

# **Study of the adoption of organizational innovation within a developing sector**

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## **Abstract**

In France, the social sector provides an example that is both revealing and up-to-date regarding organizational changes: it is here that the import and appropriation of organizational changes may be observed, having made their presence felt in other sectors undergoing change. However, the integration of these innovations is also characterized by questions raised regarding the swing between innovation and tradition whilst at the same time highlighting them as an element that promotes business development. This study has thus revealed the players' real capacity of adaptation in the face of the introduction of various kinds of innovation in a sector where change is in full swing. In this paper, we are offering an analysis of this adaptation capacity even though we were expecting conflicting results. Indeed, the players often have to implement a process without any measures having been taken to take ownership of the innovations. It would seem that prior identification of the numerous clues coming from the sector environment, the awareness of requirements, some coherence in management experience/discussion/actions and a latent request for change identified in our previous works, are familiar elements in a positive representation of the change facilitating the appropriation of innovations. But our research also opens doors to reflection where businesses undergoing change are concerned: it shows the importance of the human factor and highlights the positive influences to be used to attain high overall performance.

## **Key words**

Tradition, innovation, organizational change, representation, social sector, business development.

## INTRODUCTION

Innovation of any nature always raises the question of how it is to be adopted. Thus, placing a new product on the market challenges the marketing departments, whose business it is to know how the consumer will react to the innovation. On an organizational level, a structural or management tool innovation poses similar challenges. The players may resist, fight and thus contribute to failure. But, on the other hand, they may support it, promote it and make a success of it. Here, innovation and change appear to be closely linked: innovation brings about behavioral change which can, in turn, contribute to a successful innovation. Literature on the subject (Poole and Van de Ven, 2004), outlines the numerous difficulties faced by the players when adopting innovations and, as a result, the necessity for an appropriate management method.

In a reputedly traditional sector, i.e. a sector that is generally accepted to be free by nature from the constraints (especially regarding economic performance and its determinants) facing companies (from the business sector), the successful adoption of an innovation by the players/members of organizations in this sector is even less likely. The gulf between practices driven by innovation and those that are prevalent in the traditional sector leads to believe that there will be strong resistance from the players and great difficulties in adopting the innovation and possibly even its rejection. What do the facts tell us? Can the prognosis for these difficulties be proved? What do they depend upon?

To answer these questions, our review of literature has led us to the research of cognitive approach of organization and, in particular, the analysis of representations and their mechanisms (I). These are indeed determinants in the adoption of innovations and the adaptation to change (Perret, 1994). Our empirical investigations were directed towards the social sector, a sector whose characteristics suited our question perfectly (II). This sector gives a representative example of the tradition/innovation swing. Being the subject of major organizational changes, the sector shows how management tools are imported, having already proved their effectiveness in other, less traditional sectors.

## **1- REPRESENTATIONS AT THE HEART OF THE CHANGE PROCESSES**

The cognitive approach of organizations (Weick, 1979; Johnson, 1988; Laroche and Nioche, 1994) highlights the role of representations in organizational processes. It seeks to understand how and why decisions should be taken such as whether or not to support a project, to take action, to promote it and to guide it. These decisions are not therefore based on the player's objective, outer environment, but depend on how the player dresses it in his mind. The individual is indeed active in the selection and re-arrangement of information; he interprets it (Priem, 1994; Hodgkinson and Thomas, 1997; Hodgkinson, 2002). In this respect, the way a change project is put to use as well as how it is adapted cannot be detached from the meaning that the players, reformers and reformed, give to the events and, more globally, to the environment. To ensure that meaning is created, the player builds himself a cognitive structure: representations, which will then be at the heart of any managerial choice and behavior in approaching adaptation (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963; Schwenk, 1984). Our intention in this paper is firstly to define the representations (1.1), then to show which change models have successfully integrated these representations (1.2). The challenge here is to throw light on the manner in which the players involved in the change integrate the creation of meaning into the context of the introduction of innovative management tools. This is in order to have a better understanding of the adoption or rejection of these tools.

### **1.1 REPRESENTATIONS IN LITERATURE**

To understand the fundamentally complex environment, the individual simplifies and assimilates the data, thereby losing an amount of the information. In the process, he builds and uses knowledge structures (Kahneman et al. 1982; Walsh, 1995) that relate to a cognitive simplification of the world of information (Schwenk, 1988). Where numerous terms (mindsets, mental maps, cognitive base, reference frameworks, beliefs, cognitive diagrams...) are used in academic works, they do express the same idea and can therefore act as substitutes (Walsh and Fahey, 1986; Hodgkinson and Sparow, 2002). Faced with the complexity and abundance of information, the individual develops cognitive structures that only reveal certain aspects of reality. A cognitive structure is an interpretation diagram that helps to make reality comprehensible. It is generally defined as a series of broad frameworks which an individual uses to establish some coherence to information or situations, thereby facilitating

understanding (Smircick and Stubbart, 1985; Walsh, 1995; Huff, 1997; Prasad and Prasad, 2002). It therefore plays the role of reducing complexity and uncertainty (Cyert and March, 1963). It now seems possible to give shape to these diagrams. In this way, cognitive maps can enable different complex, numerous and sometimes contradictory pieces of information to be compared and linked to each other. They are the basic structure of knowledge, capable of giving definite form to the complex hypotheses of the individual and giving access to the cognitive structure (Eden, 1992; Huff and Jenkins, 2002; Pye and Pettigrew, 2005).

A representation is therefore more than a simple reflection of the surrounding world; it is a guide to interpretation and action. If the individual builds himself a cognitive structure, this is linked to organizational cognition. Thus, the cognitive paradigm<sup>1</sup> is formed. *“The paradigm is seen as a constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, etc., shared between the members of a given community”* (Lauriol, 1995). In organizational cognition, the concept of ideology, belief or interpretive schemes rests on the principle that the system of ideas is organizational and that the manner in which it perpetuates and is passed on is seen as a unilateral action from the organization to its members.

Representations thus include an individual and social cognitive element: they concern personal experiences (individual cognition) and are linked to systems of ideological and cultural thought (organizational cognition) relating to the shared representations. Ehlinger (1998) emphasizes that the notion of shared representation requires clarification: *“The notion of sharing does not mean that all the members of the organization adhere to shared representations. In some cases it is only management that adheres to them. In other cases, it is more a consensus or mutual understanding that makes decision-taking and collective action possible”*. For the author, organizational representations are made up of a nucleus of shared labels and differentiated peripheral elements. *“Organizational representations, far from being made up of shared beliefs, are fixed around ideas strongly adhered to by the members of the organization”* (Ehlinger, 1998).

Acting as guide to interpretation as well as to individual and collective action, the representations play a central role when organizational change is taking place. They sit at the very heart of the adoption mechanisms of change or innovation. Some change management

models thus highlight the role of meaning in the processes of organizational transition and its adaptation.

## **1.2 REPRESENTATIONS AT THE HEART OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE**

Representations thus form a reference framework (Perret, 1994) that ensures understanding of the situation and offers an appropriate behavioral guide. They are therefore in part at the origin of behavior in the face of organizational change. Hence, the existence of systems of uniform representation, shared by all, leads the individuals to choose information that conforms to their past experience and to reject any that could cause disruption. From this viewpoint, the system of homogeneous representation would be playing the role of “integrator”, leading to a degree of “normalization” in behavior (Perret and Ehlinger, 1995). The representation system shows itself to be a strong process of preservation, structuring perception, attitudes and behavior.

When carried further, there are two models that clearly highlight the need to integrate representation into change procedures.

Pichault (1993) explains this perfectly. Amongst the change models identified, the author points out the interpretive model that places representations at the centre of its analysis. This approach leads to consideration of the organization as a system socially constructed around shared meaning. This perspective is mainly concerned with highlighting the importance of processes of perception and attribution of meaning made by the players in order to understand the change situations. Weick (1979) feels that the change attracts the attention of the players because it bears no resemblance to anything that the individuals and the organization knew before. They give it meaning through the mental operation, or *enactment*, which involves staging the change. But this staging does not take place under every circumstance. Individuals are tempted rather to manage a selection, or to confirm the meaning that they give to situations. This confirmation helps to enhance the understanding of already familiar situations. *“Selection consists precisely in applying various structures to ambiguous signals in order to improve understanding. These structures are formed from inter-related variables built up from previous experience and which, when superimposed over the signals, will either confuse things even further and lead to rejection, or they will provide a meaningful interpretation”* (Pichault, 1993). It comes back to the individuals tending to choose

explanations, interpretations and meanings to help to confirm the old practices of interpretation (*enactment*). These practices are stored according to a retention process, or memorization of thinking patterns. The process of carrying out the change is therefore based on how management produces meaning; the collective meaning that management gives to change will condition the reaction of the employees. This approach shows that change always produces creation processes of meaning and significance. There are never any mechanical relationships; hence the same context may be perceived in completely different ways and produce unexpected changes.

Moving on from here, Perret (1994) proposes the “demarcation/support” model. Based on the idea that representations condition the regeneration processes of organizational practices<sup>2</sup> (Perret and Ehlinger, 1995), this model highlights the role of the reformer and emphasizes the fact that he must operate in accordance with the demarcation and support strategies. He must “*deal with*” the ambivalence of the representations. In the first instance, the manager distinguishes the project from daily action and puts himself forward as the spokesman for the creative and innovative aspect of the change. In this way, he creates legitimacy for the project. In the second instance, the leader in charge of the change cannot act without “support” from the organizational context, perceived as bearer of constraints that weigh on the process. The aim is for the project to be accepted and taken on board by the individuals. The idea is to maintain some constraints or ties and to be obliged to adopt a random or emergent procedure taking into account the uncertainty and unpredictability of the results of the action within a complex system.

The models presented highlight on the one hand the importance of analyzing representations prior to the initiation of the project, since these representations are able to redirect it and, on the other hand, the necessity to act on them. The central hypothesis is that the degree with which the representations converge with the change determines the support of the players with regard to the development of the process and their adaptation to change. It is therefore at the heart of our study. This study was carried out within the social sector, an area benefiting from much observation and numerous changes. In the following, we show how we conducted our empirical investigations; we describe the changes in progress and follow up with the analysis of the main findings of our study.

## 2- STUDY OF THE SOCIAL SECTOR

The social sector offers a particularly interesting field of observation for study. It is a sector characterized by its own transformation towards a new business approach in its endeavors to improve performance. Firstly, if we use the company from the lucrative private sector as reference point, it is marked with a degree of tradition. Its economic performance constraints remained restricted considering the subsidies allocated for its operation. As a result, organization methods and management resource tools (human, financial and technical) would often at the outset be far removed from those found commonly in companies from the purely business sector (management control, job and skills management...). Next and most importantly, it is undergoing great change. Under the effect of political and legal changes, the sector is experiencing upheavals on a level never previously encountered.

### 2.1 CHANGE, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL SECTOR

Our field of research lies within the social sector, bringing together different organizations that, however, practise the same principal activity. This sector cuts across several branches that are subject to different collective agreements (or to Civil Service regulations). The difficulty in identifying this sector, about which often little is known, stems mainly from the diversity of services offered, of organizations and of their functions, a diversity that makes the precise scope of their fields of activity unclear: disabled children and young people, disabled adults, the elderly, children and young people in difficulty, adults and families in difficulty, infants, assessment and prevention of social and medical welfare problems, administrative or legal personal protection, educational and therapeutic incentives, integration, etc<sup>3</sup>.

This diversity is shown in the publicized figures. The following are by way of example:

<i>Official employment figures</i>	<i>Sources</i>
625,699 employees (private)	Prospective monitoring centre for trades and qualifications in the private non-profit making health, social and medical welfare branch. 2005 figures
800,000 employees (state)	Employment Ministry 2006 figures
1,300,000 employees in human services of which 80,000 from the non-profit making home care branch	National agency for human services. 2006 figures

For about the last thirty years, this sector has been undergoing remarkable development, characteristic of the change of a strongly public sector towards a strongly private and

associative sector and governed by the resulting rules. In this respect, the social sector offers a prime field of observation of representations and behavior of the players in the face of innovations in the sector. Thus, some thirty years after the act of 1975, the social and medical welfare sector began to undergo major reforms. From its beginnings to its reform, what events and what changes have shaped its route?

There are three major periods that have marked this development. The 1975 act established the rupture between health and social welfare. For the first time, it helped to organize the social and medical welfare services into a homogeneous and autonomous entity (period 1). But faced with the increasing size of the sector and its numerous transformations, this legislation became gradually obsolete... This is why, in 1995, the public authorities and the players in the sector began to discuss the updating of this legislation (period 2), resulting in (relative) agreement with the 2002 act reforming social and medical welfare policy. The aim was to organize all the structures on the same level whilst asking them to highlight their special features. In other words, it was a question of giving coherence and meaning to the fragmented landscape of the social and medical welfare sector (period of the reform of the sector).

### ***Period 1: 1975 to 1995, the creation of a sector***

The welfare act of 1975 is considered to be ground-breaking on two counts: it symbolizes the empowerment of the sector in relation to the hospital system and it establishes the social and medical welfare sector as a homogeneous entity, subject to shared regulations. This sector unification was made possible because of a dual regulation mechanism: state-authorized collective agreements on account of the increased professionalization of the sector and its funding by public authorities; and a joint authorization system to replace the self-assessment procedure that had been in force until then. This new authorization system for the establishments offered relative flexibility: no planning (supply/demand) had been established; co-ordination of the establishments in the form of grouping or agreements was just a possibility. These two facts, that worked perfectly at the time that the decrees of the 1975 act were implemented, quickly became out-dated by an environment undergoing great changes.

### ***Period 2: 1995 to 2002, scope and changes in the sector***

Between 1975 and 1995, the welfare act was faced with numerous legislative and societal upheavals. From the legislative point of view, the welfare act was being progressively challenged. Hence, between 1982 and 1986, with decentralization, welfare policy became regional and contractualized; health establishments were able to create and run their own social and medical welfare establishments or services: the split between health and social welfare was officially repaired; limited financial budgets were set up. The socio-economic environment also saw great changes with major consequences on social work: unemployment was becoming a big issue at the very time that new ways of life (urbanization, individualism) were becoming widely established. With social cohesion beginning to disintegrate, professional exclusion was rapidly leading to social exclusion (appearance of the new poor). The social issue was therefore seen to be transferring its attention noticeably from the more traditional assistance to marginal populations to emergency concerns on a huge scale. Moreover, new players were being called in by these upheavals: the social sector was covering new ground (urban politics, social development,...) and new methods (networking, priority given to integration). During this transformation, a movement to specialization within the social professions emerged: new job titles appeared because of the effects of the diversification of tasks in social work.

But weaknesses existed alongside this desire to change and various reports highlighted the shortcomings of the welfare act:

- silence over the rights of those receiving benefits,
- focusing on full-time care,
- shortfall in meeting demand with supply (major discrepancies in the equipment available in the various regions...),
- and an absence of organized partnerships between claims assessors; between players; and between claims assessors and players.

From reports to consultations, it was seven years before any of the planned changes were implemented.

## **2.2 THE REFORM OF THE SECTOR**

As from the year 2000, public and associative partners have been hoping to reaffirm and strengthen the identity of the social and medical welfare sector, of the management and professionals working in more than 25,000 social and medical welfare establishments and

services (32,500 including home help medical professionals) and caring for more than 1 million people. The sector was running on funding of 15 billion euros (2001): 8 billion euros from the health insurance contribution, 1.5 billion euros from the national state health contribution, 5 billion euros from regional health contributions. The act of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2002 was to provide the four major channels for this evolving sector.

#### *Channel 1: Broadening the scope*

It acknowledged structures as being vital players in the sector, structures such as health centers, drug rehabilitation and prevention centers, home help services and less traditional domestic and welfare centers. These new establishments reflected the emergence of new needs, the appearance or development of certain diseases and were helping to remove the barrier between social welfare and health that could put a brake on innovation and flexibility when it came to the care of certain categories of the population. Similarly, this channel broadened the scope of social and medical welfare services to cover day care, family care, ongoing care programs... It then gave rise to a certain amount of experimentation: innovative activities or partnerships; splitting up public services; departure from the charging system used at the time... Finally, it was also the platform for professional training opportunities as it encouraged the development of initial and in-service training schemes (particularly for management) and joint cross-professional training.

#### *Channel 2: a strategy of real guidance for the establishments*

With the aim of improving control procedures between managers and administration, all the mechanisms for planning, authorization, monitoring or pricing became more transparent and thorough. Amongst these mechanisms was the desire of the establishments and services to commit to an assessment procedure of the services they were delivering: the renewal of an establishment's authorization was from then onwards dependent on the results of the assessment.

#### *Channel 3: intra-sectorial co-operation*

In order to organize true co-ordination amongst the deciders, the players and between the deciders and players, formal procedures of dialogue and partnership were established:

agreements, long-term contracts covering objectives and methods, groupings of social or medical welfare co-operation...

*Channel 4: a strategy for a services program*

This strategy included the reinforcement of the rights of the people being cared for. Much more than reaffirming these rights, social reform went from a placement strategy based on the ability of the institution to take people in, to a strategy for a services program based on the ability to respond successfully to the various issues regarding the people cared for. In this respect, it meant that each structure had to have a certain number of tools: work plan, employees' handbook, operational regulations, human rights and freedoms charter, work permit, qualified personnel, social committee.

Current perspectives show the willingness to strengthen the new position taken by notions of multidisciplinary, networking and assessment. Whilst acknowledging institutional fields aiming simultaneously at quality intervention in specific missions and effective personal service structures within broad perspectives of care and improved quality of life, these notions unite the sector under an identity of professionalism, making it a sector of fully-fledged activities.

Finally, the main changes expected for establishments in this branch are twofold: changes linked to the evolution of public needs, that is, social demand expressed by the users and changes relating to the evolution of public demand. Since the end of 2006, public partnerships have carried more influence, prompting two major changes: structured budgetary control and a high quality procedure for the traceability of services. Faced with these challenges, the sector has assumed the following characteristics<sup>4</sup>:

- the role of organization of social work in the civil society is of prime importance for the players involved (it is a strong and shared value).
- the terms action, change and adaptation, form the framework of the thought processes of the individuals who are awaiting organizational change and are aware of the environmental shifts.
- the need for improved efficiency is equally great (the need for innovative practices). The answer was found in networking (and could be related to the creation of poles of activity in the hospital sector, for example).

- the lack of financial means is strongly identified.
- the necessity for openness is expressed. Using the experience of other sectors of activity could lead the social branch to using their tools.

It is through all these elements that we are able to discuss the slide from the “traditional” sector to the “innovative” sector. The modernization act of February 2002 led various structures to open their environment and break with old practices. Characteristics of these practices had been as follows: a mechanistic bureaucratic structure, centralized decision-making, the presence of groups of pairs between the individual and the organization. In this kind of organization, work routines have the disadvantage of prompting apathy (Montgomery, 1995), job specialization leads to resistance to new ideas with everyone focusing on their own areas of skill and exchanges are limited to the activity and not to the innovation. The “traditional” aspect in the mechanistic sense of the word is then reflected in the organizations by, amongst other things, the absence of shared work, partitioning of structures, a lack of formalization with regard to in-house qualifications and a practically non-existent human resources service. It is therefore these aspects that we are currently observing and that will then help us to consider the concept of the social sector as a developing innovative sector.

In order to deal with this issue, that is, the adoption of innovations by the players of a sector undergoing major changes, our strategy for gaining access to the actual state of affairs draws from case study. Considering the exploratory characteristics of the issue, quality analysis has been used based on in-depth interviews. The aim is to reveal data that could represent and explain the actual behavior, acceptance or rejection and to identify the representations that lead to these factors. In order to support our methodological choices, it is necessary to describe the method of access to the actual situation and the data analysis method used.

The procedure was based on in-depth analysis of two cases. According to Yin (1990), the case study is empirical research that studies a contemporary phenomenon in its current context where the boundaries between context and phenomenon are blurred and where multiple sources of explanation are used. This method seemed particularly suitable for our purpose because of the necessity to access data “buried” in the experience of the players and the background history of a sector.

Bearing in mind the aims of our study, the cases were selected to fit with our theoretical framework. They were thus chosen according to two selection criteria: a developing sector whose changes are reflected by new organizations and the pursuit of good economic performance; and organizations that had undergone change within this context. Our selection criteria therefore required us to retrieve specific data that could only be produced by certain interviewees. We carried out a series of 30 interview, 15 over the telephone and 15 face to face with the players from two organizations (a foundation and an association) running several establishments in the “Centre” region of France (in this case, two establishments per organization). The establishments are all run under private collective agreement. For two of them, their field of activity is in the support and help of young people in difficulty; the other two are in the field of mentally disabled adults. Four managers, one secretary general and a deputy manager, six department managers, eight education professionals, supervisors and helpers were involved in this study.

Questions forming the basis of the semi-directed interviews covered the following areas:

- the current function and mission as well as the interviewee’s experience in the establishment.
- questions on the representation of the environment and the changes detected.
- the actual changes experienced by the interviewee in terms of process, role played and support, as well as the areas of discussion observed.
- the effects on the work of the social player in a professional capacity.

The body of data retrieved was processed using the vertical and horizontal thematic analysis technique across the interviews. Because of the uniformity of ideas and concepts held by the interviewees, it became necessary to regroup the statements from the raw transcripts into analogous groups, then to homogenize the categories within and across the interviews. This then enabled us to produce a grid of cross-interview categories. We then classified the various categories in order to produce the following findings.

### **3- FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

We present here a summary of interviews per theme and extract (cross-sectional analysis of the most significant responses), since in this work it is not a question of producing monographic studies, but of exploring the field of representations of change and adoption of

innovations. We have used a decoding system based on concepts of literature review. From this decoding, we can proceed to a global analytical discussion on the themes brought up by the players.

In order to fully appreciate the findings of the study, we have chosen to quote the main proposals and then to discuss them in relation to the literature. Moreover, we have presented a summary table for each theme showing the link between the innovations of the sector, the representations of the players and the behavior observed. Four themes emerge from our analysis: environmental changes and structural innovations, organizational innovations, the introduction of new management tools and procedures and the rebuilding of roles.

### ***Environmental change and structural innovations***

Within the framework of environmental and organizational change, the players need to attribute meaning: they make their selection and give meaning to the information produced by the environment. This activity of creating meaning is based on representations. Hence the quality (traditionally implied to be good as it is presumed to be geared towards the users) is supported by the term of the budgetary constraints (that have positive connotations even though they are seen as an upheaval in the sector). The slightest difference expressed between the official and the unofficial then holds all the attention: in the case of this establishment, beliefs about this difference are divided and thus reflect a feature of organizational cognition. The gap between the traditional sector and the innovative sector is filled by financial constraints introduced by external partners and legitimized by the private structure-type organization put in place. Structural movement is facilitated by the development of the representations: the financial constraint is announced a long time in advance. This appears to be integrated, accepted and then spread around the social body, forming an element of the cognitive paradigm of the organizations studied. It facilitates structural innovations that have the potential to generate financial gains. Faced with the increased complexity of the social sector and with competition, the economic aspect brings new challenges. The gulf between the traditional and innovative characteristics is narrowing. The box below illustrates our analysis and table 1 summarizes it.

<b>Box 1: Structural innovations</b>
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“In 2004 there was an amalgamation between two establishments. We did indeed need a size effect; we needed to pool our means and to guide budgetary constraints... We now have clearly identified organization within, implemented by a manager from the private sector: *the objective*: capital... The pursuit of profit lies at the heart of the contract of objectives and means as a kind of association share charter; however, official policy would not place it at the heart of the activities of every establishment.”

**Table 1: Structural innovation, associated representations and behavior**

<b>Organizational innovation</b>	<b>Representations of the players</b>	<b>Observed behavior</b>
Search for a size effect Profit objective Pooling of means Detailed budget management	Identification of constraints Trade-off between social value and market value Impact of the manager's (private sector) representations	Use of company vocabulary: profit, budgetary constraint... Reporting tools put in place

***Internal organization innovation***

Organizational innovation is shown to be favorably perceived. However, we are aware more of consensus or mutual understanding than of the total support of all the players. This reveals an amount of ambivalence towards these organizational innovations. Individual representations partially differ. If responsiveness is perceived as an asset, it is accompanied by political games. In the face of this cognitive divergence, the manager plays the role of integrator. The appearance of the reforming manager is a key point: he legitimizes the new organization, gets the players used to the shifting of their beliefs (financial field) and is involved in the slide of the traditional axis (constraints of taking responsibility, quality, listening) towards the innovation axis (finance, management control, formalization). His action should make representations uniform and strengthen the support for ongoing organizational projects. The appropriation of innovative tools by the players should be facilitated. This analysis is illustrated in the box below and summed up in table 2.

**Box 2: Internal organization innovation**

*“We have an internal organization system that creates the link between field work and office support with the establishment of regions. It is a boundary that is constantly being readjusted. Adjustment operations were created: management control on a regional level... On a local level, there is a HR contact for activities and procedures. It's a little like a business partner: its approach is to shake things up....”*

*“After years of working under one master, the new director has quietly but firmly broken with tradition. In any case, we were moving towards disaster.”*

*“The budgetary constraints gave everything a different atmosphere: it was more political... The quality procedure came into being at that time: we established a whole organization system that would formalize things, making our activity traceable”*

**Table 2: Organizational innovations, associated representations and behavior**

<b>Organizational innovation</b>	<b>Representations of the players</b>	<b>Observed behavior</b>
Establishment of regional administrative centers Creation of new functions Opening up structures Formalization of procedures	Legitimacy through well-founded decisions Shifting of beliefs (traditional axis to the innovative axis)	Positive impact of the reformer manager Brakes on political behavior

### ***Introduction of new tools and procedures***

New tools and operational procedures are globally accepted. Decision-making and collective action has been made possible in this regard. Any reticence perceived is in the area of the role/tools relationship and not in the innovative tool in itself. However, the players are turning their back on their customary practices. Although there is still some reluctance to be felt in the organization, which reveals a delay in the formation of organizational cognition, on the whole, representations on an individual level are positive. They help as much with the understanding of the tool (and procedures) as with its appropriation. The existence of areas of discussion is common to our finding. The box below illustrates the proposal and table 3 presents a summary.

### **Box 3: New tools and new procedures**

*“We set up internal control procedures, technological tools and revised internal regulations. The assessment discussion has already been going on for 2 years. Things are working, but we don’t really know what to do with them yet...”*

*“There are qualified people from all levels, through training or accreditation of prior learning... It’s a question of acknowledging effective work, via salary as well. But the ability to interact is more important than qualifications”*

*“There are more procedures: paperwork, etc.”*

*“Things are driven from the top, but we have more freedom of speech”*

**Table 3: Procedural innovations, associated representations and behavior**

Organizational innovation	Representations of the players	Observed behavior
Management tools Formalization of qualifications	Control associated with observed changes. Recognition of work effort Feeling of freedom	Paradox between acceptance and doubt regarding practice Predominance of activity over qualifications Burden of the administrative aspect

***Reconstruction of the players' roles***

Faced with the complexity and abundance of information, the individuals begin to reconstruct their roles. The interpretation diagram that they have created with the organization and the reformer manager (who has also provided it) helps them to understand their new role, with differing degrees of support. The players attribute roles for themselves, roles that bear little resemblance to the previous description. These common meanings of reality join in the construction of the organization as a transformed social system. The role that the players give themselves supports the way they stage the change (*enactment*): the differences of appreciation awarded to the roles are created from variables produced by previous situations superimposed over current signals. The result is a sensible interpretation made by the players. These reactions are also conditioned by the behavior of leaders and passed on by local managers: how well they explain situations or the production of meaning given to organizational movements, has a strong influence on the reactions of the players with some of the hazards being hard to identify because they are often attached to the players themselves (free will, complexity of variables). As a general rule, this reconstruction of roles reflects a collective cognitive system that is favorable to ongoing innovation. This analysis is illustrated in the box below and summarized in the table.

**Box 4: Role reconstruction**

*“The department head was the only person on board ... with no break between private and working life. His core business was the care of individuals he was entrusted with”*

*“He is an external and internal co-ordinator; he is involved in the organization of training courses respecting the legal framework and coaching; he runs progress, appraisal and recruitment interviews”*

*“The educational professionals are at the heart of several functions: organizing care, support management, families, social organizations, ability to manage cross-activity projects...”*

*“These days we are accountable to everyone: official social services, the rights of young people and families, internal employees...”*

*“We are running the risk of becoming dehumanized in our work, of dealing with children, families and disabled people as clients for example”*

*“It’s not only the results that count; it is also how you arrive at them. But as yet we don’t have the same pressures that they have elsewhere...”*

*“Being a player is about acting and therefore being responsible. This sense of responsibility is called upon more and more, but under autonomous terms, together with accountability”*

*“We are society’s safety net: we often pick up the things that society no longer wants to know about.... But this same society is now asking us to work with it. It’s a paradox, but explainable at the same time...”*

**Table 4: Role reconstruction, associated representations and behavior**

<b>Innovations in the roles of the players</b>	<b>Representations of the players</b>	<b>Observed behavior</b>
Shift from a support profession to a management profession Shared HR function for management Partners from outside the profession Quantifiable procedures Links with partners (finance, reporting, social image)	Formalization of professions Specific missions Feeling for the job (fear of dehumanizing) Responsibilities towards other players Increased autonomy regarding responsibility for the functions	Involvement with various procedures Role of the manager/coach Accountability (activities, budgets)

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In order to have a better understanding of the adoption of innovation by the players, our discussion has been developed over two phases. Firstly, literature review has helped to highlight the role of representations in the adaptation behavior of the players as well as the importance of assessing their influence on the change actions led by the reformer managers. Next, our empirical investigations in a sector undergoing major structural and organizational change, have revealed interesting findings.

Whereas we tended to believe that innovation would be held back by features of the past, borne by a set of representations anchored in tradition, our results revealed that the various innovations were accepted and that the players had committed themselves to adaptational behavior. Although they swing between the individual and organizational levels, representations do support the innovations. They characterize a swing towards an innovative structure, that of companies in the business sector. Representations of players from the social sector converge sufficiently to support the structural and organizational innovations that this sector is facing. The central hypothesis of our study, proposing that uniformity of representations plays a decisive role in the adoption of innovations, has been confirmed.

Beyond this finding, mobilization of representations to explain the “how” for the introduction of tools in the sector, gives rise to much debate. Firstly, the success of the path enabling the introduced innovation depends on three conditions: a leader identified as being able to carry the project and identifiable with the project<sup>5</sup>; a line of consistency descending across the organization; a shock effect of prior awareness (financial sustainability). Next, seeking total support is not necessary and could even be considered idealistic: mutual understanding leaves room for shared collective representations and for freedom of individual cognition. Finally, the players use variables from former situations superimposed over current signals. They themselves play a practical role of demarcation/support. The result is a sensible interpretation and differences of appreciation. From this angle, the reformer manager who is sensitive to the players’ production of responsibility (cognitive work, self-management by the player himself) then plays a role setting the boundaries followed by a support role in order to create the required space for random behavior that re-integrates uncertainty as part of the action in a complex system.

From these findings, our research opens up to debate and gives rise to future lines of discussion.

In the first instance, observing the process of adoption by the players holds educational value for future managerial practices. In a rapid, high performing economy, this process shows that the players may hold a share in the stakes if the role of leader is consistent with the necessary awareness.

Secondly, questioning oneself on the theme of innovation and transformation of a sector is recognizing implicitly that there will be conflict and admitting that the players are working in

a shifting time field with the present only being built upon the past. The necessity for habit helps to provide marker points that reassure the player faced with daring innovation. This is why the installation of new tools calls above all on the concept of relative innovation, that is, innovative tools for the sector concerned. These tools relate as much to identifiable elements (interview assessment support, formalized quality procedure, management control procedures, etc.) as to processes using these same supports (budget objectives, management behavior standards, etc.). In this case, there is no real rupture, but more a shift of tools between sectors, accepted by the players (no reactions of surprise and prior knowledge of these practices). On the subject of rupture, we have looked at the role of the players: this rupture is globally accepted and integrated across the changes (see, for example, the answers regarding new identified missions). By contrast, we find real questioning and a strong feeling of rupture with previous situations in the field of current and future responsibility. Over and above this responsibility, the players have more questions regarding their professional identity (values, activities, missions) than the sector in itself and discover a new field of research for management, aiming to improve understanding of and explain their situation. This will undoubtedly be an important consideration for rapidly changing systems.

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