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Oportunidades e Desafios do Processo de Tomada de Decisão Coletiva no Setor Público: Um Estudo de Caso na Pós-Graduação da UFMG

Opportunities and Challenges of the Collective Decision-Making Process in the Public Sector: A Case Study in the Graduate Education of UFMG

Oportunidades y Desafíos del Proceso Colectivo de Toma de Decisiones en el Sector Público: Un Estudio de Caso em el Posgrado de la UFMG

Bianca Drielly Mendes

*Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Minas Gerais,
Brasil*

biancadrielly@hotmail.com

Lilian Bambirra de Assis

*Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Minas Gerais,
Brasil*

lilianbassis@hotmail.com

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Abstract

Research objective: Analyze the opportunities and challenges provided by the collegiate decision-making process in the public sector; specifically, in the graduate courses of UFMG.

Theoretical framework: A reflection was made on the evolution of public administration in Brazil and the collective decision-making process.

Methodology: A case study of a mixed approach was produced based on documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Results: The results indicate a decision-making centrality in the colleges of the graduate programs where the coordinator's power varies according to the course. The processes are unique in each program; however, the debate was highlighted in all programs as essential for decision-making. This decision-making model was considered one of the best because it is democratic, transparent, and legitimate. However, there are certain prerequisites, such as participant diversity and efficient coordination.

Originality: This article broadens the understanding of power dynamics in public policies, identifying governance improvement opportunities. The analysis of collective decision-making processes, although scarcely explored, is essential for the construction of equitable, inclusive, and democratic societies.

Theoretical and practical contributions: This study is expected to serve as a foundation for the construction of a reference for participatory decision-making processes, fostering their adoption and making the already implemented processes more effective and inclusive.

Keywords: decision-making; collective decision in the public sector; collegiate decision; postgraduate. Oportunidades e Desafios do Processo de Tomada de Decisão Coletiva no Setor Público: Um Estudo de Caso na Pós-Graduação da UFMG

Resumo

Objetivo da pesquisa: Analisar as oportunidades e desafios propiciados pelo processo de decisão colegiada no setor público; mais especificamente, nos cursos de pós-graduação *stricto sensu* da UFMG.

Enquadramento teórico: Realizou-se uma reflexão acerca da evolução da administração pública no Brasil e do processo de tomada de decisão coletiva.

Metodologia: Estudo de caso, de abordagem mista, produzido a partir de análise documental e entrevistas semiestruturadas, apreciadas via análise de conteúdo.

Resultados: Os resultados indicam uma centralidade decisória nos colegiados dos programas de pós-graduação, onde o poder do coordenador varia conforme o curso. Os processos são singulares em cada programa, entretanto, o debate foi destacado em todos como essencial para a tomada de decisão. Esse modelo decisório foi apontado como um dos melhores, por ser democrático, transparente e legítimo. No entanto, há pré-requisitos como a diversidade de participantes e uma coordenação eficiente, etc.

Originalidade: Este artigo amplia a compreensão das dinâmicas de poder nas políticas públicas, identificando oportunidades de aprimoramento na governança. Ademais, a análise de processos decisórios coletivos, ainda pouco explorada, é essencial para a construção de sociedades mais equitativas, inclusivas e democráticas.

Contribuições teóricas e práticas: Espera-se que este estudo sirva de fundamento para a construção de uma referência para os processos participativos de tomada de decisão, fomentando sua adoção e tornando os já implementados mais efetivos e inclusivos.

Palavras-chave: processo decisório; decisão coletiva no setor público; decisão colegiada; pós-graduação.

Resumen

Objetivo de la investigación: Analizar las oportunidades y desafíos que brinda el proceso colegiado de toma de decisiones en el sector público; más específicamente, en los cursos de posgrado stricto sensu de la UFMG.

Marco teórico: Se realizó una reflexión sobre la evolución de la administración pública en Brasil y el proceso colectivo de toma de decisiones.

Metodología: Estudio de caso, de enfoque mixto, producido a partir de análisis documental y entrevistas semiestructuradas, apreciado a través del análisis de contenido.

Resultados: Los resultados indican una centralidad en la toma de decisiones en los colegiados de los programas de posgrado, donde el poder del coordinador varía según el curso. Los procesos son únicos en cada programa, sin embargo, el debate se destacó en todos como esencial para la toma de decisiones. Este modelo de toma de decisiones fue señalado como uno de los mejores, porque es democrático, transparente y legítimo. Sin embargo, existen requisitos previos como la diversidad de participantes y la coordinación eficiente, etc.

Originalidad: Este artículo amplía la comprensión de las dinámicas de poder en las políticas públicas, identificando oportunidades de mejora en la gobernanza. El análisis de los procesos colectivos de toma de decisiones, aunque poco explorado, es esencial para la construcción de sociedades más equitativas, inclusivas y democráticas.

Aportes teóricos y prácticos: Se espera que este estudio sirva de base para la construcción de un referente para los procesos participativos de toma de decisiones, fomentando su adopción y haciendo más efectivos e inclusivos los ya implementados.

Palabras-clave: toma de decisiones; decisión colectiva en el sector público; decisión colegiada; Postgrado.

Introduction

Public management is increasingly moving toward a participatory and deliberative model, reinventing institutional politics and management. This form of governance is associated with the expansion of the public sphere, decentralizing decisions, strengthening democracy, diluting authoritarian practices, enhancing the legitimacy of decisions, and fostering innovation, albeit with increasing complexity (Carneiro, 2004; Milani, 2008; Mintzberg, 1995; Paula, 2005; Tenório, 1998).

Consequently, public sector decision-making currently involves an array of actors, including public, private, non-governmental, and civil society, and employs various strategies for participation, inclusion, coordination, debate, and problem-solving (Milani, 2008; Mintzberg, 1995; Paula, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to meet the minimum requirements, such as diversity of individuals, deliberation, and communication structure (Macêdo, 2018).

Consequently, collective decision-making has become increasingly prevalent in organizations as it integrates diverse perspectives, promotes greater decentralization of power, and encourages shared responsibility (Almeida & Moraes, 2021). Collective decision-making refers to the outcome of a group negotiation process, conducted through rational, collegial, political, bureaucratic, or anarchical means, to determine a course of action (Almeida & Moraes, 2021; Chaffee, 1983; Melo, 1991; Souto-Maior, 1988). These decision-making models differ in their methods of alternative selection, assumptions, values, implications, outcomes (Chaffee, 1983), and characteristics that warrant further analysis for deeper understanding.

The intricacies of governmental decision-making processes are becoming increasingly challenging. Studying these processes becomes relevant as it allows us to understand power dynamics and negotiation strategies, and the influences shaping public services and policies while identifying the improvement opportunities and promoting effective and inclusive governance.

Hence, this study examines the opportunities and challenges presented by collegial decision-making processes in the public sector, focusing on the graduate programs at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Federal University of Minas Gerais; UFMG). To this end, a qualitative case study, with a descriptive approach, was conducted, using document analysis and semi-structured interviews of 18 participants from four graduate programs (*Programas de pós-graduação* - PPG) at UFMG. From this perspective, the study broadens the discussion on administrative decisions, particularly regarding collective decision-making processes in collegiate settings; a topic that holds significant importance yet remains understudied. Furthermore, it is expected to serve as a foundation for establishing a framework for participatory decision-making processes.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows: the next section presents the theoretical framework, addressing the evolution of public administration in Brazil and contextualizing collective decision-making while discussing its advantages and disadvantages. Subsequently, the case selection is justified and the methodological approach is described. Finally, the analysis and discussions are presented, accompanied by concluding remarks and references.

Public Administration in Brazil

Public administration has gradually adapted to the needs of the state and its citizens who are increasingly aware of their rights and the importance of controlling public actions, thus, demanding greater quality and transparency (Abrucio, 1997; Bresser-Pereira, 1996; Paula, 2005). As a result, changes have been made to keep pace with the economic, social, administrative, political, and technological transformations in society to safeguard public interest and promote state democratization (Paula, 2005).

However, the evolution of governmental practices remains a challenge (Paula, 2005). Therefore, analyzing the characteristics and landscape of Brazil's public administration is crucial for understanding the transformations that have occurred and for enhancing democracy and social welfare.

It is widely recognized that Brazilian public administration encompasses three management models – patrimonial, bureaucratic, and managerial (also known as the New Public Management) (Bresser-Pereira, 1996). These models coexist within the governmental apparatus, adapting and combining, as witnessed in the combination of traditional patrimonial administration and bureaucracy, giving rise to “bureaucratic patrimonialism.” However, there are instances where one management logic takes precedence over another (Paula, 2005). The patrimonial model is characterized by arbitrary decision-making and disregard for citizens. In this model, there is no distinction between public and private goods. Public property is viewed as an extension of the rulers' patrimony, creating a setting conducive to corruption, nepotism, and misappropriation of goods (Bresser-Pereira, 1996; Paula, 2005).

Bureaucracy emerges as a countermeasure to patrimonialism, introducing impersonality, professionalization, formalism, separation of public and private goods, and adherence to laws and regulations. Its primary aim is to modernize the administrative machinery through concepts, such as rationality and efficiency (Weber, 2008). However, in practice, the model proved inefficient, resulting in a more rigid administration due to excessive bureaucracy and its consequent dysfunctions. Furthermore, its implementation did not eradicate the previously existing patrimonial practices (Bresser-Pereira, 1996; Faria et al. 2023; Paula, 2005).

Deemed unsustainable, a new reform was necessary, leading to the managerial model. Inspired by private sector management, this model emphasizes political, financial, and administrative decentralization, state democratization, and quality public service delivery. It prioritizes public interest and is grounded in efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness (Abrucio, 1997; Blonski et al. 2017; Bresser-Pereira, 1996; Faria et al. 2023; Paula, 2005).

Currently, Brazil's public administration is increasingly moving toward participatory and deliberative management (Paula, 2005). Social management, for example, stands out as it enables the incorporation of internal and external actors in public organizations, fostering democratization in the decision-making processes and combating structural inequalities in society through emancipation and empowerment (Ckagnazaroff, 2004).

Ckagnazaroff (2004) associated participation with the decentralization of power since those involved have a tangible possibility of intervening in public life. This management type, according to the author, is characterized by a multiplicity of actors and dynamics of conflict and agreement, presenting a complex challenge (Milani, 2008).

Hence, the adoption of collective decision-making strategies emerges as a compelling solution to address the growing demand for participation and the subsequent expansion of the involved actors.

According to Pearce, Wood, and Wassenaar (2018), public universities are expected to increasingly adopt shared leadership models in the future. According to the authors, this management model transcends the political representation of facultyⁱ. It grants the actors a genuine voice, enabling the pooling and application of individuals' inherent skills and abilities to address university matters more efficiently. This ensures the prosperity and sustainability of higher education institutions.

Collective Decision-Making

Collective decision-making stems from the early stages of societal development and involves the integration of information among members to reach a joint decision (Mahmoodi et al., 2013). However, this can be considered new in organizational contexts (Aktouf, 1996).

According to Frega (2009), collective decision-making is associated with solving complex problems as these require diverse individuals to find the resolution. Almeida and Morais (2021) defined collective decision-making as the outcome of a negotiated choice process, involving two or more actors, resulting in a shared decision and distributed responsibility. This negotiation can occur through the aggregation of individual preferences or through the integration of these preferences in which decision-makers renounce their inclinations and decide as a group, that is, as a decision-making unit.

Conversely, Souto-Maior (1988) viewed the process as a game whose outcome depended on the choices of all the players who influenced other actors through manipulative strategies. However, the aim is to fulfill individual desires rather than maximize them. Therefore, the decision, for the author, is a joint solution.

Cançado, Tenório, and Pereira (2011), however, emphasized that coercion was incompatible with collective decision-making. Furthermore, consensus should be reached through mutual understanding, rather than negotiation, thus, requiring alliances and coalitions (Sobral & Peci, 2013).

Therefore, the decision-making process becomes more complex than individual decision-making due to the need for consensus, which, in turn, is generated by the convergence and confrontation of different interests, perspectives, and information (Araya, Carignano & Gomes, 2004; Fisher, 2017; Melo, 1991).

Despite advantages, such as increased diversity of information for decision-making and decentralization of power, this decision-making model has certain disadvantages. These include a propensity to assume greater risks due to risk distribution and limited potential for swift decision-making as debates, minimum quorum, and consensus among stakeholders are required (Sobral & Peci, 2013). Table 1 presents some advantages and disadvantages of collective decision-making, as identified in the literature.

Table 1 Advantages and disadvantages of collective decision-making

Collective decision-making	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Decentralization of power	Imbalance of power
Greater democratization, inclusion, and representativeness	More complex decision-making process
Higher quality and precision in decision-making	Greater consumption of resources (more inefficient)
Greater impersonality	Illusion of invulnerability and increased risk-taking propensity
Greater sharing of information	Longer decision-making process
Greater diversity of experiences and perspectives	Possibility of prolonged deadlocks
Identification of more alternative solutions	Pressures for compliance
More open value system	Decision-making based on incomplete and asymmetric information
Collaborative and competitive environment	Self-censorship

Greater motivation for the people involved	Illusion of morality and unanimity
Greater acceptance of the decision by the people involved	Prioritizing consensus over optimal outcomes
Greater legitimacy in decision-making	Decision-making influence of a dominant minority
Greater and better control of subsequent actions	Diffusion of responsibility for results
Enhancing personal maturity	More conservative decisions

Note. Source: Adapted from Almeida and Morais (2021); Bernardes (2005); Fisher (2017); Frega (2009); Janis and Mann (1977), Mahmoodi et al. (2013), Sobral e Peci (2013).

Specifically, collegial decision-making is a hallmark of Brazil's higher education institutions, which are governed by collective bodies comprising faculty, students, and administrative staff. These agents are required to rationalize together toward common goals (Chaffee, 1983; Law No. 9.394, 1996). This enables the representation of diverse ideas across domains, ensuring decentralization and enhancing the quality of decisions (Fernandes, 1998).

It is important to emphasize that a collegial decision is not merely the sum of individual decisions (Song, 2009). Chaffee (1983) defined collegial decision-making as a consensus-based process with shared responsibility, aimed at collective well-being. It is significantly influenced by power dynamics (Sousa, Sobrinho & Vasconcellos, 2012). In this regard, Bernardes (2005) emphasized the necessity of equal participation among all group members, highlighting communication and debate as essential components of the process.

Regarding consensus, McKinney (2001) defined it as the collective acceptance of a decision by all group members, even when it does not align with individual preferences, for the benefit of the community. The study emphasized that a choice was considered reasonable for the majority when the participants felt that they were able to express their preferences and reach a definition together.

Chaffee (1983) identified four additional decision-making models commonly observed in universitiesⁱⁱ, as shown below:

Table 2 Decision-making models

	Model Rational	Model Collegiate Body	Model Politics	Model Bureaucratic	Model Anarchy Organized
Choose	Maximizing preferences	Satisfactory for most	Amended from the proposal presented by the majority group	Outcome of procedures	Coincidence
Assumptions	Maximization	Consensus	Winning	Historical pattern	Accident
Values	Known <i>a priori</i> from the list of individual preferences consistent with the objective	Shared responsibility	Multiple, non consensual, based on self-interest	Operational efficiency	Multiple, implemented by opportunity of choice
Implications of choice	Active and aware	Committed to overall well-being	Little or no causal link between objectives and outcomes; not individually intended	More process-oriented than decision	There is no purpose
Outcomes	Intended; causal relationship is understood	Change organic and gradual	Negotiated outcomes of the decision-making process, resulting in organizational changes	Predictable based on organizational structure and interaction norms, with significant organizational change being highly challenging	Incidental, which serves as a lesson for others

Note. Source: Translated and adapted from Chaffee (1983).

It is worth noting that, in practice, collegial decision-making can be influenced by all the aforementioned assumptions as it results from an integration of socially constructed analyses, based on circumstances, needs, and their institutionalization. In other words, there is no single model (Chaffee, 1983).

Methodological Procedures

Derived from a master's thesis, this qualitative case study employs a descriptive approach. The research methodology incorporates "document analysis," examining institutional regulations, resolutions, and online resources, including data regarding the number of permanent committees in PPG. Additionally, "semi-structured interviews" were conducted with participants involved in collegiate discussions at both central and academic unit levels. Eighteen interviews were conducted between March and June 2022, following the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Minas Gerais.

With more than 95 years of history, UFMG has stood out for its academic excellence in various evaluations. It ranks fourth in the Folha University Ranking (2019) as the best university in Brazil for teaching quality, is the third-best federal higher education institution in the country (World University Rankings, 2023), and ranks seventh in the Latin America 2023 regional ranking (Times Higher Education, 2023). Regarding graduate studies, 45.3% of its

programs received grades 6 and 7 (international standard of excellence) in Capes' most recent quadrennial evaluation (2017-2020), compared to the national average of 11.5%. These results justify its selection as the case to be analyzed.

The PPG analyzed were intentionally selected, following Patton's (1990) "critical case sampling." Four out of 79 academic PPGsⁱⁱⁱ were chosen for being pioneers in adopting a self-identification commission in their selection processes. These programs are (with the percentage of reserved spots in 2022/1 in parentheses) Political Science (31.25%), Social Communication (50.00%), Demography (20.00%), and Education: Knowledge and Social Inclusion (50.00%). This restriction relates to the case examined in the master's thesis – the affirmative action policy in UFMG's graduate programs – where it was observed that these programs had refined their quota allocation policy, incorporating an optional and sophisticated mechanism to prevent fraudulent racial self-declarations and suggesting a higher likelihood of having undergone thorough collegiate deliberation.

Five students, twelve faculty members, and one administrative staff member from the university's central administration were interviewed and distributed among the programs as follows – 4 from PPG1, 5 from PPG2, 3 from PPG3, and 5 from PPG4. To ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of the participants, interviewees' names and positions remain anonymous. Throughout the study, the programs will be identified by random numbers, ranging from PPG1 to PPG4, and the interviewees will be designated as E1 through E18. Content analysis was used for data exploration and interpretation, following the three stages outlined by Bardin (2000) – pre-analysis, material exploration or coding, and data treatment (i.e., inference and interpretation).

Opportunities and Challenges of Collegial Decision-Making

Reinforcing Chaffee's (1983) observations on the collegiate structure of higher education institutions, an analysis of UFMG's organizational structure reveals that the institution comprises numerous collegiate bodies, both academic and administrative. In this context, E1 stated:

The university operates on the principle of collective decision-making. From the departmental level, collegiate bodies, faculty assemblies, and chambers...up to the Dean's Offices, CEPE, University Council, and Board of Directors. In general, the whole university hierarchy obeys collegiate decisions, which, I think, is super-healthy in a community like the university because then democracy, discussion, and decisions involve listening to various points of view. They take into account individuals' opinions, whether positive or negative, regarding the topics under discussion for the decisions to be made.

This account aligns with Fernandes' (1998) emphasis on the significance of collegial decision-making processes in universities, who linked this strategic approach to the representation of diverse ideas inherent in highly diverse institutions. Except for program collegiate bodies, the university's collegiate bodies consist of faculty members occupying at least 70% of the seats, with up to 15% technical-administrative staff in education and 20% students, all elected by their peers in accordance with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education in Brazil (Law No. 9.394, 1996).

In the programs, the proportions of faculty and students remain unchanged; however, there are no seats allocated for technical-administrative staff who serve only as secretaries during meetings (Resolution No. 04, 1999). Furthermore, the program coordinator chairs the sessions and serves as the primary executive authority, responsible for initiating various matters within the body's jurisdiction. Macêdo (2018) concluded that this role was essential for the communication structure in the decision-making process.

The decision-making agenda includes business items, such as discussion and approval of minutes, communications, coordinator's *ad referendum* decisions, and the main agenda, during which agenda items are addressed. The work of referees and commissions is planned to support decision-making. In addition, they are permitted to change the order of proceedings, remove items from the agenda, and table items (with approval from the plenary) (Supplementary Resolution No. 03, 2022).

Complementary Resolution No. 03/2022 further stipulates that collegial decision-making within the institution must proceed through two phases for each agenda item – discussion and voting. The coordination team has the authority to determine the number of registrations for presentations and the duration of each intervention. Thus, once the discussion phase is over, each agenda item is submitted to the plenary for voting.

Decisions are made by the majority of members present. When multiple items relating to the same subject are involved, they may be voted on as a block, without impeding their presentation and discussion. Each member is

entitled to one vote, which must be cast personally. The chair holds a regular vote and an additional tie-breaking vote. Voting on matters of personal interest is prohibited (Supplementary Resolution No. 03, 2022).

According to the following narrative, UFMG's collegiate bodies, while independent, are correlated. This aligns with Bernardes' (2005, p. 47) perspective on collegial management's interconnectedness, "The model envisions power distribution, where all units have authority and autonomy, ensuring no single entity makes decisions in isolation."

The programs have autonomy, the Dean's Office doesn't interfere directly, like...an imposition on the programs (E1, excerpt 1).

A decision is made within a specific context, initiating a discussion. For example, when creating a graduate program, the process begins with a general group of professors. The proposal must then be approved by a department, followed by the collegiate body, the graduate chamber, the CEPE, and finally, the University Council. This applies to an internal decision involving all these procedures, but passing through various collegiate bodies and following all the necessary steps (E1, excerpt 2).

However, beyond the common aspects, each collegiate body is unique and singular, with its particular nature and context. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each collegiate body to develop its internal regulations, establish research lines, collegiate composition, etc., while adhering to higher standards (Complementary Resolution No. 03, 2022). Consequently, each collegiate body has a unique configuration and distinct characteristics, resulting in highly heterogeneous structures that may vary in terms of composition, size, procedures, decision-making processes, management strategies, and other factors. Conversely, the centrality of the collegiate body is ingrained in all the programs for all the decisions.

On analyzing the four programs, PPG4 stood out as the only one that operated almost exclusively in a collegial manner. According to the interviewees, except for bureaucratic and administrative matters, all decisions regarding the program were made collectively, with the PPG decision-making process being entirely collegial. However, the program's procedures were only feasible due to its small scale.

In view of this, the use of *ad referendum* decisions is not common in the program. According to E14, in the past, the coordinator made decisions and they were implemented, however, this caused some unease within the collegiate body. This view was shared by E16 who stated that they had previously felt unease with a decision made *ad referendum*. Therefore, the responsibility for decision-making has been transferred almost exclusively to the collegiate body in recent times, with increasingly less reliance on *ad referendum* procedures. As E14 and E16 stated, even when *ad referendum* is used, the questions are discussed beforehand, at least among the professors; albeit informally.

Furthermore, with the changes and trends emerging from post-social isolation during COVID 19, a facilitator for this collaborative process came through the creation of a group on the WhatsApp messaging application, highlighting the crucial role of technology in fostering an integrated process (Angeloni, 2003). Another characteristic of a small program, according to E18, is that information on demands is widely shared, facilitating collaborative care.

According to this interviewee, the program's decision-making process is good as extensive preparatory work is conducted before the collegiate meeting, involving everyone, "Everyone is constantly working to prevent any negative outcomes" (E18). The commitment of the program's members to the collective well-being is evident, which, according to Chaffee (1983), is an implication of the collegial decision-making model.

The program consistently strives for diversity in its board composition to achieve a plurality of individuals, as proposed by Lazari and Bolonha (2017), and enhance representativeness in line with Fernandes (1998). Furthermore, the role assigned to the program coordinator is that of the coordination operations leader, "We aim to maintain the principle that the coordinator coordinates, they don't give orders. And it's the collegiate body that makes the decisions" (E14).

For E18, the faculty holds the program in high regard. In their words, "...it's as if the program were indeed a larger entity above all else." Thus, thinking about it in general terms, and specifically about what is best for it, is more important than individual preferences. This is consistent with Almeida and Morais (2021) regarding relinquishing personal preferences and collective decision-making, herein, understood as a decision-making entity. It is worth noting that no mentions of resolutions or committees operating within the graduate program were found during the interviews or on the program's website.

At the opposite pole stands PPG2, an extremely large program, to the extent that E7 compared it to a massive elephant moving around, making it extremely laborious. This disadvantage has been raised by researchers as one of the challenges of collegial decision-making (cf. Almeida & Morais, 2021; Frega, 2009; Sobral & Peci, 2013).

Furthermore, all PPG decisions are processed through the collegiate body, whether via reports, agenda items, or *ad referendum* decisions. Due to its extensive scope and broad collegiate structure – the largest among those analyzed in both cases – the program faces substantial demands, further increasing its complexity. Therefore, its coordination and processes are time-consuming, requiring various management strategies.

One strategy used by the program is the establishment of committees, ensuring that demands are forwarded to the Collegiate (E7) “in a filtered and deliberated manner.” Furthermore, various resolutions have been implemented to support and streamline decision-making processes. Agendas are prepared and distributed in advance, allowing each department to discuss its core topics and enabling representatives to present their department’s position for debate within the collegiate body. E9 emphasized that, in certain cases and for specific topics, the collegiate body often consults subject matter experts and seeks relevant experience to inform their decision-making process. Procedures are linked to reducing uncertainty and risks and improving information quality (Pan & Chen, 2018; Stair, 1998).

Building upon Fisher’s (2017) understanding of how collegial decision-making dynamics correlate with its communication structure, E7 shared a perspective similar to E14 regarding the coordinator’s role in managing the collegiate body rather than the program itself. The interviewee emphasized that during their tenure, they aimed to implement more effective and efficient processes for coordinating collegiate meetings. According to E10’s accounts, these procedures have been maintained by the new coordination.

Thus, various strategies were adopted, including not discussing reports as they are merely informative, implementing a maximum speaking time for each participant, removing items from the agenda that led to no conclusion – in such cases, members were asked to further develop the discussion within their respective lines so the matter could be reintroduced at a subsequent meeting, and creating an annotated agenda in which the coordinator clarified “what each item was about, attaching relevant documents to aid the debate and stating our position on the matter. I believe that by establishing this dynamic, we prepared thoroughly to clarify the issue, provide information, and support the collegiate body in making the decision” (E7).

E7 added that, after adopting the annotated agenda, they rarely engaged in major controversies, and the coordinator’s recommendations were seldom rejected. He emphasized, however, that there was not always unanimous agreement; consequently, some proposals were rejected or modified and approved differently, albeit in a very calm manner. These processes are characteristic of a combination of the rational and political decision-making models (Chaffee, 1983).

In summary, PPGs 2 and 4 have developed unique management characteristics for their collegiate bodies. However, some of these distinctive features could be adopted by other collegiate bodies to enhance their agility and integration. PPGs 1 and 3 are programs of comparable size to the median (160), with PPG1 being slightly smaller and PPG3 slightly larger. Similar to PPG2, they frequently collaborate with committees to support their decision-making. Committees can be either permanent or established to address a specific topic.

E5 pointed out that, in PPG1, some committees have a certain degree of discretion, such as the scholarship committee, which deliberates on the merits and demerits of scholarship recipients and the allocation of new scholarships. Furthermore, the collegiate body deliberates on opinions prepared by committees and discusses certain matters in detail. Similarly, committee compositions always include members of the collegiate body.

PPG1 was the only program that openly discussed the transparency of its meetings, “...sometimes they are already convened as open, so there’s an invitation for ‘extended meetings.’ But apart from that, it’s very common. Sometimes there’s a person interested in the matter...they come, sit, watch, and listen. They are open, like everything at the university; thesis defenses and so on” (E3). He added that external parties had the right to be heard, however, not to vote. A notable feature of this program is its student representation. Although it holds two seats on the collegiate body, it is allocated only one vote, which explicitly contradicts UFMG regulations, which guarantee each member the right to one vote (UFMG, 2022). Moreover, this contradicts the principle of equal participation among all group members as proposed by Bernardes (2005).

The PPG3 collegiate body has no particularities. According to E11, a variety of agents play a role in shaping the decisions. According to him, the collegiate body establishes its position based on internal dialogues among committees, professors, students, the program secretariat, and demands from other UFMG bodies, CAPEs, CNPq, the Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation (FAPEMIG), and others. It is worth noting that the program’s internal committees have only recently been formalized.

Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Collective Decision

A blend of the four general organizational decision-making models identified by Chaffee (1983) is evident in the decision-making process at UFMG's graduate school, with the collegiate model being the most prominent among them. Exploring decision-making in the collegiate bodies, despite the voting requirement stipulated in UFMG's general regulations (2022), it was found that only the largest collegiate body (PPG2) consistently implemented voting for all its decisions. The other programs tried to reach a consensus (Chaffee, 1983), as elucidated by E11, "...you always try to reach a consensus...so it involves a good deal of patience as well. If the program isn't ready to make a decision, it meets again..."

However, the PPGs stress that there are differences of opinion, along with specific cases and times when voting is necessary. Furthermore, it is common to establish advisory committees, which delve into the topics, prepare reports, and suggest proposals for the collegiate bodies, which, in turn, discuss the matters based on these foundations.

Agreeing with McKinney (2001), E11 distinguished consensus from harmony. In his view, there was an effort to consider the technical intricacies and procedural complexities, and a commitment to reasonableness, requiring substantial effort to reach a consensus. E3 added, "It's more common for people...to vote together in graduate school, after discussions. And sometimes there's one...two abstentions that are recorded. Sometimes people make a point of saying, 'Ah! I'd like to register my opposing vote. I'd like to register my abstention'."

Thus, corroborating Bernardes (2005), the debates were considered extremely valuable, "Things aren't just a vote that you get there and cast your vote....there's this space for discussion, there are collegiate meetings that last 4 - 5 hours, so many people talk...So, I think, having this space for discussion is important" (E18). Consequently, E4 and E7 asserted that the occasional haste in scheduling decisions was detrimental.

Hence, it is sometimes up to the coordinator to make certain decisions and *ad referendum* is an advantageous strategy in such cases, "...the collegiate body, when there's a rush...to make a decision, without any consultation, the coordinator puts in an *ad referendum* so that the collegiate body is aware of the decision. Even if they can't...sometimes they can't go back. But, I think, this is very important" (E7). However, the coordinator's position does not always supersede the others. Sometimes their position is defeated, which, according to E8, is part of the democratic process and the collegiate decision, "...this pain is better than not having this body and having managers who decide for themselves."

Furthermore, in certain instances, coordinators are compelled to implement decisions that they, as managers, recognize as suboptimal for the program, despite the collegiate body's approval, "Coordinators frequently find themselves on the losing end. Not least because those voting on matters aren't responsible for implementation. You realize that some ideas, while appealing in theory, are impractical to execute" (E3). This aligns with Lazari and Bolonha's (2017) argument that collegial decision-making does not always yield the optimal outcome.

The process involves reconsideration and reframing of initial positions. The interviewees noted that discussions often reveal superior proposals, more compelling ideas, or novel approaches. Hence, consensus does not require convergence of thoughts, instead the presentation of factual data, sound arguments, and robust knowledge to persuade others to believe and consent to the ideas. This validates the notion that consensus is achieved solely through understanding and subsequent coalition formation (Sobral & Peci, 2013), and that it can materialize through isomorphic pressures (Ferreira, Silva & Costa, 2022).

However, the debate may lead to discomfort. Seventeen out of eighteen interviewees were asked about discomfort during debates, with 72% (13 individuals) experiencing discomfort at some point. Among them, only one interviewee (E10) experienced discomfort, inhibition, and embarrassment in expressing himself. According to him, this discomfort occurred at the beginning of his term, which he attributed to a lack of familiarity with the environment. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, collegiate meetings were held online, making things more challenging and creating an intimidating atmosphere. With the return to in-person meetings, he feels more comfortable about asserting himself, arguing, and advocating for his beliefs. Moreover, as he became more familiar with his colleagues, it alleviated the initial discomfort. This aligns with Almeida and Morais (2021), Lazari and Bolonha (2017), Sousa, Sobrinho, and Vasconcellos (2012), and Song (2009) regarding the need for minimum requirements to ensure unconstrained expression and defense of diverse perspectives.

For others, discomfort arose from the conflictive and less argumentative personalities of the members of the collegiate body, along with unnecessary comments, exposure of third parties, uninformed discussions, lengthy debates, disrespectful treatment, and sensitive issues (such as disaccreditation and academic dismissal).

Nevertheless, E3 believed these discomforts to be a part of social interaction, not specific to collegiate meetings, as they are inherent to the decision-making dynamics of any organization, stemming from human relationships rather than the decision-making process.

Conversely, adaptation proves crucial in mitigating discomfort. For E10, the exercise of the mandate was directly linked to the comfort of the members of the collegiate bodies. This presents a challenge as, according to the General Graduate Regulations (Complementary Resolution No. 02/2017), the terms vary from two years for faculty to one year for students, resulting in significant fluctuations, particularly for the latter. Another issue concerned the implementation of decisions, which, according to E4, overburdened the teachers who lacked the appropriate training and competence, diverting them from areas where their skills could be better utilized, rendering this a poor administrative model.

Regarding the interviewees' perception of collegial decision-making, it is generally viewed as a good strategy, except for E5, who considered it the only viable option. Nevertheless, most interviewees perceived this process as the optimal decision-making strategy, considering it beneficial, democratic, transparent, and "essential."

For E7, "...collective decisions ensure that issues are being debated, weighed, and all sides are being heard. It's a matter of maintaining a fundamental democratic principle." He added that they prevented vertical and horizontal centralization of power in organizational decision-making, supporting Mintzberg's (1995) position.

Conversely, some interviewees characterized the collegial decision-making process as slow, laborious, and in need of improvement. Despite this perspective, no interviewee mentioned a more suitable alternative for university decision-making. Table 3 presents the advantages and disadvantages of collegial decision-making according to the interviewees' perceptions.

Table 3 Advantages and disadvantages of collegial decision-making

Advantages	Disadvantages
Decentralization of power	Labor-intensive process
More democratic decisions, with greater participation, inclusion, and representativeness	Illusion of invulnerability (this protects you legally)
More qualified, conscious, and robust decisions	Longer decision-making process
Highest ethical principle	Lengthy debates that often go in circles
Mutual clarification and information sharing	Information asymmetry
Greater diversity of experiences and perspectives	Discomfort in debates
Identification of more alternative solutions	Need for consensus building
More open value	Decisions may be somewhat obscured
Collaborative environment	Discomfort with other members
Greater stakeholder engagement	Representation bias
Greater acceptance by those involved	Medium and long-term decisions (if urgent, not mature)
Greater transparency, impersonality, and legitimacy	Possibility that members are not open to discussion
Decisions more aligned with the whole	Conflagrations, disputes, and internal conflicts
Existence of a space for discussion	More formalities
Shared responsibility	The manager must have exceptional coordination skills
Critical mass	Topics debated unequally (as not everyone is equally invested in them)
Greater transparency (inhibiting particularistic interests and ensuring accountability)	Difficulty creating a comfortable space
Requires a certain level of planning	Actors often focused on decision fragments (without a holistic perspective)
Decision better understood	Handling dissent and time
Greater enforceability	-

Advantages	Disadvantages
Internal agreements needed	-
Lower degree of uncertainty and risk	-
Greater attention to adversity and situations	-

Based on the analysis, it is evident that the diffusion of responsibilities was perceived as a disadvantage by the authors, while the interviewees viewed it as an advantage. All 14 advantages presented in Table 1 were mentioned by the interviewees, while only 6 out of 14 disadvantages were mentioned. Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that the advantages of collegial decision-making outweighed the disadvantages.

Reinforcing the significance of coordination for collective decision-making, previously highlighted by Macêdo (2018), E11 stated that this process required certain management and leadership approaches. For E7 and E3, coordination should be impartial, facilitating meetings, establishing criteria for cross-cutting issues, and gathering data to support decisions. This reduced information asymmetry and broadened the debate for comprehensive decision-making. As E3 stated, “Sometimes, due to information asymmetries, you have actors focused on fragments of the decision without understanding the whole picture. This is very common and recurring.” However, E11 emphasized that coordinators did not always seek these elements. In his view, collective decision-making should be approached with caution and should consider multiple dimensions, which, despite requiring a great deal of effort, is a sign of institutional maturity.

Another aspect concerned the composition of the collegiate body, “if the way the collegiate is composed...is not correctly selected to represent the diversity that exists in some institutional sphere, the collegiate reinforces a *status quo* effect,” argued E15, aligning with Sobral and Peci (2013). Hence, the structure of the collegiate body must be representative of its constituents. However, there is inherent selectivity in its composition as individuals voluntarily choose to participate and subsequently undergo a public voting process. It is crucial to move beyond mere representation and focus on fostering shared leadership (Pearce, Wood & Wassenaar, 2018).

Concluding Remarks

Collective decision-making has become increasingly prevalent and essential in modern public administration, with collegiate-style governance being a hallmark of Brazilian public universities. The primary aim of this study was to examine the opportunities and challenges presented by collegial decision-making processes in public-sector graduate programs at UFMG. To this end, a qualitative case study, with a descriptive approach, was conducted, using document analysis and semi-structured interviews, which were evaluated through content analysis.

Beyond shared characteristics, each collegiate body had distinct features, with specific internal regulations and variations in size, composition, procedures, and other aspects, reflecting their nature and context. However, in all PPGs, decision-making was centralized within the collegiate body, that is, all decisions passed through it. Nonetheless, the implementation of these decisions varied. Some programs relied almost entirely on collegiate work, limiting the coordinator’s decision-making power. Others distributed responsibilities among committees, resolutions, and annotated agendas, granting the coordinator more decision-making power, often through *ad referendum* decisions.

Regarding the decision-making processes, the findings suggest a combination of the four general models of organizational decision-making proposed by Chaffee (1983) in UFMG’s graduate programs, with the collegial model being dominant. Consensus is prioritized; however, its presence is not essential for decision-making, unlike debates, which are indispensable despite potential discomfort.

Collegial decision-making in universities is the optimal strategy as it is the most democratic, transparent, representative, and legitimate approach, despite some drawbacks, such as slow processes and information asymmetry. However, to make this model viable, it is essential to foster an open and safe environment, along with articulate and assertive coordination, which are the fundamental characteristics of effective management.

It is worth noting that this research is limited to the study of specific graduate programs, rather than an entire organization, which may hinder the generalization of the results. Nevertheless, the authors believe that the approach adopted throughout this research was appropriate for achieving the study’s objectives. In this regard, the study recommends that future research address the gaps in this study by expanding analyses to other programs, educational levels, and higher education institutions, including private universities. These institutions may employ

different approaches to collegiate governance and decision-making processes, which could potentially be adapted to the public sector. Additionally, the authors suggest further exploration of the political nature of decision-making in universities.

The authors hope that the information and insights will promote the adoption of participatory management models, support inclusive and effective decision-making processes, and enhance the understanding of the potential and limitations of collective decision-making in the public sector, particularly in collegiate settings. Additionally, the presented strategies will be implemented to improve current practices.

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Notas:

ⁱNotes: Shared governance model.

ⁱⁱ General models of organizational decision-making. In his study, Chaffee (1983) applied decision-making models to universities though these models can be found in other types of organizations as well.

ⁱⁱⁱ Professional master's programs were excluded as they are part of a national network with distinct characteristics, including their coordination, selection process, regulations, standards, and CAPES evaluation criteria. From this perspective, they are not considered UFMG's graduate programs, instead collaborative programs hosted by the institution.