



## CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN BHUTAN: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT TEST

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### Abstract

Leadership is also frequently described as a quality or set of skills related to the capacity to persuade, inspire, and direct a group toward a desired result. The fundamental idea behind leadership is a dynamic process that has altered over time and is always evolving (Dambe & Moorad, 2008). Thus, be it in the government or the private sector, it is essential for the Managers or officers to possess the required attributes of leaders to increase organizational performances. The personnel agency of the Bhutanese civil service, Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) have been putting commendable effort in the leadership development projects for the all civil servants. A similar step towards the civil service reform was initiated by assessing the civil servants in the highest position level of Secretaries (EX1), Director-Generals (EX2), Directors (EX3) and the Chiefs (P1M). The assessment is known as Leadership Assessment Test (LAT) for executives and Executive Eligibility Assessment (EEA) for the Chiefs. A mixed method research study was conducted and after carefully studying and analyzing the data collected and inferences drawn, it was found that the assessment was successful in achieving its objectives to make accountability as the measure of the service. It is known that such assessment need to be implemented further to other levels within civil service after carefully scrutinizing and eliminating any loopholes in current assessment.

**Keywords:** Leadership assessment test (LAT), leadership development programs (LDP), RCSC, civil service reforms, civil servants, accountability, managing out, EX1, EX2, EX3 and P1M.

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## Introduction

In developing nations, the civil service is very crucial for socioeconomic development, effective governance, and maintaining political stability (Tshewang, 2015). The Civil Service is the backbone of the nation, and the country's development results are a mirror image of the Civil Service's performance. One of Bhutan's largest employers is the civil service, which has the sole obligation to serve the government with honesty, impartiality, and integrity as well as to administer public services for the benefit of the state (Gyeltshen, 2018). The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) is the apex institution for the civil service in Bhutan with the responsibility of "recruitment, career planning, deployment and in-service training of the civil servants" (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources [MoLHR], 2010). In order to achieve this goal, the RCSC has proposed and implemented various reforms in the fiscal year of 2014–2015 in response to an evaluation of the state of the civil service. These reforms allowed the civil service to reach its full potential and go from "good to great" (Choden, 2016).

The Leadership development programme has always been a top priority area in the reforms of the civil service by the personnel agency, RCSC. The agency has been putting a lot of emphasis on fostering leadership qualities and accords the need for leadership development in the civil service. Because they are the protector of special trust and care taker of the public resources, civil officials are required to exhibit the greatest caliber of leadership abilities in order to maintain employee satisfaction and boost organizational efficiency (Choden, 2018). Depending on the level of management and leadership inside their organisations, governments must handle complicated, multifaceted difficulties. For instance, the global coronavirus pandemic necessitates swift action from public sector leaders to guarantee the provision of crucial public services while safeguarding clients and staff (Gerson, 2020).

Considering all these, RCSC took a major step in civil service reform starting from January, 2022 and conducted the leadership assessment test for 62 executives in the positions of Secretaries and Director-generals. RCSC continued the assessment and further extended the assessment operations for Directors (EX3) and even for officers in P1 Management (P1 M) position level in order to identify and select the eligible and potential candidates for the Executive-level positions. The assessment was based on the Leadership Capability Framework (LCF) designed by RCSC. The Leadership assessments are conducted at regular frequencies and even currently is an ongoing

process where the assessments are now even being planned for the lower management level employees.

Therefore this paper aims to study various aspects of this assessment exercises conducted as part of reforms for the civil service. It also emphasizes to study the immediate implications that can be witnessed and also anticipate and foresee the implications that are likely to happen in the near future of the administration and governance in Bhutan.

## Problem Statement

The "leadership assessment exercise" is still considered as an important landmark in the reform activity and although the RCSC has the clear mandates and plan of actions behind the project, no detailed and clear information regarding the assessment is disseminated to the general public. Even no study or research has been conducted on these recent assessment activities until now and this provide a good scope to try to make a detailed study on these subjects and have clear cut understanding and information on it. The assessment was carried out in the crucial time of pandemic Covid-19 where the public servants were actively engaged in the implementation of plans and policies necessary for fighting against the virus. Thus, it may even arise questions and doubts on the minds of civil servants and specifically those working in the health sectors regarding the appropriateness of the time of conducting the assessment as the tests were written examinations and it obviously required a good time investment and well preparation.

Moreover, the exodus of civil servants have been seen after the relaxation of Covid-19 and when the countries like Australia and Canada reopened its international borders. The RCSC managed out 47 Executives who could not get through the assessment in March, 2022 and due to this some also pointed out that the fear and job insecurity has pushed the civil servants to leave the system. Therefor such reforms and transformations in the civil service is also causing the mass resignation of civil servants and especially of mid-level professionals and critical employees (Wangchuk, 2023).

This study will, thus, try to make a clear understanding about the RCSC's decision on undertaking such exercise and a clear future plan of actions and their system of management of employees after the exercises.

## Research Objectives

1. To understand the different aspects of the leadership assessment exercises

2. To analyze the impact of leadership assessment test on Bhutanese civil services
3. To identify the issues related to the leadership assessment test

### Literature review

The secondary source of information known is through the literature review and it offers thorough guidance on how to conduct the current study, including methodology, theoretical knowledge, and key findings (Yangdon, 2021). For the vivid understanding of the study and to have the comprehensive background and secondary information regarding the topic, literature has been divided into various headings. The headings include (I) Motivation and background of Leadership Assessment Test, (II) Leadership Assessment Test for the EX1/2, (III) Leadership Assessment Test for EX3, (IV) Executive Eligibility Assessment for P1M and (V) The Leadership development program for P2M.

### Leadership Assessment test in Bhutan: Motivation and Background

An executive performance evaluation tool designed to improve and clarify roles and accountability is called the Leadership Assessment Exercise. The Leadership Assessment Test and the civil service reform by RCSC is also one way or other inspired by His Majesty the King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk when His Majesty particularly focused on strengthening the accountability of civil servants and other important reforms during the National Speech on 114<sup>th</sup> National day Celebration on December 17, 2021. On 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021, only few days after the speech there was an article written by Lhamo (2021), where it was clearly highlighted that the RCSC will start to evaluate the Government Secretaries (EX1) and Director-Generals (EX2) from January, 2022 in an effort to enhance performance and strengthen accountability.

It was also known from the officials of RCSC that they were motivated by His Majesty the King's Royal Address to "boldly embrace accountability as a measure of our service".

"We start with the civil service leadership since it is leaders that generate results and exhibit responsibility in their particular organisations," an RCSC official stated.

It was vividly pointed out by RCSC that those who can get through the assessment will be acknowledged and rewarded, while those who cannot will be managed out after proper evaluation. A high-level independent panel was established to carry out the assessments. The assessment's findings helped the RCSC make decisions about

career and succession planning, as well as, about offering alternate career paths to officials who are judged to not be the greatest candidates for their current roles.

Accountability is the primary force behind the radical transformation of public service into an organisation that achieves our national objectives.

### Leadership Assessment Test for EX1 and EX2

The Royal Civil Service Commission's inaugural leadership assessment exercise in January, 2022 revealed that 50% of the 62 executive-level public officials, including Secretaries (EX1) and Director-Generals (EX2), failed to satisfy of the standards set by the Commission (Lhamo, 2022). Out of 62 executives, 18 of them were Secretaries and rest 44 were Director Generals. According to RCSC representatives, the organisation intended to properly reward and recognise individuals who were able to perform and those who show lack the ability to perform would be removed from their existing roles to create room for those who are more qualified. This could entail giving them the choice to resign or retire as well as managing them into lower-level employment.

Forty-four executives of the 47 who failed the leadership assessment vacated their offices on April, 2022. The commission stated that 44 executives chose to take a special retirement offer, in which they were given retirement benefits and also the additional salaries of the remaining months before they superannuate. Besides this, 2 executives chose to be demoted and another moved to a specialist position level. It was known through the commission that, of 47 executives who could not meet the assessment expectations, 7 were Secretaries, 22 were Director-Generals and 18 were Directors.

Only 7%, or roughly 4 people out of 62, had exceeded expectations, the Commission stated in a press release. For additional evaluation on whether they are qualified to take on extended roles, they were assessed further. The RCSC was always careful and never revealed the names of managed out executives publicly. The RCSC contacted the secretaries and director generals one-on-one to inform them of the results.

The panel of the assessment for the executives comprised of the intellectuals form the local and international level. The panel, according to the press release, concentrated on evaluating traits that would be essential for tackling problems Bhutan will face in the future. The panel evaluated the executives' aptitude for managing people, their capacity to think critically and work with others outside of their organisations, as well as their commitment to and capacity for achieving results.

Additionally, the evaluation was based on the executive's work goals, reactions to hypothetical work-related events, comments on their leadership abilities from peers, superiors, and subordinates, as well as their performance in both the group and individual interviews. The panel evaluated their capacity to set themselves, their teams, and their organisations up for success. The Commission has used the panel's evaluations as a reference for making a number of important choices (RCSC, 2022).

Similar assessments were carried out for officers at the director-level in the month of February, 2022. "The RCSC is reviewing and revamping its system and approach to shift the entire civil service to a more effective personnel management system to support Bhutan's transformation," the press release stated.

### Leadership Assessment Test for EX3

Following the evaluation of Secretaries and Directors-Generals, which took place in January, a leadership assessment exercise for Directors (EX3) revealed that one-third (or roughly 18) of the directors failed to meet the standards expected of executives in these positions. However,

another third (about 19) of the 59 Directors evaluated were promising. The RCSC initiated the similar process and managed them out, just like it had done with underperforming Secretaries and Directors-General. According to RCSC Officials, in order to forward our national goals, the choice to manage our executives out had to be made (Lhamo, 2022).

The RCSC further assessed the qualified directors' capacity to take on further responsibilities. The news release claimed that "along with executives at the secretarial and director-general position levels, these directors will be active in fostering civil service reforms and restructuring." These groundbreaking leadership evaluations have highlighted how crucial it is to have a system that regularly evaluates civil workers at all position levels. The RCSC started with the leadership of the civil service because, "it is our leaders who should drive results and exemplify accountability". The RCSC's approach to leadership selection and performance management has fundamentally changed as a result of all of these measures taken together. Similar to the assessment for EX1/2, the assessor panel was made up of local and international people.

**Table 1:** The Outcome of the Leadership Assessment Test for the Executives (EX1/2/3) by RCSC

Total executives assessed (EX1/2/3)			Number of Executives failed			Number of Executives Managed Out		
Secretaries	Director-Generals	Directors	Secretaries	Director-Generals	Directors	Demotion	Moved to specialist position	Voluntary resignation
18	44	59	7	22	18	2	1	44
Total = 115			Total = 47			Total = 47		

### Executive Eligibility Assessment (EEA) for P1M

As stated by Dolkar (2022) in the Kuensel dated 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2022, RCSC began the leadership assessment process for personnel at the P1 Management level on November 12, 2022. There are total of 423 P1 managerial post holders, according to the RCSC records. The assessment was anticipated to give the executive selection process more precise data points for merit-based selections. P1M constitutes the crucial talent pool for leadership jobs. All P1M officers who want to be considered for executive-level jobs were strongly encouraged to attend, according to an RCSC official. It was not mandatory for all to take part in the leadership assessment.

The official explained that the P1 evaluation is merely a requirement for eligibility; in order to be qualified for an executive post, applicants must pass the test. The RCSC official stated, "It is one of the requirements to apply for executive-level employment." The evaluation was based on the Leadership Capability Framework (LCF) of the

RCSC. These leadership evaluations are still conducted on a regular basis by the RCSC, and officials may choose to apply for further leadership assessment exercise.

Only 15% of 230 chiefs who participated in the leadership assessment of officers at the P1 Management (P1M) level were deemed to be the most outstanding and qualified for executive posts within the civil service. Following the Executive Eligibility Assessment (EEA) for P1M officers, the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS), commissioned by the RCSC, submitted its findings to the RCSC as information for upcoming executive selection. The RCSC reports that roughly 230 officers took part in this year's EEA. There were 190 male candidates and 40 female candidates (Dolkar, 2022).

An RCSC official stated that these outstanding officers will thereafter be given stretch assignments and enlarged tasks to further test their potential for Executive-level positions. Employees are given an unusual problem, a high amount of responsibility,

and a challenge to bring about change in stretch evaluations. The EEA, which consists of both the group and individual evaluations, is a component of RCSC's efforts to improve leadership selection, and attempts to discover exceptional candidates for Executive-level roles. Six distinguished local and international evaluators from the public and corporate sectors made up the assessment panel.

### The Leadership Development Programme (LDP) for P2M

The Royal Institute of Management (RIM) in collaboration with the RCSC invited application for the Leadership Development Programme for the civil servants in P2 level position of PMC. The programme is mainly focused on bringing positive changes in the mindset and behaviour of the future leaders as expected by the Leadership Compatibility Framework (LCF). The LDP consists of various modules and the first module for the LDP was conducted from 8-9<sup>th</sup> December, 2022. The whole program is expected to be completed in 4 to 6 months.

In order to enhance the learning for the program, the participants had to complete assignments before attending the workshop and also complete the regular learning and other assessment activities during and after the workshops. The participants are also expected to design and develop the Leadership Change Project which they have to implement as a post workshop assignment.

### Research Methodology

The study is conducted by incorporating both *qualitative* and *quantitative* research methodologies. Under the qualitative study, some questions regarding the perceptions and feeling of civil servants about the particular assessment exercises were asked in the survey questionnaire. Such information does not involve any number or a need to be deduced through any mathematical calculation. Rather, it was based on some non-quantifiable elements and the open-ended questionnaire formed the part of this method.

Under the quantitative component, all these data and responses received were analyzed through the Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) 21.0 version software and even tabulated using excel sheets, tables, graphs and charts to represent and demonstrate the inferences clearly. Many close-ended questions were asked which reached to a number that could be clearly represented through appropriate figures.

### Population and Sampling technique

The population of this study is the Bhutanese Civil Servants, especially the civil servants who have already undergone the assessment, which until now consists of the pool of Executive level civil servants in EX1, EX2 and EX3 position, the Secretaries, Director Generals and Directors and also the senior most P1M level civil servants of the Professional and Management level category, the Chiefs.

**Table 2:** Tabular representation regarding the size of the population of study.

Total number of Civil servants	Numbers of Civil Servants in various positions				Numbers of Civil Servants assessed (Population)			
	EX 1	EX 2	EX 3	P1	EX 1	EX 2	EX 3	P1
31,177	25	52	79	423	18	44	59	230
Total = 31,177	Total = 579				Total = 351			

The sampling method that was incorporated and used for study purpose was *purposive sampling*. As clearly stated in the research sample, the study mainly focuses on the perceptions of the civil servants who have already undergone the leadership assessment test. Thus, the very criteria for the inclusion in the sample for this study is the Bhutanese civil servant individual who has already undergone the assessment test. This makes the sample of this study very specific and limited.

### Data Collection tool

For this research study, both categories of data collection is employed for an extensive and detailed study. *Secondary data* collection was undertaken where the researches and studies conducted by various scholars in the same area of study was referred, properly analyzed and

incorporated under the literature part of this study. The *Primary data* collection was also conducted through online survey as the original data and responses from the sample was very critical to meet the objectives of the study.

The *Online questionnaires* survey was chosen as the data collection tools for this study. Being a student in a University of India, only the online method was seen to be convenient and appropriate as the data needed to be collected from the civil servants of Bhutan. In this method, *Google Forms survey* was used for collecting data through a series of questions to receive the response from individuals. The questionnaire included all kinds of questions, which are fixed-alternative, scale and open ended questions.

### Limitation of the study

Some drawbacks are always associated with the online survey method for data collection, where the response rate was very low and more importantly, the study is only limited to the responses submitted. And the findings and results of the study is solely dependent on the honesty and enthusiasm of the respondents. Besides this, the sampling method followed in this study is the Non-probability sampling methods. Such type of sample can be easy and cheaper to access, it is also associated with risk of sampling bias. Thus, the inferences that were made about the population might be weaker than with probability samples and the conclusions may be limited. However, effort has been made to make the non-probability sample as representative of the population as possible.

### Data analysis and findings

This section of the paper properly analyzes and display the primary data that are collected through the online questionnaire and according to the

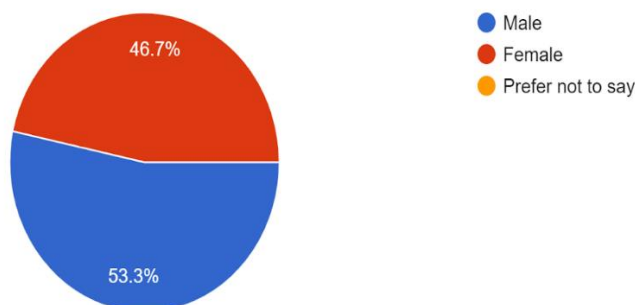
findings, the inferences and conclusions are drawn. This section consists of various parts and the first is the Demographic details or the profile of the respondents. Then the second and following parts as clearly bifurcated in the questionnaire, exhibits the data with related graphs and charts of the main focus area and its questions regarding the leadership assessment exercises in Bhutan.

### Demographic details

Generally the percentage of women in civil service in Bhutan has always been less as compared to the men and the disparity in the number is even greater in the higher top position civil servants and leaders. As according to the Civil service report of 2021, the percentage of Women in Executive positions (EX 1/2/3) was only 12.18% as against 87.82% of Men. However, it was quite motivating to note that the percentage of women civil servants in P1 level of Professional and Management category (PMC) stands equal to Men with 50% and 50% respectively (RCSC, 2021).

**Fig 1:** The number of male and female respondents

2. Select your gender.  
30 responses



According to the statistics, the total number of civil servants assessed by RCSC counts to total of 351 and the Executives forms 34.5% and the rest 65.5% forms the P1 level officers as the population of the study.

**Table 3:** Respondents by position level

Position level	Frequency	Percentage
EX 1	4	13.3
EX 2	6	20
EX 3	6	20
P1M	14	46.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

As clearly reflected in the table 3, even the number of respondents forms the maximum percentage from the P1M category of civil servants, the Chiefs with 46.7% then followed by the Executives in EX 2 and EX 3 position with 20% each, and finally EX 1 with 13.3%.

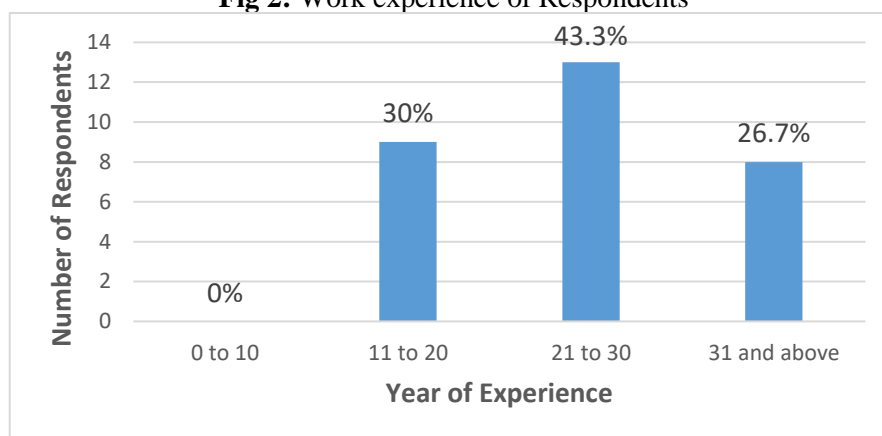
Since the number of civil servants assessed was very less as compared to the huge number of civil servants of 31, 177, the population for this study also becomes very less and this is associated with a drawback where the sample is not representative of the whole civil service. However, emphasize is made to make the sample more diverse and representative by collecting the response from civil servants working in different ministries and agencies. The table below represents the different ministries and the numbers of respondents that are associated with each ministry.

**Table 4:** Ministries and the number of respondents associated with the particular ministry

Ministry/Department	Frequency	Percentage
Prime Minister's Office (PMO)	3	10
Ministry of Health (MoH)	7	23.3
Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD)	8	26.7
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL)	5	16.7
Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MoENR)	3	10
Ministry of Finance (MoF)	4	13.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

As compared to other ministries, the number of respondents were more from the MoESD forming 26.7% of the total responses, then followed by the MoH with 23.3%. The MoAL has 5 responses which formed 16.75% and the MoF with 13.3% of total responses. Then the remaining ministry, MoENR and the PMO had equal responses with proportion of 10% each.

The graph below depicts the work experience of the respondents in the civil service. As all the sample of this study consists only of the senior most and highest position level Executives and Chiefs, most of them have the work experience of more than 20 years in the civil service sector and for Executives and even for some P1 Chiefs, their years of service in the civil service even exceeds 30 years.

**Fig 2:** Work experience of Respondents

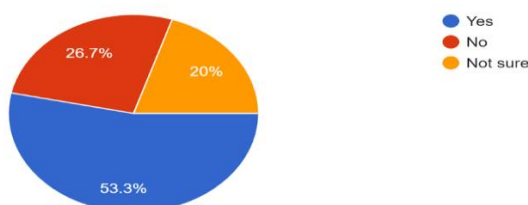
### Aspects of the Leadership Assessment Test

The leadership assessment framework comprised of four broad areas: i) Planning; ii) People management; iii) Performing now; and iv) Positioning for the future. This framework consisted of a four-part assessment process: i) Annual Performance Agreement (APA) and Leadership Statement (LS); ii) A Time Limited Situational Judgment Tests (SJT); iii) Group

interview; and iv) Individual Interview. A similar four-part assessment process for EX3 positions was used. Instead of submitting the APA and LS, emphasis was given to their job scope and achievements. And similarly for the P1M positions, where they had to submit a 500-word essay as the application and based on its evaluation, further assessment tasks were carried out.

**Fig 3:** Respondent's satisfaction on the curriculum of assessment

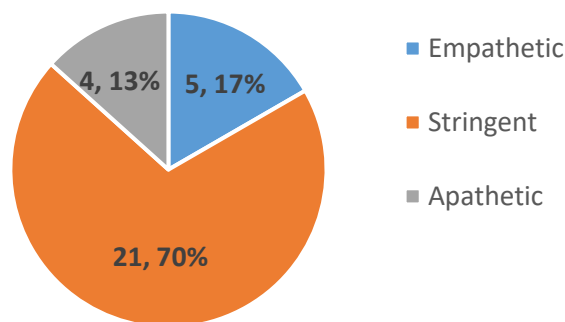
3. Are you satisfied with the curriculum of the assessment exercises?  
30 responses



When inquired about their perception and satisfaction on the curriculum of the assessment exercises, 53.3% felt that the assessment was well designed and it was based on defined objectives. However, 26.7% of them were not happy with the curriculum of assessment and they felt that it was more focused on the assessment that evaluated an individual’s knowledge and understandings on

leadership and did not consider any past contributions and achievements of individuals. An independent panel for the assessment was constituted with a balanced representation of individuals with varying degrees of experience, expertise and perceptions, both within and outside of the Civil Service, including external experts to provide a fair, transparent and objective assessment.

**Fig 4:** Respondent’s perception on the behaviour of the panel

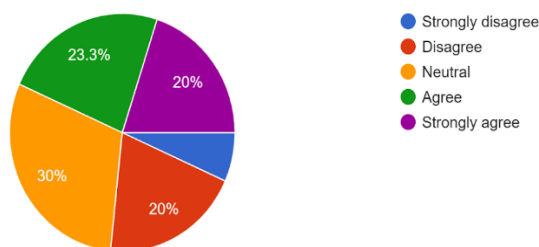


Majority of the respondents, 70% felt that the panels of the assessment test were very stringent and it was clearly evident from the performances of the Executives and the Chiefs where only small percent of candidates could crack through the entire round of assessment. The assessment led to the process of managing out 47 executives who could not perform up to the expectation in the assessment. The very objective of the Leadership Assessment

was to put in place a simple and effective system to assess top leadership in the Civil Service to make accountability a measure of service (RCSC, 2022). This reform initiative in the civil service was inspired and motivated through the golden words of His Majesty the King, when His Majesty a royal address to the nation on the December 17, 2021 and emphasized on the enhancing the accountability of civil servants.

**Fig 5:** Respondent’s perceptions on effectiveness of assessment in meeting its objectives

9. The LAT has best served its objectives to to assess top leadership in the Civil Service to make accountability a measure of service.  
30 responses



There were mixture of responses where almost 43.3% of the respondents agreed that the assessment exercise was very effective and the objectives of conducting such assessment was fulfilled. And 30% of them were not very sure to take their stand whether the assessment really served its aims and objectives. However, 26.7% of

the respondents felt that the assessment did not come out to be effective on meeting its objectives and they felt that instead of introducing an accountability in the system, it instilled a fear in the minds of all public servants and as a result lost many talented and experienced colleagues by



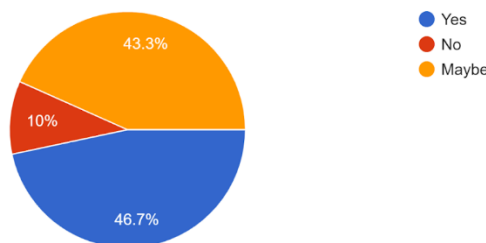
voluntary resignations. Moreover, they regarded the assessment as a process of filtration of civil

servant leaders and for the right sizing of the civil service sector.

**Fig 6:** The requirement of assessment for the lower level civil service

10. Do you think that such leadership assessment exercises should be extended and conducted to all other levels of civil service?

30 responses



As clearly depicted in the chart above, 46.7% of the respondents feel the importance of such assessment anticipate the positive implications it can have in the civil service of Bhutan in the long run. However, equivalent proportion of respondents, 43.3% were not very sure on this matter. The main reason was some of the immediate implications that were seen following the assessment. Thus, they feel that if the assessment is to be further extended, it should properly scrutinize the issues and eliminate the loophole that was present in earlier assessment.

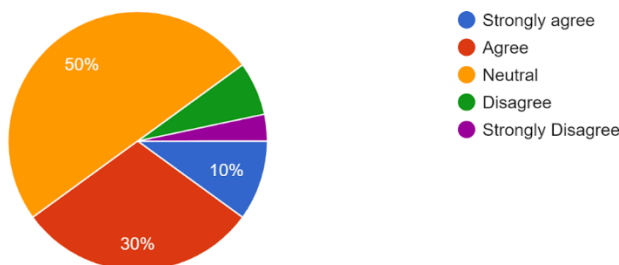
**Impacts on civil service**

One of the objectives of the RCSC have always been to keep the Bhutanese civil service as compact and efficient as possible considering the small population of the country. For a small and developing country like Bhutan, a huge number in the civil service sector means great investment and input of resources. Even in the recent Civil Service Reform Bill 2022, it proposes to reduce and downsize the existing 10 ministries to 9 ministries. The proposal has been made for the ministries to make necessary changes in their name and for the agency to reorganiza their system to “build a better future that is so progressive, relevant, and responsive to changing times” (Wangchuk, 2022).

**Fig 7:** Managing out Executives for creating a small and efficient civil service

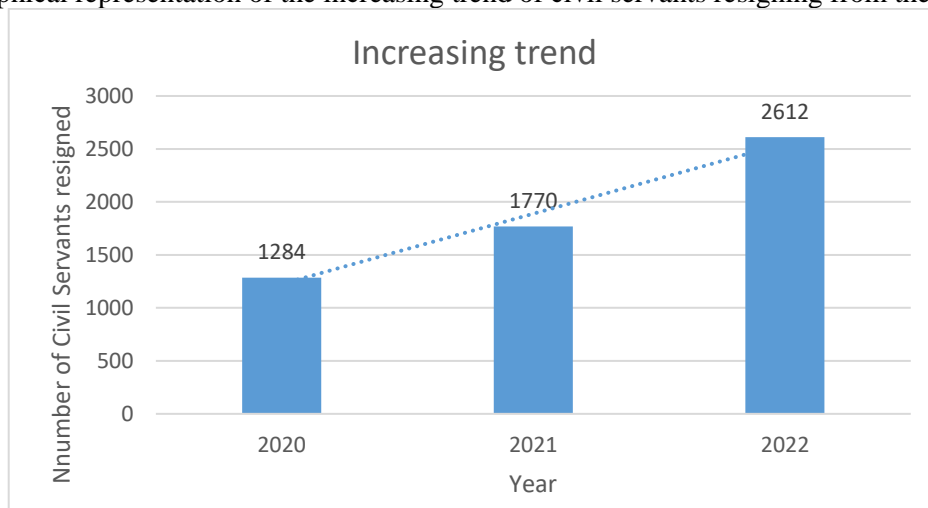
3. The RCSC's decision of 'Managing out' and setting a criteria to pass the eligibility assessment to apply for higher position is a wise step for creating the small, compact and efficient civil service.

30 responses



40% of respondents agree that the process of ‘managing out’ the underperformer executives was a thoughtful step towards downsizing the civil service and increasing its efficiency and effectiveness. However, 50% of the respondents were not confident enough to stand its ground and agree with the statement because they felt that even

though it is one way to create a compact civil service but it did not consider the executives who have given their maximum years of their life in the service of its nation. Thus, they felt it was not a fair play on the part of those executives who were managed out right after the assessment.

**Figure 8:** Graphical representation of the increasing trend of civil servants resigning from the civil service

As clearly evident from the graph above, a highest record of 2,612 civil servants left the civil service in the year of 2022 and shows an increasing trend with the increase in more than 800 employees compared to statistics of 2021. According to the latest records of the RCSC, among the 2,612 civil servants resigned, more than 60% resigned voluntarily. According to the Civil service report, the attrition rate has increased from 4.82% in 2021 to 8.26% last year, 2022 (Lhaden, 2022).

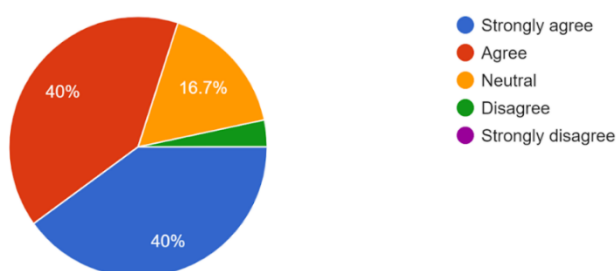
A news article by Dolkar (2023) stated that one of the reasons for the experienced civil servants

especially at the P1M level to leave the civil service is leaving for Australia and Canada for better income and opportunities. Another reason, which many civil servants silently agree is the leadership assessment of officers in the P1M level conducted in Nov, 2022. As per RCSC record, a total of 40 officer at P1 level have been separated from the civil service in the year of 2023, January till now. Amongst them, 14 of them were serving in Managerial positions, while 26 of them in specialist positions. Most of the officers in specialist position were from the education and training service group.

**Fig 9:** Respondent's perception about assessment exercise and exodus of civil servants

4. Do you agree that the assessment exercise programme is one of the reasons for exodus of civil servants resulting in the loss of experienced and talented pool of civil servants.

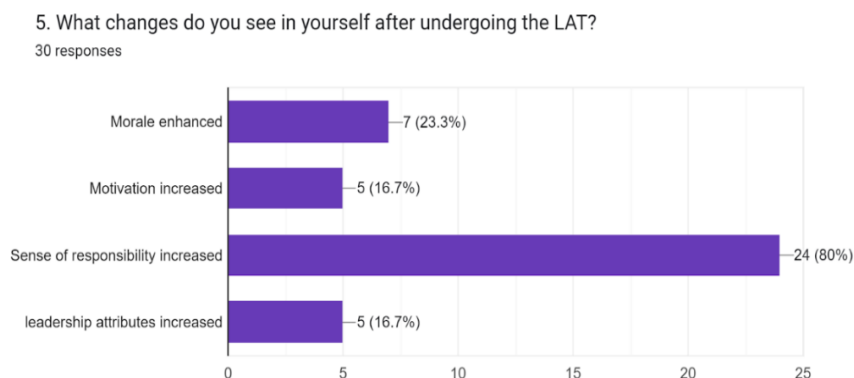
30 responses



Even when asked regarding the assessment exercises being one of the reasons for the exodus of the talented and critical pool of civil servants, almost 80% of the respondents agree with the statement and even shared their concern for an implication that it can have in the civil service sector if such trend continues.

After collecting the perception of civil servants, it was known that even the workload and the

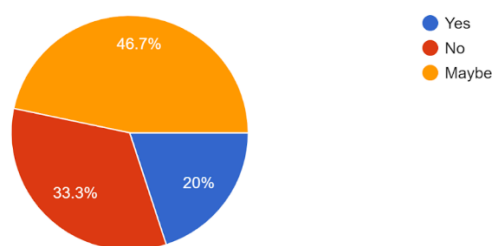
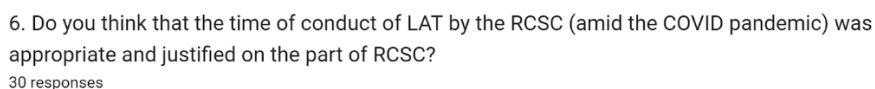
responsibilities of the civil servants who got through the assessment have increased. According to them, after having passed the assessment, the schedule became tight with conference after conferences on top of the responsibilities. Thus, they believe that if such reform can improve the services and promote equal pay for equal work, it is a good and wise step.

**Fig 10:** Changes in respondents after the assessment exercise

As also clearly evident through the graph above, almost every respondents, around 80% of them felt that their sense of responsibilities and accountability was enhanced. They were given even greater and more responsibilities within the department to shoulder which helped them to develop both in the personal and professional level. As they were associated with greater authority and responsibility, they became even more accountable for their work and decisions and to all the employees in the department.

The assessment exercises by RCSC came in when the world was combating against the pandemic and

Bhutan, not being an exception. When asked about respondent's thought on the decision of the RCSC to conduct the assessment amid the COVID-19, 20% of them felt that the time of conduct was appropriate and such reforms should always be welcomed regardless the situations of the particular country is going through. They shared that there is no such thing as right or wrong time. It is a matter of doing it now when the reform is happening or never. Any approach has no right or wrong decision. It just clarifies that any civil servant should be prepared and well learned to take on any challenges.

**Fig 11:** Respondent's perception about appropriateness of the time of conduct of

However 33.3% of respondents, especially serving in the MoH felt that such reforms are very essential and can have great positive impacts in the civil service in the long run but the time of conduct was not the best time. They shared that comparatively, most the Executives and Chiefs in MoH were completely occupied in containment of pandemic and had affected in their preparation of the assessment and even were not aware of the procedure of 'managing out' would be implemented for under performers.

#### Issues regarding the leadership assessment test

In the news article by Dema (2022) in the month of March, 2022, the news regarding the executives who failed in the assessment and also an unverified list of civil servants who excelled the assessment circulated in the social media, which impacted the civil servants who were assessed and even resulted in their several sleepless nights.

Many executives, who were assessed and even got through, shared their concern that the way of delivering the result by the RCSC was so insensitive and did not consider the implications on the executives. It has caused so much emotional

distress to not only the executives but also their family and friends.

On the other hand, the Officials of the RCSC stated that the list which was circulated on the open social media platform was not from the commission. They clearly pointed out that they would not share such level of information directly to the public and are confident about the security of their information.

Some other challenges and issues that were faced by the respondents during the course of conduct of the assessment exercises are discussed as follows;

- i. The decision of the RCSC to conduct the leadership assessment exercises came out of the blue and the basis and the criteria of the assessment was not clear even to the civil servant leaders who were going to sit for the assessment.
- ii. The Executives and Chiefs especially working in the MoH share their concern and discontent regarding the setting and the timing of the conduct of the assessment.
- iii. Some of the respondents even felt that the group assessment was bit disorganized and the members of the group did not seriously consider the time that was made available. As a result, some members did not get adequate time and opportunity to express their views and opinions.
- iv. As some part of the assessment was conducted via online platform, it was associated with drawbacks like technical glitches and connectivity issues.
- v. The assessment was stretched over weeks and thus, they faced some difficulty in keeping the consistency in preparation for their assessment and besides, they had to perform their normal office duties as usual which added more weight to their task.

### Implications on the civil service

Some of the worth mentioning implications of the assessment on the Bhutanese civil service were shared by the respondents. According to them, the implications could be;

As it can be clearly seen through the current trend of resignation of civil servants, there might be more civil servants leaving in the near future. Since not many get through the assessments, so the failures would be demotivated. As a result, we may lose our skilled and talented pool of civil servants.

However, if we look to the positive side of the assessment, it has even more positives impacts in the civil service sector of our country.

- i. As being the sole motto of the assessment exercise to make 'accountability' as a measure of the service for the civil servant leaders, it will create accountability and responsibility for those

interested in pursuing their career in the civil service.

ii. The assessment played and will continue to play as an important source of information on the areas for the improvement along, support to build the leadership capacity and providing the necessary resources to implement and get the desired outcomes would bring positive impact in the Bhutanese Civil Service.

iii. The traditional belief of enjoying and basking the sun of security for the life time in the civil service is no longer relevant these days. This notion was put into action when the 47 executives were managed out by the RCSC. This will instill a fear in the minds of civil servants and will help them to become more responsible and be professional in their job.

iv. The competencies of civil servants can be enhanced through such rigorous assessment and in return helps in increasing the productivity and performances of the organization.

### Conclusion and suggestions

It is noted that the candidates had to undergo through rigorous steps of assessment that was stretched over weeks and it was necessary to select the best out of best. It can be concluded through the analysis that the curriculum of the assessment was very suitable, relevant and best fit to serve its objectives. Despite the various issues and challenges faced by the candidates and the criticism faced by the personnel agency, the RCSC, it is found that the assessment proved to be a very effective tool in civil service reforms and best served its objectives.

It is clearly evident that the assessment could bring some positive changes in the person, both at personal and professional level. At professional level, the assessed leaders could see an increase in their responsibilities and this helped them to improve their management skills and knowledge by learning new things. They became more accountable when shouldering more responsibilities and bearing more authorities. At personal level, they could feel their motivation to work has been increased drastically and being more valued as an eminent decision maker of the organization increased their morale. Thus, it automatically resulted in the increase in an organizational performances as well. Therefore, such assessment exercises, after properly studying its requirement and measuring its impacts on the civil service sector, should continue and extend its operations towards other position level.

There are few suggestions that are proposed and if found appropriate and significant, can be adopted by the RCSC while further conducting the

assessment for other positions. The suggestions are:

1. This study suggests that for any reforms in any area of civil services, especially in the leadership programs that includes some assessment framework, the RCSC should ensure that the candidate and if possible the whole system should be aware and informed and have detailed knowledge on every aspects of the assessment. There should be complete and clear information on the basis, the framework and even the reward and punishment mechanism according to their performances.
2. The curriculum of the assessment was designed and formulated based on the Leadership Compatibility Framework (LCF) and also successfully served its objectives. It suggests that the assessment exercises would be more comprehensive and appreciative if it also entails some criteria to consider the past achievements and professional contributions and dedications of an individual in the civil service.
3. Such Leadership assessment exercises proved to be very impactful and effective in the civil service sector and especially for a developing country like Bhutan. Thus, it suggests that the RCSC and the government should continue to initiate such kind of reforms and particularly the Leadership assessment should be extended to other position level with its prime objective to identify and enhance the leadership capabilities in every civil servants and prepare them in the best way for the higher positions.

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