HABILITATION THESIS

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN THE ERA OF QUALITY: PROCESSES, INNOVATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This habilitation thesis synthesizes more than a decade of scientific activity focused on the analysis, optimization, and transformation of organizational processes, the development of quality management in public services, and the consolidation of an integrative perspective on organizational performance. The work brings together my contributions in the fields of operational management, Lean Healthcare, service quality evaluation, multicriteria decision support, frugal innovation, digital transformation, and bibliometric analysis, offering a coherent and evolutionary framework of my research and academic dissemination.

My academic trajectory began with a strong interest in identifying process dysfunctions within public systems, particularly in the healthcare sector. Building on my doctoral dissertation—centered on the application of Lean Six Sigma methodology in Romanian hospitals—my research revealed deeply fragmented operational structures marked by informational waste, significant clinical variability, and a lack of real integration between clinical and administrative flows. In subsequent studies, I extended this analysis through advanced statistical tools, empirical modelling, and organizational perspectives on institutional culture, demonstrating that operational performance results from the interaction among processes, behaviours, and organizational culture. My contributions to the field of quality management highlight the necessity of moving beyond traditional approaches focused solely on compliance and documentation, advocating instead for a systemic and experiential perspective on service quality. Using tools such as SERVQUAL, the Kano model, functional variable analysis, and user-perceived quality assessments, my studies show that user satisfaction is primarily determined by how the service is delivered, rather than by

its technical outcome. This finding is particularly relevant in healthcare, where patient experience becomes a strategic indicator of institutional performance and a predictor of public trust.

A major pillar of my scientific work is represented by multicriteria decision support applied in complex managerial contexts, such as resource allocation in hospitals, evaluation of managerial alternatives under uncertainty, or defining the strategic priorities of public institutions. Employing methods such as AHP, FAHP, and Delphi techniques, my research demonstrates that effective managerial decision-making requires rigorous analytical structures and transparent, context-adaptable tools.

Innovation and digital transformation constitute a central dimension of my recent research. Studies dedicated to frugal innovation, the relationship between professional performance and digitalization, and the emergence of thematic clusters (such as "AI in healthcare") emphasize the need for strategic reconstruction of public organizations under the new digital paradigms. I highlight how emerging technologies—generative AI, expert systems, digital twins, and cloud infrastructures—can reduce process variation, enhance quality, and strengthen data-driven decision-making.

The bibliometric analyses included in the thesis provide a global perspective on the evolution of these domains, identifying emerging directions and gaps in international literature.

The central original contribution of this thesis lies in the proposal of an integrated conceptual model that unites three fundamental dimensions of institutional performance: (1) waste reduction and process-flow optimization, (2) statistical control of process variation and stabilization of critical activities, and (3) cultural transformation towards collaboration, learning, and continuous improvement. Through empirical and correlational analyses, the model demonstrates that process performance and perceived quality are inseparable and must be addressed simultaneously, not sequentially.

The thesis also presents a strategic vision for academic and professional development over the next ten years, aligned with the requirements of the habilitation process. The proposed directions include: internationalization of research; development of an interdisciplinary laboratory dedicated to process and service analytics; participation in European research networks; creation of a training agency specialized in artificial intelligence for public institutions and private organizations; and expansion of academic publishing through the elaboration of two to three scholarly volumes in operational management, service quality, and AI-driven public sector transformation.

Overall, the results, models, and analytical tools presented in this thesis confirm the maturity of my research, its academic relevance, and its direct applicability to managerial practices. The habilitation thesis reflects both the consistency of a solid scientific trajectory and the capacity to generate new research directions, contributing to an academic community grounded in excellence, professional ethics, and innovation.