The impact of culture on performance appraisal reforms in Africa

The case of Uganda's Civil Service

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ABSTRACT

This article explores administrative culture and examines its impact on performance appraisal reforms in Uganda's civil service. It reveals that Uganda's bureaucracy is characterised by large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, high ethnicity adherence and political neutrality. Research findings indicate that these cultural variables influence the performance appraisal by sabotaging its actual implementation and undermining its institutionalisation. The study supports the use of power distance and uncertainty avoidance by various scholars to analyse the linkage between administrative culture and instruments of management. The additional dimensions of political (neutrality) biasness and ethnicity pursued are highly relevant additions to the literature.
It is argued that for the successful introduction of performance appraisals, culture matters. Although the Ugandan government introduced appraisal reforms, incompatibility between the values embedded in the appraisal and the host administrative culture watered down the reform.

INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisals provide the basis for making selection and promotion decisions, determining salary increases, and they are a vehicle for feedback between supervisors and employees. Although a few studies concerning performance appraisals and culture have been published (György 2004; McCourt and Foon 2007), more research on culture and performance appraisals is required. For the successful introduction of performance appraisals, culture matters. This article analyses the relationship between administrative culture and the introduction of performance appraisal reforms in the Ugandan civil service. It explores the

extent to which performance appraisal reforms are introduced and institutionalised in terms of their acceptance by the civil service.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM IN UGANDA

The performance appraisal – an instrument used by organisations to evaluate the performance of their employees is said to be one of the most problematic components of human resource management, yet it plays an important role in providing the basis for making selection decisions, determining salary increases, and providing feedback between supervisors and employees (Mount 1984:1). For the period 1976-1997, the Ugandan civil service used the annual confidential report which was a closed system of assessing individual performance. The appraisal was confidential thus open to abuse. The second period – the main focus of this article – stretches from 1998 to August 2008, and concerns a *new* performance appraisal system introduced in the Uganda civil service. This appraisal was considered superior because it included assessment of critical competencies needed to achieve outputs; provided for an appraisal meeting; allows appeal; feedback; and had provision for developing concrete action plans to improve performance and staff development.

WHY THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL REFORM?

Following recommendations from the *Public Service Review and Reorganisation Commission* (PSRRC), Uganda introduced a new performance appraisal system as part of its administrative reform efforts to improve the public sector performance. The PSRRC noted that civil servants needed to be objectively assessed on their actual performance in relation to well defined targets and tasks agreed upon between themselves and their supervisors. However, this new *open* appraisal system was not successful due to a variety of reasons revolving around administrative culture and limited implementation.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND CULTURE

Every country has a need for performance appraisal and actually carries out these reforms. However, it is argued that their success depends on the context. Despite several efforts to reform public service organisations in developing countries, tangible improvements are few and far between (Polidano 1999; Schick 1998). One cannot undermine the ability of cultural variables because "Social arguments tied to organisational culture can potentially have an instrumental side, that is, informal norms and values can be useful. Employees can feel more loyal and function better because the institutional aspects of their activity are emphasised" (Christensen *et al.* 2007:39). Civil servants may work against a reform without knowing that they are doing so. This is because they have been socialised into particular ways of performing functions and may not realise or appreciate other ways of generating things. Thus, it is pertinent to investigate how administrative culture affects performance appraisal.

ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURE

Many definitions of administrative culture pertain, and a few will be cited for elaboration: It is "the general characteristics of public officials, i.e., shared values, attitudes and beliefs" (Henderson 2005:41). Zhuplev and Shein (2005:109) believe administrative culture manifests itself in behavioural norms, adopted and adhered to by participants of the governance process. Administrative culture has also been described as the interpretative profile of the significant underlying structure, which includes practices, shared views, and value systems amongst functionaries. It is embedded in the way societies address and interpret their problems and includes the collective reflection and sharing of historical memories, myths and symbols, as well as past cleavages (Nef 2005:232). In this article, administrative culture is the shared values, beliefs, norms, traditions and practices of public officials.

MEASURING ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURE – THE DIMENSIONS

The dimensions of administrative culture used in this article are based on known variables used to measure and describe culture – namely, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, political neutrality/bias, and ethnicity. Although some of these variables are commonly used for cross national studies, they are mirrored in the bureaucracy because organisational culture is isomorphic to societal culture (György 2004:37; Jahoda 1984; Javidan *et al*. 2004). It is for three reasons, that these variables are selected. *Firstly*, several studies have used these variables, and researchers have proposed that managerial practices can be predicted by various national values (Aycan 2005; György 2004; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Therefore these studies are used as a point of departure for the study. *Secondly*, the variables are mirrored in the civil service (House *et al*. 2004; Islam 2004) hence it is relevant to use them as a point of departure in analysing the administrative culture of Uganda. *Thirdly*, ethnicity and its consequences have for long been associated with African maladministration and the claim is gaining prominence (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Olivier de Sardan 1999; Hameso 1997; Nnoli 1993; Tambiah 1989). It is therefore important to apply and analyse them with regard to the civil service in Uganda.

Power distance

Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Hofstede's survey of East Africa considers the region to have a high power distance culture. With large power distance, the bureaucracy is highly centralised; juniors are not expected to challenge authority openly or to participate in decision making but to take orders (Munene *et al*. 2000). Yet, performance appraisal is expected to be a participatory exercise. There is also the appraisal feedback process, which Fletcher and Perry (2001) observe that employee appraisals and feedback on results in large power distance organisations will most often be conducted by a person with relatively more power than the ratee, while in low power distance cultures, performance appraisals are less dependent on superiors.

Power distance could also be perceived in the form of the *colonial chief factor¹*. The chief signified total, absolute power, unchecked and unrestrained (Mamdani 1996). No wonder the success rate of the annual confidential report in Uganda's bureaucracy was high (Turya-Muhika 1982), but when this was replaced with the more transparent performance appraisal, the success rate declined. One of the possible reasons is because the old annual confidential report preserved the power of the rater and hence was *fitting* for a high power distance culture. This manifestation of power distance is re-enforced by *status symbolism,* whereby privileges and status symbols contribute to the authority of the bosses. In a large power distance culture, those in power would like to see the performance appraisal as another symbolic exercise that contributes to their authority. Additionally, in order to overcome red tape in bureaucracies, *informality²* comes in and causes civil servants to pay limited attention to performance outputs and results (Schick 1998). Yet, performance appraisals usually require the assessment of competencies, integrity, initiative and work relations. Therefore, the presence of high power distance in the Ugandan civil service may prevent participatory decision making, transparency and also compromise merit.

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations. The concept denotes a deficit in knowledge about what the future may hold, it expresses the extent to which people either tolerate ambiguous situations or need formal rules (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Bureaucracies in strong uncertainty cultures are more likely to create and maintain rules than in weak uncertainty cultures, and people in the strong uncertainty culture will tend to avoid situations that may be uneasy to tackle. With regard to *rule-following*, civil servants who are subjected to rigid and complex rules seldom take initiative (Jabbra and Jabbra 2005). Mendonca and Kanungo (1999) argue that the relatively high uncertainty avoidance in the developing countries implies that civil servants are unwilling to *innovate and are risk averse*. When performance appraisal is introduced in the high uncertainty avoidance culture, civil servants may resist appraisal reforms because they have to learn something new.

The level of *control over environment vs. feedback management*: becomes important when reviewing past performance. Munene *et al.* (2000) argue that Ugandans view themselves as having complete control over their environment. It is thus supposed that the higher the degree of uncertainty avoidance, the more the risk aversion and rule following, the less the innovation and the more the concern for maintaining the *status quo*. Such a situation may impede the introduction of performance appraisal in the Ugandan civil service.

Political neutrality vs. political bias

According to Putnam (1975), attitudes of bureaucrats may be classified into classical and political. A classical bureaucrat is more procedure and rule oriented while the political bureaucrat is more problem or programme oriented. A classical bureaucrat may dislike political influence and intervention by political leaders in the daily affairs of the bureaucracy. In contrast, a political bureaucrat is more sensitive to political signals and trusts politicians. If a bureaucracy is more classical, their dispositions to appraisal reform measures by the

government may vary from being positive to negative. In contrast, a politically biased bureaucrat's inclination is to support government policies.

In Uganda, bureaucrats are more classical because they are selected and promoted on the basis of merit. However, in recent years it has been observed that politicisation of the bureaucracy and administrative reforms are accepted primarily for political survival (Mwenda and Tangri 2005). If selection of key positions in bureaucracy is based on political patronage bureaucrats may change from being classical to political bureaucrats. This in turn would make them more loyal and supportive to the performance appraisal system.

Ethnicity[3]

Ethnicity is a very contentious issue in discussions on culture and political theory. Ethnicity could be seen as a characteristic of collectivist cultures whereby people, from birth onwards, are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups; the group that a person belongs to continues to give protection in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Ethnic affiliation provides a sense of security, a source of trust, certainty, reciprocal help and protection against the neglect of one's interests by strangers (Horowitrz 1994:49) especially in situations of alienation, and insecurity' (Lentz 1995).

In Uganda, like most of Africa, people do not strive to make autonomous choices. They take into consideration the consequences of their choices to other people (Hyden 2006:191). The debate on ethnicity in the appointment of public officials in Uganda presents two issues; one is on representation, the other on professionalism (Mwenda 2008). In such a scenario it would be expecting way too much to anticipate that merit-based promotions will happen. Even leading academics accuse each other of practicing tribalism at work (Kagolo 2008). Whether Uganda is ethnically challenged or not is yet to be confirmed, but what is clear is that the concern is more prominent than ever before and cannot be wished away. *Manyiani* (whom do I know) and *Mwanawaani* (whose child) are two ethnically based social formations dominating the Ugandan scene, and have been institutionalised to the point that they sometimes influence the way formal institutions operate. In Uganda there is a saying that *technical know who is better than technical know how*, meaning that in order to get a job or a promotion, who one knows matters more than what one knows. The more the interpersonal relationships in the civil service are influenced by ethnicity, the more it may compromise neutrality, impartiality and merit.

ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURE IN UGANDA'S CIVIL SERVICE

This study notes that cultural values are numerous, flexible, hidden, changing, intersecting, dynamic and resilient. Therefore the ones used in this study are only indicative and not exhaustive. In a recent study, Karyeija (2010) found that large power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, political neutrality and ethnicity characterise Uganda's administrative culture.

On a scale ranging from 1 to 5, whereby 1 represents the least prevalence of the variable and 5 the highest, an index which revealed the following results based on the mean was developed: power distance 3,7, uncertainty avoidance 3,8, high political neutrality 3,9, and

Table 1 Perceptions Index of administrative culture in Uganda

Variable	Mean
Political neutrality	3,9
Strong uncertainty avoidance	3,8
Large power distance	3,7
High ethnicity	3,4

ethnicity 3,5, as reported in table1 above. All the four variables scored above the median (i.e., 3) and thus one may conclude that the Ugandan bureaucracy is characterised by a high presence of *Large power distance* was evidenced by a steep hierarchy, a wide range of salaries, the colonial chief mentality, disparities in status and a focus on status symbols, *Strong uncertainty avoidance* was mainly suggested by rule following, risk aversion and lack of innovation, and *High political neutrality* where bureaucrats prefer to be neutral and independent of the politicians, but at the same time politicians, and deride the politicisation of the civil service. With regard to *ethnicity*, findings revealed that there is ethnically based favouritism.

LARGE POWER DISTANCE AND THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Hierarchy

Those who value hierarchies tend to expect juniors to express deep loyalty. This tendency has serious implications for the performance appraisal system. For instance, members of the low cadre civil service note in interviews that while they are carrying out their jobs, what matters is to fulfil the supervisor's personal preferences, as an individual, and not in his/her official capacity. As such, the ultimate grading in the performance appraisal system *firstly* does not measure what the individual staff member has done for the organisation. *Secondly*, there is the problem of supervisor's imposing goals upon their staff rather than the staff participating in devising what those goals should be. It is expected that the rater and the ratee sit down and agree on targets, but this seems not to be what is practiced. If the performance appraisal system is to be implemented as prescribed in the guidelines, then it ought to be fair, transparent, objective and participatory.

Feedback management and appraisal environment

Feedback management is important in the conduct of performance appraisal. The rater is responsible to ensure that feedback is given to the ratee. Feedback during performance

appraisal reviews in Europe tends to allow the ratee to express dissent. Such behaviour is not considered appropriate to employees in Uganda, for face-saving is regarded as more important than learning from the appraisal review. Respondents indicate that there is a high propensity for the *command and control* method of directing activities, yet the performance appraisal system promotes the view that people should discuss the variables upon which their success will be measured.

In addition to the problem of feedback, the environment in which the performance appraisal exercise is conducted also emphasises power distance and therefore undermines the intention of the appraisal meeting. The study found that most appraisal meetings take place in the raters' office and the rater may allow interruptions, taking phone calls and attending to other people.

Power distance in terms of gender and generational differences

Large power distance partly arises from some people being awarded a culturally superior status. The inequality of persons, not least gender and generation differences, causes the appropriateness of the performance appraisal system to come into question because the latter is predicated upon supervisors and subordinates negotiating the subordinate's annual objectives. In terms of gender, there is always tension when a supervisor is a woman and she must negotiate objectives with men. In such cases it is common to find that the rater's decisions are not based on facts but on opinion. Consequently the spirit of the performance appraisal system is undermined.

The attitude of the chief

If a supervisor assumes himself to be the *chief*, he assumes that every element of power is in his hands. *Firstly,* the rater and the ratee may avoid instances where self-esteem can be hurt. *Secondly*, since the appraisal exercise is not yet seen as a tool for wielding power, assessors do not feel a sense of pride and power when using it. Therefore, as long as those in authority think that the performance appraisal does not give them the ability to dole out rewards and sanctions, they will either not carry out the appraisal or simply fill it out in a perfunctory manner.

Privileges and status symbols and their effect on performance appraisal

The belief that one's rank in the hierarchy reflects differences in quality stimulates the need and desire to be promoted. Given that the performance appraisal system is not directly tied to the promotion system, it is seen as a waste of time. Evidence from the interviews supports the conclusion that self-assessment and agreement between the rater and ratee on a joint action plan is considered inconsistent with the 'natural flow of power', as one respondent put it. The rater must hand over the appraisal form to a countersigning officer to confirm that the assessment is done correctly and is genuine. Consequently the appraisal exercise is perceived as a tool that undermines the power, influence, status and privilege of the *chief.*

STRONG UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL REFORMS

The paradox of rule following

It may seem paradoxical that civil servants who feel comfortable being rule followers are uncomfortable with the appraisal which is also a set of rules. One possible explanation for the paradox in rule following is that when rules tend to disfavour employees and cause them to feel uncertain, the employees try to circumvent them. In this case, the rater feels in charge of the future by determining the performance targets – yet it undermines the principle of having both parties agree on performance targets. Another reason for the paradox in rule following is that since respect and promotion are results of seniority, the performance appraisal system may be undermined because of the general attitude towards young people. Although there are so many rules and regulations guiding the usage of performance appraisal, they are not respected as they ought to be.

The effect of 'psychological contract' on performance appraisal

In societies with high uncertainty avoidance cultures, there is a unique type of *psychological contract* whereby the supervisor and the subordinate tend to back up each other even if the performance of the junior is poor (Schein 1999). There is a need for interdependence that is mutually beneficial. One respondent had this to say: "I know my permanent secretary is very busy. When the time for them comes like for promotion, I will fill them out and take them to him for signing. He is not bothered about those so-called indicators." The intention of the *contract* is to forestall uncertainty. All this contributes to sabotaging the appraisal at the implementation phase.

Uncertainty and performance targets

Some of the work in the civil service is difficult to quantify. For instance, it's difficult to do a joint appraisal on the basis of agreed indicators when the standing orders explicitly give heads of department control over a subordinates' schedule through a clause stating that the junior will handle "…any other tasks that may be assigned by the superiors." It is also possible that a subordinate could be required to do work outside his job description, and then it becomes practically impossible to appraise the person on such tasks. Thus in the long run, unless this mismatch is managed the performance appraisal cannot take root.

Ambiguity in relation to performance appraisal

Ambiguity in the performance appraisal thwarts innovation, which is intended to be one of the main purposes of the appraisal exercise. Much as there are guidelines and workshops, measuring qualitative work quantitatively, requires a high level of specificity in a strong uncertainty context like Uganda. Take for example the qualitative variables specified under *Part C* of the appraisal form: Professional knowledge, Planning, Organising, Leadership,

Decision making, Management of resources, and Loyalty; these are not clearly denoted with marks. The potential conflict of interest is very high due to ambiguity.

Innovation in relation to performance appraisal

In large uncertainty-avoidance cultures, innovation is less encouraged. Radical ideas are avoided in favour of maintaining the status quo, rendering the appraisal system less effective. This situation is most apparent when the performance appraisal form requires a supervisor to assess the junior's core job competencies, and yet there is no provision for evaluating the level of creativity and innovativeness of the civil servant. The whole appraisal form is composed in such a way that it focuses on technical solutions and behaviour – hence a challenge to the appraisal reform.

Risk aversion and performance appraisal

The relatively high uncertainty avoidance implies unwillingness to take risks and accept the changes the performance appraisal system would entail if fully implemented. This is manifested in the reluctance by civil servants to take initiatives outside of prescribed roles. This is confirmed by an official who says: "Within the civil service, we handle things very carefully. Therefore for the performance appraisal to succeed, we have to implement it in bits, but if you want to make people commit themselves to an ambitious programme, they coil. Civil servants are risk averse!" she said. I interpret this quote to mean that civil servants approach appraisal reforms with caution.

Expert power and performance appraisal

The recognition of the value of expert power is characteristic of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005:189). This leads to the proposition that had the performance appraisal form been given more prominence and reference to expert power; it would have been more effective. Of the 10 competence areas for evaluation, only one refers to expertise. If the appraisal is perceived as an instrument which minimally addresses expertise, then ratees do not consider it useful and will naturally give it less attention in relation to other activities. In addition, the desire for experts to be recognised also undermines the performance appraisal because Ugandans have a strong need to be surrounded by loyal people. In interviews, respondents agreed that having loyal juniors not only motivates the senior, but is desirable.

POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL REFORMS

The political aspects are very important for the success of appraisal reforms. President Museveni personally introduced key reform issues to Uganda. He claimed that these reforms were hatched during the five years he was leading a guerrilla war. However, given the prevailing situation concerning political support, the most successful exercise was downsizing

of the civil service by about 54% in five years. It is the contention of this study that the performance appraisal has limited support because of high political neutrality amongst the civil servants and because they may also have less support for the incumbent.

Political will and symbolism

Some respondents indicate that the performance appraisals, together with other reforms are intended to give the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government much needed legitimacy. The reforms appear to give an impression that the fundamental change of making the civil service more efficient and effective has been achieved. Sometimes government actions are intended to gain public support. The population is demanding more accountability from the government and one way to show this accountability is to provide a package of administrative reforms within the public service. Findings of this research show that civil servants are seldom dismissed due to poor performance. One could argue that the aim of portraying the government in good light through the introduction of the appraisal system is a mere symbolic act rather than a true attempt to make the public service better.

With the government taking a cautionary approach, it is understandable that no reward has been linked to the appraisal while the lack of punishment for not fully implementing the system has created a sense of low priority and less attention being given to the appraisal system. Although most interviewees disfavour coercive measures, they highlight the lack of attention the appraisal receives and the absence of political will to make government implement it. Research findings show that bureaucrats want to keep aloof from the politicians and therefore resist the performance appraisal because it is perceived as a tool of the NRM.

Attitude of the politicians towards civil servants

As noted by Polidano (1999:12), the introduction of modern performance-oriented staff appraisal is a straightforward exercise, but the difficulty comes afterwards because governments are reluctant to link appraisals to career rewards and sanctions. Promotions continue to be based on seniority and at times patronage. Uganda has made bold steps in applying this model of appraisal, but it falls short because the reform turns out to be long on rhetoric and short on results.

Data denotes that in order for the performance appraisal to succeed it must have the support and approval of politicians. Therefore, it is incumbent upon bureaucrats to design appraisal reforms that appeal to politicians. Yet sometimes a gap looms between political priorities and bureaucratic priorities which do not support appraisal reforms. One way to reduce this gap is for the civil servants to develop systems and mechanisms of translating political agendas into implementable policies.

Patronage

There have been several complaints that top public sector positions, especially in the important government ministries like defense, have been filled by politically loyal officials. This has undermined the importance of the performance appraisal system which should ideally lead to promotions. The President appoints the permanent secretary and, therefore

those who aspire for the top post would rather play politics. The performance appraisal becomes ineffective since employees consider it not as an instrument to promote merit, but party loyalty.

One may well ask: if the performance appraisal is not related to promotion, then does it matter if people are recruited on the basis of patronage? This is the dilemma. *Firstly*, it brings the problem of double standards: one group of civil servants is promoted on the basis of the performance appraisal and another group is promoted on the basis of political patronage. *Secondly*, there is the issue of presidential appointments which are political in nature; for instance, in the Ugandan civil service, all appointments from assistant commissioner to permanent secretary are presidential appointments. This means applicants for such positions are interviewed by the Public Service Commission and forwarded to the president for appointment. However, if for any reason, the President is not comfortable with an appointee, he will not appoint the person. In addition, the President also has the discretion to appoint individuals and recommend them to the public service for formality purposes. Therefore, if these appointments are political, then promotions based on the appraisal will not be the norm and hence the appraisal system becomes irrelevant.

Patronage and performance appraisal

Most respondents managing the reform process observed that administrative reforms (of which the appraisal is a small component) are dominated by monetary enticements. The merits of the performance appraisal are inconsequential as long as the bureaucrats can profiteer by accepting the reforms. In a study including Uganda, it has been reported that civil service officials negotiate with donors over the design of projects, but the officials' main concern is their own personal financial benefit. Other findings indicate that during the initial stages of the performance appraisal, the idea of participating in a big reform programme is welcomed. It created opportunities for certain civil servants in the form of salaries, allowances, official cars, and domestic or foreign trips. The interviews indicate that civil servants will prefer to give attention to issues where they can earn extra money from the donors.

EFFECTS OF ETHNICITY ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL REFORMS

The *Manyiani* (I know who) factor seems to have some influence over the way public administration operates in Uganda. Management events in Africa reveal a complex of ethnic *arithmetic* whereby tribal preferences take precedence over formal procedures for recruitment and promotion (Montgomery 1986). Similar trends were found in the Ugandan civil service where respectable leaders indicated that while executing the performance appraisal form, it is the personal, *kinship*, and informal relations that guide most of the process, though it will not be admitted or documented. In fact one senior bureaucrat has this to say: "Even when I have a brother or relative in another department, I try to seek friendship with his boss so that he favours him, and this is or will be replicated in my own department if chance arises." The impression created therefore is that it is who you know, not what you know that really matters while being evaluated. In doing so, the whole appraisal process is compromised.

Arguably, people in Uganda are group-oriented and paternalistic in nature, and therefore are capable of searching for ethnic homogeneity as an adaptive response to alienation in the work place. Over 75% of respondents in this study opine that tribal and ethnic considerations influence administrative practices in the civil service. Interviewees divulge that in some public departments people from western and southern Uganda dominate senior posts. This issue of exclusion has been blamed for causing dissatisfaction, reducing morale, increasing absenteeism and poor motivation in the way the appraisal reforms are perceived and implemented.

In some cases ethnic homogeneity has enhanced the effective and successful implementation of the performance appraisal because people sharing values are likely to support one another during crises, and the lower staff may accept appraisal results from their own *kin*. This is commonly seen in the recruitment and deployment of support staff. Respondents reveal that it is common for an officer who is entitled to official transport to prefer a driver who hails from the same district. The existence of a complex system of *ethnic arithmetic*, by which tribal preferences take precedence over formal procedures for recruitment and promotion, can be found in governments everywhere.

CONCLUSION

The Ugandan civil servants have been reluctant to embrace the performance appraisal system because it does not *fit* with the dominant cultural attitudes and administrative behaviour. But apart from a cultural adjustment programme on the part of the civil servants, reformers must recognise the nature of Uganda's bureaucracy and design a performance appraisal system that does not appear to undermine or confront these cultural tendencies. Instead they must manipulate them and shape a performance management tool for building a culture of performance. Results indicate that the performance appraisal is sabotaged by the civil servants because they are politically neutral and less partisan. The Uganda's civil service is ethnically fractionalised. This has led to irregular appointments and promotions, which definitely undermine the intention of the merit-based appraisal system.

This study has at least two implications for other African countries: *firstly*, administrative culture matters and it should be studied, understood, managed and developed. *Secondly*, it is important to establish how administrative culture manifests itself in various ways across Africa and influences policy reform and change in each country. This is because most of the reforms, such as the performance appraisal, are structured according to Anglo-Western value systems which are instrumentally rational and hence may not be congruent with the African culture. In sum, as the Ugandan case demonstrates, administrative culture matters for the successful implementation of performance appraisal reforms in Africa.

NOTES

1. The boss conceives himself as a colonial chief who had legislative, executive, judicial, and administrative powers.

2. Informality denotes socially shared unwritten rules that are created, communicated and enforced unofficially.

3. Characteristics of ethnicity are; a) common geographic origin: b) migratory status; c) race; d) language or dialect; e) religious faith; f) ties that transcend kinship, neighbourhood, and community boundaries; h) literature, folklore, and music; i) food preferences; j)settlement and employment patterns; k) special interests with regard to politics; l) institutions that specifically secure and maintain the group; m) an internal sense of distinctiveness, and n) an external perception of distinctiveness (Thernstrom 1980).

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