The Individual Performance of Portuguese public sector top level managers and considered motives

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INTRODUCTION

Individual Performance (IP) is defined as the total population of behaviors relevant for accomplishing the organization's goals. Its structure comprehends two dimensions: Task performance and Contextual Performance. Task performance comprehends 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 comprehends 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, 1993:73, 1997).

This work focuses the critical requirements of the managers' job in the Portuguese public sector (PPS). This means focusing the behaviors that distinguish between a good and bad performance, a particular relevant approach considering the fact that the Portuguese public sector, a strongly burocratic organizational context with considerable dimension (and economical constraints), is in the present moment being submitted to a major reorganization, making managers behaviors even more preponderant.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

Identify the task and contextual behaviors that Portuguese public sector top level managers adopt, and their motives to adopt them.

METHOD

Participants
10 Portuguese public sector top level managers.

Table 1: Participants characterization

Sex	Female		Male
	1		9
Age	31 - 40	41 – 50	51 – 60
	1	5	4
Former sector of activity	Public Sector 8		Private sector 2*
Years in a management position	1 – 5 9		5 – 15 1

*1 of whom in an organization that associates public and private rules.

Gathering data techniques
Critical incident technique applied in the context of interviews

Procedure
Interviews were held at the participants' workplace. All interviews (each with approximate 40 minutes) were audio taped, with the participants' authorization, and than transcribed.

Data analysis
Content analysis (QRS Nvivo7)

RESULTS

57 critical incidents were gathered, 10 being removed for ambiguity, for a final 82.46% usable response rate.

Task and contextual behaviors identified

We found 33 task performance incidents and 14 contextual performance ones. Results show that the most relevant task behaviors sub dimension is "Technical and management behaviors", specially "Decision making, problem solving" behaviors. Behaviors "Communicating and maintaining others informed", "Training, coaching and developing subordinates" and "Administration and paperwork" weren't identified (See table 2).

Table 2: Task behaviors identified by top managers in the Portuguese Public sector

Task performance		
Sub dimensions	Behaviors	
A. Dealing and communication	1. Communicating and maintaining others informed	0
	2. Representing the organization	2
	3. Influencing	4
	Subtotal 1	6
B. Leadership and supervision	4. Guiding, directing and motivating subordinates	3
	5. Training, coaching and developing subordinates	0
	6. Coordinating subordinates and other resources	4
	Subtotal 2	7
C. Technical and management	7. Planning and organizing	2
	8. Technical proficiency	3
	9. Administration and paperwork	0
	10. Decision making, problem solving	6
	11. Staffing	2
	12. Monitoring and controlling resources	3
	13. Delegating	2
	14. Collecting and interpreting data	2
	Subtotal 3	20
	Σ	33

"Personal Support" and "Conscientious Initiative" are the most relevant contextual behaviors sub dimensions identified, namely "Courtesy and support" and "Initiative". "Organizational Support behaviors" were the least identified (see Table 3).

Table 3: Contextual behaviors identified by top managers in the Portuguese Public sector

Contextual performance		
Sub dimensions	Behaviors	
A. Personal Support	1. Helping	0
	2. Cooperate	0
	3. Courtesy & support	6
	4. Motivate	0
	Subtotal 1	6
B. Organizational Support	5. Representing	0
	6. Loyalty	0
	7. Compliance	3
	Subtotal 2	3
C. Conscientious Initiative	8. Persisting	1
	9. Initiative	4
	10. Self development	0
	Subtotal 3	5
	Σ	14

Motives to adopt (task and contextual) behaviors identified

Results also show that participants tend to explain their behavior principally in regard to their personal intentions/desires (see table 4). These intentions/desires are primarily the enhancement of the organization (e.g. protecting the organization's image) and the subordinates (e.g. protecting the subordinates image and dignity).

Table 4: Motives managers use to explain their behaviors

Motives for the behaviors	Number of incidents*	e.g.
1. Managers' characteristics	9	Personal beliefs
2. Subordinates' characteristics	5	Competencies and personality
3. Situational characteristics	9	Subordinates duties
4. Managers' intentions/desires	34	Enhance the organization; Enhance the subordinates

* Each participant could present various motives simultaneously to explain a single behavior.

Participants explain their adoption of "Decision making, problem solving" and "Influencing" task behaviors with their intention/desire to accomplish something, particularly enhance their organization (see table 5).

Table 5: Task behaviors more frequent and associated motives

Behaviors	Motives frequently associated
Decision making, problem solving	Managers intentions/desires (namely, enhance the organization)
Influencing	Managers intentions/desires (namely, enhance the organization)
Coordinating subordinates and other resources	Managers intentions/desires (no major tendency)

In relation to contextual behaviors, participants explain the adoption of "Courtesy & support", "Compliance" and "Initiative" behaviors with their intention/desire to accomplish something (once again), particularly enhance their subordinates, protecting them at a personal and professional level (see table 6). "Initiative" behaviors are also explained with the managers' intention/desire of guaranteeing their business partners performance.

Table 6: Contextual behaviors more frequent and associated motives

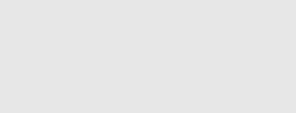| Behaviors	Motives frequently associated
Courtesy & support	Managers intentions/desires (namely enhance subordinates)
Compliance	Managers intentions/desires (namely enhance subordinates)
Initiative	Managers' intention/desires (namely enhance subordinates; and enhance the performance of business partners or dependent organizations)

DISCUSSION

Situational factors seem to explain the identified behaviors. "Decision making, problem solving", "courtesy and support" towards subordinates and the "initiative" of doing everything considered necessary to complete a team or organizational aim appear as fundamental behaviors in order to deal with the existing Portuguese Public Sector economical constraints, burocratic procedures and subordinates uncertainties about their professional future and the future of the organizational structure. Taking these constraints, it's interesting to see that managers explain their behaviors are mainly driven by their intention to enhance the organization (e.g. protect its image) and subordinates (e.g. their image and dignity).

In this organizational setting characterized by uncertainty and new rules (e.g. Performance appraisal system), the adoption of contextual behaviors is even more relevant, since they are particularly significant in organizational crises and change, promoting an organizational, social and psychological context that enhances organizational stability.

This work emphasizes the importance of the Critical Incident Technique in the study of the managers Individual Performance, as it enables the identification of good performance behaviors in a contextualized way.

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