Friendly hacking into the public sector: co-creating public policies within regional governments

How to install a progressive transformation process within and with the public administration to develop co-creation of public policies by users and administrative personnel? What are the tools and methods involved in the process? The article will present the experience on the subject of the French public innovation lab La 27e Région and its community of administrative personnel, elected representatives, designers, sociologists and various players coming from different disciplines and involved in promoting co-creation of public policies (La 27e Région 2010). **Background:** The challenge of modernising administrations has been well documented for a few decades with the introduction of New Public Management to public sector organisations. So far, most of the research found mainly negative impacts of these reforms (*e.g.* Pollitt and Bouckaert 2006; Hood 1991; Aucoin 1990). Partly in response to New Public Management, a new movement is beginning to grow within the public administration, that tries to combine the current managerial culture with social innovation, design and open source cultures. This movement is represented by structures such as the Danish MindLab, the Social Innovation Lab for Kent in Great Britain or La 27e Région in France. Through this movement, co-creating has been identified as a key factor of success (Bason 2010). The article will explore solutions developed by La 27e Région to achieve this purpose, synthesized in the concept of "friendly hacking". Here, "friendly hackers" does not designate traditional hackers but the community engaged in the process of change inside the administration. The two apparently contradictory terms are referring to the "hacking" of the administration, *i.e.* an action that would be disruptive enough to question public structures, but "friendly" in reference to traditional hackers as playful do-it-yourself enthusiasts, able to achieve promising results by recombining quickly the existent and co-creating together (Simon 2005). **Methodology:** The article will review the different lessons learned about friendly hacking through field experimentations, based on testimonies of the actors involved in La 27e Région on-going programmes *Territoires en Résidences* and *La Transfo* along with workshops at national and European levels that will happen in the coming months. The methodology will be inspired by intervention research (David and Hatchuel 2008). **Expected results:** The article will highlight both strengths and limits of the "friendly hacking" approach, as well as key lessons to overcome the difficulties encountered, such as:

- The *inside-out posture*: the friendly hackers must find a balance between staying outside the institution to be sufficiently detached and preserve critical point of view, and being immerged in the institution enough to engage a change;
- The *neutral-activist role*: this role also requires a subtle balance between neutrality (when it comes to get people from different status to work together) and activism (this neutrality is possible because strong values such as freedom of speech are constantly promoted, as a manifesto);
- The *enabling collaboration*: friendly hacking is based on co-creation process, use of collaborative tools and intention to enable the public structure to adopt these tools and innovate on their own is;
- The *doing before thinking*: friendly hacking is an hands-on activities that gain credibility because it provides an evidence of success, not necessarily by breaking-in the public structure but in delivering an improvement that works;
- The *multilevel interaction*: friendly hacking is not the result of a single activist but the involvement of a supportive community. In a similar way, the transformation of the public sector calls for coo-petition between territories, government levels and cross fertilizations within an heterogeneous community of interest;

- The *envisioning perspective*: the community of friendly hackers focuses on forms of mutual improvements, work-in-progress and is by essence oriented toward a collective construction of the future;
- The *hacking documentation*: friendly hacking also implies transparency of the whole and publication of both successes and failures so that anybody can replicate the process and collaborate to improve it.

Contribution to theory and practice: The characterization of the "friendly hacking" process of La 27e Région will enable a better understanding of its action for itself and for its partners. It will also document a way to move towards co-creation of public policies. It will also contribute to develop the academic field questioning innovation in public sector. If New Public Management in all its forms as well as its consequences is proficiently documented, this new practice of modernisation of the public administration is indeed nowadays still emerging.

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Key Words: co-creation of public policies, innovation in public administrations, friendly hacking, La 27e Région

Theme: Paradoxes in collaborative and open innovation in networks