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Rethinking Performance Evaluation in Higher Education: Insights from Technical, Economic and Administrative Staff

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ABSTRACT

The evolving dynamics of the labor market have raised expectations regarding both the continuous development of human capital and the effectiveness of human resource management practices. In response, higher education institutions are increasingly required to modernize their internal performance evaluation mechanisms in order to enhance organizational efficiency, transparency, and employee motivation. The transition from traditional appraisal methods to innovative, often digitalized, evaluation systems has the potential to improve objectivity and streamline processes; however, it also introduces challenges related to employees' perceptions of fairness and practical relevance. This study examines the perceptions of Technical, Economic, and Socio-Administrative (TESA) staff within higher education institutions regarding an innovative performance evaluation system. In particular, it explores the relationship between the clarity with which evaluation criteria are communicated and employees' perceptions of the system's fairness. The analysis highlights both the perceived benefits and the obstacles associated with the implementation of such systems. The findings provide valuable insights for the development of transparent, equitable, and development-oriented human resource management practices in the academic sector, supporting more effective alignment between organizational objectives and employee expectations.

1. Introduction

The evaluation of employee performance in higher education institutions represents a complex and multifaceted process, requiring the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. This complexity is further amplified by the specific organizational context of universities and by the distinctive roles of Technical, Economic, and Socio-Administrative (TESA) staff, whose contributions are essential to the effective functioning of academic institutions. In an increasingly dynamic and competitive environment, where institutional performance is closely linked to the quality and engagement of human resources, performance evaluation has evolved into a strategic management tool aimed at leveraging individual objectives with broader organizational goals.

Recent developments in human resource management have encouraged the transition from traditional appraisal systems toward more innovative and digitalized evaluation frameworks. However, their successful implementation depends not only on their technical design but also on how they are perceived by employees. In particular, factors such as the clarity of communication, employee involvement, and feedback mechanisms play a critical role in shaping perceptions of fairness and acceptance of the evaluation process.

Despite the growing body of literature on performance appraisal systems, limited attention has been paid to the perceptions of non-academic staff within higher education institutions. Existing studies tend to focus predominantly on academic personnel, often overlooking the perspectives of TESA employees, who represent a significant segment of the workforce and contribute directly to institutional performance. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research examining how specific elements of innovative evaluation systems, such as the clarity of communicated criteria, affect employees' perceptions of fairness and usefulness in this particular context.

Against this background, the present study aims to analyze the perceptions of TESA employees in Romanian higher education institutions regarding an innovative performance evaluation system. More specifically, it investigates the relationship between the clarity of communication of evaluation criteria and the perceived fairness of the evaluation process, while also considering the role of participation, feedback, and self-

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evaluation. To achieve this objective, the research adopts a quantitative approach, combining theoretical analysis with empirical data collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the conceptual model and research hypotheses. This is followed by a detailed description of the research methodology, including data collection procedures and analytical methods. The subsequent section discusses empirical results and hypothesis testing. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the main findings, their theoretical and managerial implications, as well as directions for future research.

2. Conceptual model of research

The conceptual model of the research has the role of highlighting the theoretical and logical links between the investigated variables, providing a visual structure through which the formulated hypotheses are organized. The starting point is the general objective of the study, namely the evaluation of the perceptions of TESA employees in higher education institutions on an innovative performance evaluation system.

Starting from this objective, four research hypotheses (H1–H4) have been defined, each targeting an essential dimension of the performance evaluation process. Each hypothesis captures the relationship between an independent variable (VI) – which describes an element of the evaluation process (clarity of communication of criteria, consultation of employees, providing feedback, transparency of results, etc.) – and a dependent variable (VD) – which reflects employees' perceptions of the system (fairness, objectivity, acceptance, usefulness for professional development).

Thus, the conceptual model proposes a coherent structure that allows the empirical testing of the relationships between variables. On the one hand, it contributes to understanding how organizational and procedural factors influence TESA employees' perceptions of performance evaluation. On the other hand, it provides an analytical framework through which the results of research can be correlated with the specialized literature, facilitating both the confirmation and the possible nuances of existing theories.

Built around the general objective of the research, the hypotheses were defined as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the clarity of the communication of the performance evaluation criteria and the perception of the fairness of the performance evaluation system among TESA employees.

VI: Information on employee performance evaluation criteria is clearly communicated.

VD: The performance evaluation system is fair for all TESA employees.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the employee's involvement in establishing the evaluation criteria and the perception of the evaluators' objectivity.

VI: I am consulted in establishing the evaluation criteria

VD: Evaluators are objective in assessing performance

H3: There is a positive relationship between providing constructive feedback and the employee's perception that the evaluation correctly reflects their activity.

VI: I receive constructive feedback following the evaluation

VD: The evaluation correctly reflects my activity

H4: There is a positive relationship between active participation in the self-evaluation process and the feeling that evaluation contributes to professional development.

VI: I actively participate in the self-evaluation process

VD: Performance evaluation contributes to the professional development of TESA employees

3. Results

The analysis of hypotheses is an essential step in the scientific research process, as it allows the verification of the proposed relationships between the investigated variables and the validation of the conceptual model. Their testing illustrates the transition from the descriptive to the explanatory level, confirming or refuting the theoretical assumptions formulated on the basis of the specialized literature (Neuman, 2014). They establish causal or correlational links between variables and allow empirical observations to be compared with theoretical expectations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Confirming hypotheses supports existing theories, while refuting them can lead to reformulations, adjustments, or the proposal of new research directions (Bryman, 2016). In addition, hypothesis testing ensures the scientific rigor of the research, as the application of appropriate statistical techniques (e.g., Chi-square test, Pearson or Spearman correlations) provides objective evidence on the validity of the analyzed relationships (Field, 2018).

H1: There is a positive relationship between the clarity of the communication of the performance evaluation criteria and the perception of the correctness of the performance evaluation system among TESA employees.

VI: Information on employee performance evaluation criteria is clearly communicated.

VD: The performance evaluation system is fair for all TESA employees.

To test the H1 hypothesis, the Crosstabulation Count and the Chi-Square Tests for independence were used.

The contingency table gives us a suggestive distribution: respondents who perceived the communication of the evaluation criteria as clear (options "Agreement" and "Full agreement") also tended to perceive the evaluation system as fair. In contrast, those who disagreed on the clarity of communication assessed the system as unfair. This distribution suggests a possible positive relationship between the two variables analyzed. (Table 1)

Table 1. H1 contingency table

		The performance evaluation system is fair for all TESA employees.					Total
		Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agreement	Total agreement	
Information about employee performance evaluation criteria is clearly communicated.	Totally disagree	5	0	0	0	0	5
	Disagree	4	6	2	0	0	12
	Neutral	1	3	8	1	1	14
	Agreement	0	3	15	24	2	44
	Total agreement	0	0	5	4	16	25
Total		10	12	30	29	19	100

Source: SPSS Output

The Chi-square test indicated a statistically significant association between the two variables ($\chi^2(16) = 135.181$, $p < .001$). Also, the Linear-by-Linear Association test was significant ($p < .001$), supporting the idea of a directional relationship between communication clarity and perception of equity. However, it is noted that 76% of the cells in the contingency table had expected frequencies of less than 5, which may affect the validity of the Chi-square test. This limitation suggests the need for further analysis or restructuring of categories (by merging) to ensure robustness of the results. (Table 2)

Table 2. Related Chi-square H1 Tests

	Value	**Df**	**Asymptotic Meaning (2 Sides)**
Pearson Chi-Square	135.181a	16	.000
Probability ratio	110.884	16	.000
Linear to linear association	61.660	1	.000
N valid cases	100		

a.19 cells (76.0%) have an expected number of less than 5. The minimum expected number is 0.50.

Source: SPSS Output

To assess the strength and direction of the relationship, two correlation measures were calculated: Pearson's r: $r = .789$, $p < .001$, and Spearman's rho: $\rho = .741$, $p < .001$

Both indicate a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the clarity of the communication of the evaluation criteria and the perception of the fairness of the evaluation system. These results reinforce the support of the hypothesis formulated.

Table 3. Symmetrical measures related to H1

		Value	Asymptotic standardized error	Tb approximately	Approximate meaning
Interval by interval	Pearson's R	.789	.043	12.721	.000c
Ordinal by ordinal	The Spearman Correlation	.741	.058	10.925	.000c
N valid cases		100			

a. We do not assume the null hypothesis.

b. Using the standard asymptotic error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on the normal approximation.

Source: SPSS Output

The results of the statistical analysis support the H1 hypothesis, highlighting the existence of a significant positive relationship between the clarity of the communication of the performance evaluation criteria and the perception of the fairness of the evaluation system among TESA employees. This underlines the importance of effective communication in building a perceived fair evaluation system.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the employee's involvement in establishing the evaluation criteria and the perception of the evaluators' objectivity.

VI: I am consulted in establishing the evaluation criteria

VD: Evaluators are objective in assessing performance

In order to test the H2 hypothesis, according to which there is a positive relationship between the involvement of employees in establishing the evaluation criteria and the perception of objectivity of the evaluators, a contingency table analysis was performed, followed by the Chi-square test and the calculation of the association coefficients.

The crossover table shows a clear trend: employees who declare that they are consulted in establishing the evaluation criteria tend to consider, in a much higher proportion, that the evaluators are objective. Thus, in the 'Overall agreement' category on consultation, the majority of respondents (13 out of 16) also indicated a high level of agreement with the objectivity of the evaluators. On the other hand, those who declared "Totally disagree" with the consultation frequently associated a negative perception of the objectivity of the evaluation. (Table 4)

Table 4. H2 contingency table

		Evaluators are objective in evaluating performance					Total
		Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agreement	Total agreement	
I am consulted in establishing the evaluation criteria	Totally disagree	6	3	2	0	1	12
	Disagree	3	6	5	5	0	19
	Neutral	1	2	8	10	2	23
	Agreement	0	1	7	19	3	30
	Total agreement	0	0	0	3	13	16
Total		10	12	22	37	19	100

Source: SPSS Output

The results of the Chi-square test confirm this observation: the Pearson Chi-Square value ($\chi^2 = 94.381$, df = 16, $p < 0.001$) indicates the existence of a statistically significant association between the two variables. Although a high percentage of cells (72%) have expected frequencies of less than 5, which is a methodological limitation, the consistency of the results is supported by correlation coefficients. (Table 5)

Table 5. Related Chi-square H2 Tests

	Value	**Df**	**Asymptotic Meaning (2 Sides)**
Pearson Chi-Square	94.381a	16	.000
Probability ratio	86.707	16	.000
Linear to linear association	48.998	1	.000
N valid cases	100		

a. 18 cells (72.0%) have an expected number of less than 5. The minimum expected number is 1.20.

Source: SPSS Output

Both the Pearson ($R = 0.704$, $p < 0.001$) and Spearman ($\rho = 0.694$, $p < 0.001$) coefficient show a strong, positive, and significant correlation. (Table 6)

Table 6. Symmetrical measures related to H2

		Value	**Asymptotic standardized error**	**Tb approximately**	**Approximate meaning**
Interval by interval	Pearson's R	.704	.061	9.800	.000c
Ordinal by ordinal	The Spearman Correlation	.694	.065	9.552	.000c
N valid cases		100			

a. We do not assume the null hypothesis.

b. Using the standard asymptotic error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on the normal approximation.

Source: SPSS Output

In conclusion, the statistical analysis validates the H2 hypothesis. It can be said that the involvement of employees in the process of establishing the evaluation criteria has a positive impact on their perception of the objectivity of the evaluators. The higher the level of consultation and participation perceived by employees,

the more likely they are to view the evaluation as fairer and more objective. This result suggests the importance of transparency and active participation of TESA staff in the performance appraisal process.

Research in the literature shows that the involvement of employees in evaluation processes has positive effects on their perception of the objectivity and correctness of the system. In higher education institutions, where TESA staff directly support academic and administrative activities, participation in the setting of evaluation criteria becomes essential for building trust in performance management mechanisms.

Kanfer et al. (1987) highlighted that participation and knowledge of the criteria increase perceptions of objectivity, which is important for complex institutional environments such as higher education institutions. Other studies have shown that employee involvement in the formulation of evaluation criteria increases process satisfaction and organizational engagement (Sampathkumar, 2020). Moreover, Tran et al. (2021) demonstrated that evaluators' subjectivity reduces the perception of objectivity, but transparency and open communication can diminish this negative effect.

In the context of higher education institutions, these results support the idea that the involvement of TESA staff in defining the evaluation criteria can contribute to a more positive perception of the objectivity of evaluators, to increase professional satisfaction and to the strengthening of the organizational culture based on equity and transparency.

H3: There is a positive relationship between providing constructive feedback and the employee's perception that the evaluation correctly reflects their activity.

VI: Receive constructive feedback following the evaluation;

VD: The evaluation correctly reflects my activity.

The analysis of the H3 hypothesis aimed to identify a positive and meaningful relationship between providing constructive feedback and employees' perception that the evaluation correctly reflects their activity. To test this hypothesis, simple linear regression was used, where the independent variable was "I receive constructive feedback following the evaluation", and the dependent variable "the evaluation correctly reflects my activity".

The Pearson correlation coefficient (R = 0.688) highlights a positive and strong relationship between the two variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.473) shows that 47.3% of the variation in the perception of the correctness of the evaluation is explained by the constructive feedback received, the remaining 52.7% being determined by other factors. Since the adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted R^2 = 0.468) is very close to the R^2 value, the model exhibits good stability. (Table 7).

Table 7. Summary of the model related to the H3 hypothesis

Model	Correlation coefficient (R)	Coefficient of determination (R2)	Adjusted Coefficient of Determination	Standard Estimated Value Error
1	.688a	.473	.468	.812

a. Predictors: (Constantly), receive constructive feedback following the evaluation

Source: SPSS Output

The results of the ANOVA test confirm that the regression model is statistically significant (F(1.98) = 88.033, p < 0.001), which demonstrates that the identified relationship is not random, but reflects a real effect (Table 8).

Table 8. ANOVAa method related to hypothesis H3

Model		Sum of squares	Degrees of Freedom (Df)	Mean squares	Test F	Meaning
1	Regression	58.087	1	58.087	88.033	.000b
	Residual	64.663	98	.660		
	Total	122.750	99			

a. Dependent variable: The evaluation correctly reflects my activity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Receive constructive feedback from the evaluation

Source: SPSS Output

The regression model for the H3 hypothesis is represented by the equation:

CORRECTNESS = 1.404 + 0.642 x FEEDBACK

The coefficient (B = 0.642, p < 0.001) suggests that an increase of one unit in the perception of "receive constructive feedback" leads to an increase of 0.642 units in the perception that the assessment correctly reflects the activity. (Table 9) In other words, employees who receive more constructive feedback tend to consider that their evaluation more accurately reflects the work done.

Table 9. Coefficient related to hypothesis H3

Model		Non-standard coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Of course.
		B	Standard error	zeta		
1	(Constant)	1.404	.253		5.551	.000
	Receive constructive feedback from the evaluation	.642	.068	.688	9.383	.000

a. Dependent variable: The evaluation correctly reflects my activity

Source: SPSS Output

Thus, the H3 hypothesis is confirmed, demonstrating that constructive feedback is an important predictor of how employees assess the objectivity and fairness of the evaluation process. This result is consistent with the literature, which shows that quality feedback has a direct impact on the perception of organizational fairness and satisfaction with evaluation systems (Erdogan, 2002; Jawahar, 2007). Recent studies also confirm that constructive feedback strengthens employees' trust in assessments and contributes to increased engagement and motivation (Schäpers et al., 2020; Sherf et al., 2021). From a managerial perspective, these results highlight the importance of providing constructive, clear and specific feedback as a strategy to strengthen the perception of fairness of the evaluation process. In the absence of it, there is a risk that evaluations will be perceived as superficial or not aligned with the reality of employees' work, which can affect motivation and level of commitment.

H4: There is a positive relationship between active participation in the self-evaluation process and the feeling that evaluation contributes to professional development.

VI: I actively participate in the self-evaluation process

VD: Performance evaluation contributes to the professional development of TESA employees

The analysis of the H4 hypothesis aimed to identify a positive and meaningful relationship between active participation in the self-evaluation process and the employees' feeling that evaluation contributes to their professional development. In this regard, a simple linear regression was applied, where the independent variable was "I actively participate in the self-evaluation process" and the dependent variable "performance evaluation contributes to the professional development of TESA employees".

The Pearson correlation coefficient (R = 0.552) indicates a positive, moderate-strong relationship between the two variables. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.305) shows that approximately 30.5% of the variation in the perception that evaluation contributes to professional development is explained by active participation in the self-evaluation process, the remaining 69.5% being influenced by other factors. Because the adjusted coefficient (adjusted R^2 = 0.298) is very close to R^2, the model shows stability (Table 10).

Table 10. Summary of the model for hypothesis H4

Model	Correlation coefficient (R)	Coefficient of determination (R2)	Adjusted Coefficient of Determination	Standard Value Error Estimate
1	.552a	.305	.298	.902

a. Predictors: (Constantly), I actively participate in the self-evaluation process

Source: SPSS Output

The results of the ANOVA test show that the regression model is significant (F(1.98) = 43.057, p < 0.001), which indicates that active participation in the self-evaluation process has a significant effect on the perception that performance evaluation contributes to professional development. (Table 11).

Table 11. ANOVAa method related to hypothesis H4

Model		Sum of squares	Degrees of Freedom (Df)	Mean squares	Test F	Meaning
1	Regression	35.027	1	35.027	43.057	.000b
	Residual	79.723	98	.813		
	Total	114.750	99			

a. Dependent variable: Performance evaluation contributes to the professional development of TESA employees

b. Predictors: (Constantly), I actively participate in the self-evaluation process

Source: SPSS Output

The regression model for the H4 hypothesis is expressed by the following equation:

DEVELOPMENT=1.996+0.486×SELF-ASSESSMENT

The regression coefficient (B = 0.486, p < 0.001) indicates that an increase of one unit in the degree of active participation in self-evaluation determines an increase of 0.486 units in the employees' perception that performance evaluation contributes to professional development (Table 12). This shows that active involvement in the self-assessment process reinforces the perception that assessments do not only have an administrative role, but are also a tool for professional development through the process of learning and professional progress (Costa & Faria, 2018).

Table 12. Coefficient for hypothesis H4

Model		Non-standard coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Of course.
		B	Standard error	zeta		
1	(Constant)	1.996	.268		7.455	.000
	I actively participate in the self-assessment process	.486	.074	.552	6.562	.000

a. Dependent variable: Performance evaluation contributes to the professional development of TESA employees

Source: SPSS Output

The results confirm the H4 hypothesis and highlight that encouraging employees to actively participate in the self-evaluation process is a beneficial practice, which can transform performance evaluation from a simple formality into a support mechanism for career development. (Yan et al., 2023)

4. Conclusions

The present study provides empirical evidence regarding the perceptions of Technical, Economic, and Socio-Administrative (TESA) employees in higher education institutions toward an innovative performance evaluation system. The findings highlight a series of statistically significant relationships between key characteristics of the evaluation process and employees' perceptions of fairness, objectivity, and developmental value.

The results of the hypothesis testing offer important insights. First, the confirmation of H1 demonstrates that the clear communication of performance evaluation criteria significantly enhances employees' perception of fairness. This finding emphasizes the critical role of transparent and effective communication in fostering trust and acceptance of evaluation systems. Second, the validation of H2 indicates that employee involvement in the establishment of evaluation criteria positively influences the perceived objectivity of evaluators. This underscores the importance of participatory approaches and organizational transparency in strengthening the credibility of the appraisal process.

Furthermore, the confirmation of H3 reveals that constructive feedback is a key determinant of employees' perception that evaluations accurately reflect their work. In this sense, feedback represents not only an evaluative mechanism but also a motivational tool that reinforces engagement and professional commitment. Finally, the validation of H4 highlights that active participation in the self-evaluation process contributes significantly to the perception that performance appraisal supports professional development. Employees who are actively involved in self-assessment tend to perceive evaluation as a meaningful process that facilitates learning and career advancement, rather than as a purely administrative requirement.

Overall, the findings suggest that the value of performance evaluation systems for TESA employees is strongly influenced by the degree of transparency, participation, and developmental orientation embedded within the process. Insights such as clear procedural guidelines and high-quality feedback not only enhance perceptions of fairness and accuracy but also transform performance evaluation into a strategic instrument for individual development and organizational effectiveness.

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