The Portuguese Public Administration reforms potential impact in the development of civil servants work related stress: SIADAP Case

Baptista, C. & Ferraz, D.

Portuguese National Institute of Public Administration (INA,IP)

INTRODUCTION

The Restructuring of State Central Administration Programme (PRACE) was launched in 2005 as the first step towards the Portuguese Public Administration reform. The main objective was, in a brief sentence, to cut costs and raise efficiency of public services. Beside PRACE, others systems started to be discussed and implemented. This was the case of the *Integrated System for Management and Performance Assessment in Public Administration*, known as *SIADAP*. This reform process affects several areas (e.g. reduction of administrative structures) and civil servants face new challenges concerning new management practices and greater demands related with the necessary continuos aquisition of relevant knowledge and competencies, in order to cope with the public services changes and new requirements (e.g. pressure from public opinion in order to develop services/products with better quality).

The relation between public sector reforms and work related stress is not fully study and, in Portugal, the subject also remains without special attention although the empirical, day – to – day, evidence shows an overall dissatisfaction among the civil servants concerning their work conditions (context and content).

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this analysis is to reflect on which characteristics within the new legal framework related with the Portuguese public administration reform may promote distress among Portuguese civil servants. For the purpose we considered the Integrated System for Management and Performance Assessment in Public Administration (SIADAP). An association will be establish between the legal framework and the main factors of WRS presented by the I-WHO (2000).

METHODS

We applied the documental analysis technique to the *Portuguese Public Administration performance appraisal system* (law no.66-B/2007), approved by the Assembly of the Republic in December 2007. This qualitative analysis was based in the research framework "Factors associated with work related stress" presented in the *Report on Work Related Stress*, produced by the I-WHO, from the University of Nottingham (2000).

MAJOR FINDINGS

Nowadays, Portuguese Public Administration steps toward a fundamental change concerning the modernization of strutures, models and processes. Until now, the strong administrative law tradition affected the attention devoted to organizational behavior issues and impaired the required cultural and organizational changes necessary to develop a more pragmatic, modern, efficcient and participative culture in several areas. Human resources management is one of these areas where the Portuguese public administration reform seems to be more pressing and problematic. As we analyze the content of the Integrated System for Management and Performance Assessment in Public Administration (SIADAP) we found several intrinsic characteristics that may promote distress among Portuguese civil servants.

The purpose of SIADAP is to assess the performance of public services, their respective managers and other staff. This system highlight the need for establishing integrated performance indicators that assess the effectiveness , efficiency and quality of the public services. Although this principles and others (e.g. sense of coherence from organizational strategic objectives to managers and staff objectives; transparency; participation in the process) appear in the law no.66-B/2007, it is difficult to effectively apply this model in some public services. This result from several factors. First of all, its clear the *conflict between the prevailing procedural and normative culture and the desirable innovation and objective cultural paradigm* that underlies the public administration reform agenda. This fact tends to create a *"conflict demanding" and a resistance to change climate*. SIADAP is considered, by public decision makers, as an example of the desirable pragmatic system of HR management and organization in Public services. In theory, this appraisal regime promotes principles related with the importance of a participative attitude and reinforces the role of team work as the key factor to accomplish organizational and unit objectives (e.g. in terms of products / services / results) .

When we explore the main ideas of SIADAP, we find a system that, for instance, doesn't create the conditions to balance individual capacities and organizational objectives. The latter assume the main priority creating situations where an individual feels *lack of support and resorces* to effectively develop their activities. It's important to remember that one of the structural ideias of PRACE was to cut costs and raise efficiency. Other stressful factors are associated with this *interpersonal /group needed cooperation* to accomplish unit objectives, specially because people are not "familiarized" with the concept and practice of common goals, interdependent workflows and team work (unit) appraisal with subsequent consequences. In a basic sense, until now, everyone felt internal control over their own pace of work because the organizational dynamic was, mainly, based in the individual work. SIADAP represents a shift towards a new form of conceiving the individuals contribution to the organizational development in public services: the integration of all performance levels within the organization. As SIADAP and others regimes (mobility, careers and pay system; new work contract applied to public administration) are being implemented in public services, people are coping, in a dialy basis, with some of their stressful features.

Some of these stressful factors are also related with the *ambiguity* concerning the comprehensiveness of "new" terms and conceptions underlying this appraisal system and how they should be applied to respond to complex and completely different work contexts. Along with this factor, is th*e lack of widespread technical practical guidance in the implementation of the syste*m. This lack of specific information contribue to the perception of confusion and decreased credibility on the added value of this system to HR management.

CONCLUSION

Many studies have found strong associations between organizational change, the experience of stressful work conditions, and sick leave (Alexanderson & Norlund, 2004; Arnetz, 2005; Hasson, 2005; Kivimaki, Vahtera & Thomson, 1997; Parker, Chmiel & Wall, 1997; Vahtera et al., 2000). This means that work context and content may contain stressful features which contribues to physical and psychological harmful consequences (e.g. Baker, 1985; Cox & Cox, 1993). As we considered this evidence, we see that some of the most refered organizational stressful characteristics are present in the concept, principles, objectives and structure of the Integrated System for Management and Performance Assessment in Public Administration (SIADAP). Therefore, for example, we emphasize the absence of clear and comprehensive principles for system implementation, the principle of fostering a completely different paradigm of dynamic intergoup relations to accomplish goals, in a prevailing bureacratic and rules driven culture.

It´s important to note that many stressful features are "hidden" in the principles and objectives of this regimes resultant from the present reform agenda. This stressful features could affect the civil servants job performance, well being and organizational developmentof public services.

As a final remark, we emphasize the need to proceed for diagnosis – intervention projects which aim to prevent in a primary level work related stress in Public sector workers. It's important that public decision makers consider the potential harm of WRS and start eliminating is impact in a primary phase : legislation conception. The participative role of civil servants is also very important and should be effective in putting into action better practices which promote a modernized public administration, but also, a protective safety culture that create better psychosocial conditions at work and, of course, in their relations with the citizens.

REFERENCES

•Alexanderson, K., & Norlund, A. (2004). Sickness absence – causes, consequences and psysicians' sickness certification practice. A systematic literature review by Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care. *Scadinavian Journal of Public Health*, Supplement 63, 1-263.
•Arnetz, B. (2005). Subjective indicators as a gauge for improving organizational well being. An attempt to apply the cognitive activation theory to organizations. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 30, 1022-1026.
•Baker, D.B. (1985). The study of stress at work . *Annual Review of Public Health*, 6, 367 – 381.
• Cox, T. & Cox, S. (1993). Psychosocial and organizational hazards: monitoring and control. *Occasional series in Occupational health*, n5, WHO (Europe).
•Bogg, J. & Cooper, C. (1995). Job satisfaction, mental health and occupational stress among senior civil servants. *Human Relations*, 48 (3), 327 – 341.
• Cox, T, Griffiths, A. & Rial – González, E. (2000). *Research on work related stress*. European Agency for Safety and Health at work.
•Hasson, D. (2005). *Stress management intervetions and predictors of long term health*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
•Tavares, LV. & Alves, A. (2006). The future of Portuguese public administration and a new agenda for public administration sciences in the 21st century. *Public Administration*, 84 (2), 389 – 406.