

Performance Evaluation of the Government Agencies of Kazakhstan¹

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Abstract

Performance evaluation of the government agencies seems to be one of the most important issues in modern public administration. The countries with developed economies introduced various performance evaluation models. The developing countries also implement instruments to evaluate the government agencies performance. Unlike countries with developed institutional environments, the developing ones very often import evaluation models that have been proven in other countries. In that context, our research aimed to understand how the performance evaluation models work in countries with a developing institutional environment. The fact is that the performance evaluation of the government agencies shows certain results which present it in a positive way to the public. Unfortunately, these survey results do not adequately cover difficulties and obstacles that appear in the performance evaluation introduction process. In this regard, the perception of the evaluation system by the first-hand (civil servants), as well as the end entities (NGO representatives) of how the introduction of the evaluation institute contributes to improving the effectiveness of government agencies need to be analyzed.

This article presents an analysis of the impact performance evaluation on performance in government agencies of Kazakhstan through interviews with civil ser-

- 1 This work has been supported by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan under Grant 0696/ГФ4 "The Institutionalization of the Performance Evaluation System of Government Agencies in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Modern Conditions and Prospects of Development" (2015–2017).
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vants (insiders), as they are aware of administrative changes, and representatives of NGO that closely interact with government agencies, so they can really assess the effect of changes. Data collected by quantitative and qualitative methods, such as legislative analysis, mass survey, in-depth interviews of civil servants and NGOs, and focus groups. The authors took into account all the limitations that are typical for surveys of civil servants in countries with a developing institutional environment (e.g. Nemec et al. 2011).

In general, the research results provide a wider understanding of the effectiveness of institutional changes when embedding NPM tools into the administrative reforms through a “top-down approach” in emerging economies. The results show that the implementation of a new institution (performance evaluation) into the existing structure of formal institutions of the government agencies was accomplished. It was found that implanting a new institution caused, to some extent, a short-term “shock” to the government agencies, as there since previously there were no objective criteria for evaluating their activity. At the same time, performance evaluation is still not unincorporated into the internal management system in government agencies. It is perceived as a redundant imputed data transfer function for external evaluators. For this reason, top management of government agencies does not involve all staff in the process of evaluating and discussing its results. However, employees show interest in participating in these processes. All this once again confirms that the post-Soviet countries are still in networks of past heritage, namely they preserve a centralized bureaucratic system controlled from above.

Keywords:

Civil servants, government agencies, organizational change, performance evaluation.

1. Introduction

Government agencies’ performance evaluation is a key element of the New Public Management (Leoveanu 2016). Performance evaluation is considered a part of the overall performance management system and is presented as a process of quantification of the performance and effectiveness of actions (Salem 2003; Hansen 2017). These tools motivated the government agencies to focus on the results.

Many developed countries have introduced performance evaluation models (Dobrolyubova 2017; also, e.g., Andersen et al. 2016; Jakobsen et al. 2016; Dooren et al. 2010). As a practical matter, the performance should be evaluated on an ongoing basis and serve to alert the management system as early as possible, and as a means to improve the accountability. For example, the OECD member countries demonstrated a number of advantages of the performance evaluation reports: reports are focused on results of the government; they provide more information about government objectives and priorities, and tell how various programs facili-

tate achieving these goals; reports show how planning works and serves as a signaling device; they provide key participants with detailed information on what works and what does not; transparency is improved by providing more information to the Parliament and the society (e.g. Curristine et al. 2007). According to Talbot (2010), the implementation of the evaluation system helps improve the actual performance of government agencies, but there are many other contributing factors. The scarcity of financial resources, human capital and lack of effective leadership may impede the overall performance. Also, the introduction of an assessment can be accompanied by concomitant unexpected effects (e.g. Bemelmans-Videc et al. 2017; Thiel and Leeuw 2002; Leeuw 2000; OECD 1996), which appear especially in certain organizational and cultural terms that cast doubt on the effect of its implementation. However, via the utilization of the performance evaluation techniques, performance management and reporting could result in increased performance, as well, among other things.

Some developing countries also introduce tools to evaluate the effectiveness of their public administration. Unlike developed countries, the developing ones often import evaluation models that have been proven in other countries. Nevertheless, it must be understood that initially performance evaluation models were developed for a certain institutional environment. A developing country importing a particular model needs to take into account the extent to which this model can actually improve the effectiveness of government agencies, and why this may not happen. This governs what it will be in the end: will it be a symbolic reform or an effective reform? True, this is tested through the degree to which the performance evaluation routine is institutionalized in practice and what results we can show. In this regard, Helden and Uddin (2016) rightly note that it is important to find out how any new performance management model is developed and implemented in a specific institutional context.

The introduction of a performance evaluation system is equally important in the context of strategic management and the implementation of the strategy both at the macro level and at the level of an individual public-sector organization. The process of institutionalization is also important here: particularly through the cultural and systemic changes as a result of administrative reform, it is possible to institutionalize the system by making it a sustainable and efficient institution (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). Successful organizational changes have results only when members of the organization “incorporate new policies and innovations into organizational results” (Fernandez and Rainey 2006).

In the meantime, the issue how institutional innovations like performance management practices, including performance evaluation, influence any organizational culture and organizational behavior to change is still poorly explored. The main goal of our research is the analysis of insiders’ and outsiders’ perceptions of how performance evaluation of the government agencies was introduced, and to

what extent these institutional changes have a real impact on the government agencies' performance. Our research questions in this context could be: (a) what is the perceived opinion? (b) to what extent does this perceived opinion reflect reality?

This is the first study on this topic in Kazakhstan. With this study, we would like to considerably contribute to performance management discourse in this specific institutional context.

There are several reasons why Kazakhstan was chosen as a case study. Firstly, this can be of interest to the audience studying the public administration reforms in emerging countries subject to a nationwide introduction of a performance evaluation system. Secondly, Kazakhstan was to catch up with the introduction of performance evaluation, facilitated by using available international experience, best practices and lessons learnt, thus avoiding mistakes. The third feature was a top-down institutionalization of performance evaluation via an "intermediate institution", such as the Center of Government Agencies Performance Evaluation of the Economic Research Institute. Whereas the civil society is underdeveloped, this can be considered an alternative to NGOs from the evaluation point of view. In addition, we note that a regulatory framework of the performance evaluation was adopted in Kazakhstan before introducing the performance evaluation system.

2. Theoretical framework

The evaluation of the government agencies' performance is a crucial issue for the modernized public governance (e.g. Andersen et al. 2016; Gerrish 2016; Tomažević et al. 2015). In the ideal model, the performance management system assumes both measuring the results of the organization's activities that have quantitative measurable goals (performance measurement) and evaluating the extent to which the goals were achieved (performance evaluation); reporting on the achieved objectives should ensure transparency and accountability of the government agencies for a wide range of consumers and stakeholders (accountability and transparency), and heads of public sector organizations must thereby ensure a decision-making based on information about the work of the organization in question. Only when there is no gap between the evaluation system and the decisions made does the systematic effect emerge. According to Hansen (2017), the additional features of performance measurement, as compared to evaluations, are, firstly, that performance measurement systems are embedded in the routines of the organization. In this sense, the performance evaluation is considered a form of "institutionalized evaluation" that, however, must not necessarily have the purpose and consequently the increase of the organization's performance.

However, many countries face a large number of challenges when utilizing performance evaluation mechanisms, including issues like improving performance evaluation and quality of information. As various studies explored, this happens

when the government agencies' performance evaluation is accompanied by challenges and unexpected results. For instance, the introduction of the evaluation system indirectly caused stricter regulations, growth of bureaucratization, expansion of red tape, overformalization of processes and actions, structural complexity, excessive domination of rules and norms, leading to delays in fulfilling actual tasks at hand (e.g. Bemelmans-Videc et al. 2017; Thiel and Leeuw 2002; Leeuw 2000; OECD 1996). Also, the introduction of the evaluation led to a sharp increase in the number of regulators and auditors. A number of evaluation units have been established in governments globally. As a result, in the 2000s experts talked about "audit explosion" (Mendez and Bachtler 2011). The growing number of auditors required expenditures for them. It was a paradox when the government agencies were requested to use resources rationally, meanwhile the additional evaluation-related costs could not be compensated by improved performance (Bischoff and Blaschke 2016; Dubnick 2005).

Some scholars refer to the weak correlation between the performance indicators and the activity itself. This is because the indicators fail to evaluate the transforming activity in full over the years. The link between the actual activity and the reported activity declines eventually. A recent meta-analysis of public sector organizations shows only a small positive average impact on performance (Gerrish 2016). Another problem was that some countries introduced the evaluation system without considering managerial and organizational culture. A question like "How to use evaluation data?" often followed. In some cases, the individual confidence proved to play a significant role in deciding on the use of evaluation data. The more the participants believe that the performance evaluation will benefit their agency, the more they will integrate the evaluation information into the decision-making process of their government agency (Hajnal 2015; Taylor 2011). Such findings of the scholars require ways to prevent the emergence of such paradoxes throughout the evaluation and performance.

3. Performance evaluation in the public sector in Kazakhstan: strategic goals and institutional changes

We focused on the Republic of Kazakhstan as one of the Central Asian countries that have achieved certain successes in reforming its public administration. This is evidenced by being 32nd in the World Competitiveness Ranking IMD-2017 (in comparison Kazakhstan ranked only 47th in 2016). Significant improvements have been made in IMD's "Government Effectiveness". In particular, powerful progress is observed in the group criteria, such as "Public Finance", "Institutional Environment" and "Business Legislation" (IMD 2017). This is also confirmed by the World Bank data, according to which the performance of government agencies has grown by

25 % over the last five years (WB 2015). In the Doing Business rating (2015–2017)⁶ Kazakhstan was 53rd in 2014, 41st in 2015, and 36th in 2017. The country has a good ranking in Starting a Business, Registration Property, Enforcing Contracts.

Kazakhstan achieved some good results thanks to the introduction of strategic planning, result-oriented budgeting and internal audit (OECD 2014; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; Makashova 2016) to improve public service delivery, significantly changing the role and nature of the government agencies' functions (OECD 2018).

Even though the need to introduce the performance evaluation system was first voiced in 2005, the Kazakhstani President's Decree on "The Annual Performance Evaluation of the Central Administration and Local Governments of Oblasts, Cities of National Status and Capital City" was adopted in 2010 (e.g. Su-leimenova et al. 2017).

The annual performance evaluation of government agencies in Kazakhstan was institutionalized in several stages. The first stage (2005–2007) is characterized by the generation of an idea to evaluate the performance of government agencies and government's attempt to accelerate its introduction. There was the aim to catalyze the modernization of public administration system, which laid the basis for the next reform stage.

In the second stage (2008–2009), a regulatory framework was adopted over a short period of time, to underlie basic standards of effectiveness of government agencies' performance. It should be noted that prior to the implementation of its evaluation system Kazakhstan carefully studied the world experience. Basic approaches of Kazakhstan's annual evaluation system were built upon the Management Accountability Framework of Canada (MAF). The main similarities of the evaluation systems of Kazakhstan and Canada include specific pillars in accordance with the distributed authorities of government agencies. Financial Management, Information Management, Result-orientation, HRM, Public Service Delivery and others could be found in both systems. However, the major difference lies in the purpose of the evaluation system. MAF focuses on improving the quality of management techniques across government agencies. In Kazakhstan, the evaluation aims to identify the incompliance of a government agency with established norms, standards and requirements, rather than performance.

In the third stage, (2010–2015) the President's Decree on evaluation was approved in 2010. This legally anchored the scope and procedure of performance evaluation. The main parts of the performance evaluation include the attainment and implementation of strategic objectives and tasks across the supervised industry/scope/region; the enforcement of acts and instructions of the President of Kazakhstan, Secretary of State, Government, President's Administration, Prime

6 Available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/reports/global-reports> (last accessed 10 January 2018).

Minister's Office; budget management; delivery of public services; human resource management; use of information technology; legal support of government agencies.

In the years 2010–2014, the performance of the government agencies was evaluated in the above-mentioned seven areas, and in five since 2015. Two areas, namely the enforcement of acts and instructions of the President of Kazakhstan, Secretary of State, Government, President's Administration, Prime Minister's Office and legal support of government agencies, were excluded.

The fourth stage (2016–2017) was marked by changes in performance evaluation approaches. In 2016, within the framework of the Nation's Plan on 100 Specific Steps, the evaluation approaches were revisited (e.g. Suleimenova et al. 2017). The focus was put on measuring the results and ensuring the transparency of the evaluation system (IER 2017). The new architecture of government agencies' performance evaluation that has been introduced since 2017 drastically differs from the previous structure. It suggests three pillars:

- "Attainment of strategic goals and indicators of budget programs". This pillar will evaluate the quality of planning and achievement of goals of strategic plans by the central government agencies and development programs by the local government agencies aligned with key performance indicators and accomplishment of indicators of budget programs;
- "Interaction of government agencies with citizens". Under this pillar, the evaluation aims to strengthen transparency and accountability of government agencies by improving the quality of public service, introducing the Open Government toolkit and addressing the citizens' complaints;
- "Organizational development". Under this pillar, the evaluation is aimed to determine the efficiency of measures of HRM and implementation of information technology (Sek 2017).

Six central government agencies were responsible for developing and evaluating all other government agencies. After evaluation these government agencies transmitted all information to the Center of Government Agencies Performance Evaluation of the Economic Research Institute (CGAPE). CGAPE was coordinated by the Ministry of National Economy (MNE). In collaboration with MNE CGAPE prepared reports to the Expert Commission. The representation of the Expert Commission is the Center of Strategic Studies and Analysis under the Kazakhstan President's Administration (CSA). CSA is responsible for presenting evaluation results to the President of Kazakhstan.

We found one contradiction here, namely that the six government agencies which are responsible for developing policy in these areas are at the same time responsible for developing and evaluating all other government agencies. For example, according to general functions the Department of the Public Administration

Development of the MNE is responsible for improving state planning. At the same time in agreement with Decree (2010) this department is responsible for designing evaluation methodology of the indicator “attainment of strategic goals” and for evaluating all government agencies in the country. The main question is “How can these government agencies be impartial in evaluating its own policy?”

Generally, the implementation of the evaluation system has positively affected the government agencies’ performance (MNE 2016). The delivery of public services’ quality is increased. The data of 2016 show that in six years the delays in public service delivery reduced 46 times (in comparison with previous time), with more than 50 % of services being delivered by www.e-gov.kz portal. According to MNE 73 % of beneficiaries (customers) are fully satisfied with the quality of services they have received. The government agencies have almost completed designing and integrating IT systems. 95 % of the government agencies are already integrated with each other by the Intranet portal of the government agencies (IPGA). The electronic document circulation increased from 32 % in 2010 to 99.9 % in 2015; automated functions raised from 24 % in 2010 to 85 % in 2015.

Overall, after applying the evaluation criteria the efficiency of government agencies was increased in six years. At the same time, the World Governance Indicators show that the level of Kazakhstani government effectiveness still lags behind the leading countries. The government effectiveness was scored 40.19 out of 100 in 2010 to 50.48 in 2015 (WB 2015), while the top 30 countries, which Kazakhstan plans to join in accordance with Strategy-2050, score 75. To achieve this goal, the government of Kazakhstan needs to increase efficiency.

Despite this, we conclude that the government agencies have experienced significant changes in their work since performance evaluation was introduced in Kazakhstan. It shows that there is an ongoing organizational development, and there are changes in organizational culture. However, official statistics shows the situation from the perspective of improving performance indicators, and they are not sufficient to explain the nature and fundamental reasons why this should be the case. Therefore, we needed both questionnaires and interviews as a way of identifying the opinions of the objects and subjects of the assessment process, regarding our research questions.

4. Methodology

Research into performance management has a long history in disciplines such as Public Administration, Public Management, and Organizational Theory. The specific interest in performance evaluation and performance management has emerged within Public Administration, starting in the 1970s and 1980s and going forward in the last few decades. This study focuses on this stream of research to maintain a focal point on civil servants’ perception in particular (their perception

of the process of implementing performance evaluation; their explanation of what factors and barriers contribute to or impede the institutionalization of the process in our understanding).

In this context, we aim to answer two sets of major questions: (a) what is the perceived opinion? (b) to what extent does this perceived opinion reflect reality?

We took into account that there are certain difficulties with the data correctness of civil servants of the post-Soviet countries, such as Nemec et al. (2011). In ordinary practice, civil servants respond fairly easily to evaluation questions. At the same time, it is difficult to count on a truthful answer to questions about assessing the policies and actions of management. In this case, the respondent, even on condition of anonymity, fears the consequences of his answers. Therefore, a combination of research methods was used.

So, in 2015 we started to conduct a review more over than 50 legal acts to identify stages of institutionalization of the performance evaluation in Kazakhstan. At the same time, we prepared the project of the questionnaire based on a literature review within the scope of the research topic. The project of the questionnaire was studied by the experts of the Center of Government Agencies Performance Evaluation of the Economic Research Institute. The pilot survey was in October and November 2015. It allowed us to determine the target audience and correct the questionnaire.

In 2016, a survey study with a face-to-face data collection method was employed. The survey was based on questionnaires with 32 questions in three sections. A quota sampling was used. Sampling was formed from a quota of subjects of a specified type.

Administrative civil servants of Kazakhstan divide into two groups: corps A and B. Corps A is the small group of Senior Civil Servants. Corps B is the large group of executive civil servants. According to the Register of civil service positions (Decree 2015) all positions divide into 5 subgroups: A, B, C, D, E, which corresponds to governance levels from up to down. We selected a sample of 300 from category C, which is the staff of every ministry. A sample of 700 was selected in categories D and D-O, which are staff of the 16 akimats⁷ and departments of Economic Management and Budget Planning of the oblast, Astana, and Almaty akimats (Table 1). The overall sample is 1000 respondents. Respondents characteristics are in Annex 1.

In addition data which allow us to answer our questions were collected via in-depth interview. The interviews took place between May and August 2016 and lasted from 25 to 60 minutes. In total, 15 civil servants and 15 respondents from NGOs were interviewed. The sample included 15 civil servants at Corps B, who are responsible for carrying out evaluations in the government agency. In the case of NGOs, we have selected 15 respondents from those NGOs which regularly commu-

7 Akimats is the administration of the governor of the oblast.

nicated with the government agencies. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and took place in a private setting at the participants' workplace. The interviews were conversational in style and, beyond background questions relating to prior work experience, we asked 12 questions divided into two sections. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and anonymized.

Table 1
Sampling

Target audience	Number	Sample
Administrative civil servants corps B of the 11 ministries	8337	300
Administrative civil servants corps B in 14 regions and 2 cities (Almaty; Astana)	41769	700
Total	50106	1000

In 2017, data were collected via focus groups. The focus groups took place between April and June 2017. Overall, 5 focus groups were organized. The sample included 30 civil servants from central and local government agencies. Within a focus group, a moderator posed a series of questions intended to gain insight in the way the group viewed performance evaluation, its impact on government agencies' performance, staff involvement in discussion evaluation results, organizational development. The conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed.

32 questions, presented in the questionnaire, were divided into 3 groups, allowing the identification of the characteristics of the respondent (age, experience in civil service, participation in the assessment process), attitude to the assessment process, the need for and practice of discussing the results of evaluation in the team, comparison of the government agencies rating, learning the experience of other government agencies and other in-depth interview questions used for more detailed information and the disclosure of some specific features of the assessment and its results. We had long and detailed discussions about the process and the results of the government agencies assessment. If the interview engaged experts, who were involved in the evaluation process, then various civil servants were invited to the focus groups. Focus group questions were aimed at obtaining a variety of information in order to clarify the reasons for the difference in views of the evaluation. The principle of a "straight funnel" was applied – questions were asked from broader, more stimulating respondents to talk, to express themselves spontaneously on the issue under discussion, to more particular and specific ones, drawing people's attention to the details of the problem under study.

5. Results

As we mentioned above, official statistics about performance evaluation results in Kazakhstan show that the implementation of the evaluation system has positively affected the government agencies' performance (MNE 2016). In fact, the civil servants see these results in their own job. The mass survey revealed that 64.4 % of respondents agreed that the evaluation indeed improved the performance of a given government agency, citing three main arguments in favor of evaluation benefiting the activities of the government agency:

- Firstly, the attainment of planned results increased (52.5 %). Here, civil servants were referring to the fulfillment by them of the indicators of the strategic plans of state bodies, compiled for three years;
- Secondly, engagement (buy-in) of staff in improving the effectiveness of the government agency increased (33.2 %);
- Thirdly, the quality of public services delivered improved (24.4 %) (Table 2).

Table 2
Distribution of respondents' views

Answers	N	%
Better attainment of the planned outcomes	338	52.5
Improved quality of public services	157	24.4
Efficient budget administration	117	18.2
Employees' engagement (buy-in) in improving performance of the government agency increased	214	33.2
Changes, novelties of a government agency's activities or certain processes succeeded	93	14.4
Improved coordination and interaction with other stakeholders and government agencies	92	14.3
Improved satisfaction and harmonization of stakeholders' needs	51	7.9
Don't know/No answer	17	2.6

Note – The total is not equal to 100 % as the respondents could choose several answers

Overall, the changes in the activities of the government agencies are tracked by insiders and outsiders both. The civil servants participating in the interview assessed the government agencies' effectiveness 3.77 out of 5 on average (or 75.4 %). The NGO representatives put 4 (or 80 %). In this case, we observe a more critical attitude of civil servants towards the work they do, rather than NGO representatives. In the course of the interviews the latter criticized government agencies; however, they were positive about changes occurring across the government agencies.

Some respondents mentioned the fragmentary nature of changes, and some said no changes had happened at all.

- Respondent A (civil servant, female; 35): “I personally believe it has increased fragmentarily. Suppose, the Executive Secretary’s ranking depended on that. And the Executive Secretary kept it under control... One or two have always had a headache. The ministry worked with the Ministry for Civil Service or the Ministry of Finance or the President’s Administration, for instance. The one who was responsible could clearly comprehend the essence of the evaluation. The need and importance of the evaluation was known to two or three people in the ministry, who were addressing it”;
- Respondent B (civil servant; male; 34): “The analysis of the performance of the last years proves that the government agencies have become more responsible in terms of evaluation. However, there are some other factors to be considered. The government agencies know in advance against which criteria and indicators they will be evaluated. Accordingly, they will spend more time and focus on indicators or the scope of work to be assessed in the future”;
- Respondent C (civil servant; male; 40): “I would not say that this measure was 100 % successful. There are only certain positive changes. Unfortunately, not to the fullest as expected, i.e. more work needs to be done”.

It is obvious that the implemented evaluation system influenced the improvement of the government agencies’ performance. The formal statistical data and civil servants’ perception substantiates the statement. We came to the conclusion that institutional innovations, such as strategic planning, budget planning, performance evaluation, were fully introduced throughout government agencies. It was facilitated by the “responsible behavior” of civil servants, which is expressed in the form of strict compliance with legal requirements. If a top-down decision to introduce a new institute is made, it will be implemented. This has been ascertained during interviews with the civil servants. We consider this in a positive way.

In Kazakhstan, from the procedural perspective the government agencies have three processes related to performance evaluation: 1) drafting materials on a specific pillar of performance evaluation; 2) collating and forming reporting materials on a specific and/or all the pillars of performance evaluation; 3) engaging in the implementation of the “Action plan” following the evaluation results.

The survey found out that 57.8 % (or 578) of all the respondents (1000) were involved in the performance evaluation process. They largely participated in the first two processes, i.e. preparation of primary materials and reports. However, only 15.2 % out of 578 respondents noted their engagement in the implementation of the Action plan following the evaluation results.

Respondents engaged in the performance evaluation to a larger extent worked in the following areas: attainment of strategic goals – 35.5 %; budget management – 23.4 %; enforcement of acts and instructions – 22.7 %; HR management – 19 %. To the least extent, they were engaged in legal groundwork (9.5 %), use of information technology (9.7 %) and delivery of public services (13.3 %). A smaller share of respondents (9.9 %) took part in all pillars of government performance evaluation. The extracts from the in-depth interviews explain the figures as follow:

- Respondent B (civil servant; male; 34): “I should say that the engagement level varies, because the leaders are involved largely. The doers are not involved at all, with some of them even not knowing what evaluation is. The leaders know about evaluation as they feel the outside controls from relevant authorities; they understand the priorities in certain areas to be strictly adhered to.”

Consequently, the government agencies seem not to be accustomed to widely engaging the civil servants into the evaluation process. This demonstrates the availability of managerial choice, and it means that the leaders accumulate all performance-related work within a certain division, without engaging the whole staff into the process in order not to distract the employees to indirect work.

As for the discussion of evaluation results with the staff, 75.2 % out of 1000 respondents answered that they were acquainted with results of the evaluation (Table 3a). We examined respondents’ answers to this question in terms of their involvement and disinvolvement in the evaluation process. Table 3b illustrates that those involved in the evaluation process answered positively to a greater degree.

Table 3

Distribution of answers to the question, “Could you please tell me, are you acquainted with results of evaluation of performance of the government agency?”

a)

Respondents, %	Answers	
	Yes, %	No, %
100	75.2	24.8

b)

Respondents by	N	Answers	
		Yes, %	No, %
Involved in the evaluation	578	84.9	15.1
Not involved in evaluation	422	61.8	38.2

The interview helped clarify that the evaluation results are discussed with the directors of Departments⁸ in ministries, and directors of Departments in local executive bodies⁹. No respondent answered that there were general meetings with the involvement of every employee to discuss the performance evaluation results.

However, most civil servants in category “C”¹⁰ see no need to discuss performance evaluation results collectively (as compared with the answers of respondents in category “D”¹¹, representing the local government). This means that in central government agencies the level of employees’ interest seems to be lower than in local executive bodies.

As a counter to this question, we asked the respondents whether the leadership discusses with them the need to change anything in the government agency (not related to the evaluation results). Surprisingly, 90.6 % of 1000 respondents have answered that the management of the government agency is discussing the need of changes, helping to realize and perceive the need and consistency of the management’s actions.

On the same line, the need for changes is also discussed mainly with heads of structural units, who then discuss them with their team members. There is an obvious fragmentation there. Since any organizational change may affect concerns of all employees, then initiatives in this area should be discussed across the team. Given that the performance evaluation relates to certain indicators only, the evaluation results will be discussed with the stakeholder group within the government agency only.

In the interview some civil servants point out that after discussing the evaluation results the brainstorming sessions are conducted to adjust the current activities and elaborate measures to improve performance.

Despite this, civil servants show a high interest in open discussion of evaluation results (83.1 % out of 1000 respondents). To a certain extent, the unwillingness of leadership to openly discuss results of a given government agency’s performance results leads to the formation of a “passive position” for a group of employees. We take notice that the information on the results of the evaluation is discussed in a “cascading way”: from top management to middle, from middle managers to low level, from line managers to the staff.

Overall, implementation of the evaluation system positively affects the organizational development of a government agency. On the one hand, the involvement of civil servants in the evaluation process contributed to their professional development. Participation of civil servants in the process of assessing the effectiveness

8 These are structural units of Ministries.

9 These are independent government agencies, belonging to the local government.

10 Category “C” represents civil servants of the ministries.

11 Category “D” represents civil servants of the local government.

affected the growth of their professionalism. This happened with 70.4 % of respondents out of those were involved in the assessment process. 18 % of respondents have upgraded their skills. 13.1 % of respondents were awarded with incentives (bonus, letter of appreciation, certificate of honor, etc.) (Table 4).

Table 4
Implications of respondents' involvement in performance evaluation process

Answer options	Respondents (N 578)	%	by categories	
			Category "C"	Category "D"
It helped me improve my professional level	407	70.4	67.6	71.6
I was forwarded to advance training in order to improve knowledge and skills	104	18.0	11.4	20.9
I received material/nonmaterial rewards (bonus, letter of appreciation, certificate of honor, etc.)	76	13.1	16.5	11.7
I was promoted/advanced in office	32	5.5	3.4	6.5
I was downgraded	3	0.5	1.1	0.2
I had to change my workplace	7	1.2	1.7	1.0
No impact	4	0.7	1.1	0.5
Don't know/No answer	49	8.5	11.9	7.0

Note – The total is not equal 100 % as the respondents could choose several answers

Comparison of answers of civil servants in category "C" and "D" highlighted that the bonuses were used as incentives in the ministries, and advance training in local executive bodies. On the other hand, there is an improvement in horizontal communication between the units. In the course of survey, the positive impact of the evaluation system was assessed. It manifests itself in the fact that "all divisions of the government agencies became more efficient in interacting with each other" (26.3 %), "the employee motivation system changed" (17.7 %), "we became a more cohesive team, a team spirit appeared" (16.2 %).

When comparing respondents' answers depending on their involvement in performance evaluation, we found certain disagreement. Among the answers of involved respondents, the one was ranked first "All units of the government agency have come to an efficient interaction with each other" (30.6 %), the second was "Nothing's changed, everything remained as before the implementation of the government performance evaluation system" – 26.1 %. Hierarchy of answers by respondents not-involved in evaluation process, is presented in reverse order, the first goes the answer "Nothing's changed, everything remained as before the implementation of the government performance evaluation system" (30.1 %), sec-

ond – “All units of the government agency have come to an efficient interaction with each other” (20.4 %). Two age categories: from 18 to 30 years and 61+ did not notice any changes.

Implementation of the evaluation system results in negative organizational changes side by side positive ones. The respondents have noted the growth of paper “red tape” and bureaucracy against the increase of effectiveness of interaction between all divisions of the government agency, collective cohesion. The findings in “Human Resources Management” criteria testify the growth of bureaucracy. According to data of 2016, 50 % of civil servants in Category C and up to 60 % of civil servants in Category D have regular overtime work. At the rate of 40 hours per week, the employees in the ministries work 44.5 to 54.5 hours per week (IRE 2016). There is an implicit “overtime working” culture is distributed across the government agencies. This is not unusual. The study by the World Bank in 2005 and Academy of Public Administration in 2012–2013 also confirmed transformation of this practice into tradition. I.e., the government agencies have a generally accepted “overtime working” habit (WB 2005; Primashev 2013).

The survey results revealed that the organizational culture of the government agencies experience new trends such as “learning best practices”, “lessons learnt”. The best practices learning is widespread in government agencies. Government agencies’ performance evaluation allows not only to compare results, learn from each other’s experience, but also draw certain conclusions and lessons, i.e. the effect of social learning. In this regard, the questionnaire included questions allowing to know the opinion of civil servants concerning comparative assessment. The majority of 1000 respondents answered that their government agency compares its processes and results with those of other government agencies, learns and adapts the experience, draws lessons from own mistakes (Table 5).

Within the government agencies, the exchange and spillover of knowledge and experience among the units and employees is widely practiced, however, this does not take place on a regular basis. It is obvious that the sharing of knowledge and experience occurs fragmentarily, as necessary. Overall, in the respondents’ view the government agency encourages innovation and the creativity of its employees.

Further, the respondents were offered to choose factors which largely affect the government agency’s performance and impede the effective organization of the government agency’s activities.

Out of 11 options, 5 answers were often noted as factors largely influencing the effectiveness of a government agency. They are:

- Accurate functional distribution of duties among the employees (54.6 %);
- Appropriate organizational structure (48.7 %);
- Director’s role as a leader (45.9 %);
- High professionalism and effective cooperation of employees (43.7 %);

- High professionalism and effective cooperation of employees (43.7%).

Table 5
Distribution of respondents' answers

- a) Does your government agency compare its processes and results with other organizations?

Respondents type by	Options					
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No answer
Involved in the evaluation	33.6	18.2	26.0	5.9	16.4	–
Not involved in the evaluation	23.0	19.4	25.8	8.3	23.5	–

- b) Does your government agency study and take over the experience of other identical organizations?

Respondents by	Options					
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No answer
Involved in the evaluation	25.1	25.9	36.4	9.7	2.9	–
Not involved in evaluation	24.1	27.6	32.8	12.7	2.8	–

- c) Does the government agency learn from its mistakes?

Respondents by	Options					
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No answer
Involved in the evaluation	50.0	22.5	14.5	6.2	3.6	3.1
Not involved in evaluation	41.9	22.0	18.0	6.9	6.6	4.5

A more attentive study of gender-based responses showed the difference in priorities of men and women (Table 6).

Table 6

Priorities in answers of men and women to the question, “Factor largely influencing the effectiveness of the government agency”

Men	Women
1. Director’s role as a leader	1. Accurate functional distribution of obligations among the employees
2. Accurate functional distribution of duties among the employees	2. Appropriate organizational structure
3. Appropriate organizational structure	3. High professionalism and effective cooperation of employees

The distribution of responses shows that male civil servants recognize as the priority the role of leadership in ensuring the organization’s effectiveness. In their turn, female civil servants care for the correctness of the organization’s buildup and division of labor.

Respondents unanimously pointed out the “improper functional division of duties among employees” as the main factor hindering the effective organization of activities in the government agency. At the same time, civil servants of the central government agencies indicated a “lack of motivation to focus on results”, and civil servants of local government executive agencies selected “low professionalism of employees, lack of cooperation between them” as the second most important factor. These answers draw attention to the need of further improvement of management in government agencies.

It should be noted that a study independent of our work, conducted by Van der Wal and Mussagulova (2017, 31), also established that civil servants in Kazakhstan would like to see a clearer division of labor, a description of functions, and more efforts put into the creation of a favorable working atmosphere, which makes it possible to achieve efficiency. This shows that this problem is acute for public servants.

Thus, the survey results partially proved the link between the performance evaluation and changes in organizational culture/organizational behavior in the government agency. Probably, in the case of Kazakhstan the problem was that the need to introduce the performance management and evaluation was initiated not within the government agency itself, but by the other government agencies exercising controlling functions.

It follows that when implementing the performance evaluation system, which is essentially an instrument of the latest developments in the field of public management theory, namely relevant to the New Public Governance concept (Talbot 2010), employees are more likely to perceive both effective tools that are typical of “classical” public administration (in particular, the functional distribution of duties among the employees). This situation, as noted by Iacovino et al. (2017), is charac-

teristic in particular of some countries called the Latin type of public administration, in which there is a mixture of tools used in a variety of paradigms.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The generalization and analysis of the study results made it possible to make the following outputs and conclusions.

Despite MNE's positive results in improving the government agencies' performance, BTI 2018 takes the position that budgetary planning continues to suffer from a failure to link strategic planning, the budget and human resources either at the whole-of-government or ministry levels; there is, according to the OECD, no clear multi-year financial framework for ministerial services and no joint planning and reporting on either performance or the budget. They argue that there is also no systematic review and evaluation of programs. People and ministries are poorly coordinated to implement policy. There is low transparency and accountability in these organizations. Ministries do not work together easily when faced with challenges that often require crosscutting responses (BTI 2018).

We see this in the overall results of our research, which indicate that the changes of the government agencies activities are tracked by both insiders and outsiders. The interviewed civil servants rated the effectiveness of government agencies' on average 3.77 out of 5, as opposed to the NGO representatives with an average score of 4. Here we observe that the implementation of the evaluation system resulted in the rise of the government agencies' effectiveness, as evidenced by the factual data of the Ministry of National Economy and the perception of civil servants, as well as representatives of the civil society. At the same time, the rise in performance was primarily caused by the stricter executive discipline, as well as the penetration of information technology.

The collected data shows that the government agencies do not widely engage the civil servants into the evaluation process and the discussion of evaluation results. Mostly the leaders accumulate all performance within a certain division, without engaging the whole staff into the process, in order not to divert attention of the employees to the secondary business tasks. The evaluation results are discussed in a "cascading way": from top management to middle, from middle managers to low-level, from line managers to the staff. Although this is in clear contradiction, the modern management paradigm assumes a systemic approach according to which the evaluation should be introduced in the management toolkit.

Some evidence from our survey confirms that the involvement of employees in the evaluation process facilitated their professional growth and improved horizontal communication between the departments. In contrast to the positive effect of the performance evaluation to government agencies' performance some respondents have noted the growth of paper "red tape" and bureaucracy against an in-

crease in the effectiveness of interaction between all units of the government agency and collective cohesion. We think it has to do with the lack of a performance culture. In “Benchmarking Civil Service Reform in Kazakhstan” OECD experts argue that developing a performance culture is the ultimate goal of HR reform (OECD 2018, 160).

Thus, we have concluded:

- firstly, the introduction of performance evaluation rules and procedures in the public institutions was accompanied by the incorporation of a new institution into the existing institutional structure. The process of introducing a new institution has caused, to some extent, a short-term “shock” in government agencies. The essence of the shock was that the introduction of new rules led to a change in the tasks and responsibilities of civil servants. However, later the process was followed by passive adaptation;
- secondly, the discrepancy in the perception of the respondents involved and uninvolved in the evaluation process is caused by the unincorporated performance evaluation in the internal management system of government agencies. Despite the fact that it was originally introduced seven years ago, it is still perceived as an imputed data transfer function for external appraisers. The nature of this phenomenon lies in the fact that the post-Soviet countries are still in the networks of the past heritage, namely, they retain a centralized bureaucratic system controlled from above.

Based on new trends, modern government agencies must become more employee-centric. This approach requires modernizing the performance management system. Focus on the quality of feedback and discussion is a novel approach in this area. That must be accompanied by the creation of a framework for managers and employees to support high-quality discussions for providing effective feedback and training to the managers about day-to-day coaching skills (Conway 2018). However, the study results show that not all public managers perceive evaluation as an element of “result-based management”, although they are aware of the importance of staff involvement in improving the effectiveness of the government agency. Under the pressure of institutional constraints, the leaders make decisions that lead to organizational paradoxes, in particular “organizational fragmentation”. At the level of psychological attitudes, the organizational fragmentation can lead to contradictory self-identification of civil servants.

It should be noted that there are some doubts about the difference in internal and external perceptions of the effectiveness of public administration in general and the effectiveness of government agencies, in particular in post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan. Therefore, we cited the findings of BTI (2018) and OECD (2018) as examples. In reality, there is a certain inconsistency between the results of the Ministry of National Economy, BTI (2018), and our research. This could be

the subject of discussion in future research. Indeed, BTI (2018) draws conclusions from the results of evaluating the effectiveness of management in general at the macro level taking into account the general political, socio-economic situation in the country. MNE makes the conclusion of improving the internal effectiveness of government agencies in comparing data of the year 2010, when the assessment was first conducted. Our results show the perception of insiders about improving the effectiveness of their government agencies. As we have seen, insiders note the progress in improving efficiency, although they note the presence of still unresolved issues. According to OECD experts, this is due to the lack of development of performance culture, which should be agreed to a certain extent.

In general, our study helps understand the effectiveness of institutional changes when embedding NPM tools into the administrative reforms through a “top-down approach” in emerging economies. This shows how important it is to take into account the institutional environment, informal institutions in particular, the position of stakeholders and the need to use a multi-agency approach; and once again demonstrates the need for a comprehensive application of the reform instrument. According to the well-known works of authors from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of public administration (Talbot 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011), it is important to take into account the organizational context in developing the performance management system in the government agencies, which should improve their performance. As we found during the in-depth interviews and surveys, in order to succeed the government agencies need to develop feedback with managers and government officials. As one can see from the results of our research, the measures that were proposed to improve the performance are in the spirit of Old Public Management, which is typical of countries with the Latin tradition of public administration (e.g. Iacovino et al. 2017).

On the other hand, the creation of a performance-oriented culture should be accompanied by the following recommendations:

- methods and tools for the government agencies’ performance evaluation should be oriented towards the pragmatic nature in the internal evaluation system, and the socio-economic nature in the external evaluation system. In other words, the internal evaluation system should identify compliance with the principles of profitability and efficiency in the activities of the state agencies. In this case, the internal system should be built in such a manner that each government agency knowing the methods and tools of evaluation, develops its internal business processes, taking into account the stated principles;
- it is necessary to provide each civil servant with the essence of the performance management system: what will it lead to, how does the evaluation take place, the criteria and parameters of the evaluation, etc.;

- it is necessary to coordinate the system for discussing evaluation results at all levels, both between leaders and groups, and to involve stakeholders in the process of evaluating results.

Thus, we can conclude that the specific theory of performance evaluation for government agencies in developing countries should be constructed. So, it must include the comprehensive research directions of organizational and managerial culture, special mechanisms of usage, the results of evaluation for agencies' activity improvement, for shaping the motivation of civil servants in some specific way with "fine tuning", which depends on patterns of organizational culture of concrete state bodies. This requires more detailed studies of the parameters of organizational changes caused by the use of tools of new paradigms (such as New Public Governance etc.), in particular the introduction of an evaluation system for self-learning organizations. It should also clarify the existing design of the assessment system, which, in particular, should help to overcome some of the problems identified from our research.

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ANNEX 1

Table 7
Distribution of respondents by gender

Gender	N	%
Female	605	60.5
Male	395	39.5
Total	1000	100.0

Table 8
Age categories of respondents

Age groups	N	%
18 to 30 yo	397	39.7
31 to 40 yo	342	34.2
41 to 50 yo	165	16.5
51 to 60 yo	92	9.2
61 + yo	4	0.4
Total	1000	100.0

Table 9
Distribution of respondents by ethnicity

Nationality	N	%
Kazakh	923	92.3
Russian	66	6.6
Belarusian	4	0.4
Tatar	2	0.2
Ukrainian	2	0.2
Azerbaijani	1	0.1
Ingush	1	0.1
Uigur	1	0.1
Total	1000	100.0

Table 10
Level of education of respondents

Education level	N	%
Specialized secondary	–	–
Incomplete higher education	6 th	0.6
Higher education	885	88.5
Postgraduate education (magistracy, doctoral studies)	109	10.9
Total	1000	100.0

Table 11
Distribution of respondents according to the length of service in the state agency

Work experience	N	%
Up to 1 year	59	5.9
From 2 to 5 years	477	47.7
6 to 10 years	398	39.8
11 to 15 years	–	–
From 16 and above	65	6.5
Failure to respond	1	0.1
Total	1000	100.0

Table 12
Distribution of respondents by general experience in the civil service

Work experience	N	%
Up to 1 year	31	3.1
From 2 to 5 years	300	30.0
6 to 10 years	276	27.6
11 to 15 years	204	20.4
From 16 and above	188	18.8
Failure to respond	1	0.1
Total	1000	100.0