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Digitalization and Human Resources Management Practices on Public Administration Studies. What is the Impact of Digitalization on Trial Court Management?

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Abstract

This paper aims to present an analysis of the most relevant studies on human resources management and digitalization in the public sector through an overview of the existing academic literature by focusing specifically on the trial court organization. Although studies on the impact of digitalization and HRM practices on public administration have a common background, they have evolved separately: this work identifies and analyzes the conditions that favor the contamination between these two scientific fields, but also how these different studies interact in a specific case such as in the trial court organization. The bibliometric analysis was employed to analyze 336 articles drawn from 194 main journals (ranging from 1985 to 2022). The findings show that the studies on HRM and digitization in the context of the trial courts are still scarce. This article provides outstanding theoretical contributions concerned scholars and managers of digitalization and HRM on public administration and their semi-permeable boundaries. Research limitations and avenues for further research are given.

Keywords – Digitalization; Trial Court; Public Administration; Bibliometric Analysis; Human Resources Management.

Paper type – Research Paper

Sommario

Digitalizzazione e pratiche di gestione delle risorse umane negli studi sulla pubblica amministrazione. Qual è l'impatto della digitalizzazione sulla gestione del tribunale di primo grado?– Il contributo si propone di presentare un'analisi degli studi più rilevanti sulla gestione delle risorse umane e sulla digitalizzazione nel settore pubblico attraverso una panoramica della letteratura accademica esistente, concentrandosi specificamente sull'organizzazione del tribunale di primo grado. Sebbene gli studi sull'impatto della digitalizzazione e delle pratiche di gestione delle risorse umane nella pubblica amministrazione abbiano un background comune, essi si sono evoluti separatamente: questo lavoro identifica e analizza le condizioni che favoriscono la contaminazione tra i due ambiti scientifici, ma anche come questi diversi studi interagiscano in un caso specifico, ovvero l'organizzazione del tribunale di primo grado. L'analisi bibliometrica è stata utilizzata su 336 articoli tratti da 194 principali riviste (dal 1985 al 2022). I risultati mostrano che gli studi sulla gestione delle risorse umane e sulla digitalizzazione nell'ambito dei tribunali sono ancora scarsi. Nel complesso, l'articolo fornisce contributi teorici rivolti a studiosi e manager della digitalizzazione e della gestione delle risorse umane nella pubblica amministrazione, intesa nei suoi confini semi-permeabili. Vengono definiti i limiti della ricerca e le possibilità di ulteriori sviluppi della stessa.

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1 Introduction

Change management is the process used to implement changes through actions such as redefining employees' tasks and training activities relating to the new digital skills, changing the performance evaluating system and choosing new staff selection criteria, or defining the approach to involve and motivate people and the approach that facilitate the transition towards a new cultural paradigm (Boyne, Meier, O'Toole & Walker, 2005; Canonico, De Nito, Esposito, Martinez, & Pezzillo Iacono, 2017).

Change management approaches, methodologies and tools relating to digitization within public administration are conceived as collaborative, involving all different organizational actors in designing activities and operational processes using a bottom-up model (Jakimowicz & Rzczkowski, 2021).

Hence, public administration (PA) is associated with the management of innovation rules and procedure and the implementation of a behavioral approach as the implementation of effective technology (Hinna, Mameli, & Mangia, 2016; Di Virgilio, Bova, Di Pietro, & Sheehan, 2014; Taylor & Helfat, 2009; Manzoni & Angehrn, 1997).

Digital transformation in the public sector is more difficult as it involves reshaping and managing organizational structures, dynamics, processes, practices, organizational and inter-organizational tools, and the relations of the various stakeholders (Sidorenko, Bartsits, & Khisamova, 2019).

For this reason, scholars have studied the role of the human resources (HR), 'fit' with performance in a range of contextual factors which include the external environment and internal structures (Knies & Leisink, 2018). Empirical evidences show that the positive impact of human resources management (HRM) on organizational performance, in term of improvement of productivity, profitability and reduction of employee turnover rates is highly influenced by digital transformation (Arthur, 1994; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Van De Voorde, Paauwe, & Van Veldhoven, 2010; Karikari, Boateng, & Ocansey, 2015; Mondal, Di Virgilio, & Das, 2022).

The need of a well-performing, efficient and innovative public service has become more impellent within public organizations today. This process started with the first attempts to implement the reforms inspired by the New Public management (NPM) that were developed during the 1980s (Hood, 1991). In fact, NPM introduces the conceptual linkage between the public service and the outcome criteria (efficiency, effectiveness, customer value, transparency), as underlined earlier by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), later stage by many other scholars (Capalbo & Palumbo, 2013; Kuipers et al., 2014; Capalbo, Sorrentino, & Smarra, 2018; Higgs, Kuipers, & Steijn, 2022).

The results of these reforms are not the same in all the contexts in which they have been applied, as shown in many works including Dan and Politt (2015) and Ibsen, Larsen, Madsen, and Due (2011). There are many factors that can explain the success or failure of a reform, but among these the role of the human resource is essential (Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Nijenhuis, 2017). Wynen, Boon, Kleizen,

and Verhoest (2020), in fact, emphasize the role of human resources in the success of public administration reforms, who are responsible for providing services, implementing reforms and supporting innovation through their knowledge, competence and expertise. Indeed, Ongaro and Van Thiel (2018) sustain that the complexity of administrative processes determines the depletion of human resources hindering the innovation processes of public organizations. Consequently, to improve HRM practices could help recruit and retain key staff, improve effectiveness and foster a performance-oriented culture by HR assuming a more strategic role (Covell, 2016; Ingraham & Rubaii-Barrett, 2007; Knies, Boselie, Gould-Williams, & Vandenabeele, 2017; Knies & Leisink, 2018; Mondal, Di Virgilio, & Das, 2022). The operationalization of HR policies and employee-facing roles are traditionally seen as part of administrative duties and routine tasks such as welfare and labor relations.

Nonetheless the role of HR function is heavily influenced by the distinctive features of public organizations. First of all, public organizations are open to public scrutiny and monitoring, and therefore have a wider range of stakeholders compared to the private sector; this means that their mission can have multiple goals and priorities (Rainey, 2009). The lack of credibility of the HR function in the public sector has created the perception that it is peripheral and relatively powerless in comparison with more powerful groups competing for resources. Klingner (1993) observes that under strategic HRM the traditional role of the HR function in the public sector of balancing efficiency and responsiveness with individual rights and social equity is drifting towards cost and accountability. Despite this, the role and activities of the HR function are still thought to be influenced by traditional public sector values, and that ensuring fair treatment of employees and being a good employer are significant factors together with strategic pressures. This process has become increasingly complex due to the digitization process (Abishov, Polyak, Seidullaeva, Kermeshova, & Sabirov, 2018).

In particular, the use of modern information technologies in judicial activity allows us not only to expand and facilitate access to information, but also to ensure the implementation of the constitutional right of citizens to access justice towards creating a digital justice. Through digitalization, governments are tasked with standardizing the interpretation of laws, minimizing cases of miscarriage of justice, and thereby increasing the efficiency of the administration of justice and the efficient use of justice (Abishov, Polyak, Seidullaeva, Kermeshova, & Sabirov, 2018; Kovtun, Vinokurov, Kapustina, Polenov, & Ozerov, 2020).

The international trends in the development of digital justice and the problems that slow down the transition to a digital form of justice are less considered in the literature, despite the numerous experiments implemented starting from 2015 onwards (Langbroek *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, even though the scholars studied the impact of justice reforms and considered trial courts as organizations for

many years, the studies that analyze the impacts of reforms on organizational aspects of trial courts are scarce (Steelman, Goerdt, & McMillan, 2000; Shomade & Hartley, 2010; Zan, 2010; Saman & Haider, 2013).

As a result, scholars did not sufficiently deal with the impact of organizational aspects on court performance and the various aspects of caseload management (Steelman, Goerdt, & McMillan, 2000).

Consequently, the ultimate goal of this work is to stimulate researches on HRM and digitization in public administration, focusing in the context of the trial courts and their semi-permeable boundaries, as shown by a bibliometric analysis of 336 articles drawn from 194 main journals (ranging from 1985 to 2022) and the implementation of the network analysis of the authors' keywords.

2 A bibliometric analysis of the academic literature

Bibliometric analysis has been used in science mapping to quickly identify the research structure within a field of study and provide accuracy to the traditional literature reviews (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Recently it has also been used in research trend studies to help identify a research trend specific to a country or mapping a specific field of study and topic (Dotsika & Watkins, 2017), and highlight evolutionary characteristics of a discipline's development (Ye, Kueh, Hou, Liu, & Yu, 2020). The quality of the literary review can be enhanced by using the bibliometric analysis which entails a transparent, systematic and reproducible review process. It allows to map the research fields and prestigious work without subjective bias, which is essential for the holistic approach to the literature process (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). In this study the web-based interface of R-package ('bibliometrix 3.0') 'biblioshiny' has been used.

There are countless literature reviews of current trends of HRM and digitalization in the public sector, but very few studies on trial court management which are also up to date.

The aim of this work is to evaluate the impact of HRM and digitalization in public sector and in the trial court organization. With the use of a bibliometric and systematic literature review we aim to identify the main current trends in caseload management, and how these are influenced by the new HRM and digitalization practices. A keyword network analysis of HRM research and digitalization in public sector and in trial court management was performed.

Specifically, this study aims to provide an answer to the following research questions:

RQ1. What topics and keywords researchers have studied HRM digitalization in PA?

RQ2. What topics and keywords researchers have studied on digitalization in trial court management?

RQ3. What topics and keywords researchers have studied on HRM digitalization in trial court management?

3 Methodology

The search criteria and the selection of database were determined by the aim of the study and its research questions. This study aims to analyze the research trend of HRM and digitalization in the public sector and in trial court management by comparing the relationship between the keywords given by the authors. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, the Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS) database were chosen which offers access to multiple academic databases published worldwide. According to Zupic and Čater (2015), it is possible to determine the research streams and themes in a specific branch of literature by analyzing the literature. Hence, we decided to adopt a bibliometric analysis approach as it is considered to be the most suitable in order to explore the development of literature and academic discourse about impact investing.

This study follows a five steps workflow (as illustrates in Figure 1) to perform the bibliometric analysis, and was employed “Bibliometrix”, an open-access software developed by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) to facilitate the completion of the recommended workflow.

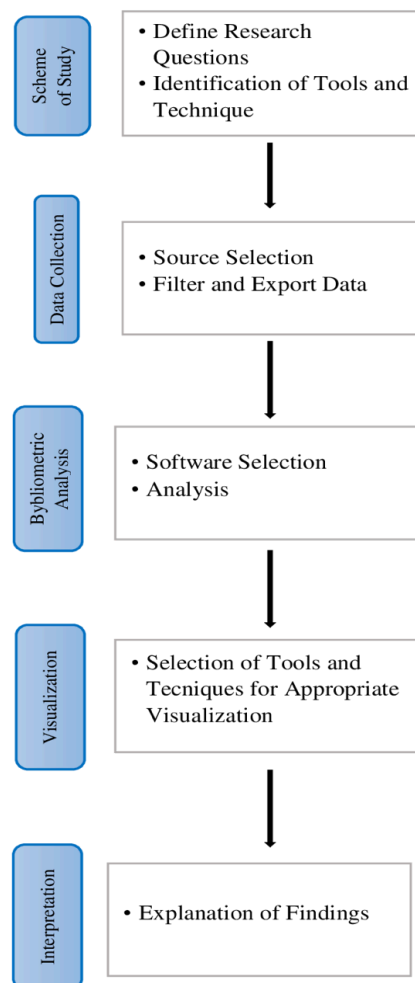
The use of Bibliometrix ensure objectivity thanks to an automated process embedded in its source code. As Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) point out, in this paper, we propose a unique tool, developed in the R language, which follows a classic logical bibliometric workflow that we reconstruct. The replicability derives from objectivity in the sense that researches arrive at the same result by using the same procedures and similar source documents. Finally, the flexibility it offers allows to create a dataset, split it into clusters and analyze the dataset still keeping the clustering.

3.1 Data collection

The literature review was conducted by identifying existing studies on HRM and digitalization research trends in the context of public administration through the procedure of Galvagno and Dalli (2014). First, we singled out a group of relevant articles by using field related: i.e., human resource(s), human resource(s) management, personnel manage(ment), HR, and HRM, digitalization, change

management, change organization, information processing management, big data and public administration, big data and public management, performance trial, performance justice, duration of trial, efficiency of trial, knowledge sharing upskilling reskilling, caseflow management. The data providers used are Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS) and we decided to consider only the English scientific articles of top journals in public management, and HRM, for the period that spans from 1985 to 2022. Subsequently the full text of the chosen articles was carefully reviewed and only those falling within the scope of this work were selected. For this reason, only 336 articles of the 753 collected make up our sample.

Figure 1 – The procedure of bibliometric analysis



Source: Zupic and Čater (2015)

3.2 Authors' keywords analysis

The study uses authors' keywords network analysis to delve into future research flows (Akter & Wamba, 2019). We choose the keywords, because they are a good representation of the essence of the article (Dotsika & Watkins, 2017). We decided to use authors' keywords, because some analyzed articles do not present the keywords generated by data providers of citations (for example the Keyword plus of Web of Science), despite some methodological articles, such as Zhang et al. (2016) and Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) recommend using keywords provided by data providers.

We follow the methodology illustrated by Reed (2017) to carry out the revision and recoding of keywords so as not to affect the results of network analysis.

The network analysis of authors' keywords allows to explore the semantic framework of literature (Chen & Xiao, 2016; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Han, Chae, & Passmore, 2019). We employ the multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) for the keyword mapping; MDS states that keywords are more related as good as they are closer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2009). Finally, we use the clustering analysis, that measures as the keywords are associated with a topic by a smart local moving algorithm (Waltman & Van Eck, 2013).

Keyword level analysis allows to identify the main features of the literature to which they refer by studying their position and degree of connection.

The measurement of this is made through the indicators of centrality, which associate a numerical value to a node (keyword, in our case) (Van Eck & Waltman, 2009; Waltman & Van Eck, 2013; Yoo, Jang, Byun, & Park, 2019). Obviously, the different indicators follow a different perspective (Han, Chae, & Passmore, 2019; Yoo, Jang, Byun, & Park, 2019). We adopt the degree centrality, that indicates the degree of popularity and visibility of a node.

More specifically, degree centrality assigns an importance score based on the number of links associated with each node, thus it calculates how many direct connections each node has with the other nodes in the network (Chen & Xiao, 2016; El Kouni, Karoui, & Romdhane, 2020).

In fact, the centrality degree provides easily interpretable information allowing you to understand the specific importance of a single node within the network (Yoo, Jang, Byun, & Park, 2019). Perry, Pescosolido, and Borgatti (2018) and Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) recommend using degree centrality, because it is easy to interpret and is the most popular.

4 Findings

4.1 Descriptive analysis

The Table 1 shows the main information of the sample: there are 336 articles on HRM and digitalization in public administration, 160 of which consider the impact of digitalization in the caseload management, and only 29 articles discuss about HRM and digitalization in trial courts.

The cluster HRM and digitalization in public administration (RQ1) envelopes the cluster “digitalization in the caseload management” (RQ2), which includes the cluster “HRM and digitalization in trial courts” (RQ3).

Furthermore, the Table shows that organizational studies of the trial courts start just from 2007, while these topics have been widely covered since 1985 in the public sector. The sources are 194, 87 and 19 journals respectively for the three clusters with a similar average of articles of sources equal to about 2. The analysis of annual average of publications, annual standard deviation of publication and annual median of publication shows that the distribution of number of publications of HRM and digitalization in PA is asymmetric, because there is a big difference between the values of average and media, 9 and 3, respectively. The asymmetric distribution could support the idea that there was a moment, in which the scientific production is blown up.

In the last two rows of Table 1, we indicate the number of the authors’ keywords and keywords plus, that are generated by WoS. In section 3.2, we explained why we decided to use authors’ keywords, 820 keywords allow to identify the semantic framework of literature, with the implementation of network analysis (Chen & Xiao, 2016; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Han, Chae, & Passmore, 2019).

Table 1 – Main information of the sample

Main information about data	HRM – Digitalization in PA	Digitalization in trial court management	HRM – Digitalization in trial court management
Timespan	1985:2022	2007:2022	2007:2022
Sources	194	87	19
Documents	336	160	29
Annual average of publication	9.08	10.67	1.93
Annual standard deviation of publication	30.81	10.11	2.01
Annual median of publication	3	11	3
Keywords plus	520	267	72
Author’s keywords	820	611	135

Source: Authors’ elaboration

We continue with the analysis of authors' characteristics (Table 2). The authors of three clusters present a similar behavior. In fact, the articles have about 2 authors and the involved scholars often present stable collaboration. The collaboration index present values bigger than 2, and the authors that work together produce more than one article (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Table 2 – Authors' characteristics

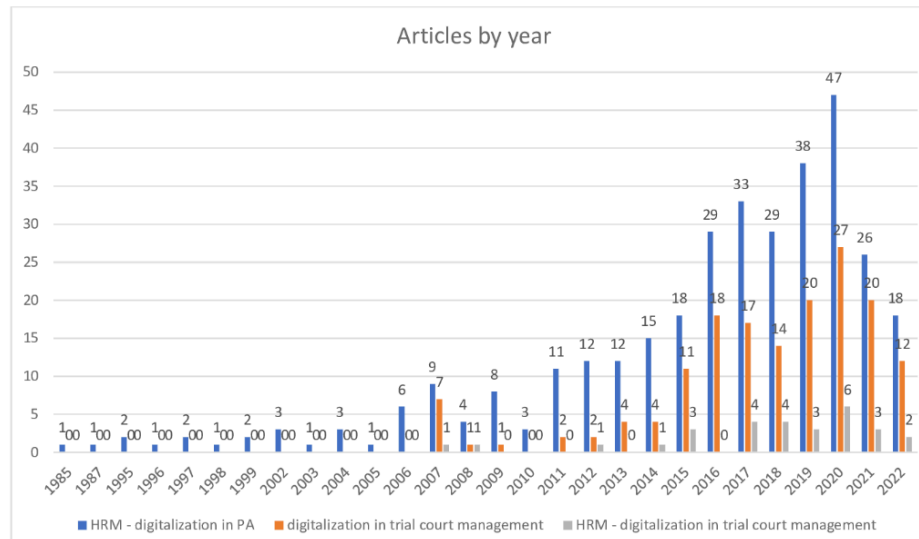
Authors	HRM – Digitalization in PA	Digitalization in trial court management	HRM – Digitalization in trial court management
Authors	532	285	55
Authors per article	1.58	1.78	1.90
Authors appearances	636	338	59
Authors of single-authored documents	163	52	9
Authors of multi-authored documents	173	233	46
Single-authored documents	199	64	11
Co-Authors per documents	1.75	2.1	2.03
Collaboration Index	2.25	2.4	2.56

Source: Authors' elaboration

We conclude the descriptive analysis with the evolution of the annual production of articles. Figure 2 allows to graphically evaluate the annual distribution of scientific production, the cluster HRM and digitization in PA has a highly asymmetric distribution; this means that the interest of the scientific community has manifested itself at a specific time.

In our case, the year 2016 saw a significant increase in scientific production; in fact, the number of articles increased from 18 in 2015 to 29 in 2016. The explanation is linked to the implementation of some experiments to apply more advanced and efficient organizational models and to introduce technological innovation in public offices and even in the trial courts (Langbroek *et al.*, 2016).

The cumulative frequency distribution confirms the analysis and previous considerations, showing that until 2015 only 34% of all scientific production had been produced (Table 3).

Figure 2 – Articles by years

Source: Authors' elaboration

4.2 Thematic cluster-level analysis

Table 4 shows the main keywords: organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover, transformational leadership, positive organizational support, performance innovative behavior, and job performance.

It is evident that none of the keywords directly associated with court management is between the most frequent. The explanation is related to the fact that the articles dealing with the impact of digitization and HRM on the efficiency of the courts are a small part of the whole sample.

Figure 3 shows summarized keywords network, each keyword color represents the association of clusters and the coordination of keywords assigned by calculation of distance measure. We found nine keyword nodes, but we focus on these related to the trial court management.

The Tables 5 and 6 report two different clusters. The two clusters are interesting, because although the two clusters are connected through Administrative justice and Organizational justice, it is clear that the issues of HRM and digitization in the context of caseflow management are considered separately. In fact, HRM issues are not related to performance improvement and digitization is not related to job performance.

Table 3 – Years of publications

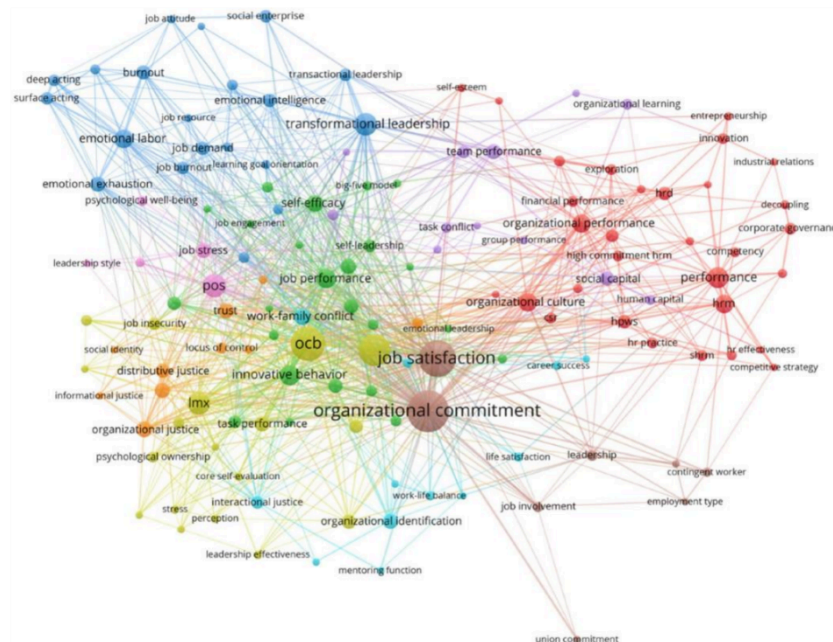
Year	HRM – Digitalization in PA			Digitalization in trial court management			HRM – Digitalization in trial court management		
	Frequency	%	Cumulative percent	Frequency	%	Cumulative percent	Frequency	%	Cumulative percent
1985	1	0.30%	0.30%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1987	1	0.30%	0.60%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1995	2	0.60%	1.20%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1996	1	0.30%	1.50%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1997	2	0.60%	2.10%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1998	1	0.30%	2.40%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
1999	2	0.60%	3.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2002	3	0.89%	3.89%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2003	1	0.30%	4.19%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2004	3	0.89%	5.08%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2005	1	0.30%	5.38%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2006	6	1.79%	7.17%	0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0.00%	0.00%
2007	9	2.68%	9.85%	7	4.38%	4.38%	1	3.45%	3.45%
2008	4	1.19%	11.04%	1	0.63%	5.00%	1	3.45%	6.90%
2009	8	2.38%	13.42%	1	0.63%	5.63%	0	0.00%	6.90%
2010	3	0.89%	14.31%	0	0.00%	5.63%	0	0.00%	6.90%
2011	11	3.27%	17.58%	2	1.25%	6.88%	0	0.00%	6.90%
2012	12	3.57%	21.15%	2	1.25%	8.13%	1	3.45%	10.34%
2013	12	3.57%	24.72%	4	2.50%	10.63%	0	0.00%	10.34%
2014	15	4.46%	29.18%	4	2.50%	13.13%	1	3.45%	13.79%
2015	18	5.36%	34.54%	11	6.88%	20.00%	3	10.34%	24.14%
2016	29	8.63%	43.17%	18	11.25%	31.25%	0	0.00%	24.14%
2017	33	9.82%	52.99%	17	10.63%	41.88%	4	13.79%	37.93%
2018	29	8.63%	61.62%	14	8.75%	50.63%	4	13.79%	51.72%
2019	38	11.31%	72.93%	20	12.50%	63.13%	3	10.34%	62.07%
2020	47	13.99%	86.92%	27	16.88%	80.00%	6	20.69%	82.76%
2021	26	7.74%	94.66%	20	12.50%	92.50%	3	10.34%	93.10%
2022	18	5.36%	100.00%	12	7.50%	100.00%	2	6.90%	100.00%
Total	336	100.00%	100.00%	160	100.00%	100.00%	29	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 4 – Main authors' keywords

Rank by frequency	Keywords	Degree centrality
1	Organizational commitment	303
2	Job satisfaction	258
3	OCB	197
4	Turnover	202
5	POS	110
6	Transformational leadership	116
7	LMX	109
8	Performance	122
9	Innovative behavior	84
10	Job performance	83

Source: Authors' elaboration

Figure 3 – Network analysis

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 5 – Administrative justice node

Keywords	Degree centrality
Administrative justice	18
OCB	16
Turnover	14
Job satisfaction	13
POS	10
Organizational commitment	10
Procedural justice	8
Innovative behavior	8
Job performance	7
Court delay reduction	5

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 6 – Digitalization node

Keywords	Degree centrality
Digitalization	26
Big data	22
Administrative justice	18
Organizational justice	13
Procedural justice	8
Court delay reduction	7
Performance	7
Change management	6

Source: Authors' elaboration

Thanks to the network analysis we have identified the two streams of research on which focusing our attention in order to identify best practices useful to practitioners. We deal with this in the following.

The studies linked to the Administrative justice node are those most connected to the issues of caseload management. In fact, in some works such as trial court as organization (Ostrom, Ostrom, Hanson, & Kleiman, 2007) the need for an active management of the proceedings is emphasized through a concrete and real division of labor between the administrative staff and the judges.

Practical methodologies have been identified to speed up the proceedings, such as for example delegating all the bureaucratic activities to the registrars, or favoring a rapid and effective exchange of information between all the stakeholders. This node also includes studies dealing with performance management where in the first phase performance indicators are identified: quality of court decisions, productivity, and timeliness (Borgia, Das, Di Virgilio, & La Torre, 2024; Deidda Gagliardo, Borgia, Di Virgilio, & La Torre, 2024). We identify the methodologies to ensure constant monitoring.

The studies linked to the digitalization node describe how information technology can facilitate the work of the courts. In this case, the most relevant issues are related to digital management systems of the documents, tools for the digital transmission of documents, etc. Case management systems deserve an in-depth analysis. These systems allow the registration of cases, the management of the documents, the possibility of searches and queries and the reporting based on the data entered in the system, practice which ensure the transparency of the judicial system. The fundamental objective of the systems is to allow an overview of pending cases, their state of process and the next necessary procedural actions (Steelman, Goerd, & McMillan, 2000).

5 Conclusions and future researches

According to Osborne's analysis (2018), the study demonstrates how interest in HRM in public sector research has grown. This analysis, reveals a process of quantification of HRM research in public sector. This is apparent from the prevalence of quantitative research, particularly in public administration and public management journals, and close examination of employees' behavior and attitudes at individual level.

The focus is to ensure a high level of performance through innovative HRM and determine the cross-fertilization between HRM and innovation (Mondal, Di Virgilio, & Das, 2022). Digitization plays a fundamental role in this process of redefining and reorganizing HR. This process of integration between HRM and digitization has not yet been addressed in court trial management. The paper highlights that the added value of HRM for public sector performance is mostly unexplored and therefore must be investigated empirically. The concept of added value of HRM stems from research conducted mainly in the private sector. When this topic is investigated in the context of public sector, the attention is shifted on individual worker performance using cross-sectional data.

Last but not least, the rapprochement of HRM and digitization in court trial management depends on editorial policies, which often prove less interdisciplinary than many such journals' mission statements suggest. Including more scholars from the field of public administration in the editorial boards of

organizational journals, publishing special issues on public organization and organizing, and generally encouraging more submissions to journals of organization studies from the field of public administration would help strengthen the ties between these two fields.

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