



## DEVIATIONS BETWEEN OSTENSIVE AND PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES: A PROPOSAL OF A REVIEW CYCLE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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### Abstract

**Objective of the study:** To propose a revision cycle for organizational routines in public administration organization based on the analysis of deviations between the ostensive and performative aspects of the contracts management and supervision routine of the Instituto Federal Catarinense.

**Methodology/approach:** Qualitative, descriptive, single case study research, with data from documentary research and interviews.

**Originality/Relevance:** The research helps to appropriate the topic of organizational routines to public administration by analyzing deviations between agents' behavior and the rules that govern them. Additionally, a revision cycle of these deviations is proposed.

**Main results:** Deviations arising from the outdatedness or inadequacy of what is foreseen in the ostensive aspect were identified. Moreover, agents tend to base performativity on something other than what is foreseen in documents and instructions since their habits, competencies, and skills force them to inertia in how they act.

**Social/management contributions:** The proposition of an organizational routine review cycle for public administration that curbs unwanted variations in routine execution.

**Keywords:** Organizational routines. Public administration. Ostensive and performative aspects.

### DESVIOS ENTRE ASPECTOS OSTENSIVO E PERFORMATIVO EM ROTINAS ORGANIZACIONAIS: PROPOSTA DE CICLO DE REVISÃO PARA ADMINISTRAÇÃO PÚBLICA

#### Resumo

**Objetivo do estudo:** Propor um ciclo de revisão de rotinas organizacionais de organizações da administração pública a partir da análise de desvios entre os aspectos ostensivo e performativo da rotina de gestão e fiscalização de contratos do Instituto Federal Catarinense.

**Metodologia/abordagem:** Pesquisa qualitativa, descritiva, de estudo de caso único, com levantamento de dados a partir de pesquisa documental e entrevistas.

**Originalidade/relevância:** A pesquisa ajuda a apropriar o tema rotinas organizacionais à administração pública ao analisar desvios entre o comportamento dos agentes e as normas que os regem. Adicionalmente, propõe-se um ciclo de revisão destes desvios.

**Principais resultados:** Foram identificados desvios oriundos da desatualização ou inadequação daquilo que está previsto no aspecto

ostensivo. Adicionalmente, os agentes tendem a não basear a performatividade naquilo que está previsto em documentos e instruções, tendo em vista que seus hábitos, competências e habilidades os forçam à inércia no modo de agir.

**Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas:** Proposição de um ciclo de revisão de rotinas organizacionais para administração pública que faça a contenção de variações indesejadas na execução da rotina.

**Palavras-chave:** Rotinas organizacionais. Administração Pública. Aspectos ostensivo e performativo.

### DESVIACIONES ENTRE LOS ASPECTOS OSTENSIVOS Y PERFORMATIVOS EN LAS RUTINAS ORGANIZATIVAS: UNA PROPUESTA DE UN CICLO DE REVISIÓN PARA LA ADMINISTRACIÓN PÚBLICA

#### Resumen

**Objetivo del estudio:** Proponer un ciclo de revisión de las rutinas organizacionales de las organizaciones de la administración pública a partir del análisis de las desviaciones entre los aspectos ostensivos y performativos de la rutina de gestión y supervisión de contratos del Instituto Federal Catarinense.

**Metodología/enfoque:** Investigación cualitativa, descriptiva, estudio de caso único, con recolección de datos a partir de investigación documental y entrevistas.

**Originalidad/ Relevancia:** La investigación ayuda a apropiar el tema rutinas organizacionales a la administración pública, analizando desvíos entre el comportamiento de los agentes y las reglas que los rigen. Además, se propone un ciclo de revisión de estas desviaciones.

**Principales resultados:** Se identificaron desviaciones resultantes de la desactualización o inadecuación de lo previsto en el aspecto ostensible. Además, los agentes tienden a no basar la performatividad en lo previsto en documentos e instrucciones, ya que sus hábitos, competencias y habilidades les obligan a una inercia en su forma de actuar.

**Aportaciones teórico-metodológicas:** Proposición de un ciclo de revisión de rutinas organizacionales para la administración pública que haga la contención de variaciones no deseadas en la ejecución de la rutina.

**Palabras clave:** Rutinas organizativas. Administración Pública. Aspectos ostensibles y performativos.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Organizational routines are the building blocks of organizations and can be better understood when segmented between the ostensive and performative aspects. The ostensive aspect concerns the ideal and preconceived state of the routine (Feldman, Pentland, D'Adderio & Lazaric, 2016). On the other hand, the performative aspect refers to the execution of the routine by specific people in specific places (Feldman & Pentland, 2003) and comprises the execution of the routine done by the agent. Feldman (2016) indicates that the routine is built and updated from the recursiveness between the ostensive and performative aspects. Thus, when the actors repeatedly execute the routines, the understanding of the ostensive aspect is executed in what can be called the performative aspect. The balance between what is expected and what is actually done stabilizes the constitution of the routine and leads, in general, to its improvement (Vidal & Rocha-Pinto, 2020).

Ideally, the execution of the routine occurs in the most accurate possible way of its ostensive preconception should occur, which is presumed to be built and optimized from a continuous process of learning and organizational reflection (Wegner & Glaser, 2020). The dynamic routines perspective (Feldman, Pentland, D'Adderio & Lazaric, 2016) accommodates variations from the execution of the preconceived form of routines, given that, for example, different people will do different tasks and routines in different ways over time. On the other hand, it is also understood that sharp deviations between the ostensive and performative aspects suggest problems in the routine's execution or in its more formally established conception.

In public administration, deviations between aspects may expose agents to risks related to compliance with technical or legal requirements, where the existence of nonconformities may lead to accountability for failures. Thus, the performativity of organizational routines in the public sector exists along with a complex set of norms included in the ostensive aspect with legal requirements. Such requirements are important to consider in studies of organizational routines (Royer & Daniel, 2019), local needs, political orientation, and regularly positioned leaders. Accordingly, they can lead to deviations and issues that hinder innovation in the sector (Lewis, Ricard & Klijn, 2018).

Contracts management and oversight are among the most critical routines in public administration due to their high degree of exposure to integrity risks (Leite, 2022). Contract routines are subject to Law 8.666/93, regulated in the Federal Executive Branch by Normative Instruction SEGES 73/2021, and supervised by the Audit Courts and internal control units. The other public administration spheres have regulations or can adopt the federal rule. In this normative environment, it is common to observe the emergence of new understandings about some issues, new requirements, or changes in understanding since the matter is related to points of labor legislation, among others. Another essential aspect to be highlighted is that the set of normative instructions documents the regulations and describes the ostensive aspects of the routines in public administration.

Procedural Manuals in Public Administration are commonly developed to mitigate the complexity of the constitution of the ostensive aspect of routines and for standardization and error mitigation (Silva, 2018; Catanduba, 2021). This is usually done through staff mobilization, committees, or working groups. However, this mobilization is typically a problem due to chronic understaffing. In addition, the history of the constitution of the Federal Institutes (Otranto, 2010; Pacheco, 2020), coming from the grouping of pre-existing institutes, increases the complexity of the environment, as it carries the past organizational cultures and customs that may result in differences in the execution of the routine.

Given the presented circumstances, the main goal of the research was to propose a review cycle of organizational routines of public administration organizations from the analysis of deviations between the ostensive and performative aspects of the routines. Thus, the foundation of our contribution was the routine of management and supervision of contracts of the Instituto Federal Catarinense.

Qualitative research of descriptive nature was performed to achieve this goal, focusing on analyzing existing deviations between the ostensive and performative aspects of the aforementioned routine. The data came from eight interviews with contract managers. The study also used floating reading and categorization of approximately 900 secondary documents. This data was collected during 2022. After analyzing the gathered data, a routine review cycle was set up to reduce deviations between the ostensive and the performative aspects.

The results of the qualitative research point to two types of deviations not yet characterized in the literature: the deviation where the agent does not pay attention to some element foreseen in the ostensive aspect of the organizational routine and the deviation related to the outdatedness or inadequacy of the preexisting forecast in the organizational routine. Aiming to minimize these deviations, a routine review cycle composed of three steps inspired by the literature on organizational routines is presented as follows: Step 1 - Instrument review: focused on gathering, systematizing, and providing what is expected to be executed in the performativity of a routine; Step 2 - Creation of a collaborative environment: focused on establishing active communication among the agents of the routine so that the sequential variety is diminished, given expanding access to the ideal version of the routine in its ostensive facet; Step 3 - Institution of monitoring and guidance policy: moment focused on stimulating agents through management instruments to be actively basing the performative aspect on the ostensive definition of the organizational routine that was improved in the first step and socialized in the second.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background concerning organizational routines. After that, details about the method are presented, then a section describing and analyzing the data. Then, a section focused on structuring the routine review cycle and, finally, the final considerations are presented.

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### *2.1 Organizational Routines*

To Becker (2008, p.1), "understand routines is to understand organizations". This brief statement summarizes routines' relevance and centrality in understanding organizations. Much of the work in organizations is performed through routines (Feldman, 2000); they are vital to how new things emerge over time (Sele & Grand, 2016), thus, may even be considered ubiquitous (Becker, 2008). Additionally, studies on the topic indicate that routines are formed by previous routines (Nelson & Winter, 1982); firms tend to repeat what they already did (Zander & Kogut, 1995); and that experiences are transmitted organizationally (Zollo & Winter, 2002). It is well understood in the literature that organizational routines involve people doing tasks, reflecting on what they are doing, doing those tasks in vastly different ways, or doing the same tasks in slightly different ways (Feldman, 2000), which accommodates the idea that there is change in the essence of organizational routines.

Routines are essential to conduct organized tasks; however, they are a source of inertia since, if an activity is working well, the tendency is for it to continue to be performed similarly. At the same time, new variations may become incorporated into the process and force a substantial change in the definition of the organizational routine. The main contribution of Feldman and Pentland's (2003) study — probably the most cited article in the literature — is that, while routines are a source of inertia and often inflexibility, they are also an essential source of flexibility and change.

Another important landmark in the research on organizational routines was the appropriation that Nelson and Winter (1982) made of evolutionary economics to study how these variations in routines occur. According to the authors — and other scholars on the subject (Miner, Ciuchta & Gong, 2008) — this process follows the idea of the evolution of species in biology, where, for everything that is established (e.g. a species or a routine), variation tends to occur, followed by the selection of the fittest, culminating in the retention of the version that is most appropriate to the context.

This contradicts traditional neoclassical assumptions about how industries develop and change over time, leading to the definition of routines as regular and predictable patterns of behavior of industries (Nelson and Winter, 1982). For the authors, routines could be seen as playing three different roles: first, routines act as genes — not only identifying an organization by the way it acts and differentiating it from other organizations, but also determining which firms are apt to be selected by the environment and thus survive. Second, routines act as organizational memory, as it is in their core that organizations store knowledge in the form of routinized activities, since much of the knowledge is not explicit in documents, systems, or forms. Finally, the authors praise the role of routines in acting as a truce, reconciling divergent interests of the organization's members and avoiding intra-organizational conflicts in repetitive activities.

Organizational routines are also related to the concept of skills and competence in which Nelson and Winter (1982) state that "individuals act on the basis of their skills" thus enabling them to perform

certain tasks in firms. The sum of individual skills and competencies chained into routines suggests that "the outcomes, actions, and characteristics of each organization are marked by a set of skills" (Miracles, 2011); those, through aggregation into routines, allows thinking that firms are dependent on individual skills. Thus, it is likely that when a firm incorporates particular routines involving several individuals, it will involve their habits (Hodgson, 1993).

Suppose habits can be understood as the propensity to behave in a particular way in a given situation (Hodgson, 2004a). In that case, it is also coherent to admit that the performativity of routines does not require much thought and reflection, which can lead to repetitions that are very close to being automatic, thus removing the performative aspect of ostensive new versions of the routine.

The "Dynamics of Routines" perspective developed from an interest in what happens within routines. It "altered the grain size or granularity of analysis and moved the unit of investigation from the firm and the routines that constitute them" (Cohen et al., 1996) to the routines and actions that constitute them (Feldman, 2016). The focus on formal procedures has also shifted to the actions performed by specific people at specific times and places.

Feldman (2000) pointed out that routines were sources of change over time, a finding that challenged the dominant view of routines as sources of stability and inertia. New ways of theorizing routines based on these ideas shifted the focus from routines as "entities" in early works to routines as consisting of parts, i.e., the ostensive and performative aspects (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). It also shifted the emphasis from inherently static routines to generative and dynamic routines (Parmigiani & Howard-Grenville, 2011).

Personnel involved in routines may have substantially different understandings of their purpose (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002). Execution is seen to unfold based on multiple understandings rather than on a single shared, immutable understanding. Dominant meanings for routines emerge through negotiation among actors, which ensures that some meanings are discredited in favor of those articulated by more powerful voices. For example, a hiring routine will have variations on the better way to hire people for different types of jobs, in different departments, or at different times of the year. However, each of those variations identifies the activities involved as a legitimate, recognizable, and authentic representation of a job hiring process.

One of the most important theoretical contributions to the field of routine dynamics by Feldman and Pentland (2003) is the discussion of the dynamics of routines as a resource between ostensive and performative aspects. The performative aspect deals with specific performances in specific times and places, and the ostensive aspect as a formalized pattern (Feldman, 2016). For the authors, this dynamic generates a source of both stability and change in the dynamics of routines, and can be seen as a generative (Pentland, 2012) and a performative model of routines (Feldman 2000, 2003; Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

According to Feldman (2016), the interrelationship between change and stability is the central issue in studying the dynamics of routines. For the author, the endogenous interrelationship between

ostensive and performative aspects produces relative stability. This implies that one way to achieve stability in a pattern is to provide flexibility that accommodates agents' preferences and minor adaptations. Tsoukas & Chia (2002) compare stability to walking on a tightrope, which results in apparent uniformity and stability with constant adjustments.

Supposing that objects of routine performance may be variable, such as the different contracts to be managed and supervised, some small changes arise as an adaptation to maintain the pattern, and are called "effortful accomplishment" (Feldman, 2016). However, other changes may result in new patterns, called "emergent accomplishments."

Feldman (2016) presents the idea of the temporality of routines, as their performance does not have an instantaneous outcome, nor does it persist indefinitely, but looks like a trace across time and space, like a process rather than a thing. She further points out that the action of each repetitive pattern can result in a potential change in performance through small changes and efforts by the agents. This aspect reinforces the idea that routines benefit from constant revision processes.

Studies from a routines dynamics perspective also show that internal or endogenous forces are in evidence. Through this lens, merely staging routines creates opportunities for novelty (Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Deken et al. (2016) discuss a progression of increasingly novel forms of routine work in the context of an automotive supplier trying to develop a new line of information-based services (e.g., navigation panel). The collaborative environments for routines can create opportunities for their enhancement, as variation is a natural part of routines (Cohen, 2007).

Given the understanding that organizational routines are sources of stability, they entail in their essence a process of change, and that, despite changing, they still have a solid base built on the skills and competencies of the agents. As a result, we find deviations between the ostensive and performative conceptions of routines. In this sense, studies have explored the magnitude and nature of these deviations. Iannacci & Hatzaras (2012) state that artifacts are the main instance of convergence between them and that, in other circumstances, deviations tend to prevail. Liljenberg & Nordholm (2018) state that it is necessary to stimulate the approximation between these instances and that this intentional act promotes the operational performance of the execution of routines. Thus, deviations are a significant part of the analysis of routines and can be minimized from its evidence.

## *2.2 Organizational routines in public administration*

Public administration has a social purpose as its primary objective, contrasting the private sector, which focuses on economic output. Therefore, it may be harder to identify advantages in a public environment because benefits (public value creation or accountability) are allocated to the community rather than retained by the organization and are difficult to measure (Pablo, 2007; Piening, 2013). From this perspective, these differences are expected to reflect in organizational routines because aspects such as legal certainty may overlap economic efficiency measures in the design of organizational routines.

In the public sector, organizations also live in a complex and dynamic environment that must meet legal requirements, local needs, political guidance, regularly positioned leaders, and issues that can become obstacles to innovation in the sector (Lewis, Ricard & Klijn, 2018). Although the definition and use of dynamic procedures are specific to the private sector (Pablo, 2007). The public sector can leverage the dynamics of routines, even though its focus is on the development and optimization of resources that do not lead to the pursuit of profit maximization.

Innovation research in the public sector still has a long way to go (Lewis, Ricard & Klijn, 2018). Innovation is associated with transformation, and when related to processes, it means that changes happen as a direct reflection of the execution of organizational routines. Innovating is not positive per se, but the effects of innovation can contribute significantly to value generation in the public sector (Oliveira & Junior, 2017). This means the emergence of innovation has nothing to do with achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage. Instead with the exercise of creative routines and the willingness of public agents to share ideas, information, and knowledge the target audience's necessities can be met.

On the other hand, the enormous challenges inherent to the public reality and environment should be considered. Among them, short-term perspectives stand out due to political issues, regular elections, risk-averse culture, employee motivation, and organizational complexity (Homberg, Vogel, & Weiherl, 2019; Lewis, Ricard, & Klijn, 2018; Martinson & De Leon, 2018; Pablo, 2007). For public organizations, these challenges can be seen as opportunities, as they may be able to propitiate innovation in the face of managerial and policy change, especially when their trajectories focus on organizational learning (Gardiner, 2014; Lewis, Ricard & Klijn, 2018).

### 3 METHODS

Qualitative research concerns aspects of reality that are difficult to quantify, which characterizes the theme of organizational routines. This organizational phenomenon requires the evaluation of various aspects, such as the way they are executed, the context where they take place, and the agent that performs them. The research was carried out by analyzing the external and internal documents to which the organization is subject, as well as the applicable legislation. It also employed interviews with the agents who perform the routine of management and supervision of contracts in an environment characterized by administrative decentralization of the Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC).

To enable the research objectives and analysis, a case study (Yin, 2016) was carried out in an organization that allowed the researchers to reach the focus of this effort: to identify deviations between ostensive and performative aspects in organizational routines. In this sense, the choice of the IFC is justified by its nature as a public organization, by its extension — as an institute with 16 campuses distributed throughout the state of Santa Catarina, and by the formalization of their routines through accessible documents. The research universe is delimited by the contract managers of the 16 campuses, including participants in the elaboration of the IFC's Institutional Manual for Contracts Management

and Supervision that governs the routine of contracts management and supervision.

The research began with a survey of the legislation applicable to the routine and the documentation guiding the organization's activities --- aside from the Institutional Manual, reports from the internal audit unit, and examination and other related documents on the organization's website. The initial survey was to check the norms applicable to the routine. All documentations, internal or external, are of public access.

The analysis of the documentation present in the administrative processes, which are the formal record of the acts of management and supervision of contracts executed by the different campuses, was the step that demanded the most effort. Approximately 12 thousand pages distributed in about 900 documents were evaluated.

The evaluation sought to identify if the documentation contained in the acts of contracts management and supervision were consistent with the models and guidelines provided in the manual. For the evaluation of the processes, the administrative processes for contracting outsourced cleaning services were also listed because it is a service contracted by all units of the IFC.

Interviews were conducted with eight of the sixteen contract managers. Regarding the number of interviewees, Thiry-Cherques (2009) states that theoretical saturation occurs by the 12th interview, and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) that the sixth interview identifies the central categories. Therefore, the number of contract managers interviewed was adequate for the survey of the study's evidence since they corroborated with documentation gathered throughout the administrative processes analyzed and norms associated with the research. The interviewees can be characterized as key informants, which, for Schensul (2004), are well-informed individuals with extensive contacts and active involvement in the activity or people with deep and broad information about a system or subject of interest.

The data analysis technique was content analysis, which according to Bardin (2011), can be segmented into three stages: 1) pre-analysis; 2) exploration of materials; and 3) analysis and interpretation of data and drawing inferences. The pre-analysis stage consisted of systematizing the initial ideas into an analysis plan and preparing the interviews for transcription. Pre-analysis occurred in three moments: in the survey and organization of the documentation, the organization of the administrative processes analyzed, and the systematization of the answers obtained in the interviews.

The exploration of materials consisted of using the plans defined in the pre-analysis to compare and categorize responses. In this stage, the interviews were transcribed, along with detailed descriptions of the contracts management and supervision routines, diagrams' presentation, schemes, flows, and a survey of the used artifacts. The exploration started with the reading of secondary data in the organizational documents and in the regulations, and the registration of relevant points. This step allowed to check whether or not there exist outdated elements in disagreement with the regulations in force at the federal level. At this stage, the examination of the instructions contained in the contracts management and supervision manual allowed the analysis and description of the ostensive aspect of the



routine.

The analysis continued through the transcription of the interviews that sometimes occurred concomitantly with the analysis and interpretation of the data and the making of inferences (third stage) because the systematization of the answers within the questions to the interviewees' required interpretation. The researcher's experience as a contract manager facilitated the analysis of the terms and explanations that emerged in the interviews, which were confirmed by cross-referencing the primary and secondary data. Finally, in analyzing the results, only the initial evidence that could be associated with secondary data or confirmed by the interviewees was maintained.

#### **4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION**

Feldman (2016) claims that there is a background concerning the action, which means the institutional environment deserves to be considered, which is the context and origin of IFC. Therefore, knowing the background where the routine is inserted may improve its understanding.

##### *4.1 Studied Context*

The Instituto Federal Catarinense was formed by pre-existing institutes, which were unified and gave rise to the organization from the enactment of Federal Law No. 11.892, December 29, 2008. These organizations tend to inherit the existing organizational culture and customs, as pre-existing management practices could be more persuasive — according to Szulanski and Jensen's (2004) perspective that the replication of a model for knowledge transfer highlights persuasion, reliability, and how it works.

Therefore, the first contract managers brought their work routines to the campuses where they worked. The lack of determinations or initial guidelines from the Rector's Board concerning contracts management and inspection allowed the direct transmission of knowledge and *modus operandi* from the already established campuses to the most recent ones. This happened in the perspective that routines are transmitted as a replicator model (Nelson and Winter, 1982) and were assimilated from the presence of public employees from the old campuses in the implementation process of the new campuses, replicating their *modus operandi* by the tacit transfer of skills (Hodgson, 2004b).

In 2016, the Internal Audit Unit (UNAI) noted the need to promote training and standardization of various work processes. The UNAI notes followed the effort done by the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU), the Federal Executive's external control body, to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending. The recommendations regarding the routine of management and supervision of contracts were in the sense of standardizing their routines at the institutional level.

Following the recommendation of the UNAI, the Pro-Rector of Administration (PROAD) formally determined, on October 14, 2016, the creation of the working group responsible for the preparation of the Institutional Manual for the management and supervision of contracts. The proposed manual should cover the entire IFC, as well as other activities of the institution, materializing the effort

for institutional standardization. The work group — composed of 4 employees — wrote the manual, with 211 pages and structured in chapters. Chapter 1 briefly introduces the manual's objective, which is to guide the performance of contract managers and inspectors through behavioral parameters that standardize the performance in all units. Additionally, the manual intends to provide a global vision of the activities, making it clearer what is expected by the routines, generating more security, celerity, and transparency in the contracts.

The manual's explicit objective is to level the contracts management routines' knowledge, which implies standardizing and establishing minimum parameters. It also intends to regulate, which implies determining with precision. Finally, it intends to guide and facilitate the performance of contract managers and inspectors, which implies being an instrument of daily guidance and consultation. Therefore, the stated assumptions of the manual show the intention of the instrument to formally represent the routine in its ostensive aspect.

The Manual is for contract managers and inspectors — a mix of experienced and novice professionals who, at different stages of experience in the activity, have already overcome some difficulties still present for the newer ones. Therefore, the more experienced look for something more practical, while others look for more detail. The manual intends to deal with the need to standardize contracts management. The standardization brings more legal safety for administrative acts, besides allowing the use of metrics to audit the execution of the contracts. At the same time, the manual aims to be a tool for guidance and daily consultation, especially for new entrants and to mitigate disruptions in the replacement of contract managers and inspectors.

#### *4.2 The contracts management and inspection routine*

The contracts management and inspection routine is developed by two agents: the contract manager and the contract inspectors. The manual presents their duties, the assumptions, the best profile of the agent to perform the activities, and the actors' restrictions and responsibilities. The rationale for the activities of both agents is expressed in Normative Instruction 05/2017 SEGES, on which the manual is based and subject.

The contracts management and supervision routine is represented in the manual through four tasks: 1) contract implementation; 2) execution supervision; 3) contractual alterations; and 4) contract closure and receipt of the object. These four tasks are presented using process flow diagrams, accompanied by their respective details, and describe the ostensive aspect of the routine studied. Tasks are constituent elements of organizational routines that appear commonly in the literature (Becker, 2008).

#### *4.3 Deviations between ostensive and performative aspects*

Although the manual explicitly states the intention of leveling and regulating the executions, it was possible to verify that the procedures performed by the contract managers show that each one

performs the activities in different ways, despite all of them complying with the normative devices. The verified deviations are presented in Table 1 and denote the prevalence of administrative autonomy in relation to the manual's standardization proposal.

**Table 1**

*Observed deviations in the execution of tasks that are part of the routine of contracts management and inspection*

| <b>Ostensive Aspect</b>   | <b>Performative Aspect</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Tasks and their expected execution patterns (in sum)</b>   | <b>Observed deviations in documentation and interviews</b>   |
| 1) Contract Implantation<br>E.g.: The agent is expected to document the negotiations held in a meeting with the contractor.   | Dealing with each other by different means and in different ways.<br>Greater or lesser detail of the acts connected to the processes.                    |
| 2) Execution Supervision<br>E.g.: the contract supervisor is expected to record the irregularities identified and the measures taken monthly. The use of checklists for checking the documentation presented is expected. | Orders from different levels.<br>Documents merged in different orders.   |
| 3) Contractual alterations<br>E.g.: an order or authorization from the competent authority is expected in a specific document.  | Use of own templates and guides, not the ones in the manual's appendixes.<br>Documents merged in the process in a different order, or without a pattern. |
| 4) Contract Closure<br>E.g.: Finding the final receipt of the contracted object is expected.  | Higher or lower formality in the performance of administrative acts.<br>Some processes with no record of an initial meeting with the contractor.         |

*Note.* Developed based on survey data.

Analyzing the deviations allows us to note them and assess the reasons for the identified deviations.

#### *4.4 Reasons for the deviations*

One reason for misalignment is that the ostensive aspect of the routine is insufficiently detailed in the manual. Theoretically, the performativity of the different tasks that make up the routine did not feed into the ostensive aspect that characterizes what is expected from the execution of the routine.

A second reason is how the instrument's implementation, adoption, and observance were conducted. The method seems to not draw the agent's attention to the completeness of the description of the routine execution patterns proposed in the ostensive aspect. If the instrument were in full use, it could be expected that the discussions among users would revolve around doubts about the

operationalization of its procedures. On the other hand, the interviewees point out that this does not occur. It is more common to use several means of clarification on performing the routine, either by direct personal contact between the agents or by consulting materials from outside the organization. In some cases, the agents ignore the existence of the manual as an orientation tool.

Finally, a last reason is deviations from the agents' habits and abilities. The interviews reveal a preference for performing the activities in a habitual, trivial way, derived from how the routine has "always been done". This reason was associated with the agent's reading of what is possible and adequate. In some cases, they revealed they could not conceive of any other way to perform the activity. Some pointed out that, instead of considering the manual and updating the way of doing it, the safest thing would be to keep doing it as it has been done. In this sense, one can see the inertial and rigid characteristic of the routine acting as a way to keep the performance stable and without changes.

Thus, the possible reasons for the identified deviations can be summarized and aggregated as presented in Table 2. The persistence of the problem occurs mainly due to little diffusion of the standardizing instrument: the manual. The unexpected changes in the normative associated with the revision of understanding make the agents question if the orientation in a static instrument is the best alternative. This question arises because there is a certain difficulty in keeping the team constantly mobilized for the use and updating of the instruments, especially when these also change.

**Table 2**

*Reasons for the identified deviations*

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**Associated with the manual, the main document of the ostensive aspect:**

- 1 – The manual has outdated elements.
- 2 - Difficulty in understanding the graphical representation of the flow and insufficient level of detail.
- 3 - The annexes are not directly associated with the flow steps.
- 4 - The manual's annexes are not available in editable format.
- 5 - The manual does not provide legal precautions to observe in each step.
- 6 - Frequently asked questions by users are not included in the manual, and other specifics are not covered.

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**Associated with how to implement, review, and monitor the manual's use**

- 7 - There was no adoption initiative or campaign.
- 8 - An instrument published only for guidance, not mandatory, favoring non-compliance.
- 9 - Lack of a systematic update and revision of the manual based on the agents' experiences.

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**Associated with users' habits**

- 10 - A preference for using one's models for performing the tasks that make up the routines.
- 11 - Tendency to stick to the way of performing tasks, considering the ability to perform the tasks differently than in the manual.
- 12 - The habit of seeking information and resolving doubts in sources other than the manual.

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*Note.* Developed based on survey data.

The fact that the manual does not offer any advantage to contract managers and inspectors is highlighted in this analysis. The spontaneous adoption of a new work methodology is presumed to be unlikely if it does not present points perceived as advantageous, such as simplification, elimination of rework, or increased legal certainty, and without an effort of implementation or monitoring by superiors to credit the initiative. According to the interviewees' reports, using pre-existing models is the natural way to develop the routine. Therefore, without any effort, the tendency is that each contract manager will continue to perform the activities according to the existing system on his campus, with all the advantages and weaknesses imbued in its practices.

The analysis of the documents revealed that the normative instructions are in constant change compared to the manual. Normative instructions are presented in a static, textual format — which does not adequately promote use in real daily situations. This is a relevant reason for possible deviations to increase over time if the instrument is not revised and the dynamics of routine execution change.

Considering this, it is appropriate to present a review cycle that joins the ostensive and performative aspects, which, even if it does not reach a full standardizing degree, can promote the timely registration of changes over time and their daily use. In this perspective, creating documents in collaborative platforms can enable socialization and the use of guidance material and allow the overcoming of a second obstacle found in the interviews: the lack of personnel. Creating instructions in a tool that requires review and validation by pairs of contract managers creates conditions for collaborative development. Finally, this updating system could be mediated by the organization's administration and reinforced with the follow-up of the internal audit unit. In other words, the tool could become a living and dynamic guide, and be incremented with each new issue that arises based on the users' construction.

Reflecting on the problem proposes implementing a cycle that feeds the guidance material or instrument of the performative execution of the ostensive version of the organizational routine. In this perspective, to meet the different user profiles and the diverse visions of what an orientation material that represents the routine should look like, a revision cycle with three idealized steps is proposed, starting from identifying deviations and the reasons raised as their causes. This proposition aimed to consider relevant aspects of the organizational routines literature, as presented in the next section.

## **5 PROPOSED REVISION CYCLE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

### **Step 1: Reviewing the instrument**

This step considers that the literature about routine emphasizes establishing a recursion between the ostensive and performative aspects. One should encourage the revision and updating of the instructions periodically in manuals or official guides. This should be done by considering new norms, laws, and other coherent legal devices, along with the experiences, knowledge, and skills of the participating agents who are executors or experts performing a given routine. Since it needs to serve

different audiences, it may be appropriate to segment the session with an initial synthesized description for the more experienced agent regarding the necessary documents and reference to the attached models.

Those models seek a quick and synthetic orientation, usually to check that nothing was missing in their procedures. Subsequently, the activities can be discussed in more detail to serve new employees, including instruction on organizing and checking the different documents and requirements of contracts management, and alerts to good practices.

### Step 2: Creating a collaborative environment

The designation of employees for reviewing and constantly updating the procedures and internal materials for contracts management and supervision may only sometimes bring the best results, as they may not be interested in resolving a particular demand. Thus, creating an environment is needed where the employees can collaborate in constructing and improving the instructions. This environment should be collaborative and interactive, allowing the exchange of experiences associated with the manual updates proposed in step 1. Here there are several ways to establish this environment, such as online discussion forums, monthly meetings of best practices, or even actions that are performed by e-mail or other digital technological tools.

This internal system could be fostered through a policy of incentives for contribution. It may include the allocation of a specific budget to reward contributor agents. The contributions could be the solution of impasses, standardization of understanding, simplification, or efficiency gain of the work process. This incentive policy could be defined through business rules to reward organizational validated efforts and, therefore, eligible to receive incentives.

However, only some feel comfortable asking open-ended questions in collaborative environments, sometimes because of the embarrassment of publicizing their questions and opening up their way of working to the scrutiny of their colleagues. Nevertheless, especially new contract managers are faced with many questions that may seem basic but can potentially lead to serious problems.

It might be appropriate for the alternatives for establishing collaboration to include an option for anonymous participation. What is relevant is, as predicted in the routines literature, the frequency of mutual feedback between the performances performed on a day-to-day basis and what is predicted, codified, and clarified in the overt portion of the organizational routine is increased.

### Step 3: Institution of monitoring and guidance policy

Contracts management and monitoring, as an individual activity of each unit, does not benefit from the need for orchestration among the various campuses as in the case of institutional purchases. However, defining a monitoring policy linked to the internal audit unit can be encouraged. The validated instructions in this internal consultation and collaboration environment could be associated with internal audit verification tools, legitimizing formal follow-up actions and compliance with instructions at the higher organizational level. Thus, the collaborative environment itself, where contract inspectors and

managers would have the guidelines and the repository of document templates, would gain credibility as a natural instrument of standardization. This environment could also be a primary source of consultation and compliance by contract managers and inspectors since the rules of this environment would audit them.

Here, the last moment of revision of the ostensive structure of the routine is a validation by experienced agents who will be able to monitor whether deviations continue to occur, increase or decrease. This makes the routine grow incorporated knowledge and brings the ostensive aspect's instructions closer to the executing agents' day-to-day performances.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The research aimed to propose a review cycle of organizational routines of public administration organizations from the analysis of deviations between the ostensive and performative aspects of the routine management and supervision of contracts of the Instituto Federal Catarinense. Understanding the reasons was essential to explain the dynamics in the context of decentralization and administrative autonomy, so that the administration can take more assertive measures to ensure compliance in the execution of their routines and to mitigate possible deviations.

Procedures standardization in the purchasing sector, an activity preceding contracts management, that incorporates the set of documents, and processes associated with contracts management, showed that documental and procedural standardization among IFC administrative units is possible — due to the need for orchestration to assemble a single purchasing process from instructions and defined steps. Routine management and contract supervision is an individual activity of each unit that does not benefit from the need for orchestration among the various campuses but can be encouraged by the definition of a monitoring policy linked to the internal audit unit.

One of the reasons highlighted by the study's results, associated with the misalignment of the ostensive and performative aspects, is the need for constant revisions of the guidance instrument to provide an environment with reliable and up-to-date instructions. The proposition of a collaborative environment and review by the users is suitable for constantly changing environments. In this perspective, the proposal may contribute to other organizations that share the characteristics of administrative autonomy, personnel problems, and fluid rules that are constantly changing, being relevant to various public administration entities since all of them are subject to external control bodies. This approach intends to increase regulatory compliance, which is a relevant aspect of public administration.

More specifically, different deviations are present in the routines analyzed. The causes are associated with the composition of the manuals; the revision and monitoring policy; and the users' habits, competencies, and skills. The instructional material in a collaborative platform would have the potential to reduce the deviations presented by revising the instrument, creating a collaborative environment, and instituting a monitoring and guidance policy.

As a study limitation, the methodology adopted for data collection was not broad enough to allow the description of the routine in the various campuses, which would provide the evaluation of the identified deviations in greater clarity. In addition, having analyzed eight interviews and documents may have yet to reach the saturation of the deviations and their reasons to the point of providing an analytical generalization.

For future studies, expanding the research on the deviations and their reasons is suggested, using other contexts, routines, or organizations to broaden the understanding of this phenomenon. Other researchers could validate the steps proposed to reduce the deviations from the action research methodology. Finally, further research on the routines constraints, their constitution, and how the fluid nature impacts this would be coherent.

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