Belgian and Swiss service providers faced with the challenge of jobseekers guidance: Predominance of stakeholder games or of the collaborative framework?

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Abstract

The public employment services have contracted out their jobseeker guidance role to service providers. The article focuses on how the collaboration between the public services and private employment operators is organised in Belgium and Switzerland. These partnerships have to contend with two challenges, which are the recruitment of candidates for training projects and the measurement of the results of the service. Our initial hypothesis supports the idea that stakeholder games are more effective in solving critical situations than the collaborative framework. The international comparison allows us to vary the partnership creation methods and to show a particular articulation between the stakeholder games and collaborative framework.

Points for practitioners

The model of cooperation between public and private operators influences the quality of the relationship. Some partnership models are more likely to inspire trust between partners because they leave more room for expression and negotiation than others. Faced with the difficulties that arise in the course of a collaboration, the private operators will adopt opportunistic attitudes when the initial frame of the collaboration

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is narrower and accompanied by a relational asymmetry in order to somehow counteract the lack of a margin of manoeuvre for negotiation.

Introduction

At the end of the 1990s, the European Commission[1] encouraged Public Employment Services (PESs) to contract out part of their jobseeker guidance mission to private operators (Divay, 2009).[2] PESs do not have enough resources (financial, human, material) to meet the demands of their diverse audiences. This prompts them to hand over a part of their mission to private operators who will set up guidance and training projects.[3] These collaborations are 'symbiotic' public–private partnerships (PPPs) as, in the main, the partners share the same values, missions and objectives when it comes to managing the unemployed (Mazouz, 2012). The objective of the projects is either the job placement or skills training of individuals who have good chances of finding employment, or the development of a skills report or an action plan for those who have some way to go before getting a foot on the job ladder.

These PPPs constitute a 'community of practices' (Belhocine et al., 2005: 7) in the sense that they are:

> a public body [the PES], usually linking private non-profit [or private commercial] organisations, through projects targeting specific social groups ... who depend essentially on the government for their funding while the government depends on the organisations to implement its public policies. (Belhocine et al., 2005: 9–10)

Through this type of collaboration, the public and private partners essentially seek to serve a 'cause' (Mazouz, 2012), that is, the public interest, by implementing 'services intended for specific audiences or responding to changing situations or emerging needs' (Lister, 2000).

The PES themselves define the model of collaboration with the service providers through the development of public contracts. Our study focuses on how public and private operators manage the difficulties (relational, financial, administrative, etc.) that undermine trust between them. Two major 'challenges' particularly affecting the private sector have been identified: the first concerns the recruitment of jobseekers for the projects set up by external operators; and the second concerns the assessment of their performance.

The hypothesis is that in the face of these challenges, the stakeholders develop strategies or rely on the collaborative framework to solve them. Two types of

approaches are used to analyse the analysis of the material, namely, the frameworks of experience and the stakeholder games within the partnerships, which will make it possible to grasp the model of participation and possible interactions between partners. To corroborate this postulate, institutional contexts were chosen that use different partnership creation models. Three case studies were carried out with two Belgian PESs that use the call for projects technique and one Swiss PES that uses the call for initiatives technique to establish collaborations with the private service providers.

Public employment systems in Belgium and Switzerland

In Belgium, employment is a federal jurisdiction for the unemployment insurance part, but the aspects that touch on the guidance and supervision of the unemployed have been regionalised since 1984 and 2015, respectively. Unemployment benefit is granted for life on the basis of work whereas it is limited to a maximum of 36 months if it is granted on the basis of studies. It is degressive and regularly monitored by unemployment insurance. The PESs are regional: Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB)[4] for the Flemish Region; Forem for the Walloon Region; and Actiris for the Brussels-Capital Region. They are also in charge of vocational training, with the exception of Actiris as this aspect is entrusted to Bruxelles Formation.

   In Switzerland, employment is a confederal power administered by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, which is responsible for all matters relating to economic policy. The Swiss labour market authority is responsible for the law on the employment service, whose implementing partners are the cantons (26 in total) and regional employment offices. The Helvetic Confederation offers a range of labour market measures (training, programmes, courses) to all the cantons. Switzerland has a relatively low unemployment rate of around 3%, unlike Belgium, where it stands at around 9%. Swiss jobseekers can only stay unemployed for one year.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

The two conceptual frameworks used – the frameworks of experience and the stakeholder games – are intimately linked by the presence of stakeholders who are the intermediaries between the frameworks and the games. Any partnership is considered in a specific context of collaboration in the sense of a 'framework of experience' (Goffman, 1991). This framework regulates daily interactions by ensuring a dual function: that of steering the perceptions and representations of individuals; and that of influencing their commitment and behaviour (Nizet and Rigaux, 2005). Thus, structures and stakeholders are interrelated within the process of socialisation of the experience in a rationale of interaction and not of determination. In other words, structures exist only when they are implemented by the stakeholders.

PPPs are 'social primary frameworks' (Goffman, 1991), where human intentions and actions create a social framework. The PPP is a 'social game' in which stakeholders have a role and rules to respect (Scharle, 2002). It contains all the verbal and non-verbal interactions of the stakeholders (Lauzon and Therrien, 2008). Each stakeholder reports on their interests, desires and intentions for the partnership. The stakeholders are on the lookout for attitudes and discourses that will endorse their perception. One of the internal risks that Préfontaine (2008) identifies for PPPs is the relational difficulties spawned, in particular, by the bureaucratic nature of the public sector. Some contractors are wary of the power wielded by public authorities through rigid administrative procedures. Several studies in the field of management and accounting reveal that the strongest stakeholder imposes their point of view on the agenda and the course of the exchanges and that they alone define the type of bureaucratic control that they will use with regard to their partner (Carr and Ng, 1995; Dekker, 2003; Seal et al., 2004).

The quest to satisfy their personal interests triggers relationship problems from the beginning of the partnership (Lauzon and Therrien, 2008). These tensions are reflected in conflicts of interest and even in accusations. Other negative effects of a partnership may develop, such as increased complexity, loss of autonomy in decision-making and information asymmetry among members of the partnership (Provan, 1984; Schermerhorn, 1975; Williamson, 1975).

The presence of rivalries and 'game playing' problems is reflected, in particular, in the negotiation of the initial rules of the 'game' (Scharle, 2002). This corresponds to a transformation by a process of 'modelling' of the framework that is visible to all. Préfontaine shows, for example, that private companies join forces to exert pressure on the public sector to use a simplified document – in the case in point, a letter of agreement. By dint of trying, the public sector finally accepts this compromise.

The transformation of the framework can also result from a 'fabrication' resulting from deliberate or even hidden efforts to disorientate the activity of others. Estache et al. (2009) show, for example, that the public administration modifies the bid assessment procedure and criteria to establish a contract with the desired private provider. The administration dominates its partners and resorts to corruption. This fabrication can have significant negative consequences for the people/organisations concerned.

The frameworks of experience can also be ambiguous (letting the doubt hover over the terms and conditions of the selection of the tenders) or contain (in)voluntary errors (cream off the unemployed at the beginning of an insertion project) that engender erroneous attitudes in an individual (enthusiasm about good results). According to Neuville (1997), opportunistic strategies undermine collaboration from the moment the partner discovers them and interprets them as such. Otherwise, they have no impact in terms of trust.

A twofold hypothesis can thus be formulated: when it comes to overcoming challenges, either the initial frameworks of experience predominate (the

collaborative model in a PPP), or the transformed frameworks (the stakeholder games). The methodological tools and research settings are explained in detail in the following before entering into the heart of the empirical material.

Research methodology

Doctoral research was carried out on the issue of trust in collaboration between the PESs and private labour market operators. The data were collected from a qualitative empirical approach where observation techniques and semi-directive interviews were rolled out to capture the experiences of the stakeholders of the partnership through their practices and their discourses.

Intense observation work, via the tracking (Zimmerman, 1981) of the partnership department staff within the PES in their daily work, made it possible to obtain snapshots of the life of the partnerships, from their initial outline to their dissolution. The opportunity arose to participate in the meetings, called 'monitoring committees', organised by the PESs with the service providers for the implementation of the projects. The observation work focused on the play[5] of interactions between partners, especially when challenges (difficulties) arose.

Semi-structured interviews, of the 'comprehensive' type (Kaufmann, 2011), were conducted with the partnership department staff of the PES ($N = 52$) and the service providers ($N = 31$), particularly following these monitoring meetings. The interview grid, pre-tested and adapted according to the status of the interviewee, focused on the experience of the challenges and their resolution, the public procurement procedures, the selection of service providers and contracting, the supervision of operators and the monitoring of the projects, the assessment of the service, the partnership history, the rollout of the collaboration, the institutional context and its evolution, and so on.

Three research settings were mobilised for more than a year and a half (from April 2011 to November 2012) within PESs, two in Belgium (Actiris in Brussels and Forem in Wallonia) and one in Switzerland (Cantonal Office for Employment, Geneva). These two countries were chosen because they both belong to a federal state with a great deal of autonomy granted to the regions/cantons, and consequently to the institutions in charge of employment and vocational training policies. Each PES uses a specific technique to develop collaborations with private operators.

Since 2010, the Cantonal Office for Employment has chosen the call for initiatives as a partnership model, while Actiris and Forem favour the call for projects technique (since 2004 and 2008). The use of these public procurement procedures makes it possible to create 18,000 trainee positions in training and/or guidance for a total of 310,000 unemployed people receiving benefits in French-speaking Belgium and around 1300 places for the approximately 17,000 jobseekers in Geneva. Belgian PESs collaborate with more or less 150 to 200 private operators while the Geneva PES cooperates with around 70.

As part of the call for initiatives, the partnership department staff identify a number of potential service providers to whom they send a letter of invitation to collaborate on the creation of projects for jobseekers. They organise an individual meeting with the interested service providers to start negotiations on the possibilities of collaboration and the creation of the project. In the wake of this meeting, the service providers submit a project to the PES. PES staff meet to select the project that best fits their expectations. Exchanges may take place in the meantime to discuss certain aspects of the project (price, the number of people offered guidance, etc.). This technique offers the operator an opportunity to actively participate in the construction of the PPP. When the time comes to sign the agreement, the operator and the agents of the Office discuss the terms and conditions of the partnership (its workings, the frequency and type of meetings, etc.).

The specifications for the call for projects contain a large number of clauses. The methodology for supervising jobseekers, the programme and the price of the project (which is capped thereafter) are left to the discretion of the operator. This partnership-building technique enables the PES to establish agreements with a multitude of operators in order to meet the varied needs and profiles of the jobseekers. No discussion or negotiation takes place between the publication of the call for projects and the Office's response letter regarding the bid. The PES imposes the terms of collaboration and monitoring of projects. In the next part, we will turn our sights to the analysis of the empirical material.

Description and analysis of the empirical data

This part focuses on the analysis of two challenges, namely, the recruitment of jobseekers for guidance/training actions and the assessment of the private operators' performance. Frequently mentioned by the stakeholders on the ground, these challenges are significant because they touch on the very foundation of the partnership, which is to take on responsibility for candidates in exchange for funding.

Recruitment of candidates for guidance and training projects

To deliver their services, private operators must recruit a certain number of jobseekers, as defined by the partnership agreement. The candidates are either recruited in a continuous flow in the case of individual guidance or in an irregular flow in the case of a group guidance project. Depending on the type of agreement, the Employment Office undertakes to refer jobseekers to the service providers. This jobseeker referral mission is entrusted to PES staff, who are known as 'advisers'.

The difficulty of recruiting jobseekers. Matching the offering of training/guidance with the potential candidates is no easy matter. First, advisers must obtain information about the offer and be satisfied with the work provided by the service providers. Then, the profile of the candidate must correspond to the prerequisites stipulated

in the project and the latter must interest the person in question. Difficulties may arise for the service provider during the candidate recruitment process because these conditions are not always met:

> It's hard to get the candidates, only 50% of the group finally continued the project. (Operator B, Forem)

> We were providing guidance to 70 people a year and now we are at 80. In 2010, Actiris sent us 20 people. It's something but not that much. We take care of everything, even the recruitment. Actiris must be sent the dates of our actions for their calendar. It does not change much in terms of recruitment. People are difficult to recruit. (Operator I, Actiris)

> If we look at the start of the project, we decided to start with two groups of 10, 12 people and give them a training day with a test at the end to evaluate what they have learned. We should have had between 20 and 24 people. Specifically, we had 12 from the OCE (Cantonal Office for Employment) and we started with seven people. (Operator C, OCE)

Even though operators face difficulties in recruiting jobseekers, the partnership agreements contain different clauses in this area. That of Forem stipulates that the operators are responsible for promoting their action and for recruiting the candidates. The Office may refer jobseekers but the operator must also promote its offer. On the other hand, the service providers of the Cantonal Office for Employment cannot promote their training or recruit candidates themselves. The OCE undertakes to refer candidates to the operators, even if this is not specified in the agreement.

Actiris does not make any undertaking to refer candidates except in the context of a specific call for projects concerning an active job search. Service providers cannot promote their activities. They receive only jobseekers from the PES. As a result, they are exempt from this responsibility. The referral of candidates is 'informal' in the sense that the adviser invites the jobseeker to visit an operator.

The recruitment system for jobseekers is not always optimal, regardless of whether it is the responsibility of the operator and/or the Employment Office. The fact that the PES does not streamline the traffic of candidates, but reduces or blocks it, can have serious financial consequences for the operator because without the required number of candidates, it will not receive all of its funding. Not referring jobseekers to service providers is a form of treason because moral or contractual commitments are not respected. As Scharle (2002) has shown, trust is broken because the initial rules of operation are changed.

Complaints, canvassing and traffic as strategies. The candidate recruitment period is a major source of stress for some service providers, prompting them to take recourse

to various strategies. Some operators will inform partnership department staff of their situation and ask for help:

> The Forem asked me to change training venue. My concern was that I was not a known operator in this new area. I was afraid of not having enough jobseekers to join this type of training and of suffering financially. I asked for help so that I could get to know Forem advisors in this area. (Operator G, Forem)

> It's always the OCE that sends us trainees. It's an OCE budget so it's up to them to send us the candidates. We gave presentations to advisors to explain our project. In April, we quickly realised that the advisers did not understand the value of the project despite the fact that we addressed issues such as simulation, distance from employment, self-confidence, etc. We had trouble selling our project. I spoke with my contact at the OCE. We will try our luck with the public assistance advisers. (Operator D, OCE)

Operators adopt other attitudes if the critical situation continues. They question the agents and constantly complain about the problem of recruiting jobseekers. They do this by telephone and during face-to-face meetings (guidance committees) devoted to setting up and monitoring the service:

> I have an operator who calls me three times, four times a year, to tell me he does not have enough people. He complains on the phone. It's the wailing office. When I see his phone number, I just go 'oh no'! Sometimes I answer because I tell myself that there is no point in putting him off. Sometimes I can't because I can't summon the courage. I have to listen to him crying on the phone for 20 minutes. Listen to him complaining. (Agent B, OCE)

Some Actiris operators have access to guidance committees, which are a forum to express their difficulties, particularly as regards the bureaucratic and drastic application of the administrative rules and procedures. They team up to put pressure on the partnership department staff so that the PES fulfils its duty and changes the procedures (Préfontaine, 2008). One of them, concerned by a recruitment problem, expresses his dissatisfaction at the end of a committee. He requested help from the partnership department staff more than a week before starting to deliver the service due to the looming public holidays. The department apparently refused, claiming that he made contact before the beginning of the applicable one-week deadline. In the end, the intervention was carried out too late, so he could not start his project. His intention is to have his problem noted in the minutes of the meeting. The complaint almost turns into a settling of scores. The operator has signed a partnership agreement in which the Office undertakes to send it candidates. It cannot promote its offer because only the Office is responsible for recruitment.

When complaints do not make it possible to obtain more candidates, some OCE operators begin negotiations with PES staff to try to play down the challenges.

Some of them start 'canvassing' advisers to 'sell' their training and get candidates. In principle, they should not use this practice because the advisers have a catalogue containing all the training courses organised by the service providers:

> I know that the manager of one service provider spends his day on the phone with the advisers. He does marketing. I'm exaggerating a bit but he networks. I've refused to do that. Either people are convinced by the quality of my training or they are not. I'm not going to spend my day on the phone calling buddies asking if they have someone for me. It may be a mistake. If you start telephone marketing, you have to take on someone else to do that. I prefer spending time in the field with the supervisors and trainees. (Operator D, OCE)

For their part, some Actiris service providers have decided to recruit candidates themselves, without counting on the help of the Office, even if the partnership agreement forbids the service provider from advertising its guidance project itself. In doing so, service providers do not comply with the rules laid down by the Office and, therefore, endanger their collaboration with the PES.

Forem operators are developing another strategy that is even more risky. This is the 'traffic of fake participants' ('trafic de candidats illicites') (Remy, 2016), which consists of taking back former candidates to reach their quota of unemployed under guidance. Using this method puts the service provider at risk in the face of the legal framework imposed by the Office. It is, above all, implemented during training sessions because the operator must have a minimum number of candidates to be able to deliver its service. These strategies tend to be put in place by the old operators on the basis of previous experiences of collaboration with the Office:

> We received complaints from three trainees. We realised that some people needed to be mobilised but they were in an 'employee' module. When we called the operator, it told us that there was no room in the 'mobilisation' module. It put the person in another session. It did this only to fill a group. (Agent M, Forem)

These examples highlight the presence of opportunistic actions among providers. These attitudes can be explained by the (too) risky nature of the terms and conditions of the experience, in that jobseekers are not easy to recruit. A lack of candidates means cancelling the training activity. To avoid the loss of funding, some operators anticipate this risk by adopting opportunistic attitudes that can sometimes be harmful for the pathways of the individuals. Let us move on to the second challenge, which is the assessment of the service delivered by the service providers.

Assessment of the service delivered by the external operators

The partnership department staff carry out a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the private operators' services. However, the latter have the impression

that the quantitative dimension is more important, for example, in the granting of funding, than the qualitative dimension of the work of offering guidance to the unemployed.

Results that are difficult to measure. The PES operators do not always manage to achieve the quantified objectives. Different quotas are specified in the partnership agreement. The operator must recruit a certain number of candidates and obtain a positive output rate. Positive outputs mean that the candidate is employed or enrolled in qualifying training. For some measures focused on mobilisation and referral, the candidate must have completed a skills assessment or established a professional project. However, the issue of results is not always clear for service providers, which reflects a 'management ambiguity' (Goffman, 1991):

> To achieve the results, a job placement or a qualifying training is necessary. It's not very clear what the results to be achieved are. I don't know the percentage of positive outputs I have to generate. It changes all the time (Operator E, Actiris).

Some operators perceive negative consequences of an essentially quantitative assessment of the project. Having not achieved their quantified objectives, they see part of their subsidies cut. This situation has a non-negligible effect on the volume of activities and workers within the organisation. The reduction of the budget can lead to the discontinuation of certain training projects and/or supervision of jobseekers, as well as the loss of certain jobs.

For example, a Forem agent meets an operator as part of a guidance committee devoted to assessing the project. Together, they review the deliverables (in this case, attestation of training or employment) for each candidate. Several trainees dropped out of the training along the way. These dropouts have an impact on the funding of the project. The operator and the agent do not agree on the method of calculating the subsidy. According to the operator, the Office should deduct €167 for each person who dropped out of the project. The agent does not agree, so he escalates the matter to the headquarters to inquire about the method of calculation to use. In the end, the operator will lose the sum of €1550 per candidate. The difference is considerable for him.

Other service providers, in collaboration with Actiris and OCE, make similar comments about the consequences of the difficulty of measuring the results. The withdrawal of funding is experienced by operators as endangering their organisation:

> We did not quite fulfil our contract last year. A part of the grant has been cut without negotiation. We did not have enough people in phases 2 and 3 of the candidate guidance project. It corresponded to the sum that was cut. (Operator K, Actiris)

> For the moment, we have eight courses cancelled and eight courses partially filled; partially completed, which means partially funded. Overall, it's as if we had cancelled

16 courses. If we stop the measure, our contact at the OCE needs to tell us quickly
because we must lay off staff. (Operator D, OCE)

Low quality, overbooking, traffic and negotiation as strategies. Operators take advantage
of the ambiguity of management to develop strategies to obtain their financing.
Forem defines the type of attestation to be provided by the operator for the
candidates followed but nothing is specified in terms of the quality of the deliver-
able. One PES agent reports that some operators take advantage of the confusion
to give the PES a curriculum vitae with little content and full of spelling errors.
Another procured a certificate of work even though the candidate only worked for
a day as a waiter. The operators concerned obtained their funding for these can-
didates, but the agent raises the question of the quality of this job and the work of
the operator.

In order to achieve the objectives, the operators sometimes resort to the 'over-
booking technique' (Remy, 2016), which consists of accepting more candidates
than the required number per training session. This practice aims to reduce the
financial risks for the operator in case of dropout:

> There are just two trainees who did not get a deliverable, but since we accepted more
> people to compensate for any losses, we managed to make the numbers. I overbooked
> because there are a lot of people who give up the training along the way. If you have a
> session of 12 people, you take 15. If we have three dropouts, we receive the entire
> budget envelope. (Operator E, Forem)

Actiris operators do not use this technique because they have to enter the infor-
mation about the candidates into the Office database, which allows management of
the jobseeker pathway. On the other hand, they resort to the technique of the
'traffic of fake participants', just like Forem service providers, in the sense that
they make the unemployed switch from a guidance and/or training activity of a
specific call for projects to in-house training or training sessions related to other
calls for projects. This practice of 'internal channels' is banned by the PES because
the same candidate receives two different lines of funding:

> If the person covered by an 'APS' [Guidance for Specific Audiences] wants to switch
> to a job search, we will direct them to the 'ARAE' [Active Job Search Workshop]
> measure that we have internally. (Operator D, Actiris)

> More or less half of our trainees sign up for one of our internal trainings after having
> followed the training session of the call for projects. And other people are redirected
> to other related trades. Normally, we cannot set up internal channels. We are not
> supposed to have modules of the call for projects that promote our internal train-
> ing.... The ultimate goal is to train jobseekers. It is clear that our idea is that people
> are reintegrated socio-professionally. (Operator E, Forem)

The strategies of the OCE service providers differ because one of the specificities of the collaborative framework is that they do not have control over the recruitment of candidates. Operators enter into negotiations with the partnership department staff during the assessment of the results but also the contract review.

The operator must provide the PES with a skills report for each candidate, but three of them do not have one because of a number of days of absence that is too high. The negotiations concern the number of days that the candidate was present in training. The whole issue revolves around the justification elements put forward by the operator. The latter justifies its position by pointing out the difficult personal situation of the candidates (problems of health, housing, etc.). The service provider insists on the accumulation of factors that are extrinsic to the motivation of the candidate. Finally, the agent gives in because he knows that the operator has done its best with the candidates and that the financial situation of the organisation is delicate. However, the agent told us before the meeting that he would not change his mind. The outcome of these negotiations is crucial as it will define the budget that they will receive from the OCE.

All these examples highlight the types of strategies – sometimes opportunistic – developed when the framework is ambiguous in relation to the assessment of the service. Thus, overbooking, the traffic of fake participants and negotiations are mobilised according to the specificities of the collaborative framework.

Discussion

The collaborative frameworks in which operators operate vary from country to country. The partnership models established by the PES generate different power relations between public and private operators. In this way, relational asymmetry is stronger in the framework of the call for projects where the partnership model as designed does not allow the private stakeholders to be part of a process of negotiation or deliberation. On the other hand, it is more tempered in the call for initiative model where private stakeholders have the opportunity to start negotiations. Faced with challenges, the hypothesis is that the partners use either the initial collaborative framework or the stakeholder games (transformed frameworks) to solve them.

Strategies arise when the collaborative framework contains 'ambiguities' and 'errors' – 'misunderstandings' (Goffman, 1991) – unintentionally caused by the PES, which raises doubts about how to work in partnership. Private operators 'modularise' and 'fabricate' new frameworks by developing two categories of strategies (see Table 1) to mitigate or overcome challenges. The first category contains 'moderate' acts, which are the complaints to the partnership department staff when faced with problems recruiting jobseekers, the canvassing of the advisers in charge of referring the candidates towards the private providers and negotiation with the agents of the PES. Operators use expression (alone or in groups) and negotiation to put pressure on the PES to try to clarify the initial rules of operation and to ease relational tensions.

Table 1. The strategies developed by the service providers.

Tests	Types of strategy	OCE service providers	Actiris service providers	Forem service providers
Jobseekers who are difficult to recruit	Moderate	Ask for help Complain Canvass Negotiate	Ask for help Complain	Ask for help Complain
	Risky	/	Advertising and recruitment themselves	Traffic of fake participants
Results difficult to measure	Moderate	Negotiate		
	Risky		Traffic of fake participants	Traffic of fake participants Low quality Overbooking of candidates

On the other hand, the second category of strategies corresponds to the 'risky' acts, which are the low quality of the service, the traffic of fake participants and the overbooking of candidates. The risk comes from the fact that the discovery of these strategies by the partnership department staff can endanger the collaboration because the operators sometimes instrumentalise the jobseekers to reach their objectives and receive all the funding. Driven by opportunism, these strategies can create 'ruptures' (Goffman, 1991) at the management level in the sense that 'the individual (the PES agent) is initially deprived of an indication as to how to react' (Nizet and Rigaux, 2005: 71).

Risky strategies are only observed in the case of a management of the partnership by a call for projects. Operators whose collaboration with the Office for Employment is part of a call for initiatives use 'moderate' strategies. This observation can be explained, among other things, by the fact that this collaborative framework offers operators a greater margin of manoeuvre for negotiation. They may be less tempted to take risky actions – to transform the initial frameworks – as they have the opportunity to discuss and negotiate with the PES agents.

Ramonjavelo et al. (2006), in their work on PPPs, highlight that the collaborative framework through partnership contracts and the rules and procedures help partners to trust each other. Our analyses qualify this result in that the framework model influences the confidence that stakeholders have or do not have and the presence or absence of opportunistic behaviour. In this way, the collaborative framework can alter the quality of the partnership relationship. It has a decisive influence on the way in which events are managed by the members of the partnership. Stakeholder games are conditioned by the collaborative framework in which stakeholders must interact.

Conclusion

To solve the difficulties encountered in a partnership, members can mobilise the initial collaborative framework or develop strategies. The partnership management methods chosen by the PES to establish and manage collaborations with private operators are not without consequences for the quality of the partnership relationship. Some partnership models are more likely to inspire trust between partners because they leave more room for expression and negotiation than others. A narrower framework accompanied by strong relational asymmetry can generate opportunistic attitudes among private operators, which are a way of counteracting the lack of margin of manoeuvre for negotiation.

The analysis shows that faced with the challenges and difficulties encountered in the collaboration, the operators will adopt certain more or less opportunistic attitudes according to the 'framing of the experience' initially imposed by the PES. The framework of the experience, whatever model is chosen, influences the stakeholder games. These results can be extrapolated to any type of partnership in the sense that the terms of the collaborative framework will influence interactions among stakeholders. It thus appears crucial for public institutions, and more broadly for all organisations that operate in a network and with partners, to deliberately think about the management of partnerships beforehand, and to anticipate the consequences of the chosen model before committing to collaborations with external service providers, whoever they are.

One limitation of the analysis is the absence of a call for tenders as a partnership model, which would have made it possible to draw a comparison between the three possible models of partnership and to further qualify the analytical observations. Another limitation is to have research settings where the state is federal with a great deal of autonomy left to the regions. It would have been interesting to compare different institutional contexts.

Notes

1. Through the European Employment Strategy and the International Labor Organization's 1997 Convention 181 on Private Employment Agencies. Although it is outside the European Union, Switzerland is influenced by these policies.
2. Operators are commercial (temporary employment agencies, private companies with limited responsibility (SPRL), etc.) or non-commercial (non-profit associations (NPOs), local missions, on-the-job training enterprises, socio-professional insertion bodies (OISP), etc.).
3. The projects developed meet the needs of the regional job market and the profiles of the unemployed (youth, women, jobseekers over 50 years old, etc.).
4. Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training.
5. For more details on the global research methodology and the analytical model used, see Remy (2016).

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