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The programming quality of Ministries. Empirical evidence from the analysis of the Performance Plans

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is twofold. Firstly, programmatic quality of Performance Plans (PdP) of the 13 Ministries is measured in three consecutive years: 2017, 2018, 2019. Programmatic quality is here defined as suitability to carry out management and responsibility for the stakeholders. In particular, draft methods and contents of the Plans have been investigated, with respect to organizational and individual performance. The second purpose is to identify whether a quality improvement on PdPs is produced along the introduction of three enabling conditions by the "Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica" (DFP) i.e. Guidelines 1/2017, methodological accompanying workshops, and the designation of the "Organismo Indipendente di Valutazione (OIV) from the National List. In order to achieve the first objective, a documental analysis has been implemented through a novel measurement grid involving 56 dummy variables corresponding to the programmatic quality elements of the PdPs. Cronbach's Alpha has been applied to measure the reliability of the grid, also adopting re-sampling method to assess the robustness of this methodology. The second purpose of the research has been investigated by the development of a descriptive statistical analysis carried out through graphical evaluation of boxplots. Empirical evidences show a significant improvement in average and median of the programmatic quality between the PdPs 2017 and 2018, which may be explained by the introduction of new guidelines and, for those Ministries that participated to the experimentation, the methodological accompanying workshops. In some cases, the designation of a new OIV from the National List leads to an increase in the PdPs programming quality. The programming level remains almost the same between PdPs 2018 and 2019, probably due to the end of the methodological accompanying workshops. Nonetheless, the research shows a significant overall improvement in the definition of organizational and individual performances and their related indicators.

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The main contribution of this work is to highlight the effects of the recent soft regulation approach introduced through DFP Guidelines on the Ministries' PdPs programming quality and to identify if the enabling conditions were useful to maintain a proper level of quality. Finally, the proposed evaluation grid, here validated through quantitative methods, may represent a useful tool for practitioners to evaluate programmatic quality of other Public Administrations.

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