ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCE IN A HOSPITAL INSTITUTION: THE VISION OF REVIEWS AND REVIEWERS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the vision of reviews and reviewers about the performance evaluation process based on competencies, at a hospital. The research has predominantly qualitative nature, which strategy was concerned to the case study. The procedures used for data collection were document analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. For the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, the descriptive statistical treatment of the data was used. The interviews, in turn, were interpreted by means of discourse analysis. Both analyzes converged on the triangulation of research methods. Strengths and opportunities for improvement in the processes of performance evaluation performed by the organization were evidenced. Furthermore, we discussed the common understanding on the part of users about their meaning and on their ability to enhance current practices and that there are reliable and valid benefits in applying this type of tool. It was also highlighted the importance of the possibility of revisiting the evaluation processes in order to be more effective and consistent with the organizational and individual expectations. The intention of this research was contribute to the

affirmation of the necessary approximation of the academy with the reality of management, facilitating conversation and reflecting benefits to both.

KEY WORDS: Competence Management; performance evaluation; competence assessment; hospital

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a visão de avaliados e avaliadores a respeito do processo de avaliação de desempenho baseado em competências, de uma instituição hospitalar. A pesquisa possui natureza predominantemente qualitativa, cuja estratégia deu-se pelo estudo de caso. Os procedimentos utilizados para coleta de dados foram: análise documental, questionários e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Para a análise das respostas obtidas no questionário, foi utilizado o tratamento estatístico descritivo dos dados. As entrevistas, por sua vez, foram interpretadas por meio da análise de discurso. Ambas as análises confluíram na triangulação de métodos de pesquisa. Foram evidenciados pontos fortes e oportunidades de melhoria nos processos de avaliação de desempenho executados pela organização. Além disso, discutiu-se o entendimento comum por parte dos usuários sobre seus significados e sobre a sua capacidade de aprimorar práticas atuais e que existem benefícios confiáveis e válidos na aplicação deste tipo de ferramenta. Destacou-se ainda a relevância da possibilidade de revisitar os processos de avaliação de forma a serem mais efetivos e condizentes com as expectativas organizacionais e individuais. Pretendeu-se com esta pesquisa contribuir para a afirmação da necessária aproximação da academia com a realidade de gestão, facilitando a conversação e refletindo benefícios para ambas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão por competências; avaliação de desempenho; avaliação de competências; instituição hospitalar.

1   INTRODUCTION

The recognition of the strategic function of the people management area brings out to meaningful discussions pointing out that the organizations have to assume the need to manage the individual and the collective performance in line with the organizational strategy. Within this context, performance management, according to the models management articulated by competencies, appears as an alternative increasingly widespread in academic and corporate business scenarios, in view of its capacity to provide the aligned management of strategic organizational objectives, individual wishes and environmental demands.

This interrelationship between strategy and competencies can in fact converge in direct benefits to the organization, allowing the alignment between the short and long term goals, the increase of synergy between new and already existing competencies as well as a better coordination of management in the identification and development of individual competencies or organizational competencies, that should encourage new strategies (Bitar & Hafsi, 2007).

The development of the organizational competencies is closely connected with the individual skills development and, for the latter it is necessary both the own instinct and the organizational investments in their employees (Munck, Borim-de-Souza & Zagui 2012). Essential among such investments are those targeted to structured tools capable of evaluating the individual performance in relation to their competencies delivery as expected by the company throughout time. The importance of such tools lies in their objective of adding value to the organization and also to the individual, allowing for mutual development.

The realization that the developed competencies contribute to achieve better individual and organizational performance is an essential step in indicating the predictive validity of a management by competencies model (Munck & Munck Borim-de-Souza, 2011). At this point, however, it remains the questioning about the relationship between the objectives proposed through the management by competencies models and their results. Accordingly, the performance evaluation appears in recent literature as the most widely used method to measure the professionals' results and deliveries within organizations. It can be said that its goal is to diagnose and analyze the individual and group performance, enabling

the personal and professional development as well as an enhanced performance (Limongi-France, 2010).

Many authors in the area of people management, human resources management, behavioral management, among others, have dedicated their researches to the subject, which resulted in many publications on the subject. On the domestic scene, Santos Coelho Junior and Moura (2011) and Munck et al. (2011) conducted surveys through the available literature and reported a significant volume of publications about the subject. However, what is found, in most cases, is only the conceptual part of the assessment process, and little focus is targeted to its construction and empirical application.

Given these considerations, in this paper, the objective is to analyze the reviews' and reviewers' vision regarding the performance assessment process based on competencies of a hospital. Within its framework, it is considered the perception of this group in relation to the application and objectives of such a management tool, besides its usefulness in the individual and professional development.

It is believed that the management and, consequently, the performance assessment in the context of management models articulated by competencies constitute one of the several challenges that could or even should become major topics for an extensive research agenda, within the universe of people management area. Even by dealing with a subject frequently explored by theoretical and conceptual ways, this is a topic that deserves attention in new researches, especially empirical, including towards stimulating findings that may confront or reinforce the theory.

The concern in demonstrating the reviews and reviewers vision regarding the performance assessment process lies in the attempt to extract the full potential and benefits that the tool can provide, as well as its limitations foci, even if only in the view of the research participants. It will be made possible to the organization its action at points that need revision and maintenance, evidenced by the present study, which can favor not only the institution as a whole, but also its members. Extrapolating the implications for the organization studied, this study aims to achieve the managers in general terms, especially those involved with the competency management, encouraging them on this

assessment instrument capable of providing information that will target the pursuit of better organizational practices.

2   PEOPLE MANAGEMENT MODELS ARTICULATED BY COMPETENCIES

The incorporation of the competencies approach is of such magnitude in an organization that it should lead to new management models and even to new organizational models (Bitar & Hafsi, 2007). Indeed, the competency management is part of a larger system of organizational management, it is about an ongoing process that has as its starting point the organization's strategy and that directs its activities to attract and to develop the necessary skills for the fulfillment of their goals (Munck et al., 2011).

Among the reasons for the incorporation of management models articulated by competencies, Draganidis and Mentzas (2006) point out two essential reasons: a) they may provide the identification of skills, knowledge, behaviors and competencies required to current and future demands of personnel selection in line with the organizational strategies and priorities; b) they may help direct efforts to the individuals and groups development.

In order to manage competencies, it is not enough to adopt a model because, once incorporated, it demands a considerable administrative burden, as well as possible conflicts (Markus, Cooper-Thomas & Allpress, 2005). A model of management by competencies is surrounded by a number of risks of social ties decomposition and collective pertinences, which together can promote an unbridled individualization. Communication and transparency are therefore essential, but represent factors immersed in countless difficulties, since they need to fit to the views, languages and pertinences, never homogeneous (Zarifian, 2003).

In this context of complexity where the management models articulated by competencies are immersed, it is not rare to find works that report the obstacles and difficulties involving its definition and operationalisation. Markus, Cooper-Thomas and Allpress (2005) emphasize that the biggest problem in the use of competency models lies in the lack of homogeneity in its definition and also in its amplitude. Vakola, Prastacos and Soderquist (2007) explain that such difficulties are often associated with the process complexity required in order to identify the

appropriate competencies and also those associated with the construction process of a suitable model to the organizational reality. Fleury and Fleury (2004), point out the great difficulty that companies face in the alignment of competencies and strategies. Because of these and many other barriers, the management by competencies model eventually loses its usefulness, going often to be more a hindrance in the organization, rather than a system of management support.

In this discussion about the management models based on competencies, some points should be highlighted. There is a clear need for a prospective and proactive approach of the models, aiming at the possibility for the organization to eliminate and offset competencies that since their identification are deemed obsolete. Similarly, the competencies, if developed in line with the strategy, can be used as powerful tools of communication in order to translate strategies and changes in behavioral terms, which are more easily understood and therefore applicable (Vakola, Soderquist & Prastacos, 2007).

The management by competencies also requires the resumption of appreciation of the relationship between the organization and the individual, since it emphasizes the importance of a competent human being in the effectiveness of numerous processes inserted into a business routine. It asks for the employee's individual and collective purposes alignment to the organizational purposes. In a context of valuing the individual and returning the work to the individual, the concerns regarding its historicity, educational training, professional development and social relationships start being more important (Zarifian, 2003).

The organizational members' commitment, and especially the commitment of the managers directly involved, is also of paramount importance. Managers are not only responsible for identifying appropriate competencies as from a preexisting set, but also for fostering, molding and possibly to let them dissolve (Bitar & Hafsi, 2007). It is stated that the critical factor for successful development of organizational competencies is related to the real intention of the managers in doing so, requiring constant efforts throughout time (Prastacos & Spanos, 2004).

In order to overcome the frequent difficulties linked to the incorporation of management models based on competencies, actions must be taken collectively, considering the organizational goals, the individual aspirations and the environmental influences. The changes affect not only the company scope but also the individual, who is the main factor so that decisions are taken. It can be seen so, the vital need of efficient communication, given that it is as from an efficient communication that the common difficulties can be resolved more easily - how to properly disseminate the model throughout the organization, to relate the individual competencies to the organizational competencies and activate obsolete competencies.

Munck et al. (2011) warn that a competency model can be considered valid in so far as it has a common language in different strategic levels in the organization which shelters it, a situation that allows quality and agility in its assessment processes, implementation and improvement. It is upon the organization therefore to choose a valid management model articulated by competencies that allow it to act in accordance with its goals.

As observed, the individual competencies are directly related to the work environment, in other words, to the organizations. There is an intimate relationship between organizational and individual competencies in so far as the professional brings effective contribution to the company body of knowledge, contributing to the maintenance of the competitive advantage and thus adding value to the organization (Dutra, 2007). Thus, focusing on the performance assessment of people through competencies, in the following topic, we explore issues on individual competencies and their assessment possibilities within organizations.

2.1 INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES AND PEOPLE ASSESSMENT BY COMPETENCIES

The most significant registers on the subject arise in the 1970s, with the studies of David McClelland. Since then, there has been expansion of researches on competencies and it is possible to find such term defined in many ways, from the perspective of several paradigms, in approaches and different classifications. At the individual level, Draganidis and Mentzas (2006) list in their researches 13

definitions for the term **'competencies'** established by academics and organizations of different locations in the world since 1982 until 2003. Authors realize that, basically, the individuals' competencies are conceptualized as a combination of tacit and explicit knowledge, behaviors and skills that provide them the potential of effectiveness in performing tasks.

For Drejer (2002), the individual competencies mean the application of the knowledge quality on experiences and actions, in other words, in accordance with the expected results. For Maggi (2006), individual competency is the translation of knowledge and experiences into action in the course of a continuous learning. Competency is primordially **to know how to interpret, to know how to evaluate** and **to know how to intervene** in order to manage, at the same time, the course of action and the space of reciprocal acknowledgments. The author adds that competence is a combination of different elements: the knowledge dimension inevitably combines with the experience dimension, with values dimension, with the personal history dimension and the work history dimension, and all of that at the moment of individual, subjective and social action. The competence is then contextualized, it is specific to a particular situation and thus is utterly contingent; it is impossible to reproduce it or transpose it to other situation.

In consonance, Fleury and Fleury (2004) understand that the appropriate notion of competence is associated with verbs and expressions such as: to know how to act, to mobilize resources, to integrate multiple and complex knowledge, to know how to learn, to engage, to take responsibility and to have strategic vision. For them, the competencies are knowledge and skills into action. Moreover, the individual competencies, for being contextualized, will be different depending on the person who is acting in one or other organization. The competence of the individual is not a state, nor is it reduced to a specific knowledge; on the contrary, in order to follow the dynamic organizational environment, competences must be updated and improved (Maggi, 2006; Fleury & Fleury, 2008). To do so, assessment parameters are necessary.

In healthcare organizations, Tolfo and Brand (2007) report the description, which does not seem to be different of the professionals' competencies. In order to be well prepared in the current market, it is necessary that these professionals

are integrated into the institution business and objectives, to hold specific technical and professional competencies to accomplish their operations in the best possible way, and especially that they develop social competencies because they will be building up relationships with people, be them either their internal or external customer.

It is expected that within the organization the individuals who exercise their functions, are not seen as a resource or an asset, but as a strategic extension of all marketing objectives. When considering that the individual competencies identify the individuals' proficiency for taking sound decisions in front of situations of complex difficulties, it is also assumed that, for such, the development of these competencies should take place mainly and not only according to their own instinct, but also through organizational investments in their employees (Munck et al., 2012). It is the HR department, based on the structuring of a focused planning, the responsible for the individual competencies development, capable of making the connection between organizational and individual competencies (Drejer, 2002).

As relevant as providing job performance and the people development based on their competencies, is to invest in mechanisms for evaluation. At first instance, within the context of people management, performance appraisal is the practice of judgment as from the objectives set by the organization: if they were achieved and if there was efficient use of resources. Performance appraisal aims to diagnose and analyze the employees' individual and group performance, enabling the personal and professional development as well as a better performance (Limongi-France, 2010).

Specifically, the performance management based on competencies considers the complementation and interdependence character between competency and performance. It integrates in a single management model, the activities of planning, monitoring and performance appraisal, as from a diagnosis of the competencies fundamental to the organization since the corporate level down to the individual (Brandão & Guimarães, 2001). This assessment is based on the set of tasks of the position occupied by the individual (Fleury & Fleury, 2007) being the performance properly expressed depending on

the behaviors (or competencies) that the person expresses and on the achievements arising from these behaviors (Gilbert, 1978).

One of the most widespread and used concepts in the academic and business community regarding the people assessment based on competencies is the delivery. The delivery consists of, according to Dutra (2007), a dimension of competency referred to what a person can and wants to deliver to the organization. Munck et al. (2011) add that the fact that a person holds a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes does not necessarily imply that the organization directly benefits from them. The delivery verification indicates this benefit.

One can define performance, therefore, as the set of deliveries and results of an individual to the organization, and there are in the assessment process three fundamental factors in interaction: the development linked to the individual's ability to take on tasks of higher complexity; the effort, in other words, the energy invested to perform the task; and the behavior. A person is **competent** when, through his deliveries, he adds value to himself and to the organization (Dutra, 2007).

Dutra (2004) developed a method of assessing individual competencies starting from the notion of delivery. In it, the notion of competencies is articulated with the notion of complexity to the extent that people with higher levels of development are capable of higher abstraction and therefore possess competencies to a greater degree of sophistication than **less** developed professionals. Furthermore, it is considered that active professionals in higher levels of complexity add higher value to the organization. Through the measurement of the complexity levels of the position, in face of the competencies already defined, it is possible to measure the development of an individual (Dutra, 2007) Thus, the concepts of competency, complexity, individual development and value addition complement each other and can form the basis for the construction of a system for management of personal development and personal performance.

Another performance management tool fairly propagated is the *Balanced Scorecard* (BSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton (1997). With the BSC, it is sought to evaluate results as from the measurement of tangible and intangible assets of a company starting from four perspectives of performance: financial,

customers, internal processes and learning. There is a systemic view of hypotheses about causes and effects, so the objectives and indicators in each performance perspective influence each other. When translating the corporate strategy into objectives, actions and indicators, the BSC is able to subsidize the competencies diagnosis, guiding the identification of the competencies needed to the achievement of objectives in each performance perspective.

There are also organizations that still use tools that allow measuring the individual performance at work, from the viewpoint of multiple sources of assessment, such as the senior boss, colleagues, subordinates and others. The 360-degree assessment is justified to the extent that the assessment of behaviors or competencies demonstrated by the person involves some subjectivity, since it is based on the reviewer's observation about the reviewed individual.

The appraiser perception on the reviewed behavior is often fraught with biases, due to factors such as prejudice, indulgence, severity and leniency, among others (Caetano, 1996). When the assessment is carried out by only one person, on the other hand, it is common the occurrence of distortions, such as to push pressure and psychosocial control in the workplace. Likewise there is self-assessment, in which the employee is invited to carry out a critical analysis of his own performance. Because it is carried out by the individual himself, it can possess a strong bias and lack of sincerity (Limongi-France, 2010).

In this model, the employee is assessed not only by his senior superior, but also by other individuals who interact with him in his work as team colleagues, subordinates, customers, and in some cases even by suppliers and by the employee himself (self-assessment). Supervisors represent the traditional sources of information for the evaluation, since they are often in prime position to watch the performance. In the case of self-assessment, the development objectives are favored since increasing the involvement of the employee in the analysis process constitutes a starting point for the establishment of future targets. The assessment by the subordinate also favors the development objectives, since the subordinate is in a suitable position to assess, in frequent contact with the reviewed, from where it can be observed many behaviors related to performance (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2003).

The assumption, therefore is that the assessment carried out by various players is richer and more trustworthy than the one carried out by a single individual, since it aims to get more information on the employee performance, but above all, because people involved start to share the responsibility for the process and possible distortions in the perception of one of the evaluators are diluted in the assessments carried out by the remaining evaluators (Brandão et al., 2008).

The three mentioned methods - the model of Dutra (2004), the BSC of Kaplan and Norton (1997) and the 360-degree assessment - possess their peculiarities, advantages and disadvantages (Brandão et al, 2008). It is not the purpose here to explore them. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that these are tools that can be applied either exclusively or in integration, the latter being a more robust way of performance management based on competencies.

The main advantage of having a performance appraisal policy within the organization is to enable that individual and/or collective performance is improved. The *feedback* on the quality of work done is able to incite improvements in performance and makes possible the practice of recognition and development actions, such as level of wages and bonuses, promotions, layoffs, training needs and career planning with decisive role in motivating the employee (Limongi-France, 2010).

After considering the theoretical considerations relevant to the empirical research carried out, it follows below the methodological procedures applied.

3   METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Considering the purpose of this paper, this research is classified as predominantly qualitative, carried out by a descriptive approach (Flick, 2009), whose strategy was drawn up by the case study (Yin, 2001). The procedures used for data collection were: documentary analysis, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2009).

For the documentary research, aiming at gathering information on the program of institutional competencies, as well as the analysis of performance evaluation process based on competencies adopted in the organization, it was

used the material available on the program page of competencies and performance evaluation on the company intranet, which contains information about the history, the methodology, the structure and the theoretical basis as well as reports containing the results of recent years assessments.

The questionnaire was prepared with 11 closed questions and 01 open, based on the theoretical reference searched. The closed questions constituted in affirmative sentences, in which the respondents should point out some degree of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The assertions arranged in Table 1 (see item 4), were related to the organization performance management model, addressing topics such as its conception and its outcome prediction. There was also in the questionnaire an open question so that the respondent could expose his suggestions and comments about the organization performance management model.

Aiming at the deepening of some questions and for a better understanding of these professionals' perception, it was set a sample of the respondents, for convenience and availability to participate in semi-structured interviews. The script was comprised of questions based on the institutional process of performance management, taking into account the perception of the professional as reviewed and reviewer within the process.

The research universe represents a population predefined by characteristics necessary for the study in question. It was established as universe, therefore, 60 senior-level nurses, all of them working at the researched organization with similar characteristics in terms of training and expertise and working in the areas of critically ill patients (ICU, semi-intensive and coronary heart) and hospital stays, considered areas of high complexity. This target audience was defined because all of them met the criterion of acting in the assessment process by competencies as reviewed and reviewer. Other important criterion for defining the sample was the relative maturity of the management by competencies undertaken for this group in relation to others within the organization.

Through this universe, the sample was defined by the criteria of typicality and accessibility, depending only on the availability of the invited professionals to

respond to the questionnaire and to participate in the interview within the deadline. I was distributed via *e-mail* the questionnaires to all 60 senior nurses who had a period of seven days to return. It was obtained 44 responded and valid questionnaires which represents 73% of return rate. Among these cases, starting from the availability and the accessibility of the respondents, eight were selected and invited to participate in the interviews, which took place over a week.

For the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, it was used the data descriptive statistical treatment (frequency and average) in order to get a better visualization. The use of only this technique, characteristic of quantitative studies does not mischaracterize, however, the predominantly qualitative nature of this study. The interviews, in turn, were interpreted by means of the discourse analysis (Vergara, 2012). It was sought, in this sense, not only the message apprehension, but also the consideration about the condition of the issuer (reviewed and reviewer) and on the context in which the discourse is embedded.

In short, the analyzes converged on the triangulation of research methods used in order to sustain and increase the reliability of the results obtained from empirical research (Yin, 2001) as well as to enhance and complete the production of knowledge sought by this research (Flick, 2009).

3.1 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ORGANIZATION STUDIED

The studied organization is a private large size company in healthcare sector, in the city of São Paulo. It has about 10,500 employees in its workforce. The distribution of professionals is concentrated in 61% at the base of the pyramid, operational and technical positions; the professional level, holding complete university degree, represents 26% of staff, 11% of whom work in nursing (Registered Nurse, and Senior Nurse). Physicians represent 9%. The leadership, directors, managers, consultants and specialists, make up 4% of the population.

The Human Resources area actively participates in the construction of organizational strategic planning, which is based on the BSC, and in the setting of goals for the cycle, extending it through all the leadership levels and relating

the personal goal and the area of performance to the organizational strategic targets.

Deployed in 2008, the Program of Institutional Competencies was built with the support of a HR consulting company, through participative model, designed together with the leadership, considering the mission, vision and values of the institution, strategic planning, essential competencies and expected deliveries. The model is based on the concept of competencies and deliveries of Dutra (2007) and has been refined throughout the implementation.

The mapping of competencies provides for mission and values of the organization, technical and academic requirements, behaviors necessary to the position and expected deliveries. It was started with employees in the areas of Nursing and Multidisciplinary Team and currently of the 714 existing positions in the organization, 56% have already had their competencies mapped. According to the institutional planning and schedule, all positions will have their competencies mapped until the end of 2014.

The performance appraisal has been applied for more than 14 years in the institution, at the beginning as a way to evaluate the performance of professionals according to the job description and goals established by the manager himself. Since 2008, there was the inclusion of the competencies in the performance appraisal. This evaluation takes place annually, usually starting in October up to December. The evaluation period is long precisely in order to reach the audience which is quite varied in terms of shifts, duty periods and ease of access to a computer. Adherence to assessment is high, reaching almost 100% in the last two years.

The performance appraisal process based on competencies aims to measure the deliveries carried out by the professional in the last cycle (annual) based on the competencies mapped for the position/area; to identify the strengths and development opportunities; and to subsidize training actions, succession plans, career plans, merit plans and internal recruitment, in order to supply the organization current and future needs aiming at ensuring the continuity of the business and the skilled workforce.

Within this context, the process consists of the following steps: self assessment; partial assessment carried out by the supervisor (if the evaluator

consider necessary he may invite other professional to be a second evaluator in the process); and final assessment, consisting of the steps of consensus, feedback and Individual Development Plan (IDP).

The Individual Development Plan is established individually aiming at establishing an action plan for maintenance of the strengths and development of the opportunities for individual improvement, defining actions, forms of execution and deadlines for the targets achievement. Still at this stage the feedback occurs, through which the reviewed and the reviewer exchange their perceptions. The leader and the staff are responsible for monitoring the progress, for checking what has been accomplished and what remains to be done, for looking for solutions that meet the individual development plan, either within the institution, with internal training, for example, or in other training institutions with external capabilities or formal education (undergraduate, postgraduate, etc..), always together with the development area.

4   PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The data collected after applying the questionnaires were submitted to statistical analysis and formatted in Table 1.

Questions	Evaluation Rating					Average
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1. The initial dissemination of the competencies assessment reaches all employees allowing good adherence to process.	0	1	2	37	4	4,0
2. The deadline for completing all the stages of the process (three months) is suitable for providing the participation of everyone.	0	4	3	30	7	3,9
3. The expected competencies and deliveries according to the position and the professional level are clear, leaving no doubt while filling the assessment	4	15	6	19	0	2,9
4. I understand what is expected of me as a reviewed individual in my position and level.	0	6	2	31	5	3,8
5. I understand what is expected of employees who are reviewed by me and I am able to review them.	0	4	5	30	5	3,8
6. The competencies assessment and the individual development plan enable analysis and discussion of points that I regard as necessary	0	5	4	30	5	3,8

to assist in the management and development of my career.					
7. The competencies assessment and the individual development plan enable the analysis and discussion of points that I regard as necessary to assist in the management and development of my staff.	0	5	6	30	3	3,7
8. I get all the support I need from Human Resources Department to clear up my questions concerning the process.	0	9	8	25	2	3,5
9. My staff believes that the results of the Competencies Assessment will serve as a basis for the development and the improvement of their careers.	0	11	15	18	0	3,2
10. I believe the results of the Competencies Assessment will serve for the development of improvement actions.	1	1	4	36	2	3,8
11. I believe the results will be seen by the Human Resources and Training Department and will be turned into development actions.	0	3	14	27	0	3,6

Table 1: Data obtained from the questionnaire
Source: Compiled by the authors as from the research results

The general observation to Table 1 shows that there were few items of total rejection among respondents, only questions 3 and 10 had some few markings on the "Disagree" option. In contrast, almost all questions received total agreement, except for questions 3, 9 and 11. Again, excluding the question 3, all others showed overall average above 3, indicating the tendency to agree with the affirmatives, and then the appropriateness of the performance management adopted and practiced in the organization.

Particularly, it is noted that questions 1 and 2, regarding the disclosure and the deadline for completion of the assessment exercise, respectively, are the points of highest acceptance among respondents having in view that these questions are the ones with higher overall average (4, 0 and 3.9). Yet, they are not topics which express full agreement. Referring to the questions of lower average, therefore, lower agreement, there are the questions 3 (2.9) and 9 (3.2).

Question 3 concerns to the transparency and the objectivity of the competencies description and expected deliverables of each professional; however question 9 concerns the connection between the results obtained in the performance appraisal and the career development and enhancement. The low values obtained for both refer back to a possible need of revision of competencies and expected deliveries so as to facilitate the understanding of what is expected from each individual, which thereby they can work to achieve the expectations, raising the career prospect and the teams' development.

Regarding the professional perspective as reviewed through the question 4 - "I understand what is expected of me as a reviewed individual in my position and level" - the score is 3.8, showing that the understanding of what is expected as a reviewed individual is better if compared to their perception as to the understanding of their reviewed ones. Likewise, it is verified that in question 5 - " I understand what is expected of employees who are reviewed by me and I am able to review them" - the average of 3.8, which means that the respondents believe they have the understanding of what they need to evaluate their team.

It is emphasized that these points stand in opposition to the result of question 3 - "The expected competencies and deliveries according to the position and the professional level are clear, leaving no doubt while filling the assessment". It is always necessary to remember the possibility that there may be misunderstandings in the assessment, taking into account that the model probably does not have a common meanings sharing among organizational members.

Questions 6 and 7 received most of the markings in the alternative, "I agree". This means that, as reviewed, the respondent perceives the usefulness of the competencies evaluation practiced in the organization for the management and the development of his own careers. On the other hand, as a reviewer, the individual also believes that this tool enables him to assist in the management and in the development of their team.

Questions 8, 9, 10 and 11 deal with the individual vision, as reviewed and reviewer of his staff, on the HR support with respect to the assessment process, as well as the consequences of the results in improvement actions and career

development. The results show that there is tendency to a favorable posture to this topic; it can be stated that the process and the posture of HR present credibility, but improvements are needed, especially in the view of the reviewer, when it comes to the staff perspective on the development and enhancement of their careers.

These last five questions allow the discussion that, even though the individual perceives that the performance evaluation model adopted is reasonably suitable for him, as reviewed and reviewer, this position does not repeat when it comes to the staff led by him. There might be some miscommunication on this context or, because they are positions of different levels, there is some differentiation in the competencies definition for the teams that may cause this perception.

Following the interviews, initially it was noticed that the individuals consider that there is clarity regarding to the procedure and to the competencies stages evaluation as well as it is considered satisfactory the support given by HR. The interviewees' statements, as follows, confirm such observations.

"I think that HR may even provide tools to these people in terms of how to achieve that goal, it has already been done so to some extent [...] But I think it is a competency that we, as managers of the administration, of the competency, of the assessment, we need to take on"."(Interviewee 01)

"I think that HR does many things and I get involved in many of them, because I enjoy it [...] I think the institution is deeply concerned to the humanization of and the welfare of the people." (Interviewee 06)

On the other hand, it is necessary to reason what is stated by the individual as follows:

"I see that there is a concern of HR in supplying the gaps and encourage those who have been well evaluated, but I do not know if the team realizes such correlation, I d not think so." (Interviewee 03)

The respondents' argumentations reinforce the marked evidences in the questionnaire analysis. First in relation to HR support, indicated by Respondents 01 and 06, also emphasizing their participation as managers involved in the

process. In fact, one of the critical factors for the competencies development success is regarded to the involvement and to the real intentions of the managers in doing so (Spanos & Prastacos, 2004), as well as the HR department is the body responsible for developing the individual competencies (Drejer, 2002).

In second place, it is ratified the idea that, from the staff perspective, supervised by the individual, improvements are needed in relation to the development and enhancement of their careers. It was observed moreover that there is unanimity among respondents when it comes to the time to perform it, being the time considered satisfactory, an aspect also detected through the questionnaires.

The participants were asked about aspects they deem as strengths and as opportunities for improvement. According to the interviewees' statements, from the reviewer point of view, it was mentioned as a major challenge and, hence, as an opportunity for the process improvement, the lack of clarity as to the competencies meaning and as to the deliveries description expected of each one.

> "Have I managed to get through it, or will the person still has difficulty in understanding [...] and it seems that people do not understand, what they want to know is what those huge sentences, in practice, means that [...], I include myself in this difficult task to decipher, because when you are going to read, and thinking about that person who is there to self-assess, would she understand that language, because it is a very different language". (Interviewee 02)

Respondents also point out the difficulty in getting to transmit, to translate to the reviewed what is expected from him, mentioning examples that may illustrate the compliance or the non-compliance in accordance with each delivery, and after the examples given, make sure that they understood and feel that the review was correctly carried out, clearly and fairly.

> "The language is very complex." (Interviewee 03)

> "Each area has a different reality [...] I think that an action, it would not be the case of translating, because translating, it would seem that things are not well written, but you offer arguments for people who will perform

the assessment, to conduct him in a more quiet way [...] we make the thing more objective and not subjective. "(Interviewee 01)

It is resumed the idea that competencies may represent powerful tools of communication, capable of translating strategies and changes in behavioral terms (Vakola, Soderquist & Prastacos, 2007). The lack of clarity, however, makes it difficult for the management and guidance of the people as to what is expected of them (Fischer, 2002). So that the desired results are achieved, it is necessary to be cautious in describing the competencies and the expected deliveries from each professional category, nearing the language used to the practice of everyday life of these professionals (Marras, 2000). In fact, it is noticed the need to work this topic on the studied organization, given the evidences highlighted both in the questionnaire (question 3) and in the interviews, as the excerpt from the speech of Respondents 02, 03 and 01.

During the process of performance appraisal based on competencies, according to Benetti, Girardi, Dalmau, Melo and Parrino (2007, p. 7) "it intersects the set of competencies required for a position with the competencies a person possesses", it may be observed then: that the professional is "above the position requirements" or "needs development". These concepts are expressed through the five-score rating scale, ranging from the unsatisfactory to the outstanding. But this scale is largely discussed in the institution due to the different practices in the beginning of the measurement process through the performance appraisal tool. In this context, among the interviewees' comments there is the difficulty in quantifying behaviors and competencies, and to transmit such quantification to the reviewed so that he understands the results achieved and the required actions to be performed thereafter.

*"Five years ago I was classified as an AC. What happened was that now I am an AT, I decreased the level." (*Interviewee 02).

*"It is not just for me it is AT and for you it is AC [...], what is this concept within the delivery, and what this delivery does say, from the moment we have persuasive arguments, the assessment turns to be very quiet."(*Interviewee 01)

When the respondent refers to his role as reviewed, it is noticeable greater clarity regarding the competencies and expected deliverables. In general, on their reports, they claim to know what is expected of them and understand the requirements regarding complexity, which enables measuring the added value to the institution through their performance. Yet referring to as reviewed in the process, they consider clear the concept of Individual Development Plan (IDP), which deals with actions to prepare professionals to take on and carry out tasks of greater complexity.

"The plan is for my development in the activity I perform in the institution and thinking about my future, maybe even in other headings." (Interviewee 05)

"So many times I see that nurses who are managing their work teams or even our supervisors do not have the IDP as a route to lead us during the year." (Interviewee 01)

The vision of the Interviewee 05, also found in the questionnaires results (question 6), may represent an indication of the predictive validity of the model management articulated by competencies of the organization under analysis. In other words, the Individual Development Plan (IDP) drawn up based on the conducted performance evaluation is perceived by their users as a capable mechanism for contributing to better individual (and possibly organizational) performances, assignment criterion of the predictive validity of a model as such (Munck et al ., 2011).

The presentation made by Interviewee 01 however, depicts the view of most respondents, both in position of reviewed ones and in the position of reviewers. In general, they mention that the Individual Development Plan (IDP) could be better used and monitored. The individuals report that it is done on the system, but it gets lost along the year.

Moreover, they point to the difficulty in giving and receiving *feedback* over the year and not only at the time of assessment, either due to lack of time, planning, encouragement, security, or because of squeamishness, amongst other reasons. This action could improve the people performance, once it plays a

decisive role in the employee motivation, from the moment he feels that someone cares about his learning and development, accompanies and helps him find what the best way forward (Limongi -France, 2010). Study carried out by Araújo (2011) in relation to the managers' perception regarding the performance appraisal depicts the crucial role of *feedback* in the assessment process. The author reports that sometimes the *feedback* is confused by some managers with the assessment itself, and therefore not being considered as part of it, as it really is.

All respondents believe that assessment by competencies may assist them in managing their careers, as well as in managing their teams, for through such assessment it is possible to identify the strengths of each one, as well as the opportunities for improvement besides allowing to draw up action plans for the development and improvement of the competencies. Respondents see the evolution of the model adopted by the institution, especially those who attended and experienced the first exercises.

When asked if the reviewed individuals are able to perceive the correlation between the performance evaluation and the results obtained to the professional development, as occurred in the questionnaires analysis (question 9), the respondents claim that the team fails to realize the relationship between development, career and assessment because they are very distant from the organizational strategy. Although this is a premise of management by competencies models, the alignment of competencies and strategies represents a major difficulty for organizations (Fleury & Fleury, 2004).

But, furthermore, it was mentioned that sometimes employees do not aim at other levels of complexity, they have stagnated and do not see the Individual Development Plan (IDP) as a development tool even for his own position. On the other hand, there are professionals who understand and even request *feedback* and give a return regarding the accomplishment of their individual development plans over the year.

When asked if they believe the results are seen by the HR and Training area, aiming at turning them into development actions, most of them answered affirmatively. The interviewees point out, however, that the action sometimes is too far from the reality of the everyday life of the sector, so this correlation is not

always perceived and is left to the leadership discretion the explanation and the follow-up. These comments are in line with the results obtained by the questionnaire (question 11).

The interviews analysis together with the questionnaires analysis made it possible to score and to synthesize the strengths and the opportunities for improvement of the assessment process that emerged from the data collection, application of the questionnaires and interviews, as shown in Table 2.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
Monitoring and management team	Better knowledge of the tool and of the competencies by the reviewed ones
Monitoring and managing their own careers	Language used to describe the competencies and deliveries
Structuring action plans	Perception and role division: reviewed and reviewer - whose is the responsibility and for what they are responsible
Structuring and adequate functioning of the tool	Involvement of the individual aiming at the awareness that the performance appraisal is a tool for development and professional improvement
Deadlines and Disclosure	Explanation of the correlation between the assessment results and development actions
Support of HR department and training programs	Frequency and quality of *feedback*
Use as subsidies for reward and recognition actions	The Individual Development Plan (IDP) Monitoring

Table 2: Strengths and opportunities for improving the assessment process in the organization studied
Source: Compiled by the authors as from survey results

It is observed that while the strengths are related primarily to the formal structure and to the possibilities afforded by the performance assessment tool adopted, the opportunities for improvement are related to the explicit and proper communication, seeking greater involvement of individuals, besides the monitoring assessment results.

As seen, the main advantage of the adoption and the practice of performance appraisal based on competencies in an organization are to enable that individual and/or collective performance is improved. Once verified the alignment between the individual and the organizational competencies, it is expected that the organization's performance is also improved. To this end, it is visualized the vital need of the effective communication before, during and after

the assessment process, once it is as from it that common difficulties such as to properly disseminate the model throughout the organization and to encourage the individuals involvement can be solved more easily.

5   FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper was developed with the purpose to analyze the reviewed and the reviewer vision in a hospital institution regarding the performance appraisal process based on competencies. Based on this group perception in relation to the implementation and to the goals of such a management tool, besides its usefulness in the individual and professional development, it was evidenced strengths and improvement opportunities in the executed processes.

Although the assessment by competencies is a relevant process and targeted to the organization strategy, many individuals perform it as a formality demanded by the institutional policies, since this is a precondition for many reward and recognition programs, such as variable compensation, merit, bonuses, internal recruitment, among others. It is necessary to understand what the participants' vision is, regarding the assessment process as a management and people development tool, since the evaluation itself does not have potential for behavior change, correction of the indicated points of improvement and maintenance of positive aspects. Such actions will only be possible as from the correct understanding of the viewed and reviewers involved in the process, their ability to absorb and put into practice aspects hitherto considered subjective.

The competency-based management, effective as from models, gains relevance in so far as it allows the dynamics of such competencies in the organization, through instruments capable of forming, developing and assessing the competencies - individual, collective or organizational. Essential in a competency model application and as a first step in all its scopes, including in the evaluation processes is the common understanding by the users about the meaning of such a model and about its capacity to enhance current practices, as well as the perception that there are reliable and valid benefits. It is in this context that resides the primary point found as from the empirical research.

The model used by the studied organization has already gone through some revisions and changes, however, other revisions are needed, particularly with regard to the language used to describe the competencies and the deliveries, as explained by the research results. Furthermore, it is suggested a further closing of the Human Resources area to the reviewed and the reviewers, including to continue the perception study of this present paper with other levels, seeking to meet the needs of all target audiences and provide a better understanding as to what is expected from each one, clarifying the purpose and objectives of the assessment tool. In addition to a better monitoring on the part of HR regarding the implementation of development actions based on the assessment results, it is desired the monitoring of individual development plans and the implementation of *feedback* actions over the year.

For the company researched and its respective area of Human Resources, the relevance of this study lies therefore, in the possibility of revisiting the processes so that they can be more effective and consistent with the organizational and personal expectations. Thus, it is expected to provide as from the results of this study, a greater involvement of leadership in the internal processes, as well as the alignment of the organizational policies and procedures to the individual interests.

The intention was to extract the full potential and benefits that the tool can provide, as well as its limitations foci, even if only in the research participants view. It is recommended, therefore, to continue the studies together with the other professional categories and hierarchy levels, seeking to investigate and subsequently to refine the professionals' vision and, as a consequence, the adhesion to the development and enhancement plans of their careers, clarifying questions and prejudices related to the tool.

Future works can also be developed in the same context in order to overcome some limitations of this research. It is accepted that, despite being suitable for the established purpose of providing an overview of the subject, the drawn up questionnaire is limited in its scope, and may, in the future, be detailed and deepened. Similarly, a larger number of interviews should be carried out with the recommendation of application of the *snowball* technique.

Finally it is believed that the management and performance appraisal based on competencies constitute one of the several challenges that could or even should become major topics for an extensive research agenda. This is a topic that deserves attention in further researches, especially empirical ones, with the purpose to stimulate discoveries that may confront or reinforce the theory. This paper contributes to the affirmation of the necessary approximation of an academic proposal to the reality of management, facilitating the conversation between both areas and reflecting in benefits also for both.

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