The individual performance of top managers in the public sector

Job Performance is the worker’s total population of behaviors relevant for accomplishing the organization’s goals. It’s behavioral, evaluative and multidimensional (Vassouvaran & 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. 76).

This work focuses on the critical requirements of the top level managers’ job in the Portuguese public sector. This means focusing on 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 bureaucratic organization 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 approximately 45 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.).

Results
271 critical incidents (CI) were gathered, 47 being removed for disrespecting quality criteria, for a final 226 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).

**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 impossible 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 overly 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.

**References**


