

THE PROCESS OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCES IN A BRAZILIAN PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

The study of organizational competences has shown that, even according to the Resource-Based View – RBV - which characterizes itself for the most proficient convergence of studies about the collective and synergetic perspective of the relationship between resources and capability, we find little empirical research that investigates the internal configuration and dynamic of these elements. In this study we have tried to emphasize the composition and the relational dynamic of the organizational competences (OCs). From the presentation and analysis of different frameworks that comprise the theoretical basis for this article, the main focus was on the analysis of the formation and development process of organizational competences in a Judiciary Institution. The method used is the case study with an exploratory approach. The results of the research identify three important organizational competences in the institution as well as the elements that comprise them. In addition, the analysis emphasizes the interrelationship between these elements and the competences, which leads to the mapping of the formation and development of these competences throughout the time. Using this mapping technique, together with the theoretical fundament, a new framework is proposed. This new framework defines the composition of the subject OCs identified in the study in a way that is intended for empirical and theoretical application.

Keywords – development of organizational competences, frameworks, public administration

INTRODUCTION

One of the aspects that motivates the study of management is the identification of the elements that explain the conditions that encourage positive and productive competition within and between organizations as they progress with reform. Among the themes that are becoming more relevant in this debate is organizational competences – OCs. Pioneering studies about this topic deal with the construction of conceptual references and identifying the characteristics of OCs, as well as justifying the importance of OCs in the business and management strategy context. The objective of these studies is to

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construct a conceptual design about this theme (Grant, 1991; Helfer et al., 1996; Spender, 1996; Javidan, 1998; King et al, 2002). However, these approaches tend to configure the OCs in a more external perspective in which are highlighted the characteristics of their positive effects on the competitiveness of an organization, on the relationships with competitors and on the aggregated value of the user or client. Although they deal with many fundamental questions, these studies have left a large gap: to characterize the composition and the relational dynamics of OCs in the organizational environment. In other words, we see the need to understand how OCs are constituted and disseminated within the organization.

Exceptions among the analyses which highlight the external perspective of OCs, some current, include more explanatory studies of RBV – Resource Based View (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Teece et al., 1997) and more recent developments (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Winter, 2003; Sanchez and Heene, 2004) present, though by varying means, the concept of organizational competences as the result of a path taken by the firm over some time (*path dependence*); or as arising from strategic choices (*trade off*) that develop into a set of routines carried out according to previous investments in technology, learning and organizational processes; or even as the quality of the access of new types of resources or new skills to coordinate the resources. These studies add to the concept a dynamic perspective very much dependent on articulating the resources and the internal capabilities of the organization. However, even in the current RBV, which is characterized by a more fruitful convergence of studies about the synergistic and collective perspective of the relationship between resources and capabilities, the empirical research which deals with the internal configuration and the dynamics of these elements is scarce.

Even the most well known notion of organizational competences: the ability of a business to combine, mix and integrate resources of products and services, in order to achieve organizational performance and clients' recognition of value (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990), highlights an "external perspective". Prahalad and Hamel's expressions "combine, integrate resources" and "clients' recognition of value" present a generic and external view of the OCs, more focused on their relationship with the market, accentuating the figure of the client or user. Thus, in prioritizing the external notion to the phenomenon, an understanding of the "internal perspective" is not brought forward, more focused on characterizing the composition and dynamics of OCs in the organizational path.

Possibly the *firm specific* principle (Penrose, 1959, 1995), translated through the idea of *causal ambiguity* (Dierickx and Cool, 1989; Reed and Defillipi, 1990), which argues that organizational competence is the result of the interaction of various tangible and intangible resources, specific for each organizational context, can inhibit researchers in their task of investigating further this "internal perspective" of organizational competences. The complexity of this task, associated to the idea that the results can hardly or only partially be generalized to other organizations or contexts, appears to dampen the researchers' motivation for this approach.

It is possible that this is reason enough to reduce the frequency of these studies aimed at identifying different combinations of resources, abilities, systems and other elements

that compose the dynamics of an organizational competence, especially in the case of empirical based research.

This article proposes to confront and respond to this challenge. Based on different frameworks identified in the literature, especially that which contributes to the construction and systematization of knowledge of the composition of organizational competences, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the “internal perspective” of the OCs. Thus, it presents the composition and internal dynamics of the organizational competences of a public institution linked to the Brazilian Judiciary. In order to reach this result, the work systemizes and reconstructs the formation and development process of the organizational competences in this institution. The consolidation of this construction has the form of a new framework that attempts to express the configuration of the OCs identified, which presents a significant theoretical-empirical application potential.

FRAMEWORKS OF DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCES

When analyzing the evolution of the notion of organizational competences, we saw that the discussions begin from the concept presented by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) and advance to more recent constructions, the results of new contributions based on identifying the elements that can be found in the composition of OCs, which make this notion a more dynamic construct adhered to the organizational path (Teece et al., 1997; Becker and Ruas, 2005; Drejer, 2000; Easterby-Smith and Prieto, 2008). Therefore, the focus of the studies changes from a conceptual static analysis to a more dynamic and contextualized view, of which the elements of the OCs are a part, as are their paths, focusing, then, on the stages of generation, evolution and renovation of these competences. Thus, in this case, we are dealing with, above all, the processes of formation and development of organizational competences.

As this research was done on an institution linked with the Brazilian public sector, we must consider the following: (a) the aggregation of the clients’ recognition of value becomes, in this analysis, a fundamental factor in the expression of the organizational performance, since the central purpose of a public organization is, prior to obtaining good financial results, to fulfill its social role, aimed at the public and the interests of society; (b) the formation and development of competences is a process which goes through various stages. This does not impede, however, the possible existence of periods of “stagnation”, that is, moments in which the development of an organizational competence is less intense or even interrupted.

Different frameworks found in the literature were used as an empirical-theoretical reference in the process of the analysis of organizational competence dynamics. According to Wong and Aspinwall (2004) a *framework* is a set of basic assumptions or fundamental principles of intellectual origin that forms the underlying bases for action.

Frameworks are utilized with the objective of translating complex themes into ways that can be studied and analyzed. They are used especially to communicate ideas and

findings to a wide community, among academics or among the academic and industrial communities; to make comparisons between different situations and approaches; to define the domain or limits of a situation; describe the context or discuss the validity of findings; and support the development of procedures, techniques or methods and tools (Shehabuddeen et al., 2000).

The selection of frameworks employed in this work follows a principal criterion: their contribution in the construction of a reference that subsidizes the identification and analysis of the elements that act decisively in forming and developing organizational competences. In fact, among these, a wide variety of approaches to the development of OCs have been identified, as well as different elements, factors and dynamics in each of them.

Note that not all the models and representations used in this research fit perfectly into the concept of frameworks presented above, but at least contain some referential elements. Among the frameworks studied, some are more directly related to the process of the development of organizational competences itself, clarifying the elements, relationships and flows involved in this process, while others are more generic and present concepts and hierarchies of competences and their components. Although they are different kinds of representations, they all contribute to the study of organizational competences and their formation and development process.

Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the factors considered important in each of the frameworks used in this study. In the first column are the authors of the frameworks and the year in which they were published. The second column shows the assumption or premise considered to elaborate the framework. We believe that it is these assumptions which explain the logic of the development of organizational competences suggested by each one of the authors. In the third column the main elements of each framework are highlighted, that is the fundamental variables which are measured and monitored during the development process of the competences. Finally, the fourth column presents the factors which directly or indirectly influence the performance of the principal variables of the process.

Table 1: Comparison of Organizational Competences Development Frameworks

Author / Year	Assumption / Premise	Elements / Main Variables	Influencing Factors
Robert M. Grant (1991)	Identifying the resources and capacities and defining the best strategy to use them.	Resources and capacities.	Strengths and weaknesses, complexity of capacities, gains generated, use of resources and capacities strategy, investments.
Nigel Pets (1997)	Continuing improvement of organizational competences with the application of meta-abilities and evaluation of value aggregated to the clients.	Core competences, essential capacities, meta-abilities.	Identifying abilities, organizational learning, incorporated knowledge, rapid deployment, restructuring and innovation.
David J. Teece , Gary Pisano and	Integration, construction and reconfiguration of	Organizational competences and	Organizational processes, position of the business

Amy Shen (1997)	competences, considering the organizational processes, the position of the business and the paths to be followed.	dynamic capacities.	and paths to be followed.
Henk A. Post (1997)	Construction cycle and competence leverage from strategic guidelines.	Core competences and dynamic capacities.	Mission, view, values, knowledge, abilities, execution and operation capacities.
Ron Sanchez and Aimé Heene (1997)	Construction cycle and competence leverage.	Resources, organizational competences.	Strategic options, cash flow, market.
Gabriel B. Awuah (1997)	Network influence on the exchange relations in the development of organizational competences	Exchange relations, learning and adaption.	Products, services, social and information exchange.
Anders Drejer (2000)	Developments of organizational competences within performance levels linked to organizational learning.	Technology, human beings, organization and culture.	Organizational learning, complexity, involvement level of personnel and units of the organization.
Xu Qingrui, Zhao Xiaoqing, Wanyan Shaohua and Chen Jin (2000)	Influence of innovation in the organizational competences development.	Innovation Portfolio, capacities and competences of the organization.	External environment, internal conditions, investment capacity.
Kathleen Eisenhardt and Jeffrey Martin (2000)	Organizational and strategic routines focused on elements that can generate differences in the environment or at least accompany changes in the environment.	Learning, manipulation and configuration of resources, path dependence and change.	Market dynamics, organizational practices.
Pedro Luís Büttenbender and Paulo Figueiredo (2002)	Accumulation of organizational competences linked with the process of organizational learning.	Routine competences and innovative competences.	Organizational learning, innovation.
Constance E. Helfat and Margaret A. Peteraf (2003)	Development through a standard of capacities lifecycle.	Phases of the lifecycle.	Team, resources, organizational learning, decision taking.
Afonso C. Fleury and Maria Tereza Fleury (2004)	Constant cycle of evolution: resources, competences, learning, strategy.	Resources and organizational competences.	Organizational learning, business strategy.
Grace V. Becker (2004)	Development of organizational competences through levels of complexity, delivery, value aggregation over time.	Path dependence, value and complexity chain.	Organizational learning, investment, value and delivery level aggregation.
Valery Michaux (2009)	Formation of collective capable of coordinating and cooperating motivated by organizational demands.	Cognitive reference sharing focused on reaching objectives.	Interaction, practices, cooperation.

Source: authors,2010

Note a difference in the main variables in the first models studied in relation to the more recent ones. In the first models more generic terms related to organizational competences predominate and they are more concerned with showing the logic of their structure and characterizing the concepts of the organizational competences, essentials, capacities and resources of their link with the strategy. Note also the effort gone into the studies to show the external perspective, that is, to emphasize the explanatory power of the concept regarding its capacity to meet the clients' expectations and lever the organizational competitiveness.

Although the first models were based on these assumptions, it is only the more recent frameworks that are dedicated to exploring the OCs from the internal and dynamic perspective, highlighting how the internal elements of the business articulate and make up the organizational path. These attempts can be seen through the terminology used in these frameworks, such as: innovation portfolio, complexity and delivery of competence, path dependence, value chain, *etc.* It can be understood that when analyzing the behavior and variation of these elements, the authors are studying the development of the organizational competences. In this sense, the temporal dimension in these frameworks is accentuated. The very notion of cycle suggests the idea that each "round" is completed in a different time and in each new period the initial position of the variables also presents a different configuration. In other words, each time the process restarts it carries a load of experience and learning from the previous cycles. This movement is configured through three situations: construction, accumulation and competence leverage. Construction refers to the creation, intentional or not, of the competence. Accumulation is the way in which the elements of the competences integrate and modify as time passes. Finally, leverage deals with the enhancement acts or the optimum exploitation of the competences within the organization.

In the fourth column of Table 1, a great variety of factors can be seen, which, according to the authors, can directly or indirectly influence the formation and development of organizational competences. As in most social phenomena, these also have different interpretations and configurations. Although these different views enrich the literature on the subject, they can at the same time also make the systematization difficult, creating barriers for the organization to appropriate this notion.

With the intention of contributing to the systematization of these concepts, by constructing the comparative table of different frameworks it was possible to verify some converging points:

Organizational learning: is characterized by being one of the factors most dealt with, directly or indirectly, by the authors of the frameworks. By being a dynamic process of the development of competences in a constant state of change, organizational learning takes on a fundamental role, to enable the business to adapt to new realities and necessities which present themselves. Therefore, the organization needs to constantly learn in order to, through this learning, generate new competences or improve the already existing ones.

Strategy: from the frameworks analyzed, it can be inferred that strategy maintains a close relationship with the process of developing organizational competences. Some

authors perceive strategy as the influencing factor of the development of competences in the organization; others believe that strategy is influenced by this development. Once again the idea of a spiral emerges, where there is no exact beginning or end, but rather, a continuing process with, above all, a relation of coherence between the strategy and the development of competences.

Innovation: As pointed out by Xu et al. (2000) and supported by other authors, innovation has a remarkable role in developing organizational competences, or more precisely, in their construction. To be quite distinct and to be able to generate competitive advantages, competences need a considerable amount of innovation. Furthermore, the concept of incremental innovation is directly associated with the process of competence leverage, when minor innovations in process or practice can boost the effects of competences.

Complexity: refers to the level of differentiation and value aggregation of the competence, that is, the more complex the composition of an organizational competence, the greater its competitive advantage generating potential. With the aim of illustrating this concept a competence, “product flexibility”, which refers to the capacity of a manufacturing business to make changes to the product during the design and/or assembly phase, has been defined. This competence can provide different levels of added value to the organization throughout its history, depending on the degree of complexity from the intensity and quality of human and technological resources incorporated into it (Becker, 2004).

Resources: Originating from the Resource Based View (RBV), most of the studies about the development of organizational competences consider resources (physical, human, financial or technological) and their actions (identification, application and articulation of resources) as key influential factors in this process. In this context human resources (people) are highlighted as being an important element of the organizational competences, not only individuals, but principally from the point of view of the collective and of the interaction of cooperative work, as pointed out by Michaux (2009).

Market/external environment: some of the frameworks presented suggest that the external environment and the market in which the organization is, also exert a strong influence on the development of competences. For example, it is very common for a previously considered essential competence to lose its value if the market (competition) imitates or substitutes it. Another example is the rate of change which organizations maintain with members from the outside, such as suppliers, partners and other businesses. Therefore, frequently the dynamism of the market (external environment) requires changes and better use or manipulation of the resources available within the organization (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The scientific methodology used in this work had a qualitative character as this kind of approach provides a better understanding of the problem to be faced by the researcher (Malhotra, 2001). This approach is appropriate and useful in the study of organizations

and offers the possibility of a better understanding of a phenomenon in the context in which it occurs.

The predominance of the Resource Based View increases the importance of the phenomena at company level. Specific company attributes rarely can be explained by quantitative research. In this context the qualitative procedures are highlighted, when case studies are presented as the best alternative (Hoskinsson et al, 1999; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). This type of research has characteristics appropriate for questions such as “how” and “why” phenomena occur (Yin, 2005).

A longitudinal perspective was used which explains the organizational change over time (Van de Ven and Huber, 1990), that is, the research was carried out sequentially over different periods of the history of the institution. The research consisted of the analysis of the characteristics and the elements of the processes regarding the development of organizational competences in order to verify the behavior and the relationships amongst these elements as well as the influence of the context in each period. According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), the most common method found in the literature about the subject to capture this longitudinal perspective is the linear sequence, in the form of phases or periods.

The researcher's efforts to carry out a longitudinal study requires some care, according to Langley (1999): (a) regarding the historical recall: the challenge is to come as close as possible to the interviewee's past realities, encouraging him to identify analysis patterns between periods; (b) regarding the volume of information: the volume of data can hinder the selection of what is relevant and what is not. Furthermore, it can encumber the visualization of the paths of the research and where the analysis of information begins and ends; (c) regarding the configuration of temporal analysis: in this type of analysis it is common to adopt a historical narrative, however it is necessary to go beyond a simple description of a temporal evolution (Van de Ven; Huber, 1990).

Most qualitative research uses narrative as a research strategy (Langley, 1999) and depending on the aims of the researcher, the narrative can serve different purposes, notes the author. Studies about organizational competences, as they explore how the capabilities and resources are linked to achieve competitive advantage, place great importance on the recall of historical narrative (Post, 1997, Teece et al., 1997, Cockburn *et al*, 2000). The concept of path dependence, from the studies on evolutionary theory of Nelson and Winter, emphasizes the idea that the history or trajectory of a business over time is what provides clues to understanding its level of competitiveness at the current time (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Teece et al., 1997).

Considering these ideas, this work consists of two data collection stages:

1st Stage – Due to the longitudinal character of the research, one of the objectives of the first data collection was to define the periods – or phases – which would govern the later data analysis. In this initial data collection, a further intention was to preliminarily identify the organizational competences of the institution and the elements that constitute them. This stage consisted of interviews, collection and analysis of documents and direct observation.

2nd Stage – After the first stage was carried out, the collected data was analyzed which enabled a new interview to be prepared aimed more specifically on the study periods and the organizational competences identified. The objectives were: to confirm the competences identified from the first stage, identify the elements of the competences and map the process of the formation and development of the organizational competences in the studied institute. This second stage consisted of interviews and document collection.

Five interviews were carried out in each stage; the interviewees were selected according to the tasks they performed and their position in the institution, their respective activities and their knowledge of the proposed theme. It was also a criterion that the interviewees cover all areas of the tribunal, from different departments and offices of the institution. In the first stage, the following were interviewed: **an official**, on the second hierarchic level of the court, connected to the strategic summit; **a coordinator**, responsible for the area of documentation and information; **a section head**, linked to the area of personnel development; **a head of an election office**, the unit closest to the operational processes and to the service delivery to the citizens; and finally, **a civil servant technician**, directly involved in the recall of historical memory of the court. In the second stage of data collection another five people were interviewed: **two officials**, belonging to the second hierarchic level of the court; **an advisor to the Director General**, active in issues related to organizational strategy; **a coordinator**, in the area of internal control; and the **Director General** of the institution, highest hierarchical member after the president, occupying this post for thirteen years.

Priority was given to the longer serving staff, capable of presenting and describing the elements and factors which have influenced the development of organizational competences over time. In this sense, the time of employment in the institution of the interviewees varied between ten and twenty five years, this enabled reliable and qualified data to be collected, with information from who has lived and who lives through the daily routine of the tribunal in significant posts within the administrative and operational structure. With regards to the length of employment, the exception was the civil servant technician who had been in the tribunal for five years but who made up for this lack of experience with a deep knowledge of the history of the Regional Electoral Tribunal of Rio Grande do Sul due to his professional activity.

An analysis was made of the content of the collected data in order to group and interpret the information, facilitating the understanding. According to Bardin (2007), the analysis of content can be understood as a set of techniques of communication in order to obtain, by systematic and objective procedures, a description of the content of messages, indicators which allow one to infer knowledge regarding the production / reception conditions of the messages.

The extracted information was analyzed individually according to defined categories and to the historical periods to which they belonged. First the facts and events relative to the dynamics of the formation and development of organizational competences in the different periods of study were historically described. Next, an analysis focused on identifying and characterizing the elements that compose the organizational competences and their interaction and behavior over time.

All of this analysis was made in light of theoretical reference, principally the frameworks of the development of organizational competences studied, in order to enable the construction of a framework representative of the development of organizational competences in the Regional Electoral Tribunal of Rio Grande do Sul, and consequently to offer a theoretical/empirical reference for a comprehensive representation of this process within the reality of the institutions linked to the Brazilian Judiciary.

CASE ANALYSIS

Institution studied: The Regional Electoral Tribunal of Rio Grande do Sul

The unit of analysis chosen for this work was the Regional Electoral Tribunal of Rio Grande do Sul (TRE-RS), the body which represents Electoral Court in this state of Brazil.

When the Superior Electoral Tribunal was established in 1932, the regional tribunals were also created, among these the TRE-RS which is the appellate court of the Electoral Court, with Electoral Zones as subordinates. The principal activities of the TRE-RS are in two spheres: judicial and administrative. In the judicial sphere, the TRE is responsible for conducting the electoral process, dealing with matters concerning the electoral law. In the administrative sphere the institute manages the elections, enabling the collection and assessment of the political resolve of the citizens (TRE-RS, 2008). The current structure of TRE-RS is formed by the Tribunal Secretary with approximately 450 civil servants and the Electoral Zones, active throughout the state with around 350 civil servants.

This institution has an important role in society, being responsible for the planning and execution of the electoral process and hearing all the judicial claims regarding this in the state. The dynamic and evolutionary character of the electoral process in Brazil and the recent administrative reforms going through the public sector make this institution a representative case for this kind of research.

Definition of the periods for the longitudinal study

The historical periods for the longitudinal study were established from the data collection carried out in the first stage of the research. This data collection included semi-structured interviews and secondary data found in documents and internal registers of the court itself (Table 2):

Table 2: Periods for Longitudinal Study

<p>1986 to 1995: The notable fact which marks this period as one of the most important in the history, not only of TRE-RS, but also of all the Electoral Justice in Brazil, is the national re-registration of voters which aimed at updating, standardizing and computerizing the voting register. From this standardization TRE-RS takes on new characteristics such as “organization”, as it begins to be more integrated, internally as well as in relation to the national structure of the Electoral Justice.</p>
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<p>1996 to 2003: 1996 marks the event of electronic voting with the gradual use of electronic voting</p>

machines throughout the country which represents a great step for the Electoral Justice as a whole and is reflected directly into TRE-RS. This development led to further changes in the work process and in the quality of service provided by the institute. The image itself of the institute was strengthened by the use of the electronic voting machines, increasing the credibility from the society and the agility of the electoral process.

2004 to 2008: 2004 brings another change to TRE-RS, this time with an internal focus regarding the structure as an organization. Due to a systematic increase of the Electoral Justice tasks and the extent of the citizens' political rights, two new laws are passed which more than doubles the number of civil servants active in TRE-RS. This fact generates the need for important changes in the management of the organization.

Source: authors, 2010.

Identification of organizational competences in TRE-RS

The other result of the initial stage of the data analysis and collection was the identification of the main organizational competences of the court. In order to accomplish this, as well as the interviews and collection of documents done, the researcher also carried out direct observations. The following competences were identified:

- Quality and agility when dealing with the public: The quality and agility when assisting the public was one of the most mentioned characteristics in the interviews in relation to what the institute does best. This characteristic was reflected in terms such as speed, reliability, recognition and satisfaction amongst others. Other evidence that supports this quality and agility in providing service can be seen in satisfaction surveys carried out in 2005 and 2006. The excellence in attending to the citizen, according to the data collected, is the result of a culture born within the institution itself and passed on to new civil servants. The civil servants' qualifications and good salary also appear as motivating factors for this quality of citizen care.
- Quality in the execution of the electoral process: this refers to the ability of the Tribunal to successfully carry out all of the stages of the electoral process. This involves routines, procedures, logistics and the infrastructure needed to support all of this process. All of the civil servants of the Tribunal in some way participate in administrative or juridical activities. Furthermore the process also involves a necessary harmony and cohesion with the national structure of the Electoral Justice, composed of the Superior Electoral Tribunal and the other TREs. It is therefore, in this main activity, that quality is more consistent.
- Capacity for technological development: From the interviews and the secondary data collected, the relevance and impact of technology on the recent history of the institution and on other organizational competences identified can clearly be seen. This refers to the institution's ability to make use of technology in the best possible way in pursuit of its goals. Despite difficulties faced in the public sector of high costs and to acquire advanced technology and due to constraints (such as the necessity to make purchases by bidding which often results in lower prices but poor quality), in the issue of technology, the image of the Tribunal remains that of excellence.

Historical trajectory of the organizational competences

The organizational competences of TRE-RS developed differently over time, however they followed a pattern similar to that described by the authors of the frameworks of the development of OCs, consisting of a construction period, followed by accumulation and leverage. Table 3 shows these stages, describing the situation of the organizational competences in the study periods.

Table 3: Evolution of Organizational Competences in the Studied Periods

Competence “Quality and agility when dealing with the public”		
	Situation	Evolution
1 st Period	<p>This competence was almost inexistent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the beginning of this period the registration of voters was done manually, hand-written on forms. • Service was slow with a delay of up to 15 days to issue the title. • The agility of the court existed in judging electoral process. 	Construction
2 nd Period	<p>This competence establishes itself and becomes one of the hallmarks of the Tribunal to the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With computerization the service becomes much faster. • Society recognizes the quality of service of the Tribunal. • Improvement and creation of Tribunal services to the public. 	Accumulation
3 rd Period	<p>This competence is improved by expansion and management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing of the service, especially in the electoral registry offices where there is more contact with the public. • More services become available through internet, facilitating access for citizens. • In a new perspective, arising from managerial public administration, satisfying the “client” becomes the main focus of the service. 	Leverage
Competence “Quality in the execution of the electoral process”		
	Situation	Evolution
1 st period	<p>This competence is considered to be already existent in this period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great personal effort from the civil servants. • Demand from society for transparency and safety in the electoral process. • Society more confident in TRE-RS compared to other states of Brazil. 	Construction/ Accumulation
2 nd Period	<p>Considerable strengthening of this competence in this period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The election process goes through various improvements beginning with the electronic voting machines. • Better control over the election process and larger decentralization. • Increase in credibility in reliability and fairness of the electoral process. 	Accumulation
3 rd Period	<p>A renovation of this competence begins to occur, as well as the quality already established, efficiency in the electoral process is sought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of the procedures and work tools aimed at increasing efficiency in the electoral process, optimizing cost and searching for better results. • Modern methodologies of management are reflected in the quality and efficiency of the electoral process. 	Renovation/ Construction
Competence “Capacity for technological development”		
	Situation	Evolution
1 st Period	<p>Facts contribute to the future emergence of this competence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting re-registration and electronic data processing in 1986. • Aggregation of electronic votes from 1989. • Creation of informatics centre and posts for Information Technology specialists in 1994. 	Construction

2nd Period	<p>In this period this competence effectively emerges in the Tribunal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computerization process, ranging from the electronic voting machines to systems used in daily activities. • In relation to the use of IT, TRE-RS stands out from the majority of others. • Technical ability and initiative of the civil servants contribute to technological development. 	Construction/ Accumulation
3rd Period	<p>The situation at this moment is maintenance and improvement of this competence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The training and systematic development of civil servants specialized in IT • Increase computerization of the internal processes of work. • Faster and more efficient diffusion of information by means of IT tools. 	Leverage

Source: authors, 2010.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The objective of the final stage of the analysis was to identify the elements that make up the organizational competences as well as the relationships between these elements and their participation in the development of the organizational competences in the institution.

From the data collected, the theoretical founding and a thorough analysis of the history that involved the development of the three organizational competences outlined in this work, it was possible to identify their elements, that is, aspects which make up these competences, which are: human and material resources, investments/budget, technology, organizational culture, innovation, organizational learning, model management and the external environment.

Tables 4, 5 and 6 summarize the behavior of the elements identified with the main notable facts in each study period.

Table 4: Behaviour of the Elements of the Organizational Competences in the 1st Period of Study

1st Period – 1986 to 1995	
Elements	Behavior (situation)
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The institution was small, with few civil servants in relation to the growing demand. • More “family” environment. • The quality of the execution of the electoral process was the result of a great personal effort of the civil servants.
Material Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weakness and limitations in the infrastructure available for the civil servants of the court, including from a technological point of view.
Investments/ Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget and, therefore, the investments grow larger in order to implement necessary changes. The investments are principally in infrastructure, technology and personnel.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially, voters’ registration was done by hand on forms. Re-registration begins in 1986 with electronic processing. • Electronic processing was practically all external of the Tribunal. • Very little IT infrastructure. This begins to change in 1994 with the acquisition of a computer centre.
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of the “serve well” culture, driven by, among other factors, the challenge of carrying out the re-registration.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenges faced at this time generated a strong sense of pride and commitment in the civil servants which was passed on to new workmates.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenge of carrying out the re-registration generated the necessity for creativity and innovation. • The limitations on material resources and personnel to implement the elections also demanded creativity and innovation. • The civil servants of TRE-RS showed a creative and pro-active profile, with innovating initiative to overcome the difficulties faced.
Organizational Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning in this period occurred on a day to day basis and was not systematic. • Learning through “trauma” and mistakes. • There was almost no record or store of information. Knowledge was restricted to individuals.
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategies were only operational. The goal was to meet the election timetable. There was no long term planning. • Some IT projects emerge.
Management Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management of the Tribunal was closely linked to a bureaucratic model.
External Environment/ Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratization, with increasing responsibilities of the Electoral Justice and number of elections. • Increase in the electorate due to population growth and some changes in the laws such as the right to vote for illiterates (1985) and young people between 16 and 18 years old (1988) • Voters’ re-registration and electronic processing of registers. • Society did not expect “good service” from a public entity, therefore little external demand in this aspect • A demand for reliability and transparency in the electoral process intensifies from society. Fraud in the Rio de Janeiro elections of 1984 increased this demand.

Source: authors, 2010.

Table 5: Behavior of the Elements of the Organizational Competences in the 2nd Period of Study

2nd Period – 1996 to 2003	
Elements	Behavior (situation)
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of a team specialized in Information Technology. • Training of civil servants because of the need to use computers and Informatics systems. • Retention of skilled workers on the basis of good salary and working conditions
Material Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a centralized structure, to attend to voters in the capital and in some cities in the countryside, with more than one voting zone. • Acquisition of more equipment and improvements to the infrastructure available to the civil servants because of the growth of the organization itself.
Investment/ Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The control of the budget becomes greater, requiring more efficiency of the management of resources.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in the use of technology from the acquisition of equipment at the end of the previous period. • Computerization of the vote through the electronic voting machine. • Technological advances allow faster dissemination of information and improved internal communication. • Development of the “on-line title” with immediate emission of the voter’s title. • Development of computerized systems for work procedures.
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good service provided produces a feeling of pride and commitment in the civil servants, further increasing the “serve well” culture and generating a culture of “ethics”.

	<p>that is, the interests of the civil servants to act within the standards required by society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “innovation” culture also increases, the civil servants become accustomed to searching for innovative solutions for the problems they face.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The installation of the electronic voting machine brings an “innovative” image to the Electoral Justice. • Innovation is necessary to deal with the new demands from the installation of the electronic voting machines.
Organizational Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The civil servants go through a recycling process with regard to technological abilities. • New civil servants arrive with specialized knowledge, passing on this knowledge in some way to others, this then becomes incorporated into the organization. • The organization begins to search for more systematic methods for training and development of the civil servants.
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still no perspective for strategic long term planning. • Maintaining career civil servants in commissioned and management posts allows planning and execution of some long term projects. • The organizational strategy is dictated by the strategic thought of the court leaders.
Management Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite movement for administrative reform from the public, the management style still very much follows the bureaucratic model. However, at the end of this period an inclination of the managers to seek efficiency and improvement in the work procedures begins to emerge.
External Environment/ Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still little demand regarding quality of service as the general level of service from public organs is low. • The installation of the electronic voting machine meets society’s demand for fairness and reliability in the electoral process. • The Public Administration environment goes through changes, management reform is a reality and de-bureaucratization is one of the main objectives. • Within this administrative reform context, the “principle of efficiency”, which from 1990 becomes a constitutional principle of Public Administration, is consolidated. <p>Society makes a greater demand for an ethical and professional posture from public institutions.</p>

Source: authors, 2010.

Table 6: Behavior of the Elements of the Organizational Competences in the 3rd Period of Study

3rd Period – 2004 to 2008	
Elements	Behavior (situation)
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of approximately 100% of the staff of the Tribunal. • Creation and filling of at least two places in each election office in the countryside.
Material Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of the infrastructure of the election offices and officials of TRE-RS due to the increase in number of civil servants. • Concern for efficiency and economy of material resources of the Tribunal increases.
Investment/ Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget control continues to increase. However, investments in infrastructure and Information Technology are increased because of the growth of the Tribunal structure.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant expansion of IT equipment available. • Development of software for work procedures and to support changes in the management area. • Increase in use of free software.
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The already existent “innovation” culture becomes stronger with the arrival of new civil servants with new ideas and knowledge as well as natural drive and initiative of the newcomer to the organization. • Institutionally, the Tribunal is concerned in conveying the “serve-well” culture and the feeling of pride in working for the Electoral Justice to the new civil servants.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this period there are few technological innovations directly regarding the elections.

	<p>However, innovations in the application of IT for work procedures continue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The major changes in this period are in the management area and the optimization of procedures.
Organizational Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The duplication in the number of staff brings a large and varied load of new knowledge which slowly becomes incorporated into the organization. • Investment of training and development of personnel increases, there is also a considerable growth in the systematization and organization of these processes. • In particular the training of managers is one of the highlights of this period. • The mode of distant learning is implanted which enables a faster and wider spread of knowledge
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tribunal begins slowly to professionalize and modernize the management. • Strategic planning for the next 5 years. • The Tribunal seeks to disseminate concepts and strategic thinking to the civil servants.
Management Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalization and modernization of management still in its infancy. • Modern methods and tools for management are implanted such as Quality Management, Project Management and Competence Management, among others. • The Tribunal creates a committee for Social Responsibility including it into a larger plan for sustainable social development • The Personnel Management also evolves focusing on individual and collective development of the civil servants.
External Environment/ Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The administrative management reform is a reality in a large part of the public sector. There are several such initiatives in all spheres of the government. • Society's demand and control are stronger yet. Now, not only regarding ethics and efficiency, but also quality in attending to the citizen. • The political class exerts a greater demand for quality in providing service. • The technological evolution presents new work tools and methods, including the expansion and use of free software in the public sector. • The legislation regarding the vote counting becomes stricter and increases the responsibility of the Electoral Justice. • The Jobs and Salaries Plan passed as a Law in 2006, increases the importance and requirements regarding the training of civil servants.

Source: authors, 2010.

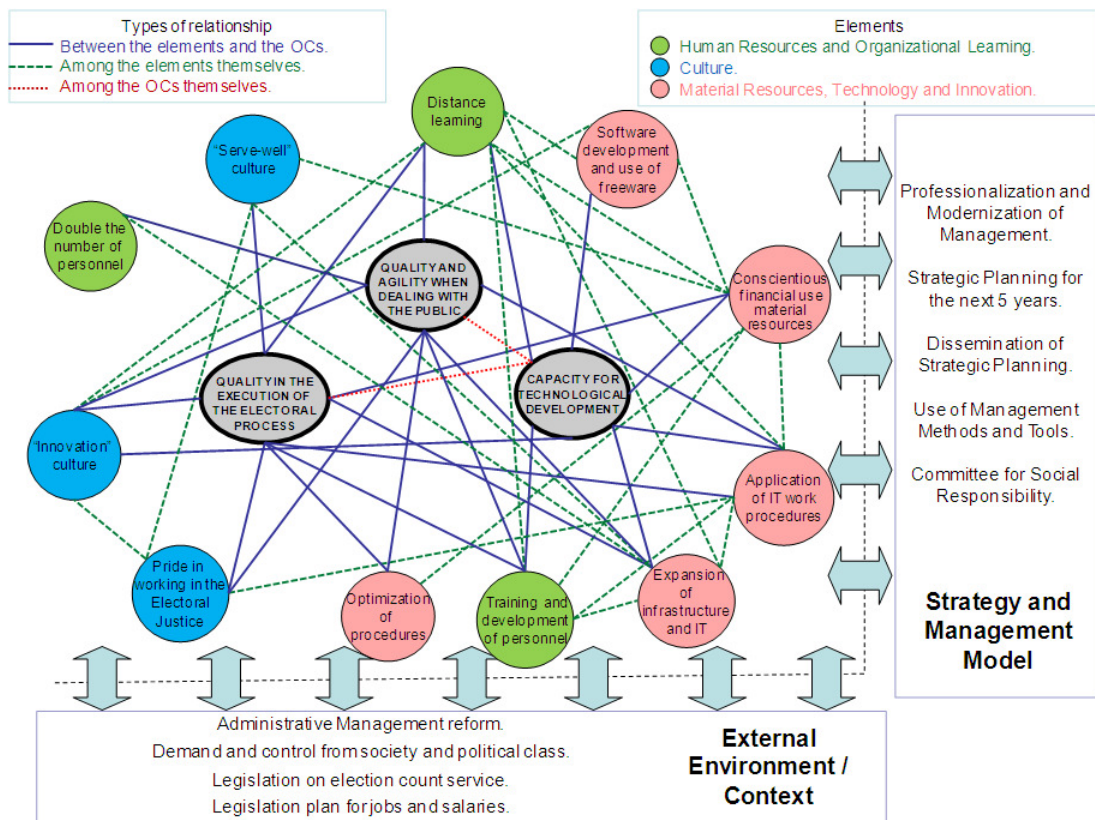
Table 6 shows the behavior of the elements that make up the competences in the third study period, enabling an analysis of the current situation of the relations among the organizational competences and these elements. Note that not all the relationships are direct since characteristics and behavior of one determined element can frequently influence others, indirectly acting on the dynamics of the OCs. Furthermore, it appears that there are three types of relationships: between the elements and the competences; among the elements themselves; and among the organizational competences themselves.

Figure 1 shows these relationships in the current context of the dynamics of the formation of the organizational competences in the studied institution. For example, the action "training and development of personnel" originating from the group of elements formed by "Human Resources and Organizational Learning", besides having a direct influence on the organizational competences, also influences other actions such as "application of IT in the work procedures" and "conscientious use of material resources". In turn, these actions reflect the organizational competences and in other actions establishing synergetic and dynamic interrelationships. The action "training and development of personnel" is influenced by "distance learning" and "IT and infrastructure expansion", with which the training and skills reach a considerably higher

level than the effective employees. Finally, some factors related to strategic action and the external environment also influence these actions, such as the decision to invest in “professionalization and modernization of management” and even “legislation plan for jobs and salary”, obliging minimum training hours for the Tribunal civil servants.

The emergence of new actions or a recombination of existing ones can have an influence on the configuration of new elements, enhance or inhibit the sustainability of existing organizational competences or even indicate the development of new competences. Therefore, the analysis of this diagram allows a more detailed perception of the complexity of the relationships that result in the development of organizational competences in TRE-RS. The diagram attempts to “explode” these competences in elements, and these elements in actions in order to show in detail the compositions of these interrelationships. Having a better knowledge of this process, the organization can effectively act on it, in order to improve the actions and the network of relationships observed.

Figure 1: Relationships among the Organizational Competences and their Elements



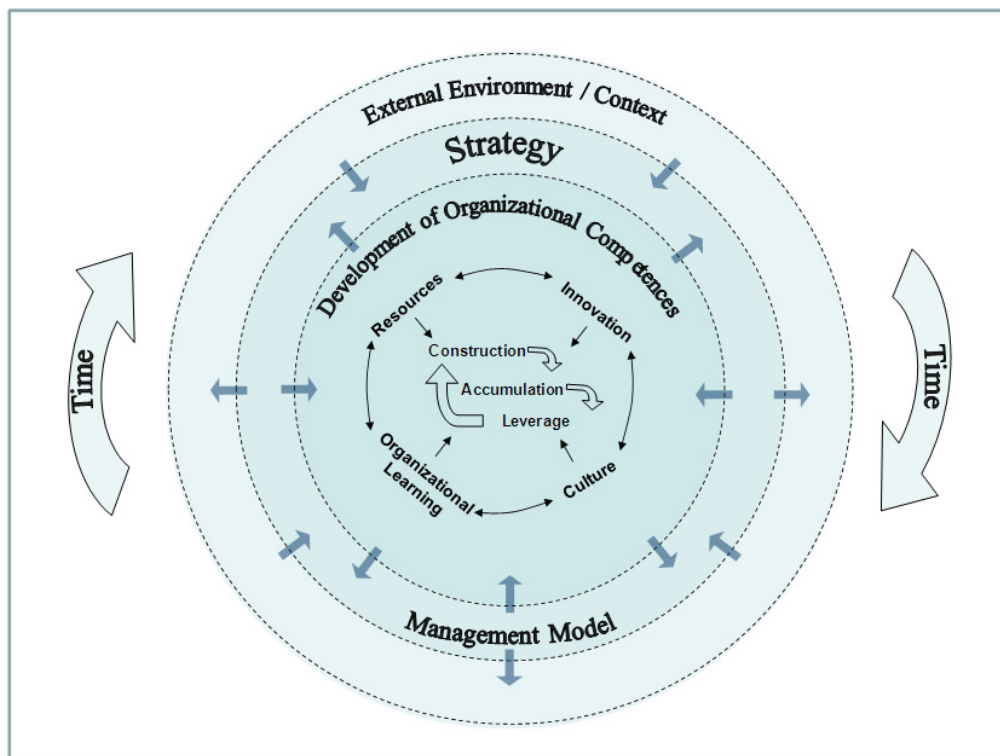
Source: Authors, 2010.

Going beyond the dynamics of the relationships presented in Figure 1, Figure 2 suggests a framework representing the developing process of the organizational competences in the Regional Electoral Tribunal of Rio Grande do Sul, serving as a reference to the reality of institutions associated with the juridical public sector of Brazil.

The framework emphasizes at its core the idea of “continuous cycles” which represent dynamic movements of **construction**, **accumulation** and **leverage** of the competences, as the main characteristics of the process of the development of organizational competences over time. These cycles do not necessarily happen uniformly or regularly, as can be seen in the analysis of the organizational competences of the Tribunal, when the stages occur at different periods and sometimes overlap.

We believe that the way the business moves to “how to act collectively”, which involves the elements proposed in the core of the framework (learning, innovation, resources and culture), is what will dictate the intensity and rhythm of the movement of the cycles. Alternating individual and collective moments of action and reflection, advances and setbacks are perceived, failure and success, until, gradually the new work principles and practices are incorporated and seen internally and externally, resulting in organizational competences (Becker and Ruas, 2005).

Figure 2: Framework of Development of Organizational Competences of TRE-RS



Source: authors, 2010.

The elements **resources** (financial, human, material and technological), **culture**, **innovation** and **organizational learning** directly influence the development of organizational competences and maintain relations among themselves, indirectly or directly interacting with one another.

On a broader level in the diagram the elements **strategy** and **management model** appear, these influence all of the other elements and maintain a two way relationship with the external environment, which, in turn, is presented as the greater scenario in which the organization is placed and develops its competences and the relationships between the elements. The concept of **time** is highlighted, the perception of which

resulted from the longitudinal character of the research, this enabled the analysis of the behavior and situation of the competences and their elements in three consecutive periods. The conclusion is that the study of organizational competences requires observation over time in order that the construction, accumulation and leverage can be seen more clearly, thus demonstrating the strong relation of this process of development with the organizational trajectory.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the phenomenon of competitiveness and high performance is one of the greatest challenges to organizational management. We understand that there are different ways to observe this phenomenon. In this article the approach of organizational competences has been used, as it aims to show in which aspects the organization reaches and gains prominence through its actions. In order to portray the organizational complexity, this approach encompasses different streams of knowledge which make up and sustain the organization, such as organizational learning, culture, organizational structure, policies and practice of personnel management, production and system information. For scale and diversity, this approach of organizational competences enables the construction of a clearer and more complete view than only the “functioning” of these issues separately. Thus, the proposal presented in this study intends to integrate various views about the formation and development of competences in order to, through an elaborated representative framework, contribute to a more homogenous construct of this process in the organizational trajectory.

Analyzing how an organization has learned, constructed and modified its history serves as a guideline for organizations to visualize the consequences of action taken and the impact on the overall business performance. If we look only at resources and abilities of the present moment, we run the risk of wrongly analyzing and incorrectly inferring why some firms have greater competitive advantages or better performance than others.

Analysis of the paradigm of the Resource Based View is also considered a challenge. It is important to point out that empirical studies are still in their infancy compared with the extensively tested Porterian paradigm (Carneiro et al., 1997). While being developed and consolidated as a reference in the search for competitive advantage, interest in RBV has increased: concern, which initially focused on proving legitimacy, is now about what the resources and abilities which differentiate an organization are and how they develop over time (Teece et al., 1997).

Due to the complexity and variety of aspects involved in the formation and development of competences, examples of organizations that depend only on a random combination

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of resources and abilities are not rare. The purpose of this article is exactly to point out the relevance that this process must be deliberate and managed, and to provide reflections about the ways that managers act and interfere in the process with a higher degree of assertiveness. This is configured both to identify where the focus of high performance of the organization is, and to improve this focus, highlighting what must be done to get these competences, increase them, strengthen them and even branch them out to generate new focuses.

Still, regarding the analysis of the formation process of the development of the competences, although construction, accumulation and leverage phases of the organizational competences have been verified, this movement is not necessarily as organized and is not in this order. For example, an organizational competence can, after a period of construction and accumulation, be renewed or reconstructed, without necessarily going through the process of leverage. This seems to be the case of the “Quality in the execution of the electoral process” of this study; it begins to go through a renovation, when the quality, already consolidated, gives rise to a search for efficiency in the electoral process.

This analysis concludes that there are three types of relationships in the formation and development process of the organizational competences. The first of these is the relationship evident between the competences and the elements that make them up. The second is amongst the elements themselves, that is, the elements influence each other, indirectly influencing the development of the competences. The third type of relationship is amongst the organizational competences, when the development of one interferes with the development of another. As with any system organized in a network, the network of relationships among organizational competences, presented in Figure 1, is also susceptible to change. Any alteration can affect all the system and can even lead to the emergence of new competences and the disappearance of existing ones, depending on the intensity and frequency of this interference.

However, without disregarding the dynamic view of the competences, a certain degree of stability over time can be observed. What changes often is the composition or even the configuration of the relationships among the components of the OCs. The agility with which a business can change over time is strongly related to the collective character of its organizational competences. The formation and development of these competences involve the mobilization of a set of business resources and abilities, characterized by a collective based process.

Studying this “black box” requires refined methods. In this article, the case study method proves in our view to be the most appropriate, and using the Resource Based View it provides with a greater wealth of information aspects related to the idiosyncrasies of the business (Hoskinsson et al., 1999) not previously identified and explored in depth. The development of tools for environmental analysis over a time frame is much more sophisticated than simply assessing the current situation of an organization. Comparing various periods of the same organization is a complex issue. Recalling a trajectory of a business requires more accurate analysis and data collection as it entails elements often forgotten or part of the distant memory of the interviewees. Such a situation involves the researcher having to rely on the availability of the

interviewees as one question can have as many different answers as there are number of periods defined for the historical research. This conquest of the availability of the interviewees goes beyond the control of the researcher.

We note that the formation and development process of the organizational competences in the public sector has many similarities to the perception of the authors studied in the theoretical basis and also to the process in the private sector. However, although the elements and the processes of the competences are, at first glance, similar, some peculiarities and characteristics present in the public sector modify the essence of these elements and some parts of the development process of the organizational competences, revealing considerable differences. Among these peculiarities are: the precision of the principles and rules of administrative law; the lack of management continuity; administrative un-preparedness; bureaucratic dysfunction; and specifics of budget management.

The function of a public organization underscores another difference: the development of its organizational competences is intended not only for organizational performance and financial results (as with the private sector) but also, mainly for the well-being of the public and to fulfill its institutional role in society.

Other differences were evident in this case study, such as the cultural issue which is very strong in the public sector due to the long history of most of the organizations and because of its very public nature. This characteristic is clearly shown in this case study; the cultural factors strongly influence the development of the organizational competences. The speed at which changes happen in a public organization is another characteristic which was observed in this study. For example, employing new technology or a modern management approach may require an official authorization, which can take a long time.

Finally, this article has sought to make an empirical contribution to the theoretical construction on the subject of the development of organizational competences. Carrying out this case study in a public sector institution brought a new perspective based on the composition and the dynamics of the elements that make up OCs hitherto little explored by academic work. Public institutions are organizations with their own particular characteristics which quite often do not fall into the models developed for private businesses.

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