

Promoting Innovation in Public Organisations: An Analysis in a National Public Institution in Algeria

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ABSTRACT

Organisational innovation has become a critical factor for the survival and competitiveness of public-sector organisations. This form of innovation entails the introduction of new ways of doing and organising work that aimed at enhancing the organisation's capacity to achieve its objectives. The aim of this study is therefore to explore the conditions that stimulate the development of organisational innovation in the context of a national public institution experiencing transformation and modernisation in Algeria. More specifically, our aim is to identify the internal and external conditions that facilitate the emergence of innovation, using a descriptive and analytical approach based on qualitative data collection (interviews and observations). The results of this work show that innovation is not isolated in the organisation, but is influenced by the organisation's internal and external environment. This environment exerts pressure but also provides the conditions and the opportunities for innovation. The existence of a clear development strategy and project-based working structures provides a favourable context for innovation. Innovation is also a collective phenomenon, arising from the contribution of all key people in the organisation and the mobilisation of collective capacities through the role of leadership and the organisational support. Public organisations must therefore pay particular attention to these aspects in order to create value and innovate in their practices and remain competitive in an increasingly turbulent environment.

KEYWORDS: *Innovation, Leadership, Project Structure, Public Organisation, Strategy.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *L32, O31, O35.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Faced with the challenges of the external environment, innovation is becoming imperative in public sector organisations to deliver quality public service while efficiently utilising the organisation's available resources (Clausen et al., 2020; Moussa et al., 2018a; Verhoest et al., 2007). Innovation is a value-creation process that takes different forms and dimensions. For example, the adoption of new management practices, structures or procedures is a form of organisational innovation which improves the organisation's capacity to reach its goals. Therefore, in the context of public organisation, it plays a crucial role, particularly in the value creation process. This innovation reflects the ability to detect problems at the point of activity and adopt new practices to solve them (problem-finding and problem-solving practices) (Skálén et al., 2018). To accomplish this mission, several conditions must be met, affecting both the organisation's strategic management and the operational management of its activities.

In this context, organisational innovation in the public organisations faces many barriers and obstacles, particularly in terms of bureaucracy, such as strict central agency controls, risk aversion, and managerial resistance (Torugsa & Arundel, 2016). Unlike the case in the private

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sector, the diffusion of innovation is relatively slow in the public sector (Albury, 2005b). Consequently, the focus of research on innovation in the public sector is oriented towards the importance of open systems. In fact, the innovation process development is linked to the existence of working conditions that encourages individual and collective creativity through collaboration and ideas sharing (Torugsa & Arundel, 2016). The objective here is to create the bases for the value creation process. From this perspective, results and value creation are at the heart of New Public Management (O'Flynn, 2007), calling for the adoption of more flexible organisational structures. Thus, the management of public organisations is nowadays experiencing a shift towards a new approach centred on collaborative innovation (Chen et al., 2020; O'Flynn, 2007).

An analysis of innovation drivers in public organisations distinguishes between two types: internal and external. Internal drivers include strategy, organisational climate, strategic leadership, entrepreneurship, and organisational resources (Marr 2009: 48). A clear strategy that every employee understands is crucial to fostering innovation (Agolla & Lill, 2013; Poister et al., 2010). Furthermore, open organisational climate plays a significant role in promoting innovation by enabling feedback and experimentation and by motivating employees to make improvements (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017). External drivers are related to the organisation's external environment, most importantly, to the role of the state in the context of public organisations (Agolla & Lill, 2013; Poister et al., 2010).

In Algeria, as the public sector constitutes a significant part in the economy (Labaronne, 2013), the state is adopting new management approaches to modernise public services. Thus, public organisations can be transformed into flexible operators, capable of responding continuously to the needs of the society. This modernisation effort is manifesting through the reform of public action, with big impacts on sectors such as postal and finance. The primary objective of this study is therefore to answer the following question: what are the factors contributing to the development of organisational innovation within an organisation in this sector, specifically Algeria Post. This study will analyse the challenges of fostering innovation in a public management context with a particular focus on the construction of organisational innovation within Algeria Post. The present work aims at understanding the antecedents of the innovation process emergence. It highlights the importance of a clear organisational development strategy, the need to move to a project-based operational mode, and finally the key role of the organisational climate in stimulating innovation through effective leadership.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Innovation development in the context of new public management

In the context of public organisations, innovation means the introduction of new changes in public goods and services, business processes, and organisational methods (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017). In fact, successful innovation is related to the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services, and delivery methods, leading to significant improvements in results, efficiency, or quality (Albury, 2005a). The development of innovation in public organisations is a process of public value creation articulated around three levels: strategy, capacity, and operation (Chen et al., 2020). At the first level, organisations enable themselves to define their field of action, mission, and guiding principles. Capacity, on the other hand, involves establishing processes to equip the organisation with the administration, structure, expertise, management, technology, and resources required to fulfil the mission entrusted to it by public authorities. Finally, the

operational component concerns the process used by the organisation to implement its strategic decisions and policies in the interests of its mission (Chen et al., 2020).

External pressure on public organisations is reflected in managerial pressure, which is one of the factors driving the innovation process in the public sector (Clausen et al., 2020). Furthermore, the organisational climate for innovation is a key element in fostering the emergence of new ideas, by providing support for the introduction of new ways of doing things (Skålén et al., 2018). Hence, hierarchical support plays a crucial role in the search for innovations and innovators, their incubation, encouragement, and motivation (Borins, 2001).

Furthermore, the concept of innovation lies at the heart of New Public Management (NPM), as it significantly improves public service (Buchheim et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Skålén et al., 2018). The adoption of NPM in public organisations became a common practice in order to face market competition (Hansen, 2011). This new management approach calls for more private-sector management practices to be applied in public sector organisations. This means more professionalisation of practices with a focus on entrepreneurial leadership and the pursuit of efficiency through cost control (Osborne, 2006). It therefore marks a shift in the role of managers, who, besides working to achieve target objectives, are now responsible of developing sustainable value for the organisation (O'Flynn, 2007). In this regard, NPM aims at enhancing efficiency by encouraging the shift from rigid hierarchical organisations to flatter, more specialised, and autonomous ones, (Hansen, 2011). Additionally, it calls for greater organisational flexibility, particularly in managing individuals within the organisation (Hughes, 2006, as cited in O'Flynn, 2007).

Moreover, the adoption of innovation in a public organisation is a process that takes place in two different stages: initiation and implementation, which reflects the organisation's deliberated strategy to enhance its level of efficiency and performance (Damanpour & Schneider, 2009).

An organisational framework developed by Sahni et al. (2013) illustrates the managerial conditions necessary for the development of innovations in public organisations (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017). This framework highlights five important elements for innovation development in public organisations, including experimentation, feedback loops, motivation for improvement, response to poor performance, and constraints on budgets (Sahni et al., 2013). As innovation is an experimental process that involves a margin of error, it is crucial for organisations to tolerate risks, which is not the case in public organisations (Borins, 2001). However, it is through this process of trial, error, and learning that innovation emerges and spreads both internally and externally in the organisation. As a consequence, innovation cannot exist unless those elements are present and respected in the organisation, especially in the public context.

2.2 The manager's role and leadership

Organisational factors are the most examined antecedents of organisational innovation in the literature, with a particular focus on leadership (Buchheim et al., 2020). Indeed, leadership and management skills play a significant impact on the innovation capacity in public sector organisations (Moussa et al., 2018b). In this context, the manager is expected to influence the behavior of others in order to mobilise them in the transformation process of the organisation (Damanpour & Schneider, 2009; Moussa et al., 2018a). Empowerment is at the heart of this process, which is based on individual engagement in the transformation processes. Indeed, the essence of the innovation process, lies in the adoption of new ideas and experimentation and

necessitates to get rid of bureaucratic practices within public organisations. This is where the role of transformational leadership is often cited as a key determinant of innovation and creativity (Moussa et al., 2018b).

Various studies have shown that transformational leadership has a direct positive impact on the innovative behaviour of individuals within public sector organisations (Mutonyi et al., 2020; Skålén et al., 2018). Management support is essential to foster innovation. In fact, the role of senior managers in promoting and facilitating innovation can be seen through their openness to the adoption of new ideas and their support of innovation champions (Wipulanusat et al., 2019). Thus, the development of a new value proposition arises from internal resources, particularly from employees' perspectives through problem detection and solution resolution practices. This process is known as the resource integration process or value facilitation process (O'Flynn, 2007; Skålén et al., 2018). Group cohesion is also positively influenced by this type of leadership and consequently contributes to stimulate innovative behaviour (Mutonyi et al., 2020). Delegation of authority and empowerment serve as sources of motivation, with the sense of autonomy fostering innovative behavior (Moussa et al., 2018b; Skålén et al., 2018). The role of leadership becomes even more crucial in a context where innovation is the only alternative available alternative for public-sector organisations to face the challenge of efficiency. To achieve this, managers must have the opportunities to innovate, but also the motivation and skills to do so in an effective way (Albury, 2005a). Innovation is not an option, it must be considered as a core value of the public organisation (Albury, 2005a).

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Our empirical study is based on a descriptive and analytical approach using qualitative data collection methods (interviews and observations). This qualitative study is exploratory in nature and aims to better understand a social phenomenon through a case study. The choice of this approach was motivated by the complex nature of our central question. Consequently, our study at Algeria Post seeks to understand the dynamic transformation of work practices within this organisation by analysing the development of innovation from the perspective of the actors involved in this phenomenon.

For our study, we used documentary research, semi-structured interviews, and passive observation as instruments for information collection. The following are the headings of our interview guide:

Table 1. Interview guide headings

	Headings	Title
1	Heading 1	The institution's development strategy
2	Heading 2	Innovation drivers
3	Heading 3	The role of the project manager and leadership

Source: elaborated by the author.

For the analysis of the interviews, we used a thematic analysis methodology. This method enables us to organise the information, to identify the most significant meanings in the speech and to categorise the interviewees' statements into general themes that were identified in our literature review. It's important to note that we ensured interviewees had the opportunity to freely express themselves on the addressed themes. Our objective is to discover some aspects

that were not initially covered or anticipated. In practice, our analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. *Processing the gathered information*: This means identifying key words to develop themes (thematic analysis).
2. *Interpretation*: At this level we give sense to the information within specific theoretical framework.

In total, we studied 9 projects.

Table 2. List of the studied project

Project	Project
1. Standardisation and document control	5. Financial services management process
2. New electronic payment solution	6. Postal activities process
3. TPE	7. TMS
4. Overhaul of the information system	8. Smart Vista
	9. Tpe steering sub-teams

Source: elaborated by the author.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this analysis, we will at first present the organisational context of innovation development in this public organisation and the relationship of projects with their internal and external environment. At a second level of this analysis, we will examine the innovation process to understand the mechanisms of innovation and explore the role of project team leaders in this process.

4.1 Innovation at the Heart of Algeria Post's strategic development plan

Algeria Post is a PICE (public industrial and commercial establishment) with a network of 3,823 outlets. Algeria Post's business is organised around three main activities: physical and electronic mail/packages, financial services, and the postal network. Through these activities, Algeria Post is required to fulfil a public service mission and ensure the operation and supply of high-quality postal and financial services. To this end, the strategic development plan implemented by Algeria Post is essentially based on the following strategic axes:

- Optimisation of the postal network and diversification of resources through *innovation and the launch of new value-added services*.
- Reorganisation of the establishment, formalisation of procedures and overhaul of the process system to ensure better governance of activities, corresponding to an *organisational innovation*.
- Change of structure and emphasis on project-based management by interviewees

As part of the reforms undertaken by the Algerian government in the postal sector, Algeria Post must make a transition from traditional work logics towards new management approaches. This shift reflects the strategic need for project-based management to support innovation. *«Indeed, the project work represents an organisational model that provides public-sector establishments with an opportunity to overcome the limitations of rigid, hierarchical structures prevalent in public-sector companies. The advantages of this organisational approach is to foster skills development at all levels of the organisation»*. From the project managers' declaration.

The study of innovation development within project teams at Algeria Post is important for the modernisation of the institution and the highlighting of new management practices: « *As Algeria Post deploys project teams that are semi-autonomous, it finds itself amidst a period of transformation and modernisation at all levels..... in this context, the project team remains the primary forum for innovation* ». From the project managers' declaration. In relation to the perception of the importance of the project mode and the reasons for adopting such a mode of operation, project managers put forward the following reasons:

- Sharing knowledge and reducing complexity.
- Motivating people while working on the project.
- Having clear objectives and timetables.
- Bringing together individuals from different disciplines who can influence the project's success.
- Achieving time savings, efficiency, and success.

These findings are similar to the results obtained from many studies on the contribution of the project work structure to innovation (Gemünden et al., 2018; Severo et al., 2020).

- A work-structure at the heart of innovation genesis

During its operations, the project team is able to ask for the help of individuals both within and outside the company in order to better complete its mission. In some cases, the search for the appropriate knowledge needs engaging retired individuals who are willing to share their expertise. For example, in the standardisation and document control project, former executives participated as guest contributors to the project. « *In a project team, it's common to have a business referent, who is an employee possessing relevant expertise and demonstrated experience in one of Algeria Poste's areas of activity. This individual participates in the project on a part-time basis, having been invited by the project director or the business or support activity manager to join the work sessions* ». This example provided by a project manager illustrates the fact that soliciting individuals from the field who possess deep expertise is important to solve problems and contributes to stimulating the innovation process.

4.2 Manifestations, challenges and factors stimulating organisational innovation

Several of the studied projects contains examples of organisational innovation. For instance, the document standardisation and control project is one good example as it addresses operational processes central to the Algeria Post business, aiming to develop a process map. This project requires extensive sharing, transfer, and accumulation of knowledge and information. Similarly, the information system overhaul project represents an illustration Algeria Post's modernisation endeavor. In the previous system, each structure developed its own software and applications separately. The system overhaul aims to integrate all systems, facilitating information flow to management and enabling different structures to access the same information. The tangible outcome of this project is, therefore, the development of a process map and a procedure manual, both representing forms of *organisational innovation*.

More examples of organisational innovations can be found in projects such as the Financial Services Management Process, the Postal Activities Process, and TMS. In this project, some forms of innovative practices have been formalised and diffused to be used across all Algeria Post departments. A good example includes the team meeting minutes and status reports, which were standardised and shared with all regional departments to guide their work. Other examples are related to the organisation of daily tasks., where some documents were eliminated as they were unnecessary, while others were merged due to their similarity. Finally, in the TPE project, the innovation development facilitated the creation of a new

electronic payment solution using the EDHABIA card for paying telephone bills, internet/mobile recharges.

Despite its importance, the development of the innovation process faces several challenges and issues within Algeria Post. Questions regarding organisational structures, decision-making, and motivation are critically important in this context. Therefore, it is essential to adopt flexible modes of tasks organisation, effective communication and sufficient autonomy to foster the emergence of innovation.

In the case of project teams at Algeria Post, our investigation also highlights the necessary alignment between human cohesion and technical coordination within these teams, in order to preserve the synergy of efforts and ensure commitment to the objectives. However, maintaining cohesion is sometimes challenging due to its dependence on the existence of a shared vision of work, as well as on mutual trust between team members.

From an organisational point of view, the operations of the project team are systematically related to operation system of the company. Additionally, it is challenging for the project team to separate itself from the organisation's existing standards and work methods. For instance, considering organisational culture, some cultures are more open to participative coordination and ad hoc team composition, while others may be more resistant to adopting these practices.

The analysis of interviews and observations has allowed us to identify the following factors that we consider crucial to innovation: « *The real support of management is essential for the implementation of this highly delegated operating mechanism, which introduces a fresh perspective on problems and new approaches to solutions, unlike the specialisation enforced by rigid functional structures* ». From the project managers' declaration. This agrees with the findings of many other studies (Hsu et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2020). The project management mode represents a response to the inconveniences of procedural approaches, involving a partial abandonment of procedural logic in favour of a contractual logic among teams. Several organisational mechanisms can foster the emergence of innovation.

In our case study, we discovered that the operational model of project teams is situated between coordination and cooperation. The typical coordination mechanisms, such as adjustments and exchanges in meetings, gather isolated contributions from multiple participants. On the other hand, cooperation is deeper and allows team members to collectively define and develop the project as they interact, providing an opportunity for cognitive learning through ideas exchange. This leads to the emergence of new norms (2-loop learning) and the adoption of new behaviours and work methods.

« Today, it is wiser to aim higher and talk about a collective ambition that invites everyone to take part in the collective exploration of new directions and solutions ». From the project managers' declaration.

The role of the project team leader

The challenge for Algeria Post is to transform team leaders into transformational ones who inspire a vision of a better future for team members, encouraging them to think independently and take initiatives to solve problems. It is this type of leadership that can stimulate innovation. The team leader is responsible for the final outcome of the team, he intervenes to make sure the team meets the productivity and performance standards. Hence, leaders can be

seen as facilitators of team activities, they build confidence among team members and enable them to exchange information in an easy and a reciprocal way . Attention must be paid to the composition of the team and the profiles of its members. We have observed that teams with members having different profiles, different specialisations and varied skills, tend to learn the most. Project managers often try to ensure that team members have complementary skills, with the term "**complementarity of skills**" frequently emphasised by team leaders.

Managing the dilemma: capitalise on experience or innovate

The team leader confronts a complex situation: either to capitalise on existing knowledge or to pursue new opportunities that entail experimenting with new and unfamiliar concepts. « *Taking the case of quality management as an example, this requires first and foremost mastery of existing processes, but also the ability to react successfully to fluctuations in results over time. The ability to adapt highlights the introduction of human and managerial dimensions as the primary success factor in a field whose performance is based on continuous improvement.*».

- Towards a collective representation of work: « The challenge is to provide the team with a common basis for representation through the exchange of ideas and points of view. In teamwork, we seek to exchange and compare ways of doing things and observing things, in order to select the best ones. This presupposes an exercise in listening and understanding, and an openness to others and their experiences. » From the project managers' declaration

4.3 Recommendations for strengthening the foundations for innovation

Working in a team is advantageous as it facilitates idea fertilisation and allows for the exploration of multiple solutions. Additionally, teamwork promotes smooth project execution through knowledge sharing and mutual support among team members. Operating in project mode helps in meeting Algeria Post strategic goals and ensuring the effectiveness of plans and operations involved in executing these strategies. Consequently, the leader must adopt a participative management approach, not only overseeing the work of team members, but also, and primarily, motivating them. This study has enabled us to formulate a number of managerial recommendations to guide the actions of Algeria poste, in order to respond effectively to the challenge of innovation. Innovation must be part of a constructive vision that focuses on the link between individual, collective and organisational resources.

Build a culture of project-based work and idea sharing: To achieve such a result, it is crucial for the management to provide the managers with full support in terms of resources and tools required for project success (both at implementation and at day-to-day level). As an example, project team leaders must benefit from specific training in project management to enhance their abilities and skills. Risk management and the human dimension of project management should be at the heart of this training. Furthermore, it is important to develop collective skills not only for the current needs but more importantly for the potential challenges in the future. Therefore, a culture of teamwork and collaborative work is much needed. This can be achieved by encouraging people to meet together and to discuss the work problem regularly. By doing this, it becomes much easier for people to find a solution by sharing their interpretation of the situation. Group presentation including the team's members and the management staff, and internal seminars are good examples of some practices that can enhance a culture of project-based work.

Facilitating day-to-day collaboration as it represents a big part in the success of project teams. In fact, projects consist of interdependence tasks requiring a high degree of collaboration. One way to facilitate collaboration is through the good organisation of

workspace and office arrangements. The workspace organisation should be designed to promote communication, exchange of ideas, and the sharing of knowledge and expertise among team members. It is important to state here that collaborative effort is also a matter of people's motivation and engagement. Therefore, it is important to promote work collaboration methods that meet the people's needs. This can be done by organising traditional team meetings but also creating opportunities for virtual collaboration through multiple work platforms. Hence, all team members will feel valued and encouraged to contribute to the success of the project.

Choosing the right management and leadership system: According to our interviews and study findings, the dominant management style within Algeria Post project teams tends to be a combination of persuasive and participative approaches. In practice, team leaders at Algeria Post use generally a transactional leadership based on supervising of activities and ensuring that objectives are met through the exercise of legitimate authority.

The challenge for Algeria Post is indeed to encourage team leaders to change their management style from transactional to transformational leadership. Transformational leaders inspire team members by articulating a vision of a better future and encouraging them to think critically and take initiative in problem-solving (Bednall et al., 2018; Chang, 2016; Mokhber et al., 2018). To achieve such results, leaders can influence the work environment by establishing stable and clear rules to facilitate the work of team members. Another crucial challenge for project team leaders is to maintain a good work atmosphere, which enhances team dynamics and member satisfaction. This can be achieved through job empowerment and the recognition of each member's contributions to the team success.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, our study highlights the growing importance of innovation in public sector organisations, in order to respond to environmental pressures and successfully implement the development plans undertaken by the authorities. In this context, public sector organisations are obliged to adopt new forms of structure in order to create value through the development of innovation. In the public sector, the innovation emergence is daily process of ideas generation and adoption that takes time. The challenge lies in the ability of these public organisations to create and preserve a climate that encourages and protects this type of innovation. In this matter, the role of leadership is crucial to give individuals the opportunities to feel empowered and capable of making improvement decisions at their own level. Hence, our research represents a contribution to public sector modernisation effort in Algeria, placing innovation at the heart of this transformation process.

This study in Algeria Post constitutes an exploratory investigation aimed at understanding the innovation development process. Furthermore, it initiates new research perspectives on the subject. For instance, analysing innovation development in two different contexts such as public and private sectors, examining the social and cognitive determinants of innovation in project teams, and exploring the mediating role of leadership style in supporting innovation in public sector organisations.

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