

Exploring Public Agents' Perception of Public Performance: A Conventionalist Approach

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Abstract: *The need to characterize public performance has arisen due to the significance of the way public decision-makers and agents perceive and define it. This paper delves into the intricate realm of public administration by examining the nuanced dimension of public agents' perception of public performance. Drawing inspiration from [1] conventionalist theory, the paper proposes an analytical approach that seeks to explore and describe how public agents interpret and construct performance within their evolving professional landscapes. This transition to a conventionalist framework is crucial for illuminating the fundamental elements that contribute to the characterization of performance within public organizations. By integrating conventionalist perspectives, this research aims to shed light on the subjective aspects of public performance. We contend that a conventionalist lens offers a rich and nuanced understanding of the intricate social and organizational structures that influence the construction and interpretation of performance within the public sector.*

Keywords: Perception; Public performance; public agent; theory of conventions; Public Administration

I. Introduction

This paper is dedicated to a thorough theoretical and conceptual analysis of the complex phenomenon of public agents' perception of public performance. Our initial objective is to establish a comprehensive state-of-the-art review of the characterization and definition of a multidimensional concept such as performance, with a particular emphasis on the realm of public performance. This work aims to explore various approaches to characterizing this concept, highlighting theoretical models designed to conceptualize this phenomenon.

Additionally, special attention will be given to the perception of public performance by public agents, a dimension often overlooked within the scientific community despite its crucial importance in the context of modern public management. We will delve into the phenomenon of post-bureaucratization, a facet that shapes a new mindset among public agents and redefines the operational dynamics of public administrations. Simultaneously, we will examine the theory of conventions as a suitable theoretical framework to analyze public agents' perceptions of performance. In this regard, we propose an approach that aims to provide a theoretical framework for exploring and describing how public agents apprehend performance in their field of action.

This contribution marks a crucial transition to an essential dimension of public performance management: the perception of public agents. Our objective is to highlight the fundamental importance of these elements in characterizing performances within public organizations. We draw on the main reference worlds described by [1] to illuminate our understanding of how public agents construct and interpret performance in an ever-evolving context.

II. Performance, a polysemic concept

The concept of performance is inherently complex due to its pluralistic nature, encompassing various layers of interpretation, ranging from the literal sense of "the accomplishment of something" to more elaborate meanings. The academic literature consistently emphasizes the absence of a standardized or uniform definition of performance, and scholars engage in ongoing debates about its multidimensional nature.

The linguistic definition of the term, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, delineates performance as the manner in which an action is carried out, encompassing both effectiveness and inefficiency, as well as the act or process of accomplishing a task. [2] notes that, across the literature, all perspectives on performance share a common characteristic, namely their connection to the terms efficiency and effectiveness.

Various perspectives on performance emerge, reflecting the evolution of the understanding of organizational effectiveness. Scholars highlight the temporal dimension, emphasizing efficiency and effectiveness, along with other interdependent criteria such as quality, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction. [2] definition of performance is based on [3] work, preferring to focus on the level of goal attainment for an organization or service.

In fact, the advancements in the conceptualization of performance underscore its multifaceted nature, integrating dimensions such as efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and innovation. This concept is perceived as dynamic and constantly evolving in the context of organizational management, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative measures, while emphasizing the significance of goal attainment and the actions of stakeholders.

Despite the clarity of [2]'s definition, differences of opinion arise when associating the term "performance" with management concepts. The perspective advocated by [4] and supported here asserts that performance lies in an organization's ability to achieve its goals fully, challenging the notion that the level of goal attainment represents the complete realization of those objectives. This divergence underscores the complexity of conceptualizing performance in the organizational context.

On the other hand, if [2] associates performance with the terms efficiency and effectiveness, would it not be logical to include both terms in the definition? It is observed that she has used only efficiency (degree of goal attainment) to define performance and omitted efficiency when not mentioning the consumed resources. Therefore, a slight modification of [2]'s definition is suggested, where both efficiency and effectiveness should be considered, and the terms degree/level should be eliminated. Thus, the revised definition would be: "Performance is defined as the accomplishment of an organization's objectives rather than individuals, minimizing the minimal use of resources to achieve this objective." [2]

However, confining the analysis to [2]'s work is insufficient for defining this controversial concept. Although her definition is considered a solid foundation, other researchers have put forth diverse propositions based on their perspectives. For instance, in 1999, [5] considered performance as an ambiguous term that cannot be simply defined. He initiated an analysis at the organizational level, suggesting that a performing organization is one that successfully achieves its objectives, implementing an appropriate strategy effectively. However, in 2001, [6] chose to use the term more freely, stating that "the word 'performance' is somewhat elusive in that it seems to mean very different things to different people. So, we use it quite loosely, pretending to understand its meaning, but in reality, we often use it to bridge a lack of common understanding." In fact, [6] chose to consider the term "performance" only in the context of business or the public sector. He argues that the public sector provides a good starting point using the three "E"s of performance, namely:

- Efficiency [providing outputs and even desired results]
- Effectiveness [using the least inputs possible to obtain these outputs]
- Economy [buying inputs at the least possible cost]

Otley was not convinced that exclusive use of efficiency and effectiveness was sufficient to define a concept, as Samsonowa had done. He also took into account the economic factor. Indeed, he was not alone in resorting to the three "E"s to describe performance. [7] adopted a constructivist model (the trialectical perspective Subject-Object-Project) to study performance through evaluation. He considered performance as a criterion related to the objective dimension of the three dimensions of evaluation, while the subjective dimension was Relevance and the rational dimension was Coherence. According to [7], the performance criterion leads to the same three "E"s that [6] used in the public sector: Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Economy. In fact, [7], in his attempt to define performance, acknowledged how challenging it seemed to achieve a consensus on a single definition of this concept. He was convinced that the concept had multiple dimensions, based on the findings of [8], who identified four dimensions: social, economic, political, and systemic, and [9], who reduced these four dimensions to only two: objective and subjective. Among the many definitions proposed by researchers, [7] chose to provide an example from [10], who successfully identified three main senses:

- Performance is success; it does not exist in itself; it is a function of representations of success, variable according to companies, according to actors.
- Performance is the result of action, unlike the previous definition; this sense has no value judgment. The measurement of performance is "understood as the ex post evaluation of results" [10]
- Performance is action. In this sense, performance is a process and "not a result that appears at a given moment" [11]

In another attempt, Bessire shows an interest in [12]study of the articulation between the three terms: performance, relevance, and coherence. For [13], performance seems to be the result either of a simple summation of relevance and coherence or the product of an iterative loop between the same three terms. From another perspective in the field of public management, [13]argue that performance in the public sector concerns intentional behavior, whether individual or organizational. Performance has a quality that can be either high or low. Firstly, when performance relates to the quality of actions, it is conceptualized as competence or capability. Secondly, when it comes to the quality of achievements, performance equals results. Finally, when performance is conceptualized considering both the quality of actions and the quality of achievements, it can be termed sustainable results.

In the business context, performance is linked to the "accomplishment of an action," and its subsequent evaluation is determined based on how this action was performed. However, other meanings of performance provide useful indications on how it should be implemented; the "accomplished" action must be standardized, non-random, quantifiable, and it must retain relevance for the performer or artist. We can summarize this idea into a few priorities governing the effective use of performance in the literature. Performance is always assessed based on the presumed relevance of an entity to a particular environment (thus, we commonly evaluate a business based on its impact, for example, in a specific market, and not based on its impact in a place that is not likely to be relevant to its operation). Performance is always carried out with a relevant objective in mind (thus, we generally evaluate a business based on a future vision established on what the business aims to achieve, and not based on the objectives of another organization that is not the business). Performance is always reduced to relevant and recognizable characteristics (thus, we commonly evaluate a business based on competitiveness parameters such as cost, quality, time, etc., as well as more challenging competitiveness priorities to measure, like flexibility or sustainability, because they are relevant and recognizable; however, we do not evaluate based on irrelevant and unrecognizable characteristics (thus, we do not evaluate a business based on its performance in terms of the "ability to use office supplies")).

Despite its multidimensionality, performance is often perceived as a measurement concept rather than a theoretical one. Managers tend to concentrate on financial metrics, while businesses are increasingly focusing on other dimensions of performance, such as quality, customer satisfaction, and environmental impact. Consequently, performance measurement increasingly mirrors the diversity of companies' activities and their impact on society and the environment.

III. Subjective Performance: A Socially Constructed Reality

The inherently subjective nature of performance precludes perfect objectification, as it is influenced by subjective considerations. Capture parameters define performance in a specific manner, rendering it susceptible to multiple interpretations. Consequently, performance becomes intriguing as it is perceived solely as the product of the entity's consciousness, as described by [14] in the context of a 'socially constructed reality.' It results from the suspension of continuity in favor of 'snapshots' of discrete events, utilized to assess the success or failure of an entity. The key lies in transforming pure, continuous, and ever-evolving performance into an admired performance based on instantaneous, periodic, and capturable measures, used to craft a subjective image of 'performance.'

In essence, performance exists only when subjected to evaluation and ceases to exist without it. Performance is fundamentally a function of bounded rationality, necessitating the establishment of limiting parameters for its capture. It relies on established parameters, thereby directing subjective viewpoints at the expense of other equally valid but considered less relevant perspectives.

The capture of pure performance never involves a specific viewpoint; subjectivity is rather encapsulated in the methods used to capture the admired version of performance. Capturing performance in its entirety is impossible, as it is abstract, continuous, and socially constructed in a world of competing social visions. Thus, performance in the business context is inevitably subject to subjectivity and alteration despite our efforts. Our attempts to reduce performance to an authoritative formula indicate a willingness to sacrifice the purity of performance in favor of its more practical and flexible form, namely, subordinate and subjective performance.

Subjective performance is thus unavoidable in the business context, as the impracticality and theoretical nature of pure performance become evident. 'Pure' performance must remain free of interference and constant, whereas methods for capturing performance, influenced by entities such as individuals, teams, companies, or interorganizational groups, lead to a diluted pluralistic consensus on the adequacy of an entity's performance in a specific context. This divergence is predictable, as our interest lies in 'impure,' politically motivated performance, subject to bounded rationality and the subjectivity of the sponsor, rather than 'pure' performance, which remains essentially unchanged."

TABLE 1 : The different perceptions on performance

Authors	Perceptions on performance
Fayol H.	A performing organization is that that achieves more with the same effort
Georgopoulos B.S. and Tannenbaum A.S.	Organizational performance is the degree to which an organization as a social system considering certain resources and means, achieves its objectives without asking for an effort on the part of its members
Mahoney T.A. and Weitzel W.	Performance is the efficient and productive action
Seashore S.E. and Yutchman E.	Performance is the capacity of an organization to exploit its environment in the acquisition of rare resources that are essential for it to function
Lewin K.	Performing groups are those that are most creative and productive than others
McGregor D.	Organizational performance is evaluated through the achievement of organizational goals and the optimal use of human resources
Likert R.	The performance of an organization may be appreciated through its economic success and the quality of its organization
Argyris C.	Performance resides in the integration of individual and organizational objectives

[15] points out that the literature employs various concepts concurrently or without specific preference to define the notion of performance. Some authors associate it with terms like efficiency, capability, or competitiveness, while others link it to concepts such as effectiveness, yield, productivity, health, success, or excellence. Larousse dictionary defines it as the collection of results obtained in a test, whereas Robert characterizes it as the achievement of a team in a trial. Although these definitions are not contradictory, they carry distinct meanings. The literature emphasizes that performance is assessed in diverse ways by clients, investors, HR professionals, salespeople, and technicians, each using their own terminology to name, describe, and explain it. Hence, the multitude of disciplines and areas of interest related to performance results in a variety of terminologies used to describe it.

IV. The Characterization of Public Performance: The economic approach vs the stakeholder approach

The contemporary discourse on public performance has experienced a surge in significance within political, administrative, and academic realms, particularly at the local community level. Initiatives such as performance approaches have evolved to enhance activity and structural management. However, the lack of a precise definition and common practices surrounding public performance has led to a proliferation of varied, often unsuitable, and overly general definitions. This complexity is labeled the "jungle of performance," highlighting challenges arising from interpretations by different actors.

Within this dynamic professional and academic landscape, a critical need emerges for technical developments and tools to be preceded by an abstraction phase, thoroughly analyzing the concept of public performance. Various scholars offer distinct perspectives, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of performance. [16] suggests a relationship between objectives, means, and results, where performance results from the simultaneous exercise of efficiency, effectiveness, and an appropriate budgetary process. [17] advocates a transition from the 3E system (efficiency, effectiveness, economy) to a 5E system (economy, efficiency, effectiveness, environment, and equity). The varied viewpoints underscore the necessity of studying the practical interpretation and understanding of the concept.

The connection between performance and the quality of actions in public management transforms the concept itself, oscillating between capacity, results, and sustainable outcomes. Performance's multifaceted nature is evident in the literature's diverse definitions and associations. [18] identifies three meanings of performance in responsibility management: success, the result of action, or the action itself. The definition and management of performance are not independent and self-determining; they adapt to different contexts and domains, varying across countries and cultures. The global perspective on performance management systems emphasizes the intricate and multidimensional nature of performance, highlighting the need for contextual adaptation.

In exploring the economic approach to public performance, three prevalent models emerge: the Public Choice Theory model, the New Public Management (NPM) model, and the model proposed by [19]. These models provide frameworks for assessing organizational performance, incorporating dimensions such as economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. The New Public Management movement, articulated by [20], emphasizes principles like results-oriented management, impact measurement, customer satisfaction, financial streamlining, and enhanced financial transparency. [19] model further elaborates on the internal and external dimensions of performance, connecting them through a performance management loop. Alongside these economic approaches, stakeholder-oriented models gain prominence, involving citizen participation in performance representation and measurement. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Public Sector Scorecard (PSS) are presented as models that integrate stakeholder perspectives into performance evaluation. The CAF, drawing inspiration from the Total Quality Management movement, distinguishes between beneficiary and social results. On the other hand, the PSS, derived from the Balanced Scorecard, aligns performance measurement with the needs and expectations of users and stakeholders, extending its application to various public sector entities. These models showcase the evolving nature of performance evaluation, incorporating diverse perspectives and emphasizing stakeholder engagement.

V. Examining Public Agents' perception of Performance :

Over the last two decades, the understanding of performance in the private sector has undergone a significant transformation, extending beyond mere financial success ([21]). A comprehensive study by [22] introduced four dimensions of organizational performance: business efficiency (productivity), human capital (social cohesion), organizational legitimacy in the eyes of external groups (stakeholder satisfaction), and organizational longevity (product quality, financial profitability, and competitiveness). While this multidimensional approach is intriguing, adjustments are needed to fully consider the unique features of public organizations, given the notably more complex definition of performance in the public sector.

Numerous publications and research efforts have addressed this issue ([23]; [24]; [25]; [25]; [26]; [28]). However, these studies are either theoretical or based on empirical data primarily gathered through interviews with high-level administrators or elected representatives. Research interviews on this matter seldom reach administrative agents at the base of the pyramid, despite their crucial role in implementing new performance standards.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) defines performance as a combination of customer/citizen-focused results, agent-focused results (efficiency and satisfaction), society-focused results (societal and environmental performance), and performance-focused results (concerning the organization's defined mandate and objectives). While other attempts draw inspiration from the Balanced Scorecard ([29]; [30]) or similar models from the private sector, they are somewhat limited in truly understanding how agents perceive performance. These models, however, highlight that public sector performance must be assessed by multiple stakeholders with potentially conflicting expectations, with personnel being one of these stakeholders. Given the challenge of integrating all these expectations into a coherent performance management system, administrative agents must learn to navigate "strategic ambiguity." In this regard, it would be interesting to observe how administrative agents reconcile these expectations within the framework of their own professional functions.

From a theoretical perspective, the authors rely on the well-known "triple E," evolving into the "five E" (equity, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and efficacy) ([31]) to examine how public administrations should implement these "E's" to enhance their operations and reduce costs. Models that integrate literature on public management and political science are particularly intriguing, as they develop concepts such as "results," "impacts," and "products," present in the analysis of public policies. However, these publications primarily focus on citizen perception (often termed "clients" in public management literature or "target population" in policy analysis literature), and how the administrative agent envisions performance is seldom considered, with personnel seen as a mere means to achieve political goals.

Further approaches concentrate on analyzing market management methods. Additionally, [32] and [33] provide detailed analyses of goal definitions, indicator choices, measurements, and issues related to reporting. As expected, the performance of public administrations is primarily measured using quantitative indicators concentrated at the product level, offering a limited view of the complex nature of public organization performance ([34]; [33]). This narrow definition of performance leads to dysfunctions and can result in motivation problems, as the role played by administrative agents is not fully taken into account [35], and their professionalism is seriously questioned [36], potentially leading to an identity crisis [37].

Reforms in the public sector over the past two decades have brought about significant changes in structures, roles, and service management. The pressure to contain public expenses, ensure economical, efficient, and effective resource use, and transform traditional administrative bureaucracies into managed entities has impacted all public servants [38]. The roles of

public officials and other agents are also evolving, and they are now often required to manage in increasingly competitive market conditions, with a specific focus on customer service. Moreover, the skills and competencies required of new public managers are vastly different from those expected of traditional administrators. Even more changes are anticipated for the future [39].

Public management reform, in the form of the professionalization of public services and the adoption of ideas and practices from the private sector, has paved the way for the development of public choice theory with its postulate that individuals are motivated by self-interest and especially by monetary rewards. This leads to major confusion among public agents, especially at the lower levels of public administration.

For example, in his analysis of the link between human resource management methods and performance management within certain British local authorities, [40] highlights the complex organizational reality that public agents must face. They are often unable to define the organization's objectives and, consequently, to describe the link between their role and overall performance [40]. Even when performance seems precisely defined, focusing on the "client," frontline agents claim to face contradictory orders related to ambivalent expectations [41], confirming the observations of other studies conducted in Switzerland and Canada by [42]. State agents seem torn between the traditional bureaucratic culture and the culture inspired by managerialism and the market ([43]; [44]). However, a closer examination of these results reveals elements of very different identities, essentially determined by professional identities and individual and contextual variables [45]. [45]'s typology is relatively interesting in this regard: it relates individual preferences to organizational reality (traditionalists prefer procedural bureaucracy, individualists prefer a market-based form) to offer a more diversified view of what performance could be in these environments. Thus, performance in the public sector must necessarily be considered as a multidimensional notion, far more complex than the quantitatively focused outcome indicators essentially used in performance agreements inspired by a managerial perspective of public services [38]. Despite this high level of "managerialization," the public sector remains public, not profit-oriented, and subject to a specific legal framework that ensures legality and fairness for citizens, creating a hybrid environment [46]. According to this author, the realm of new public values must be discovered, and the values, classified, as only a few suggestions are available today. Some researchers label this new hybrid world as neo-Weberian state [47]; [48]; [49]) or consider it more generally as the resurgence of the bureaucratic model ([50]; [51]). In this environment, it is interesting to analyze how public agents describe the notion of "performance," what priorities prove to be important, and how they cope with potentially contradictory expectations related to projects to modernize public administration and more traditional, rule-focused ways of carrying out administrative processes [52]. Even though they essentially focus on a single variable (perception of performance), these results will also be useful to better understand the value system and new identity references of public agents.

1.1. Post-Bureaucracy or the Identity Crisis of Public Servants

The rise of the New Public Management (NPM) marked a departure from the conventional bureaucratic model initially formulated by Max Weber. Presently, there is a growing call for a resurgence of the bureaucratic model, an unexplored domain characterized by the amalgamation of logics, methods, and values from both the public and private sectors. Numerous analysts, including leading experts in administrative sciences ([53]; [38]) and organizational sciences [50]), outline this hybrid vision. The post-New Governance Paradigm (NGP) is distinguished by a fresh amalgamation of principles that have shaped classical public administration, maintaining its distinctive features (such as legality and equal treatment), and principles derived from alternative governance approaches, notably the market and networks. In addition to hierarchy (bureaucratic governance) and the market, the emerging public governance underscores a third operational model inspired by networks. In this model, public servants no longer necessarily assume a central role, fostering a culture of shared leadership [54].

Recent examinations of the identities and motivations of public servants underscore their fluctuation between a classical identity as neutral servants of the state and an identity as public managers, overseeing either government services or private enterprises with equal indifference [44]. The public service itself has undergone a profound transformation in the last decade, termed post-bureaucracy [52], rendering traditional personnel management approaches obsolete. The expectations and motivations of public servants have significantly diversified, reshaping the psychological contract with employers [55], as well as their attachment to the organization. Consequently, public administration personnel navigate a realm of hybrid values that unconsciously blend classical "civic" values with those originating from the business sphere, such as customer orientation and the principle of equal treatment. This fusion prompts an identity crisis among many public servants, compelling them to seek new guiding principles [56].

1.2. The perception of public performance : A Conventional framework

Research exploring the transformation of identities amid paradoxical, ambiguous, or rapidly changing contexts linked to public service modernization initiatives [57] emphasizes the current oscillation of values among public servants. This oscillation extends from traditional public sector values (such as the ethos of civil service, honesty, integrity, impartiality, objectivity, commitment to the common good, dedication, and public welfare) to values inspired by the private sector (including an emphasis on profitability, managerialism, a results-oriented culture, performance, and efficiency). The hybridization of cultures and managerial practices across both public and private sectors holds the potential to disrupt established reference points, expand the capacity for action, and introduce conflicts of values that challenge the identity of public servants [58]. Scholars increasingly employ various terms such as "neo-Weberian state" [47], neo-bureaucracy [50], or New Public Service [59] to underscore the necessity for institutions to forge a "new public ethos" that supports the rejuvenated identity of public servants.

The theory of conventions, an economic and sociological framework, introduces a fresh perspective on the coordination of economic activities. Originating in France during the 1980s through the works of scholars like André Orléan, Luc Boltanski, and Laurent Thévenot, this theory posits that economic agents are not solely rational individuals maximizing their utility but are social beings influenced by conventions that govern their interactions. Conventions, whether implicit or explicit rules, guide the behavior of economic agents, encompassing a wide range from legal rules to social norms, customs, and habits. This theoretical framework has revitalized our understanding of coordinating economic activities and the impact of conventions on the behavior of economic agents. The concept of the "common world" [1] offers valuable insights into the analysis of representations and values. It refers to a community of shared meaning and belonging that operates according to its logic, oriented toward a common superior principle, enabling the perception and interpretation of reality from a specific perspective. While [1] typology of common worlds does not specifically focus on public organizations, it enriches the discourse by exploring other dimensions that constitute diverse worlds founded on different logics, transcending the bipolarity of identities mentioned earlier.

Our exploration starts from the premise that within public organizations, different "worlds" coexist to shape the evolving landscape known as "post-bureaucracy." These worlds represent various frames of reference, providing potential arenas of identification for public servants navigating a plurinomic rather than anomic environment.

Rather than relying on conventional literature regarding performance management in the public sector, which often focuses on frameworks such as the previously mentioned five E's, it proves more insightful to adopt a broader perspective by examining conceptual frameworks stemming from political and organizational sociology. We contend that these frameworks facilitate a more profound analysis of perceptions and meanings in the new hybrid environment of public services, providing a better understanding of the evolving identities of public servants.

[1] investigated how individuals justify their actions within groups and collectives to facilitate collaboration. They identified reference worlds to which people attach themselves, categorizing them through a typology composed of ideal-typical reference worlds. Each world is built on a common superior principle inspired by significant political philosophies, serving as a criterion for judging actions [42]. These worlds reveal communities of meanings and spheres of legitimation that members of a collective entity or organization refer to when justifying their decisions and behavior. When individuals with different reference worlds collaborate, challenges may arise unless they agree on a common ground, referred to as a "convention." This typology of worlds seems suitable for analyzing the perceptions of public servants.

Based on a historical analysis of Western thought, the authors identify six and later seven grand cities, representing reference magnitudes guiding individuals' behaviors [1]. Each world revolves around a grandeur principle that forms a value scale, sealing the agreement between people in that world. A relation to grandeur structures the relationships among the members of the world. The authors emphasize that the existence of these higher principles of action legitimacy requires specific investments, termed form investments, and passage through what they call a trial. Gaining the respect of individuals is not easy. To be accepted into a world, one must prove allegiance to the values of that world.

Although essential for the organization's smooth functioning, [1] highlight that dialogue between these different worlds can be challenging, as disagreements may emerge among them. In such cases, two forms of agreements may arise. The first is arrangement, a bargaining where none of the conflicting worlds manages to find a common principle of justification. Agreement emerges on practices that the worlds will tolerate, and the agreement is punctual and informal, largely depending on the individuals who supported it. In contrast, compromise appears as a more enduring form of agreement,

aiming to bring forth a practice, object, or person likely to be perceived as legitimate in the various conflicting worlds, having a distinct and acceptable identity in each.

TABLE2: The reference worlds described by [1]

World	Common Principle	Brief Presentation
Industrial	Efficiency and superior performance	Inspired by machines, the industrial world is characterized by its focus on efficiency and productivity. Actions are justified by their performance, and measures are appropriate and optimize resources.
Civic	Collective organs and democratic expression	The civic world is based on the figure of the citizen, and is founded on the legislation and mechanisms that govern collective entities. It is characterized by its focus on benevolent relations that animate an entity, and on its own reputation and recognition.
Domestic	Concentration on the market, the mechanisms of competition, and the tradition	The domestic world is inspired by the family, and is characterized by its focus on the value of a person, the existence and value of an action, etc., and on the relations that animate a person.
Opinion	Opinions about others	The opinion world is characterized by its focus on the perception of others, and on the existence and value of an opinion.

Source [52]

[1]conduct an examination of political philosophy in response to the complex issue posed by the diverse principles of agreement. Their work facilitates the establishment of an order centered around a shared good. They introduce a classification of five cities: the inspired city, the domestic city, the city of opinion, the civic city, and the market city. The focal point of their analysis is the concept of "common worlds," where the natural order is described through categories that define subjects, objects, qualifications, and relationships.

In a broader context, achieving a justifiable agreement requires not only the construction of a system of constraints governing such agreements but also demands that individuals possess the necessary capabilities to adhere to these constraints. Individuals must be willing to embrace changes inspired by a certain state, making this world less stable and facing the paradox of a magnitude that eludes measurement or contingency.

In the domestic realm: This framework extends beyond the family context to interpersonal connections. Within the domestic city, the bond between individuals is conceptualized as the generation of family ties, creating a space where the relationship of domestic dependence is established. According to the domestic model, grandeur is a state of dependence from which individuals derive the authority they can exert over others. Understanding one's rank is synonymous with comprehending one's grandeur and, by extension, understanding oneself ("misunderstanding oneself would be foolish"). [60]expands this principle of kinship into the political realm, grounding the divine authority of the Prince in blood heritage and the embodiment of the State in the king's body. According to [60], the king, primarily solitary and responsible, exists solely for the State with which he merges. His grandeur is proportional to his sacrifice. In this sacrificial conception, celebrating his virtues aims to highlight all dimensions of the magnitude he sacrifices for the common good, subordinating "the totality of his personal satisfactions."

[61]emphasizes the sacrifice of the Prince and the economy of the relationship he maintains with his subjects. The sovereign is considered God's minister, holding the "oath" and ensuring the "subordination" of this city, bridging all individuals in the State. Descendants are subordinate to ancestors, and children to fathers. The father's love creates unity among subjects. The authority of the State extends to paternal authority.

Submission to the Prince makes the "multitude one man," forming the foundation of justice and social bonds because "the subordination of the powerful" limits the unrestrained expression of selfish desires. The great find justification for their existence only in their willingness to "protect the small."

The grandeur of the domestic city is part of a hierarchical chain and is defined as the ability to encompass in "one's person" the "will" of subordinates. The common superior principle is the generational lineage, respecting tradition and

hierarchy to establish order among individuals of a domestic nature. The state of grand corresponds to hierarchical superiority. The dignity of individuals is linked to the ease of habit. The repertoire of subjects lies in the relationships individuals have with their peers. Great beings include the king, the leader, the family, while small beings are the "self," the "I," the bachelor. The objects of this world include rules of etiquette, such as good manners, presentation, gifts, and polite formulas.

The investment formula lies in the fact that the great have duties towards their surroundings, these duties involving the rejection of selfishness. The relationship of magnitude is respect and responsibility for the order of beings in the same house. Natural relations between individuals require good education to ensure the continuity and permanence of tradition. Harmonious figures of natural order are expressed through figures of propriety, usages, and principles, constituting the soul of the home.

The trial model is represented by the family during family ceremonies such as receptions and communions. Judgment belongs to the superior, granting trust, considering, judging, and offering admonitions. Evidence relies on the mode of knowledge specific to the considered world. The state of small and the decline of the city are characterized by self-satisfaction and the uninhibitedness of shamelessness.

In the domestic world, relationships are based on familial bonds, authority, and tradition. Public agents operating within this framework may prioritize hierarchical structures, emphasizing a sense of duty, responsibility, and familial connection in their public service. The grandeur in this context may be linked to a perceived ability to protect and serve, mirroring familial relationships.

In the opinion world: The city emphasizes the importance of memory, even though it is not permanent, allowing celebrities to be forgotten from one day to the next. The grandeur of this city depends on others' opinions, based on the definition of honor according to [62].

In the opinion city, the construction of grandeur is linked to the formation of conventional signs condensing and manifesting the force generated by the esteem individuals have for each other. This allows for the "equivalence between people" and the "calculation of their value" based on gestures, acts, behaviors, and words. According to [62], an individual's value is determined by signs of honor and dishonor.

In the city of opinion, grandeur depends solely on the number of people granting their credit. The foundation of honor and distinction is power. Grandeur is evaluated based on the degree of exposure to the gaze of others, visibility, "being in view," i.e., being known through fortune, position, and honorable actions. Obscurity is considered dishonorable.

The construction of grandeur can be based on arbitrary signs. The common superior principle is the reality of others' opinions, with reactions of public opinion conditioning success. The state of grand arises from celebrity and visibility linked to the more or less catchy, persuasive, or informative nature of individuals. The dignity of individuals comes from the desire to be recognized, as individuals are motivated by self-love. The repertoire of subjects includes celebrities and their supporters, opinion leaders. Objects necessary to stand out include an image or brand present in the media, conveying a message to a target audience. The investment formula corresponds to giving up secrecy, a price to pay. The relationship of magnitude is related to the potential for identification, with the great understanding others because they identify with them. Natural relations between individuals are based on influence and persuasion to attract. The harmonious figure of natural order is represented by the image among the target audience, the audience. The trial consists of events being presented before others, and individuals only achieve grandeur if it is made visible. Judgment is linked to the measurement of the convergence of opinions. Evidence consists of being known, synonymous with success. Decline is related to a situation of indifference and banality.

Public perception plays a crucial role in the opinion world. Public agents in this framework may be highly attuned to how their actions are perceived by the public, with an emphasis on visibility and reputation. Public performance is evaluated based on the opinions and judgments of others, with success ti

In the civic world: Collective entities attain states of grandeur. The civic city relies on the authority of a "disembodied sovereign," and sovereignty is realized through the convergence of human wills of citizens expressed in the general will, focused on the common interest. According to [63]'s social contract, the contracting parties are considered members of what is sovereign and also "co-particular."

The social contract is a fundamental act that, according to [63], exerts two actions at once contrary and connected on individuals, called a "balance" or "compensation," constituting a sacrifice favorable to all, founding and justifying grandeur. The general will is expressed in the exercise of suffrage.

Each member of the city possesses "three different wills": their own will, tending to their particular advantage; the common will of magistrates, relating to the prince's advantage; and the sovereign will, general both as the State considered as a whole and in relation to the government considered as a part of the whole. Grandeur is represented in the form of a quality of consciousness.

The common superior principle is constituted by the preeminence of the collective, collective consciousness, or the general will. The state of grand is characterized by what is regulatory and representative. The dignity of individuals is linked to their aspiration for civic rights, for participation. The repertoire of subjects includes collective entities and their representatives such as parties and offices. Objects include legal forms, laws, decrees, and courts. The investment formula is made in progress, in a dynamic vision. The relationship of magnitude is linked to delegation relationships, such as membership and representation. Natural relations between individuals may involve gathering for collective action, mobilization, and speaking out. The harmonious figure of natural order is represented by the democratic republic and representative institutions. The trial involves demonstrations defending a just cause. Judgment is linked to the verdict of the ballot, the vote. Evidence is represented by laws, statutes, and legal rules. Decline would be division, isolation, and individualism.

The civic world emphasizes collective decision-making and adherence to shared values. Public agents operating in this context may view public performance through the lens of the common good and participatory governance. Grandeur may be associated with effective collaboration, adherence to legal frameworks, and the pursuit of civic ideals.

In the market world: The common superior principle is represented by competition, a result of individuals' actions motivated by desires pushing them to possess the same objects and scarce goods. The state of grand is linked to the convergence of desires expressing price. The dignity of individuals includes interest, desire, and selfishness. The repertoire of subjects consists of competitors, businessmen, sellers, and clients. Objects are wealth and luxury items. The investment formula is opportunism, freedom, openness, and detachment. The relationship of magnitude is the fact of possessing and being able to possess. Natural relations between individuals are interest-based relationships, such as buying, selling, negotiating, and currency. The harmonious figure of natural order is the market. The trial is done in conducting business, a "concluded deal." Judgment is made by price, justified value. Evidence is obtaining money, profits, results, and rewards. Decline would be the servitude of money.

In the market world, competition and the pursuit of individual interests are paramount. Public agents influenced by this framework may approach public performance with a focus on efficiency, results, and individual achievement. The market-oriented perspective may prioritize measurable outcomes, reflecting a more results-driven approach to public service.

In the industrial world: It is a world where technical objects and scientific methods occupy a central place. In the market grandeur, the identification of external goods requires detachment from people and oneself so that these objects can serve as a support for transactions.

The construction of the industrial city is developed by [64]through a critique of [63]. In his book "On the Industrial System," [64]challenges "metaphysicians and legalists" opposed to "industrialists and scholars." He proposes the "elaboration of the positive drawn from works" to establish a "social physiology of organized bodies," where society is described in the traits of an organized machine. Society is also susceptible to treatment for pathologies (hygiene rules).

In the industrial world: It is a universe where technical objects and scientific methods occupy a central place. In the market context, the identification of external goods requires detachment from individuals and oneself so that these objects can be used as support for transactions. The construction of the industrial city at [64]is based on a critique of [63]. In his work "On the Industrial System," [64]questions the "metaphysicians and legalists" who oppose "industrialists and scholars." He proposes the "elaboration of the positive drawn from works" to establish a "social physiology of organized bodies," where society is depicted as an organized machine. Society is also susceptible to treatment for pathologies (hygiene rules). The industrial city is founded on the principle of the "objectivity of things where a social system naturally forms." Legalists must create laws that best favor the prosperity of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. According to [64], a natural association should be considered as an industrial enterprise.

The industrial world values efficiency and systematization. Public agents adopting this framework may seek to streamline public processes, implement technological solutions, and view public service as a well-organized system. The emphasis may be on optimizing performance through scientific methods and technological advancements.

The authors present the different worlds based on the analysis of manuals and guides aimed at teaching how to behave discerningly in situations governed by each form of common good. The common superior principle is efficiency and performance in the organization. The state of grand is characterized by what is performant, reliable, and operational, while

what is inefficient, random, and inactive is considered small. The dignity of individuals originates from their work and energy. The repertoire of subjects includes professionals (experts, specialists, managers), and objects are the means (tools, methods, plans). Investment is made in progress, in a dynamic vision, and the relationship of magnitude is linked to the potential to master. Natural relations between beings are found in "the regular functioning of beings and machines," and the harmony of natural order is reflected in organization and the system. The trial consists of tests, start-ups, and achievements, and judgment must be effective and correct, with everything needing to work. Evidence passes through the measurement and proof of temporal regularity. Decline would be instrumental action, treating people as things.

However, this conventionalist framework emphasizes that individuals are not necessarily permanently anchored in one world. They can shift to another depending on work situations. Thus, a strategic management of "states of grandeur" can be observed. The worlds proposed by [1] provide a comprehensive and nuanced reference framework that can be applied to examine how public agents define and perceive public performance. Each world represents a distinct set of principles and values governing social interactions and order. Understanding how public agents navigate these worlds offers insights into their varied perspectives on public performance. To explore these different worlds, we adopt an interpretative perspective that allows us to grasp the complexity of reality by sharing the actors' worldviews. This leads us to a profound understanding of the main constitutive dimensions of their perception of performance through the analysis of the representations to which they refer on this subject. By juxtaposing these worlds, an analysis of how public agents move between or combine these frameworks can provide a deeper understanding of their approach to public performance. For example, a public agent might draw from the civic world's emphasis on collective decision-making while also incorporating market-oriented strategies for achieving efficiency.

VI. CONCLUSION:

This academic inquiry has navigated the complex terrain of public administration, focusing on the intricate facets of public agents' perception of public performance. Through a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual analysis, we have illuminated the multifaceted nature of the performance concept, with a specific lens on the public sector. The exploration of various characterization approaches and theoretical models has provided a foundational understanding of the challenges and dimensions inherent in conceptualizing performance within this context.

A significant contribution of this study lies in its dedicated attention to the often-neglected dimension of how public agents perceive public performance. By addressing the phenomenon of post-bureaucratization and the evolving mindset of public agents, we have acknowledged the transformative nature of contemporary public management. The integration of the theory of conventions as a novel analytical framework has further enriched our exploration, offering a nuanced perspective for understanding how public agents interpret and construct performance.

Drawing inspiration from [1] conventionalist theory, our approach has sought to unravel the subjective aspects of public agents' perceptions. This transition to a conventionalist framework has been instrumental in highlighting the fundamental elements that contribute to the characterization of performance within public organizations. By leveraging conventionalist perspectives, our research has provided valuable insights into the social and organizational structures shaping the interpretation and construction of performance in the public sector.

As public administrations continue to evolve, this paper underscores the importance of considering the subjective dimensions of public agents' perceptions in the discourse on performance management. By acknowledging the influence of conventions and shared meanings in shaping these perceptions, policymakers and practitioners can refine strategies to enhance the quality of public services, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective and responsive public administration. Ultimately, this research advocates for a holistic and nuanced understanding of public performance, recognizing the dynamic interplay of subjective interpretations within the complex landscape of contemporary public management.

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