



Improving efficiency in tribunals through a fixed-term workforce: The experience of Verona and Vicenza judicial districts[■]

Federico Brunetti, Angelo Bonfanti, Francesco Bonetti and Arianna Persi*

Department of Management - University of Verona (Italy)

Email: federico.brunetti@univr.it; angelo.bonfanti@univr.it;
francesco.bonetti_02@studenti.univr.it; arianna.persi@univr.it

* Corresponding Author

Abstract

The judicial system is the result of a complex organizational network, where professionals with different expertise work together to provide efficient services to citizens. However, excessive amount of bureaucracy and high workloads can slow down the proper functioning of courts and reduce their efficiency by causing deterioration of service quality. Recent reforms of the Italian judicial system have led to the incorporation in the courts of the so-called UPP (“Ufficio Per il Processo”, which can be translated in English with “Trial Office”) staff, a new professional category, with the purpose of filling gaps in the workforce and promoting significant improvements in qualitative and organizational terms. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of UPP staff in terms of efficiency improvement. More precisely, it investigates what tasks are performed by UPP staff and how UPP reduces the case backlog in Italian tribunals to improve service quality to citizens. In terms of managerial implications, the findings of our research point to the need for an adequate communication activity towards both the current workforce in the tribunals and the newcomers. Furthermore, the introduction of new resources into the organization, even if – or just because – its temporariness/short term duration call for a strong training action on both sides. While, as for the social implications, the UPP can be seen as one of the first attempts to introduce a change in a much old-fashioned branch in the public administration realm – the judicial system – and for this very reason it is presumably expected to have a positive impact, even if not immediately, in the medium run.

Keywords

judicial system; courts; tribunals; fixed-term workforce; efficiency; backlog reduction

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1. Introduction

An effective and efficient justice is kind of vital for any state, because – not to mention other reasons – justice is a basic need for the human being, justice is essential to the social contract among citizens and justice is necessary to the proper and orderly conduct of economic activity. It's not difficult to understand that, consequently, the judicial system is something essential for any type of associative form of life and that it's no coincidence that throughout the entire evolution of human civilization courts, judges, verdicts and so on deserved a very special attention. From the point of view of its operating conditions, the judicial system is the result of a complex interplay between legal norms and organizational structures, where professionals with different expertise work together to provide effective and efficient services to citizens, companies and whatever entity is entitled to access it. It comes as no surprise, then, that a smooth and fast enough working of such an interplay is not easy to achieve, but it is at the same time critical for the above reasons.

In the Italian context, the judicial system has long been suffering – and it is still suffering – from a poor ability to meet the expectations required, especially in terms of acceptable response times to reach decisions. Excessive amount of bureaucracy, insufficient judicial and administrative staff and huge backlog of work have been identified as the main reasons for the poor functioning and lack of efficiency of courts. This, in turn, affects the overall quality of the judicial service, because quickness is – since the ancient times (“*iustitia dilata est iustitia negata*”) – an intrinsic requisite of justice. Recent reforms of the Italian judicial system have led to the incorporation in the courts of the so-called UPP (“*Ufficio Per il Processo*”, which can be translated in English with “*Trial Office*”) staff, a new professional category, with the purpose of filling gaps in the workforce and promoting significant qualitative and organizational improvements. Accordingly, the following research question emerges: What is the impact of UPP staff in terms of efficiency improvement?

Moving from a quick sketch of the causes of delays that most plague the Italian judicial system, the aim of this study is to examine how the so-called UPP staff has been implemented by the Italian government to solve the issue. More precisely, this research investigates what tasks are performed by UPP staff and how UPP reduce the case backlog in Italian tribunals by improving services offered to citizens in terms of efficiency. In methodological terms, this study adopts an exploratory approach by performing a two-stage interview process comprising a questionnaire and some interviews. In this regard, this research uses Italian judicial districts, especially Verona and Vicenza ones, as units of analysis.

The characteristics of UPP introduction in the Italian judicial system make it a very interesting case to analyze, both from the point of view of its (first) results in terms of efficacy of addressing the problems it was designed for and from the point of view of the considerations that can be drawn in more general organizational and managerial terms.

The paper is structured as follows. After presenting inefficiencies of the Italian judicial system, the methodological choices are presented as well as the findings of the twofold empirical investigation are described. Next, the contribution of the research and its implications, both managerial and social, are highlighted. Finally, this study concludes with research limitations and future avenues.

2. Research background

Within the Italian justice system, the organizational factor is considered important to combat the excessive length of judicial proceedings and, consequently, the inefficiencies of jurisdiction. For this purpose, the Article 111 of the Constitution introduced the principle of the reasonable

time of the trial, placing the attention of all those involved in the civil process to time as a central factor in the exercise of the judicial function. The value of the efficiency of justice – definable as the optimal allocation of resources with respect to the results that justice is called to achieve – does not find a legislative formulation expressed in the sources that regulate civil judicial proceedings.

Despite the importance of the efficiency topic, there's a lack of scientific publications dealing with the efficiency of courts of justice, making this subject hard to analyze properly.

The World Economic Forum, a global non-governmental organisation, established in 1971, publishes annually a report with the aim of providing a useful tool for investigating the state of well-being of a country, its strengths and the elements on which it is appropriate to intervene. This report provides a ranking that measures the competitiveness of countries by comparing the results that each country achieves in 114 key performance indicators, grouped into 12 pillars, each representing an area considered important for competitiveness (Enabling Environment, Human Capital, Markets and Innovation Ecosystem). The pillars on which the Global Competitiveness Report is based are as follows: 1. Institutions; 2. Appropriate infrastructure; 3. ICT Adoption; 4. Macroeconomic Stability; 5. Health; 6. Skills; 7. Product Markets; 8. Labour Markets; 9. Financial System; 10. Market Size; 11. Business Dynamism; 12. Innovation Capability. From an examination of the analysis carried out in 2019, although Italy is in a relatively satisfactory position in many indicators (Table 1), it occupies position no. 126 out of 141 concerning the “Efficiency in settling legal disputes” indicator (belonging to pillar 1. Institutions); this figure highlights a condition of serious difficulty in the judicial system, that affects not only private citizens but above all the socio-economic context of the entire country. If, on the one hand, the efficient management of the judicial system increases security and trust in institutions, on the other hand, an uncertain and inadequate management of civil disputes harms compliance with contractual obligations, reducing the competitiveness and attractiveness of investments and ultimately compromising the level of wealth produced annually (GDP).

So, what are the main factors that lead Italy to rank among the last positions in such an important indicator for a country? From the scant scientific literature on the topic, it is possible to identify problems both on the supply side and on the demand side, on which it is necessary to intervene to make significant improvements in the justice system.

Table 1 - Efficiency in settling legal disputes

Global Competitiveness Report 2019	Institutions	Infrastructure	<i>Efficiency of legal framework in challenging regulations</i>	ICT Adoption	Macroeconomic stability	Health	Skills	Product Market	Labour Market	Financial System	Market Size	Business Dynamism	Innovation Capability	Overall (out of 141)
France	22 ^{sd}	9 th	23 rd	28 th	36 th	7 th	35 th	28 th	50 th	14 th	9 th	24 th	9 th	15 th
Germany	18 th	8 th	11 th	36 th	1 st	31 st	5 th	9 th	14 th	25 th	5 th	5 th	1 st	7 th
Italy	48 th	18 th	126 th	53 rd	63 rd	6 th	42 nd	31 st	90 th	48 th	12 th	43 rd	22 nd	30 th
Spain	28 th	7 th	74 th	19 th	43 rd	1 st	37 th	34 th	61 st	26 th	15 th	34 th	25 th	23 rd
United Kingdom	11 th	11 th	16 th	31 st	1 st	33 rd	11 th	21 st	9 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	8 th	9 th

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report (2019)

On the demand side, an excessive recourse to judicial disputes emerges, consequent to the presence of relatively low private costs for going to litigation (Marchesi, 2002), which justifies the advancement of opportunistic behaviour on the part of the population. Added to this is the law, which imposes a direct link between the length of criminal proceedings and the fees of legal defenders, a situation which creates a significant incentive for the latter to keep the number of court hearings high and the duration of litigations long.

On the supply side, the Italian judicial system performs poorly in terms of dispute resolution times: Italy holds the European record for the average duration of ordinary civil cognition processes, requiring over 9 and a half years for all three levels of judgement (Marchesi, 2002). The causes of this temporal extension are due, on a theoretical level, to the scarcity of the resources employed, the insufficient and inadequate number of magistrates and/or the low

productivity of the magistrates; however, there was no effective confirmation of these in the statistical data which testified, on the contrary, to an increase in productivity and in the number of magistrates present concerning the population. On the other hand, the presence of inefficiencies in the distribution of resources (both human and economic and material) between types of judicial offices and at a geographical level was evident; this figure, albeit years later, does not seem to have recorded substantial differences. Indeed, there is an optimal size of judicial offices, where there is a balance between resources and productivity; if the judicial offices are excessively large, the loss of productivity is high, but it increases considerably if they are undersized. For this reason, with the recent reforms of the judicial geography (which came into force starting in 2012), it was decided to abolish the small judicial realities (including courts and prosecutors' offices, branch offices and offices of the Justice of the Peace).

According to different Authors (Peyrace and Zago, 2015), the inefficiency of the Italian judicial system are attributable to the three following main causes:

1. technical inefficiency (due to the lack of best practice adoption within the courts of justice);
2. reallocation inefficiencies (category about all those inefficiencies that arise due to a misallocation of resources across courts all around the Country);
3. size inefficiency, implying that a significant reduction in trial length could be effectively achieved by splitting the largest courts up.

While the first kind of inefficiency follows the traditional Italian economic dualism (North vs. South), the last one is about an issue homogeneously distributed all over the peninsula (Peyrace and Zago, 2015). Moreover, although the third point seems to contradict what was previously stated, it underlines how much the debate regarding the correct sizing of the courts is a delicate and difficult issue, on which there is still no univocal opinion.

Finally, Verzelloni (2020), analyzing the main reforms carried out by the Italian government to deal with the inefficiencies of the courts, outlines the causes of a purely organizational nature and others relating to the Italian political and socio-cultural context. According to the author, belong to the first group elements such as: "uncovering rate of professional and administrative personnel, organizational well-being, working conditions and spaces, turnover frequency, presence of support figures for judges, availability of technological tools, are included in the first category, internal organization and division of workloads". Instead, it binds to the second category of variable inefficiencies such as: "characteristics of the socio-economic fabric, presence of a culture of legality, rate of litigation, breadth and stability of the 'social capital', quality of other public administrations, sustainability of local policies, citizens' trust in justice, relations with lawyers and the willingness of lawyers to contribute to the containment of trial times and the development of conciliation attempts" (Verzelloni, 2020).

These Authors investigate inefficiency of the courts of justice from a purely economic point of view, rather than a managerial one, thus highlighting a large gap in the scientific studies on the subject. Consequently, given that studies about judicial efficiency from a managerial perspective are scarce in literature and that the topic of inefficiency in tribunals was conducted exclusively in aggregate terms, this study responds to the need to develop such perspective, considering the impact of UPP staff in terms of judicial efficiency improvement, which hitherto represents an under-investigated topic in the service management literature.

3. Method

3.1. Research method

This exploratory study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate how UPP staff has performed to reduce the case backlog in Italian tribunals and, consequently, to improve in term

of efficiency. This method is suitable to the purpose of this study to the four following reasons: a) it enables to explore and examine complex and emergent social and business phenomena (Yin, 2017), b) it enables to collect significant data in its natural state without manipulation or intervention during the process (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), c) it enables to provide a solid contribution to the existing literature, moving iteratively between theory and the data to grasp better the empirical phenomenon (Dubois and Gadde, 2014), and d) it enables the results to be used to develop further research (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Italian tribunals of different judicial districts were considered multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2017). Specifically, the study focused on the Verona and Vicenza judicial districts, which are in Veneto region in the northeast of Italy. Multiple observers as sources of data were used for data triangulation (Jack and Raturi, 2006) to overcome single-source bias and increase the validity of results. The choice of setting case study in Italy was because justice Italian reform is leading judicial systems to embrace new cultural and organizational dimensions of justice such as efficiency.

This research used a two-stage interview process comprising a questionnaire and interviews because this methodological process enabled us to build a realistic observation of the cases (Snow and Thomas, 1994), by obtaining many ideas and impressions about the topic under investigation. The respondents have communicated their ideas, projects, and strategic actions freely and flexibly using their preferred narrative structures (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and this enabled us to understand individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward this phenomenon (e.g., Krueger and Casey, 2000).

3.2. The study context: UPP

Based on Legislative Decree No 221 of 2012, amended by Legislative Decree No 90 of 2014, the UPP is introduced in Italy as an organizational structure established with the aim of ensuring reasonable time of process, innovating the organizational models of the offices, and ensuring a more efficient use of information and communication technologies. To achieve this goal, the judge is accompanied by a qualified support team that facilitates the preparatory activities of the trial and speed up the drafting of proceedings. There is therefore a marked change in the judge's conception of work, marking the transition from a typically individualistic management to a shared management of the judicial activity. In fact, the judge's work was strictly inherent in the professional training of the magistrate. With this change, it is implemented by means of a structure owned by trainees, honorary judges, and administrative staff (stationery staff), suitable to support judicial tasks in quantitative and qualitative terms. In particular, the honorary judges shall carry out all the preparatory acts necessary for carrying out the judicial function, the trainees shall assist one or more professional judges by carrying out preparatory acts for carrying out the judicial function or tasks of an administrative nature, while the administrative staff carry out the typical tasks of the function, identified by the manager together with the Head of the Office. All this happens in the civil and criminal sections of the Courts of Appeal, the Ordinary Courts and the Courts for minors, and in the criminal field also at the offices of the GIP and the GUP. However, this organizational system has struggled to take root immediately, due to the lack of human, material and technological resources that could make it work.

In 2021, the establishment of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (in Italy named Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza - PNRR) aims to bring the Italian process back to a model of efficiency and competitiveness, trying to reduce the time of proceedings. To achieve this purpose, UPP is made further operational with the addition of trial officers, officials employed by the Ministry of Justice, recruited, with competition, on a district basis. To this end, 16,500 graduates are employed in two fixed-term instalments in the period 2021-2024 with the aim of reducing the backlog and reducing the time of civil and criminal proceedings. In other words, with the PNRR, UPP assumes an innovative potential that lies not only in the large

number of employees employed, but also in the overall improvement objectives of the office, to be realized through a structure of assistance to the magistrate. Specifically, the staff has the task of relieving the judge from performing minor tasks, simple or routine, as well as creating quality support to the drafting of measures, the study of doctrinal and jurisprudential issues. In other words, an organization is created in which the judge should exercise the activity *stricto sensu* jurisdictional, reaching the decision after a preliminary elaboration, from the staff, of the skeleton of the proceeding.

3.3. Data collection

The empirical study employed a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Precisely, the questionnaire was submitted between May and June 2023 to the UPP staff of the judicial district of Venice, which includes the courts of Padua, Treviso, Verona, Venice, and Vicenza. This research method enabled us to identify the tasks that UPP staff are daily performing.

The interviews were carried out to examine how UPP staff reduce the case backlog in Italian tribunals and, thus, to improve in terms of efficiency. Specifically, three in-depth interviews were performed at the Verona tribunal and two at the Vicenza tribunal: the first interview has been carried out to two judicial officials of the area GIP, the second to two UPP employees of the GIP area, and the third to the president of the criminal section. In both the cases, informants were chosen for their knowledgeability in the topic under investigation as well as their availability to participate to the interviews.

The interview guide was designed based on the main themes of the research question. More precisely, the interview guide included the following three questions: 1) How is the work organization within the UPP (or with UPP staff)?; 2) What are the most critical issues solved with the introduction of UPP staff within the tribunal? Would you please share some brief examples?; and 3) What would be useful to do to improve these possible criticalities? Five interviews were conducted in March 2023. Each of them lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. They were conducted by following a conversation with purpose approach, which allows interviewers to vary the detail of the answers, as well as the order of the questions. According to the interpretivist approach, the interview can be seen as a “socially constructed event” (Caruana et al., 2014, p. 120) in which the researcher/interviewer acts as an expert facilitator who stimulates the respondents. The interviews were digitally recorded, later transcribed, and then checked for accuracy. The recording of the interview made it easier to focus on the interview content and the verbal prompts and thus enables the transcriptionist to generate “verbatim transcript” of the interview.

3.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used as research technique because it enabled us to examine a large amount of data to identify themes and to obtain new contents. In procedural terms, a series of iterative coding and analysis were conducted by authors independently to triangulate the initial results. This approach was aimed at reducing the subjective interpretations of the researchers (Flick, 2000). These independent analyses were then compared collectively to identify the major themes emerged from the interviews. As a result, narrative constructs about the main topics of the study emerged and are in the following section proposed.

4. Findings

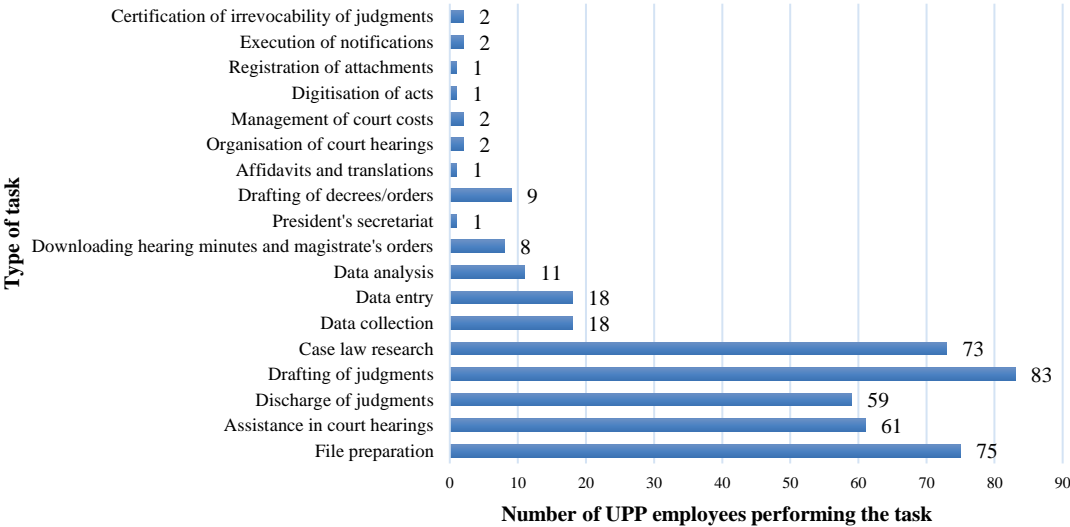
The findings of this study comprise two empirical investigations: a questionnaire delivered to UPP staff, and five interviews carried out to the administrative staff of the courts of Verona

and Vicenza. First, will be presented the results of the survey, and then the results of the interviews.

4.1. Tasks performed by UPP staff

Based on the questionnaire submitted to the UPP staff of the judicial district of Venice, which includes the courts of Padua, Treviso, Verona, Venice and Vicenza, a total of 114 replies were obtained, of which 21 from the court of Verona and 31 from the court of Vicenza. At the entire district level, the responses received from UPP staff are broken down as follows: 47 in the civil area, 5 in the labor area, 50 in the criminal area and 12 from other areas. Figure 1 shows the main tasks performed by UPP personnel within the entire judicial district of Venice and the number of UPP employees performing them. Drafting of judgements, file preparation and case law research are the top three tasks most frequently carried out by UPP staff.

Figure 1 - Tasks performed by UPP staff



The tasks can be divided into the three following macro-areas: 1) magistrate assistance, 2) liaison activities, and 3) chancellery assistance, as Table 1 shows. Precisely, magistrate assistance activities consist of assisting the magistrate in all those activities that are strictly the magistrate’s responsibility, while chancellery assistance activities consist of supporting all those activities that are the chancelleries’ responsibility. The liaison activity, on the other hand, consists in carrying out all those activities that are partly within the competence of the judge and partly within the competence of the chancelleries.

Table 1 - Main macro-areas of tasks performed by UPP staff

Magistrate assistance	Liaison activities	Chancellery activities
Drafting of judgements	Assistance in court hearings	File preparation
Case law research	Data collection	Discharge of judgements
Drafting of decrees/orders	Data analysis	Data entry
	Downloading hearing minutes and magistrate’s orders	Affidavits and translations
	President’s secretariat	Registration of attachments
	Organisation of court hearings	Execution of notifications
	Managements of courts costs	Certification of irrevocability of judgements
	Digitisation of acts	

The most frequent tasks (i.e., drafting of judgements, file preparation, case law research, assistance in court hearings, and discharge of judgments) are evenly distributed among all the three macro-areas, highlighting how the UPP employees are effectively supporting both the judiciary and the chancellery. In effect, the role of the UPP officer is to be of help to both the magistrate and the chancellery and to act as a link between these two areas. This result is in line with the most frequent activities carried out in the courts of Verona and Vicenza from which emerges that UPP employees support the duties of magistrates and chancellery staff, as Figures 2 and 3 show.

Figure 2 - Tasks performed by UPP staff at the court of Verona

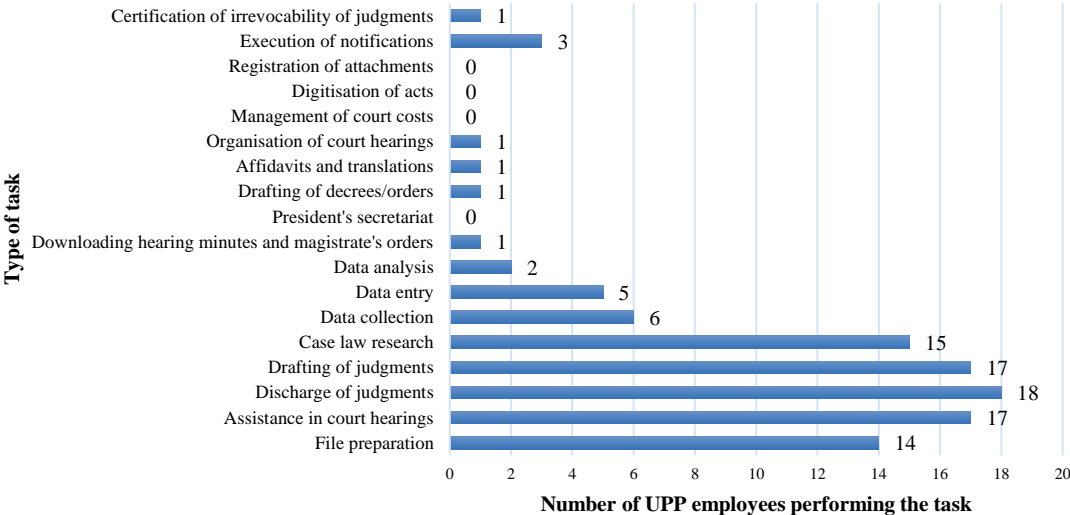


Figure 3 - Tasks performed by UPP staff at the court of Vicenza

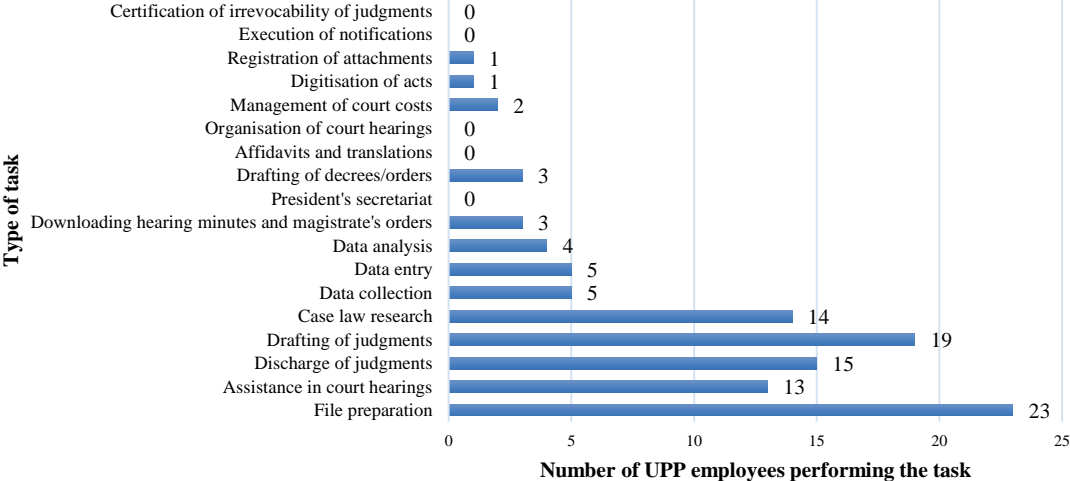
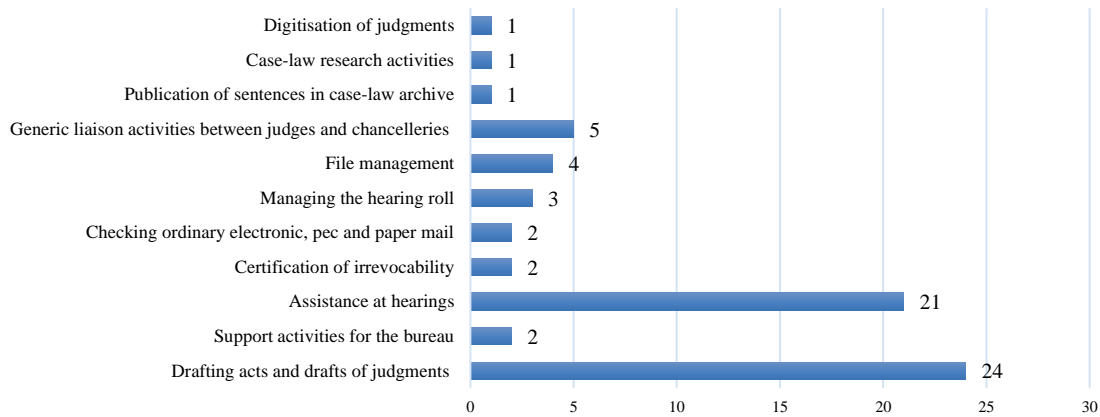


Figure 4 shows the activities that the entire judicial district of Venice would suffer functionally due to absence from the office to illness or shift work of the UPP officer. Precisely, drafting acts and draft of judgements and assistance at hearings are the two activities that would suffer functionally if the UPP employee were to be absent from the office. The drafting of acts and draft of judgements is part of the macro-area of magistrate assistance, while assistance at hearings is part of the macro-area of liaison activities. These results newly confirm the fundamental role of UPP staff in assisting the magistrate and in acting as a bridge between the judge and the chancellery. In particular, the UPP staff, being of great support in drafting acts and drafts of judgments and in attending court hearings, effectively helps to clear the backlog and reduce the duration of civil and criminal trials.

Figure 4 - Functionally impaired activities due to the absence from office



Figures 5 and 6 show which activities would be functionally impaired in the courts of Verona and Vicenza, respectively. In the court of Verona, the activity that would suffer most in the event of the UPP officer's absence from the office would be assistance in court hearings, whereas in the court of Vicenza it would be the drafting of acts and the drafts of documents. This shows that in the court of Verona, the liaison activity is of high importance and that the UPP staff is mainly useful as a bridge between the judiciary and the chancellery. In the court of Vicenza, on the other hand, the activity of assisting the magistrate is prevalent, highlighting how the UPP staff is useful above all to support the judges.

Figure 5 - Functionally impaired activities due to the absence from office at the court of Verona

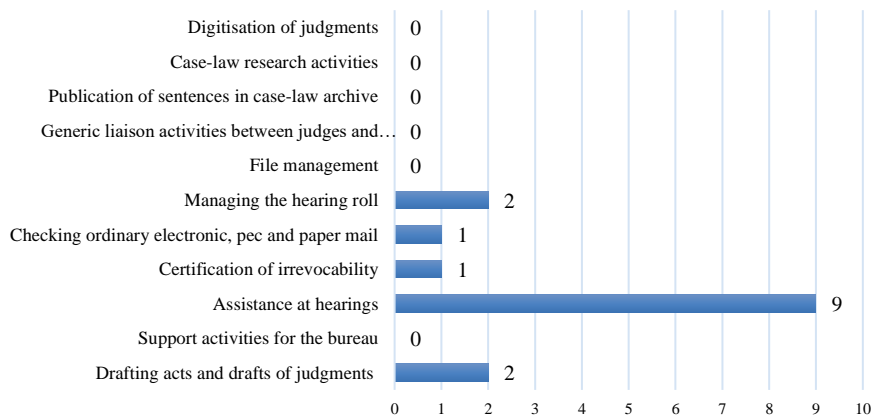


Figure 6 - Functionally impaired activities due to the absence from office at the court of Vicenza

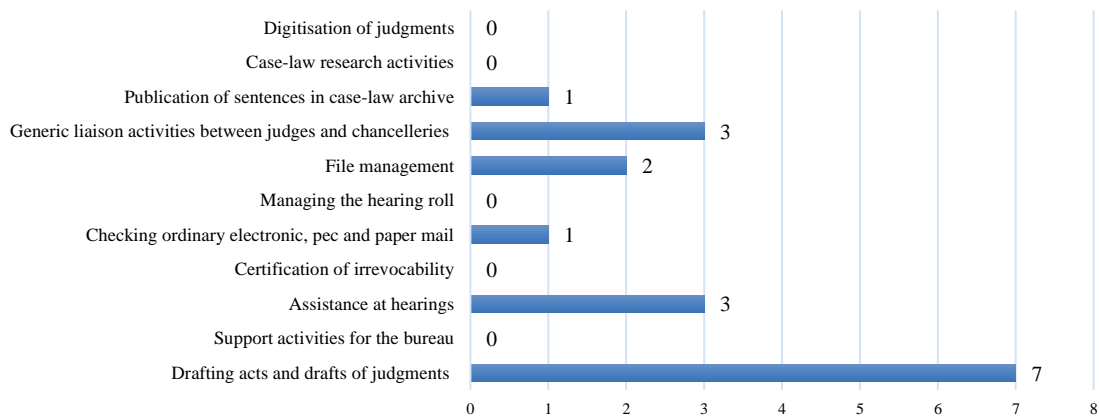
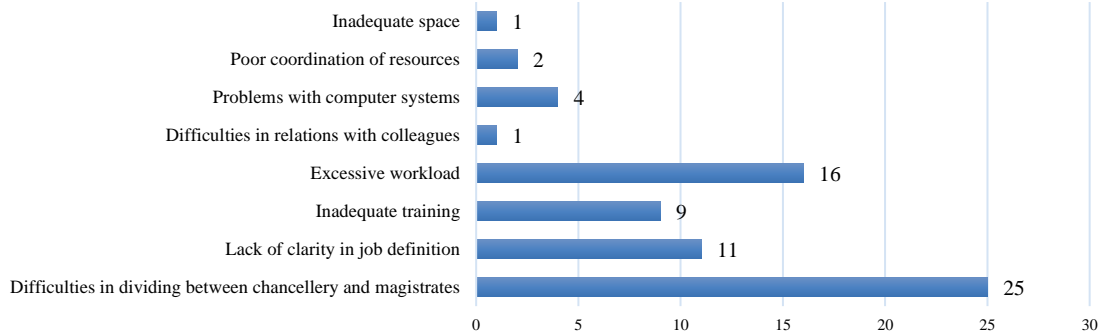


Figure 7 shows the difficulties that UPP employees encountered in performing their duties, for the entire judicial district of Venice. In particular, the difficulties faced are mainly of four types:

- *Difficulties in dividing between chancellery and magistrates*: this difficulty is due to the hybrid nature of the UPP staff. The figure of the UPP officer was created precisely to be a bridge between the judiciary and the chancellery in order to clear the backlog and reduce the duration of civil and criminal trials. Being a hybrid figure, the main problems encountered relate to the difficulty in dividing between chancellery tasks and activities in support of the magistrate.
- *Excessive workload*: this difficulty is linked to the huge backlog in the courts. Thanks to the introduction of UPP staff, the backlog is being cleared, but this entails a high workload for the UPP staff who, for each proceeding, not only have to support the magistrate, but also have to perform the related chancellery tasks.
- *Lack of clarity in job definition*: this difficulty is related to the fact that the UPP officer is a new figure that never existed before. Initially, there was confusion among chancelleries and magistrates as to what tasks the UPP staff should perform, reaching a point where magistrates and chancelleries tried to hog as many UPP officers as possible, as they were very supportive in performing the different tasks.
- *Inadequate training*: most of the UPP employees are young people who have just graduated and are on their first work experience, and therefore needed extensive training. The training that did take place was not considered adequate.

Figure 7 - Difficulties experienced in daily activities



Figures 8 and 9, respectively, show how in both the Verona and Vicenza courts the main struggle is always related to the difficulty in dividing between magistrates and chancellery, due to the dual nature of UPP staff. While in the court of Verona no further major difficulties are highlighted, in the court of Vicenza, excessive workload, inadequate training and lack of clarity in job definition result to be important difficulties experienced.

Figure 8 - Difficulties experienced in daily activities at the court of Verona

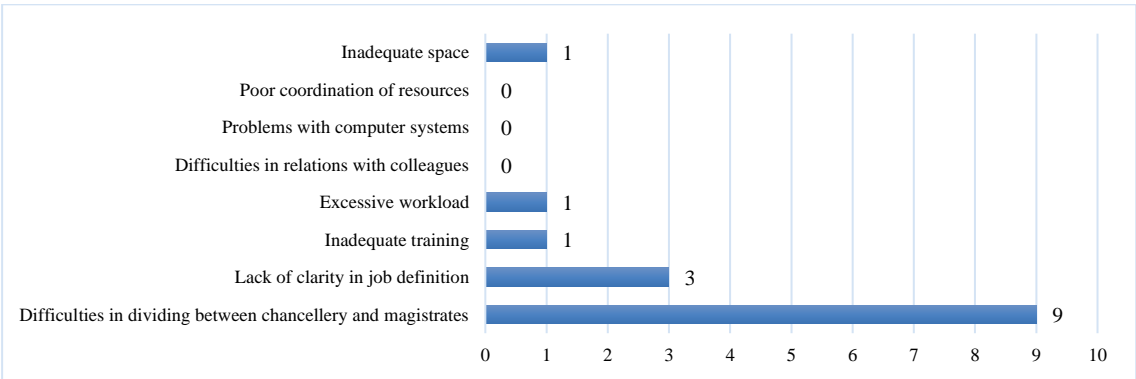
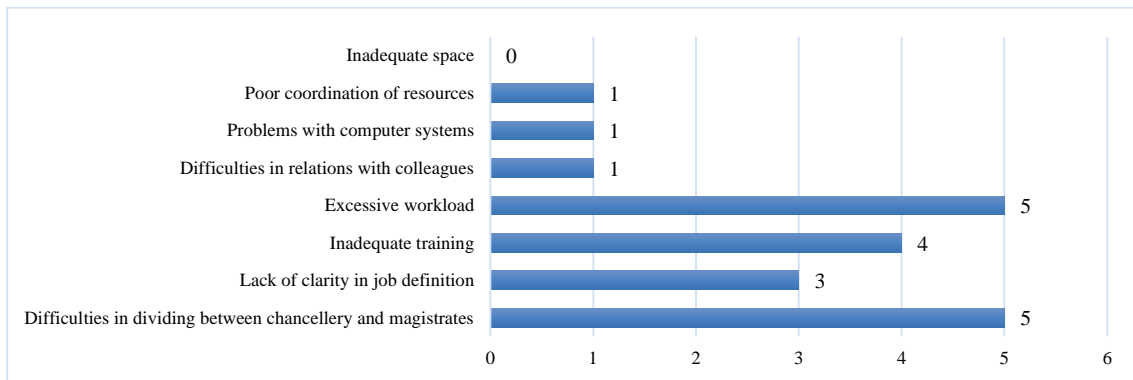


Figure 9 - Difficulties experienced in daily activities at the court of Vicenza



4.2. How UPP staff improve efficiency in Italian tribunals

Regarding the results from the administrative staff side, in the words of the interviewees, the court of Verona and the court of Vicenza confirm the different situation in which these courts find themselves. The Vicenza court, in fact, is a judicial district that, after a period of great difficulty and under the threat of commissarial management, is now working very well in both quantitative and qualitative terms, so much so that it can be considered a best practice among Italian courts. The Verona court, on the other hand, while performing better than the average Italian court, still has room for improvement.

Ultimately, the results regarding UPP implementation and results reflect this state of affairs, with Vicenza showing positive implementation and results and Verona showing some critical, though not major, issues. Therefore, since problems are usually more interesting than favorable situations, Vicenza will be presented first and Verona second.

Overall, the UPP provision produced positive effects in the Vicenza court. After some initial concerns on the part of the administrative staff, due to the fact that the resources were assigned not to hire new staff on permanent contracts but only on fixed-term contracts, the collaboration went ahead well. In particular, each UPP unit is assigned to one or at most two judges and acts as a sort of interface between the judge and the Registry. In doing so, UPP is really contributing, as it takes on cases it knows well, relieving both the judge and administrative staff. No UPP units are assigned to assist the Chancery in its general activities. One observation that is worth noting is that UPP units are not randomly assigned to judges but are sought to be best matched based on their personal and professional characteristics. The results from Vicenza, among others, show that when it comes to organizational issues, context and organizational culture matter and that it is difficult to change the way an organization works through a single measure. The same measure, UPP in this case, produces different results depending on the context in which it is implemented. In other words, where things are going well, they will go better, while where the starting situation is not as good, the measure can improve it, but rarely reverse it.

In a bullet point form, the court of Verona findings can be expressed as follows:

- poor managerial culture and customer orientation on the part of the judges: the administrative staff complains that often judges are too focused on their job to issue sentences and on the legal side of their work, not giving enough attention to the organizational aspects of the office;
- administrative staff is undersized with respect to the workload: this is a fairly old problem in Italian courts where, due to financial resources constraints, the staff is constantly below its proper size. So, the administrative staff would have preferred higher investments in hiring permanent staff than in fixed-term one. As a result, UPP staff have sometimes not found a completely positive work environment;

- UPP resources are sometimes not enough skilled with respect to the tasks to be performed: as one might expect, UPP resources sometimes lack of knowledge and competences. They are usually just graduated and do not have sufficient practical experience in the tasks they have to perform;
- UPP contracts have a given expiration date, so they offer temporary support: UPP are meant as an extra-staff to help reducing the backlog of cases in the Courts, but this makes it difficult to invest in them, because there won't be enough time to see the payback;
- lack of clarity in definition of tasks assigned: UPP personnel works both for judges and for administrative staff, and this creates a hybrid situation, source of possible misunderstandings. In the first stage UPP personnel time was devoted 100% to judges, but it was soon realized that some time needed to be devoted to administrative tasks. So, now the most frequent worktime distribution is 60% to judges and 40% to support administrative staff;
- poor definition of the hierarchical line: formally UPP personnel depend on judges or, better, acts as a staff to them, but in practical terms they report (also) to administrative staff. In connection with the previous point, UPP personnel is "serving two different bosses at one time" and, as it is well known, this is hardly a good deal.

5. Managerial and social implications

As for the managerial implications, the findings of our research point to the need for an adequate communication activity towards both the current workforce in the tribunals and the newcomers. The evidence collected suggests that some of the problems in the implementation of UPP are to be ascribed to the circumstance that neither the administrative staff of judicial offices nor the UPP people were aware enough of the respective do's and don'ts. In any group of people working together it is important that everybody knows what his/her job is and what other ones'.

Alongside with communication, the introduction of new resources into the organization, even if – or just because – its temporariness/short-term duration calls for a strong training action on both sides. Actually, it makes no sense to imagine people coming from outside the organization immediately able to get things done. And this is even more true when people coming from the outside is for the most part, as in UPP case, in their very first employment.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the introduction of a supplementary workforce is not easy in any organization and, even more, in one like the case in point, judicial offices, that are by their very history and nature rather distant from a business-like and customer-oriented mindset. In this sense, the Court of Verona and Vicenza experience should be considered satisfactory enough.

As for the social implications, the UPP can be seen as one of the first attempts to introduce a change in a much old-fashioned branch in the public administration realm – the judicial system. And, as it was stated in the Introduction, the judicial system is a fundamental part of any society or form of collective life.

Therefore, any attempt to move towards a more managerial and customer-oriented attitude and behavior in the Courts should be welcomed as a step towards a more efficient and effective judicial system and, consequently, as an outcome with positive social implications, even if not immediately, in the medium run.

To the extent that it sheds light on an under-explored context, helping understand what has and hasn't worked in the implementation of UPP initiative, we believe our research can bring some fresh insights and, ultimately, some positive social implications.

6. Conclusions

The research conducted so far has some limitations that make the present work a starting point for future studies. There are mainly three factors that should be emphasized:

- number of questionnaires and number of replies
- limitations in the geographical horizon of the research
- degree of participation in the questionnaire

As regards the first point, reference is made to the total number of questionnaires on which the research was structured; in this sense, to limit the margin of uncertainty or error, it would have been appropriate to base the analysis on a much wider range of answers, to have a more representative sample and less conditioned by the "extremes".

Furthermore, the research was conducted on a local rather than a regional or national basis. Indeed, the questionnaires analyzed belong to the district of Venice and, in particular, only and exclusively the answers relating to the judicial realities of the courts of Verona and Vicenza were taken into consideration. This implies that the responses can be influenced by many factors relating to the socio-cultural context of the territory, thus offering a picture which is not very suitable to be understood as representative of the phenomenon at a national level.

Finally, a further limitation of the research is represented by the degree of participation of UPP staff in the questionnaire. Without questioning the level of sincerity of the answers, it is not easy to define how many have decided to offer their contribution, by participating in the questionnaire initiative, out of the total number of UPP employees present in the Verona and Vicenza process offices. This leads to question how much the research conducted is representative of the phenomenon within the context, albeit limited, taken into consideration.

Despite the limitations, the paper presents an embryonic and interesting analysis that offers a starting point for future research insights in an area, still today, little studied and treated from a scientific point of view.

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