Star Performers: Task and Contextual Performance are Components, But Are They Enough?

Abstract

Identifying outstanding performers or 'stars' is a critical component of managing talent. However, organizational effectiveness in this area is limited by the current lack of guidance about the behavior and characteristics of stars. We address this gap by combining a conceptual analysis with an empirical study involving 174 managers. Conceptually we examine the alignment of managers' perceptions of outstanding performance with the well established task and contextual performance model and find this framework accounts for a core element in managers' judgments about outstanding performers. However a second, more qualitative approach finds that other dimensions including being self-directed, and a willingness to lead are also important. Our findings are consistent with a long-term trend toward identifying work effectiveness with highly discretionary, psychological and behavioral elements, and consider the implications of this for the study and management of high level, individual effectiveness.

Keywords: identifying talent, star performers, individual performance, talent management, task and contextual performance.

A decade on from the declaration of the 'talent wars' by McKinsey & Co. (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod 2001), researchers and practitioners still acknowledge the need for greater sophistication in our identification and management of talent (Collings and Mellahi 2009; McDonnell, 2011; Wooldridge 2006). A talent management system needs to systematically identify outstanding performers, the 'stars' who consistently demonstrate superior performance in relation to others (Groysberg 2010). Without a clear picture of what constitutes star performance it is difficult to create valid and reliable processes for the creation of talent pools (Capelli 2008) and to facilitate optimal working environments for outstanding performers (Groysberg, Lee and Abrahams 2010). We argue that future progress in this regard depends on at least one key requirement – a better understanding of how managers conceptualize and recognize outstanding performance and performers and it is to this task that the present study directs itself. Our objective is to assess the extent to which task and contextual performance dimensions (Borman and Motowidlo 1993) account in whole or in part for managers' perceived differences between outstanding and average performers. Our key research question is: does the combination of high levels of task proficiency and discretionary behaviors focused on helping others and the organization (Werner 2000) account in whole or in part for managers' perceptions of star performers? Consequently, this paper both extends previous empirical work on task and contextual performance and broadens its application into the important area of star performers and talent management. Application of such a model in this context has the benefit of focusing our attention on the behavioural patterns of star performers. This is a core requirement for the identification of stars and for developing high potentials into stars or the 'talent pipeline' (Fernandez-Araoz, Groysberg and Nohria 2011) .

Background

Managers acknowledge that employees and the roles they perform are not uniform in their strategic value (Boudreau and Ramstad 2005b). Executives and HR managers further report that attracting, developing and retaining outstanding performers is often a significant roadblock in achieving organizational performance targets (Boudreau and Ramstad 2005a). Yet it is apparent that the talent management literature lacks clarity and consistency in how it defines outstanding performance. The term 'talent management' is used to describe: (a) a general rebranding of the HR function, (b) the process of identifying and managing high performers and high potentials (Jones, Whitaker, Seet and Parkin 2012), and (c) the international mobility of workforces (Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow 2010). Consequently it is not surprising that theoretical developments in the area of talent management are lacking and implications for HR practice are scattered and unclear (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Lewis and Heckman 2006; McDonnell, Collings and Burgess 2012).

While it is intuitively obvious that outstanding performers demonstrate superior performance to average performers, organizational psychologists have demonstrated over a considerable period that performance is in itself a complex, multifaceted construct (e.g. Katz 1964; Marinova, Moon and Van Dyne 2010). Therefore, we begin our exploration of outstanding performance by drawing on existing models of human performance in work settings from the fields of Organizational Behavior and Industrial/Organizational psychology. There is ample evidence across many types of jobs and contexts that job performance involves more than just task performance, more than simply applying a set of skills and knowledge to carrying out an organizationally specified set of tasks. For example, in the field of software design and engineering high performers differ from moderate performers in terms

of their cognitive and communication skills and behaviors (Sonnentag 2000b; Sonnentag, Niessen and Volmer 2006). However, there is presently little understanding of how managers in less specialized work contexts or occupations perceive and judge someone as being an outstanding performer.

Star performers

Research in this area typically defines 'stars' as employees who consistently demonstrate superior performance in relation to others and are substantially more productive (Kelley and Caplan 1993). Stars are therefore more highly visible and in demand in the relevant labor market because of their individual human capital and also their social capital – what they do with the social relationships they create within and external to their organization (Groysberg 2010; Oldroyd and Morris 2012). Sonnentag (2000a) in summarizing the research on expertise, notes that excellent or star performers have superior knowledge, especially in relation to procedural knowledge, show more focus on goal setting and on long-range goals, seek more feedback and show higher social skills and greater involvement in team-oriented behaviors.

To date there has been little actual research into stars, with the notable exception being Kelley and Caplan's study (1993) at AT&T's Bell Labs. Their objective was to define the difference between top performers and average employees in order to improve productivity. Interestingly, their findings indicated that individuals who scored highly on a particular factor that was believed to lead to star performance, (eg. cognitive ability, risk taking) were not necessarily labeled as stars by their managers – there were other factors involved. They found that stars were more strategic in their approach and more proactive.

Kelley and Caplan (1993,10) concluded that the main difference between stars and average workers was not cognitive ability but the way top performers *did* their jobs, their

"patterns of behavior on the job" - noting that it "wasn't what these stars had in their heads that made them standouts from the pack, it was how they used what they had". Their research informed the development of a training program based on the work strategies of star performers in an attempt to improve the performance of other 'average' workers (Kelley 1998).

While a useful starting point, we argue that the main implication of their work is that a better understanding is required of these differences in 'patterns of behavior' between stars and average performers. We need greater conceptual clarity about the behaviors characterizing star performance and a theoretical framework that allows us to understand these behaviors within the larger context of studies of work performance. To this end, we adopted the well established task and contextual performance framework (Borman and Motowidlo 1993) to begin to explore the patterns of behaviors that managers perceive being demonstrated by outstanding performers. The key issue we address is the extent to which the dimensions of task and contextual performance account in whole or in part for managers' perceived differences between outstanding and average performers.

Task and contextual performance and outstanding performers

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) argue that task performance relates to the more technical aspects of performance - the application of technical skills and knowledge to perform a task. On the other hand, contextual performance involves behaviors that support the organizational, psychological and social context in which tasks are performed – such as volunteering for extra activities, and helping others. These discretionary behaviors have also been conceptualized as organizational citizenship behavior (Organ 1988).

Studies show that managers can and do distinguish between task performance and contextual performance, and that both types of behavior contribute independently to the

effectiveness of individuals, managers (Hosie, Willemyns and Sevastos 2012) and

organizations (Borman and Motowidlo 1993). Contextual performance has been associated

with effectiveness ratings of individuals in technical roles (eg. air traffic controllers) (Griffin,

Neal and Neale 2000), and has been identified as a distinguishing feature of outstanding

performers in technical organizations where levels of task performance are high across many

employees (Kelley and Caplan 1993). Managers reward both task and contextual

performance (Van Scotter, Motowidlo and Cross 2000) with contextual performance likely to

influence managers' evaluations over time even if it is not a formal component of the job

performance criteria (Johnson 2001). Furthermore, being rewarded with career development

opportunities for exhibiting these behaviors is perceived as fair by co-workers (Bish, Bradley

and Sargent 2004). In addition, Werner (1994) found that both elements strongly influenced

supervisory evaluations of performance; it is not sufficient to demonstrate high levels of

contextual behaviors but low levels of task performance.

Therefore, we propose that managers will perceive as outstanding performers those who

combine high levels of task performance with high levels of contextual performance. That is,

a person who is technically competent and who *also* demonstrates high levels (or a wide range

of) contextual performance behaviors is more likely to be considered a star performer than a

person who scores highly on only one of these dimensions, or on neither dimension.

However there may be more to understand about what makes an employee an outstanding

performer than is provided by the task and contextual performance framework. While

necessary for describing outstanding performers, these two dimensions may *not be sufficient*

to account for the patterns of behavior that distinguish outstanding performers. Therefore

along with using a quantitative approach for comparing the task and contextual performance

of outstanding and average performers the present study also makes use of an exploratory,

qualitative methodology to explore what other kinds of behaviors are potentially important to being seen as an outstanding performer.

Method

One large Australian public sector agency participated in this study. The agency, identified through industry contacts, employs over 25 000 people nationally to provide a 'one stop shop' for services delivered on behalf of ten government departments to over 6.5 million customers. HR professionals in the agency were interested in this research as it complemented their cultural change program aimed at raising awareness of performance issues and the role of managers in improving performance of their teams. However, the shift towards a performance based culture in the public sector (O'Donnell 1998) had not yet fully translated to the performance review process itself. The process is formalized as we would expect in a public sector context (Peretz and McGraw 2011), but does not require managers to rate the performance of individual employees in relation to performance targets Instead, managers conduct annual, developmental performance reviews (Armstrong and Baron 2005) to identify and discuss capability gaps and to develop an agreed development plan to address these gaps. At the time of the study there was no organizational policy in relation to identifying high performers.

Data collection

A paper questionnaire was administered randomly to 1,000 mid-level managers selected by the organization. Managers received an email from their HR Department advising them of the project being undertaken and were asked to complete a short anonymous questionnaire which was mailed directly to them. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher directly if they had any questions about the project or the questionnaire, and returned their

completed questionnaires directly to the researcher in supplied pre-paid envelopes. Steps were taken to encourage responses to the mail survey. The survey was designed to be as respondent friendly as possible, follow-up emails were sent as reminders, stamped return envelopes were provided, correspondence was addressed to participants, with a cover letter on university letterhead, direct contact details of researcher were provided as well as a deadline for completion (Dillman 2000). A final reminder email was sent two weeks after the first reminder. The use of two reminder emails did generate additional responses.

Managers assessed the contextual and task performance of one of their subordinates using existing scales – it was their choice who they assessed. They were also asked to describe the behavioral characteristics of a person they considered to be a star performer within their work unit. An advantage of this design over an alternative, such as asking managers directly to describe a star or non-star subordinate, or one of each, is that it is less likely to evoke their implicit assumptions or theories about stars when carrying out their ratings.

Completed questionnaires were received from 174 managers (120 females and 54 males), with a mean age of 41 years. The subordinates (125 females and 49 males; mean age 41) had reported to their manager for an average of two years. The majority of subordinates were in customer service officer roles in call centres and walk-in service centres, but they did not all have similar job descriptions.

Task performance was measured using Williams and Anderson's (1991) five-item scale. An example item is: 'Compared to other people that you supervise, doing the same type of work, how likely is it that this person would: Adequately complete assigned duties' using a scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*). Contextual performance was measured using Van Scotter and Motowidlo's (1996) fifteen-item scale that has two sub-scales - Interpersonal Facilitation and Job Dedication. An example Interpersonal Facilitation item is: 'When

performing his or her job, how likely is it that this person would: Praise co-workers when they are successful'. An example of a job dedication item is: 'When performing his or her job, how likely is it that this person would: Put in extra hours to get work done on time'. Both sub-scales use a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*). Managers were also asked to indicate using a simple 'Yes'/ 'No' response whether they considered the person they were rating to be an outstanding performer – a 'real star'. The term 'star' performer was used in the questionnaire because the term was being widely used in organizations, and discussions with managers from a number of organizations indicated that this term was used naturally in conversation, so they had no difficulty with understanding or accepting this term. Finally, we asked managers to consider an outstanding performer within their area–who could be the current person if he/she was described as a star. They were asked to briefly describe: (a) the behaviors someone would have to demonstrate to make them a 'star' in the organization; and (b) what distinguished a star's performance from an average performer. Appendix A contains the complete set of scales for all measures.

Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables. All three scales were judged to be reliable (task performance α = .93, interpersonal facilitation α = .84, job dedication α = .90).

Insert Table 1 about here

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, using AMOS 18 (Arbuckle 2003), to assess the fit of the 3-category performance model (i.e., interpersonal facilitation, job dedication and task performance) to the data. Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was employed in the analysis due to its suitability for small sample sizes (Gerbing and Anderson

1985). An expected maximization algorithm was used to replace missing at random data via

MVA in SPSS (Allison 2002). Fit indices relating to the CFA are displayed in Table 2 and

indicate a reasonable fit of the model to the data with parameters mostly equivalent or slightly

better than the lower-bound criteria for acceptance (Hu and Bentler 1999).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Fit was improved by removing 3 items shown as complex in the modification indices,

thus improving the parsimony of the solution (Brown 2006). Table 3 shows standardized

estimates and squared multiple correlations. This supports the proposed theoretical structure

of perceived work performance comprising of three dimensions: task performance,

interpersonal facilitation and job dedication (Van Scotter and Motowidlo 1996).

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A hierarchical logistic regression analysis was performed to evaluate how well the two

contextual and single task performance variables predict whether a person has been classified

by their manager as a star (1) or not a star (0). The use of a categorical dependent variable in

this type of analysis was appropriate given the classification we were asking managers to

make (Long 1997). Ratings from 174 managers were available for analysis and these had

nominated 73 persons as stars and 101 as non-stars. While the ratio of stars (40% of the

sample) may intuitively seem high, since there is no comparable data for deciding this and

given the exploratory nature of this research we do not see this ratio as a critical issue.

A test of the full model with all three predictors produced a highly significant result, $\chi2$ (3,174) = 59.60, p =.000, indicating that the predictors, as a set, distinguished quite well between stars and non stars (Table 4), with the model correctly predicting the status of 74% of subordinates, though being somewhat more accurate for non-stars (79%) than stars (67%). However it is evident that one variable – Job Dedication has the most influence. Given the moderately strong correlations between the three predictors (Table 1) it would be inappropriate to conclude that Task Performance or Interpersonal Facilitation are unimportant, but in a statistical sense Job Dedication clearly has the strongest influence and possibly 'soaks up' the influence of the other two. Therefore it is evident that the task and contextual performance dimensions successfully distinguish between who managers perceive as stars and average performers.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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The interaction among predictors was also tested to investigate whether those seen as outstanding performers scored highly on *both* task and contextual performance. Following the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991) for analysing interactions, the variables were standardized to manage the correlations between the predictors and the interaction terms. None of the interaction effects were significant, nevertheless Figure 1, which plots subordinates' status (star /non-star) against their standardized scores on Task Performance and Job Dedication shows several interesting patterns. These patterns help explain why the interaction effects were not significant. First it is evident that almost no one who scored below the mean on *either* of these dimensions is classified as an outstanding performer (Area A in Figure 1). This indicates that both dimensions contribute to whether a person is seen as an

outstanding performer by their manager. It is also evident that persons scoring highly on only one dimension, either Task or Job Dedication (Areas B & C respectively in Figure 1) are rarely categorized by managers as outstanding performers. However it can also be seen in Figure 1 that not all persons who have high scores on both dimensions (Area D) are classed as outstanding performers. Figure 1 also suggests a ceiling effect in the task performance measure with no one scoring above the first standard deviation. This is an issue to which we return later.

Insert Figure 1 about here

We interpret this pattern of findings as follows: for a subordinate to be rated a star performer, in this sample at least, it is necessary to perform at least moderately highly on both task and contextual performance dimensions; a low score on either dimension precludes being described as a star. However, performing even at high levels on both dimensions is not sufficient to ensure being described as a star – some employees with high scores on both dimensions are not viewed as stars, while others with only moderately high scores on both dimensions are considered stars. A possible explanation for this pattern is that some who score highly on both dimensions lack one or more necessary attributes for being viewed as a star, while some moderate scorers who are seen as stars possess these attributes. Put simply, at least moderately high levels of both task and contextual performance are *necessary but not sufficient* for a person to be described as a star by their manager. This interpretation is consistent with our earlier observation that the task and contextual performance scores are

somewhat better at predicting non-stars than stars i.e. absence of high scores on either dimension is more predictive of status than presence of high scores.

In sum, these results support the value of the task and contextual performance framework for clarifying the nature of outstanding performance while at the same time showing that it is not sufficient to fully explain it. Therefore it is to the qualitative data that we next turned in order to investigate potential additional attributes of star performers.

Managers' describe star performers

Our analysis of the qualitative data we collected as described in the Methods section involved three stages. The first stage employed an iterative, exploratory process in order to identify categories and to ensure that each category was internally consistent and distinct from others (Miles and Huberman 1994). Following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), this stage involved five phases: (1) familiarizing ourselves with the data by reading and re-reading the comments and noting down initial ideas, (2) generating initial codes across the data set and then collating data relevant to each code, (3) collating these codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing the themes, and (5) defining and naming the key themes. Therefore, in this step we organized the data into patterns based on the explicit written comments of participants (Boyatzis 1998). We then moved into an interpretation phase (Braun and Clarke 2006) where we considered the significance of the key themes or categories, their implications and the extent to which these overlapped with the task and contextual performance framework. Finally, we focused our analysis on any elements not accounted for by the task and contextual performance framework.

One hundred and sixty-six managers (95%) provided comments describing star performance, with an average statement identifying two behaviours (e.g. my stars are self-directed and consistently meet targets). Our thematic analysis identified five major categories

of behavioral dimensions. Table 5 shows these categories and example comments from the
data.

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The first category, 'Team Development' refers to a person's support and development of
other team members, which enables the team as a whole to perform at a higher level. The
second category, 'Self-Direction' describes a person's capacity for self-directed work;
including descriptions such as 'proactively solves problems' and 'low-maintenance'. The
third category, 'Knowledge and Skills', captures the importance of having 'excellent' levels
of technical skills, job knowledge and 'comprehensive knowledge of the business'. The
fourth category 'Goal Achievement' represents the person's ability to consistently achieve
goals including statements such as 'consistently meets targets', and 'demonstrates
persistence'. The final category is 'Leadership' which includes 'being able to take a strategic
viewpoint' and 'sees the job in a holistic way'. Taken as a whole this indicates that stars have
a range of attributes that go beyond both technical and contextual dimensions.

The results also reveal some similarities between managers' descriptions and the
Interpersonal Facilitation and Job Dedication sub-scales of contextual performance and the
task performance scale. For example, category three 'Knowledge and Skills' and category
four 'Goal Achievement' are similar to task performance in that stars are described as people
who complete the tasks assigned to them and have the relevant knowledge to do this.
However, what is notable is the emphasis managers' placed on certain behaviours in
particular. For example, category two 'Self-Direction' implied more than initiative (an aspect
of job dedication), managers reported that stars displayed high levels of self-management and

needed less day-to-day supervision than average performers. Our final set of categories

represents more than simply solid task performance, with a strong emphasis on the way in

which the person completes their tasks and a different level of effort compared to others.

Category five 'Leadership' captures something unique and in addition to the task and

contextual performance elements. Managers' valued the capacity of stars to see 'the big

picture', influence others and lead others in the right direction. Our analysis therefore

suggests that what makes a star is not fully captured by 'good citizenship' but includes

consistently high levels of work performance, proactivity, and having a broad, strategic

perspective.

Discussion, implications and future directions

Our findings indicate that the task and contextual performance framework lends itself

to 'unpacking' key aspects of the outstanding performer construct, providing a useful starting

point for investigating the nature of outstanding performance. People are very unlikely to be

described by their managers as outstanding performers without above average levels of both

task and contextual performance; therefore both dimensions are *necessary* for understanding

and describing outstanding performance. In particular, the job dedication factor was found to

be central in managers' perceptions of outstanding performers. Interestingly however, our

results also suggest that having high levels of task and contextual performance is not

necessarily *sufficient* for being described as an outstanding performer.

We identified additional attributes (e.g., being self-directed, and willing to engage in

leadership behaviors) that seem to be required in order to be perceived an outstanding

performer, or that may even compensate for a person's level of task and contextual

performance.   The leadership aspect in particular is not well accounted for by the task and

contextual performance framework that tends to emphasize compliance with and support for 'the status quo' rather than a capacity to challenge it (Borman and Motowidlo 1993). The proactive nature of these discretionary behaviors is consistent with recent developments in the contextual performance construct to capture behaviors associated with taking initiative, seeking additional productive tasks and taking opportunities to develop knowledge and skills (Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie 2006). In turn, such developments can be seen as part of a broader trend in our understanding of work performance.

Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006) observed that over a period of time researchers have expanded how they conceptualize work performance to include individual-level behavioral elements not captured by traditional task approaches, with contextual performance being one of the best known examples of this trend. The results of a series of meta-analyses they conducted supported two conclusions: that empirical models linking overall job attitudes to composite or unitary indicators of job behaviors including contextual and task performance, absenteeism and turnover were more strongly supported than models linking attitudes to diversified or single behavioral criteria; second, lower contextual performance appeared to be a leading indicator or early warning of more serious withdrawal behaviors, involving a temporal progression from lateness to absenteeism and eventually turnover.

Our results are consistent with and complementary to Harrison et al.'s interpretation (2006; also see Rich, Lepine and Crawford 2010) in several respects. We found that empirically task and contextual performance were correlated and that both had a role in accounting for managers' global judgments of star performers, but also that contextual performance was the best indicator. This supports their argument for the existence of a higher-order, behavioral construct that they termed individual effectiveness, which represents

'a general response that involves the overall engagement with, or contribution of favourable efforts, to one's work role' (Harrison et al. 2006, 315).

Advocating a stronger focus on describing and understanding the discretionary aspects of work behavior is also consistent with emerging work on new ways of thinking about work role performance. For example Griffin, Neal and Parker (2007) identified three main dimensions that they argue are necessary to a better understanding of work performance: proficiency, which is similar to what have been termed task, or in-role performance; adaptivity that involves coping with, responding to and supporting change (cf. Pulakos et al. 2000), and proactivity that involves initiating change, self-starting and having a future-orientation. These aspects in particular resonate with our qualitative findings. Work by Parker and her colleagues (Parker 2007; Parker, Williams and Turner 2006) identifies the important influence of individual attitudes such as a flexible work role orientation and work role characteristics such as job autonomy on individuals' propensity to be proactive at work. Based on the preceding analyses we propose that *high level, individual effectiveness* (or star performance) can be defined as 'a constellation or combination of behavioral and psychological characteristics involving high levels of affective and cognitive engagement with one's work role as well as a positive contribution in the task domain, and in particular high levels of discretionary, work behaviors including contextual performance, adaptivity, and proactivity'.

We conclude with a consideration of some limitations and future research priorities. First, while this study employed mixed methods, both the quantitative and qualitative investigations were cross-sectional in nature. A design that assesses perceptions of stars at different points in time would be useful in future research in part to reduce potential problems of common method variance. Future research using a longitudinal design would also provide

stronger evidence on the differences between stars and average performers and would be particularly useful in informing us about the process by which high-potentials develop into stars and how this process can be managed effectively (Sonnentag 2000a). An interesting question is what prevents persons who score high on both dimensions from developing into stars and whether their development can be facilitated given that they already possess several key attributes.

Second, our results are based on individual perceptions from a single organizationsample. As such, our findings need to be validated in other contexts (e.g. Ring, Bigley, D'Aunno and Khanna 2005). The research design would also be improved by adding objective measures of performance (e.g. performance review results, other supervisors' ratings, or peer assessments) as well as managers' ratings (Sonnentag 2000a). Future research designs also need to consider the expectations of managers and how the relationship between subordinate and manager may influence the demonstration of contextual performance in particular (Johnson 2001).

Managers in this study reported a higher percentage of stars than one would expect based on the performance and expertise literature estimates of approximately 10% of the workforce being the very top performers. While this may be due to specific contextual factors such as public sector managers being less influenced by a performance culture (Teo, Ahmad and Rodwell 2003), we believe that a significant, general factor contributing to this result is a lack of discriminating ability of the task performance measure at very high performance levels. As we observed earlier, higher task performance was significantly related to the likelihood of being seen as an outstanding performer and the fact that it did not differentiate very strongly may be the result of what appeared to be a ceiling effect, with task performance (Williams and Anderson 1991) not discriminating very well at the top end of the performance

range. While managers in this study were able to articulate observable differences between outstanding and average performers, we were to some extent grappling with the problem of how to measure these variations with sufficient accuracy when it came to measuring outstanding task performance. Researchers interested in studying outstanding performance may need to consider the development of measures that are able to discriminate at the 'outstanding' end of work performance (Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000), rather than relying on those measuring variation around the average performer.

Our findings have several practical implications for talent management. First, our findings indicate that the task and contextual performance framework is useful for profiling some of the core requirements of star performance. This behavioral framework is therefore useful as a valid and reliable framework for talent management related HR practices (Lewis and Heckman 2006), such as identifying, recruiting and managing star performers. This can help ensure that talent management practices are more systematic, empirically based and therefore more strategically useful (Jones et al. 2012) instead of relying on generic, vague prescriptions. Second, task and contextual behaviors can be learned. Therefore these behaviors can be a core feature of development programs for high-potentials. High-potentials learn from experience (Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney 1997) and a long-term developmental focus is evident in organizations who have invested in talent pipelines (Derr, Jones and Toomey 1998). Incorporating the development of task and contextual performance behaviors into such development programs and using these behaviors to guide recruitment, selection and reward activities starts to provide the integrated approach to talent management practices that is required (Collings and Mellahi 2009). This approach would particularly suit the public sector context where HR practices are driven by the principles of equity and merit (Teo et al. 2003) and therefore a structured focus on behavioral elements is highly desirable.

Conclusion

It is likely there is no 'single recipe' for outstanding performance across all contexts (Kelley and Caplan 1993) and while task and contextual performance are likely to be important in most contexts we cannot neglect the potential situational influences on high level, individual effectiveness. Even more importantly, while we support Harrison et al.'s (2006) view of the importance of understanding the attitudinal and psychological underpinnings of people's affective and cognitive engagement with their work role we add that it is also important to study the role that HR practices can play in shaping these underpinning factors.

Basing our understanding of what constitutes outstanding performance on well established theory and empirical findings as we have here can contribute to the confidence we have in the implications we draw for HR policy and practice. First, we initially assumed that to be a star you had to be rated highly on both task and contextual performance. Our results showed this assumption to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for understanding outstanding performance- task and contextual performance are indeed important, but the findings indicate that other aspects (being self-directed, engaging in leadership behaviors and contributing in a strategic way) may be required and may even compensate for average task or contextual performance. Therefore task and contextual performance are core components of high level, individual effectiveness. However we need to further investigate other discretionary behaviors that are increasingly being seen as central to outstanding performance. Finally, our findings emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of performance and the combination of factors that constitute outstanding performance as well as pointing to some of the measurement challenges in discriminating between outstanding and 'merely' good performance.

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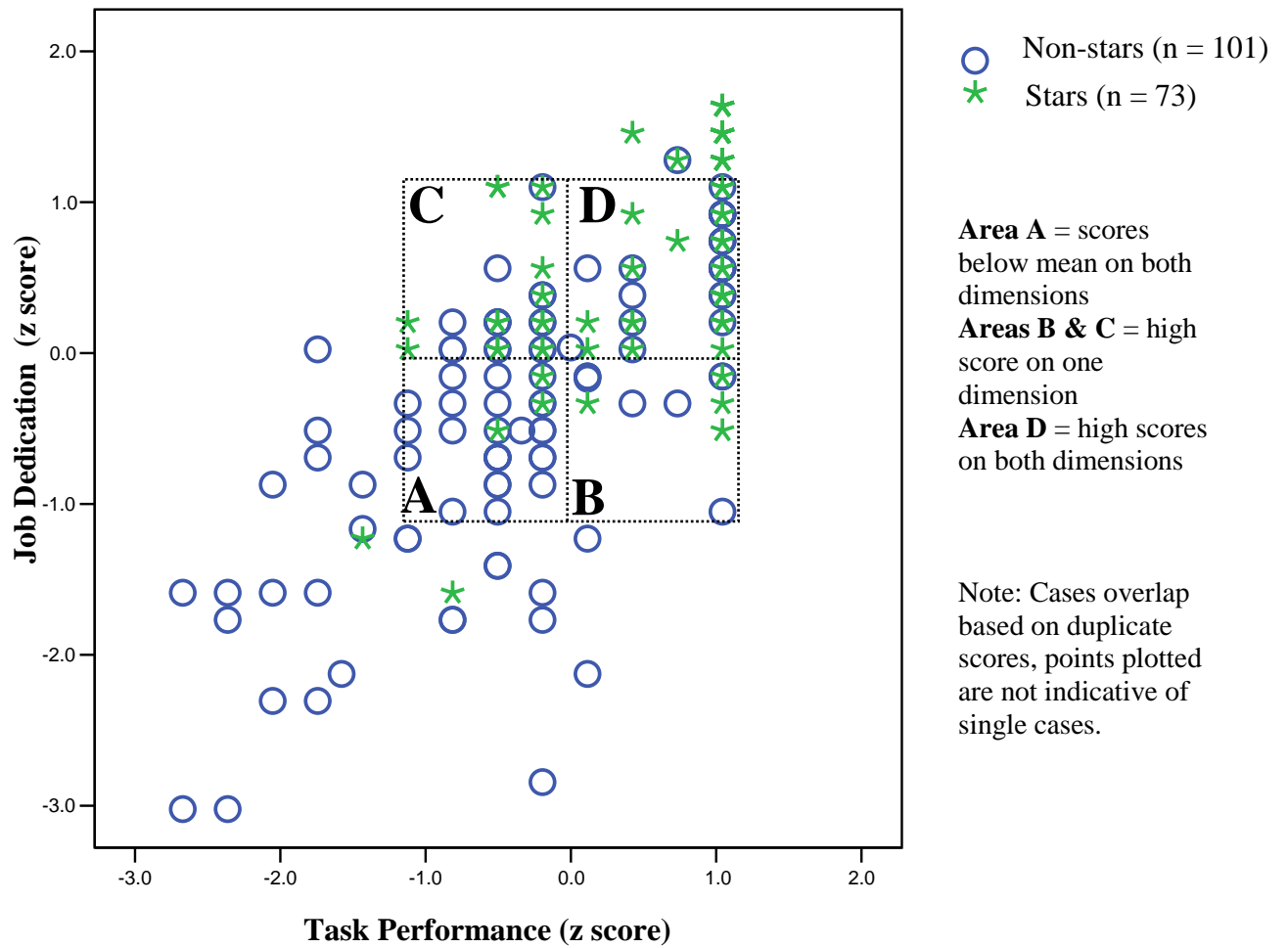
FIGURE 1

Scatterplot of Relationship between Job Dedication, Task Performance Ratings and Designation as a Star

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1.Task Performance	4.33	.65			
2. Interpersonal Facilitation	3.85	.57	.49**		
3. Job Dedication	3.86	.70	.72**	.66**	
4. A star?	.42	.50	.43**	.38**	.52**

Note: N = 174. ** p < .01.

TABLE 2

Goodness of fit statistics for confirmatory factor analysis for performance

classifications

Goodness of Fit Statistics	Value
Chi-square	152.36
DF	99
CFI	.97
NFI	.92
RMSEA	.06
Standardised RMR	.05

TABLE 3

Confirmatory factor analysis of performance classification using structural equation modelling

Performance categories	Standardized estimates		
	Interpersonal facilitation	Job dedication	Task performance
Work harder than necessary		.70	
Ask for challenging work		.70	
Exercise personal discipline		.80	
Take the initiative		.73	
Persist in overcoming obstacles		.75	
Tackle difficult work enthusiastically		.81	
Praise co-workers	.63		
Support co-workers	.61		
Talk to others before taking action	.70		
Encourage others	.70		
Treat others fairly	.69		
Adequately completes duties			.85
Fulfil responsibilities			.91
Perform tasks expected			.95
Meet formal requirements			.94
Fail to perform essential duties (R)			-.64
Highest SMC	.48	.65	.91
Lowest SMC	.37	.48	.41

Note: SMC = squared multiple correlation

TABLE 4

Results of Logistic Regression Predicting Stars

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald test (z-ratio)	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Task performance	-.366	.287	1.627	1	.202	.693
Interpersonal Facilitation	-.160	.254	.398	1	.528	.852
Job dedication	-1.249	.374	11.148	1	.001	.287
Model Chi-square [df]	59.604 [3]		% Correct Predictions Overall 74% Star 67% Non-star 79%		-2 Log likelihood	177.086

N= 174, *p* = .000

TABLE 5
The Categories Derived from Managers' Descriptions of Stars and Example Statements

Category	Example Statements
Team Development	'A star performer creates the environment that encourages all staff to get on with the tasks.'; 'Supportive of other team members'.
Self-Direction	'Requires little direction/external input'; 'Low maintenance'; 'Adjusts according to demand/priorities without being told'.
Knowledge and skills	'Seen as an expert resource in the office'; 'Good business acumen'.
Goal Achievement	'A star performer goes beyond the bounds of what is required of them.'; 'Consistently meeting/exceeding all performance metrics.'; 'Goes the extra mile'.
Leadership	'Takes initiative and leads the way'; 'Looks at total environment, can see where they fit.'; 'Interest in the bigger picture';.

APPENDIX A

Measures

Contextual Performance (Van Scotter and Motowidlo 1996) completed using a scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (extremely likely):

Interpersonal facilitation sub-scale

1. Praise co-workers when they are successful.
2. Support or encourage a co-worker with a personal problem.
3. Talk to others before taking actions that might affect them.
4. Say things to make people feel good about themselves.
5. Encourage others to overcome their differences and get along.
6. Treat others fairly in daily interactions.
7. Help someone without being asked.

Job dedication sub-scale

1. Put in extra hours to get work done on time.
2. Pay close attention to important details in their work.
3. Work harder than necessary to ensure work is completed.
4. Ask for a challenging work assignment.
5. Exercise personal discipline and self-control – even in difficult situations.
6. Take the initiative to solve a work problem.
7. Persist in overcoming obstacles to complete a task.
8. Tackle a difficult work assignment enthusiastically.

Task performance (Williams and Anderson 1991) completed using a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely):

1. Adequately complete assigned duties.
2. Fulfil responsibilities specified in their job descriptions.
3. Perform tasks that are expected of him/her.
4. Meet the formal requirements of their job.
5. Fail to perform essential duties (R).