

Discussion on the Quantification-Based Performance Evaluation of Rural County Government

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Abstract

At present the government performance evaluation has already become popular in all fields of government performance management. It contributes a lot to the construction of service-oriented government. However, the quantitative evaluation on government performance is far different from each other in practice. This paper tends to explore the development trend of quantitative evaluation on agricultural county government's performance, hoping to provide with reference for agricultural county government understanding and realizing performance management completely.

Keywords: Public administration, Performance management, Performance evaluation

Presently relevant theories about public organization's performance evaluation have been mature. The quantitative evaluation on government performance has gradually become popular at different administrative levels in China. Considering the special features of agricultural county government, the quantitative evaluation on its performance needs to meet higher requirements. This paper will discuss the necessity of making quantitative evaluation on agricultural county government's performance.

1. The characteristics of agricultural county government

The research object in this paper is the agricultural county government that is appointed by the central government. Its administrative position is between the province, city, and the town. It is a relatively independent and legal administrative organization at a lower level with complete government functions and is in charge of certain region. It belongs to certain administrative level with special functions. The agricultural county government has unique characteristics that will limit its performance evaluation. At present, characteristics of agricultural county government include:

(1) Stay in a lower level in the management system. In the administrative management system from the central to the local in China, the agricultural county (city) government is merely one of management levels. Above there are the central, provincial, and city government. The agricultural county (city) government aims at executing the guidance and policy from higher levels. Below there are the town and other grass-roots units. Therefore, the agricultural county (city) government should make up policies and measures that are right for local development. Considering the administrative modes and features, the local administrative organization adopts a leader-responsibility system. The administrative organization at a lower level should submit to the lead of the one at a higher level. The local administrative organization should submit to the lead of the central government. The special position determines that the agricultural county (city) government should pay attention to its execution function in constructing a service-oriented government. Therefore, a quantitative evaluation on its performance becomes necessary in order to make the evaluation more convincible.

(2) The particularities of management. Because the local resources endowments are different, agricultural counties are under the influences of natural environment and climates, which causes the diversity of agricultural county (city) government's work. In executing the central, provincial, and city government's policies, the agricultural county (city) government has to take local conditions into consideration to make decisions. It means the agricultural county (city) government needs to try its best to meet the requirements in practice. In fact, the official departments have different responsibilities and functions. The agricultural county (city) government holds a great dominance in constructing a service-oriented government. Therefore, it is necessary to set up some parameters for a quantitative evaluation on government performance in order to reflect local conditions more scientifically.

(3) The comprehensiveness of management. The agricultural county (city) government is a typical representative in China's administrative organizations. It has all functional departments that are the same with its upper government. This is for a comprehensive management of all public affairs. However, this organizational mode has poor flexibility and may cause a management dilemma, namely "huge and overstaffed organization". Then, the quantitative evaluation on performance can help to drive the agricultural county government work better.

2. The connotation and concept of agricultural county government's performance evaluation

In western countries, the government performance is also named as "public productivity", "national productivity", "public organization performance", "government achievement", and "government behavior". In the literal meaning, it means the achievement and effect gained by the government. It has rich connotation. On one hand, it includes the government's "output" performance, namely the performance of government in providing with public service and arranging social management. On the other hand, it includes the government's "process" performance, namely the performance of government in exercising its functions. The government performance can be divided into organization performance and individual performance. The former includes the overall performance of government at certain level, the performance of the government's functional department, and the team performance. This paper focuses on the quantitative evaluation on the agricultural county government's overall performance.

For the agricultural county government management, the core is to improve performance. Therefore, the first step is to understand and evaluate present performance. Use scientific method, standards, and procedures and make right evaluations on the agricultural county government and its departments' performances, achievements, and practical work. By this way, we can further improve and perfect the government performance.

The agricultural county government's performance evaluation is based on efficiency, ability, service quality, and the satisfaction degree of the public. Make evaluation and grade the performance by assessing the agricultural county government's input, output, middle achievement, and final achievement in the management process. The government performance evaluation is based on the performance, pursuing the direct control of public responsibility mechanism over government's public departments, and pursuing that the government management will be responsible for legal institutions and customers. According to the evaluation standards, the service quality and public needs are primary, what indicates a management idea of public responsibility and customer priority. The evaluation aims at enhancing and perfecting the public responsibility mechanism, and making the agricultural county government more competitive in managing public businesses, transferring public services, and improving living qualities.

The quantitative evaluation chiefly focuses on the agricultural county government's expenses, operations, and social effects in management activities. By measuring these aspects, the performance can be graded. The agricultural county government's performance evaluation is not a single behavioral process but a behavioral system and a comprehensive process composed of many rings: describe the evaluation's requirements and objects, establish the evaluation's aims and quantitative goals, make up evaluation standards, make performance evaluation according to standards, compare performance results and goals, analyze and report the performance results, and improve the government management based on performance evaluation.

3. The agricultural county government's performance evaluation has profound management ideas.

The management idea existed in the agricultural county government's performance evaluation is reflected by the government performance evaluation's nature, values, and characteristics. In nature, government performance evaluation is a kind of market responsibility mechanism. Cooper concludes this mechanism as: firstly, it is an "economic efficiency assumption"; secondly, it "adopts cost-interest analysis method"; thirdly, it is to "establish performance standards by an input-output mode, emphasizing on the evaluation on the output"; fourthly, it is to "define the market responsibility mechanism based on customer satisfaction. This definition is to regard citizen as consumer." Therefore, the agricultural county government's performance evaluation, the market responsibility mechanism is kind of local residents' direct control and choice over the public services provided by the agricultural county government. The agricultural county government is responsible for the local residents. Without residents' choice, it is hard to form the market mechanism. As a result, it can not inspire a competition among public service suppliers. Therefore, it is impossible to form the public responsibility mechanism in the agricultural county government.

In values, the value orientation of agricultural county government's performance evaluation determines the performance evaluation's standards. Therefore, only when there is reasonable value orientation in government performance evaluation, can we construct scientific performance evaluation standards. For the evaluation on agricultural county government's public service supply, just as what was said by Pennock, the key should focus on the aspects that meet the needs ----- not only the government's needs but also the human needs. Only by meeting the human needs, can the policy prove its values for the human being. And the policy can prove its rationality of existence. With the base of social fairness, contemporary government management emphasizes on public responsibility and democratic participation, making efficiency, orders, social fairness, and democracy become the essential value orientation of agricultural county government's performance evaluation. The value orientation of efficiency reflects the quantitative requirement of the society for government management performance. The value

orientation of orders, social fairness, and democracy is a kind of interactive behavioral mode that can solve all social relationship and interest conflicts, reflecting the qualitative requirement of the society for government management. In the performance evaluation process, these value orientations are embodied by management efficiency, management ability, public responsibility, and satisfaction degree of the public.

In the characteristics aspect, the implementation of agricultural county government's performance evaluation is to meet the requirements of the information and democracy trend for government management. As an important content and method of government management, the evaluation is special because the appraisal of primary tasks and the results have already push managers using a new view to think about the accomplishment of management plan or certain specific projects. The agricultural county government management includes not only the public departments' management of local public business, but also the management of internal business; not only the management of affairs, but also the management of any organization. All these facts contribute to the form of the characteristics of agricultural county government's performance evaluation: complexity, multi-levels, hard to make quantitative evaluation, multi-objects, and objectiveness.

4. The problems in China's agricultural county government's quantitative performance evaluation and the necessity of quantitative evaluation system study

Relevant theories and practices about agricultural county government's performance evaluation are still in a researching stage. Recently, as an important content of agricultural county government's performance evaluation system, although quantitative evaluation research has already made new progresses, it still serves as a bottleneck of performance evaluation. In a sense, this condition blocks the development and progress of administrative management system in China.

(1) Unclear concept

Equalize government performance evaluation with agricultural county government's performance management. Performance management is a set of complete management system. Performance evaluation is the core ring of performance management and also the important tool and method. It reflects performance management's specific operational method. The agricultural county government's performance evaluation is based on efficiency, ability, service quality, and the satisfaction degree of the public. Make evaluation and grade the performance by assessing the agricultural county government's input, output, middle achievement, and final achievement in the management process.

(2) Unclear objects of quantitative research

Different index systems are right for different agricultural county governments and their departments. An index system should guarantee a relatively smaller error in a horizontal comparison and reflect the differences of different departments in agricultural county government. For a vertical comparison among the departments of agricultural county government, the index system should also reflect the characteristics of climates and grains. Many researches adopt certain quantitative methods and index systems and draw relevant conclusions. However, they never report how these index systems are constructed, the construction method, the empirical results, and what kind of governments these index systems are right for. These researches fail to make these issues clear. Their conclusions need to further prove.

(3) The unilateral performance evaluation index

Because most agricultural county areas are undeveloped, there are no scientific performance evaluation index systems. They merely copy what is used in industrial cities, equalizing economic performance with government performance. To evaluate work performance is not based on performance and the contribution to organizational goals and missions, but whether obey rules, and whether meet leaders' intentions. The participation of the public and administrative counterparts needs to be further enhanced. Theoretical direction is poor. The quantitative performance evaluation on agricultural county government needs to be further studied. The aim should be defined clearly. The evaluation standards are too simple and the indexes are too general. The evaluation results are impractical in a sense.

(4) The lagged-behind and simple quantitative research method

Presently, the agricultural county government's performance evaluation is not popular. Relevant quantitative research methods are lagged behind heavily. For using DEA to evaluate agricultural county government and its relevant departments' performance, in 1985, a famous American scholar adopted DEA to study the influences of large city organization on local police service efficiency in America, revealing the different influences of institutional structures on performances. Twenty years later, in 2004, domestic scholars began to make similar studies. Till 2007, some scholars introduced DEA evaluation into agricultural county government's performance evaluation.

(5) Unsystematic government's comprehensive performance evaluation

The contents and goals of agricultural county government's comprehensive performance evaluation are too narrow and the designed evaluation frame is unilateral. Therefore, the performance evaluation is not objective and comprehensive. Presently, the relatively general analysis basically belongs to an effect analysis. In other words, firstly divide the index systems that reflect the government performance results into economic subsystem, political subsystem, and social subsystem. Each subsystem includes many indexes. Then define every subsystem and its main index according to different methods. Finally multiply and add the practical value of every index and relevant weight. Get the comprehensive performance value of the government during certain period. Although this effect analysis realizes the emphasis on government performance results (achievements) in new public management in a sense, it neglects the evaluation on agricultural county government's achievement efficiency and seldom analyzes the input-output efficiency. Besides, few analyses are about the analysis of coordination among agricultural county government's performance subsystems and the analysis of continuous improvement ability in the time sequence. According to systematic opinions, only when the agricultural county government performance's development degree, efficiency degree, coordination degree, and continuousness degree are integrated into the big frame of government comprehensive performance (sustainable development degree), can it reflect the government's comprehensive performance objectively and generally, showing the government's requirement for multi-values orientations.

(6) The separation between evaluation subject and research subject

At present, most researchers who focus on government performance evaluation are "academism" scholars in colleges or related with administrative management. However, the practitioners of government performance evaluation are mostly public functionaries in departments of government. Researchers seldom take part in government's performance evaluation process. They seldom make performance evaluation on agricultural county government's performance. For agricultural county government, because of limits of conditions, evaluators seldom care about theoretical research. Even if researchers make experimental performance evaluation for agricultural county government, some reasons, such as unsuccessful communication with relevant departments of agricultural county government, and weakness of fundamental statistical work, may lead to the absence or distortion of data, causing a decrease of quantitative research's quality and credibility. The separation between evaluation subject and research subject leads to a gap between theories and practices.

(7) The unilateral use of comprehensive quantitative research method

The uniqueness and complexity of agricultural county government determines that its evaluation has to be based on many methods. For the research on complex political system, if there is no coordination of relevant evaluation technologies and statistical technologies, one method is too unilateral, such as the use of DEA evaluation method. A complex political system has many input and output indexes and hard to be established. As there is a significant positive correlation between input indexes, it means the information reflected by them is highly overlapped. It not only makes the DEA mode design and the calculation process more difficult. What's more important, it is hard to find out the obvious logic relationship between performance evaluation results and indexes. Without key points, the evaluation indexes' economic meanings are unclear. Therefore, if DEA analysis combines with certain statistical models, such as factor analysis model, regression model, and time sequence model, it will help to avoid the multi-collinear issue. Identify the key influencing factors and discuss further the external reasons of government and the proportion of government technological improvement. For another instance, the implement of balanced scorecard is also unilateral. Its implementation is based on the causality analysis of indexes in different aspects and internal indexes in every aspect. The internal consistency between the logical analysis method and the analytic network process (ANP) makes the balanced scorecard and the analytic network process can be used at the same time. In the causality analysis process, using the analytic network process to determine the rational weights of indexes in different aspects can enhance the analysis function of the balanced scorecard method. Besides, we should pay more attentions to the comprehensive implementation of the balanced scorecard method, the economic value-added (EVA) method, and the activity-based costing (ABC).

5. Conclusion

Because there are many problems in the quantitative research on the agricultural county government's performance evaluation and the special significance of quantitative performance evaluation, it becomes necessary, important, and urgent to study the government's quantitative performance evaluation system. How we make an overall design for indexes of government's performance evaluation based on the quantitative evaluation's foundations, backgrounds, experiences, and value orientations, construct a set of scientific and rational quantitative evaluation method system, and make objective evaluation on government performance from an angle of government's sustainable development will become the key point of the research on the quantitative evaluation system of government performance.

Perfect the original index system for the agricultural county government further. According to the characteristics of agricultural county government, select scientific and rational indexes for the four evaluation systems and build up evaluation index systems for these departments. Increase the research samples and use BP neural network complete the prediction for government performance. Or, adopt a more scientific method to study the prediction for small sample data. Integrate the electric government's performance evaluation into government's comprehensive performance evaluation, making the quantitative evaluation process more scientific and the evaluation results more practical.

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