

Lifelong Learning: Use of Psychological Factors in the Greek Public Administration

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Abstract - The integration of occupational psychology principles into human resource management is considered appropriate to increase employee productivity and the effectiveness of public sector organizations. In Greece, the use of psychological factors in human resource management in the public sector is a relatively new field, as occupational psychology has been included in the training programs of public sector executives only in recent years. In addition, the percentage of public administration executives trained in the use of psychological agents has not yet been investigated. Also, there is a lack of research evaluating the results obtained concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization when managers and heads of departments apply the principles of occupational psychology. This research aims to address this existing gap. 520 Directors and heads of services of the Greek public sector answered an electronic questionnaire designed by the researcher, based on the purpose and research hypotheses they investigated: 1st to have great interest from managers in acquiring relevant knowledge and 2nd that those executives who received relevant training make intensive use of the knowledge they acquired. The electronic questionnaire was sent to all services of the Greek State and was answered by 520 directors and supervisors.

The results showed that there is a high percentage of executives who are trained and use psychological factors in human resource management. At the same time, it was found that training in psychological aspects is crucial to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations.

Keywords - Human resources, management, psychology, motivation, effectiveness.

1. Introduction

It is commonly accepted that the effectiveness of an organization, whether it is a private enterprise or a public organization, depends largely on the people who work for it. It is their own performance that determines the efficiency, effectiveness and achievement of the strategic goals or mission of the organization/business [1].

Employee efficiency is linked to human resource management and the leadership model adopted by Managers and Heads of Departments. In this context, more and more managers and supervisors are being trained in organizational psychology, emphasizing the use of psychological factors (motivation, reward, personal and professional development) [2].

Their education is mainly part of the framework of lifelong learning, and the cognitive results arise after attending educational programs organized mainly by the National Center for Public Administration and Local Government of Greece.

The term lifelong learning means the continuous process of acquiring knowledge that helps a person acquire new skills and adapt to new conditions and requirements, both personally and at a professional/work level. This includes all forms of learning, formal and informal and all fields, such as vocational training, training in new technologies, experiential seminars, etc. [3].

The term "organizational psychology" or "work psychology" refers to the application of rules and psychological methods in the workplace with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life of employees and the better functioning of the organization [4].

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According to Hellriegel, and Slocum, [5], organizational psychology focuses on four factors: a) employee-related processes, b) organization-related processes, c) individual and group-related processes, and d) change-related processes at the organizational and individual level.

One of its most important features is that it focuses on behaviors which, through the use of psychology and human behavior principles, try to optimize the benefit of the employer by increasing the commitment of employees to the goals, mission, and vision of the organization [6].

2. Literature Review

In the context of organizational psychology, leaders provide incentives for employees to extend their education, to improve their personal, financial and professional development and to increase their performance, while ensuring fairness within the organization, creating a good working climate and preventing work-related stress-related illnesses [7].

These motives, as shown by many research data, are crucial to the success or failure of the strategic planning and goal set by an organization [8], [9], [10].

Similar results are also found in the studies of Katusé [11] and Elbanna et al. [12] who found that if employees understand their contribution to the achievement of the organization's strategic goals, they adjust their behavior in order to achieve the goal, while Nyaga and Litunya [13] and Nkosi [14] found that the psychological factors that enhance organizational effectiveness are motivation for training and professional development and employee involvement in the development of the strategic plan.

In Greek literature there is a lack of similar studies, as most of them focus on motivation and leadership model. This may be because only in recent years the use of psychological factors in public administration has given special attention. From the two studies identified, it appeared that there is a low rate of use of psychological factors resulting in employees not reaching their full potential and the organization having low effectiveness [15], [16].

However, several researchers involved in the recording of the problems that the Greek public sector faces in its operation, consider that one of its most important drawbacks, which needs immediate improvement, is the lack of knowledge of managers and supervisors on issues related to human resources management [17], [18].

3. Training of Executives of the Greek Public Administration

Courses on organizational psychology and behavior are offered by many universities in Greece, while other organizations, such as the organizational psychology branch of the Hellenic Psychological Society, organize training seminars on the subject. However, as far as the public sector is concerned, the relevant training seminars are organized by the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government [19].

The educational and scientific work, of the National Centre, is carried out by specialized Teaching Staff and supported by an experienced team of scientific and administrative executives from the National School of Public Administration and Local Government (ESDDA), the Training Institute (INEP) and the Institute of Documentation and Innovations (ITEK) [19].

The National Centre (EKDDA) implements many training programs aimed at civil servants holding administrative positions. Many of these programs concern the way of exercising administration, such as the following two:

- “*Management capacity development: leadership and strategic thinking - organizational change*”, which aims to develop knowledge and skills in leadership, strategic thinking, and organizational change, so that public sector executives can meet the current needs for more effective management and includes modules on leadership models and leader characteristics, leadership and behavior, strategic thinking and organization, impact analysis, linking personal motivation to organizational strategy and organizational change.
- “*Developing managerial competences: human resource management*” which aims to equip participants with knowledge and skills that will enable them to exercise human resource management by adopting innovative practices that promote performance improvement based on objective evaluation criteria and promote initiative and a spirit of teamwork to achieve results. The program includes modules on human resource utilization and human resource management, job planning, employee mobility, job descriptions, employee profiling, organizational unit performance appraisal, employee performance appraisal and appraisal support tools, and the development of an action plan to improve organizational unit performance; and personal development.

It is worth noting that although training programs, in human resource management, have often been implemented in the Greek public sector, in recent years, there are no findings, in the literature, showing how many managers and supervisors attend them. Also, no relevant research has been identified that states whether and to what extent psychological factors are applied in the Greek public sector [20], [21], [22], [16].

This study attempts to fill this gap, the purpose of which is twofold: 1) to record the percentage of managers and supervisors of Greek public sector organizations who are trained in the use of psychological factors in the exercise of human resources management and 2) to record the percentage of managers and supervisors who make use of what they have learned.

4. Methodology

In order to record the rates of participation in training programs and the use of psychological factors in human resource management, the quantitative method was adopted, which is considered the most appropriate for recording and evaluating the frequency with which the topic under investigation occurs [23].

In scientific quantitative research the goal is generalization, that is, the description of one or more population variables as well as the explanation of relationships between population variables. Therefore, information on the various population variables needs to be collected and analyzed. Because gathering information is a difficult, time-consuming, expensive and sometimes impossible process, information is collected from a sample of the population and based on the data (elements) selected, from the sample, analyzes are conducted [24].

Regarding the sample, according to the latest census by the Ministry of the Interior (ypes) [25] the total number of civil servants in Greece is 3.893,845 people. However, the number of managers and supervisors employed in the services and bodies of the Greek public sector is not officially recorded. Same applies to the gender of the employees.

So, the questionnaire, after being created in electronic form, was sent to the administrations of the public services, which operate in all 51 prefectures of the Greek territory (Ministries, Local Government Organizations, Primary and Secondary Education, Hellenic Police, etc.), accompanied by an informative note about the objectives of the study. At the same time, it contained the researcher's commitment to maintain anonymity and use the data only for the needs of the research [24].

The questionnaire was answered by 520 managers and supervisors of various services and organizations of the Greek public sector (education, local government, health, police, etc.).

The questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as a research tool, based on the goals and research hypotheses of the study [24] and consists of three parts. The first includes the demographic characteristics of the participants, the second includes questions about participation or not in training programs related to human resource management and the last part includes questions about the use or non-psychological factors in the exercise of management.

Two investigative cases have been raised in this context:

1. We assume that there is a high interest, from the executives of the Greek public administration, to acquire knowledge in human resource management using psychological factors
2. We assume that the executives of the Greek public administration make intensive use of the knowledge they have acquired

The data collection process started in July 2022 and was completed in October of the same year and was processed using the SPSS 27 statistical package.

5. Results

Of the 520 people who took part in the survey, 334 were women and 186 were men. The majority of the sample belongs to the 51-60 age group. Just over half of the participants (50.6%) hold a postgraduate degree, while a small percentage (4.8%) have a PhD.

In terms of job position, the majority of the sample (71.5%) are supervisors and the rest (28.5%) are managers with most (73.8%) having held this position for the last decade.

In order to record the percentages of managers and supervisors who attended training programs, participants were asked to indicate whether they took part in training seminars and how many.

From their answers (Table 1), it appears that 128 people (24.6%) had never participated in such training activities, while the majority of the rest (59%) had attended 1-5 seminars (Table 2). This indicates that among the group of managers there is interest and concern to participate in courses that provide them with complementary tools to their formal education.

Table 1. Attendance at the training seminars

Participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	128	24,6	24,6	24,6
Yes	392	75,4	75,4	100,0
Total	520	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Frequency of attending seminars

Attendance of seminars	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid None	128	24,6	24,6	24,6
1-5	307	59,0	59,0	83,7
6-10	50	9,6	9,6	93,3
Over 11	35	6,7	6,7	100,0
Total	520	100,0	100,0	

When asked about the reasons for abstention, most (43.8%) attributed it to lack of information, while a respectable percentage (17.2%) stated that they did not consider it important to participate in such seminars (Table 3).

The data reveal that 74,2% of the respondents who have not participated in training seminars claim that the reasons are beyond their control. This is due to a lack of information or a shortage of courses or seminars. In this sense, the administration should improve its channels of promotion and dissemination of training seminars.

Table 3. Reasons for non-participation in seminars

Reasons for abstention	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid I didn't think it was important	22	17,2	17,2	17,2
I did not find the subject interesting	11	8,6	8,6	25,8
I was not informed about the holding of the seminars	56	43,8	43,8	69,5
Limited number of seminars	39	30,5	30,5	100,0
Total	128	100,0	100,0	

5.1. Percentage of Managers and Supervisors who Apply What They Have Learned in Training Seminars

Since the aim of this study was also to record the percentage of managers and supervisors who, after being trained, applied the new knowledge, in this section the data was only drawn from those who took part in the training seminars. Thus, the number of the total was 392 instead of 520, who were asked to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement on specific statements related to the areas where they used their newly acquired knowledge.

In the statement “*I use the knowledge and skills I received from the training to apply psychological factors to improve the performance of my subordinates*”, the majority expressed themselves positively by choosing either the statement “I agree” (58.9%) or the statement “I strongly agree” (16.3%).

However, there is also a percentage (21 persons/ 5.3%) who expressed a contrary opinion, considering that the implementation of new knowledge did not improve the efficiency of employees (Table 4).

Table 4. Application of psychological factors that improve the efficiency of subordinates

Increase in efficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Totally disagree	4	1,0	1,0	1,0
Disagree	17	4,3	4,3	5,4
Neutral opinion	76	19,4	19,4	24,7
Agree	231	58,9	58,9	83,7
Totally agree	64	16,3	16,3	100,0
Total	392	100,0	100,0	

Equally high were the percentages of positive responses to the question: “*This training helped me to motivate my subordinates*”, as more than half of the participants (55.9%) stated “I agree” or “I strongly agree” (16.8%) (Table 5).

The results confirm the point of view of those who argue that exercising management using psychological factors is beneficial for the effectiveness and the achievement of the goals set by the organization. They also reinforce the views of those who believe that the effectiveness of public administration depends on the leadership skills of the executives who exercise administration [17].

Table 5. Use of knowledge to motivate subordinates

Worker motivation		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Totally disagree	4	1,0	1,0	1,0
	Disagree	22	5,6	5,6	6,6
	Neutral opinion	81	20,7	20,7	27,3
	Agree	219	55,9	55,9	83,2
	Totally agree	66	16,8	16,8	100,0
	Total	392	100,0	100,0	

Positive answers with the option "I agree" and "I strongly agree" (total percentage 56.4%) were also given to the question/statement: *This training helped me to keep my subordinates committed to their work.*

However, in this particular question there was a significant percentage (33.2%) that expressed neither positive nor negative, which is a cause for concern and requires further investigation to find the causes (Table 6).

Table 6. Using knowledge to maintain subordinates' loyalty

Employee loyalty		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Totally disagree	7	1,8	1,8	1,8
	Disagree	34	8,7	8,7	10,5
	Neutral opinion	130	33,2	33,2	43,6
	Agree	187	47,7	47,7	91,3
	Totally agree	34	8,7	8,7	100,0
	Total	392	100,0	100,0	

The usefulness of training in the psychology of work was also confirmed by the answers given by the participants to the question *"This training did not help me to improve the efficiency of my subordinates"*.

The responses confirmed the initial assessment that managers and heads of public services recognize the important contribution and training they have and the use of psychological factors as the most of participants (47% of the total) expressed their disagreement with the above statement choosing either 'disagree' (percentage 32.7%), or 'strongly disagree' (percentage 14.3%) (Table 7).

Table 7. New knowledge did not contribute to the improvement of subordinates' efficiency

No increase in efficiency		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Totally disagree	56	14,3	14,3	14,3
	Disagree	128	32,7	32,7	46,9
	Neutral opinion	100	25,5	25,5	72,4
	Agree	94	24,0	24,0	96,4
	Totally agree	14	3,6	3,6	100,0
	Total	392	100,0	100,0	

Also, a large percentage (68.4%) of those who participated in training seminars expressed positive responses when asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement *"This training helped me to implement practical approaches that improve the efficiency of my subordinates"*.

As shown in Table 8, more than half of the participants (56.9%) chose the statement "agree" (56.9%) or the statement "strongly agree" (11.5%).

However, it is worth exploring the fact that this question also recorded a significant percentage (23.7%) of participants who were neutral.

Table 8. Implementation of practical approaches that improve the efficiency of subordinates

Outreach practices		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Totally disagree	4	1,0	1,0	1,0
	Disagree	27	6,9	6,9	7,9
	Neutral opinion	93	23,7	23,7	31,6
	Agree	223	56,9	56,9	88,5
	Totally agree	45	11,5	11,5	100,0
	Total	392	100,0	100,0	

As part of the study, the use of psychological factors was also explored to investigate how the use of psychological factors affects employee performance, which as mentioned above plays an important role in organizational effectiveness [20].

Thus, participating managers and supervisors were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the question/statement *"My subordinates strive for the highest possible performance"*.

From the answers given it seems that the use of psychological factors motivates employees to be more efficient as 62.7% chose the statement "I agree" (51.9%) or the statement "strongly agree" (10.8%) (Table 9).

Although the positive statements (61.7%) far outweigh the negative statements (8%), there is a significant percentage (29.2%), which corresponds to about one third of the participants, who also maintain a neutral attitude in this question, raising questions about the reasons for this attitude (neutrality).

Table 9. The effect of psychological factors on productivity growth

Employee performance	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Totally disagree	7	1,3	1,3	1,3
Disagree	35	6,7	6,7	8,1
Neutral opinion	152	29,2	29,2	37,3
Agree	270	51,9	51,9	89,2
Totally agree	56	10,8	10,8	100,0
Total	520	100,0	100,0	

6. Discussion

The present results are in line with findings of other researchers who found that the use of psychological factors in management practice improves organizational performance [8], [9], [10].

They also agree with other international studies that have shown that providing incentives for professional and personal development enhances employees' commitment to the organization's goals [14], [13].

Regarding the rate of use of psychological factors in management, the results of the study are in contrast to other Greek studies that showed low rates of use that resulted in reduced commitment and low effectiveness [15], [16].

7. Conclusions

The results of the present study are in line with theorists who argue that the use of psychological factors such as rewards, incentives, and opportunities for personal and professional development can motivate employees to improve their own performance and that of the organization in which they are employed [20].

At the same time, they demonstrate that more and more managers and supervisors of public organizations have realized the importance of training them in issues related to human resource management and the effectiveness of psychological factors.

Also, the statements of the participants show that the percentage of managers and supervisors taking part in training seminars is high, confirming the first research hypothesis that there is a high interest on the part of the executives of the Greek public administration to be trained in human resource management using psychological factors.

Furthermore, the results confirm the second research hypothesis, as the executives of the Greek public administration intensively use the knowledge acquired in human resources management, thus improving the effectiveness of their services.

In summary, from the results of this study, it is evident that training in psychological aspects is vital to improve the performance of human capital as well as to enhance management in organizations.

Given that only managers and supervisors took part in this study, it is considered that it would be interesting to design and conduct a new survey that would examine the combined views of leaders and employees on the use of psychological factors to identify those that are most effective.

In addition, it seems appropriate to investigate the neutral attitude expressed by the participants, which in several of the questions was at high levels, in order to determine the reasons for it. Possibly, the qualitative methodological approach, in the investigation of this specific topic, would be the most appropriate method, as it is the one that seeks and identifies in depth opinions and behaviors of individuals for various situations [26].

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