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Bureaucracy Towards Science: practitioners forging interaction with researchers

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Bureaucracy Towards Science: practitioners forging interaction with researchers

Here, we explore how Brazilian internal control bureaucrats adopted measures to strengthen a scientific journal called *Revista da CGU*, improving interaction with researchers. Based on work on public governance, epistemic communities, and internal control, we examine if such strengthening represented a deliberate strategy to forge an internal control epistemic community. Our documentary data analysis indicates that the voluntarism of such bureaucrats with little formalization and low institutional support marked the journal's strengthening and continuity. Findings also indicate that bureaucrats used the journal to deepen the debate with the academy on specific themes, approaches, and methodologies. On the other hand, they do not allow us to infer whether the deliberate agency of bureaucrats was aimed at forging a "classical" epistemic community. We suggest a profound debate about the possibilities of reviewing epistemic community theory and adopting interviews for responding to gaps and soft spots arising from the limitations of documentary data.

Introduction

There are certain shared notions about epistemic communities in social sciences, but different approaches still explore some nuances. What are these communities made of? What constitutes their fundamental links? Are epistemic communities unnoticeably built and evolved, or do the perception of their existence and the intentional agency of their members represent central elements to explain them?

The rise of the public governance agenda has promoted debate on learning, innovation, and evidence-based public policy, pressuring bureaucracies to appropriate results and typical approaches and methodologies of the scientific field. Thus, in this context, it is preassumed that even bureaucrats tied by formal chains will forge or integrate epistemic communities to interact with scientific areas, going beyond their immediate bureaucratic prerogatives.

Epistemic communities composed of internal control bureaucrats in the context of public governance may represent fruitful investigation cases. They represent "bureaucrats of others bureaucrats," reinforcing a compliance-based perspective on controlled bodies' roles.

On the other hand, they also must explore new governance-based perspectives to not put learning, innovation, and new policies based on evidence of controlled bodies in check.

Here, we explore how internal control bureaucrats have adopted measures to strengthen a scientific journal, improving interaction with researchers. This paper analyzes these measures taken by servants of the Brazilian federal government's central internal control body to examine if such strengthening represented a deliberate strategy to forge an internal control epistemic community.

Drawing upon work on public governance, epistemic communities, and internal control, we adopt exploratory qualitative research based on content analysis to investigate the case of a scientific journal called *Revista da CGU*. Such a journal was created within the Brazilian Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) structure, and the voluntarism of bureaucrats to its strengthening with little formalization and low institutional support has marked its trajectory.

The two first sections explore the literature on public governance and epistemic communities, discussing how these communities can be part of policy strategies. After, we focus on contradictions between the internal control's compliance-based perspective and the need not to keep learning, innovation, and evidence-based policies of controlled bodies in check. Finally, we discuss the strengthening project of the *Revista da CGU* as a deliberate strategy of bureaucrats to improve the interaction between researchers and practitioners.

Public Governance Theory and Agenda

Work on public governance as a theory or agenda indicates its rise in the 1990s in the following steps of the new public management (NPM) cycles of the 1980s. Framed as an of the post-NPM proposes, public governance aims to overcome NPM's analytical and prescriptive deficits mainly related to disregarding political dimensions and institutional contexts (ANSELL e TORFING, 2022; OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR e LUSTOSA DA COSTA, 2020; RADNOR, OSBORNE e GLENNON, 2022).

Public governance has taken on a variety of connotations as a result of its incipience, flexibility, and even appeal. These interpretations range from management to a group of characteristics of socio-political concertation for decision-making, implementation, and assessment. For instance, Rhodes (1996) acknowledges that owing to political communities' potential for self-government, governance may be associated with the minimum State or possibility of governing without government. From a different perspective, Fukuyama (2013) defines governance as a series of abilities of a government to deliver services, regardless of whether this government is democratic or not.

Pollitt and Hupe (2011, p. 643), in turn, indicate that governance represents a type of “magic concept” characterized by the following shared aspects: it has broadness, covering different domains with “multiple, overlapping, sometimes conflicting definitions, and connect with many other concepts;” it has normative attractiveness, with an “overwhelmingly positive connotation”, being “hard to be ‘against’ it”; it implicates consensus by diluting, obscuring, or even denying “the traditional social science concerns with conflicting interests and logics”; it has global marketability, being “known by and used by many practitioners and academics – that is, they are fashionable” and used in “official policy documents, the titles of reform projects and new units in both governmental and university departments.”

A fruitful stream of current literature in the field of political science and public policy has attributed the rise of notions and theories about public governance to the perception of politicians, researchers, and managers of the need for an inversion in the conception of the art of governing in contemporary liberal democracies.

This inversion of what represents “governing” was based on the recognition that decision-making and policy implementation processes in democracies have not represented an exclusive monopoly of formal chains of government, taking place outside the State apparatus and relying on the influence or even with the steering or participation of a variety of non-State

stakeholders, including crossing borders ones (ANSELL e TORFING, 2022; GJALTEMA, BIESBROEK e TERMEER, 2020; OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR e LUSTOSA DA COSTA, 2020).

For this paper, in summary, the public governance literature indicates a turning point in thinking about the role of different actors in management and public policy. Even in the nuclei of government and the toughest bureaucracy, the centrality of dialogue and joint learning with different groups with diverse perspectives for the formulation and implementation of measures began to be recognized. Thus, public governance thinking made possible a new discursive context for legitimizing new forms of policy production, which we highlight the epistemic communities.

Epistemic Communities in Public Governance

This section debates the literature on epistemic communities in public governance to explore perspectives on these communities in such a discursive context, focusing on the discussion on how they can be constituted, evolved, and used in sets of policy strategies.

Work of epistemic communities that rose in the 1990s treated this concept apart from public governance, more closely linked to the literature on international relations. In their seminal works on epistemic communities, Haas (1992) and Adler and Haas (1992) pointed out that this concept was constituted as a theoretical proposal for studying cross-border phenomena in international relations with impacts on policymaking. The common definition of an epistemic community is given by Haas (1992, p. 3), who indicates that:

An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area. Although an epistemic community may consist of professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, they have (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared

notions of validity — that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise—that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence.

In the end-1990s, Thomas (1997) tested and proposed applying epistemic community theory to analyze interagency cooperation at the domestic level. He observes that the concept of epistemic community deals with a specific phenomenon and was little explored in the literature in the study of inter cooperation and organizational change processes. An epistemic community could comprise only a part of one public organization, a category of bureaucrats, a political community, or an advocacy coalition.

The differential would be the effects of the epistemic community on the policy learning process and organizational behavior due to the strength and cohesion of its members in decision-making based on consensual knowledge and not just on the positions of power they occupy or their strength numbers. Case study results followed his hypothesis that the strength of agreements and cooperation practices between the agencies analyzed would be a function of the power of the epistemic community (THOMAS, 1997, p. 237).

Arguing for the need to review Haas' works twenty years after his first seminal works, Cross (2012) suggests new theoretical fronts for exploring empirical cases about the role of epistemic communities in the new context of global governance. In his theoretical exploration, he argues that epistemic communities are forged and evolve through the participation and attitudes of professionals that go beyond their formal bureaucratic prerogatives. In this sense, these communities may arise from formal structures, but they can work while being displaced and legitimize themselves apart from these structures (CROSS, 2012, p. 154).

He also recognizes that global space's growing complexity and resulting uncertainties have demanded broad political and policy solutions. Accompanying this assertion, he points

out that the evolution of epistemic communities results from the need for these solutions to have greater integration between technical-specialized and scientific knowledge that considers particular circumstances between countries and sectors with the participation of non-State stakeholders (CROSS, 2012, p. 159-160).

Some limitations are highlighted by the public governance literature on the capacity of epistemic communities to generate policy learning and “good” changes. Heikkila and Gerlak (2022, p. 247) indicate that epistemic communities are related to the new debate on policy learning in the governance agenda, citing the work of Dunlop and Radaelli (2020), which identified them as one of the other three types of learning: reflexive stakeholder processes, hierarchies, and negotiated/bargaining arrangements. In her authorial work on pathologies of policy learning, Dunlop (2017) proposes that the result of epistemic communities for policy learning would be a function of four distinct capacities related to governance: administrative, absorptive, analytical, and communicative.

In the case study, she verified that elements indicated strong administrative capacity but also pointed out deficiencies in certain aspects of the other three capacities that created conditions for failure. Delving into the inability to absorb the message of the epistemic community, limited learning left decision-makers isolated from reality. Lack of control over how the results were linked to public policy resulted in politicizing the research process. Finally, the method left policymaking unrelated to using strong evidence (DUNLOP, 2017, p. 34).

Thus, based on previous work, we observed that epistemic communities are not only unnoticeably built and evolved and do not represent neutral instruments for policy learning or institutional change in public governance thinking. Due to the attributed legitimacy to their members and shared and produced knowledge, producing correspondent power results, such communities can be forged as parts of strategies for driving and influencing intended shift

processes. However, given the peculiarities of the environments, structures, and public policies these communities are linked to, the intended results may be limited by undesirable practical situations, but their perception of existence and contour measures may also be the object of the strategies adopted by their members.

Brazilian Internal Control in Public Governance

Here we explore new trends and challenges of Brazilian internal control in the context of public governance. This section focuses on work about contradictions between the internal control's traditional compliance-based perspective on controlled bodies' roles and the need to not put learning, innovation, and new policies based on evidence of these bodies in check.

Internal control (and internal audit) represents a group of artifacts of management and promotion of accountability. From an instrumental point of view, internal control can be defined as the organizational process that aims to mitigate risks to achieve objectives (SPIRA e PAGE, 2003). From a more modern perspective, internal control and auditing provide information to support strategic decision-making by top management (SCHILLEMANS, VAN TWIST, *et al.*, 2018).

In Brazil, internal control of the federal government is led by CGU, which combines in the same organizational architecture preventive measures with investigative actions of possible management irregularities (BALBE, 2010). In a context of action in a network of State and social actors for the provision of services and public policies, these mechanisms gain prominence to mitigate risks arising from tensions between deficits and excesses of accountability (BOVENS, 1998; 2007) and in sustaining public governance (LANGELLA, VANNINI e PERSIANI, 2022; ROUSSY, 2013)

Internal audit has moved from a notary role and verifier of the veracity of financial data to a proactive role for the improvement of public policies (ROUSSY e PERRON, 2018) and,

in this sense, there is a need to develop a more comprehensive, deeper list of knowledge and mature for the public sector to understand and interpret (CAPERCHIONE, 2023).

This government agency also has the legal mandate of a central body to work in the technical supervision and supervision of the bodies that comprise systems of common activities – internal control, internal affairs, ombudsman, transparency, and public integrity. In this sense, the CGU's role is based on a governance model for inter-organizational coordination of both stakeholder networks of each system and between these networks, representing an example of meta-governance (KOOIMAN, 1993) or of “governance of governance” (JESSOP, 2002).

It is also essential to highlight that the CGU represents Brazil in international forums, such as in the working groups of the anti-corruption conventions of the United Nations, OECD, OAS and G20. In terms of transparency, open government and social participation, the agency participates in initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the International Conference of Commissioners on Access to Information (ICIC).

In this way, the role of the CGU presupposes the sharing of knowledge, values, and experiences, which, in turn, tends to reinforce the view on the importance of this type of sharing among its bureaucrats, representing a promising environment for strategies for forging epistemic communities.

The Case of *Revista da CGU*

This section presents and discusses the foundations and measures adopted within the strengthening project of *Revista da CGU* as a deliberate strategy of a group of internal control bureaucrats to forge and integrate epistemic communities, seeking to expand interaction with the scientific field to appropriate its results and typical techniques and methodologies.

Here, we adopt exploratory qualitative research based on content analysis to investigate the case of such a journal, which was created within the Brazilian Office of the Comptroller

General (CGU) structure, focused on the voluntarism of some bureaucrats to its strengthening this with little formalization and low institutional support.

Documentary data was gathered from the CGU website (<https://www.gov.br/cgu>), *Revista da CGU* website and its issues (https://revista.cgu.gov.br/Revista_da_CGU/), and the response to the request for information 00106.006832/2023-56 that authors sent through the official access to information service Fala.Br (<https://falabr.cgu.gov.br/>).

For this investigation, we considered two relevant characteristics for the object of this work. The first characteristic is that *Revista da CGU* is a scientific journal that aims to disseminate scientific knowledge related to specific fields of science as a general purpose of this type of scientific vehicle. Thus, it must be recognized as a useful publication instrument to attract researchers interested in publishing their research. Second, unlike other journals edited by universities and research institutes, *Revista da CGU* is edited by CGU, which as an internal control bureaucracy, does not have scientific research promotion as one of its primary purposes.

For our research strategy, we adopted three analytical categories based on the abovementioned characteristics, considering that time and changes over matter:

- editorial purpose, process and team – it includes journal’s mission, scope, guidelines, boards editors, reviewers, and review practices;
- structure provided by CGU – it considers references on support provided by CGU as publisher for planning, management, operation, and improvements;
- strengthening foundations – it refers to the foundations of strategies for the journal’s strengthening and the support that CGU provided for these strategies.

By adopting these categories, we then examined documentary data to analyze if *Revista da CGU*’s strengthening, even with little formalization and institutional support of CGU as its publisher, can represent a set of strategies aimed at forging or expanding an internal control

epistemic community. *Revista da CGU*'s trajectory can be divided into three stages and the gathered documentary data are examined based on the three analytical categories.

First Stage – the creation of Revista da CGU (2006-2011)

The first stage began in 2006, and the journal's first issue was launched in December of this year. Until 2011, it launched two issues per year, except for 2010, with one issue. There is only a little information about such a journal related to this stage. In the 2006 CGU Results Report, as well as in the editorial section of the first issue, there is only a brief mention of the journal's purpose, indicating that it represented a vehicle to publish papers of CGU servants and occasional collaborators on topics related to auditing, internal affairs, ombudsman, and corruption prevention activities (CGU, 2006, p. 67).

The information from the editorial sections of other issues in this stage and the response to request 00106.006832/2023-56 reinforces that the journal's primary purpose was related to disseminating CGU bureaucrats' technical works, with no data on the existence of formal review processes or teams of editors and reviewers of a typical scientific journal, at least in the terms defined by the American Psychological Association (2017).

Although in the 2006 CGU Results Report, *Revista da CGU* appears among the initiatives of CGU's Secretariat for the Prevention of Corruption and Strategic Information (SCPI), there are no indications that such a journal had a permanent structure or formal support, being not mentioned among the structuring norms of the CGU, which leads us to infer that the activities related to receiving submissions, reviewing papers, editing, and publishing were not formally foreseen among the responsibilities of any internal unit, nor that they had an allocated budget and support team. In addition, no information was found among the available data on projects or initiatives and grounds for the journal's strengthening in the period.

Second Stage – Revista da CGU's Return and Editorial Improvements (2015-2019)

The second stage is between 2015 and 2019 because *Revista da CGU* had no issues launched between 2012 and 2014. In relation to this period, the published issues' editorial sections indicate the existence of a formal blind peer review process, an editorial council, an editorial committee, and a formal list of reviewers. In addition, there are indications of a support team and adopting an information system for managing the editorial process.

The formally expressed purpose becomes the dissemination of scientific research related to internal control, internal affairs, transparency, ombudsman, and prevention and fights against Corruption, now open to all those interested in submitting works for publication in the *Revista da CGU*.

Although in the issue #10 editorial section, *Revista da CGU* is mentioned as an initiative under the responsibility of the Board of Planning and Institutional Development of the CGU Executive Secretariat, there are no indications that such journal had a permanent structure or formal support, having continued not to be mentioned among the structuring norms of the CGU. Issue #15 editorial section and the response to request 00106.006832/2023-56 point to a change in the editorial committee at the end-2017 and indicate the first mention of the journal's impact factor. As in the previous stage, no information was found among the available data on projects or initiatives for *Revista da CGU*'s strengthening in the period.

Third Stage – Revista da CGU's Strengthening (2020-2022)

The third stage began in 2020, representing a period of efforts for strengthening with some improvements in the journal's structure and editorial process and its planning, coordination, and care with some documentation. Another outstanding situation at this stage was the declaration of COVID-19 as a public disaster, which affected the special dossier plan, as will be seen.

The response to request 00106.006832/2023-56 indicated that three documents are the most significant. The first one is the Operational Plan 2020, assigned in January 2020, being

indicated as the first step towards a four-year strategy (2020-2023) and establishing the *Revista da CGU*'s purpose as "to disseminate high-quality scientific research on topics related to [...] Internal Control, Internal Affairs, Transparency, Ombudsman, and Prevention and Fight against Corruption" (CGU, 2023).

The second document is the Monitoring Report of March 2020, which proposes that *Revista da CGU*'s first effort for strengthening should be treated as an incubation project. Thus, it presents adjustments to the operational plan due to the verified "lack of institutional components" [for the journal's sustainability] "along with the top management and the formal mechanisms of planning, coordination, monitoring, and provision of administrative, logistical, and budgetary support" (CGU, 2023).

The latter, the Incubation Evaluation Report of January 2021, presents outputs and proposals resulting from (1) the journal's incubation project, (2) the analysis of demands of CGU, (3) demands and opportunities from the relationship with the community of practitioners and scholars related to the areas of knowledge under the scope of the journal, and (4) changes imposed on the special dossiers plan due to COVID-19.

These documents indicate improvements in the journal's website and blind peer review process and the preparation of a communication plan and special dossiers plan. They also indicated that it was established formal rules and competencies for the editorial committee and reviewers and the adoption of a new version of the information system for managing the editorial process. These measures were justified to attract more researchers and readers and increase the impact factor by better positioning in the classification list published by the Brazilian agency that evaluates graduate programs and scientific journals.

During the incubation in 2020, *Revista da CGU* was led by servants of the General Coordination of Innovation for Corruption Prevention. In 2021, it was allocated in the structure of the Board of Governance of the CGU's Executive Secretariat. Although such documents

point out the existence of an *ad hoc* support team, as in the case of the second stage, there are no indications that such a journal had a permanent formal structure, positions, or administrative and budgetary support provided by CGU.

Differently from the previous stages, there are several mentions of the fundamentals of the improvements made to the *Revista da CGU* in the third stage, which were found among the abovementioned documents and different issues' editorial sections. As pointed out, strengthening actions were justified to make the journal more attractive to authors and readers and increase the impact factor.

Specifically in relation to the special dossiers plan, in addition to its editorial sections, it indicates that they deal with relevant topics for public policy and science, and for each dossier, it was nominated guest editors from the scientific field. The announcements of these dossiers on the *Revista da CGU* website were justified by the need to strengthen the interaction between researchers and bureaucrats, bringing communities of scholars and practitioners closer together.

Looking for what could be the central purposes of the project, it is mentioned on the journal's website and in the editorial sections issues that it refers to improving interaction with researchers and, in this way, to make possible deepen the debate with the academy on specific themes, approaches, and methodologies to enhance policies related to CGU's competencies.

The documentary data also indicates that bureaucrats involved in the strengthening project and the editorial process worked in an *ad hoc* situation, as these measures were not part of the structures or prerogatives formally established by the CGU, not being the responsibility of any of its internal areas. Until the writing of this paper, *Revista da CGU* is not foreseen in the regimental structure or the internal regiment of this body, which represents the formal structuring norms of the CGU.

The findings above indicate that the strengthening and continuity of *Revista da CGU* were marked by the voluntarism of some bureaucrats, considering the lack of formalization and low institutional support in its trajectory. Despite these findings, the documentary data does not allow us to infer whether the deliberate agency of CGU bureaucrats was aimed at forging a “classical” epistemic community that, as the literature treats, would allow sharing of normative and causal beliefs, notions of validity, and common policy enterprises.

For possible future work, we suggest a profound debate about the possibilities of reviewing epistemic community theory and adopting interviews for responding to gaps and soft spots arising from the limitations of documentary data.

Conclusion

The rise of public governance has promoted debate on learning, innovation, and evidence-based public policy, pressuring bureaucracies to appropriate results and typical approaches and methodologies of the scientific field. Thus, in this context, it is preassumed that even bureaucrats tied by formal chains will forge or integrate epistemic communities to interact with scientific areas, going beyond their immediate bureaucratic prerogatives.

Epistemic communities composed of internal control bureaucrats in the context of public governance may represent fruitful investigation cases. They represent “bureaucrats of others bureaucrats,” reinforcing a compliance-based perspective on controlled bodies’ roles. On the other hand, they also must explore new governance-based perspectives to not put learning, innovation, and new policies based on evidence of controlled bodies in check.

Here, we explore how internal control bureaucrats have adopted measures to strengthen a scientific journal, improving the interaction with researchers. This paper analyzes these measures taken by servants of the Brazilian Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) to strengthen *Revista da CGU* to examine if such strengthening represented a deliberate strategy to forge an internal control epistemic community.

The documentary data indicate that the bureaucrats involved in the strengthening project and the editorial process worked in an *ad hoc* situation, as these measures were not part of the structures or prerogatives formally established by the CGU, not being the responsibility of any of its internal areas. Until the writing of this paper, *Revista da CGU* is not foreseen in the regimental structure or the internal regiment of this body, which represents the formal structuring norms of the CGU.

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