Decisions Are Always Made According To The Protocol

Behavioural Competencies

Protocol, traditionally associated with formalities and ritual, is today undergoing a profound transformation. In a context shaped by globalization, constant media exposure, and the growing complexity of institutional relations, Protocol has established itself as a strategic, cross-cutting, and indispensable discipline. More than a set of rules, it is an organizational language that structures interactions, regulates expectations, and safeguards the symbolic coherence of institutions. Beyond Ritual: Protocol as a Strategic Organizational Language.

Protocol as a Pillar of Organization and Legitimacy

Protocol has evolved beyond a merely operational tool to function as a genuine system of institutional legitimacy. Through the management of precedence, spatial organization, time planning, and the conscious use of symbols, it creates predictability, security, and hierarchical clarity. In a world where communication is instantaneous and global in reach, any misstep becomes immediately visible and can severely damage reputation. For this reason, Protocol has become an advanced image-risk management instrument, requiring swift, coherent, and strategically aligned decision-making.



The Head of Protocol as a Multidisciplinary Leader

The evolution of institutional contexts demands a head of Protocol with a leadership-oriented profile. This professional function acts as a relationship manager, behind - the - scenes strategist, experience curator, and guarantor of security and confidentiality. Mastery of technical expertise remains essential mastery of precedence, ceremonies, and seating arrangements, and flow management is non-negotiable. Excellence lies in the ability to apply this knowledge through effective leadership and consistent professional conduct.

Behavioural Competencies the Core of Excellence

Protocol is a profoundly human discipline. It is precisely in situations of pressure, uncertainty, and public exposure that behavioural competencies crucial to success are revealed:

- Emotional intelligence - essential for managing teams, egos, and expectations;
- Discretion and confidentiality - pillars of institutional trust;
- Anticipatory capacity - enabling risks to be prevented before they become visible failures;
- Intercultural communication - indispensable in international environments;
- Decision-making under pressure - the hallmark of leadership in protocol;
- Strategic hospitality - understood as a tool for relational value creation.

It is this combination of technical expertise and relational intelligence that enables the creation of high-excellence events: events capable of communicating values, reinforcing institutional narratives, and generating influence.

When Protocol Fails: A Lesson in Delegation of Authority

While serving as head of Protocol at the Army Personnel Command, I encountered a situation that perfectly illustrates the importance of behavioural competencies, leadership, and delegation.

We received a request from a municipal council to use our grand hall for an institutional event. Everything appeared aligned until, just minutes before the ceremony began, I identified a critical failure, the seating plan had not been prepared.

I approached the municipality's Head of Protocol to confirm the intended arrangement for the high authorities. The response lead to an issue. They had not received the confirmation of the attendance from the senior civil authorities and, as an improvised solution, had placed generic "Reserved" labels in the front row, without any nominal identification, and left the remaining rows no markings.

This was our "Home," and we could not allow the event to begin with such a visible flaw. Within minutes, we activated our response capacity. As the Army Protocol Authority, I immediately designed the seating plan for the confirmed military authorities. My deputies, whom I had entrusted with delegated authority, proceeded to identify the

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE
+
RELATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
=
HIGH-EXCELLENCE EVENTS

arriving civil authorities and organize their precedence according to the Portuguese Protocol.

We adopted a simple and effective strategy: two top-tier seats were deliberately left open for last-minute adjustments, while the remaining seating was completed as the civil authorities arrived. The welcome reception provided the necessary buffer to fine-tune the final layout.

The decision proved to be correct. The two reserved seats were occupied by senior civil authorities who ultimately attended despite not having confirmed participation. When the ceremony began, the front row was composed fully in accordance with the official rules of the Portuguese state, with no visible shortcomings.

This episode reinforced a fundamental truth in protocol: the success of an event depends as much on preparation as on adaptability. It was made possible by the delegation of authority entrusted to my team, allowing each member to act with autonomy, precision, and a strong sense of mission as new information emerged. Behind the scenes, the lesson was clear: when technical competencies fail, behavioural competencies must take over.

Conclusion

We firmly believe that protocol is now a discipline of organizational intelligence, where technique, culture, strategy, and fundamentally human relationships intersect. It is through protocol that institutions present themselves, position themselves, and establish legitimacy. The head of Protocol is a discreet, rigorous professional and, above all, a leader who through behavioural competencies and the ability to delegate ensures that every event becomes an instrument of reputation, influence, and trust.

In Protocol, there is no room for visible failure. That is why decisions are always made—and always made well!

BY JOSÉ DOMINGOS NOGUEIRA DA SILVA

