

Bibliometric Study of the Brazilian Academic Production on Public Governance between 2017 and 2021

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Abstract

Governance seeks to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability for those involved leading to increased pressure on administrators of public institutions to meet social and political demands. Thus, understanding how mechanisms articulate to meet contemporary demands, and the impact of such mechanisms becomes necessary. This study presents a bibliometric review of the Brazilian academic production on public governance during the period 2017-2021. The research was conducted on the using the terms “Governance” and “Public”, where the first term should appear in the title and the second in any field, and only articles written in Portuguese and published in Brazil were selected. The results point to a growing interest in the subject, which may be due to concern about transparency and fairness in public administration in Brazil.

Keywords: public governance; public sector; bibliometrics.

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1 Introduction

Governance seeks to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability for those involved. Specifically, public governance seeks to preserve the rights and interests of citizens and the duties of the agents responsible.

The administrators of public institutions are increasingly confronted with moral decisions and pressure to meet social and political demands without incurring excessive expenses. This means that citizens are demanding an ethical and transparent stance from public leaders, who in turn are dealing with the heightened expectations (Benedicto et al., 2018; Ferreira, 2016).

Thus, understanding how mechanisms articulate to trigger contemporary changes in public governance, and the impact of such mechanisms on all levels of public service systems (i.e., federal, state, and municipal) and on public companies, becomes necessary.



The so-called “new governance” has also been a guideline for public sector reforms (Benedicto et al., 2018; Ansell & Torfing, 2016).

Governance within the public sector is related to the administration of organizations operating within the public sector. This administration can and should employ governance principles that have been established and consolidated in the literature for the private sector. These principles are fully applicable to the general public sector, since public and private governance contribute to aligning management with social interests by implementing governance actions (Ferreira, 2016; Brasil, 2020).

The aim of this article is to carry out a bibliometric analysis of national productions in the last five years (2017-2021), related to the topic of Public Governance. This study of the national literature broadens the awareness of public governance in Brazil and encourages the interest of academia and other sectors of society in delving a little deeper into the subject, considering its importance.

2 Theoretical Framework

Governance principles and practices were first developed for market companies. However, such practices and principles can also be applied to and benefit public and social organizations by aligning interests to contribute to the organization's longevity.

Good governance practices are also found in the UN Guide to Good Corporate Governance Practices, which includes the idea of structuring the board of directors, data protection and information technology. These principles expand existing basic governance principles (Santos et al, 2020).

Good governance, whether in the public or private sector, requires actions based on transparency and ethics. In the private sector, transparency is observed by investors, while in the public sector it is established by legislation (Pereira, 2010).

Transparency is deemed essential to underpin economic efficiency, making the processes that involve deciding on what is fundamental to the development of public policies clear and available to the administrator. In practical terms, it is possible to identify transparency within acts of governance in actions such as accountability through open interviews with the media (spoken, written, televised or on the internet), ombudsmen that are independent from the public sector, and the recording of staff meetings. It is therefore feasible to apply public policies that ensure transparency in the actions of public administrators (Pereira, 2010).

Public governance associated with information governance is directly linked to the principles of transparency and accountability. The pillars that guide information security, i.e., availability, confidentiality and integrity, converge with the principles of public governance (Ibge, 2022). Public governance is a consequence of agency conflict, which occurs when the interests of stakeholders or citizens (i.e., those who have rights), are not met by the agents responsible for fulfilling and ensuring those interests. Thus, there is an understanding that governance applied to the public sector brings an element of security to the administrator's actions (Brasil, 2020; Ferreira, 2016).

Public governance has legislation as its foundation and is established by responsible administrators who have the interests of the tax-paying community at heart. In the case of a mixed-capital company, the interests of the controlling shareholders will be at the forefront, and policies and rules will be established to regulate the actions carried out with the interested parties. (Ansell&Torfing, 2016).



Governance definitions are grouped into four main criteria: (i) guardian of rights; (ii) system of relationships; (iii) power structure; and (iv) normative system. Its inseparable values, or principles, which effectively represent the achievement of good governance are: disclosure, fairness, accountability, sustainability, compliance, integrity and ethics (Benedicto *et al.*, 2018; Ferreira, 2016; Ibge, 2015).

Ethics, simply put, consists of distinguishing right from wrong behavior, depending on the situation and the rules imposed. In public administration, public service ethics should consist of behavior congruent with the general interest. The public interest must be prioritized, imposing a multitude of duties on agents, such as the duty of neutrality, lawfulness, justice and impartiality, equality, proportionality, collaboration and good faith, information and quality, loyalty, integrity, competence and responsibility (Rio, 2011).

The principle of transparency is also a fundamental principle established in the federal constitution regarding the acts of the public administration. The so-called Fiscal Responsibility Law (Lei de Responsabilidade Fisca - LRF), Complementary Law No. 101, of May 4, 2000, establishes rules to ensure accountability regarding fiscal management and greater enforcement and monitoring of transparency and financial reporting. The Fiscal Responsibility Law determines that planned and transparent action, and efficient control mechanisms are crucial to achieving balanced public accounts. However, studies have only considered the pillar of responsibility in meeting targets and limits. A control and management system that prevents risks and corrects deviations that affect the fiscal balance is necessary to achieve such balance (Cruz, 2018).

Accountability as a principle of Governance implies the continuous, concise, comprehensible and timely provision of accounts related to the actions and results achieved by the institution to interested parties. Stakeholders are citizens in the case of public institutions and stakeholders in private institutions. Therefore, governance agents must take responsibility for their actions and the consequences of carrying out their duties and responsibilities (Branco & Cruz, 2013; Ibge, 2015).

The principle of equity refers to the equal and fair treatment that should be provided to all interested parties, such as a sense of justice that takes into account the needs, interests and expectations, and rights and duties of citizens and/or stakeholders. (Brasil, 2020; Ibge, 2015).

Sustainability in fiscal and managerial terms is an obligation of leaders and decision-makers, due to the resources entrusted to them. Senior management must seek the longevity of the institution, also looking at its social, environmental, financial, and material operations when defining business and strategies (Brasil, 2020; Branco & Cruz, 2013).

When addressing the universe of responsibilities that the Public Administration contemplates, one realizes the relevance of the principle of integrity. The personal and professional standards and values adopted by an organization determine the quality and effectiveness of the governance practices recommended, as well as the credibility of any information or financial accounts provided to society (Lisot, 2012).

In 1992, the World Bank defined good governance dimensions in numerical order. The first dimension is to improve the management of public accounts with the aim of giving back to society through social services. The second dimension is to establish legislation that removes the feeling of illegality in public administration. The third dimension is to establish rules that can be defended in court and, no less importantly, the

fourth dimension is transparency and the participation of society in the actions of the public administration (Corralo, 2018).

In 2014, the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) published a document outlining the elements of good governance with to encourage improvements in the provision of public services and make accounting more effective and transparent. This document establishes a series of principles and characteristics that must be incorporated into the application of a good governance approach. The main elements are a constant commitment to integrity, ethics, compliance with legislation, and transparent and comprehensive engagement with stakeholders. The document also includes sustainability, good results, and constant training for the agents involved (Sobreira, 2017).

3 Methodological Procedures

Bibliometric analysis is a scientific research method that emerged in the 1960s and was named Pritchard after its creator. Because of its quantitative nature, it led to the formulation of mathematical models aimed at measuring scientific production (Pritchard, 1969 *apud* Teixeira, et al., 2013). Highlights in the application of bibliometric analysis include Lotka's (1926) method of measuring the productivity of scientists, Bradford's (1934) law of dispersion of scientific knowledge and Zipf's (1949) model of distribution and frequency of words in a text (Araújo, 2006; Guedes & Borschiver, 2005).

Lotka's Law or Inverse Square Law, created in 1926, was constructed from a study of the productivity of scientists, based on the count of authors present in Chemical Abstracts between 1909 and 1916. This law states that a small number of researchers produce a lot on a given subject while many authors produce little (Guedes & Borschiver, 2005).

The second law of bibliometrics focuses on sets of journals. This law was designed to identify the extent to which articles on a specific scientific subject appeared in journals devoted to other subjects, studying the distribution of articles in terms of proximity or distance variables, the so-called Bradford's law or Bradford's law of scattering (Araújo, 2006).

The third of the classic bibliometric laws is Zipf's Law, formulated in 1949. It describes the relationship between words in a given sufficiently large text and the serial order of these words, showing the word count in large samples (Araújo, 2006; Ribeiro & Santos, 2015).

Two terms were used to select the articles for the bibliometric analysis: "Governança" (Governance) and "Pública" (Public). The database filter selected articles that contained the first term in their titles and the second in any field. This study used data on the production of scientific articles in Portuguese and published in national journals included in the Capes Periodicals database. In addition, only articles published in the last 5 years (i.e., from 2017 to 2021) were selected.

The raw database contained 109 articles. A thorough analysis had to be carried out, since several articles found in the search were not aligned with the topic or were not available in national journals. At the end of the individual analysis carried out by reading the titles and abstracts, 57 articles were selected to make up the database used in this study. Articles that dealt with corporate governance in the private sector or whose content was unrelated to public governance were excluded.

The number of citations that the articles received was analyzed, and the theoretical papers were divided into meta analysis, bibliographical research or meta analysis and



bibliographical research. The papers were also divided into qualitative, quantitative or mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches. We analyzed the distribution of national academic production between the years surveyed, productivity per journal, or the number of publications in the sample per journal and the journal's position in the Qualis system for the 2017-2021 four-year period. These analyses are based on Bradford's Law.

The groups were arranged according to categories (A, B and C) to facilitate understanding. Brazil has its own system for measuring the quality of journals. Thus, we used the new Qualis, which is calculated using a mathematical model and objective indicators, resulting in 8 percentile classes that divide the journals into A1 to A4 and B1 to B4 intervals (Brasil, 2019). The minimum percentages for ranking and the grouping carried out for the analysis in this study can be seen in the table below.

Box 1

New Capes Classification

Level	Percentile	Group
A1	$\geq 87,5$	A
A2	≥ 75	
A3	$\geq 62,5$	
A4	≥ 50	
B1	$\geq 37,5$	B
B2	≥ 25	
B3	$\geq 12,5$	
B4	$> 12,5$	
C	Predatory journals	C

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data obtained from the CAPES website.

Capex has sought to expand and strengthen master's and doctoral programs in Brazil and contribute to the development of scientific and technological research (Crespi, 2017). Box 1 shows that the journals within the highest percentiles obtained by the Capes calculation are linked to Qualis A, the middle percentiles are linked to Qualis B, and the journals within the lowest percentiles are considered predatory journals, *i.e.*, journals in which the publications are not of a scientific nature (BRASIL, 2019). Production by institutional link and the frequency of keywords (linked to Zipf's Law) were also analyzed, along with the presentation of the authors' productivity results (linked to Lotka's Law).

4 Results

Table 1 shows the total number of publications per year obtained from this sample in the aforementioned period, showing a reduction in the last year analyzed (2021). The year with the most publications on the subject was 2018, with 29.8% of the articles included in this study.

Table 1

Number of publications per year

Year of Publication	Number of Articles Published	Annual %
2017	9	15.8



2018	17	29.8
2019	11	19.3
2020	13	22.8
2021	7	12.3
TOTAL	57	100

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

Bradford's law assesses the level of attractiveness of journals on a given topic. The Qualis/CAPES analysis of the journals was carried out and, which according to Rodrigues (2020), can be illustrated as an analysis pertaining to Bradford's law. As described above, the authors chose to group the journals into three categories, namely groups A, B, and C. Table 2 shows the journal classification zones, determined based on the production of scientific articles and their concentration in journals.

Table 2

Detailed Journal Qualis

Journal Classification	Journals	% Journals	% Journals per category	% Publications	% Publications per category
A1	2	4.5	52.3	35	52.6
A2	5	11.4		8.8	
A3	7	15.9		14.0	
A4	9	20.5		26.3	
B1	5	11.4	36.4	8.8	31.6
B2	5	11.4		10.5	
B3	3	6.8		5.3	
B4	3	6.8		7.0	
C	5	11.4	11.4	15.8	15.8
TOTAL	44	100	100	100.0	-

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

Most of the journals included in this study were ranked within the category A (23 journals, 52.3% of the total). A total of 26.3% of the journals ranked as A, were Qualis A4 journals. Zone B represented 36.4% of the journals and 31.6% of the publications in the sample. Zone C, which CAPES considers to be probably predatory in its new Qualis criteria, represents 5 journals and/or 15.8% of the articles included in this study.

Bradford's law of scattering makes it possible to determine the core and areas of dispersion regarding a given subject in a set of journals, by measuring the productivity of publications (Guedes & Borschiver, 2005). Therefore, when the first articles on a new subject are written, they are submitted to a small selection by relevant journals, and if accepted, said subjects attracts more and more articles over the course of its development.

Most of the articles in this sample were published in Classification Zone A (52.6%). The "Revista do Serviço Público" stands out as the journal with the most publications on the subject in the period analyzed (5 studies or 8.8% of the articles in this study).

We assessed the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to which the authors of the articles were affiliated and found that twenty-five institutions had only one article



published according to the inclusion criteria for this study and available on the Capes journals platform. Eight institutions (Getulio Vargas Foundation, University of Fortaleza, University of São Paulo, State University of Ceará, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Federal University of Viçosa, Federal University of Ceará and Federal University of Paraná) have two articles whose authors are linked to the institution. The HEIs that had the most articles with authors linked to them were the University of Brasilia and the Federal University of Santa Maria, with five articles each, and the Federal University of Santa Catarina and the Federal Technological University of Paraná, with two articles published by authors linked to the HEIs..

Zipf's Law, also known as the Law of Minimum Effort, analyzes the appearance of words a text, generating a list of terms in a theme. Thus, it becomes possible to observe, through the keywords, which theme is being addressed in a given article or book (Vanti, 2002).

Table 3

Keywords

Literal Keywords	Keywords in English	Number of repetitions
Governança Pública	Public Governance	25
Governança	Governance	11
Administração Pública	Public Administration	8
Gestão Pública	Public Management	6
Governança Corporativa	Corporate Governance	6
Accountability	Accountability	4
Governança No Setor Público	Governance in the Public Sector	3
Instituição De Ensino Superior	Higher Education Institution	3
Setor Público	Public Sector	3

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

Terms belonging to the scope of the research occurred in the list of words. The words " Governança Pública" (Public Governance) were repeated 25 times, "Governança" (Governance) 11 times, "Administração Pública" (Public Administration) 8 times, "Gestão Pública" (Public Management) and "Governança Corporativa" (Corporate Governance) six times, and "Accountability" four times. We found a total of 150 different words in the keyword analysis, which covered a wide range of topics. The variety of terms found in the survey reveals the existence of an interdisciplinary approach to the subject of study. Various sectors, such as health, education, and innovation are keywords that appeared at least once in this analysis.

Table 4

Number of publications per authors

Articles published	Number of authors	% authors
1	148	96.7
2	4	2.6
3	1	0.7

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).



In this study, only one author, Nelson Guilherme Machado Pinto, published three articles, while four authors, Karoline Rodrigues Sobreira, Manuel Salgueiro Rodrigues Junior, Ivan Carlos Vicenti and Blênio Cezar Severo Peixe, published two. The authors Karoline Rodrigues Sobreira and Manuel Salgueiro Rodrigues Junior, published two articles together in 2017 and 2018. The articles are "Governança no setor público segundo IFAC: levantamento do nível de aderência de uma instituição de ensino superior" [Governance in the public sector according to IFAC: a survey of the level of adherence of a higher education institution] in the journal *Controle: Doutrinas e artigos* [Control: doctrine and articles] and "Governança no setor público: avaliação do nível de aderência de uma instituição de ensino superior ao modelo de governança pública da IFAC" [Governance in the public sector: assessing the level of adherence of a higher education institution to the IFAC public governance model] in the journal *Revista de Governança Corporativa* [Journal of Corporate Governance]. Both authors are linked to the Federal University of Paraná.

Nelson Guilherme Machado Pinto was the author of three articles on governance, namely "Governança pública: Levantamento de noções de governança em uma área administrativa de uma unidade gestora do exército brasileiro" [Public governance: A survey of notions of governance in an administrative area of a management unit of the Brazilian army] published in 2018 in the journal *Práticas de Administração Pública* [Public Administration Practices], "Os mecanismos de participação social da Câmara de vereadores de Cachoeira do Sul e os objetivos da governança pública" [The social participation mechanisms of the Cachoeira do Sul City Council and the objectives of public Governance], published in the journal *Eletrônica do Alto Vale do Itajaí* [Electronics in the Upper Itajai Valley] in 2020 and, the article "Transparência e accountability: uma análise das Universidades Federais do Rio Grande do Sul à luz dos princípios de governança da administração pública federal" [Transparency and accountability: an analysis of the Federal Universities of Rio Grande do Sul in the light of the principles of governance of the federal public administration], published in the journal *Reunir* [Reunite] also in 2020. The author is affiliated with the Federal University of Santa Maria.

Blênio Cezar Severo Peixe from the Federal University of Paraná is also the author of two articles on governance in the public sector, namely "Governança Pública: Análise Exploratória da Disclosure dos Municípios da Região Sul do Brasil" [Public Governance: Exploratory Analysis of the Disclosure of Municipalities in the Southern Region of Brazil], published in 2020 in the journal *Sociedade, Contabilidade e Gestão* [Society, Accounting and Management] and "Public governance and accountability: A bibliometric analysis of national and international scientific publications" [Governança pública e responsabilização: Uma análise bibliométrica das publicações científicas nacionais e internacionais], published in the *Journal Revista Contemporânea de Contabilidade* [Contemporary Journal of Accounting] in 2018. The author is affiliated with the Federal University of Paraná.

Ivan Carlos Vicentin, also linked to the Federal University of Paraná, is the author of two articles on the subject proposed in this study, "Práticas de comunicação da governança pública em municípios brasileiros por meio de portais governamentais" [Public governance communication practices in Brazilian municipalities through government portals] published in 2018 in the journal *Revista Tecnologia e Sociedade* [Technology and Society Journal] and "Um levantamento bibliométrico do uso de imagens na prática da comunicação da governança pública em portais governamentais



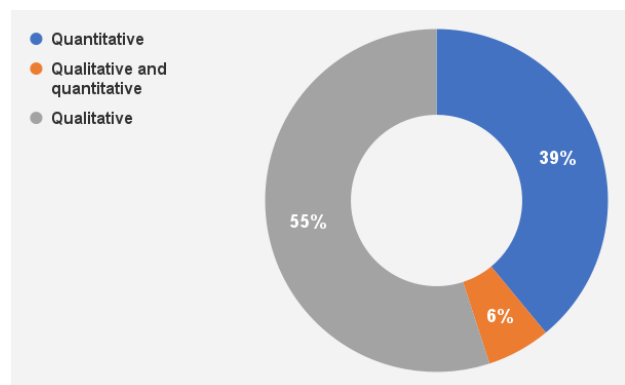
municipais" [A bibliometric survey of the use of images in the practice of public governance communication on municipal government portals], an article published in 2021 in the Journal Revista Brasileira de Administração Científica [Brazilian Journal of Scientific Administration].

The principles of Lotka's Law establish that some researchers publish more and many publish little (Guedes; Borschiver, 2005). Therefore, the results obtained are in line with the principles of this law, since productivity was gradually distributed. Table 4 shows that only 3 authors have published more than once on the subject of public governance, while 146 authors have published once on the subject.

Only 19.2% of the articles used in this analysis were literature reviews with meta-analysis, 23.1% were only meta-analysis, and over half of the articles included were only literature reviews (57.7%), highlighting the importance of theory as a scientific basis.

Figure 1

Qualitative/quantitative classification

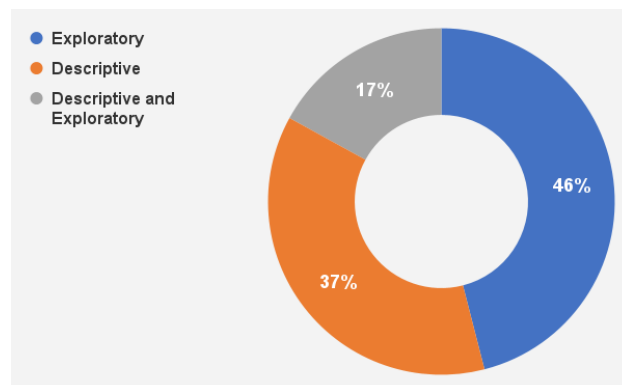


Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

The articles evaluated in this study were categorized as quantitative and/or qualitative, with most studies taking a qualitative approach (54.8%), followed by a quantitative (38.7%) and a mixed approach (6.5%), showing that theory is widely explored in empirical studies as well.

Figura 2

Classification of type of study



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

Over 45% of the studies analyzed were exploratory in their methodological strategy, 17.5% were descriptive-exploratory and approximately 36% were descriptive, indicating once again the need to further explore the topic.

Table 5 shows the number of citations received by each article included in this study. According to Guedes & Borschiver (2005), the number of times an article has been cited says a lot about its quality, relevance of the topic, of the author, and of the journal in which the scientific study was published.

Table 5

Number of citations per article

NUMBER OF CITATIONS	%
0	31.6%
> 1	24.6%
1 > 10	31.6%
10 > 20	8.8%
> 20	3.5%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the data collected (2022).

Only 3.5% of the articles included in this study were cited over 25 times until our sampling date. Note that the two studies that make up this percentage were published in A4 category journals in 2018 and 2019. In addition, one of these studies was linked to the Federal University of Brasilia, one of the institutions that had the most authors in this study.

Approximately 31.6% of the studies received from 2 to 10 citations, over 24% received only one citation and near 31% of the articles had not been cited by the time of this study.

5 Discussion

The Brazilian scenario has undergone a significant change that has led to alterations in the behavior of administrators, especially in the public sector, increasing the idea of caution when taking action and being increasingly careful to operate in accordance with the law, seeking mechanisms in the fundamentals of governance applied to public institutions before society.

We observed the highest number of publications on the subject in mid-2020, which may be related to the period after the Operation Car Wash scandals since "one of the main targets of Operation Car Wash is to punish corruption crimes that have affected, and still affect, public funds. It is not possible to disassociate the crimes investigated by the Operation with matters of accounting" (Lenz & Rodrigues, 2019).

A relevant point is that before the period observed, major public construction projects took place, due to major events hosted in Brazil, for example the World Cup and the Olympics. During this period there was a strong establishment of public governance institutions, but on the other hand there was little effective participation by civil society (Santos, 2014). News and reports from the Courts of Audit revealed corruption scandals, unfinished projects and budgets that were not economically viable (Soares, 2013).



It should also be noted that the period studied is immediately after the enactment of Law 13.303/2016, known as the Brazilian State-Owned Enterprises Law. This law was inspired by the OECD Guidelines on Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises, which provides governance standards (Fortini & Shermam, 2017). Most authors who have addressed the topic of public governance have only published one article on the subject, showing that there is room within academia for new studies on the topic of governance in public administration.

6 Conclusion

The objective of this article was to investigate the occurrence of studies exploring concepts and principles of public governance by conducting a bibliometric analysis. This bibliometric study focused on quantitative data and the formal characteristics of the articles found. The analysis used the two terms "Governança" [Governance] and "Pública" [Public] as screening criteria, selecting the database filter for articles that contained the first term in their titles and the second in any field, delimiting the search on the Periódicos Capes platform.

From the aforementioned search, it was possible to observe that the topic of public governance is widely studied in the field of academic research, and its occurrence has increased in recent years due to concerns about the transparency and fairness of public administration in Brazil. The methodology adopted for this article proved to be effective in selecting content and allowed us to make sense of what was proposed in the theoretical framework. It should also be noted that the amount of articles produced suggests that the subject of governance in the public sector tends to grow as a mechanism for good administration.

In conclusion, the study's limitation is that it only used the CAPES database. Therefore, as a suggestion for future studies, we recommend consulting other academic journal databases, and carrying out a qualitative investigation into the main published studies, to identify their characteristics, place of publication, and which methods were discussed, thus strengthening the theoretical basis and fostering interest in this subject. Publications on the subject have drawn the attention of researchers interested in understanding the mechanisms of public administration and the implications of applying the principles of governance to build an organizational reality that contributes to good results in this modern administration.

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