest a need for rater training. More than half of the respondents believed that their supervisors try to conduct fair and objective appraisals, whereas a significant proportion experienced an underlying favouritism in the process. It is believed that the supervisors use the PA to reward the employees they like and to punish the employees they do not like. Besides, employees in the selected organisations are not provided continuous performance feedback on their performances.

Regarding distributive justice, employees have an overall

positive opinion about the distribution of the outcomes. As compared to public banks, a greater proportion of respondents from private sector banks believed that their received outcomes are largely appropriate and reflect the work they have put in. The above analysis indicates that employees of Indian banks have fairer perception regarding rater source of appraisal fairness as compared to organisational source of appraisal justice. They found their raters to be fairer than the organisations.

Lastly, level of satisfaction with current appraisal system ($M = 2.66$) suggests a need for intervention in the area of appraisal. Since, one third of the respondents marked their dissatisfaction with the PAS. They believed that appraisals, in their organisations, are not administered in the best possible way.

Recommendations

Appraisals in Indian banking industry should be given serious attention rather than taken as a routine task. Also, one year is a long period to wait to appraise people and give them feedback. Only a few private banks are conducting mid-year and even quarterly reviews. It is believed that the concept of frequent appraisal would add a lot of value in the system and its relational process as it abreast the employees with organization's mission and vision. Moreover, frequent PAS would provide opportunity for employees to correct errors and also motivate them by rewarding their accomplishments.

Though the technological developments have changed the scenario of banking; human tasks and contributions have largely been replaced by technology-driven business transactions. The nature of tasks being performed by employees has changed to a large extent. Their jobs have been shifted away from typical transactions to promoting their banks' businesses. The jobs have been enlarged to sell various financial products and management of customer relations. However, with the advent of technology, human importance cannot be undermined. We cannot rule out the contribution of human capital in public service sector such as banking industry. Banking is a business where interaction between the employee and customer in itself is a product, thus, human skills such as responsiveness, explanation and support to customers play important role in delivering the services. It is the happy, motivated and satisfied work force, not the distrusted, who are likely to spur quality in service delivery. Employees tend to deliver excellent services to the customers when such behaviours are fairly recognised and rewarded by the organisations. To retain the customers and stay competitive, a system is required which motivates and engages the employees to exhibit such behaviour. The purpose of appraisals in such

organisations shall move beyond a mere evaluation tool of past performance, and be focused to assess and improve employees' skills and behaviour which enables to drive business performance. When the staff recognise that the appraisal is used for their personal and professional development, they are in general keen to adopt PA practices. The system shall aim at identification of high, mid and low performers, so as to reward the high performance, and send warning signal to improve the mid or low-level performances. By undertaking such a holistic approach, the information obtained can be used for other human resource decisions. For instance, job rotations can be done by assigning the well-matched roles to respective strengths of employees. Enhanced performance is likely to be driven if the individuals are shouldered with roles and responsibilities that well-match to their strengths, and helped to overcome the weaknesses by imparting appropriate trainings.

Conclusion and Implications

Continuing recognition of the importance of fair appraisal practices was the impetus for this study. In conclusion, employees of Indian banking industry perceived their current appraisal system to be moderately fair. Overall, satisfaction with the system is also not high, however, perceived fairness and satisfaction of employees of private sector banks is significantly higher from that of public sector banks. The study results enhance our understanding of employees' perceived fairness of their current appraisal practices in Indian banking industry, and identifies the pitfalls in appraisal process dimensions. Understanding gained from the examination of perceived PA fairness will enable the practitioners to redefine their appraisal practices. The study also provides a set of tools to gauge perception and potential weaknesses of the system. Organisations can conduct systematic annual survey to measure the justice perception of individuals. Such surveys would allow the organisations to identify the factors responsible for ineffectiveness of the system, and eventually to address the issues.

Limitations

The results of current study must be interpreted in light of certain limitations. Due to difficulties faced in collecting data, this study was restricted to public and private banks. In order to generalise the findings to the whole banking industry, a more comprehensive study should be undertaken and be expanded to include foreign banks too. A comparative analysis of public, private and multinational banks may lead to valuable insights of differences between employees' perception of PA practices and factors affecting the efficacy of the system.

Since the data for this study were collected from banking industry only the generalization of the findings to other industries have to be applied with caution. The decision to collect the data from a single industry provides strength to this study in that it allows more control on the contents of the appraisal. Keeping in view the measures chosen and the methodology adopted, the authors are of the opinion that the findings have great relevance to the banking industry. With a little caution these findings can safely be applied to other similar type of industries where relevant studies are not available.

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