



WORK HARDER

Motivation

Job Performance from an Evidence-based Management Perspective: Why Task and Contextual Performance Matters

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Executive summary

This dossier describes the importance of including both task and contextual performance in defining and describing job performance. The dossier describes how organizations who incorporate contextual performance into hiring, appraisal and training HR practices can gain a competitive advantage through linking job performance to the overall mission of the firm. The dossier describes the benefits of including contextual performance and provides recommendations to organizations on how best to include contextual performance.

Contextual performance: the ability of employees to contribute to the overall well-being of the organization

One of the most important functions of an organization is to ensure that employees are effective in performing their jobs. However, in recent years, contextual performance is viewed as an integral part of overall job performance. Now practitioners and researchers view job performance as moving beyond what is considered effective for performance on a task. Because of changes in the global market and increased competition, employees are now expected to go beyond what is expected on their job description. Contextual performance captures this ability of employees to engage in activities that contribute to the overall well-being of the organization. This aspect of job performance is viewed as equally important as task performance. Examples of contextual performance include volunteering for additional work, being a good organizational citizen, cooperating with coworkers and additional discretionary behaviors (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

The benefits of contextual performance: the ability to transform the organization to the better

Researchers and practitioners agree that job performance is multidimensional and consists of two main factors: task performance and contextual performance (Motowidlo & Schmit, 1999). Task performance is important because it relates to

producing job-specific goods and services and requires employees to acquire and demonstrate core technical skills. Although task performance is necessary, contextual performance boosts the organizational climate through strengthening social networks. When employees engage in contextual performance this contributes to the culture and climate of the organization. Contextual performance has the ability to transform the organization because employees volunteer for extra work, persist with enthusiasm and help and cooperate with others (Motowidlo & Schmit, 1999).

Personality and contextual performance: selecting the right employees

There is research to suggest that [personality traits are more effective predictors](#) of contextual performance rather than predictors of task performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). Borman and colleagues demonstrated that the personality traits of conscientiousness and dependability correlate more highly with organizational citizenship behaviors than with task performance (Borman, Penner, Allen & Motowidlo, 2001). In comparison, [general cognitive ability](#) is more related to task performance (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). There is also research showing that when organizations use job analysis, personality traits predict both task and contextual job performance (Jenkins & Griffith, 2004). One suggestion is to use narrow traits to predict contextual job performance rather than a reliance on global traits such as the Big Five personality factors (Jenkins & Griffith, 2004). A more detailed discussion about evidence-based selection and how it can be applied in organizations is provided in the evidence-based management learning team ["How to select, hire and retain the right people for a high-performance organization?"](#).

Contextual performance impacts human resource practices

One of the main reasons to also include contextual performance as a measure of job performance is that it impacts the quality of human resource practices (Befort & Hattrup, 2003). Job performance is intrinsically linked to the goals and mission of the organization (Motowidlo & Schmit, 1999). Consequently, decisions concerning how to

measure job performance and the relative weight assigned to task vs. contextual behaviors has important implications for decisions made regarding human resource practices (Befort & Hatstrup, 2003).

The importance of including contextual performance in human resource practices was demonstrated in a study by Murphy and Shiarella (1997). They demonstrated that the validity of selection procedures depended on the relative values placed on task and contextual performance. Including contextual performance in decision-making is also important for performance appraisal, which is an important human resource practice. Managerial decision-making plays an important role in the performance appraisal function and research has shown that supervisors differ in the relative weight they provide for the dimensions of task and contextual performance when deciding the overall contribution of the employee to the organization (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). When managers place relative values on task and contextual performance behaviors this impacts decisions about promotions and other rewards.

Inclusion of contextual performance in assessment decisions can also impact the fairness of human resource practices. Research has shown that the relative importance that an organization places on task and contextual performance can influence adverse impact and the hiring of minorities (Hatstrup, Rock & Scalia, 1997).

Recommendations

Thorough Job Analysis. It is important for organizations to conduct a thorough job or organizational analysis to include important task and contextual behaviors that are job-relevant. One popular job analysis method, such as the Position Analysis Questionnaire, involves collecting ratings of the importance of job-relevant behaviors (McCormick, Jeannerette & Mecham, 1972). Inclusion of these types of ratings has the potential to communicate those job-relevant behaviors that are valued within the organization. They impact hiring decisions and send a message on which behaviors are relevant to the organization in terms of daily behavior, behaviors that need to be trained, and behaviors that are rewarded through promotion or pay.

Train and Develop Managers. Research has shown that more experienced managers value contextual performance to a greater degree than less experienced managers

(Befort, & Hatstrup, 2003). Over time, managers gain a better appreciation of how task performance is related to the overall organizational context. Managers can learn to focus more on behaviors that contribute to social connectedness and promote a positive work climate (Befort & Hatstrup, 2003). Organizations can implement management training initiatives that encourage less experienced managers to gain knowledge of how task and contextual performance are linked to the mission of the organization. These gains in knowledge can impact performance appraisal ratings and managerial decision-making.

In conclusion, this CQ Dossier describes the ways in which leadership can benefit organizational effectiveness through describing emergent leadership theory that shows the importance of leadership in a dynamic environment. Previous micro-theories of leadership such as transformational and charismatic leadership have been useful yet have tended to be static and just focused on the effect of the leader on follower motivation and performance. The best theories link leader effects to organizational effectiveness through showing the process through which leadership is effective.

Key take-aways

- Contextual performance occurs when employees go beyond what is expected
- Contextual performance contributes to the overall well-being of the organization
- Personality traits are related to contextual performance and can be used in hiring decision
- Experienced managers pay more attention to contextual performance than inexperienced managers
- Organizations can include contextual performance in job analysis efforts

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