

Mimetic Institutionalism and Inclusion in the Public Service: An Analysis of the PCCTAE as a Comparative Model of Federal Careers

Fernanda Guimarães Silva Ribeiro¹; Ana De Medeiros Fernandes Dos Santos²;
André Luís Rodrigues Costa³; Felipe Gramonski Dos Santos⁴;
Gislene Silva Lima⁵; Lucas Da Cunha Lins⁶; Emanuelle Caroline Alves Serudo⁷;
Mérida Raquel De Araujo Costa⁸; Ronaldo Amaral Nemer⁹;
Tiago Luz De Oliveira¹⁰

¹Instituto Federal De Educação, Ciência E Tecnologia Do Rio De Janeiro

^{2,6,8}Universidade Federal Fluminense

³Instituto Federal Do Triângulo Mineiro

^{4,5,7}MUST University

⁹Universidade Ddo Amazonas

¹⁰Universidade Federal Do Amazonas

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Abstract: Institutional Theory has been widely employed to explain processes of structural convergence and organizational homogenization, particularly in public environments characterized by strong normative density and comparability among institutional arrangements. Within the field of Brazilian federal careers, however, there remains a gap concerning the empirical application of mimetic isomorphism to the analysis of institutional design and structural inclusion dynamics. In this context, the present study aimed to analyze mimetic institutionalism and elements of inclusion in the federal public service, taking the Career Plan for Technical-Administrative Staff in Education (PCCTAE) as a comparative model of federal career structures. This research is characterized as an integrative literature review, adopting a qualitative and interpretative approach. The search was conducted through Google Scholar using keywords related to PCCTAE, federal public careers, organizational institutionalism, and mimetic isomorphism. Study selection followed a convenience sampling strategy, beginning with a preliminary screening of titles, abstracts, and keywords, followed by full-text analysis of eligible works. The final corpus comprised 23 studies, organized into thematic axes that enabled the integration of empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. The findings indicate that the PCCTAE occupies a tensioned position within the inter-career comparative field, particularly regarding the architecture of functional progression and career predictability. The recent restructuring modified core valuation mechanisms, aligning the plan with formats associated with fiscal rationalization and administrative modernization. However, evidence related to demographic, distributive, and inclusion dimensions suggests that structural convergence does not eliminate persistent organizational asymmetries. The empirical synthesis indicates that career reforms are shaped by institutional pressures favoring alignment with legitimized models within the field. It is concluded that the transformation observed in the PCCTAE may be interpreted as a process of institutional recomposition driven by mimetic dynamics, in which the search for legitimacy and public defensibility operates as a vector of structural convergence. Nonetheless, the adoption of institutionally accepted formats does not automatically ensure substantive transformation of internal inequalities, indicating that public sector career reforms require a balance between standardization, fiscal sustainability, and organizational inclusion.

Keywords: Institutional Theory; Mimetic Isomorphism; Public Careers; PCCTAE; Public Service Inclusion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Institutional Theory has consolidated itself as one of the main analytical frameworks for understanding structural conformity and organizational homogenization in complex and highly regulated environments. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organizations incorporate socially legitimized formal structures to ensure survival and stability, regardless of their technical efficiency. This perspective was further developed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who introduced the concept of institutional isomorphism, according to which organizations tend to become similar due to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures. In contexts of uncertainty, mimetic institutionalism emerges as a strategic mechanism through which organizations adopt models perceived as successful in order to reduce risks and enhance legitimacy. Scott (2014) complements this understanding by demonstrating that regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars structure organizational fields and influence patterns of institutional reproduction. In the public sector—characterized by strong normative density and high political visibility—such dynamics tend to be even more intense, particularly in careers structured by rigid legal frameworks and comparable administrative standards.

Although institutional literature is robust in analyzing organizational fields and structural convergence dynamics (Greenwood et al., 2008; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996), there remains a specific gap regarding the empirical application of mimetic institutionalism to federal public service careers in Brazil, particularly when articulated with the dimension of structural and organizational inclusion. Studies on public careers frequently focus on remuneration, motivation, or managerial aspects, but rarely integrate institutional design with mechanisms of diffusion and structural reproduction among federal careers. This gap becomes even more relevant when considering the Career Plan for Technical-Administrative Staff in Education (PCCTAE), whose normative configuration allows comparison with other careers within the Federal Executive Branch. In this context, the general objective of this study is to analyze mimetic institutionalism and elements of inclusion in the Brazilian federal public service, taking the PCCTAE as a comparative model of federal career structures. This objective is developed through an integrative literature review aimed at articulating empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to construct a consistent analytical interpretation of institutional convergence patterns within the field of federal public careers.

II. METHODS

This study is characterized as an integrative literature review, adopting a qualitative and interpretative approach aimed at understanding the Career Plan for Technical-Administrative Staff in Education (PCCTAE) through the lens of organizational institutionalism, with emphasis on mimetic isomorphism. The integrative review was chosen because it enables the articulation of empirical and theoretical productions, allowing analytical interpretation of the phenomenon from a comparative inter-career perspective.

The bibliographic search was conducted using Google Scholar due to its multidisciplinary scope and indexing capacity for both national and international journals. Combinations of keywords in Portuguese and English were used, including: “PCCTAE,” “Career Plan,” “federal public careers,” “organizational institutionalism,” “mimetic isomorphism,” “public careers,” and “public sector reform.” Searches prioritized recent publications and works directly related to the research object.

Study selection followed a convenience sampling strategy, considering thematic adherence and theoretical relevance to the investigated phenomenon. Initially, a preliminary screening of titles, abstracts, and keywords was conducted through a floating reading process to identify potentially aligned works. Subsequently, full-text reading was carried out to confirm eligibility.

The organization of the review followed the basic logic of the PRISMA protocol, without the use of a formal flowchart, structuring the process into identification, screening, and final inclusion stages. After the screening and thematic eligibility analysis, the final corpus consisted of 23 works, distributed between studies focused on organizational institutionalism and empirical or analytical research related to the PCCTAE and comparable federal public careers.

The selected works were organized into thematic axes, enabling argumentative integration of findings and subsequent theoretical triangulation with the institutionalist framework. The analytical procedure consisted of extracting key arguments, results, and analytical categories from each study, followed by interpretative synthesis guided by the research problem.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent literature in organizational studies has reaffirmed neo-institutionalism as a central analytical lens to explain why organizations—particularly in the public sector—adopt similar structures and practices even when performance outcomes are heterogeneous. Rather than interpreting change as purely rational decision-making, contemporary studies emphasize that the search for legitimacy and alignment with field-level expectations shapes structural choices. From this perspective, institutional change is understood as a response to dominant pressures and narratives rather than strict performance optimization (Hwang, 2023).

Within this framework, organizational convergence is frequently explained through institutional pressures that operate as mechanisms of standardization. Recent empirical evidence suggests that imitation in the public sector is not merely uncritical replication but a pragmatic strategy to reduce uncertainty and reputational risk in environments where efficiency is difficult to measure and external scrutiny is high. Mimetic isomorphism thus functions as a shortcut to legitimacy, anchored in models perceived as acceptable, safe, and defensible before oversight bodies and public opinion (Campos-Alba et al., 2024).

Contemporary research also indicates that coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures often interact, producing combined effects. Observing organizational changes across different contexts, recent literature argues that organizations tend to adjust their practices according to what is institutionally expected, even when such adjustments involve downsizing, restructuring, or work reconfiguration. This argument is relevant because it shows that homogenization does not derive solely from legal mandates, but from an institutional ecology that defines certain management models as appropriate (Piyantalee, 2024).

When the focus shifts to human resource management, recent scholarship suggests that HR systems tend to become similar across countries and organizations as institutional contexts converge. Multinational analyses indicate that “similar contexts” produce “similar HR systems,” reinforcing the argument that career practices, incentive structures, and evaluation mechanisms are shaped by institutional conditions rather than purely local managerial preferences. This evidence strengthens the view that career plans are institutional technologies subject to diffusion and standardization (Mayrhofer et al., 2024).

In the public sector specifically, the literature points to a simultaneous movement of convergence and preservation of sectoral specificities. Longitudinal analyses show that public HRM retains distinctive characteristics even while incorporating contemporary managerial practices, suggesting that the institutionalization of “modernizing” models does not eliminate the public grammar of stability, merit, and accountability. This insight is decisive for career debates: reforms may mimic formats while preserving—or tensioning—core public values in their implementation (Knies et al., 2022).

From an international comparative perspective, recent studies argue that reforms in HR and career policies must be understood as institutionally situated processes. The national HRM literature highlights continuity and change as coexisting phenomena, indicating that reforms often mobilize already legitimized repertoires and, at times, import external references as justification. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, as it suggests that public careers may be redesigned through institutional benchmarking, thereby generating imitative patterns of convergence (Gooderham et al., 2025).

The discussion of inclusion has also entered contemporary public administration debates as a criterion of legitimacy and performance. Recent research emphasizes that diversity and inclusion in public service move beyond normative commitments and begin to influence organizational outcomes and public value delivery, although mediated by administrative arrangements and governance structures. In this sense, inclusion can become institutionalized as a modernization requirement—and therefore also subject to diffusion and standardization through environmental pressures (Silva, 2025).

At the intersection of inclusion and public management, recent studies examine how diversity policies connect to perceptions of justice and performance, suggesting that inclusive practices may become replicable organizational formats. When inclusion enters the dominant institutional repertoire, organizations may adopt such practices not only for substantive reasons but also for symbolic and reputational coherence. Thus, inclusion can operate as both normative and mimetic mechanism within the public field, shaping policies and career structures (Kassim, 2025).

In the Brazilian context, recent studies published in national journals explicitly mobilize institutional vocabulary—coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures—to interpret transformations and standardization processes in public organizations. These findings reinforce the argument that homogenization may occur even when adaptation to local contexts remains limited. Accordingly, career models and management arrangements may function as institutional responses aimed at signaling conformity and modernization before oversight institutions and field-level expectations (Castro et al., 2025).

Based on this body of literature, it becomes theoretically consistent to treat career plans as institutional artifacts subject to diffusion and comparison. In federal environments characterized by multiple regulated careers and pressures for standardization, reforms and restructurings may occur through imitation of models perceived as successful or through alignment with legitimized field repertoires. In this sense, the PCCTAE can be analyzed as a comparative reference to understand dynamics of mimetic institutionalism and disputes over inclusion, articulating structural convergence, remuneration design, and organizational legitimacy (Campos-Alba et al., 2024; Knies et al., 2022; Mayrhofer et al., 2024).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Comparative evidence among federal careers positions the PCCTAE as an arrangement that disputes legitimacy in the field not merely based on remuneration levels, but on how it structures salary progression and career predictability. In fields where symbolic value depends on perceived equivalence with reference peers, pressures toward convergence operate as mechanisms for uncertainty reduction and reputational protection. It is precisely at this point that mimetic isomorphism functions as an explanatory device: when the PCCTAE is constantly compared to careers with more linear trajectories, reform ceases to be an internal managerial choice and becomes an adjustment aimed at approximating models perceived as “appropriate” within the field (Costa et al., 2025; Campos-Alba et al., 2024).

This movement aligns with recent literature demonstrating that organizations operating in similar institutional contexts tend to display increasingly similar human resource systems, particularly when comparison intensifies and expectations become standardized. In practical terms, career reform debates do not evolve solely through technical efficiency, but through alignment with shared contextual standards. What appears “rational” and

“defensible” becomes the guiding principle of institutional redesign. Thus, comparison functions as an institutional pressure mechanism pushing the PCCTAE toward convergent formats, reinforcing interpretations of homogenization driven by mimetic dynamics in highly interdependent environments (Mayrhofer et al., 2024).

Public sector HRM literature further indicates that convergence may result from isomorphic change—including mimetic mechanisms—without entirely eliminating sector-specific characteristics. Public organizations may modernize through convergence while preserving enduring values such as stability, merit, and accountability. Therefore, when the PCCTAE adjusts progression mechanisms and incentive structures toward models framed as “modern,” institutional analysis need not assume linear causality; it suffices to recognize that the field offers a dominant repertoire of socially acceptable solutions that are replicated because they enhance legitimacy (Knies et al., 2022; Zolak Poljašević et al., 2025).

Empirical findings from the LAB regarding financial and pension impacts introduce a second reinforcing mechanism: fiscal constraint as a condition shaping redesign. When career costs become sensitive to pension regimes and progression dynamics, debates shift from distributive justice to sustainability governance. In austerity-oriented environments, reforms are legitimized through narratives of rationalization and control, increasing the likelihood of adopting formats previously tested and validated elsewhere. Fiscal pressure does not replace mimetic processes; rather, it intensifies them by making imitation the safest route for producing change with public defensibility (Silva et al., 2024; Zolak Poljašević et al., 2025).

Within this context, the recent restructuring (MP 1.286/2024) appears, according to LAB findings, as a modification of institutional mechanisms rather than merely numerical adjustments. Changes in progression by qualification, introduction of conditional acceleration, extension of timelines, and redefinition of the Qualification Incentive reflect reforms oriented toward conformity. Structural rules were altered to approximate a dominant grammar of control, filtering, and traceability. The mimetic interpretation gains strength precisely because reform targeted the symbolic core of legitimacy—predictability, criteria clarity, and growth format (Cardoso et al., 2025; Costa et al., 2025; Campos-Alba et al., 2024).

LAB findings concerning telework and work modernization further demonstrate that career redesign does not occur in isolation. The broader institutional agenda of digital transformation imposes additional pressures for organizational restructuring. Literature on the digital imperative shows that organizations adapt not only due to competition but because legitimacy increasingly depends on alignment with modernization expectations. As the PCCTAE incorporates telework and performance-based management elements, the probability of imitating ready-made institutional solutions increases, since the field already provides standardized, discursively legitimized models (Souza et al., 2025; Bennich, 2024).

The inclusion dimension—central to this study—reveals the limits of mimetic convergence. Structural conformity does not guarantee substantive equity. LAB evidence on demographic profiles and diversity, combined with documented inequalities within the Federal Executive, suggests that inequality persists as a structural feature rather than an anomaly. Reforms may generate symbolic modernization while leaving distributive asymmetries intact. Thus, mimetic realignment reorganizes form but does not automatically transform substantive inclusion, which requires specific justice-oriented institutional mechanisms (Franco et al., 2024; Castro et al., 2024).

Finally, findings on motivation and career perception establish the organizational consequences of institutional redesign. When a career is perceived as less predictable or less competitive, impacts emerge in engagement, satisfaction, and retention. These are not peripheral behavioral effects but structural feedback mechanisms affecting long-term institutional sustainability. While convergence may strengthen external legitimacy, it may generate internal organizational costs if recognition, predictability, and perceived fairness are weakened (Castelo Branco et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2025; Knies et al., 2022).

Taken together, the empirical sequence supports a coherent interpretation: inter-career comparison places the PCCTAE in a legitimacy dispute; fiscal constraints and modernization agendas create conditions for defensible change; reform modifies core mechanisms to approximate dominant institutional grammars; yet inclusion remains a persistent tension. Mimetic institutionalism thus emerges not as speculative abstraction, but as an explanatory framework consistent with observed patterns of convergence in highly interdependent and uncertain organizational fields (Costa et al., 2025; Cardoso et al., 2025; Mayrhofer et al., 2024; Campos-Alba et al., 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to analyze the Career Plan for Technical-Administrative Staff in Education (PCCTAE) through the lens of institutionalism, with emphasis on mimetic isomorphism, based on an integrative literature review and inter-career comparative analysis within the federal sphere. By mobilizing empirical evidence produced by the laboratory alongside recent complementary literature, the study sought to interpret how the structural redesign of the plan is embedded within a field characterized by legitimacy pressures, rationalization discourses, and institutional standardization. The objective was not merely to describe regulatory modifications, but to interpret structural movement within the broader dynamics of federal public careers.

Findings indicate that the PCCTAE occupies a comparatively tensioned position within the remuneration and structural field, particularly regarding progression architecture and career predictability. Recent restructuring modified central valuation mechanisms, aligning the plan with narratives of fiscal rationalization and administrative modernization. However, fiscal, demographic, and

distributive evidence demonstrates that structural convergence does not eliminate internal asymmetries, especially concerning inclusion and organizational equity. The empirical synthesis suggests that reform is shaped less by technical efficiency than by insertion into a comparative institutional field intensifying homogenizing pressures.

It is concluded that the observed transformation of the PCCTAE represents a process of institutional recomposition influenced by mimetic dynamics characteristic of highly interdependent organizational environments. Alignment with legitimized models enhances institutional defensibility but does not automatically resolve structural challenges related to substantive valorization and inclusion. Consequently, public sector career reforms require a balance between institutional convergence, fiscal sustainability, and organizational justice, otherwise risking formal conformity without effective transformation of persistent inequalities.

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