

# International Journal of Public Policy and Administration Research

2022 Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 1-10.

ISSN(e): 2312-6515


ISSN(p): 2313-0423

DOI: 10.18488/74.v9i1.2947

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## FACTORS AFFECTING PUBLIC SERVANTS' PERFORMANCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: EVIDENCES FROM ERITREA

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### ABSTRACT

There is little existing research that examines the relationship between the performance of civil servants and the variables that affect performance in third-world countries, and in the Eritrean civil service in particular. Hence, the principal objective of this study is to investigate the main factors that affect public servants' job performance in the civil service in Eritrea. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 14 ministerial offices, but one ministry declined to participate. The Ministry of Defense was purposely excluded as it is a different establishment in terms of its nature and characteristics. The data were gathered from a sample of 267 randomly selected respondents. The research design employed a self-administered questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The items measuring the constructs were adapted from the extant literature, and data were analyzed using a regression test. The findings of this study reveal that training, organizational culture, and work environment positively affect employee performance. However, no evidence was found to indicate that leadership and motivation influence employees' job performance.

### Article History

Received: 12 November 2021

Revised: 15 February 2022

Accepted: 2 March 2022

Published: 31 March 2022

### Keywords

Public administration  
Public servants  
Performance  
Civil service  
Developing countries  
Eritrea.

### JEL Classification:

L38.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature on civil servants' performance as research on this topic in developing countries is limited and this research aims to fill in the gap. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first extensive study of civil servants' performance in the Eritrean context.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In developing or industrialized countries, government performance is measured by the efficiency and effectiveness of the government organs, which is heavily dependent on the performance of individual employees (see Haileslassie & Narula (2017); Nigatu, Solomon, & Gedion (2017)). Managing civil service institutions is a very complex task because it involves handling people with different skills, backgrounds, emotions and feelings who are situated in different areas of a country.

In societies where delivery of vital social services is heavily dependent on the government, it is essential that institutions are highly efficient because public administration deals with wider segments of the population and should be able to overcome any operational or process problems that hinder optimum effectiveness and efficiency of goods and services production (Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2016; Nigatu et al., 2017; Quadri, 2015). Therefore, to make improvements to processes, it must be possible to measure performance; otherwise there is no way of knowing or proving if there has been an improvement (Hak & Devcic, 2016). Performance management in the civil service is an important domain. According to the IMF (2014), the public sector that includes general government and public

enterprises (financial, monetary and non-monetary institutions, depository and non-depository, as well as nonfinancial corporations) is broad. This study mainly deals with Eritrea's central government's (civil service) employee performance. In this study, civil service is referred to as the government institutions responsible for the administration and implementation of all government activities dealing with the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government and the management related to the endowment of public services.

The fundamental aim of public administration is the management of policies issued by the government so that the government itself can function. The functionality of a government relies on the effective and efficient performance of civil servants. Although the concept of performance measurement is not new in Eritrea, its application and the process of measuring civil servant performance is not well documented. The efficiency and regularity of tasks carried out, their impact on individual and organizational performance, and job assignment to positions are not clear either. Even though a large portion of civil service employees in Eritrea are young graduates who are assigned to public institutions, the civil service is not a choice employer. The factors that enhance or hinder the performance of civil servants in Eritrea has not yet been not studied. To this end, this research examines the variables that affect the job performance of employees in the Eritrean civil service. Specifically, it aims to identify and analyze the factors that have an impact on employee performance by endeavoring to answer the following research question: *What are the factors affecting public administrators' performance in civil service institutions in Eritrea?*

## 2. BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Performance in the civil service is an ambiguous, multi-dimensional, and complex concept. However, several studies identify and categorize factors affecting performance of employees in civil service institutions, among which this study will consider include motivation, training, organizational culture, work environment, and leadership.

### 2.1. Motivation

Motivation plays a significant role in employee productivity by encouraging employees' value added contribution, creativity, and innovation (Dervić & Dervić, 2017; Re'em, 2010). Although it is commonly believed that civil service and non-profit employees are more satisfied with their jobs because they feel a sense of fulfilment by providing a service to the public or to those who are in need, driving employees towards the purpose of the institution is the main task of those at the helm of the organization (Bunchoowong, 2015; O'Riordan, 2013). Based on the research findings of Rashid & Rashid (2012), employees' motivation was positively affected by several work-related factors. Other scholars have also indicated that variables such as job enrichment, balance between work and family life, monetary incentives, remuneration, working conditions, participation in decisions, work-social relationships and communication positively motivate employees (Mette & Rosenberg, 2013; Serhan, Al Achy, & Nicolas, 2018).

### 2.2. Training

Several studies indicate that productivity and profit of an organization is improved through enlightened and well-trained staff, and responsible administrations recognize that human resources are their main resource in achieving the desired objectives (Adiele, 2017; Garg & Jain, 2015; Gloria, 2012).

Cyril & Ighodalo (2016), based on a sample of 200 participants in the Nigerian Police College, found a positive relationship between training and development and workers' productivity. However, they also stated that training of Nigerian police is characterized by corruption and favoritism.

A study by Sam-Okere & Abeniga (2014), based on five local governments with 365 purposively sampled employees, revealed that training benefits employees and is an important variable for career progress. Also, the study by Iheanacho & Nnenna (2011), based on 300 civil servants, indicated that training leads to increased performance, although the influence of the type of training on job performance was inconclusive. Moreover, researchers further warn that such assumptions could sometimes be misleading. Generally, various empirical studies in the civil service

have indicated a significant and positive relationship between training and employee job performance and increased productivity (see Ahmed & Yohanna, 2014; Habib, Zahra, & Mushtaq, 2015; Kuhlengisa, 2018; Nassazi, 2013; Obi-Anike & Chidiebere, 2014; Obioma, 2012; Peter & Jagero, 2014; Salihu, 2015; Sani, Lawan, & Bature, 2018).

### *2.3. Organizational Culture*

Organizational culture is an institutional identity visible to the public and it considerably influences employee behavior thereby affecting the performance of organizations (Li, 2015; O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008). Though there are claims for the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance, according to Lim (1995), only a few studies appear to have actually investigated the existence as well as the nature of this relationship in civil service organizations. Another study by Faizal, Ozemoyah, & Mohd (2016) on a sample of 250 employees showed significant positive correlations between organizational culture and employee performance. According to this study, labor laws and a clear chain of command are two of the factors that positively affect performance.

Furthermore, several studies have indicated the existence of a positive relationship between organizational culture and employee job performance leading to enhanced group decision making, improved performance, high organizational commitment, and better quality public service (Ben Saad & Abbas, 2018; Hadian, 2017; Li, 2015; Nikpour, 2017; Tunda, 2017).

### *2.4. Work Environment*

A work environment is made up of a range of factors from company culture to leadership styles, hierarchies, and human resource policies, etc., (Salunke, 2015). A conducive work environment plays an important role in an organization by helping employees to maximize their potential, hence increasing organizational performance (Nanzushi, 2015). According to a study on Malaysia's police force by Sirajuddin (2014), the physical work environment has a significant positive relationship with productivity. Moreover, Majekodunmi (2012) reported similar findings while studying a sample of Nigerian government workforce that the physical work environment improves productivity and lowers defectivity rates. On the other hand, contrary to the above arguments, Njenga, Waiganjo, & Koima (2015) found that the physical aspects of a work environment do not have a significant effect on employee performance. Nevertheless, this result should be treated with caution as there are many studies that indicate a positive relationship between work environment and public servants' job performance in civil service organizations (see Addai, 2015; Aziz, Kumar, Rathore, & Lal, 2015; Bushiri, 2014; Lankeshwara, 2016; Leitão, Pereira, & Gonçalves, 2019; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2014).

### *2.5. Leadership*

According to Knies, Jacobsen, & Tummers (2016), there is a general assertion that leaders make a big difference in terms of performance. However, Wang, Chich-Jen, & Mei-Ling (2010) emphasized more on the leadership style of administrative supervisors, stating that these are the ones who play a vital role in overall operational performance. Similarly, Elizabeth & Gakobu (2017) stated that institutions, be it government or private, view leadership as a means of handling the dynamically changing environments in which they operate.

A study by Rukmani, Ramesh, & Jayakrishnan (2010) on public sector organizations in India focusing on 300 managers showed that the managers believe that both transformational and transactional leadership styles are important drivers of employee job performance in civil service organizations. On the other hand, Paracha, Adnan, Anam, Inam-ul-Hassan, & Hamid (2012) revealed that transactional and transformational leadership styles are significantly positively associated with employee performance. Various studies in Africa and Asia also showed a positive relationship between leadership and employee performance thereby enhancing organizational performance (see Adriani & Hilmiana, 2019; Al Khajeh, 2018; Beakana, 2017; Elizabeth & Gakobu, 2017; Koech & Namusonge, 2012; Maingi, Rotich, & Anyango, 2018; Pradeep & Prabhu, 2011; Pratama, 2016). Therefore, based on the

forementioned reviews and discussions, five hypotheses are proposed. The variables that will influence the job performance of employees in the civil service institutions were identified via the following model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + e \quad (1)$$

Job performance = constant + motivation + training + organizational culture + work environment + leadership

Where:

Y = is the dependent variable (job performance).

X1...X5 = the five independent variables (motivation, training, organizational culture, work environment, and leadership).

$\beta_i$  (I = 1,2,3,4...) are the parameters associated with the corresponding independent variable that are part of the regression coefficients.

$\beta_0$  is the intercept.

e is the error term.

Thus,

*Hypothesis 1: Training positively affects employee job performance.*

*Hypothesis 2: Motivation positively affects employee job performance.*

*Hypothesis 3: Leadership positively affects employee job performance.*

*Hypothesis 4: Organizational culture positively affects employee job performance.*

*Hypothesis 5: Work environment positively affects employee job performance.*

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the factors that affect the job performance of civil service employees, and both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected via questionnaires, which were distributed in person, from a sample of 300 randomly selected employees. Of the total distributed questionnaires, 267 correctly completed usable questionnaires were returned, which is an 89% response rate. Of the total sample, 194 (72.7%) were male, and 73 (27.3%) were female. Care was taken to ensure that a representative sample of employees was obtained from each of the civil service organizations. Secondary data were extracted from various sources, such as academic journals, books, and other internet sources. In this study, the dependent variable is employee job performance, while motivation, training, organizational culture, work environment, and leadership are the independent variables. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure 'training,' 'motivation,' 'leadership,' 'organizational culture,' and 'working environment', where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Thus, a total of five variables consisting of 48 items were employed to measure the factors influencing civil service employee performance.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. Regression was used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to reduce the number of factors under each research variable and retain the indicators capable of explaining the responses, a factor analysis was used. The retained factors had loading values of above 0.5 and were used for further analysis.

To measure the reliability of the gathered data, Cronbach's alpha was used. An alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates that the collected data are reliable, have a relatively high internal consistency, and can be generalized to reflect the opinions of all respondents in the target population (Zinbarg, 2005). Table 1 presents factor analysis.

As can be seen from Table 1, the test results show that the Cronbach's alpha result for all employee performance indicators was 0.746 and the factor loading results were between 0.553 and 0.787. Therefore, all five indicators were retained for further analysis. Using the retained employee performance indicators, the value of Cronbach's alpha was

computed again and generated a value of 0.762. This indicates that the data collected using all the performance indicator values were reliable since the Cronbach's alpha value was above 0.70.

**Table 1.** Factor analysis for employee performance indicators.

Cronbach's alpha before	Item	Component	Cronbach's alpha after
0.746			0.762
	Training	0.553	
	Motivation	0.754	
	Leadership	0.785	
	Organizational culture	0.787	
	Work environment	0.765	

As the aim of this study is to determine the variables influencing employee job performance in the civil service, a regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between training, motivation, leadership, organizational culture, work environment, and employee performance.

The multiple linear regression analysis for training, motivation, leadership, organizational culture, work environment, and employee performance is given below in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** Model summary, ANOVA, and coefficients.

Model Summary					
Model	R	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	0.496 <sup>a</sup>	0.246	0.230	3.72860	
ANOVA on performance determinants					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1084.590	5	216.918	15.603	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	3322.692	239	13.902		
Total	4407.282	244			
Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients				
	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	
(Constant)	15.913	1.458	10.916	0.000	
Training	0.176	0.040	4.420	0.000*	
Motivation	0.003	0.051	0.053	0.958	
Leadership	-0.065	0.050	-1.282	0.201	
Organizational culture	0.235	0.068	3.448	0.001*	
Work environment	0.211	0.077	2.759	0.006*	

**Note:** a indicates the coefficient of correlation between the variables, while b and \* indicate the acceptance significance level, which is below 0.05. Training, organizational culture, and work environment are the variables affecting the performance of civil servants, while the remaining variables do not influence employee performance.

The regression results in [Table 2](#) show that R is 0.496 and R<sup>2</sup> is 0.246 at the significance level of 0.05. The coefficient of determination indicates that about 25% of the difference in response to employee performance can be explained by training, motivation, leadership, organizational culture, and work environment. A significant variation in employee performance might have been affected by some external factors, such as political, economic, and technological factors. In addition, the ANOVA results for the regression coefficient indicates that a significance value of 0.000 (F = 15.603) implies that the model is significant enough to measure the relationship between the variables.

Moreover, a positive relationship was found between training, organizational culture, work environment and employee performance. Based on the findings, the model determined that 'training' has a significant relationship (0.000 ≤ 0.05) with employee job performance; 'organizational culture' scored a significance value of 0.001 (≤ 0.05); and 'work environment' showed a statistically significant relationship with a value of 0.006 (≤ 0.05). Therefore, hypothesis 1, hypothesis 4, and hypothesis 5, respectively, are accepted. Thus, the null (alternative) hypotheses of no

relationship between 'training and employee performance', 'organizational culture and employee performance', and 'work environment and employee performance' were rejected. Although these results reveal that training is positively related to employee performance, training is not based on the needs of the employees, and an assessment of employee needs was not conducted before giving training. In addition, the tendency among middle-level management cadres in the civil service often perceive training outside the country as an opportunity for going on holiday or as a means of enhancing their prospects. Nonetheless, generally in Eritrea, training is perceived as a means of acquiring new knowledge or enhancing existing skills and knowledge. This is mainly due to the government's commitment and high capital investment in education and training. Furthermore, tribalism, sectionalism, religious bias, and cost of training are not problems associated with training or when selecting staff for training in Eritrea as evidenced in other countries (for instance, see [Ahmed & Yohanna, 2014](#); [Cyril & Ighodalo, 2016](#)).

The relationships between 'motivation' and 'leadership' and employee performance were insignificant. Hence, both hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 were rejected and the null hypotheses of no relationship between 'motivation and employee performance' and 'leadership and employee performance' in the sampled population were accepted. Several factors may have contributed to these results, such as leadership/management are not based on merit, unattractive and inequitable salary in the civil service, absence of performance evaluation measures, not rewarding employees' effective performance, underutilization of key experts, lack of promotion, autonomy and participation in decisions, hierarchical authority, and lack of organizational goal specificity coupled with procrastination of salary adjustments for highly qualified and experienced employees. The results of this study concur with [Habtom \(2014\)](#), who asserted that delays in the enactment of civil service laws, absence of promotions, retirement, and salary increments are the major problems in the Eritrean civil service system and accordingly fail to attract or promote qualified staff as recruitment and promotion systems are largely concerned with formal education. Also, it is worth noting that the salary for civil service employees set in 1997 remained stagnant for 20 years until 2017 and even now the current pay structure is inadequate compared to the standard of living.

In an institutionally weak society where inefficiency is the order of the day, unqualified and unfit candidates are promoted to higher positions in civil service institutions creating a feeling of underappreciation among other employees, and these situations kill the morale of qualified employees resulting in a lack of interest in the organization and possibly avoidance of certain duties. In addition, lack of benefit packages in the civil service is another factor that contributes to employees' low motivation to serve the public. Finally, the results of this study also concur with those of other studies in a similar context, that 'leadership' is not a factor that influences employee performance in government and private hotels in Eritrea ([Ghebrejorgis, 2018](#)).

From the test results above, three hypotheses (H1, H4, and H5) are supported in accordance with the theory presented in the literature review, while two hypotheses (H2 and H3) are not supported.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this study is to identify the factors that influence the job performance of employees in the civil service in Eritrea. The study employed five variables—training, motivation, leadership, organizational culture, and work environment—to establish if a relationship exists with employee performance. The study found out that training, organizational culture, and work environment are positively related to employee performance. However, we should be cautious as well that there might be occasions where individual employee performance is high but the organization is underperforming due to a lack of good structure, poor planning, and external factors.

Generally, 'training' indicates that the more employees are trained and developed, the more productive they are and the better their performance is in serving the public thereby enhancing organizational performance. Thus, training should be geared towards developing a versatile, proper and competent human capital adaptive to changing and dynamic environments and being competitive over others, which ultimately leads to institutional productivity and effectiveness. 'Organizational culture' implies that familiarity with shared values and beliefs and cooperation

among employees influence civil service employees' job performance in Eritrea. Regarding this variable, although the results of this study concur with several other studies (as mentioned in the background section), we should also be cautious not to oversimplify because civil service organizations are subject to political changes rather than market controls and this largely influences civil service organizational culture. Nevertheless, the fact that organizational culture has been identified as key factor in employee performance should not be disregarded.

The findings of the present study also show a positive relationship between 'work environment' and employee performance. A sound work environment is essential to create the social relations at the workplace and it describes the relationship in which employees work together. Unless there is healthy environment in the institution, employees are neither happy nor motivated to work. A positive work environment makes employees feel good about coming to work and this provides them with the motivation they need to be efficient and productive. Kafui (2017) stated that the work environment has a significant effect on employee satisfaction and recommended that management should improve the work environment to boost productivity.

On the other hand, this study did not find any significant relationship between 'leadership' and employee performance. Leadership is a critical management skill to lead people or an institution towards a shared goal. Possibly, it is only through effective leadership that institutional goals can be achieved. However, the results of the present study at least indicate that what is missing is a shared aspiration for leadership, lack of setting a clear vision and common goal and communicating these to employees, lack of wisdom to value employees' ideas, failure to appreciate the skills and knowledge that employees bring into the organization, the habit of keeping information secret, and poor staffing.

It was also found that 'motivation' has no relationship with employee job performance. Motivation plays a significant role in employee productivity through influencing their behavior towards a common goal, which encourages them to give their best efforts in performing their required tasks. However, some of the main challenges in the Eritrean civil service include inadequate pay compared to the private sector in general, and the standard of living in particular, lack of promotion in a fair and transparent way, autonomy in the workplace, and failure to involve employees in organizational decision making.

Finally, this paper contributes to our understanding of the factors influencing employee performance in the Eritrean civil service. In fact, these results have significant policy and academic implications. First, unless adequate pay is offered, it is very difficult to improve and sustain motivation, and the performance and integrity of civil servants will be questionable. The argument that civil service employees differ from private sector employees in the level and type of their intrinsic desire to work and serve the public may not suffice.

Second, leadership and the development of a pay policy should be an integral part of strategic human resources management in the Eritrean civil service. By the nature of their activities, some civil service institutions deal with other international institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank, and United Nations Development Program. Dealing and negotiating with these institutions is painstaking and Eritrean civil service institutions need to secure versatile, knowledgeable, experienced, and competitive employees if a quality service is to be provided and prosperity and a good global image of the country is to be achieved. This is argued because the implementation of government policies and strategies largely depends on the courage and passion of the respective civil service.

Finally, like all research, the present study has several limitations. As the study is limited only to civil service institutions, there may also be limitations on the generalizability of the findings regarding the public sector as a whole.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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