

PPPs in the field of employment: clandestine strategies to become an efficient PPP?

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Summary:

In this article, we study the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in the field of employment, in Belgium. These PPPs are established between Public Employment Service (PES) and private operators to create projects for support and training for jobseekers the ultimate goal of which is social and professional reintegration. There are three critical moments in the life of the partnership: getting a partnership agreement with the PES, mobilizing jobseekers to participate in the delivery, and evaluating the outcomes achieved by the operator. The parties affected by these three critical steps are mainly the private operators. To overcome these difficulties, the providers implement informal and "clandestine" strategies to ensure the proper operation of the partnership and especially its performance and sustainability.

Keywords: Public-Private Partnerships, Public Employment Services, Private Operators, Efficiency, Clandestine Strategies.

Introduction

Over the last few years, multiple collaborations between the public employment services (PES) and private (profit or non-profit) firms have emerged driven by European institutions. This is part of Europe's strategy for employment the aim of which is to develop the employability of jobseekers (Orianne, 2005). Influenced by the view of "New Public Management" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), the collaborations have taken the shape of public-private partnerships (PPP) in the field of employment and professional training. These PPPs are established to create projects for support and training for jobseekers the ultimate goal of which is social and professional reintegration. The PES need to outsource this task because they are not able to carry out all of these projects by themselves.

Some authors such as Belhocine, Facal and Mazouz (2005); Mazouz, Facal and Viola (2008) and also Mazouz (2012) conducted research on PPP in the field of employment. They give a specific definition

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which highlights the first "P" of Public-Private Partnership, the "public" aspect of the PPP. However, other authors define PPP by its private character, the second "P", or as "simply" partnership, the third "P" (Remy, 2014:22-24). The PPPs in the field of employment are characterized by "a public body (the public employment service) usually linking profit or non-profit organizations through projects targeting specific social groups that depend primarily on government for their funding and the government agencies need non-profit organizations for the implementation of public policies" (Belhocine and *al.*, 2005: 9-10). Those authors call these PPPs the "symbiotic" PPP.

In that kind of PPP, both partners are not looking for a "benefit". They rather want to serve as a "cause" in the public interest by the implementation of services intended for special customers or responding to changing situations or emerging needs (Lister, 2000). These PPPs could be called an "urban regeneration approach" (Weihe, 2008:431) because "the exchanges between partners tend to be unforced exchanges, which are based on inducement and mutual interest without command" (Harding, 1998:78). Collaborations between PES and private non-profit providers were taking place in this way in the nineties. At the time private (non-profit) operators initiated requests for funding for projects aimed at jobseekers.

The essence of these partnerships is a co-operative and mutually supporting relationship: each partner has a stake in the success of the other (Scharle, 2008:232). So each partner is a "principal", according to Weihe (2008), within the agency theory. But the intervention of the European Commission changed agreements. This Commission asked PES to create partnerships with private profit operators. So the PES set up public tender more than ten years ago. The relationship changed between both partners: PES became the "principal" and private (profit and non-profit) providers became the "agents". This practice sounds like "back-door-privatization" (Flinders, 2005:220).

A PPP in the field of employment does not work the same way as a PPP in the areas of logistics, transportation, construction, etc. The risk sharing is quite different: funding is supplied by the public body; while the private body sometimes provides the infrastructure, hardware supplies, human resources, etc. Generally, the operators are determined to get an agreement with the Employment Office. In other areas, there may be problems in attracting the private sector as Chou (2014:2) highlights in his writings. Another feature of PPPs in the field of employment is the asymmetry. The partnership relationship seems to be reversed. The government has more power in decision-making than in other PPP because of providing the finance for the project set up by private operators (Remy, 2014:23). Asymmetry or not, PPP does not mean 'less government', but a different governmental role (Scharle, 2002:234). The PES becomes a "regulatory institution" of the labor market (Georges, 2007/2:181).

We studied the PPPs in the field of employment in Belgium which are managed by the partnership services within PES (Actiris for Brussels and the Forem for Wallonia). These PPPs have been created

in response to calls for projects over the last ten years. Operators are invited to submit support and training projects for jobseekers to PES. The agents of the partnership services evaluate applications. An agreement is signed between the PES and private provider if the application is selected. None aspects of the partnership are discussed between the stakeholders, which is opposite to PPPs in field of transport or construction where initial standards and penalties can be negotiated according to Lawther and Martin (2014:226). Generally, projects are organized for a period of two to three years. This duration is much shorter than that required for PPPs in construction, infrastructure and so on. Before the development of such calls for projects, agreements between PES and private operators ran for unlimited periods.

The Employment Office used to give funding without selecting operators or evaluating their work. The use of calls for projects has formalized procedures for the selection of operators and for the evaluation of their services. Currently, PPPs are formalized in a "contracts template" (Klijn and Teisman, 2003). There are three critical moments in the life of the partnership: getting a partnership agreement with the PES, mobilizing jobseekers to participate in the delivery, and evaluating the outcomes achieved by the operator. These moments correspond to "areas of uncertainty" (Crozier and Friedberg, 1980) and are experienced by operators as "delicate" situations, a kind of "test", according to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

Any difficulties in these three key steps can be regarded as a form of "failure" in the company. To overcome the "tests" of the life of the partnership, informal or "clandestine" strategies may emerge to ensure the proper operation of the partnership and especially its performance and sustainability. The parties affected by these three critical steps are mainly the private operators. We will see if they do or do not implement strategies to cope.

1. Theoretical perspective

The PPPs have been described as problematic and complex (Klijn and Teisman, 2003; Man et al., 2007). They question the practices and perspective governance (Grimsey and Lewis, 2004). The collaboration between public and private sector is fraught. Prolonged conflicts and tensions can arise during the implementation phase as a result of the interdependency and competing self-interests of the partners themselves (Siemiatycki, 2010). Mann et al. (2007:5) highlight that these tensions arise from different understandings of each other. According to them, the public sector is apprehensive about the private sector's fast track and feels misunderstood in terms of its processes. By contrast, private sector representatives complain about government's slowness in action and bureaucracy. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2011:12) point out that achieving the right balance of interests among heterogeneous partners is challenging because partners may undermine expected benefits of partnerships if the public sector is dominating. However, private interests should not dominate the joint relationship if the public value of PPPs is to be achieved.

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Public-private partnerships experience tensions related to expectations and divergent interests. Despite these differences, the public and private sector must work together for the implementation of projects. However, owing to the presence of difficulties in the implementation of the project new tensions may arise. Such situations put the partnership to the test and therefore have a bad impact on performance. These can be likened to a "failure" in the company. The manner in which these are resolved reflects the power dynamic between the stakeholders. It is interesting to explore in depth how stakeholders work together in these critical times. So, we need to understand the informal life of the partnership, and especially strategies used by the partners to overcome these challenges.

In their works, Crozier and Friedberg (1980) but also Fischer (1980, 1982) were interested in the interactions between workers within a company and, more specifically, in the power relations between them. The organization is seen as the realm of power relations, influence, bargaining and calculation. They show that the actors have a certain freedom in carrying out their work, which is called "areas of uncertainty" by Crozier and Friedberg and "interstitial freedom" by Fischer. These "interstices" or "gray areas" are between the rules. The interactions between the actors reflect the strategies they develop to enter these areas and meet their interests. The leeway of actors highlights the parallel or informal life of the organizations.

In his work, Fischer speaks about "clandestine self-management" that includes all attitudes of resistance and strategic behaviour in the workplace. These conflicting practices, represented both by "parallel life" and critique of the power relations, show the importance of individuals directing their own behaviour and actions so as to give form and meaning to their lives. The workers within a company do not carry out the tasks as has been prescribed or requested by the hierarchy. For example, the workers on an assembly line of locks for car doors may transform and consolidate operations by a rotation so as to be free from bondage to the chain. They take control of an area of operation where the methods and rules are supposed to be the law. These self-management practices depart from the official standards and may have an informal or secret feature.

The actors gradually develop practices to change the production process. They are a type of "illegal immigrants of the efficiency" (Fischer, 1980:182). In the workplace, the workers resort to acts – strings, "tricks" designed to combat deficiencies, failures, holes of the organization. The individual has an "interstitial freedom" in that he takes the opportunity to satisfy his own interests. This "clandestine self-management" is then in the service of the production because these "tips" are consequently good for production. Similarly with PPPs the stakeholders are aware of their power to modify the relationships.

With regard to PPPs in the field of employment, the PES has a new role as a regulator of the support market for jobseekers. It regulates the collaboration of private operators. Alongside these rules PPPs may also have a "parallel life" in which operators embark on clandestine strategies to satisfy their

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interests, that is to say, to make it efficient and sustainable, while at the same time also doing the partnership work. The operators would then be the "illegal immigrants of the efficiency". These practices allow them to acquire more power in a partnership where they are only "agents" while the PES is strengthened in its role as "principal".

2. Methodology of research

Our empirical approach is based on a qualitative perspective, through the achievement of observations and semi-structured interviews. We studied the collaborations between Public Employment Services (PES) and private operators of socio-professional integration market for over a year, from September 2011 to November 2012. Two areas of research were conducted in the French-speaking area of Belgium with public employment services: Actiris in Brussels and Forem in Wallonia.

Following convention 181 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Belgian PES must establish collaborations with private profit and non-profit operators. Both PES were chosen because they both use the call for projects procedure to create the partnership (PPP). This technique has been used by Forem since 2004 while Actiris has been implementing it since 2008. It enables a PES to develop partnerships with many service providers. It has a softer specification than tenders.

The device of call for projects is implemented by the Partnership service of Actiris and Forem, but each of them organizes it differently. Forem launches a big call that contains four or five types of training and / or of support for jobseekers (transition to employment, business creation, orientation and socio-professional mobilization, basic general education and short orientation module) whereas Actiris plans a call for projects by type. Each Actiris call for projects results in a maximum of thirty applications submitted by operators while Forem must manage hundreds at the same time.

Both PES commit to provide guidance to their partners for the development of their performance. Each has a specific way of managing public-private partnerships. Actiris provides collective support to its operators so that all the providers of the same call for projects are supervised by the agents of the partnership service at meetings with specific topics. These meetings take place a few times a year. On the other hand, Forem supports its partners individually at key points, which means at the beginning, middle and end of the project. This type of supervision provides greater familiarity between the PES staff and providers than a collective support does.

We decided to enter our areas of research through the public employment services, as we needed their permission to conduct our research. To understand best the functioning of PPPs in the field of employment, we did not focus on the study of one or two partnerships, but on a multitude of collaborations between PES and service providers. We were particularly interested in the issue of trust in the relations between the public and private sector.

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From a methodological point of view, the intense work of observation (Junker, 1980), by "*tracking*" (Zimmerman, 1981) of agents of partnership services in their daily work enabled us to enter the life of partnerships, from start to finish. We had the opportunity to participate in meetings, commonly called "monitoring committees" organized by the parties involved, to set up support and training projects for jobseekers. We also had permission to attend some meetings for the selection of operators by the public employment service.

Based on our observations, semi-structured interviews, "understanding" types (Kaufmann, 2011), were carried out with the employment service staff (N = 35) and service providers (N = 21). Our presence at these monitoring committees made it easier to establish contact with service providers. The themes discussed with different actors involved in the operation of the Office of Employment, preparation of the call for projects, selection of private operators, contracting, monitoring and guiding the project, evaluation and closure of project and the effects of the partnership. Observation elements and interviews are used to illustrate our findings in the analytical part of the article.

3. Obtaining a partnership agreement with the PES

The establishment of a public-private partnership between the public employment service and private operators is done by setting up a call for projects. Operators chosen through the selection process of the call for projects must sign a partnership agreement with the PES. This contract formalizes the entrance of the two stakeholders into a partnership relationship. The agreement may be executed for the first time if the operator is new. It can be renewed with a former provider. The challenge for providers is to obtain this agreement.

The partnership agreement between the operator and the PES runs for one year or more, depending on the duration of the call for projects. When it lasts for several years, it is renewed at the end of each calendar year. In some circumstances, it may not be the subject of a renewal. For example, an operator may decide to stop working with the PES if the project is not going well. In general, the PES does not stop an agreement during delivery, unless there is a serious problem. At the end of each calendar year, the project goes through a small assessment for the renewal of the contract for one year.

Most operators are working for years with the Employment Office. The signing of this contract is crucial for securing funding which will maintain or increase their volume of activity and the sustainability of their organization (see extract 1). Some operators of Actiris can find themselves in big trouble if their partnership agreement is not renewed. They depend (almost) entirely on Actiris financially. On the contrary, Forem has established a specific rule for project funding. This means that operators cannot introduce to PES projects exceeding ten percent of their overall internal business volume. The operators are afraid of not having an agreement with the Employment Office. Without funding some providers disappear from the socio-professional market.

Extracts 1

"If other operators present applications, it is an attack on our financial resources because we have less chance of being selected. Then, budgets are reduced even if we are selected. The more operators there are the less chance we have of being selected." (Operator K. of Actiris)

"It is a disaster if a non-market operator closes. If it does not fit in the call for projects, its survival is in danger." (Agent G. of Actiris)

Prior to the commencement of the call for proposals system, the providers received a structural subsidy from the PES. But actually, the agreement and funding are based on the duration of the call for projects. The application submitted by the operators must be evaluated in a procedure implemented by the Employment Office. The agents of the partnership service within the PES are tasked to examine the application against criteria defined in the specifications of the call for projects. The main criteria relate not only to eligibility (sent by registered mail, file completion, etc) but also to the consistency and relevance of the file (objectives, target audience, expected results, human and material resources) compared to expectations of the PES. The previous collaborations are also included as part of the criteria for the final decision.

The process of evaluating applications allows the agents of PES to give their opinion on whether or not to continue the collaboration with the operator (see extract 2). Their opinion is based on how the partnership went. If the agents received complaints from trainees (jobseekers) or discovered a lack of professionalism in a provider (e.g. poor supervision of jobseekers), they have a negative view of the application. When these problems are recurrent, the agents do not renew the partnership agreement.

Extract 2

"If the collaboration goes wrong, there is little chance that we will keep the operator. I know I have to keep an eye on some operators more than others. It is not that they are going to "diddle" us but I have to put more limits. They allow too much liberty." (Agent R. of the Forem)

The operators use various strategies to reduce the uncertainty in the evaluation process of applications submitted to the Employment Office. These strategies differ according to the region (Brussels or Wallonia) which the operator is from. The Walloon operators resort to the technique of "overbooking" (see extract 3), which can be external or internal to the application. The "external overbooking" is the introduction of a greater number of applications to be sure to get at least a favorable response to one of the projects while the "internal overbooking" is relative to the number of sessions training desired by the operator. If he wants to carry out two training sessions, he notifies five sessions in his application in order to get the two from agents of the PES.

Extract 3

*"As we do not know if we can maintain work stations, I actually try to submit a few more applications to be sure to get at least one. So far, the strategy has paid off but it is binding."
(Operator G. of the Forem)*

The goal is to maintain at least the same conditions in terms of the business volume and, therefore, the financial revenue. The operators can ensure the extension of the employment contract of their trainers. They know that this technique is a form of "risky act" as defined by Ogien (2006). The operators of the Forem voluntarily put themselves in danger vis-à-vis the Office of Employment. The risks are twofold. First, evaluators may identify the strategy of "overbooking", which may have a negative effect on the reputation of the operators. Second, the "greed" of the service providers can be used against them if the PES accepts all the applications introduced and they are not in a position to implement them.

This strategy has been implemented by previous operators. They present an application to maintain a certain volume of business and a certain number of work stations within the organization. They wait several months for the response of the Employment Office to find out if they have to lay off their workers or not. If the letter contains a negative decision, the provider is put at risk because it has no funds to pay the wages and the notice to employees. A new operator which has not yet formed his team will not survive this kind of test. Similarly an existing provider cannot expand its business either. Such risk occurs when the issue involved is important. In this case, it is a financial risk.

The previous Walloon providers voluntarily put themselves in danger vis-à-vis the PES by using the technique of overbooking. However, the Brussels operators do not try to maintain work stations in their organization through the use of overbooking strategies. This may be explained by the call for projects system being newer, only a few years in Actiris. The operators have not yet found the "trick". In Wallonia, the dynamic of a call for projects has been in place for nearly a decade. The agents of the Forem observe a number of "usual effects" and the implementation of certain strategies by the operators. The usual effects are observed in the writing of the application for example. Over the years, operators have learned to write their applications so that they are accepted. However, the practice of overbooking seems new.

Another strategy is implemented by service providers but only by a few of them, from both Brussels and Wallonia. The strategy is very risky and above all, very difficult to identify by the researcher as it has a politically incorrect aspect. The parties speak very little about it but it is known to many of them. Some providers have a lot of power in their region and, among other things, close relations with the authorities of the Employment Office and politics. At meetings on the selection of private operators by public employment services, some agents say the proposal of a certain operator must be accepted as is,

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because he is very influential. This means the operator already has an arrangement with the higher authorities and it makes it impossible for agents to refuse the application.

4. Mobilizing the jobseekers to achieve service

When the provider is selected by the public employment service, an agreement is signed between both institutions. It defines the terms of cooperation between the stakeholders, and the objectives to be attained by operators in terms of support and / or training of jobseekers. Private operators have to mobilize a number of jobseekers to achieve their performance levels but it is not easy to motivate them. The recruitment period for candidates is a major source of stress for some providers. Some partnership agreements state that the Employment Office is committed to helping operators in the recruitment process by 'sending' jobseekers to their firm. At times PES is not involved in this process, and at others, it takes full responsibility of recruitment.

The lack of candidates may have a significant impact on outcomes for operators as their funding are related to the number of jobseekers hired. The absence of a large number of candidates may result in the cancellation of the programme. In this case, the operator loses the entire initial funding intended by the collaboration agreement. However, costs were incurred on his part already for room hire, recruitment of administrative and technical staff, equipment and material to provide training, etc (see extract 4). The operators most affected by the cancellation of their service are those who organize their training as a group. Their training is removed when half of the candidates are not recruited. This rule is set by the Employment Office. Some operators negotiate the postponement of their service to another calendar date, but this is not always possible.

Extract 4

"Where operators have failed to recruit enough young people for their group, how are they going to pay the workers? Whether there are two or ten young people it is still necessary for the worker to be paid but, how when Actiris removes subsidies?" (Federation of socio-professional insertion)

When the situation becomes too critical (lack of candidates), the operators develop "risky" strategies to mitigate this "ordeal". Strategies vary according to the region to which the operator belongs. Some providers of Actiris decided to recruit candidates themselves without relying on the support of the PES, even if the partnership agreement prohibits the provider from publicizing its training projects (see extract 5). These acts are "risky" (Ogien, 2006) because the operator does not respect the rules of the agreement.

Extract 5

"I would like Actiris to send us more people. It is normal to do that because we work for the PES and it is noted in the agreement. We must accept people who do not speak Flemish so that the

groups are full. Recruiting takes time. We must advertise in order to have the number of people that we need." (Operator J. of Actiris)

This strategy is risky because it endangers the trust within the partnership relationship between both stakeholders. The operator says he is ready to accept any candidates, so as to get the number of people necessary to achieve the contract outcomes. A prerequisite for participation in training is the knowledge of Flemish, so when there are not enough candidates and the provider decides to hire jobseekers who do not speak Flemish; this practice raises questions in terms of the quality of supervision provided to these candidates. The operator seems to pursue at all costs the filling of quotas for the training session rather than ensuring the suitability of the candidate profile with respect to the proposed training. He is willing to lower the quality to achieve his objectives.

The operators of the Forem developed another strategy with an even riskier characteristic. This is the "traffic of illicit people" (flow of ineligible participants) which consists of accepting former candidates a second time in order to reach their quota of jobseekers for the project (see extract 6). This action puts the provider in danger of facing the legal framework imposed by the PES. It is especially used in the case of training sessions because the operator must have a minimum number of candidates to be able to start his delivery. This strategy is more likely to be used by operators from previous collaborations with the Employment Office.

Extract 6

"We have received complaints from three jobseekers. We understand that some people were needing mobilization, but they were in an "employees" module. The operator told us that there were no more places in the "mobilization" module. He put the person in a different session. He did that only to fill a group." (Agent M. of the Forem)

Some candidates are kept by the operators while they have already taken a training module within the organization. The establishment of this "traffic of illicit people" allows operators to fill their training session and get all of the funding promised by the partnership agreement. This traffic sometimes shows a vicious circle where the jobseeker remains permanently in training without integrating a job.

5. Evaluating the results of the service

All projects implemented by the operators are subject to a qualitative and a quantitative assessment. With regard to Forem, a monitoring committee comprised of an agent of the PES and the operator evaluates of the service. In Actiris' case, the operators themselves write the evaluative report. Both Walloon and Brussels operators must provide a financial report to the PES. The quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the project raise questions for Brussels and Walloon operators. They feel that the qualitative dimension is less important compared to the quantitative dimension and it is true that the reports provided to superior levels are essentially quantitative. All evaluation reports are also

used by employment service staff to improve the call for projects. According to some operators, assessment of the qualitative aspects of the project has to rely on the visit of an agent to a few sessions of training. The agent can then actually assess the qualitative dimension of the project taking into account the pedagogical and methodological aspects used. This type of assessment highlights any investment of the operator in training his candidates (see extract 7).

Extract 7

"Talking about results and performance raises some problems. There are many things we can do with our participants which does not appear in the statistical figures. We can write this in the report of activities. Just because the person does not get a job does not mean we did no training of him. The person has made progress. There is a lot of work that is not quantifiable such as the psychological and moral support." (Operator K. of Actiris)

Sometimes, providers get themselves tangled up in the achievement of targets because different quotas are specified in the partnership agreement. These quotas change along with the calls for proposals. The operator needs to recruit a number of candidates and get a rate of positive outputs. Positive outputs are either conducting a skills assessment or developing a career plan if the person is some distance from getting a job, or putting the person into a job or training if they are close to employment. The target results are not always clear to some providers of the Forem (see extracts 8).

Extracts 8

"As regards the results, we must either achieve employment or further training. We are not very clear on the outcomes. I do not know the percentage of positive outputs I have to do. It changes all the time." (Operator E. of Actiris)

"The deliverable is what matters in terms of funding. However, I did not understand things like this in the previous call for proposals. They did not explain it to me. I followed the trainees at the end of training, at one month and at three months after training. I made three follow up visits to see where the people were, but I did not consistently request evidence because I thought they were on track. When I met the agent of the Forem, I realized that I should have asked individuals for their employer's reference." (Operator E. of the Forem)

Some operators of the Forem do not realize the importance of providing employer's references or training certificates at the Employment Office to obtain funding which are related to the delivery. Without these certificates, the PES cannot ensure the achievement of objectives by the provider. Then it cannot make the payment of the benefit. The consequences are a little different regarding Actiris. The payment for the service is not directly related to the results obtained, but the number of people enrolled in training. This way of working does not diminish the important issue of achieving results. The evaluation of the delivery influences the continued collaboration with the provider for future calls for projects. It has a non-significant impact on the reputation of the operator. The Employment Office

will refuse signing a new contract if the provider has not reached the targets and jobseekers complain about his training.

The operators of the Forem are keen to get the quotas set in the agreement and receive the funding. Forem describes in the deliverables, the type of certificate to be provided by the operator. But, nothing is specified in terms of the quality of the deliverable. Some operators of the Forem took advantage of this "gray area" in the rules (see extract 9). Acceptable employment is defined by the PES as a day job. Some jobseekers achieve one day working in a temp agency or in a job completely different from the training provided.

Extract 9

*"The agent of the Forem told me that I only had to contact a temp agency to put jobseekers on a day's employment. I have thus reached my results. It was a joke but there is some truth in it."
(Operator B. of the Forem)*

In a discussion with an agent of PES on the way to a partner organization, he told us that some operators do not provide quality deliverables. One of them gave to the PES a curriculum vitae with little content and spelling errors. Another operator provided an employer's reference where the jobseeker worked a day as a barman. The operators concerned have obtained funding for these candidates but the agent questions the job quality and work quality provided by the operator.

To achieve the goals, operators sometimes resort to "overbooking" (see extract 10). The technique of "overbooking" consists of accepting more jobseekers than the required number for a training session. It aims to reduce the financial risks to the operator in case of withdrawal of candidates, a PES officer calls that "fire losses". This practice is basically implemented by operators of the Forem because the funding is linked to the achievement of results.

Extract 10

"There were just two persons who did not get a deliverable but we took more people to offset potential losses. We arrived at our numbers. I have overbooked because there are many people who leave the training early. If we have a session of twelve, we take fifteen. If we have three withdrawals, we get the entire budget." (Operator E. of the Forem)

The operators of Actiris not seem to practice this technique. This can be explained because of the database in which they must encode information about jobseekers. However, they resort to the "traffic of illicit people" as to providers of the Forem. Some of them decided to make internal channels (see extracts 11). That is to say, to pass jobseekers from training in a specific call for projects to internal training of the operator or even to training sessions related to other calls for projects. These practices of "internal channels" are prohibited by the PES. Some providers take this risk because they feel that

these practices help streamline the path of seeking work and, ultimately, to achieve better social-professional reintegration.

Extracts 11

"If the person who is in a class for mobilization wants to go into a class for job research, we take the person into an internal course in our organization which is a workshop to find a job." (Operator D. of Actiris)

"More or less half of the trainees take one of our internal courses after completing the training session of the call for projects. And others are redirected to other related occupations. Normally, you cannot make internal courses. We are not supposed to have modules of the call for projects that promote our internal training. [...] The ultimate goal is to train jobseekers. It is clear that our aim is that people find a job." (Operator E. of the Forem)

The private profit and non-profit operators are both involved in this "traffic of illicit people". However, it translates a little differently depending on the type of operator because one makes structural courses and the other manages vacancies. In both cases, the difficulty lies in the definition of "flow direction" of jobseekers. The flow is sometimes only within the agency or organization. The profit providers guide jobseekers to their vacancies. The non-profit operators do the same by sending persons to their own training. In principle the rule of the call for projects states that the movement of trainees must be beyond the agency or the socio-professional integration organization.

Discussion

Our initial hypothesis suggests that PPPs have a parallel life as companies. The stakeholders develop informal rules and strategies. To verify this hypothesis three critical moments of the life of the PPPs have been analyzed: getting a partnership agreement with the PES, mobilizing jobseekers to engage in the delivery and evaluating the results. These situations are experienced by private operators as a kind of "challenge" according to Ogien (2006:230). The challenge refers to the sense of danger; the seriousness of the risk involved varies with the degree of threat, ranging from the mundane act (pay a small sum of money to someone) to daring act (crossing a river in winter to prove that you are a man) through the risky act (circulating illicit substances). The challenge is therefore taken up by private operators because it is in their funding or their collaboration with the Employment Office.

To remain active in the support market for jobseekers, private operators need finance. Without collaboration with PES, they cannot grow their business coaching and training for jobseekers. The new collaborative framework imposed by the PES through the use of call for projects requires operators to comply with new practices of collaboration with the Employment Office. These major changes concern the development of a procedure for selection of applications, monitoring and evaluation of the

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service, financing the recruitment and / or results with jobseekers and an agreement for a limited period (two to three years).

To overcome the challenges of working with the PES, the operators develop risky strategies as exerting political influence and overbooking records to ensure agreement with the PES. They also engage in lowering quality, overbooking of candidates, "traffic of illicit people" (flow of ineligible participants) and illegal promotion of their training to recruit candidates internally to achieve their targets. These informal strategies belong to the parallel life of the partnership. They may appear as forms of "boycott" defined by Hirschman (1970:86) because providers use them to circumvent the rules of cooperation established by the PES in the call for projects. These strategies allow operators to express their dissatisfaction with the partnership framework and to minimize the risk intrinsic in the partnership and still appear as efficient partners to the officers of the PES. Not all of the providers are engaged in this kind of game (Klijn and Teisman, 2003:138).

Where the numbers in the statistical reports show that a provider has achieved its targets in terms of supervision and integration of job applicants, the PES is then inclined to continue the partnership with these operators. The ultimate goal of the risky strategies is to sustain cooperation with the Office of Employment and receive funding. However, the discovery of these strategies by the PES agents can damage the reputation of the operator and trust between both stakeholders. When such practices come to light, the agents cannot help thinking that the operator "is opportunistic and has betrayed the collaboration" (Neuville, 1998:87) with the PES. Their mission is to remind them of the rules of a partnership with the Employment Office. They do not penalize initially but warn against such practices. A repeat offense forces the agents to penalize operators because they have the impression they voluntarily adopt these opportunistic attitudes. Penalties can range from the removal of candidates in the calculation of subsidies granted to the operator, to the actual break of the partnership.

The agents decide their intervention by examining the situation in the light of the justifications and attitude of the operator. They are particularly sensitive to strategies that impact on jobseekers. Take the case of "traffic of illicit people". Some providers justify the channeling of candidates to other internal training classes as being an example of socio-professional reintegration. In this case, the operator will not be penalized, unless he does that with all candidates. It could almost be considered as the "illegal immigrants of the efficiency" (Fischer, 1982) for the reintegration of jobseekers. However, he is penalized when the officer notices discrepancy in the career of the jobseeker. In this case, the agent determines that the operator is opportunistic or even "harmful" for customers of the PES.

Providers will set up hidden strategies to ensure they are seen by agents of PES as a powerful partner. These strategies are in place to maintain the partnership beyond the current term. These practices inevitably raise the question of effectiveness of these PPPs. According to Chou (2014:7) quantitative evaluation can be used in institutional decision making. However, to use that perspective alone seems

insufficient in the light of the presence of clandestine strategies by private operators. Hodge and Greve (2007:548) highlighted difficulties in assessing PPPs and argued that a comprehensive evaluation of the PPP phenomenon would require assessment of different operations including financing, design and development, operation and ownership. But this seems to lack the qualitative approach.

The PPPs established in the field of employment by calls for projects are mainly managed and evaluated in a "management spirit" in the sense that the numbers are disconnected from the categories of outcome (meaning) (Ogien, 1995:189). The PES delegate their task of support for jobseekers to private operators but some practices raise the question of the quality of the supervision. The drifts to a management spirit appeared after the establishment of calls for projects, pushing operators to protect the interests of their organization. The discovery of these strategies could encourage the PES to engage in more control of the providers. According to Crozier and Friedberg (1980), the presence of additional rules gives more areas of uncertainty to actors and, therefore, the establishment of more informal or illegal practices. However, Reynaers (2013:48) shows that using monitoring mechanisms seems to increase transparency in comparison to traditional unmonitored procurement.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored public-private partnerships between public employment services and private operators who implement training programs for jobseekers. Particular interest has focused on the parallel life of these PPPs established in the field of employment. We looked at the use or not of strategies by private operators in the face of challenges experienced within a PPP created through the call for projects. Three critical steps for these PPPs were analyzed namely obtaining an agreement granting the PES, recruiting jobseekers and evaluating the service. Providers use informal or even illegal strategies because they experience these events as challenging and risky. They do everything to demonstrate their efficiency to PES in order to keep the partnership with the Employment Office.

These practices (overbooking applications, political influence, illegal promotion of their training, over-enrolment of candidates, low quality and flow of ineligible participants) raise the question of the efficacy of the partnership as some are good for the jobseeker while others are not. In the first case, the operator may appear such as the "illegal immigrants of the efficiency" of the reintegration of jobseekers while in the second, it could be considered "harmful" in the career of the individual. These strategies are mainly implemented to ensure obtaining an agreement and funding. It would be interesting to compare what is happening in other partnership models, those formalized via a tender or call for initiatives.

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