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Beyond Metrics: Perceived Performance in Public Service Organizations

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Abstract

Performance in public service organizations extends beyond simple numerical evaluation and emerges at the intersection of technical, relational, and symbolic dimensions. This study, conducted with Pôle Emploi (France Travail since January 2024), the French public employment service, investigates the gaps between performance measured through standardized indicators and performance as perceived by field managers. Findings reveal that stakeholders' perceptions are strongly shaped by the meaning they assign to their work, context, symbolic motivation, autonomy, and collective participation—factors seldom captured by traditional metrics. The observed discrepancies underscore those objective indicators, while useful for management, represent only part of operational reality and may obscure the nuances of human interactions and contextual constraints. The paper concludes that integrating objective measures with subjective perceptions provides a more nuanced understanding of performance.

Keywords: Measured performance, Perceived performance, Public service organization, Service quality, Symbolic motivation