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The author declares that the study was not subsidized, and there is no conflict of interest.

The author informs that the study has not been presented at any scientific event.

Management and Performance Program: bridge to uberization in the Brazilian federal public service

Programa de Gestão e Desempenho: ponte para uberização no serviço público federal brasileiro

Abstract

Objective: to analyze the introduction of the Performance and Management Program (PMP) at the Federal Fluminense University (UFF). **Methods:** the PMP began to be implemented at the UFF in May 2022. This essay presents the established changes and discusses their relationship with the process of “uberization”. **Results:** the guidelines established by the PMP, as well as the initial experience of its implementation at UFF, indicate a strong influence of the ideas guiding the phenomenon of “uberization” of work. By bringing about profound changes in the organization and control of work activities, the PMP also has the potential to impact the workers’ health, notably increasing the difficulty in mapping and controlling risks in work environments, which become more decentralized. It can also have detrimental effects on mental health, caused by a management model based on strict process control and goal fulfillment. **Conclusions:** the program instituted at UFF shares many similarities with the model of “uberized” work management, which has been emerging as a trend in contemporary capitalism, affecting workers unevenly. The change in the management model of work activities imposed by the program suggests potential effects on the workers’ physical and mental health..

Keywords: organization and administration; information technology; public sector; occupational health.

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar a introdução do Programa de Gestão e Desempenho (PGD) na Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). **Métodos:** o PGD começou a ser implementado na UFF a partir de maio de 2022, este ensaio apresenta as mudanças estabelecidas e discute suas relações com o processo de uberização. **Resultados:** as diretrizes estabelecidas pelo PGD, bem como a experiência inicial de sua implementação na UFF, apontam uma forte influência do ideário que orienta o fenômeno da uberização do trabalho. Ao produzir mudanças profundas na forma de organização e controle das atividades laborais, o PGD traz também potenciais impactos na saúde do trabalhador, destacadamente a maior dificuldade no mapeamento e controle dos riscos nos ambientes de trabalho, que se tornam mais pulverizados; e os efeitos nocivos à saúde mental, provocados por um modelo de gestão baseado no controle rigoroso de processos e cumprimento de metas. **Conclusões:** o programa instituído na UFF guarda muitas relações com o modelo de gestão do trabalho uberizado, que vem se impondo como tendência do capitalismo contemporâneo, impactando, de forma desigual, os trabalhadores. A mudança no modelo de gestão das atividades laborais, imposta pelo programa, aponta para potenciais efeitos sobre a saúde física e mental do trabalhador.

Palavras-chave: organização e administração; tecnologia da informação; setor público; saúde do trabalhador.

Introduction

The last few decades have been marked by significant transformations in labor relations, driven by the widespread adoption of the so-called gig economy, characterized by precarious employment relationships and strict control/management performed by digital platforms. In the wake of these changes, in July 2020, the Normative Instruction No. 65 of the Brazilian Ministry of Economy (IN 65/2020)¹ was published, regulating the implementation of the Performance and Management Program (PGD) for federal public administration agencies. This program raises profound changes to the way work is managed and controlled by the Brazilian federal public service. At the Federal Fluminense University (UFF), the Normative Instruction No. 28, dated May 12, 2022 (IN 28/2022)², regulates the implementation of the PGD in the institution^b. This study aims to present the main guidelines of the PGD, with a primary focus on its implementation, still in its initial stage, at UFF, as well as to discuss the relationship between this program and the phenomenon of gig work and its potential impacts on worker health.

Gig Work as an Extension of the Labor Flexibilization Process

In recent years, significant and important transformations in the exploitation of labor force have been observed. While the essence of the exploitation relationship that characterizes capitalism—the capitalist class owns the means of production and extracts the product of labor from another class in exchange for a wage—has not changed, the predominant form of such exploitation has undergone significant changes in the past four decades.

Since the 1980s, there has been a continuous and growing process of flexibilization of labor

relations associated with increased actual working hours, segmentation or fragmentation of work processes, employer disengagement from the costs of work performance, and compliance with labor protection legislation.

This process of flexibilization was marked at the end of the last century by the so-called productive restructuring, characterized by the reconfiguration of physical and administrative industrial plants to adapt production to the new flexible model of exploitation. Decentralization of jobs and outsourcing were significant features of this period.

The early decades of the 21st century have brought a new stage in this process of labor flexibilization, characterized by the generalization of work controlled and managed via digital platforms or applications. This new form of work control, management, and organization has been referred to in the literature as ‘gig work’^{3,4}. Some of its central characteristics include:

- a) a) Employer disengagement from the means of work performance and, consequently, the transfer of the costs and risks of the work process onto the worker;
- b) b) Establishment of precarious employment relationships, characterized by the denial of direct employment relationships (workers are often referred to as “collaborators” or “partners,” terms that are used to disguise the employment relationship) and by strict demands for productivity, results delivery, and standardization of the product/service offered;
- c) c) Variable remuneration directly linked to meeting goals, the quantity of products/services delivered, and evaluation, either by the consumer or the employer.

Thus, this “new morphology of work”⁵, which is also part of work management itself, is transferred to the worker. Contrary to the discourse predominantly used by these platforms, the use of these tools in the context of capitalism has not served to give more

b Although, in IN 28/2022², the word “performance” was removed, the content of the regulation refers to the PGD regulated by IN 65/2020¹. For the purposes of this work, we will continue to use the term PGD to refer to the Management Program implemented at UFF and internally regulated by IN 28/2022².

autonomy and flexibility to the worker, but rather to reduce the costs and risks of the employer and exponentially increase the exploitation and control of labor^{6,7}. This condition has been defined as “digital slavery”³.

Gig work is understood as an ongoing trend that can be generalized across various sectors of the economy, types of occupations, levels of qualifications and income, and working conditions, on a global scale, not limited to Uber and similar companies⁶. Various activities, whether performed in person (deliveries, transportation, cleaning, etc.) or digitally (such as engineering services, translation, etc.), now operate within this model, using digital tools and the internet to manage production and work⁷.

Although the term ‘gig work’ is generally used in the literature to describe the condition of those workers directly controlled/managed via information and communication technologies (ICTs)^c, it is important to perceive the phenomenon as a global process that unevenly affects all workers from various spheres. It is currently difficult to find any form of work that does not have some form of interaction and dependence on computers, smartphones, and similar devices; the expansion of digital work is eroding the separation between working life and non-working life⁷. In this sense, it is a mistake to think that formal workers, those who have direct employment relationships, whether in the private or public sector, are not included or do not suffer the effects of the gig work phenomenon.

In light of this debate, the next section will discuss the implementation of the PGD in the Brazilian federal public service, established by the IN 65/2020¹, as well as the initial impressions of its implementation at UFF. We aim to discuss the changes established by this program and its relationships with the gig work process.

PGD in the Brazilian Federal Public Administration and the Initial Experience of its Implementation at UFF

On July 30, 2020, Normative Instruction No. 65/2020¹ of the Brazilian Ministry of Economy was published, regulating the implementation of the PGD for agencies and entities that are part of the Federal Civil Personnel System (SIPEC). The PGD brings about a profound change in the way work is conceived in terms of control and management within the scope of the Brazilian federal public service, establishing, among other conditions: 1. the possibility of partial or total telecommuting; 2. permanent and daily monitoring of activities; 3. assessment of scores for each task performed; and 4. the possibility of excluding workers who do not achieve the expected program results.

Starting in March 2022, with the decrease in the lethality of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant portion of the public administration, which had been working remotely since March 2020 as an exceptional measure for personal and collective health protection, returned to in-person activities. This return prompted agency managers to take measures to increase participation in the PGD.

At UFF, IN 28/2022² regulated the PGD within the institution^d. As of that date, various academic and administrative units gradually began to adhere to the program. In less than four months, approximately 62% of the technical-administrative servants of the University had already chosen one of the provided modalities (total telecommuting, partial telecommuting, or in-person work) within the Management Program⁸. Therefore, it is already possible to engage in a comprehensive critical discussion, even if preliminary in nature, of the potential impacts of this management model on the holistic health of the worker.

c Set of processes, hardware, software, and telecommunications functions that enable the automation of communication and processes.

d It's worth noting, as a legal reference on the subject, Decree 11,072, dated May 17, 2022⁹, which establishes the Management and Performance Program - PGD for the federal direct, autonomous, and foundational public administration, even though the PGD at UFF was implemented earlier, based on IN 65/2020¹.

In the PGD, the employee must list the activities they plan to perform on a digital platform. Each task corresponds to a maximum number of hours, established according to the complexity of the task, which, in turn, is defined by a set of criteria predefined in the aforementioned Normative Instructions.

Art. 32. For each activity, the level of complexity and the execution time must be defined. The level of complexity will consider the parameters listed below, and based on their quantity, the complexity range of the activity will be identified.

I - Parameters indicated for defining the complexity range:

- a) Depends on collaborators from the same sector;
- b) Depends on information/actions from other sectors;
- c) Requires research (legislation, new knowledge);
- d) Involves a high quantity of tasks;
- e) Requires a high degree of concentration;
- f) Has a specified deadline for completion (legal requirement or institutional priority);
- g) Is not a routine activity;
- h) Is an activity that requires creativity and innovation;
- i) Requires interpersonal skills for team interaction;
- j) Requires writing skills; and
- k) Requires analysis and calculation skills.

Art. 33. Each complexity level corresponds to a duration range for the activity to be included in the Individual Work Plan (PTI), as described below. The quantity of parameters necessary to perform an activity, among those listed in Article 32, determines the complexity level:

- I - Level 1 (very low) - 15 minutes to 6 hours;
- II - Level 2 (low) - 6 hours and 15 minutes to 12 hours;
- III - Level 3 (medium) - 12 hours and 15 minutes to 18 hours;
- IV - Level 4 (high) - 18 hours and 15 minutes to 24 hours; and
- V - Level 5 (very high) - 24 hours and 15 minutes to 40 hours.²

The list of tasks to be made available in the system for each “profile” is also defined in advance in an announcement. In other words, the employee who joins the Program can only assign tasks in accordance with what is prescribed in the work plan registered for that profile, although there is room for the description of tasks and subtasks in free text.

Each task entered into the system must be approved by management and, after completion, evaluated with scores ranging from 0 to 10. Interestingly, in the UFF Teleport system, the assessment is visualized by stars, very similar to the

evaluation system used by companies such as Uber, iFood, and others typically associated with the gig work phenomenon.

The Management Program includes two modalities: in-person and telecommuting, which can be either partial or complete. By joining any of these modalities, the employee is exempt from attendance control, with the fulfillment of working hours linked to the completion of tasks described in Teleport. In the telecommuting modality, whether partial or full, the responsibility for providing the means for work performance, such as the internet, telephone, electricity, furniture, and consumables, as well as their costs, is transferred to the employee.

Art. 47. When working remotely, it is the participant's responsibility to provide the necessary physical and technological structures, using suitable and ergonomic equipment and furniture, assuming the costs related to internet connection, electricity, and telephone, among other expenses resulting from the exercise of their duties².

In other words, the PGD being implemented in the federal public service is based on a management model heavily influenced by the concept of gig work. The detailed and pre-established prescription of tasks and the transfer of work process costs to the worker are characteristics that are openly stated. Variable remuneration or payment per piece/delivery is not yet in place, but the tools for its implementation are designed in the form of electronic task control and evaluation systems.

Variable remuneration based on goal achievement is already a reality in state-owned companies. An emblematic example is banks such as Banco do Brasil and Caixa Econômica Federal, where a significant portion of bank employees' total remuneration is variable and linked to goal programs. In an article on its website, the Union of Bank Employees from Vitória da Conquista and Region highlights the risk that this type of remuneration linkage poses to workers in the industry.

Variable remunerations, regardless of the target positions, pose a risk to the banking industry by intensifying competition among colleagues, favoring individualism, and undermining

collective action. These programs also create fertile ground for increasingly abusive targets, reducing final compensation and exacerbating cases of employee illness¹¹.

There is a myth that workers' participation in such programs is due to their alienation or lack of awareness of the meaning or labor-related risks associated with them, being a product of alienation consciousness. In the brief experience developed at UFF, the impression, even though still partial due to being in the early stages of implementation, is that this is not the determining factor for participation. The category has experienced significant setbacks in terms of working conditions in recent years, such as the increase in the weekly working hours from 30 to 40 in 2017 and the implementation of electronic attendance tracking in 2019. These events, combined with an unhealthy institutional climate, precarious physical working conditions, urban mobility difficulties, and rising costs, have led workers to see these performance management programs as a desirable alternative due to the real possibility of flexibilizing their working hours and engaging in telecommuting. This has nothing to do with a supposed lack of awareness of the meaning of this management type and control system but rather with a necessity in the face of a harsh and objective process of regression in terms of living and working conditions, clinging to an opportunity to reduce the total number of in-office hours or during commutes.

Potential Implications for Worker Health and Safety

As demonstrated in this study, gig work is understood as a form of work organization, thus presenting direct implications for worker health. When work organization changes, the relationship between health and illness at work also changes. Therefore, despite being a relatively recent phenomenon, some studies indicate the impact of this work organization model on worker health¹². In the discussion about worker health in the context of gig work, two aspects stand out: 1) the effects of this type of employment relationship on workers' mental health, especially when these goals are

linked to wages, since it establishes a permanent environment of tension, stress, and insecurity¹². Additionally, "gig work establishes a professional dynamic marked by subjugation, domination, wear and tear, competitiveness, mistrust, and reinforcement of individualism, time abduction, and subjectivation processes"¹³ (p. 9).

In the context of the Management Program implemented at UFF, reports from workers begin to emerge regarding internal comparisons made by managers or colleagues regarding the quantity of tasks performed by each person and the time spent on each task. The pursuit of standardization of services/customer interactions and the valorization of productivity favors conditions of individualism, competitiveness, and mistrust¹³. In the medium term, it will be necessary to assess the impact of this new management and work control logic on mental health, sick leave, and the use of health services by employees.

Another aspect relates to the possibility of mapping, mitigating, and controlling risks in the workplace. In this new context, risk agents can no longer be confined to the company's environment but are often scattered in a space that is often impossible to delineate – since workplaces themselves no longer exist as conceived – and are linked to the tools used by gig workers, which they often own, rent, or lease¹¹.

Within the scope of UFF, the impossibility of any institutional oversight of the ergonomic suitability of telecommuting employees' workstations can be problematic. What could be the effects of this work organization in a few years on the incidence of work-related musculoskeletal disorders? And how difficult will it be to relate these diseases to work activity for pecuniary purposes, in cases where work is mostly performed outside the institution? These questions can be extrapolated to almost any aspect related to worker health and bring up issues that must be considered when thinking about the Management Program and its consequences.

Closing remarks

Uberization, as the most current phase of the process of labor flexibilization, generalizes a type of

work management based on strict control of goals and processes, applied via digital platforms. It is also characterized as a type of precarious, fluid, informal work relationship based on variable wage, per piece or service. It presents itself as a global trend that extends far beyond workers in companies such as Uber and similar platforms, affecting all workers, whether in the public or private sector, in an uneven manner.

The IN 65/2020¹ has regulated the PGD for the Brazilian federal public service. This program, in its guidelines, shares many similarities with the management model of the so-called uberized work. At UFF, its implementation began following

the publication of IN 28/2022². Still in its early stages of application, the PGD has already gained significant adherence from university employees. Therefore, based on this initial experience and in light of discussions on the uberization of work, it has been possible to build a critical discussion about this program. From this discussion, we highlighted several points: potential effects on the physical and mental health of workers stemming from a management model based on rigorous control of processes and goals; increased difficulty in mapping and controlling risk factors due to the dispersion of work environments; and the employer's reduced responsibility for ensuring the necessary means for work performance.

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Author contributions

Souza RL conceived the argument, conducted information gathering, and drafted the essay. The author approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full public responsibility for the study conducted and the published content.

Data availability

All the data supporting the essay is available in the article.

Received: October 13, 2022
Reviewed: December 08, 2022
Approved: February 01, 2023

Editor-in-Chief:
José Marçal Jackson Filho