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Public management, administrative efficiency and prevention culture in public educational institutions

Gestão pública, eficiência administrativa e cultura de prevenção nas instituições públicas de ensino

Gestión pública, eficiencia administrativa y cultura de prevención en las instituciones públicas de enseñanza

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Abstract: This article discusses the relationship between public management, administrative efficiency and a culture of prevention in public educational institutions. The analysis assumes that efficiency in the public sector is not limited to cost reduction or procedural speed, but also involves institutional capacity, continuity, quality, organizational learning and anticipation of situations that may compromise public objectives. The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, bibliographic and documentary approach, supported by references on Public Administration, governance, risk management and safety culture. Prevention is understood as a transversal organizational value capable of supporting more conscious decisions, institutional communication, learning and protection of people, without being confused with specific operational duties. In public educational institutions, the development of a preventive culture can contribute to safer, more responsible environments oriented toward the public interest. It is concluded that efficiency and prevention are complementary dimensions of mature public management, especially when incorporated into institutional culture and decision-making processes.

Keywords: public management; administrative efficiency; prevention culture; governance; public educational institutions.

Resumo: Este artigo discute a relação entre gestão pública, eficiência administrativa e cultura de prevenção em instituições públicas de ensino. A análise parte da compreensão de que a eficiência no setor público não se limita à redução de custos ou à rapidez de procedimentos, envolvendo também capacidade institucional, continuidade, qualidade, aprendizagem organizacional e antecipação de situações capazes de comprometer objetivos públicos. O estudo adota abordagem qualitativa, exploratória e bibliográfica-documental, apoiada em referenciais sobre Administração Pública, governança, gestão de riscos e cultura de segurança. Sustenta-se que a prevenção pode ser compreendida como valor organizacional transversal, capaz de favorecer decisões mais conscientes, comunicação institucional, aprendizagem e proteção das pessoas, sem se confundir com atribuições operacionais específicas. Nas instituições públicas de ensino, a construção de uma cultura preventiva pode contribuir para ambientes organizacionais mais seguros, responsáveis e orientados ao interesse público. Conclui-se que eficiência e prevenção são dimensões complementares de uma gestão pública madura, especialmente quando incorporadas à cultura institucional e aos processos de tomada de decisão.

Palavras-chave: gestão pública; eficiência administrativa; cultura de prevenção; governança; instituições públicas de ensino.

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Resumen: Este artículo discute la relación entre gestión pública, eficiencia administrativa y cultura de prevención en instituciones públicas de enseñanza. El análisis parte de la comprensión de que la eficiencia en el sector público no se limita a la reducción de costos o a la rapidez de procedimientos, involucrando también capacidad institucional, continuidad, calidad, aprendizaje organizacional y anticipación de situaciones capaces de comprometer objetivos públicos. El estudio adopta un abordaje cualitativo, exploratorio y bibliografía-documental, apoyado en referenciales sobre Administración Pública, gobernanza, gestión de riesgos y cultura de seguridad. Se sostiene que la prevención puede ser comprendida como valor organizacional transversal, capaz de favorecer decisiones más conscientes, comunicación institucional, aprendizaje y protección de las personas, sin confundirse con atribuciones operacionales específicas. En las instituciones públicas de enseñanza, la construcción de una cultura preventiva puede contribuir a ambientes organizacionales más seguros, responsables y orientados al interés público. Se concluye que la eficiencia y la prevención son dimensiones complementarias de una gestión pública madura, especialmente cuando incorporadas a la cultura institucional y a los procesos de toma de decisiones.

Palabras clave: gestión pública; eficiencia administrativa; cultura de prevención; gobernanza; instituciones públicas de enseñanza.

1 Introduction

Contemporary Public Administration is challenged to produce socially relevant results without moving away from the principles that guide state action. In Brazil, the principle of efficiency explicitly integrates art. 37 of the Federal Constitution, alongside legality, impersonality, morality and publicity. The constitutional presence of efficiency reinforces the idea that administrative action should seek quality, responsiveness and adequate achievement of public purposes.

In public educational institutions, this discussion acquires particular importance. Universities, institutes, schools and other educational organizations gather numerous communities, diverse activities and objectives that depend on administrative continuity and appropriate institutional conditions. The quality of management influences the capacity of the institution to fulfill its teaching mission and, as the case may be, research, extension and provision of services to society.

Efficiency, however, should not be interpreted exclusively as doing more with less. An organisation can reduce a certain expenditure or accelerate a decision and still produce unwanted consequences in the medium term. The managerial perspective needs to consider quality, sustainability of decisions, learning ability, protection of people and anticipation of factors that may compromise institutional objectives.

This is where the culture of prevention approaches public management. Preventing means recognising that certain situations can be anticipated and dealt with before they have

relevant effects. This logic appears both in public governance and risk management as in occupational safety and health. Although these fields have their own objects and instruments, they share a common orientation: to reduce dependence on exclusively reactive responses.

The aim of this article is to analyze, from a conceptual perspective, how administrative efficiency and prevention culture can complement the management of public educational institutions. The text deliberately focuses on principles, organizational culture, governance and decision-making, without examining specific functional assignments or operational routines.

2 methodology

The study has a qualitative approach, exploratory character and bibliographic-documental nature. Standard and institutional frameworks of public access related to Public Administration, governance, risk management and safety and health at work were used, as well as academic literature on organizational culture and safety culture.

Among the documents considered are the Federal Constitution of 1988, especially the principle of efficiency provided for in art. 37; Federal references on risk management and governance; and Regulatory Norm No. 1 (NR-1), in its current wording from May 26, 2026, used only as a reference for understanding prevention as a systematic process in the field of safety and health at work.

The analysis was organized into four axes: efficiency and public value; risk prevention and management; organizational culture; and conceptual application to public educational institutions. No personal data, interviews, questionnaires or internal information from any institution were used. Individual professional activities, functions, contracts, acquisitions, services or specific administrative procedures are also not described.

3 administrative efficiency and public value

The principle of efficiency introduces a performance dimension in administrative action, but its interpretation must remain linked to public purposes. Unlike organizations primarily guided by economic results, public institutions exist to meet collective needs legally defined and by public policies. Thus, administrative efficiency needs to be analyzed together with legality, impersonality, morality, advertising and other values that condition state action.

A comprehensive vision of efficiency considers not only the resources used, but also quality, continuity, reliability and ability to produce consistent results. In an educational institution, efficient administrative decisions are those that contribute to the fulfillment of the institutional mission and reduce unnecessary obstacles to educational activity.

This understanding also favours a long-term approach. Appearingly efficient decisions in the short term can transfer costs, create vulnerabilities or reduce future institutional capacity. Therefore, sustainable efficiency depends on information, strategic planning, evaluation of consequences and organizational learning.

Public value-oriented management seeks to balance results, integrity and responsibility. In this context, prevention is not an isolated purpose, but a way to improve the quality of the decision. When considering in advance uncertainties and possible consequences, the organization expands its ability to preserve objectives and respond in a way proportional to the challenges.

4 Prevention as a dimension of public governance

Risk management was consolidated in the public sector as a component of governance. The Union's General Controlling Officer stresses that preventive management enables uncertain events, threats and problems to be anticipated, contributing to the more effective and predictable achievement of institutional objectives. The Joint Normative Instruction MP/GGU no 1/2016 and Decree no 9.203/2017 constitute important federal references for the institutionalization of these practices.

Prevention, in this perspective, does not mean eliminating all uncertainty. Public organizations operate in complex environments and cannot fully predict events. What is sought is to develop the ability to recognize signs, evaluate possible impacts, establish priorities and respond before certain events compromise institutional objectives in a relevant way.

This logic modifies the relationship between the organization and the problems. In a predominantly reactive culture, attention focuses on the event that has already occurred. In a preventive culture, previous occurrences, available information and changes in the context are used as inputs for learning. The focus ceases to be only correction and starts to include anticipation and continuous improvement.

Prevention also requires proportionality. Not every risk demands the same level of attention, and the attempt to control all uncertainties can produce excessive bureaucracy. Mature management distinguishes situations according to relevance, potential impact and responsiveness, preserving administrative agility without abandoning prudence and responsibility.

5 organizational culture and culture of prevention

The organizational culture influences the way norms, information and decisions are understood by people. Studies on Brazilian public organizations show that cultural characteristics can favor or hinder changes, innovation and guidance for results. Formal rules alone do not ensure institutional transformation when behaviors and values remain disconnected from the intended objectives.

In the field of occupational safety, Gonçalves Filho, Andrade and Marinho (2011) present the safety culture as a phenomenon capable of evolving from predominantly reactive stages to more proactive levels and oriented to continuous improvement. Among the factors associated with cultural maturity are information, organizational learning, involvement, communication and commitment.

These elements allow a broader reading of prevention. A preventive culture does not depend exclusively on technical standards or formal structures. It strengthens when people understand the importance of communicating relevant situations, learning from experiences, sharing information, and considering consequences before decision-making.

Communication has a central role. Information that does not circulate properly can prevent the organization from recognizing trends or noticing important changes. Similarly, environments in which problems are hidden by fear of accountability tend to lose learning opportunities. The culture of prevention presupposes responsible communication, institutional treatment of information and commitment to improvement.

6 Safety and health at work as a reference for preventive culture

Safety and health at work offers a consolidated example of preventive thinking. The NR-1 establishes guidelines for Occupational Risk Management and determines that organizations implement risk management of their activities. The current wording of Chapter 1.5 came into force on May 26, 2026 and reinforces prevention as a systematic process.

The Ministry of Labor and Employment defines Occupational Risk Management as a set of coordinated prevention actions aimed at promoting safe and healthy working conditions and environments. This formulation shows that prevention is not limited to the reaction after an accident or illness, but involves organized and continuous actions.

For the purposes of this article, the relevance of this field lies in the cultural logic that it demonstrates: identify, understand, communicate, prevent and learn. It is not intended to transpose technical tools for safety of work into the whole public administration, but to

recognize that preventive guidance is an organizational value that applies, in a broad sense, to the quality of institutional decisions.

In public educational institutions, the valorization of prevention can contribute to a more integrated perception of the organizational environment. People, processes and institutional objectives coexist and influence each other. A culture that values security, respect, information and learning tends to favor not only the protection of people, but also the continuity and quality of public performance.

7 public educational institutions and organizational maturity

Public educational institutions have characteristics that make organizational culture especially relevant. The diversity of publics, areas of knowledge, administrative structures and forms of participation produces complex environments. Decision-making often needs to reconcile norms, academic autonomy, resource constraints, social demands and long-term objectives.

In this scenario, organizational maturity can be understood as the ability to learn, adapt and preserve institutional objectives in the face of changes. Mature organizations are not those that never face problems, but those that develop mechanisms to recognize difficulties, produce proportional responses and incorporate learning into future decisions.

The culture of prevention contributes to this maturity by stimulating anticipation without paralyzing the action. A preventively oriented institution seeks to understand consequences before deciding, but it also prevents excessive caution from turning into immobilization. The balance between prudence and implementing capacity is an important component of public efficiency.

Another relevant aspect is the shared responsibility for institutional culture. Organizational values are not built only by standards or by certain sectors. Leaderships, servers and other community members influence behavior patterns through decisions, communication and everyday examples. The consolidation of a preventive culture therefore depends on institutional coherence.

8 Conceptual guidelines for preventive public management

From the analyzed references, five conceptual guidelines can be identified to approximate administrative efficiency and prevention culture: guidance for public objectives; appreciation of information; proportional risk anticipation; organizational learning; and responsible communication.

Guidance for public objectives prevents efficiency from being reduced to isolated indicators. Information expands the quality of decisions and allows recognition of changes. Proportionate anticipation helps direct attention to relevant situations without creating unnecessary controls. Learning transforms experiences into institutional improvement. Finally, responsible communication promotes the circulation of information and the building of trust.

These guidelines are deliberately general. Its usefulness is to offer a management perspective applicable to different institutional contexts without prescribing tasks, functional skills or specific procedures. Each institution must translate principles of prevention and efficiency according to its structure, mission and normative frameworks.

The adoption of a preventive culture must also respect the public character of organizations. Prevention cannot justify arbitrary controls, undue concentration of decisions or removal from administrative principles. On the contrary, it should contribute to more transparent, justifiable and consistent decisions in the public interest.

9 discussion

The analysis allows us to understand efficiency and prevention as complementary dimensions. Efficiency directs the Administration to the quality of the results and the adequate care of public purposes; prevention increases the ability to preserve these results in the face of uncertainties and possible adverse events.

The main contribution of a preventive culture is to shift part of the institutional attention of the consummated problem to learning and anticipation. This change depends not only on the creation of new procedures. It depends on values, communication, commitment and ability to transform information into decision.

The literature on safety culture reinforces this understanding by demonstrating that organizations can evolve from reactive behaviors to proactive approaches. Although work safety and public governance have their own fields, the conceptual approach reveals common elements: information, participation, learning and continuous improvement.

In public educational institutions, the combination of efficiency and prevention can strengthen the ability to meet educational objectives in complex environments. Prevention, when understood as value and not as mere bureaucracy, contributes to responsible decisions and to a more stable and conscious institutional action.

It should be noted that this perspective does not intend to define positions or administrative units. This is a reflection on culture and organizational governance. The

operationalization of the principles discussed depends on the normative structure and competences formally established in each institution.

10 Final considerations

The article analyzed the relationship between public management, administrative efficiency and prevention culture in public educational institutions. The discussion showed that efficiency should not only be understood as cost reduction or speed, but as a capacity to produce public results with quality, continuity, responsibility and respect for administrative principles.

Prevention complements this perspective by stimulating anticipation, learning and consideration of the consequences of decisions. Risk management in the public sector and the culture of safety at work offer distinct but convergent references regarding the importance of information, communication, commitment and continuous improvement.

In public educational institutions, a preventive culture can contribute to more mature organizational environments and decisions that are more consistent with institutional objectives. This culture does not belong to a specific function: it constitutes collective construction, dependent on values, leaderships, participation and learning.

It is concluded that administrative efficiency and prevention can be treated as components of the same search for quality in public management. Future studies can empirically investigate how different educational institutions perceive preventive culture and what factors favor its consolidation.

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