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Abstract

Central administrative services have recently received increasing attention from practitioners and academics due to the challenging need to both manage scarce resources and provide high-quality services. In this context, performance measurement systems (PMSs) may assume a central role, although an unresolved debate remains on the claimed benefits of accountability and the difficulties that have emerged in defining and managing proper measures. This paper contributes to this debate by presenting the results of a study in which a PMS for central administrative services has been developed and tested through an action research approach drawing on actor network theory. The experiment was carried out in 15 Italian universities and five areas of services were dealt with: student support, research support, accounting, human resources, and logistics and procurement. The highly participative method resulted in a comparable system with a complete set of cost and quality indicators across the participating universities. These data proved to be useful at managerial and policy level, providing insights on the presence of scale effects and on the relative importance of quality dimensions for users of services. Participating in the project encouraged the university staff to use indicators in decision making.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)