

Performance Monitoring and Accountability through Technology: E-government in Greece

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Abstract

The paper provides an account of the likely consequences that performance monitoring systems have on public service accountability. The research draws upon an in-depth empirical study on Citizens Service Centres, one of the biggest projects of the Greek e-government strategy. Specifically, we outline the rationale for introducing performance monitoring technology in Citizens Service Centres, the use the central government ministry made of the system and the ways in which Citizens Service Centre staff responded to such performance monitoring. Drawing upon studies on e-government and the critical literature on performance monitoring systems, we argue that performance monitoring technology is a limited tool for ensuring accountability. This is due to the effects of the monitoring and performance standards, which increase staff's concerns and are likely to encourage irresponsible and unaccountable practices.

Keywords: Performance monitoring technology, accountability, e-government, discretion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most governments are engaged in electronic government projects so as to modernise and transform the ways in which their services are provided to citizens. ICTs have been deployed to support internal reorganization of government processes, as well as the ways in which citizens can request and receive services and information from national and local government [2, 7, 9, 15, 46, 48, 49]. Such reforms seek to orientate government services towards the customer/citizen, and further, to make the provision of government services

more efficient and accountable. This is what Tat-Kei Ho [47] refers to as “a paradigm shift...a transformation in the philosophy and organization of government”. ICTs provide a means for devising the redesigned processes, through BPR toolkits for example, supporting the delivery of the redesigned services, providing a way to link cross departmental processes internally and finally providing a way to receive and disseminate information and services to citizens through one stop shops, telephone contact centres and internet services [5, 37, 46]. Further, ICTs have been used to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of such services. This paper will consider this theme of performance monitoring and accountability specifically in relation to one-stop shops. One-stop shops are single points, either geographical or electronic, in which multiple governmental departments integrate (physically or electronically) for the direct delivery of public services to citizens [13, 31, 47, 49]. One-stop shops typically comprise of a front office that acts as an interface between citizens and public administration and a back office that is responsible for the processing of citizens' requests [48, 49].

In relation to the focus of this paper, performance monitoring and accountability in electronic government, there have been various studies on the implementation of performance monitoring systems in the public sector. Some studies focus on the development process of specific performance monitoring systems and their attributes [1, 3, 6, 27], others focus on the meaning, the development and the limitations of performance indicators [27], some on the purposes and benefits of performance monitoring systems [3, 43, 41, 50] whereas others focus on various concerns about the management and the natural problems of such systems [45]. In parallel, an increased body of critical literature, upon which our analysis draws, has emerged with regard to the implementation of performance targets and their consequences on

public officials' practices, governmental function and public service delivery [11, 12, 18, 27, 29, 39].

One observation emerging from this review of the literature is that there has been limited literature to date that has considered how performance monitoring technologies are deployed in electronic government and what consequences may arise from their implementation. We seek to contribute to this literature by providing an in depth case study of the Greek Citizens' Service Centres (CSC). Specifically, in the context of one stop shops, our research has been guided by the following questions. Firstly, how did the central government make use of performance monitoring technology? Second, what were the central government's intentions for the implementation of performance monitoring system? And third, what are the consequences of performance monitoring technology on staff's accountability to both the government and the citizens?

2. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Performance monitoring is deployed in order to ensure that certain performance standards in relation to governmental inputs and outputs are met. Performance monitoring goes hand in hand with the assumption that what gets measured is what gets done [39]. ICTs are important for performance monitoring, because they make it possible to monitor the accomplishments of public officials. Information about the outputs of staff can then be compared and contrasted over times and across groups through statistical analysis. This can afterwards be illustrated in reports, tables and figures and disseminated [12, 27, 29]. Indicative example of this is the league tables listing the performance of public sector workers.

This information on public staff's performance is important for the government for various reasons. Firstly, it allows improvements in the way public service organizations function. When the performance of public officials is known, then comparisons with other staff or against an ideal can be made, and when required, changes introduced [11, 18, 39]. Also, the information that derives from continuous monitoring is thought to enable transparency, as it makes public officials' outcomes visible, and accountability, because it renders public officials responsible for meeting their performance standards. Finally, performance monitoring, is thought to empower public officials, because by making them aware of their outputs, it motivates them to perform better. Hence, performance

monitoring technologies are a means to enable economic efficiency, customer orientation, accountability and public staff's empowerment.

Yet, various authors have raised a number of concerns with regard to the effects of performance monitoring on government, public staff and public service delivery. Many commentators claim that performance monitoring shifted governmental interest from the formation of policy based upon the public interest to the formation of policy based upon numbers and statistical calculations. (E-) Governing becomes a practice of collecting, measuring, comparing and ranking performances out of which standards are set that satisfy government's targets (economic efficiency, results etc) [10, 17, 42]. For instance the responsiveness of public services to citizens' needs is regarded as successful when a certain number of citizens are served within specific time limits. This quantitative orientation of public service delivery is tied to the assumption that numbers are objective in representing reality because they are devoid of human judgments [42]. However, as what gets measured and how it is measured is still outcome of human's judgement, then this claim is contentious. Also, in the effort to set performance standards, governments get into a process of homogenizing and comparing performances [10]. This practice however neglects the innumerable, dynamic and different contingencies that affect public service delivery (e.g. overlapping laws, contradictory targets, emergent actions that need to be taken etc).

What is more, performance measurement is likely to trap public sector staff in a constant struggle for continuous improvement. Performance monitoring is a normative practice that aims to guide public officials' conduct, to direct their thinking, acting and feeling so that their conduct is consistent with the performance targets that need to be achieved such as efficiency, customer orientation, accountability etc [19]. Each of these targets is intended to mould respective attitudes; for instance staff is required to become efficient, customer-oriented, and accountable respectively. Performance targets are directed, in other words, not to how one does what one is doing but what one does as outcome of who one is. The diffusion of performance targets increases officials' awareness of what they are supposed to achieve, prompts for continuous effort and leads to a state of constant formulation of their conduct in order to meet the targets set. So, rather than an empowering tool, performance monitoring is likely to discipline [42], constrain [26] and obstruct staff from taking any initiatives that are likely to endanger their performance.

In such a quantitatively directed environment, one wonders how public service accountability can be secured. Hoggett [27] argued that output orientation is likely to make public staff's focused more on the outcomes rather than the process of service provision, whereas Clarke and Newman [10] mentioned that the setting of performance standards is likely to lead to the rationing of the services at the expense of the quality of the services being offered. Similarly, du Gay [18] pinpointed that the quantitative indicators restrict public staff's decisions, make them set priorities in the way they deliver services and enable risk taking and self-seeking behaviour. Regarding accountability there are some authors who propose the codification of public service practices as a solution for the ethical public service delivery [19, 32]. Despite that, there are studies on public service ethics, with which we sympathise, which present the unavoidable use of discretion in public service delivery [34]. Particularly, Minson [36] argues that any effort towards the codification of public service ethics is likely to be in vein because public officials have to judge and make decisions based upon the available options and facts and also in relation to their responsibilities towards the government and the citizens. Hogget [28] also argued that public officials are burdened with various anxieties that are displaced to them by the citizens and the government, alike. Consequently, public officials face situations of ambivalence in their effort to balance private and public interests and make decisions out of them. This renders public service delivery, according to Hogget [28, p.186], an "art of judgment". Furthermore, Chapman [8] mentioned that public officials are inescapably affected by personal values, emotions and beliefs in the way they deliver services. And this is for him a natural phenomenon of the thinking human being.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research draws upon the qualitative paradigm [14, 16, 35] and particularly social constructionist ideas [4]. Social constructionists argue that human beings can only partially become aware of reality. What they know about reality is the reality they encounter in everyday life and share with others through their routines and interactions. This is their reality; which appears to be ordered and taken for granted and which enables their everyday actions [4]. As Berger and Luckmann [4] put it, we live in a world that is already institutionalized. Hence, in order for one to be accepted as a legitimate member of this reality, one needs to

adopt its norms, to internalize and act in consistency with them. People, however, are not simply guided by what they have to do but act upon their institutionalised reality and reproduce or reconstruct it in their everyday practices. As the social construction stream indicates the investigation of a social phenomenon is inseparable from its context and from the practices that take place within it and end to reproduce and reconstruct it. In other words, institutions are sites [44] that are ordered in a specific way and are maintained and transformed through everyday practices and interactions. With reference to this, the research examines the Greek e-government project reported in this paper as a social site in which language and practices are inextricably interlinked and lead to the project's ongoing transformation. Thus, we attend to the organisational and technological context within which the CSC functions and the practices that take place.

In order to understand the production and reproduction of practices within CSCs we undertook interviews, observation and document collection. Particularly, we reviewed the laws concerning public administration from the 1950s until the present, governmental regulations about CSC's function and their collaboration with public sector organisations, newspaper articles on public administration along with governmental documents that were produced by the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization such as presentations and reports. The research was carried out in three periods. The first period was between October 2005 and December 2005, the second from March until May 2006 and the third in August 2006. The first period was mainly but not exclusively devoted to interviewing and observing. We interviewed public officials from the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization, and particularly the project team members, who developed and guide CSC' function and administer the performance monitoring system, two politicians, who were implicated due to their position in the regulation of CSC, the vendor who implemented and maintains CSC' technological platform, supervisors and CSC staff and made observation of the latter's daily practices. The second and third period were mainly devoted to the observation of CSC staff's collaboration with civil servants from various public sector organizations and interviews with civil servants. We visited five CSCs located in the two biggest cities of Greece. In order to understand how CSC's functioned we observed their practices for at least four hours a day, each day for a period of two months. In parallel with the observations, we held discussions with CSC staff when they were dealing with citizens and also during their breaks. Notes of these discussions were recorded in a diary. Interviews with the public officials

working in the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization and the private sector company that was running the CSCs were semi-structured, recorded and lasted on average for an hour. In some cases, second interviews were taken. Interviews and observations were also carried out with the different public sector departments that frequently collaborated with the CSCs such as the transport and communications directorate, municipalities, criminal records department, competent recruitment office etc. Themes and issues emerging were then discussed, compared with the literature and developed.

4. CITIZENS SERVICE CENTRES (CSC)

4.1. The performance monitoring technology

CSCs are one-stop shops that mediate between the citizens and the public service organizations for the quick and continuous service of citizens. According to their institutional law (article 31 paragraph 1, L. 3013/2002), CSC are administrative units whose mission is the provision of administrative information and services from the point of citizens requests' submission until the provision of the end administrative act (certifications, licenses, social security etc). CSC in their typical form are comprised of the front and the back office, which are staffed by people employed on a contract basis (CSC staff). The front office is responsible for the provision of information and the submission of citizens' administrative requests to CSC system, whereas the back office has the jurisdiction of checking the completeness of the submitted requests, communicating with the respective public service organisations, transferring citizens' requests to them and monitoring their processing. Contrary to what literature suggests [46, 47], the back office of CSC is not able to process citizens' requests. The latter is done by the traditional public service organizations to which citizens' requests are transferred from CSCs either through fax, courier or through CSC staff taking citizens' requests to the relevant departments themselves. Public service organisations also continue to accept direct requests from citizens.

A central computer system was designed and introduced to serve all CSCs across Greece. The system maintains all administrative information, administrative forms and citizens' details given by prior requests they

made to CSCs. The system incorporates an MIS application that provides performance data about, among others, complete and pending requests in each CSC, the total number of requested administrative services per day in each CSC, the average response time to each citizens' request and the number of citizens being served through CSC during specific time periods etc for the project team, in the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation that was responsible for the management of CSCs, to review.

The project team, responsible for the functional, technical, economic and human resource issues of CSC, uses the performance data derived from the MIS for various purposes, one of which is the exertion of control over public administration (CSC and public service organization). The project team members believed that the MIS was an innovative means to provide an objective representation of first the performance of the staff in CSCs, but also public sector staff working in the different departments. As a ministerial official argued, 'technology gives the opportunity for the first time to control public administration...In the past, performance was measured by supervisors and thus, all estimations were subjective and biased. With the MIS meritocracy is established in the way CSC staff's performance is estimated... With CSC we also managed to have an online, daily control of public sector staff. This is a major step in the Greek public administration'.

Through the MIS the CSC project team has real time information of the performance of each CSC, and also of the output of individual CSC staff. As a project team member argued "the MIS opens a field of visibility of what each CSC employee does daily". This visibility is achieved by the provision of personal credentials to CSC staff, with which they can log into the CSC' system. When CSC staff log into the system, the MIS gives a picture of how many requests each CSC employee has placed to the system, how long it took for certain citizens' requests to be satisfied etc. As a staff member we interviewed said: 'We have credentials: a username and a password. So our pending requests, the requests we place, are all visible', '...one can check our work and mistakes, one can know about our productivity, when we enter the system and when not.' With this information the project team has the ability to measure the productivity of each CSC and each CSC staff member. Governmental officials, supervisors and CSC staff all stated that productivity is calculated by a ration comprising of the daily number of citizens' requests placed in the CSC divided by the number of CSC staff who work in the specific centre.

The information that the project team acquires about CSCs overall and the individual productivity of CSC staff is central to the formation of performance standards. Based on all the performance data collected from across the CSCs in Greece, an average number is calculated for each of the key performance standards such as productivity, response time, number of citizens' served etc. It is against this average that each CSC is evaluated: "Through the measuring of response times, the number of administrative services and the number of citizens being served, average numbers derive which constitute the work norms for CSC (e.g. 10 days to complete a citizen's request and 1000 citizens to be served within a three month period)" (Official from the ministry of Interior). "...by observing what is happening we know how long it took for CSC to respond to a request. We know that for one it took 3, another 4, another 5, another 23 days and we see for that which made 23 days to respond there is a problem. So when we see that there is a difference with the average we realise that a service has a problem and the minister intervenes..." (Official from the ministry of Interior).

When performance criteria are calculated, staff in the Ministry of Interior disseminates a report so as to increase CSC staff's awareness about their performance in relation to the average norms. These reports are distributed on a six-month basis. As a project team member said 'With the data we concentrate, we send to CSC reports. We make them understand that we know what takes place and who works and who doesn't. And I think that this is effective, because CSC staff become aware that if they don't work they will be dismissed' whereas according to a CSC staff: "Statistics are sent by us in a formal report from the ministry on a six-month basis...it is a motivation to insist and work harder. They also engage us in a competition game with other CSC". The reports provide rankings of CSC from the most to the least productive, information about the number of completed and pending requests along with the average response time for the delivery of each public service and includes comparisons between CSC' outputs. Thus, the MIS provides for the construction of specific performance targets and the dissemination of them to the CSC. The aim is to increase the awareness of CSC staff of their performance with regard to the established performance standards and achieve compliance.

4.2. Behaviours Enabled through Performance Monitoring on the daily function of CSC

Compliance was indeed on some occasions achieved due to CSC staffs' constant effort to submit citizens' requests to the system in order to increase their productivity. However, our observation of CSC staff s' practices indicated that this compliance wasn't always achieved in 'appropriate' ways. This in practice meant finding ways to trick the system, being careless in the submission of citizens' requests and developing patron client relations with civil servants. Patron-client relations refers to the development of interdependent relationships between CSC and public sector staff, which to a large extent involved personal favour making from CSC staff's side in exchange for services provided by public sector staff. CSC staff considered these practices as the proper way to respond to performance standards and hence, secure their future job stability.

The interviews with the CSC staff indicated that despite the meticulously designed MIS, the system has drawbacks that enable CSC staff to trick it in order to boost their productivity. CSC staff often submitted fake or the same request more than once to the system. These are two ways of increasing their productivity without being visible through the system: 'What we do ... is to enter to the system and by the press of a button we submit various simple requests by using friends and relatives' personal details. And this increases our productivity.' (CSC staff). 'Sometimes CSCs send the same request more than once in the same day but at different time. This repetition is done by CSC in order to show that they have increased productivity. Whether the request is the same or not is not visible to anyone.' (Civil servant from the Criminal Records Department).

Also, in order to meet the performance standards set by the government, CSC staff would submit requests that were incomplete or incorrect, even when they knew in advance that it was highly unlikely to be successfully processed. The following interview extracts are illustrative: '...thousands of requests come to us with many mistakes because either employees lack knowledge or they are not bothered to check what they submit... Employees are not interested; they view it as a job that has to be done quickly in order to increase their requests and thus their productivity.' (Civil servant from the Criminal Records Department). 'I often know in advance that certain requests are likely to fail being processed because they lack the correct supporting documents. ...one of the biggest deficits of

the CSC is that it lacks personal responsibility. No one is accountable for one's work; a small number of CSC staff submits citizens' requests with responsibility' (CSC staff).

As we said, the effectiveness of CSCs depends upon the collaboration of civil servants. If civil servants delay or fail to process the requests submitted by CSC staff, then Citizens Service Centres will fail to respond to their purpose. This dependency in parallel with the need for increased performance enabled on many occasions CSC staff engaging in public relations building between themselves and civil servants. This led to the emergence of patron-client relations between civil servants and CSC staff, which took the form of mutual favour making due to the unequal positions they believed to possess. Indicative are the following statements that derived from interviews: "Public relations with civil servants are important in order for us to do our job well and quickly" (CSC staff). "We tried to take advantage of our powerful position... For an effective collaboration with employees crucial factor is the personal relations we develop with them. Of course CSC employees went under difficult conditions in order to develop relations with us; personal favours were frequently asked..." (Civil servant). "I have done various personal favours to civil servants... They used their position and my dependency over them, in order to promote personal interests. They exploited that. But I did the same. This is something that one has to do in this job in order to survive and be successful. It is a give and take relationship that is above the government's laws" (CSC staff).

The above extracts indicate that performance monitoring enabled unaccountable and irresponsible practices. CSC staff daily tried to find ways in order to boost their productivity through the submission of requests to the systems. They did that however, by submitting fake requests or the same request more than once, by being careless of the quality of requests that are submitted to the system and by developing patron client relations with civil servants. These issues and their implications are going to be discussed in what follows.

5. DISCUSSION

This penultimate section will discuss the issues emerging from our case relating to performance monitoring technology. Specifically, we will return back to the research questions outlined in the introduction, namely how performance monitoring

technology was used by CSCs' project team, what the project team's intentions were for the implementation of performance monitoring and what the latter's consequences were on staff's accountability to government and citizens alike.

In relation to how the project team uses the performance monitoring system, the case indicated that performance monitoring technology was used in three interdependent ways: for online observation, for the estimation of performance standards and for the creation of reports on CSC staff's performance. Firstly, the performance monitoring technology enabled the continuous and real time monitoring of the work undertaken and completed by CSC staff. This continuous monitoring allows members of the Ministry of Interior a detailed insight into what takes place in every CSC. Particularly, as we have seen, the system calculates the number of CSC staff's completed and pending requests along with the time it took them to respond to citizens' requests. It also, monitors when each CSC staff is logged into the system and when is absent from work and finally, maintains statistical data so as to enable comparisons between different time periods. The second way, in which performance monitoring technology is used, is for the estimation of average performance indicators. Average indicators are calculated based upon comparisons between the data that derives from observation [11]. For the project team, responsible for the management of CSC, some of the estimated indicators are related to the average productivity, which is the number of requests set to the system per CSC staff per day and the average response time for requests' completion. The third way, in which the performance monitoring technology is used, is for the creation of reports on CSC staff's performance and their dissemination to the CSC. The information that is acquired from the real time monitoring, coupled with the estimated average indicators are included in reports [12, 17, 27], which are then disseminated to the supervisors of the CSCs. This makes CSCs staff aware that they are object of continuous observation and comparison. The above ways indicate firstly, that far from natural, performance standards are socially constructed [4, 11] as they are outcome of continuous observation, calculation and comparison undertaken by the government, in our case CSC project team. Second, these three ways indicate that the construction of the 'good performer' reflects quantitative outcomes (e.g. number of citizens served, estimated time of service provision etc) and neglects public service ideals such as ethos and accountability [10, 28].

In relation to our other research question, what did our case highlight with regard to the intension staff at the ministry had for the implementation of such a

performance monitoring system? As the research indicated, performance monitoring technology was thought to be a means for the exertion of control over CSC staff's practices and conduct and hence, as a way to deal with the problem of unaccountability from which the Greek public sector was thought to suffer [38]. Control is believed to be exerted through the system in two ways: firstly, through the continuous visibility and second, by the reports' dissemination. On the one hand, the online observation of CSC staff's outputs increases governmental visibility over the daily practices that are carried out within CSCs. This visibility gives the opportunity to the project team to intervene and take corrective actions when deviations from the performance standards are observed [11, 18, 39]. It is for them a way to pinpoint local problems, and to interfere to staff's practices in order to advise and sanction. On the other hand, the information that is incorporated in the reports i.e. the data from observation and the performance standards, aims to increase CSC staff' awareness of being object of observation and to make them internalise the performance standards they have to achieve [19]. Performance monitoring technology constructed a normative field based upon which staff was asked to perform. Performance standards were not just numbers on staff's outputs but indicators of how good a performer each staff member is. When CSC staff become aware of their own and their colleagues' performance along with the performance standards, then each staff member is likely to get involved in the process of continuous comparisons and evaluations in terms of where each one's performance is ranked in relation to the others and to the performance standards with the final purpose to change their behaviour not in order to perform better but to become better [19]. Indeed, CSC project team believed that performance standards were an 'effective' way to make the staff manage their behaviour; to make them 'competitive' and 'motivate them to work harder'. Thus, the dispatching of reports is intended, through the internalization of performance standards, to make CSC staff, disciplined to their output targets and involved into a continuous struggle for better performance [42]. The exertion of this type of control over practices and conduct is effective not only because of its disciplinary effects but also because it is a way to ensure accountability. Accountability to performance targets implies accountability both towards the government and the citizens. When performance standards are set and the staff is aware of its performance obligations, then staff is rendered responsible towards the government, for delivering the respective outputs. At the same time, performance standards affect the way public services are delivered - because they refer to

time response standards, standards on the number of citizens' being served etc - and therefore, are of interest to the citizens; hence, compliance to performance standards renders the staff accountable towards citizens too.

However, in many respects the degree to which the performance monitoring technology was able to exert control over the practices and conduct of employees and hence to ensure accountability was limited. Firstly, due to its inability to provide an 'objective' picture of what takes place in specific CSCs and second, because of its incapacity to actually control the staff's conduct. Regarding the first argument, performance monitoring technology provided a partial representation of the daily practices within CSCs [42]. A main cause of this is the focus of CSCs' project team on the outputs rather than the processes of public service delivery. Public service delivery is estimated based upon numerical results through the daily measurement of various indicators, in our case CSC staff's productivity e.g. the number of citizens served per staff per day [10, 17]. However, the performance monitoring system did not attend to the process of delivering public services. As the project team focused on outcomes, the performance data the system collected was purely quantitative. This emphasis on measuring the quantity of outputs as a means to calculate productivity similarly led to the CSC staff focusing on the quantitative outputs of their work [27]. Particularly, it led to CSC staff inputting fake, incorrect and incomplete requests to the system or the transferring of the same request at multiple times. Ensuring a high output also led to the development of patron client relations with civil servants. The development of patron-client relations was a common phenomenon of the Greek public sector; patron-client relations were developed between public officials and citizens, with the former trying to take advantage of citizens' dependency over officials' positions in order to gain economic, political or emotional benefits. With the establishment of CSCs patron-client relations were not eliminated but re-emerged between CSC and public sector staff as they were thought worthwhile for doing the job 'well and quickly'. The above practices illustrate firstly, that the quantitative orientation of performance monitoring technology triggers quantitatively oriented practices [28] and second, that an increased performance does not necessarily mean increased outputs but increased efforts to manipulate outputs. This raises various concerns about public service accountability. The quantitative orientation of the performance standards led to CSC staff undertaking inappropriate practices so as to meet their performance obligations. These consequences were neither intended by the project team of the Ministry of Interior, nor were they in the interests of the citizens; they were rather

unintended consequences, outcome of staff's discretion on the situations they faced [34].

In line with our second argument, performance monitoring technology, apart from providing partial information, is a limited tool for controlling CSC staff's conduct. Contrary to what various authors have argued as performance measuring being a disciplinary and constraining tool that obstructs public officials' initiatives [26, 42] the case revealed that CSC staff found ways to avoid some aspects of performance monitoring and acted based upon what they thought to be suitable, appropriate and worthwhile. As the performance monitoring system was output oriented, it did not provide a firm framework that delineated how they were to act, and consequently created a field of various potential actions to be undertaken by the staff, so as to serve citizens and meet the output orientated performance measures. CSC staff used their discretion and acted based upon what seemed for them to be the most appropriate action in the given situations they faced [34]. This is illustrated by the justifications staff provided about their actions. Particularly, the staff's quantitative orientation was justified because it was for them the appropriate way to increase their productivity without at the same time running the risk of being observable by the system. Similarly, patron-client relations was the necessary way of doing their job "well and quickly", of enabling an "effective collaboration" and of being able to "survive and be successful" in their job. The rationale CSC staff used to justify their actions indicates their autonomy to judge, decide and act based upon the situations they faced by prioritising, in many cases, their personal interests at the expense of their responsibilities towards government and citizens alike [10].

Of course, performance monitoring is not the sole factor that affects CSC staff's conduct; rather the public service context plays a significant role. Public services are delivered within a highly complex and ambiguous environment [28]. Our case indicates that performance monitoring technology rather than control this environment makes it even more complex. On a daily basis, CSC staff have to confront multiple and often contradictory targets. On the one hand, they continuously have to show increased outputs in order for the government to satisfy its electorate. On the other, they need to adequately respond to citizens' requests so as not to leave them dissatisfied. Furthermore, they are obliged to come in contact on a daily basis with public sector staff and to respond to their functional, legal and often, as the case showed, to their personal interests. This is an ambivalent context, with diverse and often opposing obligations to which CSC staff had to respond sufficiently. Within this

context performance monitoring technology seems to have brought a further anxiety to CSC staff, that of performing well in order to secure their job position.

Within this environment, we argue, in consistency with our third research question, that performance monitoring technology has a negative impact upon staff's accountability. As various authors have indicated [8, 28, 34, 36] discretion is unavoidably used in the delivery of public services. Based upon this argument we would like to expand it a bit further by arguing that technology rather than assisting public officials in using their discretion towards accountable practices often becomes another concern that burdens and disorients discretion and leads to opposite outcomes from those intended. And this we believe is the case with CSCs. CSC staff had to consider various factors and make complex decisions in order to respond to government's, citizens' and public sector staff's interests, that even if specific standards for the 'how' of their work existed, it is highly doubted whether these could guide their practices without using their discretion [28]. With the deployment of performance monitoring system CSC staff is rendered responsible not only for responding to the above obligations but also for meeting various performance standards. These concerns affected CSCs staff who acted according to what they thought appropriate to be done in order to respond to all of their obligations. At the same time because performance monitoring system was oriented towards outputs and not processes, it proved to be incapable of monitoring and guiding staff's practices and improving accountability, as it was intended. On the contrary, technology opened the door to inappropriate practices (e.g. careless service, submission of fake, incorrect and incomplete requests, and development of patron-client relations) that undermine responsibility and accountability. If this is the case, how can governments' ensure that public services are delivered to citizens in an accountable and responsible way? Our view is that in order for e-government technologies to respond to their citizen orientation [48, 49] they should support not only efficiency but also, accountability. Technology needs to be used in a way that considers the complexity of public service delivery, respects officials' concerns and supports the use of discretion without at the same time burdening them with further responsibilities and concerns. Thus, for e-government, what needs to be considered is not how technology should be deployed to ensure accountability, but how technology should be implemented in order not to obstruct staff's accountable practices.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to discuss the consequences of performance monitoring technology on public service accountability; a central but neglected issue for e-government. We drew upon the critical literature on public service ethics in order to argue that performance monitoring technologies are likely to burden public officials' discretion [8, 26, 34], disorient their actions and condition irresponsible practices. Based upon our in depth research on Citizens Service Centres, we presented the way performance monitoring technology is used in the specific context, its intended use and then contrasted this with the unexpected practises that this technology enabled. Contrary to disciplinary and constraining effects [19, 24, 40] performance monitoring enabled the rise of practices such as patron-client relations, careless and fake service provision, that were thought suitable ways to meet performance standards while being invisible from the system. We argue that the performance monitoring system loaded the staff with a further concern, that of being continuously monitored, measured and compared, which they took into consideration in their everyday judgment of how to act. As public service delivery is inseparable from discretion using and e-governing is directed towards accountability, e-governors need to conceptualise and deploy technologies in a way that do not become another concern for officials to be taken into consideration and reproduced in their practices.

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