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Theme 5: Open policy and governance

Designing local public organizations for the introduction of an institutional logic of co-creation: anticipating and managing internal resistance.

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Introduction

In recent years, public organizations in numerous countries have seen the rise and the clash of two conflicting paradigms regarding the conception and making of public service: New Public Management (NPM), and the Public Value Paradigm, associated with New Public Governance (NPG). These paradigms imply different degrees of openness of public organizations to their stakeholders (Schmidhuber et al., 2021). In contrast to NPM, where the citizen is treated as a client and pure customer of public services (Pollitt, 2017), the Public Value paradigm is defined by the introduction of open and participatory decisional processes (Geuijen et al., 2017). This openness of public organizations coming with the introduction of a Public Value vision of public service is also at the service of the search for solutions to current societal challenges (McGahan et al., 2021).

These two trends – participatory decisional processes, and open public innovation (Bogers et al., 2017, 2018) – nourish the legitimacy of new practices such as co-creation of public service with citizens. Co-creation is defined as the collaborative effort of two or more public and private actors to identify and define common problems and challenges and to develop, implement and evaluate new and creative solutions. It is about breaking with current bureaucratic practices and aiming to contribute to the production of public value (Torfing et al., 2019). These approaches are, however, still very new, particularly to local public organizations, and in conflict with established practices - the dominant institutional logics. Institutional logics are cultural logics, located on a macro-level, providing individuals with the foundations necessary to construct sense within a particular societal sphere (Vaskelainen & Münzel, 2017). By doing so, institutional logics set the base for what these actors perceive as important and desirable (Thornton et al., 2012). Logics can be conflicting when these bases are not compatible, or contradictory. As for the reconciliation of co-creation with existing logics, important sources of conflict can be the entrenched nature of current practices and role perceptions, a negative

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vision of change, or institutional factors limiting possibilities for co-creation (Torfing et al., 2019)

While most publications analyze conflicts arising due to institutional complexity during or after the introduction of a new logic (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010), we have decided to mobilize an approach based on anticipation. This allows us to accompany the introduction of the co-creation logic and identify potential sources of conflict before insurmountable problems can emerge. Little academic work has focused on this anticipatory approach (Besharov & Smith, 2014), designing for the unfolding of a new model to prevent problems, and to step by step build its legitimacy and capacity to hybridize with the existing logics. We propose to explore, within the scope of a single-case study and by mobilizing a contingency approach, the specific case of the field of territorial public policy and the introduction of a co-creation logic. We aim to better understand the best suited a priori strategy for the introduction of a co-creation logic in the field of territorial public policy: how to anticipate internal resistance through the identification, in advance, of sources of conflicts as well as drivers of its implementation?

1. Institutional complexity and definition of the field

Choosing local public organizations as our unit of analysis, we take into consideration the institutional complexity of the field (Greenwood et al., 2011). An organizational field is defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as “*sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute an area of institutional life*”, that interact with one another and are interrelated. While institutional complexity plays out on the field level (Raffaelli & Glynn, 2014), scholars observe an internalization of this complexity with its conflicts solidifying within the organization (Besharov & Smith, 2014). Recent publications invite to conceive of the organization as an open political arena where conflicts of logics emerge internally and externally at the same time (Waeger & Weber, 2019). This conception seems even more suitable when studying a local public organization. While a local public organization’s activities stem from a politico-administrative agreement (Emery & Giaque, 2014), its decisions expand beyond the organizational borders and are meant to guide the predefined targets’ behavior (Thoenig & Duran, 1996). The local public organization’s borders are permeable, leading to a conception of institutional complexity that goes beyond the traditional organizational limits and plays out on the level of the territory where institutional life exists. This is what forms a shared structure consisting of its proper rules, values, and norms (Arnaud & Serval, 2020).

Hence, the introduction of an institutional logic of co-creation in the field of territorial public policy requires to make it work with the existing logics that are structuring the field: the political and the managerial logics. While these logics may be conflicting, the tensions they create are not insurmountable and are the object of compromise or even hybridization (Boitier & Rivière, 2016; Fred, 2020). However, institutional complexity can become inextricable and lead to heavy contestation when a logic that is little compatible with the others which are entrenched in the employees’ mindsets (Seo & Creed, 2002), is introduced (Besharov & Smith, 2014).

For better understanding of the institutional complexity, each logic will be characterized (Thornton et al., 2012) as shown in Table 1. After having identified the sources of tensions between them, the goal is to identify the barriers and drivers of the introduction of this co-creation logic.

	Political Institutional Logic (PIL)	Managerial Institutional Logic (MIL)	Institutional Logic of Co-Creation (ILCC)
Root metaphor	Political activities are natural activities	Crisis of the welfare state	Deliberative imperative
Sources of legitimacy	Decisions taken in public space	Managerial expertise	Open and non-elitist public space
Sources of authority	Elections	Top-management	Decisional process
Sources of identity	Affiliation to political groups; common ideas	Specialized schools and networks	Multiple social classes and groups
Basis of norms	Citizenship	Rationalization of activities	Usership
Basis of attention	Expression in public space	Results	Capacity to participate and produce judgements
Basis of strategy	Change	Producing a performing public service	Co-creation of shared public value
Informal control mechanisms	Elections	Outputs	Societal outcomes

Table 1. Characterizing the three institutional logics (adapted from Thornton et al. 2012).

1.1. Institutional logic introduction strategies

Academic work on institutional logics tends to present multiple possible scenarios: either the new logic imposes itself and eventually dominates the existing one (Rao et al., 2003), or the logics converge over time and create a new dominant logic (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005), or, finally, conflicts between logics continue (Pache & Santos, 2013).

In literature, three types of introduction strategies have been identified (Pache & Santos, 2013): decoupling, compromise, and selective coupling.

Decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) corresponds to the symbolic adoption of practices that are taken for granted within an institutional logic, while at the same time practices belonging to different logics are implemented. Compromise, on the other hand intends to partially respond to requests, negotiating with stakeholders to modify their expectations (Oliver, 1992). Finally, selective coupling seeks to combine contradictory institutional logics by adopting and joining practices and activities of each one of them (Pache & Santos, 2013).

1.2. Factors explaining conflicts between institutional logics

Introducing an institutional logic may provoke more or less important conflicts, depending on the new logic's degree of compatibility with the existing ones, and its degree of centrality for

the organization's functioning (Besharov & Smith, 2014). The existence of conflicts between institutional logics is explained in literature by multiple factors. The more specific a logic, the harder it is to achieve compromise (Greenwood et al., 2011). In this respect, conflicts regarding goals of institutional logics seem to be harder to resolve than those regarding their means (Pache & Santos, 2010). Furthermore, the organization's position in the field – central or peripheral –, affects the incorporation of an institutional logic (ibid.).

On an individual level, perceived conflicts can be explained by the individuals' cognitive capacities (Voronov & Yorks, 2015), their faculties of interpretation (Almandoz, 2012) and the extent to which they adhere to the different logics (Pache & Santos, 2013), as well as their professional background (Svenningsen-Berthélem et al., 2018).

Given these theoretical considerations, we propose to explore, within the scope of a single-case study and by mobilizing a contingency approach, the specific case of the field of territorial public policy and the introduction of an institutional logic of co-creation.

2. Methodological approach

Our qualitative research is based on a single-case study. Particularly well suited for the analysis of new and highly contextualized phenomena, a case study allows to propose new conceptualizations more easily (Miles & Huberman, 2003), especially in the case of exploratory research.

This case study is based on the case of Vitrolles, a municipality in the South of France. The case of Vitrolles has originally been selected to be studied for the European H2020 project CoGov (WP04), which aims to analyze co-creation mechanisms in European municipalities.

2.1. Presentation of the case

The municipality of Vitrolles is situated in the Bouches-du-Rhône department in the South of France. Being a “*ville nouvelle*” it has seen a politically inflicted rapid growth of both its population as well as industries and business located in the area. Starting in 1973, this program has turned a small 5.000 inhabitant village into a town with now over 35.000 inhabitants. This forced growth has contributed to a fragmentation of the town around its industrial zones. The inhabitants' level of identification with their territory is therefore low. These might be some of the reasons why from 1997 to 2002, Vitrolles was one of only a handful of French municipalities to be dominated by the right-wing populist party *Front National* (FN, today *Rassemblement National*). Since being taken over by the socialist party in 2002, the focus has been on regaining the citizens' trust, reorganizing the municipality, and creating a new and positive image of Vitrolles. However, this period of political turmoil affects the municipality until today, making Vitrolles a unique case to study regarding citizen participation in decision-making processes. In August 2016, wildfires have destroyed a large part of the forest area of the municipality of Vitrolles. As a result, infrastructure had to be rebuilt. The municipality jumped on this opportunity to enhance citizen participation and used the dramatic event as a catalyst for co-creation.

2.2.Data collection

The analysis of the case is based on the collection and triangulation of data originating from multiple sources (Gioia et al., 2013; Reay & Jones, 2016): (1) five semi-structured interviews conducted before starting the co-creation process; (2) the analysis questionnaires handed out to the participants before and after the two co-creation workshops, to contextualize the findings from the interviews; (3) participant observation; and (4) publicly available secondary data.

Semi-structured interviews	1 politician, 5 public managers
Questionnaires	31 responses (1 questionnaire / participant before the first workshop, 1 after each workshop): respondents were citizens, elected politicians, public managers, directors of cultural facilities.
Observation	Several preparatory meetings, 2 co-creation workshops
Documents	Material retrieved from Vitrolles' website, the mayor's 2020 re-election campaign, and the municipality's newsletters

Table 2. Data collected in Vitrolles.

2.3.Data analysis

The content of the interviews has been analyzed thematically (Miles & Huberman, 2003). In the case of this research, based on a hybrid exploratory approach, the creation of the coding table has been partly structured by existing literature (ibid.): we have carried out an “a priori” coding (Allard-Poesi, 2003) aiming to, in an open and axial manner (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), configure our data around a semi-structured coding table, where the following elements have been included:

- The institutional context
- The sources of conflict regarding the introduction of a co-creation logic
- The introduction practices of a co-creation logic

Elements from the interviews, responses to the open questions of the questionnaires, and the notes taken during participant observation, as well as secondary archival data have been included in the coding process. This systematic process allowed to effectively triangulate the data.

Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) has been undertaken through descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 2003), consisting in the first place of the identification and description of events related to the phenomenon we observe, the actors, their roles and perceptions.

This axial coding, linking the various categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) has been possible because of four tactics of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2003): (1) searching for theoretical coherence based on the tactic of contrast and comparison, proceeding line by line and column by column; (2) coding relations between concepts (Allard-Poesi, 2003); (3) developing a logic path of indications and evidence; (4) questioning the links created through a test of alternate

explications. Coding has been conducted collectively by the whole research team and is hence based on discussions among team members. Additionally, each relational code has been challenged by alternate interpretations, and systematically linked to *verbatim*, observation notes, and/or secondary data.

3. Preliminary findings

Vitrolles' mayor's big vision for co-creation shakes up the established order within the organization. Despite him making citizen participation a priority, the administration is still based on top-down decision processes and a particularly siloed functional organizational structure. The agents' attitude is based on a traditional vision of the administration. R2 observes that *"in our culture, we have an administration that is very top-down, that is still very hierarchical, very siloed. Public policies are conducted department by department"*; and R5 confirms that *"a co-creation approach in the functioning as it exists today is impossible, precisely because we do not have a transparent, participatory functioning (...) it's a problem of competence but it's also a vision of the administration"*. A "wait-and-see" attitude is observed, according to which public service agents act as guardians of the established rules and content themselves with the application of decisions coming from above. Even department directors adopt this attitude. Thus, from an organizational point of view, the introduction of co-creation brings along two main challenges for the Vitrolles municipality: the permeability of the administrative departments to facilitate transversality, and the entrepreneurship of its agents, both of which are necessary for the implementation of co-creation. Moreover, citizens, too, adopt this attitude: they are used to being put in a client position without participating in any other part of the process than consumption, *"because we are a particular town, where, due to sociology and our history, the inhabitants expect everything to come from the municipality. It's up to the municipality to act. There is little autonomy"* (R1).

Today, in the eyes of Vitrolles' public managers and politicians, co-creation lacks precision and specification in terms of its modalities of implementation. Hence, in addition to the agents' resistance, co-creation itself remains rather vague, and provokes uncertainty in terms of its implementation. Insecurity persists among agents, not only regarding the operationalization of co-creation, but even more so regarding everyone's roles in the process. On the one hand, citizens are not considered knowledgeable enough to jointly work with the organization on the conception and production of public service. R3 states that *"when there are non-professional inhabitants in the projects it's not at all the same. It's already complicated between professionals, and with the inhabitants (..) what they bring into the process is really their experience as users"*. And on the other hand, despite their perceived lack of expertise, citizens seem to represent an attack on the role of public managers and politicians in Vitrolles who fear that they come and replace them as public service professionals. They apprehend losing control and becoming obsolete once co-creation is introduced. There is a perceived fear that *"they come to invest a place, to appropriate a place that's ours"* (R1).

Moreover, the territorial context presents hindrances to the introduction of co-creation. Firstly, a form of self-censoring regarding the identification of topics that are suitable for co-creation dominates the organization's mindset. Because of the French "*mille-feuille administratif*", competences are dispersed, and municipalities only have symbolic power in many areas. Since its creation, the Aix-Marseille Metropolis, of which Vitrolles is a part of, monopolizes numerous competences that lay with municipalities before. The introduction of co-creation is even more difficult when the core competency for a topic does not rest with the local organization but the metropolis. The distribution of power, authority, and legitimacy is a big challenge for the organization, and "*each party's place in currently still being defined*" (R3). Secondly, a lack of territorial identity can be observed and linked to the rapid development of the municipality of Vitrolles, due to the "*ville nouvelle*" program it has become a part of in 1973. Finally, an atmosphere of distrust and a lack of social cohesion is observed, in large parts due to the term of a right-wing mayor from 1997 to 2002. This period keeps affecting the mindsets of both the citizens and the organization.

Being confronted with strong resistance, the mayor and his team opt for a slow and progressive implementation of the co-creation logic. Parametrization work has been done to identify projects and areas that are best suited for the introduction of co-creation to the organization. These projects allow for a trial-and-error approach to co-creation. Moreover, starting with small projects is reassuring for those unwilling to take a risk on co-creation: the stakes are not too high. A time frame, objectives, rules, and roles are defined for each project, making sure that co-creation does not get out of hand, reassuring those who fear a loss of control. To co-create successfully one must be, as several interviewees state, "*specific from the start*" (R2), you "*have to have an object*" (R3), and "*find the right rules*" (R5). When these projects are successful, they serve as examples and can motivate to initiate more such projects. "*For success, exemplarity is very important (...) it must be shown that it has worked, that it is possible, it is feasible*" (R3). The department directors that are more prone to co-creation seem to have a different profile than the others, with more varied past professional experiences in the private and public sector. These experiences change the way they approach public service. In addition to these elements, Vitrolles also strongly relies on its citizen councils. While these are prescribed by law, Vitrolles goes further than what is required and has turned them into an effective participatory tool.

4. Discussion

The analysis of our findings has allowed us to identify two main elements that provoke conflicts in the process of introducing co-creation to the local public organization. Little compatibility of the entrenched understanding of public service making with a co-creation logic is a primary source of conflict, even more so as co-creation is set to become a central feature of the organization. The new reciprocal relationship with citizens, temporality and tradition, a lack of specification of co-creation practices, a lack of institutional leadership, and individual capacities have been identified as sources of resistance.

To contribute to literature, we propose to design a specific introduction strategy which can help prevent conflicts through the management of conflict sources and internal resistance. This

stratification-based approach nuances and complements existing logic introduction strategies, as explained above, and consists of trial-and-error. It is based on the selection of specific projects in favorable organizational spaces. Hence, it builds on learning processes that allow for the slow and progressive introduction of the logic. Stratification is a chance for co-creation to leave its marks and be integrated progressively in the mix of logics and practices that is proper to the organization. Organizational discourse is key in this process. The strategic management of ambiguity (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016) is recommended to create legitimacy for the co-creation logic, limit resistance, and prevent conflicts. Offering a space where different responses and interpretations are made possible, ambiguity can facilitate organizational change, help overcome differences, and allow for the organization to buy some time to work on its strategy (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016). It can go hand-in-hand with the use of elaborate organizational vocabulary (Alt & Craig, 2016), facilitating the promotion of the new logic among groups with different understandings of the role of local public organizations.

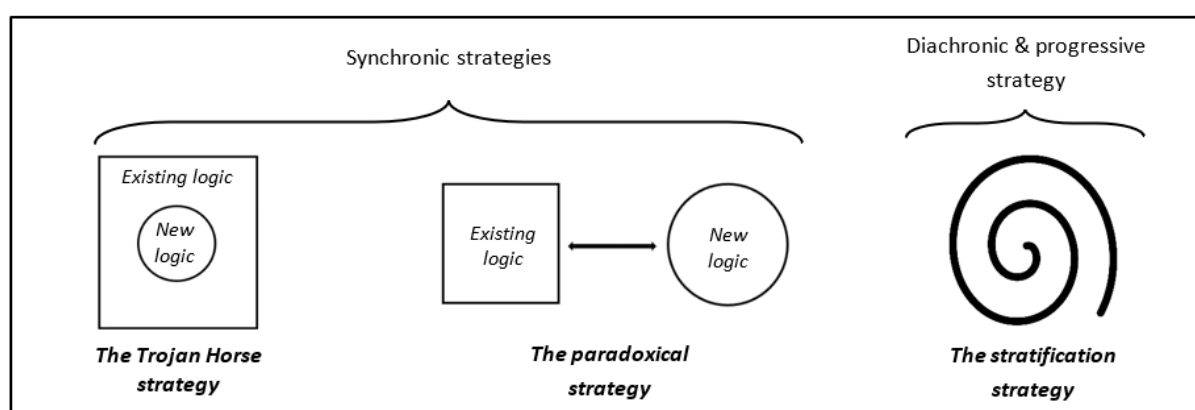


Figure 1. Three strategies for the introduction of a co-creation logic (source: authors).

Conclusion

How can a local public organization best prepare for the introduction of a new institutional logic? Studying the case of the municipality of Vitrolles, we identified the main conflict sources in the process of introducing a co-creation logic to a local public organization. More specifically, these main conflicts concern the logics' centrality and compatibility, as well as the operationalization of the logic rather than the organizational goals. We suggest that the strategic management of ambiguity in the discourse about the new logic can be beneficial when logics are conflicting. Taking these factors into account, we propose to enrich literature on selective coupling and suggest a progressive and stratification-like diachronic process to introduce the logic of co-creation to an organization.

This research being based on an exploratory single-case study, we identify several methodological limits: a lack of generalizability and comparison with other cases, and a small number of interviews conducted and questionnaires distributed being the main limits.

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