

Performance Evaluation in Public Administration. The Italian Context.

Catherine Aura ¹, Antonio Luigi Anania²

Abstract

The profound economic and social transformations characterizing modern societies in the last decade have produced processes of reform of the public administration system in Italy and abroad, attempting to improve the management of the institution itself at all levels, starting from personnel management. to the degree of response to the expectations of citizens and businesses, also taking into account the need to contain the costs of managing the public sector.

In light of these transformations, national governments have been pushed to intervene promptly and decisively, making innovative changes also to existing legislative texts where it has been necessary to modify them in various ways and with different intensities depending on the type of political-administrative system of their country.

The article aims to analyze the following issues, the objective of the document is to review some important phases of the performance cycle in the PA, through the description of the bodies and subjects involved in the process and the tools used in the performance evaluation and measurement process, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the cycle, in order to offer a critical evaluation of the evaluation of the Public Administration .

Keywords : Italian Public Administrations, Plan's performance, Performance, Measurement Systems, Accountability.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, some contextual elements have radically transformed the work of the Public Administration, to the point of making a rule that provided for its evaluation inevitable. The issue of performance measurement and evaluation is in fact framed in the broader and more complex framework of management reforms of public administrations (Mussaro & Ruggiero, 2010). The first attempts at reform can be traced back to 1993 without having produced good results, nor tangible improvements in performance, nor even a real and widespread use of measurement systems (Bianchi, 2014). The phenomenon of measuring the performance of the Administration is very current, as the economic and social well-being of a country is closely linked to the quality of institutions and the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Administration (Galli & Petrucci, 2023). Benchmarking systems and performance measurement are the most common approaches for evaluating services in the public sector (Padovani, 2014). Evaluating the performance of the Public Administration means evaluating its ability to provide public services adequate to the needs of the community. The focus on the issue of user satisfaction of public services and the search for suitable methods and tools to measure and improve it is not, however, new in our country. In particular, the performance evaluation refers both to the activity carried out by the PA and to the results achieved by it in terms of services offered and to the ways in which these services are offered, through the analysis of the planning and programming activity of the strategic objectives established by the PA and the use of indicators for measuring performance and monitoring the activity carried out by the Public Administration (Marini Mele 2021). However, the concept remains valid that there cannot be good performance without a good business strategy (Cepiku, 2018). The focus of study in recent years looks at how the Public Administration operates, therefore the political and institutional structure and the set of rules that govern the functioning of the "administrative machine", in order to be able to see the possibility of studying everything from the perspective aimed at introducing the typical operating mechanisms of private companies in public companies including, to name a few, planning, programming and control systems, personnel management systems and accounting and extra-accounting information systems. This is why public administrations and, in particular, territorial bodies have had to rethink their methods of operation. One of the most relevant problems is represented by the research and identification of specific indicators aimed at objectively measuring administrative action, with the ultimate goal of making effective planning of the performance management system easy and immediate (De Giorgi, 2020). All this has led to the introduction of programming models and control techniques that are very different from the past in order to improve their performance. For example, in the studies of Doren et al, (2012) the question of how to measure the performance of public administration arises, arguing that the areas of budgeting, human resources management and open governance illustrate both the potential and the challenge of such measurements .

¹Research Fellow in Economic and Business Sciences - Department of Business and Legal Sciences – University of Calabria, Italy; Address: P. Bucci Street - 87036, Arcavacata of Rende (Cs); e-mail: caterina.aura@unical.it.

²Financial Sector Manager – Municipality of Crotona – Italy; Address: Piazza della Resistenza - 88900, Crotona; e-mail: antonioanania@libero.it.

Performance is the result achieved by carrying out a specific activity (Formez PA). The concept of performance of public administrations is completely new in the Italian legal system, since it was introduced for the first time with Law 150/09 - Brunetta Reform (Urbani, 2013).

However, the criteria underlying the judgments that many feel like expressing on the work of public administrations were accepted in Italy already at the beginning of the 1980s as the literature shows. In fact, the Italian legislator, for more than twenty years, has been trying to reform the Public Administration through the process of "corporatization" in order to obtain a system of public companies capable of operating under the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, publicity. The reform of the Public Administration represented an important turning point, especially in relation to the mechanisms connected to the NPM (New Public Management), which can be considered as an innovative path aimed at reinventing public administrations, providing them with those requirements of effectiveness, efficiency and responsibility in relation to the reference culture (Carapia, 2024). The reform process unleashes a series of reforms of what is considered the heritage of each individual citizen and in Italy it starts mainly with real legislative measures and regulatory interventions on Local Authorities starting from law n.142 of 1990, and law 29 of 1993, which include the administrative procedure and which contain the focus of the innovations on Public Employment.

In the past, great importance was given to cost control, recently it has been joined by quality assessment techniques and analysis of the impacts of public policies, with a view to generating change in the ways of thinking and acting within public administrations. In particular, it has been understood that the administrative machine is made up of people and organizational management, therefore the use of innovative organizational-managerial tools has been implemented, new formats starting from the experience of private companies. The experience of private companies represents the output of a long and complex reform process that has affected management and organization in the public sector.

This work focuses on the theme of the performance of public administration and, in particular, of local authorities. The research focused on the motivations and contents of the main legislative interventions aimed at significantly modifying the systems of planning and control of Italian public administrations, which for too long have been oriented by bureaucratic logics, aimed at guaranteeing the formal regularity of the acts performed, but inadequate to ensure the "good performance" of public administration.

This paper analyses the issue of the new changes that have led to the reform process from the perspective of the economy of public spending, the effectiveness of collective action and the increase in staff productivity levels.

It is necessary to highlight that there are, however, still today numerous warning signals that highlight how little the behavior of many Italian public administrations has changed, despite the legislative reforms that have followed one another, with the consequence that they often show that the effects of these reforms are almost nil, even in some ways, negative, since in some situations they have generated a sense of "impotence" and "habituation" even among those who, initially, believed in the process of "corporatization" and who invested energy and resources in the direction of the desired change.

In any case, in 2009, the Legislator of the reform attempted new paths of modernization, in a managerial sense, of the Public Administration with the awareness of the mistakes made in the past. Specifically, emphasis was placed not only on the "new" concept of performance, but "organizational" and "methodological" innovations were introduced that would allow a better functioning of performance management systems, also taking into account the best experiences of other advanced countries, first of all the United Kingdom.

In particular, it is necessary to refer to the introduction of the then Independent Commission for the Evaluation, Integrity and Transparency of Public Administrations-CIVIT (now the National Anti-Corruption Authority and for the Evaluation and Transparency of Public Administrations-ANAC) along the lines of the English National Audit Office-NAO; to the definition of the Independent Evaluation Body-OIV as a new body responsible for evaluating performance within individual administrations; to the definition of the phases of the "performance management cycle"; to the identification of the characteristics that objectives must possess in order to be considered useful for the decision-making process; to the concept of organizational performance, i.e. of the public body considered in its entirety, and of individual performance, which must necessarily be linked to the former; to the various areas of analysis of organizational performance (impacts, strategies, quality, efficiency, etc.) and individual performance, etc.

This evaluation therefore includes the analysis of the contribution made by each unit involved, individual, group or organization in the provision of the expected services, with respect to different levels of analysis, organizational profiles and perspectives.

It is worth highlighting that the Legislator has reintroduced the issue of Public Sector performance into its reform "agenda", in the belief that improving the functioning methods of the administrations in question constitutes one of the ingredients for raising the levels of competitiveness of the "Sistema Italia". In this regard, numerous national and international research on the subject underlines how the Public Administration can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its action provided that performance is first measured and then managed.

In other words, the data collected by management and strategic control systems must be brought to the attention of corporate decision makers, so that they can use them to identify the root causes of any malfunctions.

Starting from these considerations, after a general overview of the regulatory evolution on the topic of performance management of Italian public administrations, we will proceed with a thorough review of the literature and a presentation and interpretation of the main innovations brought about by the mother reform of the Italian public administration, namely the "Brunetta Reform".

The study of the new regulatory elements has highlighted all the elements that until then had not been paid attention to in the management of local administrations or in their evaluation but not entirely practiced, which however concern the daily life of public administration, looking, among others, at the following aspects:

- ✓ the subjects to be involved in performance measurement and evaluation activities;
- ✓ the requirements to be respected in the procedures for identifying and assigning objectives, for constructing measures and for setting the relative targets to be achieved;
- ✓ the documentation to be prepared and the support tools to be used;
- ✓ the principles underlying the measurement and evaluation of organizational and individual performance.

Subsequently, we moved on to an analysis of the regulatory elements that led to the reform, focusing on local authorities and illustrating the tools they adopted during the planning, programming and reporting phases.

We have tried to clarify how local authorities have implemented the principles inspiring the reform into their legal systems and we have illustrated the methods used to implement documents such as the "Performance Plan" and the "Performance Report", which are mandatory only for certain Italian public administrations (Ministries, national Institutional Public Bodies, etc.).

This analysis was also conducted in light of the resolutions issued by ANAC (formerly CIVIT) on the subject, since its establishment, and of the guidelines prepared by ANCI.

The slippery question of the traditional problem of integration between the financial cycle and the performance cycle remains open, since its effective overcoming constitutes one of the "enabling conditions" for the correct functioning of performance management systems.

Specifically, the main problems currently occurring in Italian municipal administrations are highlighted with reference to the integration between the financial planning cycle and the performance cycle. In fact, the "legalized" delays in the approval of financial forecast documents certainly do not help Public Administration operators even if today there are regulatory supports that are also helping to overcome these problems by guiding professionals to seriously plan business management, with the consequence that the start of the performance management cycle occurs when the closing of the financial year is upon us and all that remains is to move on to the *redde rationem* of what has been (perhaps) produced.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of performance measurement is a topic present in the literature in the early nineties, it takes on greater importance with reforms aimed at introducing methods for measuring and evaluating performance in public administrations, on economic rationality and on the orientation to results (Hood, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). In the early nineties, several studies can be found that have examined the measurability of the activities of public organizations (Mascarenhas, 1996; Abma and Noordegraaf, 2003; 2003; Frey et al. 2013; Verbeeten and Spelke, 2014).

The focus on measurement has developed on an operational level related to its diffusion and implementation, often leaving aside the in-depth theoretical elements. On the other hand, the diffusion of performance measurement systems has occurred on the basis of external guidelines and directions rather than on authentic requests from aware resources and real contextualized organizational needs (Diefenbach, 2009; Dahler-Larsen, 2013; Marra, 2017).

In literature, the phenomenon of performance measurement linked to New Public Management is of great interest, so much so that there is no univocal definition of performance. For some scholars, the NPM approach is unsuitable and obsolete to address the complex challenges of society (Christensen, 2012; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012). In fact, performance is a broad concept (Kouzmin et al., 1999) and New Public Management does not see the performance of the public sector as something useless (Hood, 1991, DeVries and Nemeč, 2013).

Performance is a complex phenomenon, which develops on different dimensions (Amirkhanyan, Kim and Lambright., 2014) involving various stakeholders from different angles (van Helden and Reichard, 2013), it is studied as the analysis and overcoming of obsolete objectives by public management pushing public administrations to overcome the old management methods based on procedures imposed by bureaucratic control without the possibility of modelling the achievement of objectives with personalized practices also based on the personal and managerial skills of public management.

Performance is not simply a concept but a real “program of change and improvement” (Van Dooren, Bouckaert and Halligan, 2015). In literature, the term performance is sometimes associated with that of accountability, which also takes on different forms, becoming increasingly difficult to define (Kloot, 2009). Performance measurement and evaluation systems must be interpreted not only as technical information-accounting tools, but also as dynamic systems based on democratic processes, which involve citizens, being oriented towards improving the quality of the relationship, dialogue and therefore greater mutual trust between public administrators and citizens (Barbera, 2023).

In the public sector, as in the private sector, there is no univocal definition of performance. As the existing literature shows, public sector organizations typically have more than one performance dimension (Boyne, 2003 cited in Hvidman, Andersen, 2016).

Public performance is determined by several elements, starting from the external environment (Boyne and Walker, 2005), the balance between centralization and decentralization, management, diversity in the workforce, tax pressure and financial resources available, organizational methods, governance and government results, equity and cost effectiveness (Walker and Boyne, 2009). Performance can be quantitative and qualitative (Russo, 2023). The first refers to quantitative aspects such as resources, outputs produced and efficiency, while the second refers to both the operational quality and the strategic capacity of the public administration (Verbeeten, 2008). Organizations in the public sector may present differences in terms of performance, due to i) the different objectives pursued, ii) the needs of the compared areas which often do not coincide, iii) differences attributable to the costs to be sustained and the use of resources, iv) levels of managerial competence, with consequent difficulties in measuring performance itself (Smith 1988, 1990). The variables that influence performance in the public sector can be divided into 5 groups: resources, regulation, market structure, organization and management.

All the studies conducted to date show a particular interest that tries to put the personal evaluation of management at the center since it has been studied that previously the lack of attention on personnel could induce public management not to dwell on delays, dilating too much the times of bureaucracy without considering the personal objectives of management itself that today is put at the center of its own evaluation. The purpose that guides the activity of the performance evaluation system in public administration is not exclusively that of assigning economic rewards or promoting career incentives (Gabris & Ihrke, 2000). The evaluation of performance from an organizational perspective concerns the result achieved by the entire institution with its various articulations in reaching objectives aimed at satisfying collective needs; with reference to the individual profile, the evaluation of performance concerns the contribution of each operational subject involved in the pursuit of the same final product. Finally, an evaluation according to an internal perspective includes an analysis of performance in its horizontal extension in terms of input, process, output and outcome; while an evaluation from an external perspective is an analysis of performance in its vertical extension from the individual, organizational, program level, to the reporting of the related work in terms of accountability, transparency and information. The measurement and subsequent evaluation of organizational and individual performance are therefore functional to a management accounting of the results that is carried out at the organizational level. Measuring, which is the first action that managers are responsible for, is an objective act in itself and is all the more objective the more objective indicators are used (Marzo et al., 2022).

2.1 REGULATORY INTERVENTIONS

In the last two decades, public administration has been affected by a profound reform process that has involved all areas of public management, from financial management to human resources, from organizational structures to the decentralization of responsibilities.

The reform process was born from the ever-increasing sharing of the idea of public administration as a business and from the awareness that control is the key to ensuring optimal results in public management.

In the new administrative management model proposed in recent decades, control has focused on the aim of evaluating the results of administrative action, that is, evaluating the efficiency, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of services provided to citizens.

Management control and evaluation are therefore intended not so much in the sense of verifying compliance, or conformity to a standard, with a sanctioning purpose, but rather in the perspective of improving performance and, in general, the quality of management.

Since the early 1980s, a movement for the reform of public administrations has spread in several countries, characterised by the tendency to apply criteria similar to those used for private enterprises in their management.

These are very weak episodes, which were not systemic, but only affected some contexts. In any case, the emphasis is on improving management effectiveness and efficiency, through the rationalization of organizational structures and the introduction of cost and result measurement systems. The most used term to indicate this management innovation has been “new public management”.

The many problems and difficulties that gripped the public administration due to the problems related to the increase in public debt and the inability of governments to stop the growth of public spending in the most important sectors of a nation such as: public health, public employment, social security system have led to a review of the public administration model.

In Italy, the application of the principles of NPM started a season of unprecedented changes in the nineties for the country's public administrations and companies, from an institutional, political and administrative point of view. These are the years in which we enter the perspective that the public administration is at the service of the citizens. The nineties face a long process of reforms that will characterize the public administration aimed at starting at the different levels of the public sector a high degree of accountability and an improvement at least partial of the functioning of the administrative machine, redefining the boundaries of the Public Administration.

We will move to the use of new management planning and evaluation systems, with the attribution of incentives and prizes aimed at increasing management productivity; a long process of outsourcing is being implemented to implement the administrative machine, which has now become obsolete and cumbersome. The process initiated has as its objective the simplification of the organization and structures of public administrations, focusing attention on the "core-business" and the institutional mission of the entities.

Let's start with the Cassese Refirmation in the 90s with Legislative Decree no. 23 of 2009 which also achieved results such as the introduction of service cards, the creation of internal control offices, and codes of conduct for public employees and finally the reorganisation of collegiate bodies.

Subsequently, in the 1990s, other attempts to improve the Public Administration were born with the "Bassanini" Reform, pushing for objectives such as "simplification and decentralization". The Delegation Law 59/1997, the laws 127/1997 and 191/1998 (called Bassanini bis and ter), followed by the first two annual simplification laws (n. 50/1999 and n. 340/2000) led to a decentralization of administrative functions in favor of the Regions and local authorities. The birth of "administrative federalism" made a broad reorganization of the organization of the State necessary, accompanied by a considerable simplification of administrative procedures and the overall Reform of the regulatory system.

Legislative Decree no. 150/2009 identifies four tools to implement the performance management cycle: the Plan and the performance report

the performance measurement and evaluation system,

the three-year Transparency and Integrity Program and Service Quality Standards.

The result is the addition of these two documents to the already complex system of economic-financial and management planning provided for by the TUEL and subsequent integrations.

The key concepts of the aforementioned Reform can be traced back to the evaluation of results, rewards and transparency, outlining objectives, methods, responsibilities and tools through which to plan, measure and evaluate public performance, with a view to maximum transparency.

Legislative Decree 150/09 provides a simple definition of what both documents are and the timeframes for their adoption.

2.2 THE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The performance plan (art. 10 c. 1 lett. a Legislative Decree 150/2009) is a three-year planning document defined by the political - administrative management body in collaboration with the top management of the administration, according to the guidelines issued by the Department of Public Function (guidelines no. 1/2017), by 31 January of each year. The Piao promotes actions aimed at simplifying the obligations of the institutions and adopting an integrated logic and maximizing effectiveness with a renewal of procedures (Fiorentino & Pintus, 2022). It is a three-year planning document, it is consistent with the planning and budget cycle and is aimed at identifying strategic and operational objectives, defines the indicators for measuring and evaluating the performance of the institution and defines the objectives assigned to management staff.

In the event of a delay in adopting the Plan, the administration must promptly communicate the reasons for failure to comply with the deadlines to the Department of Public Service and the payment of performance-related remuneration to managers is prohibited. The Plan identifies the specific and annual objectives referred to in Article 5, paragraph 01, letter b) of Legislative Decree 150/2009 and defines the resources, indicators for measuring and evaluating the performance of the administration, as well as the objectives assigned to management staff and the related indicators www.performance.gov the plan must be consistent with the contents of the economic- financial and budget planning, identifying the strategic and operational objectives, and the indicators for measuring and evaluating their achievement.

The identification of objectives and their measurement through appropriate indicators represents the fundamental characteristic of the Plan. According to Article 5, paragraph 2 of the decree, public administrations, including regions and local authorities, must ensure that they are: • relevant and pertinent to the needs of the community, the institutional mission, the political priorities and the strategies of the administration • specific and measurable in concrete and clear terms • such as to determine a significant improvement in the quality of

services and interventions • referable to a specific time frame, normally corresponding to one year • commensurate with reference values deriving from standards defined at national and international level, as well as comparisons with similar administrations • comparable with the productivity trends of the administration with reference, where possible, at least to the previous three years • correlated to the quantity and quality of available resources. While for State administrations the Performance Plan contains the annual directive of the minister and essentially replaces it, the regions and local authorities will be able to establish, based on their organizational autonomy, the methods of carrying out the cycle. In consideration of the

The performance report different discipline of the accounting system of local authorities, it is possible to affirm that, as also supported by ANCI and admitted by CiVIT, the appropriate drafting of the Executive Management Plan (PEG), on the basis of what is established by article 169 of the current consolidated text, can replace the Performance Plan. The Plan is then followed by the operations of periodic verification of the performance trend, to be included in the scope of management control, while the demonstration of the conclusion of the cycle is entrusted to a document to be adopted by 30 June called "Performance Report" (art. 10 Legislative Decree 150/2009). This document represents an important innovation also for local authorities and is very useful as it fills a gap which is that of giving an account of the results achieved beyond the economic-financial aspects. The Performance Report has the following characteristics: • it is an annual document to be adopted by 30 June of the following year • it highlights the organisational and individual results achieved with reference to the planned objectives and the resources used • it identifies the deviations between results and objectives • it highlights the gender budget achieved • it is aimed at the governing bodies, the top management of the organisation, external bodies, but above all at citizens, interested parties, users and recipients of the organisation's services.

2.3 THE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The performance report (RsP), on the other hand, is a document to be adopted by 30 June to highlight the organizational and individual results achieved with respect to the individual planned objectives and resources and any deviations.

The Plan is then followed by periodic verification operations of the performance trend, to be included in the scope of management control, while the demonstration of the conclusion of the cycle is entrusted to a document to be adopted by 30 June called "Performance Report" (art. 10 Legislative Decree 150/2009). This document also represents an important innovation for local authorities and is very useful as it fills a gap which is that of reporting the results achieved beyond the economic-financial aspects. The Performance Report has the following characteristics: • it is an annual document to be adopted by 30 June of the following year • it highlights the organizational and individual results achieved with reference to the planned objectives and the resources used • it identifies the deviations between results and objectives • it highlights the gender budget achieved • it is aimed at the governing bodies, the top management of the institution, external bodies, but above all at citizens, interested parties, users and recipients of the institution's services.

It is true, unfortunately, that the inefficiency of public administrations (State, Regions and Municipalities) is one of the greatest evils of our country and that the attempts at reform that have been following one another for decades have come to nothing. The first critical point concerns the imperfect adequacy of the measurement systems applied within the respective contexts of reference.

The peculiarity of public administration in general, of local authorities in particular, also considered in relation to the complexity of public services provided at local level, does not lend itself to being captured by purely quantitative indicators.

How can we measure, for example, the effectiveness of a social service, an educational service, a public health service or even a service provided to the community in the field of education, school transportation and more? The exclusive tendency to privilege what is easily measurable risks neglecting fundamental qualitative aspects, such as user satisfaction, long-term social impact or even the starting contexts that made it possible to achieve a certain objective or, conversely, made it impossible to achieve it.

What has been said, beyond theoretical models that foresee hypotheses of deviations, methodological notes, more or less sustainable contradictions, represents in any case a very often structural and insurmountable limit.

Furthermore, the excessive standardization of indicators does not take into account the specificities of the different sectors of the PA, leading to a loss of crucial information on real performance, both considering each individual administration and examining the individual contribution of each sector and/or organizational unit that operates within a given context.

It happens very often that, well beyond the theoretical assumptions underlying the introduction of performance in the public sector, what was supposed to be a point of excellence, that is, being able to measure synthetically through a quantitative indicator, has ended up becoming practically the real point of weakness linked to the application of the main performance measurement models within a local authority.

This is such an objective and intrinsic element that, over time, this limit risks becoming an almost prohibitive obstacle to overcome.

All this with all due respect to the evaluation mechanisms that have been gradually implemented within local public administrations and that, even beyond subjective conditions of territoriality, all suffer from deficits that are not in line with the real mission that the introduction of performance systems intended to pursue.

In addition to this, there are other critical elements.

Added to this is the risk of "gaming" the system, where work is done to improve the indicator rather than the actual performance, as in the case of hospitals that anticipate less urgent interventions to reduce waiting lists.

3. THE INTEGRATED ACTIVITY PLAN PIAO

With the approval of the Decree of the President of the Republic of 24 June 2022, n. 81 and the Decree of the Minister for Public Administration n. 132/2022, the regulatory framework of the new "Integrated Activity and Organization Plan" (PIAO) was concluded, all within a framework of horizontal reforms envisaged in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (DL n. 80/2021). The PIAO (Integrated Activity and Organization Plan) was introduced with art.6 of DL80/2021 to implement a constraint dictated by the European Union in the context of the financing of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR): to strengthen the planning activity of public administrations and at the same time simplify their documents and obligations. This tool was introduced with the aim of harmonizing and simplifying the three-year planning process through the integration of the different perspectives involved in the generation and measurement of value (De Nicola & Fratini, 2024).

In the case of the Integrated Plan, the strengthening and simplification are substantially achieved through the unification of multiple documents provided for by the previous legislation, stimulating the structures of an institution to plan together, and in a unitary manner, the institution's strategies, overcoming the logic and method of sectoral planning.

The logic underlying the new measurement system changes the focus that was too concentrated on individual evaluation related to the measurement of the public value generated, highlighting and bringing to light the issue relating to the capacity that public administrations have to influence the needs of citizens and businesses, by carrying out their own activity (Giacomelli G., Rota S., Valotti G).

The reform that contains the PIAO officially came into force on July 1, 2022 with the so-called "Recruitment Decree" art. 6. Given the current need to digitize every activity or service connected to the Public Administration, it is necessary that the PIAO tool is integrated with data and information transmitted by interconnected platforms within public and interoperable offices in order to become essential in guaranteeing development and innovation, with monitoring aimed at effectively safeguarding legality (Racca, 2024).

In December 2021, the contents of the PIAO had already been developed thanks to the approval of the Unified Conference for the decree of the Minister for Public Administration and, in June 2022, the Minister of Public Administration and the Minister of Economy proceeded to sign the ministerial decree in which the contents and the standard outline of the PIAO were defined. The PIAO is introduced as the single planning and governance document that incorporates and replaces all those acts and provisions that until then were in use by the public administration and previously cited and that they were required to prepare.

The Integrated Plan of Activities and Organization represents for the Public Administration a new turning point, a new innovation, a manual almost considered as a single text of programming, with a view to simplifying the obligations of the institutions and adopting an integrated logic with respect to the fundamental choices of development of the administrations.

The focus underlying the definition of the PIAO aims to improve and overcome the critical issues and limitations of the programming tools, also due to their fragmentation, in order to create a new and single governance plan and the consequent performance evaluation, programming tools currently in use and introduced in various phases of regulatory evolution, to create a single governance plan for the institution.

The operational application of the PIAO has not been simple since extensions have also been arranged to the deadlines foreseen for the new obligations, this in order to benefit and meet the recipients of the entity to be able to implement and modify planning practices in a timely manner and to ensure that these are in the condition of the transition from the sectoral approach to the integrated one.

To date we are almost in line with the adjustment of the performance cycle in the local government sectors, but it must be said that many ordinary performance cycles have been distorted and modified since the entry into force, as the new practice is still at an embryonic stage and with many questions to be resolved and implemented, therefore the years just approved are to be considered trial years.

In fact, 2022 can be presented as the year of transition and experimentation for public administrations with respect to the full entry into force of the PIAO which will occur in 2023. However, the ordinary deadline for submitting this new document will be set for January 31 of each year (while for local authorities the deadline is set at 30 days from the approval of the Budget forecast).

In the PIAO, which is valid for three years but which can be adjusted annually, in compliance with the second paragraph of art. 6, it contains very important elements to consider and which are also being examined by academic literature, among which it is worth listing:

- the performance, smart working (POLA) and anti-corruption plans, the human capital management and organizational development strategy, making express reference to smart working and project management, as well as training and organizational processes.
- the recruitment of new staff and the valorisation of internal resources (with explicit reference to the three-year personnel requirements plan), which is essential for considering which professional figures may be necessary in future years, thus preparing for any possible hiring.

In order to improve the recruitment issue and to reduce its application times and avoid bureaucratic delays and excessively long times in this regard, a new recruitment portal was born in the public administration in the summer of 2021 to facilitate the hiring processes;

The aim is to simplify administrative activity and improve the quality and transparency of public services.

The flagship of the reform is certainly transparency and anti-corruption, making explicit reference to the Three-Year Plan for the Prevention of Corruption and Transparency, which has been the subject of frequent regulatory interventions, to the point of leading public administrations to constantly update the entries on their website that appear in the "Apparent Administration" section. Previously, cases of public administrations that did not publish anything for citizens' consultation have been detected. For example, databases of asset declarations and conflicts of interest can be used by contracting authorities to mitigate the risks of corruption (Racca, 2024). The brilliant novelty includes the publication of material that the institution itself makes public and that demonstrates that attention to transparency is probably a matter of interest and not of mere compliance; all in order to make consultation more accessible to the citizen and allow the planning of activities, allowing for shorter times for the provision of services (such as for registry certificates); a very important note that deserves emphasis here is full accessibility, physical and digital, to citizens over sixty-five and with disabilities, to reduce barriers to access to public services and not neglect anyone;

Also in this field, strong attention has been given to respecting gender equality (referring to the Positive Action Plans), to improve inclusion in public works places and to increase gender equality. Zilli (2023) in his study addresses the issue of preference for (female) candidates and gender precedence, introduced in public competitions in 2023.

The PIAO absorbs many documents (contained in article 1 of the Presidential Decree no. 81, of 24 June 2022) that until then public bodies were required to prepare annually, namely: the Performance Plan (PdP); the Personnel Requirements Plan (PFP) and the Concrete Action Plan (PAC); the Plan to Rationalize the Use of Instrumental Equipment (PRSD); Corruption Prevention and Transparency Plan (PtPCT); Agire Work Organizational Plan (POLA); Positive Action Plan (PAP). In particular, there is a tendency to create a coordinated system, in a single document, of multiple planning acts already provided for by previous disciplines (Miracolini, 2024).

Furthermore, paragraph 6 of art. 6 of Legislative Decree no. 80/2021, states that all administrations must adopt the PIAO, with the exception of schools of all levels and educational institutions, but for those with fewer than fifty employees a simplified plan applies.

In the event that the PIAO is not adopted by the reference body, sanctions are provided for in paragraph 5, article 10, of legislative decree 150/2009, which provide, against non-compliant managers and administrations, the prohibition of payment of performance-related remuneration; the impossibility for the administrations themselves to proceed with personnel recruitment campaigns and therefore also to the assignment of consultancy or collaboration assignments, useful tools for the proper functioning of the administrative activity. Furthermore, as regards the failure to approve the anti-corruption planning, an administrative sanction of not less than 1000 and not more than 10000 euros is foreseen (Villamena, 2023). Therefore, public administrations find themselves faced with a situation full of opportunities, even if they are aware of the difficulties that have always coexisted within them and that could persist and generate complications even in this case. They are required to provide a unitary vision of the planning processes (which until then were managed completely autonomously) and, therefore, not to think of it as another obligation to be respected or as a mere confluence of plans and programs in a single document. An essential role is that of the Secretary General or Director of the entity, who together with the political leadership, should create a climate within it such that all employees can feel involved in the process, furthermore they represent figures that determine the point of intersection between politics and management allowing a distinction between the political body and the technical-administrative structure. Also relevant is the strategic control function, which has the task of bringing the different programming guidelines, included in the new PIAO, into a common factor, trying to link the mandate programs and the administrative action with the strategic planning, which were usually handled autonomously, trying to work together as a real team.

4. CONCLUSION

From the examination and analysis of a literature that is scarce and almost absent on the topic discussed in the proposed article, the need to align a gap in the literature with more substantial and virtuous studies on the topic emerges. At the state of the art, the literature is really very scarce, especially regarding the application of what is now the new PIAO and how its adoption impacts the much-cited relationship and consequent measurement of performance using the new tools. The reasons for this lack of analysis and the scarcity of information could be attributed to the fact that we are objectively still in an embryonic phase of its application. The final objective of the analysis is not so much to question the robustness or validity of the analyzed tools such as the PIAO, or of any indicators that may arise from it in future research, but rather to suggest a possible use by policy makers of an indicator or a system that in its synthetic elements, can favor the evaluation of performance in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and economy. It is therefore hoped that checks on Local Authorities, including smaller ones, will continue to be carried out to verify the implementation of the principles of effectiveness, efficiency and economy, in line with the constitutional principle of good functioning of public administration.

We therefore take this opportunity to look at future developments regarding the study of the application of the new Plan in public administration and its evaluation in order to be able to examine and study whether there has been an improvement or a worsening of performance following its application, by verifying for example through the application of a case study, real cases of local authorities.

REFERENCES

- Barbera, C. (2023). Measuring and evaluating public performance. From traditional model to citizen-driven monitoring (Vol. 88). G. Giappichelli Editore srl.
- Bianchi, C. (2014). Conceptual models and operational tools for the evaluation and improvement of «performance» in the provision of public services from a user satisfaction perspective. In *Scritti in onore di Pellegrino Capaldo* (pp. 899-929). Milan: Egea.
- Braun S., Peus C., Weisweiler S., Frey S., (2013) Transformational leadership, job satisfaction, and team performance: A multilevel mediation model of trust.
- Carapia, S. (2024). Planning and Control of Performance in Public Administration. *Unitelematica Leonardo da Vinci Journal*, 4(1), 489-696.
- Cepiku, D. (2018). Strategy and performance in public administrations. EGEA spa.
- Christensen, T. 2012. "Post-NPM and Changing Public Governance." *Meiji Journal of Political Science and Economics* 1 (1): 1–11.
- Dahler-Larsen, P. (2013). Constitutive effects of performance indicators: Getting beyond unintended consequences. *Public Management Review*.
- De Giorgi, M. A shared measurement of organizational performance: the experience of common indicators for support functions. *Topics*, 323.
- De Nicola, M., & Fratini, S. (2024). The presence of SDGs in the PIAO 2023-2025 of Italian universities. *European journal of volunteering and community-based projects*, 1(1), 82-91.
- Diefenbach D., Millspaugh J., Skalski J., Townsend R., Boyce M., Hansen L., Kammermeyer K., (2009) An Evaluation of Sex-Age-Kill (SAK) Model Performance.
- Gabris, G. T., & Ihrke, D. M. (2000). Improving employee acceptance toward performance appraisal and merit pay systems: The role of leadership credibility. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 20(1), 41-53.
- Galli, E., & Petrucci, A. (2023). Institutional Quality, Efficiency and Productivity in Public Administration in Italy. *ITALIAN ECONOMY*, 2, 5-14.
- Hood C., A., (1991) public management for all Seasons? *Public Administration* Vol. 69 Spring.
- Klijin, E.-H., and J. Koppenjan. 2012. "Governance Network Theory: Past, Present and Future." *Policy & Politics* 40(open in a new window) (4(open in a new window)): 587–606. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655431> .
- Kouzmin A., Löffler E., Korac - Kakabadse N., (1999). Benchmarking and Performance Measurement in Public Sectors *International Journal of Public Sector Management*.
- Kouzmin A Korac - Kakabadse N., Andrew K. Kakabadse, (2001) Board governance and company performance: any correlations?
- Marini G., Mele M., (2021), Performance Evaluation in Public Administration. *Italian Journal of Economics, Demography and Statistics*.
- Marra M., (2001)., Evaluating evaluation. Obligations, ambiguities and learning in the Italian PA.
- Marzo, F., Cafaggi, F., & Colasanti, C. Expectation-based performance appraisal: behavioral investigation for the identification of current biases and formulation of possible interventions. *SPECIAL FOCUS: Performance management in public institutions after the Covid-19 pandemic. New paradigms among reforms*, 2022.
- Mascarenhas RC (1996), "Searching for Efficiency in the Public Sector: Interim Evaluation of Performance Budgeting in New Zealand." *Public Budgeting & Finance*.

- Miracolini, M. (2024). Gender equality in public employment. Potential and limitations from the contributions of the PNRR. *Journal of Anti-discriminatory Law*.
- Mussari, R., Ruggiero, P. (2010). The performance management cycle. In *The reform of public employment* (pp. 63-71). Rimini : EDK Editore.
- Noordegraaf M., Abma T. (2003), *Management by measurement? Public management practices amidst ambiguity*, Public Administration.
- Osborne D., Gaebler T., (1992). *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector*, Addison-Welsey Publishing.
- Padovani, E. (2014). Performance tree, Performance management cycle, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Performance indicators, Performance measurement and evaluation (the process of, the system of). In *Glossary of public administration reform* (pp. . 1-34). Maggioli spa.
- Pollitt, C., & Dan, S. (2011). The impacts of the New Public Management in Europe: A meta-analysis. COCOPS work package, 1.
- Pollitt, C. and Hupe, P. (2011) 'Talking about government. The role of magical concepts' *Public Management Review*.
- Racca, GM (2024). Abuse of office and public contracts. *FEDERALISMI. IT*, (16/2024), 291-304.
- Russo, G. (Ed.). (2023). *Performance Measurement in Public Organizations: Case Study: Regional Council of Lazio*. FrancoAngeli.
- Giovanni Urbani, Performance evaluation in the Italian public administration: from the season of controls to the spending review in "*RIV Rassegna Italiana di Valutazione*" 53-54/2012, pp 19-31, DOI: 10.3280/RIV2012-053003
- Van Doren, W., Caluwé, C. & Lonti, Z. (2012). How to Measure Public Administration Performance? *Public Performance & Management Review*, 489-508 (35).
- Verbeeten, F. H., & Speklé, R. F. (2015). Management control, results-oriented culture and public sector performance: Empirical evidence on new public management. *Organization studies*, 36(7), 953-978.
- Villamena, S. (2023). PIAO and public value. *Law and Society*: 3, 2023, 569-584.
- Zilli, A. (2024). Gender preference and precedence in public administration: principles and paradoxes. *Adl. Topics in labor law*, (4), 746-769.