# Teleworking As A Form Of Incremental Innovation In The PublicService

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# Summary:

The widespread use of teleworking in the public sector has been mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic, althoughthere were successful experiences in the public sector in the pre-pandemic period. This theoretical article, of a reflective and interpretive nature, aims to show that teleworking can be seen as an innovation to an existing product or service. In this way, it was possible to infer that teleworking, being a form of incremental innovation, can provide a viable alternative to face-to-face work and contribute to the sustainable development of organizations, as well as improving their processes through the use of technological tools. The research suggests that more studies be carriedout on the subject, focusing on analyzing the results of its implementation. A bibliographical review was used to carryout the research.

**Keyword:** Service Innovation; Telework; Public Management.

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#### I. Introduction

The aim of this article is to discuss the relationship between innovation in services and teleworking. To this end, it will discuss the applicability of teleworking in the public service and conceptualize innovation in services, seeking to understand whether teleworking can be considered a form of innovation in services applicable to the publicsector.

The world is constantly changing, driven by technological advances, globalization and the development of human capital. In this context, the search for innovation has become a topic of growing interest for public and privateorganizations.

For the Public Administration, innovation in services involves implementing significant changes aimed at achieving effectiveness, efficiency and effectiveness in the management of public affairs. Faced with this challenge, government entities are increasingly committed to improving both the quality and quantity of current practices <sup>29</sup>.

In the workplace, new ways of carrying out professional activities have been rethought, especially teleworking, which has emerged with significant relevance in recent years, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, triggered by the coronavirus.

Teleworking offers a number of advantages, such as better quality of life, work-family balance, flexible working hours and cost savings, but also challenges, such as the teleworker's lack of adaptation, communication and control <sup>14</sup>

Therefore, exploring the topic of innovation in public administration, especially in the context of teleworking, presents important challenges and considerations in the face of the constantly evolving demands of the current scenario.

In this way, this study is a theoretical article of a reflective and interpretative nature, which reflects the following question: can teleworking be considered a form of innovation in services applicable to the public sector? In this context, we identify the relevance of this work, which aims to promote reflection on teleworking in the public sector, an area still little explored in studies, from the perspective of innovation.

Thus, the development of this theoretical article is justified by the need to understand the potential benefits and challenges of teleworking in the context of public administration, from the perspective of innovation. It should benoted that this work was built on reflections based on the literature, offering a concise overview of the main relevant concepts, exploring the existing theme and incorporating contributions from various authors.

A literature review was the method adopted in this research with the aim of discussing the relationship between teleworking, innovation in services and public service. Key words referring to the theme and sub-themes were used. The literature on which this study was based was accessed by consulting academic works and scientific

articles available on the Web of Science, Capes, Google Scholar and Science Direct databases.

To this end, the paper is structured in three sections. The first section deals with teleworking in the public service, presenting a literature review that explores the main studies on the subject. The second section discusses the theoretical model of innovation in services, with an emphasis on incremental innovation. Finally, the third section discusses teleworking as an innovation in the public service, demonstrating how this modality can improve processes and contribute to the performance of organizations.

# II. Teleworking In The Public Service: A Literature Review

Society's demand for fast, quality public services has been increasing in recent years, which has led different public organizations to rethink their culture and structure in order to achieve better efficiency and productivity <sup>23</sup>.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has opened up many opportunities for change, leading everyone to rethinktheir lifestyles and ways of life. This moment of crisis therefore represented a milestone for transformation in the professional environment <sup>2</sup>.

Digital transformation in the world of work offers a promising and stimulating scenario for promoting socialdevelopment, especially in a post-pandemic context <sup>2</sup>. In this sense, the emergence of new technologies has made it possible to make the means and places of work more flexible, enabling the adoption of teleworking <sup>23</sup>.

Two elements are important for classifying the work activity as teleworking: the place where it is carried out and the technological resources used for communication <sup>1</sup>. Thus, teleworkers must work away from the company's physical headquarters, using technology to communicate with their colleagues and superiors. With teleworking, processes that previously only had a physical existence now also exist virtually <sup>28</sup>.

Within the Public Administration, teleworking has found greater acceptance. Despite this, there are still obstacles to its application, due to negative cultural perceptions that still prevail in relation to this type of work <sup>28</sup>. However, its adoption in public organizations has proved to be a way of balancing cost savings with increased productivity <sup>23</sup>.

Among the benefits of teleworking, the following can be listed: less financial expenditure to keep the publicmachine running, a cultural transition from control by points to control by results, an increase in the quality of publicservices and the quality of life of civil servants <sup>2</sup>. Still on the subject of the quality of life of civil servants, Fayad andNunes' work <sup>13</sup> indicates several positive points and some concerns of teleworking civil servants. The improvements for civil servants that flexible working hours and teleworking can bring were presented by Nascimento, Nunes and Souza Junior <sup>22</sup>.

Despite the many advantages offered by teleworking, some scholars also see possible damage to interpersonal relationships, which can negatively affect collaboration between employees <sup>18,7</sup>. To mitigate the potential negative impacts on the relationship between managers and subordinates, work programs should be planned and implemented with caution, and it is essential that managers develop the necessary sensitivity to promote a healthy and productive environment <sup>9</sup>.

Teleworking in the Public Administration has been strongly favored by the implementation of the Electronic Information System (SEI), as it allows portability and remote access via electronic devices. It also offers greater information security and reduced paper costs <sup>23</sup>. It should be noted that the SEI itself can be considered an innovationin services for the public service <sup>8</sup>. Remote work has been adopted in several countries for decades, however, in Brazil, this type of work emerged timidly, gaining prominence only in recent years, specifically with the emergence of Law No. 12.551/2011, which amended Article 6 of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) equating telematic and computerized means to the control and supervision of work <sup>20</sup>.

The regulation of teleworking in the private sector was instituted by Law No. 13,467/2017. However, this law does not cover the federal public sphere, as the regulation lacks specific authorizations and regulations <sup>24</sup>.

In the Brazilian public sector, the Federal Data Processing Service - SERPRO was a pioneer in adopting teleworking with a pilot project in  $2005^{32}$ .

In addition to SERPRO, other public institutions that have begun to adopt the teleworking model are the Federal Court of Auditors, the Federal Revenue Service, the National Institute of Social Security and the Superior Labor Court <sup>20</sup>.

In order to regulate this type of work in the public administration, Normative Instruction (IN) No. 1/2018 implemented the management program, a pilot experience in which participating public servants are exempt from frequency control, promoting the adoption of monitoring and control of the goals outlined in the work plan <sup>17</sup>

The Normative Instruction <sup>3</sup>, defines teleworking as a type of management program in which the civil servantperforms his or her duties away from the unit's premises using equipment and technologies that guarantee that the duties can be carried out remotely.

With the emergence of the health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, IN No. 19/2020 determined that the bodies and entities of the Civil Personnel System of the Federal Public Administration -

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SIPEC adopt protective measures to deal with the public health emergency, including guidelines for remote work during this periodof emergency <sup>4</sup>.

In July 2020, the Federal Government created a milestone for the implementation of the management program with the publication of the Normative Instruction <sup>5</sup>. This normative instituted procedures to regulate the activities of teleworking employees, establishing the periodic evaluation of their activities and goals <sup>15</sup>.

The year 2023 was marked by significant progress in the management program, especially with the publication of the Normative Instruction <sup>6</sup>, which establishes the Management and Performance Program in public administration. The main objectives of the program are to stimulate institutional planning, optimize the management of public resources, encourage innovation and digital transformation, improve the performance of teams and individuals, as well as contribute to health and quality of life at work and contribute to environmental sustainability in the public sector <sup>6</sup>.

### III. Incremental Innovation: Theoretical Model

In recent decades, public and private organizations have been investing more and more in innovation in orderto boost their production lines, optimize processes and improve public policies. According to <sup>27</sup>, innovation is a "catalyst for competitive differentiation, which is constantly sought by institutions wishing to obtain lasting competitive advantages in order to get ahead of their competitors".

Brandão et al. <sup>2</sup>, state that innovation is a broad concept that encompasses various ideas and practices aimedat improving, transforming and developing different sectors. The development of research into innovation has advanced significantly in order to solve the difficulties faced by organizations and meet the constant demands of the economic market. The concept of innovation can be understood as the application of innovative methods and actions to develop new products and services or to improve existing products or services <sup>2</sup>.

For Silva et al. <sup>27</sup>, innovation can be described as the implementation of new ideas in order to create value foran organization, resulting in the creation of a new service, system, process or the improvement of any of these singularities. In this context, innovation promotes relevant changes in both organizations and society, fostering continuous development that incorporates different perspectives within an organization. Innovation therefore drives the transformation of new products and services, as well as their development and implementation.

It can be seen that innovations are new things that add value to the enterprise. More precisely, it can be understood as a new way of doing things, aimed at better meeting society's demands. According to Escrig-Tena et al. <sup>12</sup> joint participation between "organizations, such as customers and suppliers, by sharing knowledge and resources, canfoster the capacity for innovation". Thus, it can be inferred that innovations promote improvements in the quality and efficiency of service provision.

Digital innovation is also an increasingly present reality in the Brazilian public sector <sup>30</sup>. In this context, withthe advance of new information technologies since the 1980s, there has been significant concern about the "massive displacement of jobs and the loss of skills" <sup>10</sup>. In contrast, information technologies have brought about the re- qualification of the workforce, improved the quality of service provided to the client, especially in terms of speed of service delivery, and made it possible to work remotely and outside office hours <sup>10</sup>.

It is important to distinguish between innovation and invention, as these terms are often used in a similar way. According to Silva et al. <sup>27</sup>, innovation is a process that is crucial to increasing competitiveness and is generally profit-oriented. On the other hand, invention refers to the creation of something new, which does not necessarily have an immediate profit-making purpose. However, inventions can evolve into innovations that generate economic valueand contribute to the success of companies.

For Silva et al. <sup>27</sup>, innovation can mean discontinuing a certain service that is considered inefficient in orderto drive the improvement of new services and processes to gain efficiency and profits for organizations. In this context, <sup>21</sup> stresses the need for companies to ensure competitive advantage by transferring knowledge for innovation and sustainable performance and adjusting their structures to adapt to market changes. They also point out that knowledgetransfer is an organizational phenomenon in the search for the creation of new products or processes that provide competitive advantage for organizations.

Silva et al. <sup>27</sup>, emphasize that organizations that are exceptionally successful in their ventures use different types of innovation to remain in the market. The authors point out that innovation is linked to the company's economyand management. They incorporate various types of innovation to increase the likelihood of success, performance and productivity in the face of the economic and technological scenario in which they find themselves.

One of these innovations is "service innovation". The term innovation in services is used to refer to various concepts, including the innovative result, the development process and the design of new services. In this sense, as pointed out by <sup>16</sup>, the term "service innovation" can also cover the description of the process of developing a productor service. Furthermore, according to the same authors, the concept of innovation in services is inadequately defined and understood, and clarity about innovation in services has not improved over time.

Mahavapour et al. <sup>19</sup>, state that innovation in services is seen as one of the main sources of competitive advantage between the market and organizations. They also point out that technological advances have caused

significant changes in the field of service innovation, which is fundamental to the growth and differentiation of organizations.

Among the types of innovations in services, incremental innovation is one of the most widely used, as it seeksto improve processes by adapting or adjusting existing products and services rather than implementing new ones, andis easier to apply. It can be defined as a successive modification of an existing process, product or service, without causing a substantial transformation in its basic structure. Silva et al. <sup>27</sup> point out that "for an innovation to be considered incremental, it must be an improvement on an existing product, process or service."

Innovation in services, including incremental innovation, is not restricted to specific sectors and can arise inareas such as hospitality, cleaning services and elderly care, although these service sectors are less seen in terms of innovation <sup>10</sup>.

Djellal et al. <sup>10</sup>, explain that, with technological advances, "the first wave of computerization (introduction of mainframes) resulted in incremental process innovations in the back-office activities of this type of public service organization, to increase efficiency and speed, and especially to reduce costs, such as computerization of personnel records and salaries." In addition, there have been other waves of computerization which, with technological advances to improve public services, have made successive improvements to PCs, e-mails, interactive services, etc.

Although incremental innovations provide improvements, adjustments and adjustments to existing products and services, they can also lead to a perception of a lack of innovation and a stagnation of these products and services. This is why institutions must be attentive to market changes so that they can add real and significant value.

Escrig-Tena et al. <sup>12</sup>, point out that the presence and applicability of specific procedures is not an obstacle to the innovation process in an organization. Thus, organizations should understand that the effectiveness of Quality Management in promoting incremental innovation tends to be improved with the formalization of the innovation process. The authors consider that the existing literature presents varied results on the relationship between Quality Management (QM) practices and innovation performance. For them, most studies suggest a direct relationship between QM and innovation, without considering the possible variables that can influence this relationship. Thus, quality management and incremental innovation are intrinsically related and should be aligned with the organization's business strategies, since both aim to continuously improve products and services.

# IV. Teleworking As An Innovation In The Public Service

Innovations play a crucial role, as organizations need to ensure competitive advantage by transferring knowledge for innovation and adjusting their structures to adapt to changes in the market. Innovation in public administration seeks to improve the efficiency of public management, providing quality in the service provided, bothin terms of transparency and accountability of the activities offered to citizens.

However, public services are under political influence, which puts them outside the rationalist economy of innovation. They often suffer from a lack of resources, which could be dedicated to risky innovation projects" <sup>10</sup>. Although the public service has characteristics that often inhibit innovation, it is gaining more and more ground in thefederal public administration <sup>8</sup>.

Djellal et al. <sup>10</sup>, point out that "there is little pressure from service consumers, or else this pressure is dispersedby the rigid bureaucratic structures that induce inertia in the public sector". They also point out that some professional groups, such as doctors and teachers, may hesitate to invest in innovation for fear that their privileged positions may be threatened. However, there are also exceptions, especially where basic research in universities and laboratories canbe a source of new knowledge and creative ideas on how to apply it. For their part, the authors reinforce that "bureaucratic organizations and their civil servants are considered to have no incentive to innovate because they operate in protected or monopolistic environments".

As a result, it can be inferred that public institutions are less likely to innovate, are strongly risk-averse and reluctant to experiment with innovative products and services, unlike private companies.

One of the fronts related to innovation in public administration is teleworking, the result of incremental innovation. Teleworking has emerged as a form of incremental innovation in the public service, promoting continuous and gradual improvements by allowing work to be carried out remotely. This results in optimizing processes, reducing costs and improving workers' quality of life.

Teleworking not only improves the operational efficiency of institutions, but also contributes to sustainability by reducing the environmental impact caused by employees' daily commute. Thus, teleworking represents an incremental innovation which, in line with quality management and environmental preservation, strengthens the capacity of public and private institutions to adapt to new contemporary demands and challenges, promoting sustainable and efficient development.

The need for face-to-face work is being rethought in order to promote quality of life at work <sup>2</sup>. Issues related to urban mobility are important nowadays, as they have an impact on the environment and on the physical and mentalwell-being of workers, who often have to commute for hours to work in person in increasingly large cities with traffic problems.

Teleworking, as an incremental innovation in the public service, essentially seeks to improve work processesand deliveries already present in the public sector in a non-disruptive way. Incremental innovation makes it possible to implement and improve teleworking, allowing tasks to be carried out remotely, away from the traditional workplace, through the use of communication technologies. Work, which used to be carried out almost exclusively in person, is now also done remotely, which allows public organizations to save costs related to renting space, electricity, water and other consumables, reduce the number of cars on the streets and allow teleworkers to make better use of their time.

Teleworking has proved successful in the COVID-19 pandemic, showing public managers the viability of applying this model in the long term in an increasingly digitalized world, aligning the professional world with sustainable development <sup>2</sup>.

Stoian et al. <sup>31</sup>, argue that innovation must be incorporated into an efficient and sustainable teleworking system, and that it is essential to encourage innovation in this type of work by adopting more specialized technological solutions that ensure productivity, communication and collaboration between remote team members.

### V. Conclusion

This study explored the theme of innovation in services, focusing on the context of public administration, especially with regard to teleworking, reflecting on the importance of innovation in services for progress and improvement, especially within the scope of public administration, enabling these entities to face challenges and adaptto changes in a more efficient and effective manner.

Innovation in services is a topic that addresses current and necessary contexts for developing processes and products in the face of challenges to meet changes in the economic market, which stimulates the constant search for research on the subject.

Research into innovation in services is growing, but it is necessary to worry about its applicability in the context of public organizations. Theories alone are not enough. Substantial changes are needed to implement innovations, including service innovations. For this process to be successful, it must be aligned with the organization's organizational culture, leaders and staff.

However, the success of innovation doesn't just depend on the leader and their good training. It also depends on attracting new talent, forming a team that fosters new ideas, selects those that have potential for implementation and puts them into practice in a successful way <sup>25</sup>.

The current scenario is undergoing several changes, leading the public sector to seek new forms of management, improve its performance and seek innovation in services. This study highlighted the incorporation of new technologies to improve the efficiency of services, training and professional development of civil servants, ensuring that they are able to deal with new demands and technologies. Participatory management is also relevant, involving citizens and civil servants in decision-making processes, which promotes a more transparent and responsive administration.

It can be inferred that teleworking is a form of service innovation applicable to the public sector, of the incremental type, which provides a viable alternative to face-to-face work and contributes to the sustainable development of organizations, bringing improvements to their processes through the use of technological tools. Its implementation was mandatory during the COVID-19 pandemic, but even in the pre-pandemic period there were somesuccessful experiences in the public sector. Currently, with the health crisis weakening, teleworking is in a process of consolidation and improvement, with the advancement of legislation on the subject, regulating and ostensibly welcoming this professional modality in public organizations.

This research can contribute to public managers, society and anyone interested in innovation in the public service. Teleworking is a form of innovation, however, as this phenomenon is still recent, it is suggested that more studies be carried out on the subject, focusing on analyzing the results of its implementation.

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