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The individual performance of top managers in the public sector

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UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO

Catarina Brandão[1,2] & Filomena Jordão[1,2]

catarina@fpce.up.pt

[1]Psychology Center of Porto University, Portugal
[2]Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Porto University, Portugal

Introduction

Job Performance is the worker's total population of behaviors relevant for accomplishing the organization's goals. It's behavioral, evaluative and multidimensional (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000) and comprehends two dimensions: Task performance and Contextual Performance. Task performance refers to behaviors that directly and indirectly contribute to the organization's technical core through direct support (inputs transformation) and indirect support (providing necessary materials or services). Contextual performance on the other hand refers to behaviors that «do not support the technical core itself as much as they support the organizational, social and psychological environment in which the technical core must function» (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, p. 73).

This work focuses the critical requirements of the top level managers' job in the Portuguese public sector. This means focusing the behaviors that distinguish a good and a bad performance. This approach is particular relevant considering the fact that the Portuguese public sector, a strongly burocratic organizational context with considerable dimension (and economical constraints), has been submitted to changes at different levels, making these managers' job performance even more important.

Goal of the study

Identify the job performance's internal structure of Portuguese public sector top level managers.

Method

Participants

42 Portuguese public sector top level managers.

Table 1: Participants

Sex	Female			Male		
	14			28		
Age	31 – 40		41 – 50		51 – 60	
	3		17		20	
Top manager's level	First level			Second level		
	14			28		
Tenure in the Public Sector	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 20	21 – 25	Over 26
	2	0	8	3	8	21
Tenure in the job position	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 20	21 – 25	Over 26
	33	4	1	1	0	0

Gathering data techniques

Critical incident technique applied in the context of interviews (semi-structured).

Procedure

Interviews were held at the participants' workplace. All interviews (each with approximate 49 minutes) were audio taped, with the participants' authorization, and then transcribed.

Data analysis

Content analysis using NVivo (QRS NVivo version 8.0; Copyright QSR International Pty, Ldt.), with a 87,3% level of inter rater agreement (Jones, 1996).

Results

271 critical incidents (CI) were gathered, 47 being removed for disrespecting quality criteria, for a final 82,66% usable response rate (Testa & Ehrart, 2005).

Results show the multidimensional structure of the Portuguese public sector top level managers' job performance, with 2 dimensions, 6 sub dimensions and 19 behavioral categories. The critical incidents translated 156 Task performance behaviors and 49 Contextual performance ones. Managers emphasized the "Decision making, problem solving" (Technical and management), "Coordinating subordinates" (Leadership and supervision) and "Influencing" (Dealing and communication) task behaviors, which belong to different Task performance sub dimensions. The Task performance behaviors "Administration and paperwork" (Technical and management) and "Training, coaching and developing" (Leadership and supervision) weren't identified (see table 2).

Table 2: Task performance's CI considering sub dimension and behavioral category

Sub dimensions and behavioral categories								
1.1. Dealing and communication	N.º CI	%	1.2. Leadership and supervision	N.º CI	%	1.3. Technical and management	N.º CI	%
Communicating and informing	10	22,7%	Coordinating subordinates	21	63,64%	Administration and paperwork	0	0%
Influencing	20	45,45%	Directing and motivating subordinates	12	36,36%	Decision making, problem solving	28	35,44%
Representing the organization	14	31,82%	Training, coaching and developing	0	0%	Delegating	5	6,33%
						Monitoring and controlling resources	5	6,33%
						Planning and organizing	15	18,99%
						Technical proficiency	6	7,59%
						Staffing	7	8,86%
						Collecting and gathering data	13	16,46%
Total of CI	44	100%	Total of CI	33	100%	Total of CI	79	100%

The Contextual performance dimension is also organized in three sub dimensions, as theoretically proposed (see table 3). The "Persisting" and "Initiative" behaviors were emphasized, both belonging to the Conscientious Initiative sub dimension. This result stresses the importance of these managers exhibit extra effort, particularly given the time constraints and impediments to innovation in the Portuguese public sector. On the other hand, "Self development" (Conscientious Initiative) and "Representing" (Organizational Support) behaviors weren't identified and the behaviors that support other managers are not emphasized ("Helping").

Table 3: Contextual performance's CI considering sub dimension and behavioral category

Sub dimensions and behavioral categories								
Personal Support		%	Organizational Support		%	Conscientious Initiative	N.ºCI	%
Helping	1	9,09%	Compliance	6	85,71%	Initiative	14	45,16%
Cooperate	3	27,27%	Loyalty	1	14,29%	Persisting	17	54,84%
Courtesy	6	54,55%	Representing	0	0%	Self development	0	0%
Protecting	1	9,09%						
Total of CI	11	100%	Total of CI	7	100%	Total of CI	31	100%

Discussion

The results show the specificity of the Portuguese public sector top level managers Job performance's internal structure and that the clarification of their contextual performance requires considering towards whom managers adopt different behaviors. Also, we found that these managers tend to focus behaviors related to managing problems and resources, communicating and interacting with the organizational environment and the need to persist and show initiative in their job as well as showing consideration towards subordinates. These results point that it is inadequate to consider that this manager's activity is confined to the implementation of policies and enhances his role in the decision process of the organization's direction (despite the existing constraints).

We were surprised that training, coaching and developing subordinates and manager's self development behaviors weren't identified as critical behaviors to success. Results also suggest public managers don't tend to value support behaviors towards other managers or overtly defending organizational rules. Considering the existing social and economic constraints in the public sector our study suggest the importance of top managers developing coaching skills, acknowledging subordinates needs of support, and associating their own development to the public sector success, providing their organizations with resources to face public sector's present constraints.

This research emphasizes the importance of the Critical Incident Technique in the study of manager's job performance, as it enables the identification of good performance behaviors in a contextualized way.

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