

Discrepancy between prescribed and real work: the case of outsourced service contract supervisors at federal universities in the state of São Paulo

Érika Pena Bedin¹
Andréa Regina Martins Fontes¹
Daniel Braatz¹

¹Federal University of São Carlos, Department of Production Engineering, Brazil

Abstract

Purpose – The article aims to identify the specificities and complexity of the work of public servants who act as contract supervisors, by evaluating their prescribed work and actual work.

Design/methodology/approach – For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 public servants with additional service contract supervisory roles at three federal universities in the state of São Paulo.

Findings – The results reveal the practice of designating contract supervisory roles when civil servants enter into public service, even though they have no previous experience or specific training, which causes great difficulties on a day-to-day basis.

Originality/value – Public and private organizations should reflect on the way they organize work, which is affected by the rigidity of institutional norms, causing experiences of suffering, fear, and occupational diseases. There should be a focus on people management policies and the human and behavioral development of workers. These actions are important for the development of skills that enable greater integration of the different areas of knowledge, in order to achieve results for the organization, without wearing down teams.

Keywords – Prescribed and actual work; public service; contract supervisors.

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1 Introduction

Despite increasing modifications to work and in forms of production in recent decades, some issues remain a challenge, such as suffering, disease, and accidents. These issues, in addition to having serious consequences for the people involved, cause damage to institutions and society (Nweke, Teh, Maitaba, & Al-Garadi, 2019).

The importance of studies on worker mobilization in their activities in public organizations is consolidated in the Brazilian context in an attempt to meet practical and theoretical needs (Oliveira, Baldaçara, & Maia, 2015). Among the various types of public institutions, one unit of employee engagement analysis that stands out in scientific research is public universities (Käfer-Schünke & Giongo, 2018).

Brazilian universities have undergone profound transformations and a redefinition of their role due to the changes desired by today's society and as a result of political will. These institutions exercise an increasingly strategic role in the country's socioeconomic development. In this regard, the impact of the REUNI program (Decree No. 6,096/2007) is highlighted, which greatly expanded the number of vacancies, courses, and public higher education institutions.

Menezes, Martins, and Oliveira (2018) state that the management of public universities should be considered as a theme of research in order to understand their specific characteristics. Although there are many similarities between company management and university management in terms of the administrative aspects, they are very different, especially when it comes to federal institutions, which have unique characteristics. In addition, Santos and Ferreira (2014) find that research on public organizations is scarce when compared to the amount on private enterprises, especially regarding the experiences of overload

and strategies to cope with worker suffering and dissatisfaction.

Within public universities, one of the main careers is that of Administrative Technician in Education. In this study, the general objective was to identify the impacts that the discrepancy between prescribed and actual work cause on civil servants who act as contract supervisors, that is, those who supervise the progress and execution of the contracts established through public tenders for services provided by outsourced companies.

In addition, the study of the work performed was guided by the following problem question: what are the specificities and difficulties of the work of public servants who act as contract supervisors at federal public universities in the state of São Paulo?

2 Task versus Activity

Studies show that there is a gap between what is required of workers (prescribed work or task) and what they really do (real work or activity) (Silva & Vasconcelos, 2017; Bobillier-Chaumon, 2003; Duarte & Vasconcelos, 2014). Prescribed work can be understood as the task that is imposed on the worker by the company. If the task is followed to the letter, the work becomes impossible (Dejours, Abdoucheli, & Jayet 1994).

Work activity is the maneuvers made by the worker to adapt to the real work situation, that is, the non-visible work (Dejours, 2014). The difference between the prescribed and the real work is a materialization of the contradictions in the work: what is asked and what the thing requires (Maggi, 2006). From this perspective, Guérin, Laville, Daniellou, Duraffourg, and Kerguelen (2001) warn us not to confuse the task with the activity, as shown in Figure 1, for the task always refers to what is formally or informally prescribed by the company so that the workers achieve the expected results.

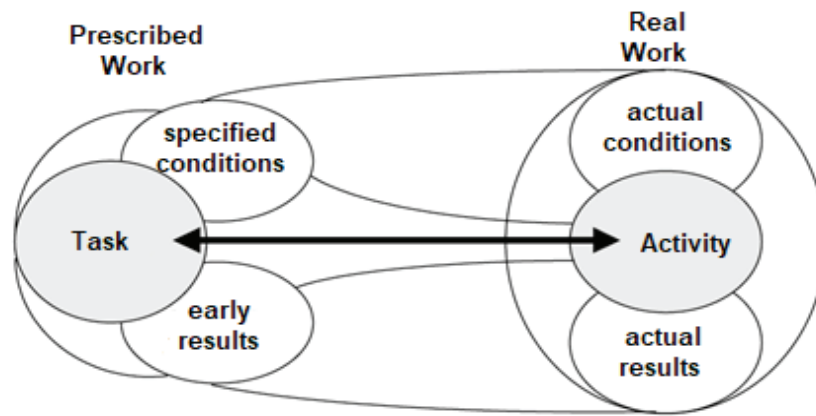


Figure 1. The distinction between the prescribed and real work

Source: From “Understanding work to transform it: the practice of ergonomics” by Guérin, F; Laville, A; Daniellou, F; Duraffourg, J.; Kerguelen, A., 2001, Sao Paulo: Edgar Blucher, p.15.

The task includes physical structure, furniture, equipment, procedures, etc. It can be understood as the way the work is controlled, misconduct is removed, unproductive work is minimized, production is maximized, which actions should be carried out, and the execution times (Abrahão, 2000).

The work is usually conceived as the division of tasks and based on technical rationality in which the production criteria, standards, rules, and means of production are based on the limits of an average man/woman carrying out a stable task (Abrahão, 2000; Wisner, 1994).

As pointed out by Guérin et al. (2001), there is a diversity of sources of work prescription that can be divided into descending prescriptions, derived from the organizational structure, and rising prescriptions, derived from the material characteristics of the situation, so that each operator will adapt to his/her own procedure. The consolidation of the work prescription can also emerge from the work equipment itself, which is considered here as technical devices (Duarte & Vasconcelos, 2014).

Dejours (2014) affirms that consolidated standards act as limiters or facilitators of the realization of an activity, given that the particularities of work situations mean the execution reality always goes beyond the model idealized in the technical devices.

During the realization of the work activities, the worker strikes a balance between production objectives, his/her own characteristics, and his/her capacity to achieve the objectives. The consequences can have positive impacts, such as the acquisition of new knowledge, experience, and training, but they can also cause negative impacts, such as an alteration in the worker's health (Guérin et al., 2001). In this sense, it is essential to analyze the variabilities of the activity, as these mold the way the worker operates to achieve the proposed results.

3 Public service and the distinction between prescribed and real work

Growing contingents of workers are involved in a variety of tasks in the services sector, whether involving the general public or limited to the production structure itself (Hyacinth & Brook, 2015). A significant amount of the production projects and work in the services sector has been based on importing the same paradigms used in classic industrial production, such as the fragmentation of processes and simplification of tasks (Meirelles, 2006). However, disregarding the specificities of the activities of this sector, such as the complexity of the client relationship and the constant variations in demand, leads to incompatibilities between what is prescribed and

the reality of carrying out the work, even if the results obtained from the services provided seem positive (Minghelli, 2018).

These incompatibilities can affect the worker's health, causing a significant increase in suffering and illness (Nweke, Teh, Muitaba, & Al-Garadi, 2019) and going against laws, standards, certifications, and national and international agreements that the institutions, whether public or private, interact with or are subject to. It is worth pointing out that these organizations traditionally have different profiles of workers. Private organizations, through their selective processes, have tended to seek generalist, flexible, up-to-date, creative, easily adaptable workers who are open to change and ready to assume a variety of tasks (Käfer-Schünke & Giongo, 2018). In contrast, in the public sphere, employees are hired through open competitions that consider the candidates' education and performance, with little behavioral analysis. However, Menezes et al. (2018) do state that there is more and more of a focus on achieving results, looking not only for efficiency, but also effectiveness.

Käfer-Schünke and Giongo (2018) complement this by saying that most public servants provide a service of an intellectual type (e.g. processing information, negotiating, inspecting, teaching, inquiring, and policing, among others) rather than manual (typically farming or repetitive activities in factory assembly lines). And, however much the routines are broken up and structured into rigid processual actions, they are still based on often contradictory legal standards. A typical example of this is when a civil servant allocated to a public university is designated to supervise contracts with companies that provide outsourced services to the organization, independent of the sector in which they are allocated (Law n. 8,666, 1993). Such designations do not exempt the public servant from the attributions inherent to their post, thus causing a considerable amount of additional work and potentially damaging the worker's health (Dejours, 2014). To better understand such relationships, it is necessary to study the comfortable and productive adaptation between working conditions and the human being (Hubault, 2018).

4 Variability of work

The notion of variability in ergonomics is related to the distance between what is predicted and what is actually carried out (Abrahão, 2000). The variabilities allow it to be explained how the task is determined in order for the work to be carried out (Clot, 2007).

Sometimes, during the conception of work, the real activity is unknown and, so, the task or its forms of execution ignore the variability inherent to the subject or the organization of the work (Béguin, 2008). By neglecting the work activity when conceiving technical devices, the devices or the process run the risk of being a source of numerous difficulties (Béguin, 2008).

Since there are different work activities with their own objectives, purposes, functions, and ways of execution, there are also different variability levels. The nearer the task, the more systematized and controlled the work activity will be and the lower its variability will be (Zamarian & Maggi, 2006; Guérin et al., 2001). Gomes Júnior and Schwartz (2014) point to the variabilities inherent to the organization of work as being variations in the raw materials, in the processes, in the demand, in the rhythm of the work, and in the equipment, among others. Regarding the workers themselves, the variations are in their competence, different motivations, and experiences (Abrahão, 2000; Guérin et al., 2001).

In the context of companies, it is possible to divide variabilities into two categories: normal ones, associated with the type of work itself, with variations in raw materials (considered partially predictable for the enterprise and for the worker), and incidental ones, associated with events, such as a poorly sanded item or faulty piece of equipment (Durrive, 2011). For Guérin et al. (2001), both normal and incidental variabilities can appear randomly and unpredictably. They mention instant variations in demand, incidents with equipment, unpredictable variations in raw materials, and variations in the environment, among others.

The variabilities inherent to workers themselves, according to Guérin et al. (2001), are

divided into interindividual (differences that exist between people: age, height, experience, effort needed to carry out a particular task, reasoning, life histories) and intraindividual (differences that concern each worker and can be short-term or long-term variations). Short-term variations are due to events occurring near to the day of the work. For example, these can be health problems, family problems, exhaustion, transport problems, a momentary loss of clarity, etc. Long-term ones are biological aging and alterations in the body due to the effects of the environment in which the worker works or lives (Durrive, 2011).

In addition, the demand for more and more diversified competencies increases the list of variations that exist in work. Such competencies appear, for example, in the case of the public universities, in order to make possible the introduction and maintenance of policies and services, as well as the responsible application of resources according to the collective interest (Menezes et al., 2018). For this, the public servant needs to know the general standards that govern the public service and how to apply them within his/her attributions, also considering the internal standards of the organization (Matias, 2017). Thus, it is important for universities to prepare internal policies for the continued training of their workers, in order to improve the execution of their services in the search of quality and the effective running of the organization (Menezes et al., 2018). Dejours (2014) comments that if enterprises know their variabilities and determine their causes, it is possible to reduce the impacts of their incidence through the development of projects.

5 Workload

The notion of workload covers the workload imposed (requirements and demands of the work situation) and its repercussions in terms of the behavior and functions of the worker (Guérin et al., 2001).

According to Duarte and Vasconcelos (2014), the workload depends on the task and on the limits on the time in which it is executed by the worker in a particular activity. An increase

of the diversity and quantity of tasks determined for each work post consequently increases the workload (Maggi, 2006). The quantitative aspect related to units of time and for how long an activity is carried out constitutes one of the determinative factors of the appearance of fatigue (Duarte & Guimarães, 2014).

The concept of workload can be subdivided into physical and mental load, where mental load is subdivided into cognitive load and psychological load. In any activity, the physical, psychological, and cognitive aspects are present and inter-connected, and any workload can determine an overload (Hubault, 2018).

Physical load is associated with characteristics connected with the worker's body, such as posture, physical effort, and repetitiveness, and it is influenced by environmental variables and the work activity (Guérin et al., 2001). According to Hubault (2018), there is considerable literature that does not associate this term with the reality of work situations, since an activity can have an elevated physical load, but no excessive complaints, while others can have a moderate physical load and obvious complaints, as in cases of repetitive work.

According to Dejours (2014), the notion of mental load shows that there are no physical activities without cognitive and psychological dimensions, especially when making decisions. For Bolis and Sznalwar (2016), the notion of cognitive load concerns the processes of reception and treatment of the information received by the worker, on which the efficiency of the work depends.

According to Dejours (2014), the notion of psychological load is related to the affective elements present in the work, and the relationship between the organization and the human being is thus the origin of this load.

Added to the workload are the different ways that the workers execute the same prescribed work, in other words, the work activity regulation, through the construction of the operating method.

6 Work activity regulation

Hubault (2018) states that regulation is a mechanism that compares the results of a process with the desired production and adjusts the process in relation to the difference revealed. Regulation suggests an “adjustment of rules and even the production of rules up to the development of transformative action: in a process, by acting the action is regulated” (Maggi, 2006, p.143).

The regulation concept is used in ergonomics in accordance with the object in which the regulation occurs: 1) a system, in which the operator carries out the role of comparator and regulator of a technical system; 2) the human activity itself, in which the operator regulates his/her work activity with the aim of avoiding negative repercussions of the activity in his/her internal state, achieving the final or objective results of the task, or learning (Hubault, 2018).

Durrive (2011) affirms that regulating work means establishing the conditions in which the work process is carried out and it is inherent to the activity. So, to address the prescribed work and the possible inadequacy of the prescription, the worker is in constant adaptation between the objectives to be achieved (personal and productive) and his/her way of working, between the variabilities of the internal and external conditions of the activity and their effects, as well as his/her own physical and mental limits (Maggi, 2006).

In the same way, the regulation functions will act upon the task. The comparison between the performance sought and the performance achieved can lead to the revelation that the objectives have not been achieved, and so to a modification of the procedures. Proof of achieving the objectives can result, in some cases, in modifications of the activity, enabling margins for maneuver and avoiding an increase in demands (Bobillier-Chaumon, 2003).

The distance from the prescribed work is a result of unique strategies, incorporated experiences, adopted regulations, and of the different perceptions of each operator in relation to achieving success in his/her activity. All these

elements mean each operator has a specific procedure, culminating in different judgments regarding the best way of treating the prescriptive rules (Wild, 2013).

Guérin et al. (2001) reinforce the concept when they mention that the procedure is the result of a commitment that takes into account the required objectives, the means of working, and the results produced. According to Vidal (2011), the procedure is the result of the regulation, by the worker, between what he/she was prescribed, the means of working to achieve it, and how this is done, by means of behavioral adjustments.

Between the tasks prescribed by the organization of the work and the activity actually carried out, there is the so-called “leeway”, which allows workers to re-order the conditions of the execution itself and alter the procedure to one that is more favorable to their well-being. This margin concerns the internal and external demands of regulation of the variables present in the work process and the possibilities for flexibilization of the activity, or procedures that shape its dynamic (Wild, 2013).

To understand the activity, Maggi (2006) uses the notion of mediation operating strategy, emphasizing that the individual is not passive in relation to what takes place between the context, his/her level of health, and the results of his/her activity. During the interaction between the individual and the task, there are physical, cognitive, and affective demands that, immersed in a specific organization of work, evolve dynamically, which causes an impact on the individual’s activity (Hubault, 2018). The operating strategy, therefore, is the ordered set of steps that involves reasoning and the resolution of problems, enabling the action (Wild, 2013).

According to Bolis and Sznalwar (2016), the regulation space allows the worker to achieve the objectives established by the task. It regulates the variabilities that take place in the work. However, there are situations in which the leeway is very limited and there are only a few interventions available to the worker in the context of his/her operations. It is in the activity that the subject’s experience and knowledge are put into practice in the way decisions are made,

promoting the regulation of incidents and making the activity viable (Gomes Júnior & Schwartz, 2014).

In summary, the process of regulating different and conditioning determinants in this process is carried out by the worker him/herself, and the result of this regulation is expressed in the construction of the procedures, which are the combination of different levels of organization of activities.

7. Strategies to deal with negative situations

In the studies of Mendes and Tamayo (2001), it is possible to identify that combat strategies, or defensive strategies, appear for the worker to avoid suffering, where very often, faced with the impossibility of modifying the organization of his/her work, there is a search for a certain social and psychological balance that will sustain that worker in the organization in which he/she acts and in his/her personal life.

Conceptually, defensive strategies are understood as a way used by the worker to protect him/herself from suffering and to be able to keep on working. They can be prepared individually or collectively (Lancman et al., 2009).

It is understood, therefore, that there needs to be a limit of tolerance or, even, negation on the worker's part by understanding his/her suffering and the defensive strategies developed, as these allow that worker to safeguard his/her morals and principles (Paiva & Souza, 2012).

Dejours (2014) describes the difference between the development of individual or collective defense strategies as lying in the fact that in the individual field what stands out it is what it is internalized in the worker, in other words, his/her own needs. In the collective field, there is a valuation of and dependence on external conditions, in which the aim is to maintain the consensus of a group of workers. Work defines the

subject in the eyes of society while the political or family spheres take second place (Maggi, 2006).

For Mendes (2007), protection strategies allow a worker to bear suffering by rationalizing the situations that cause it through compensatory behaviors in the way he/she acts, thinks, and feels. Very often, the worker manages to avoid suffering by alienating him/herself from the causes, neither acting nor seeking behaviors that lead to changes in the organization of the work.

According to psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms are unconscious processes that work to avoid psychological imbalance. Thus, it is possible to maintain a certain control when faced with unbearable and unacceptable representations and affects (driving forces). In this sense, defense mechanisms are essential for maintaining psychological health; however, the excessive use of such processes can compromise the psychological balance, as they can give rise to symptoms (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2001).

The exhaustion of these defenses can occur with the passing of time, characterizing a failure in the process of addressing suffering. With this, the possibilities of illness increase (Mendes, 2007).

8 Methodology

The research can be classified as descriptive-exploratory and uses a multiple case study, with the aim of enhancing the analytical benefits.

The proposal of this study is to identify the discrepancies between the prescribed and real work of contract supervisors. Therefore, given that the aim of the research was not to study each university in isolation, we chose not to describe the individual cases. The study was carried out at three Brazilian federal public universities located in the state of Sao Paulo, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characterization of the universities

University	Date of creation	Campus
UNIFESP	1936	Vila Clementino (São Paulo / SP)
	2004	Santos / SP
	2007	Diadema / SP, Guarulhos / SP, and São Jose dos Campos / SP
	2016	East Zone (São Paulo / SP)
UFSCar	1968	São Carlos / SP
	1991	Araras / SP
	2006	Sorocaba / SP
UFABC	2011	Buri/ SP
	2006	Santo André / SP and São Bernardo do Campo / SP

Note. Source: Research Data

In order to preserve the identity of the universities in the results, they will be described in the text as X, Y, and Z, not in the same order of presentation.

To obtain the research data, all the public servants who act as contract supervisors were

contacted by email and in person, to check the viability of carrying out the interviews, but only 14 answered positively (20% of the total), as shown in Table 2. With this, it was possible to carry out 11 interviews in person and 3 by videoconference.

Table 2
Characterization of the participants

University	Total Supervisors	Interviewees
X	9	5
Y	12	4
Z	47	5
Total	68	14

Note. Source: Research Data

The documentary analysis was carried out by examining official documents and legislation that pointed to relevant information, in order to outline and present the institutional profile.

Direct observations were carried out in the workplace, at the three universities in the study, of public servants who act as contract supervisors, for eight hours, for two days at each one.

In addition, participant observation was carried out, which is a social investigation technique in which the investigator worked, in so far as the circumstances allowed, as a contract supervisor at one of the universities in the study.

This stage was carried out in order to identify the way the worker proceeds to achieve the objectives that have been attributed to him/her, as well as the process of adaptation and regulation between the various factors involved in the work environment.

An interview script was prepared with 30 questions. With the aim of evaluating its suitability, two pilot interviews were carried out with public servants who met the criteria for choosing the participants, to check if the questions were clear, the sequence appropriate, and if they met the research objectives. After carrying out this process, the necessary adaptations were made.

The interviews took place in the period between February and April of 2017, always after 6pm (i.e. outside of working hours), both in the presential formats and in the videoconferences (through Skype®), with fourteen participants in total, in a single session for each. The duration of the interviews varied from forty to sixty minutes. The recordings were transcribed in full and the common factors were compared in order to verify the existence of data that revealed the discrepancy between the task and the activity.

After the analysis of the interviews, the main categories were identified and focal groups were applied at the universities studied, with the purpose of obtaining in-depth qualitative information. This is a quick execution technique with the possibility of providing information on the performance of developed activities, among other situations. The focal group was carried out with the same workers interviewed. The discussion session took place in auditoriums of the universities themselves in the second semester of 2017 and was directed by the researcher, who adopted the role of moderator.

Stimulus materials were used to promote and support group discussions, in order to enable the exchange of knowledge and experiences between the participants. Initially, generic questions were asked, and then they were elaborated on to address the study focus and the results indicated by the interviewees themselves. The duration of the discussion session was one hour and thirty minutes. At the beginning of the meeting, the participants were informed of the purpose and format of the discussion, of the informal nature of the meeting, and of the need for everyone to participate. The session was carried out in a harmonious environment that was suitable to the aims proposed.

Efforts were made so that the natural divergences in opinion did not interfere in the development of the session. The obtained data were registered, recording each participant's statements. After recording them, they were transcribed, seeking to reflect on the content of the discussion. Aspects were registered such as opinions, experiences, ideas, and the participants' observations, in order to validate the assessment and present notes for improvement.

To analyze the data relevant to the study, the categorization technique was used. The tool used in order to enable the codification process was version 10 of the NVivo® software, what has a set of features for codifying data and managing sources of information, search mechanisms, and features for categorization during the codification process, among others. Initially, the project was structured in the database of the software. For the data, the interview transcriptions were used. From the analysis categories, the NVivo® encoded the data, grouping them by type of similarity. Next, the codification process and data analysis took place and, in the last stage, information was extracted to compose the results.

9 Presentation and analysis of the results

The supervisors of contracts with outsourced companies are responsible for ensuring that the rules established in the contracts are met. In accordance with Law 8,666 (1993), it is a duty of public organs to supervise the administrative contracts signed with third parties. Table 3 presents a prescription of the work defined by Law 8,666 (1993) to the contract supervisors.

Table 3
Prescription of contract supervisors

Tasks	Description
1	Demand the fulfillment of all the obligations assumed in accordance with the contractual clauses and the terms of the proposal.
2	Monitor and supervise the services, keeping a record of any faults detected and sending the notes to the competent authority so that appropriate actions are taken.
3	Notify in writing of the occurrence of imperfections, setting a term for their correction.
4	Do not interfere.
5	Check documentation received for payment and send it to the sector responsible.

Note. Source: Act No. 8666 of 21 June 1993. Regulates article. 37, item XXI of the Federal Constitution, which establishes rules for public tenders and contracts of the Public Administration and makes other provisions.

The supervisors interviewed receive a work station, composed of a table, a revolving chair, and a computer. The supervisors are generally located in small rooms shared with other workers. The federal government system is available via a link, but it is up to each worker to carry out the configurations.

Based on the prescribed work, it is hoped that the contract supervisor will carry out the control and guarantee the supply of the services/products provided by the enterprises, in accordance with what was agreed, with quality, and in accordance with the law.

As pointed out by Duarte and Vasconcelos (2014), since the particularities of the work situations mean that the execution reality always goes beyond the model idealized in the technical devices, it is necessary to identify the real work, in other words, the activity of the contract supervisors.

Direct observations were carried out in the workplace of the contract supervisors, with the aim of capturing the work that the interviews did not capture. On average, each supervisor is responsible for more than two contracts, besides the functions inherent to a public servant. In addition, according to one of the interviewees, “in order to check the invoices correctly, I leave work almost two hours later every day” (INTERVIEWEE 1). Long working hours are necessary, since “there is a lack of workers, causing an overload or accumulation of work” (INTERVIEWEE 2).

So, some of the activities identified as real work were organized and numbered according to the order they occurred and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Activities composing the real work of the contract supervisor

Activity	Description
1	Accompany the contractual execution, in its quantitative and qualitative aspects.
2	Register all the incidents during the execution of the object.
3	Determine the reparation, correction, removal, reconstruction, or substitution, at the expense of the company contracted, in total or in part, of contracts in which there are defects or inaccuracies in the execution or in materials employed.
4	Reject, entirely or in part, work or services executed in disagreement with the contract.
5	Demand and ensure the fulfillment of the terms previously established.
6	Demand the fulfillment of the clauses of the contract and respective additional terms (check the existence of possible subcontracting, for example).
7	Approve the measurement of the services effectively carried out, in harmony with the rules for execution foreseen in the contract (never attest to the conclusion of services that have not been totally executed).
8	Release the invoices.
9	Communicate to the superior authority, within a reasonable time, any incident that requires decisions or actions that exceed his/her competence, given the risk or imminent damage to the public interest.
10	Receive the contractual object, by means of a detailed term signed by the parties.
11	Issue evaluations of the services provided (certificates).

The descriptions were based on the observations carried out at the three universities in the study. Although there is a difference in the order of the activities, they all take place in the same way among the cases.

The discrepancy in 7 activities among those listed supports the proposal by Guérin et al. (2001) that the real work is constructed based on the task, in the search for effective results.

The supervisors face difficulties with the physical structure and the technical devices, as is revealed in the statement: “there is no space for files and no space in the furniture for documents and current cases that need to be inspected” (INTERVIEWEE 3). This can be seen in Figure 2.

According to the supervisors interviewed, the electricity, telephones, and internet constantly fail, and, in their own words, “equipment such as

computers and printers are constantly presenting problems” (INTERVIEWEE 4). Figure 3 illustrates the situation of a specific work station of a contract supervisor.



Figure 2. Work table during the routine of a contract supervisor



Figure 3. Equipment presenting problems

In addition, according to the interviewees and what was observed, due to the lack of a financial budget it is not possible to acquire new supplies such as toner for printers, replacement pieces for computers, and software licenses. In one of the universities studied, a single computer is shared by up to four supervisors.

With the distinction between the prescribed and real work it was possible to identify the existing discrepancies, which, as Durrive (2011) puts it, occur because during the realization of the work the particular conditions undergo variations and, consequently, the expected result differs from the actual one.

It was identified that at the three universities investigated there are no standardized procedures in order to determine the task for the realization of the work. Thus, each supervisor adopts the activities that he/she considers necessary to achieve the proposed objective. One example analyzed is that most of the interviewees have already sent an invoice for payment without consulting all the negative certificates. Besides the invoice being returned to attach the documents, the enterprise was paid late and, consequently, there was a delay in the payment of the outsourced workers. These variabilities are the result of events occurring on the working day itself.

The interviews corroborated the systematic observations. The workers were questioned about the moment they were designated as contract

supervisors, which factors would help improve the performance of the activities, if they could identify the discrepancies between what was prescribed and the reality, as well as the impacts that was causing. The answers were organized based on the intention of the investigations proposed by the questionnaire and semi-structured interview script, orientated, in turn, by the research objective.

As regards the work context, it was determined that the demand for results for most of the interviewees is connected to the accumulation with other attributions of the sector. “The demand is so great that I have health problems as a result of stress. I’m alone in my sector. I do everything myself. My routine involves very intense activities and I’m constantly pushed for the most perfect results possible” (INTERVIEWEE 5).

Regarding the costs in the work, there was agreement between the statements. The employees affirmed that tiredness is due to carrying out activities involving displacement. “I carry a lot of cases, some with several volumes. There is only one printer to serve the whole floor, and it is far, I walk a lot throughout the day” (INTERVIEWEE 6).

Regarding the sense of the work, the reports were categorical as to the pleasure experienced by all the professionals, due to them managing to resolve the problems they are entrusted with. “I like my work since I consider it important for the realization of university’s mission” (INTERVIEWEE 7).

As for the damage caused by the work, the interviewees were unanimous in affirming that they are caused by a job carried out under heavy pressure and a high intellectual demand. “On account of the extreme heat, I suffer from headaches and swelling in my legs. I developed anxiety, stress, and depression” (INTERVIEWEE 8).

Those excerpts confirm the literature review by showing that depending on the ergonomic content of the organization of the work (physical, chemical, and biological demands),

there can be the risk of the appearance of a psychosomatic pathology.

The data treatment and validation of the results with the participants in the focal groups

enabled the discrepancies to be summarized and Table 5 to be built, which shows the general impacts identified by the interviewees, in accordance with each category.

Table 5

Impacts of the discrepancies between the prescribed and real work

Category	Causes	Impacts
Work context	Physical environment and unsuitable resources Poor task distribution Deficient communication Lack of technical knowledge and planning	Intense rhythm of work Demand for results Lack of integration Quarrels between members of the team
Costs of the work	Distant departments Work accumulation Dynamism	Displacement over long distances Long working hours Handling unforeseen circumstances Knowledge of legislation
Sense of the work	Recognition Freedom to express opinions Embarrassing situations Injustice	Professional fulfillment Dissatisfaction with the work Fear Insecurity
Damages from the work	Social conflicts Family conflicts Misfit between professional, family, and social life	Headaches Swelling in the legs Muscular pains Respiratory problems Anxiety Depression

All those interviewed claimed that when they joined public service did not receive proper training and were immediately designated the role of contract supervisor without prior knowledge of the legal aspects. The individual work plan is drawn up by the bosses without any contact with the worker. For Lancman and Uchida (2003), it is essential for the end users to participate in the identification and analysis of problems, as well as the formulation and implementation of solutions for the work post.

According to Lancman and Uchida (2003), when the physical and mental demands are excessive, they cause stress, and added to factors such as the workload, feelings of incompetence, pressures, and organizational factors, can increase physical and mental problems. “I arrive home agitated due to the work overload and end up having problems with my relatives. Also, I live in a constant state of stress” (INTERVIEWEE 9).

On facing of the difficulties experienced in their field of work, the contract supervisors

mentioned as combat strategies separation between personal and professional life, psychological control, and the search for personal balance. “I fight with my husband because of the time I get home. My family and social life has been heavily damaged due to the problems faced at work. If it were possible to go back in time, it would never choose this profession again” (INTERVIEWEE 10).

The strategies adopted by most of the workers interviewed are individual, using protection against work situations that cause suffering. They are strategies that do not imply actions involving the organization or behaviors, which lead to changes in the organization of the work. Strategies in this direction, according to Mendes (2007), can have a momentary effect, since these defenses tend to wear out with the passing of time, something that characterizes a fault in the process of addressing suffering and, consequently, intensifies the possibilities of illness at work (Mendes, 2007).

Thus, it is the contract supervisor who carries out all the actions required to deliver what is needed, often with scarce resources, especially with regard to human resources. Thus, failures in the contract supervision will always fall on the worker, and not the distance that exists between the act of planning / prescribing and performing the work.

Also, according to Dejours (2014), the function of the real work is to cooperatively coordinate workers to complement the work prescription, since only a small part of the actual work is visible to the eyes of the prescription and the organization of work. Most of it consists of a multitude of behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes that are not formally recognized by either the hierarchy or by consumers or peers, and are therefore invisible. To capture the invisible side of the work, a clinical eye is needed, which the contract supervisors are often not prepared for and which the organization of the work in their organizational environment prevents, leaving no other choice but to develop, using their internal resources, solutions to make the production happen.

10 Conclusion

In the area of contract supervision, changes in the organization of the work coupled with the need to control and ensure the provision of services/products supplied by companies in accordance with what has been agreed, with quality and within the law, make contract supervisors essential to public agencies. The demands and pressures for assertiveness make them potentially vulnerable in terms of their health.

The task does not cover various invisible aspects highlighted, such as knowledge of legal and technical aspects in order to carry out the activities. As reported, the public servants already receive the designation of contract supervision as soon as they enter into public service. This factor associated with the fact that they do not receive specific training causes great difficulties in their everyday life. The rules and laws researched showed that expertise and technical training are

required of these professionals, as it is necessary to apply such knowledge, skills, and tools to manage the various types of contracts in an organization.

Summarizing the perceptions of the respondents about what it is to be a contract supervisor, it was noted that, in general, the professionals understand that this is a profession that requires constant improvement and technical training, given the numerous responsibilities involved in the profession and the nature of the work itself. Also, in general, the respondents consider a contract supervisor to be the professional responsible for coordinating activities and resources, in order to achieve the objectives and goals set by the organization through its contracts.

Given the variety of tasks they perform, the respondents in this study agree that the human skills required of the profession revolve around the ability to solve problems, manage conflicts, deal with people and resources, and carry out planning and time management. Also, the ability to filter and process information is required, making it reach collaborators effectively and serving as a basis for the development of operations.

In this case, the position presents constant challenges, which are related to the efforts to coordinate various activities with limited resources in a short time.

In fact, no work is not exempt from the possibility of producing satisfaction or physical and mental stress, but the nature of the work, the way it is organized, and the conditions in which it is carried out can intensify, or not, the pleasure, suffering, or illness. The conflicts that increase the psychological load imposed by the work are the result of the worker's wishes given the demands of the organization, resulting from the worker's relationship with the organization. Thus, contract supervision work can lead to efforts that seek a balance that ensures the protection to the worker's physical and mental health. The adoption of individual defense strategies was verified among most of the interviewees, such as mechanisms for facing adversities and for best adapting to the work.

Discrepancies were identified between the prescribed and real work. It was verified that there is no collective strategy adopted by these

professionals, which may be a reflection of the fear of organizational pressures, of the absence of cooperation, trust, and integration, and of the conflict that permeates the teams in their organizational environments.

Regarding the contributions of this research, the desire is for public and private organizations to think about their form of organization of work, which is constrained by the rigidity of institutional standards, causing experiences of suffering, fear, and occupational diseases. This should be based on a focus on people management policies and the human and behavioral development of workers. These actions are important for the development of skills that enable greater integration of various areas of knowledge, with a view to achieving results for the organization, without wearing down teams.

This research aims to help fill a gap in the literature regarding the discrepancy between the prescribed and real work in public higher education institutions. In addition, it aimed to promote the discussion on the risks professionals are subject to given the increasing requirements, the demands for productivity, the pressure for results, for time management, and the rhythm of the work, which is intense, as described by the interviewees.

The difficulty the interviewees had in answering particular questions was also noted, especially those that were directly connected with the organization where they work. In this case, it can be said that the results indicate that, though the interviewees manage to develop strategies that lead them to obtain pleasure in what they do, there is a degree of suffering in the work.

10.1 Limitations of the study

The research did not exhaust the description of the reality of the contract supervisors, nor did it entirely solve the challenge of explaining their role in public organs, mainly because it is an initial study and due to the scarce specific literature on this question. However, it points to ways of promoting restructuring in the current organizational system on the part of managers and competent authorities, in terms of valuing

the human and behavioral development of these contract supervisors from the perspective of creating, introducing, and disseminating organizational practices that combine productivity and the revitalization of what it produces, thus increasing commitment and organizational bonds.

Another limitation was the number of universities and interviewees covered in this study, which only included universities in the state of Sao Paulo and a sample of fourteen contract supervisors.

10.2 Proposals for future studies

It is suggested that new studies are carried out to better explain the context of contract supervision in other government areas, since it is through its particularities and complexity that the relationships and the means that favor productivity, health, or illness are constructed.

Other studies are suggested that consider the different categories of work, as we believe in the relevance of listening to and considering the meaning attributed by people regarding their experiences in organizations, covering a greater number of universities and interviewees and seeking to reinforce the qualitative analysis of the results.

This study stimulates others with the objective of transforming work, remembering the importance of the organizational environment to the health of workers.

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Authors:

1. Érika Pena Bedin Matias, Master in Production Engineering, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil.

E-mail erikabedin@ufscar.br

ORCID

 0000-0001-8613-850X

2. Andréa Regina Martins Fontes, PhD in Production Engineering, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil. E-mail andreaaf@dep.ufscar.br

ORCID

 0000-0002-9670-6221

3. Daniel Braatz Antunes de Almeida Moura, PhD in Production Engineering, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil. E-mail braatz@ufscar.br

ORCID

 0000-0001-5769-9666

Contribution of each author:

Contribution	Érika Bedin	Andréa Fontes	Daniel Moura
1. Definition of research problem	√	√	
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√	√	
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√	√	√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√		
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√	√
6. Data collection	√		
7. Statistical analysis			
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√	√
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√	√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√	√
11. Other (please specify which)			