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► **To cite this version:**

Benjamin Drevetton, Sébastien Rocher. The success story of a ‘successful?’ management device. NEW PUBLIC SECTOR SEMINAR, Nov 2009, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. pp.cd rom. halshs-00479810

**HAL Id: halshs-00479810**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00479810v1>**

Submitted on 2 May 2010

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# *The success story of a ‘successful?’ management device*

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## *Abstract*

**This paper deals with the implementation of a management device in a French regional government. Based on a case study, it sets out to describe the stages in the implementation of this management device, from its development by administrative staff to its initial rejection and subsequent acceptance by elected officials. This study highlights the contributions of Translation Theory to our understanding of the trajectories of management devices within public organisations.**

*Keywords:* management device, translation theory, public sector.

In response to drawbacks in existing management devices and to the need for both greater transparency and efficiency in public resource management (Pollit and Bouckaert 2004), the need for better tracking and precision management of the activities of public organisations has grown. Implementing management devices has therefore become a priority for a large number of public managers and political leaders (Lapsley and Wright, 2003; Jackson and Lapsley, 2003).

This paper presents a case study of how a management device was implemented in a French regional administration<sup>i</sup>, a process that stretched from the initial political policy decision to the device's deployment two years later. It sets out to bring to light the process of building and implementing this management device and to describe the set of decisions, conflicts and controversies that emerged between the actors involved and how these events came to influence the device's form and content. Indeed, this device was initially defined as a means of tracking the achievements of public policy and yet was gradually transformed into a tool for political communication. With this in mind, this paper aims to outline a response to the assertion made by Burns and Scapens (2001) regarding the lack of research on the trajectory of management devices in organisations that is designed to analyse what becomes (or doesn't become) of management tools during implementation. The research question addressed in this paper is therefore as follows: how was this management device developed over time and subsequently implemented and accepted? This question deals with a larger one: Where do management accounting innovations come from and where do they go?

To answer this research question, this paper is grounded in Translation Theory (Callon 1981, 1986; Latour 1987; Latour and Woolgar 1979), according to which acceptance of a management device is tied to the development of a network of actors who "carry" the device and disseminate it and, in the process, shape and transform it so as to "translate" their interests into and within the tool. These transformations or "translations" are needed to tie the actors' interests to the project.

The choice of this theoretical framework can be justified by the fact that, as pointed out notably by Latour (1986, 1987) and Akrich et al. (1998), it calls into question the 'classical' approach to the acceptance of management devices<sup>ii</sup> (according to which a tool is accepted or rejected in light of its intrinsic features) and the deterministic paradigm on which this approach is built. Moreover, as both Latour (2005) and Law (2007) mentioned, insofar as it is not designed to test, translation theory is not a theory as such but rather it constitutes a framework that can explain how facts are shaped. Lastly, by referring to the sociology of

translation (or translation theory or actor-network theory), we position this paper within the current stream of research relating to the study of accounting tools through sociological frameworks (Miller 2000; Vollmer, 2003).

The first section examines in greater depth the foundations of translation theory<sup>iii</sup>. The second section describes the research methodology we use. The third section presents the process of building and implementing the management device, a process that extends from the initial political decision driving the project, through its creation, and to its ultimate deployment. In the final section, a discussion is engaged about what is a successful implementation of a management system.

## **1. New public management and translation theory : a new vision of public reform**

### 1.1 New Public Management: a way to introduce new management control system

New Public Management finds its origin in the neo-liberal ideas of the Seventies. The expression became essential only in the Nineties to indicate a whole of similar reforms concerning public organizations. Ce mouvement répond à une crise de légitimité des organisations publiques. Aucoin (1995) suggested that the NPM is a necessary reform because public management is overly preoccupied with the respect of the rules and the procedures. In a general way, NPM describes a phenomenon that ranges from managerialism (Hood 1991; Pollitt 1993) to the full package of government reforms introduced since 1980 (OECD 1995).

#### 1.1.2 New Public Management: some definitions

Le NPM est défini par Hood (1991) comme « l'ensemble des doctrines administratives sensiblement similaires qui a dominé le programme de réforme bureaucratique dans de nombreux pays membres de l'OCDE depuis les années 1970 ». Mathiasen (1996) précise que le NPM ambitionne de développer une culture de la performance au sein des organisations publiques. Pour atteindre cet objectif ce dernier est fondée sur : une attention particulière portée sur les résultats (en terme d'efficacité, d'efficacités et de qualité de service) ; une décentralisation des modes de management ; une flexibilité accrue de l'action publique (la

régie n'étant pas la seule alternative) ; la mise en œuvre de mécanismes de marché permettant de mettre l'accent sur l'efficacité des services et enfin l'initiation d'une réflexion stratégique approfondie comme guide de l'action publique. L'application de l'ensemble de ces principes n'aboutit pas à un seul et unique mode de management. Ainsi, le NPM se concrétise par un ensemble homogène et par une pluralité de pratiques. Ferlie et al. (1996) identifient l'émergence de quatre modèles distinctifs, de quatre trajectoires :

- Modèle de l'efficacité : ce modèle est celui qui se rapproche le plus de la définition donnée par l'OCDE. Il se développe au cours des années 80 avec comme objectif d'introduire la notion d'efficacité au sein des organisations publiques. Parmi les principes que prône ce modèle : renforcement des contrôles financiers, mise en place de nouveaux modes de gouvernance, développement du managérialisme.
- Modèle du downsizing et de la décentralisation : ce modèle est surtout fondé sur une rupture organisationnelle. Il s'agit de favoriser le développement de structures de petites tailles, plus autonomes associé à l'introduction de nouveaux modes de régulation (contractualisation de la relation hiérarchique)
- De l'excellence : ce modèle se heurte à la rationalisation défendue par le modèle de l'efficacité. Il se fonde essentiellement sur une analyse du comportement des individus et notamment, au sein de ce dernier, de la place de la culture et des valeurs.
- De l'orientation de service publique : ce modèle cherche à adapter les principes du management privé au sein des organisations publiques. Il s'agit d'intégrer à l'analyse la mission de service public et donc de concentrer les efforts de ces organisations sur la qualité du service et sur une réponse plus pertinente aux besoins exprimés par les citoyens.

Cette vision des réformes mises en place au sein des organisations publiques plaide pour une conception élargie du NPM et confirme l'absence d'homogénéité des pratiques de management public. Toutefois, le secteur privé constitue la référence. Aussi, les pratiques mises en œuvre au sein de ces organisations doivent être transférées aux organisations publiques. Le NPM met en avant des valeurs qui sont traditionnellement celles identifiées dans les organisations privées afin de développer l'efficacité et l'efficacité des actions publiques. Le développement d'une nouvelle vision du management public constitue la véritable rupture introduite par ce courant.

### 1.1.2 Management control system and New public Management: a focus on Balanced Scorecard

Quelque soit le modèle mise en œuvre, l'appropriation des réformes du NPM au sein des organisations publiques passe par une finalité commune : introduire le concept de performance via l'implantation d'outils de contrôle de gestion. Comme le précise Van Dooren, (2006), la performance est devenue, depuis plusieurs décennies, la principale promesse du secteur public. De nombreux auteurs insistent sur la notion de performance. Dès 1991, Wood associe les réformes issues du NPM à la volonté d'introduire des mesures de performance permettant de réduire les coûts des activités publique ou encore d'améliorer le contrôle financier des résultats. En 2001, Gruening revient sur les caractéristiques généralement attribuées au NPM, parmi celles-ci : la nécessité de réduction budgétaire, la séparation du politique et de l'administratif ou encore le développement de nouveaux outils comptables permettant d'améliorer la performance. Plus récemment, Bouckaert et Halligan (2008) réaffirment la nécessité pour l'organisation publique de définir une véritable politique de mesure de la performance. De la même façon, afin de faciliter l'insertion et l'appropriation des systèmes de mesure et de management de la performance, Modell (2001) insiste sur la nécessité d'élargir les critères d'analyse de la performance dans le secteur public.

Cette ambition de la performance se traduit souvent par le développement de nouveaux outils de gestion. The rapid analyze of the definitions given to the NPM indicates the importance of the management control system in the development of these reforms. Comme nous l'avons précisé, des pratiques, utilisées au sein des organisations privées, sont transférées au sein des organisations appartenant à la sphère publique. Thus, the NPM seeks to transform organizations bureaucrats into entrepreneurial organization by introducing management control system devices. Public organizations will set up systems of control of the performance of their activities.

Actuellement, au sein des organisations privées, l'outil de gestion le plus cité car permettant de piloter la performance est le tableau de bord (french tableau de bord). Plus précisément, les travaux de Kaplan et Norton (1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2006) formalisent un outil de gestion qui intégrerait à la fois des données financières et non-financières et qui serait donc à même d'évaluer une performance globale des activités d'une organisation. Concrètement, il s'agit d'organiser la performance autour d'un outil : le Balanced Scorecard. Ce tableau de bord

propose d'évaluer la performance de l'organisation en aménageant le pilotage de quatre éléments essentiels à la réussite stratégique :

- Un axe satisfaction client. A ce niveau, les indicateurs sélectionnés doivent essentiellement répondre à une question : Quel est le degré de satisfaction des clients ?
- Un axe satisfaction des actionnaires. Cet axe rassemble les aspects financiers de la mesure de la performance d'une organisation. Il s'agit de comprendre si les retombées financières des actions engagées correspondent aux attentes des principaux actionnaires de l'entreprise.
- Un axe processus interne. Cet axe décrypte le mode d'organisation de l'entreprise. Ce dernier permet-il de dégager un avantage concurrentiel et donc indirectement permet-il de satisfaire à la fois les actionnaires et les clients de l'organisation ?
- Un axe apprentissage organisationnel. Au sein de l'environnement, le changement peut devenir la règle. Ce dernier axe se donne comme objectif de mesurer les efforts réalisés par une organisation pour améliorer ses produits, ses process ou encore ses résultats, etc., en vue d'atteindre les objectifs stratégiques définis.

Le BSC, symbole de la gestion privée, n'échappe pas à ces tentatives d'adaptation. Par exemple, Aidemark (2001) souligne les capacités d'adaptation de cet outil aux organisations agissant sur le secteur de la santé. En effet, il semble que cet outil soit plus proche des préoccupations des organisations publiques en intégrant davantage de leurs caractéristiques. Ainsi, cet outil propose une vision de la performance qui ne se limite pas aux seuls aspects financiers : l'organisation publique n'ayant pas comme objectif une rentabilisation de ses activités. De plus, l'orientation client intègre la finalité même de ces organisations. Ainsi, Farneti (2006) propose de remplacer l'axe client par un axe « citoyen » afin d'intégrer cette caractéristique majeure. Certains chercheurs proposent de développer un 5ème axe autorisant une évaluation de la performance de ces organisations vis-à-vis de leurs parties prenantes. Il s'agit ici d'ouvrir la perspective client et d'intégrer la responsabilité sociale de ces organisations (Moulin 2006). Enfin, l'axe processus interne apporte une vision plus pertinente de la qualité du service effectué.

Peut-on associer les french tableau de bord au BSC ?

Transition :

La question cruciale posée est de savoir si les modèles développés dans le secteur privé sont transposables dans le secteur public (Ittner et Larcker, 1998). Cette question génère des attitudes très contrastées (Greiling, 2006 ; Talbot, 2005 ; Bouckaert et Halligan, 2008) allant des commentaires les plus enthousiastes faisant du pilotage de la performance la seule chance de salut pour le secteur public, aux critiques dénonçant non seulement les effets pervers ou induits de ces dispositifs mais plus largement la philosophie libérale et l'obsession du chiffre que ces systèmes véhiculent discrètement.

+ Importance d'avoir des études plus précises :

## 1.2 The Translation Theory

Translation theory was originally developed as a framework to explain the processes of building scientific facts through the networks on which these processes rest and to analyse the controversies that mark their development. This approach brings to light the conditions in which agreement emerges between the stakeholders in the development of scientific discoveries (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1984; Latour 1987; Callon 1988). Latour (1987) broadens the scope of the translation process to include techniques and the development of tools and machines by focusing on the socialisation of scientific discoveries as well as of machines. Since, a number of scholars have applied this theoretical framework to study the creation, the diffusion and even the acceptance of management devices (Robson 1991; Preston and al. 1992; Ezzamel 1994; Chua 1995; Briers and Chua 2001; Baxter and Chua 2003; Lowe 2001; Quattrone and Hopper 2005; Low and Koh 2007; Alcouffe et al. 2007).

The purpose of translation theory is to bring to light the process whereby actors are implicated in developing an innovation and the consensus required for the acceptance and diffusion of such an innovation.

To comply with this approach, innovations should no longer be seen as defined techniques whose intrinsic features ensure acceptance and diffusion. In accordance with Latour (1987), the ultimate fate of facts and machines lies in the hands of long chains of actors who transform them; their features are therefore the consequence and not the cause of this collective action. Innovations are thus viewed as resulting from a process of "translation" (Callon 1981, 1986; Latour 1987; Latour and Woolgar 1979).



Callon and Latour (1981, p. 279) define translation as “all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force”. Whatever its nature or origins, an innovation thus sets the stage for the drama of gradually developing actor networks—of both human and non-human actors driven by diverging interests—to unfold, a theatre in which the spotlight falls on confrontation giving rise to both the emergence of controversies and to multiple transformations of the innovation itself.

Callon (1986) specifies the process of translation and identifies four stages: problematization, intersement, enrolment, and finally the mobilisation of allies.

Problematization consists in formulating problems, on the basis of a statement, a need, observations or experiences drawn from the real world, which brings together a variety of disparate actors. Problematization includes recognising the convergence of these actors’ interests in the potential solutions that may be found for the problems formulated. The idea underlying a problematization thus becomes the obligatory point of passage (Callon 1986) for all actors who find in this idea an answer to their own interests.

Intersement relates to the set of actions through which an entity attempts to impose and to stabilise the identity of the other actors that it defined through its problematization. The aim is then to build a system of alliances, if necessary cutting off relationships that may exist between actors and their environment. The purpose of the intersement phase is to strengthen the links and the interests of actors in relation to the problematization.

In other words, intersement can be defined as the interpretation given by those who build a fact, their interests and those of the people they recruit to take part in building that fact (Latour 1987).

Enrolment corresponds to the definition and the coordination of roles. This stage is therefore heavily dependent upon the success of intersement. For Latour (1987), it is a matter of keeping interested parties in line because one must convince the others and find a way to diffuse the statement or the object in time and space. It is the others who have the power to transform the statement or the object into a sustainable whole. Hence, Callon (1986) states that enrolment is characterized by multilateral negotiations, power grabs or ruses that are entailed in intersement and enable it to come to fruition.

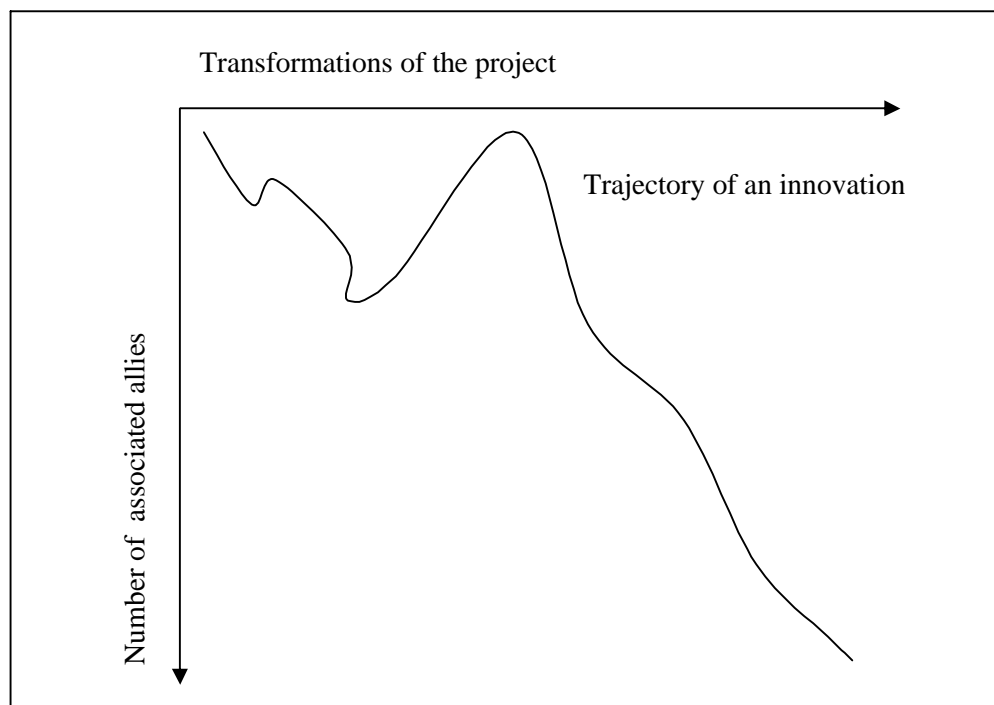
Finally, mobilising allies raises the question of how representative so-called “spokespersons” actually are. Certain actors with interests and enrolment in projects may act as spokespersons for the social groups they represent by taking part in innovation development, but does this

mean that they are in fact representative? Indeed, the participation of one or several representatives of a social or professional group in the development or diffusion of an innovation should not lead to assumptions about the behaviours of represented actors when ultimately faced with the innovation. Accordingly, final “roll out” not only raises the question of the appropriateness of the solutions found but also of the role played by every individual involved in this process. Indeed, each can act very differently when faced with the proposed solution: abandoning it, accepting it as it is, modifying the modes that come with it or the statement it contains, and even appropriating it by transferring it to a completely different context (Latour 1987). Individuals involved in the process of device diffusion and acceptance are therefore not solely passive vectors; they stand as actors in their own right who pass the device on and add to it elements pertaining to their own interests by integrating it into new environments.

As a result, as Callon points out (1986, p. 199), “this consensus and the alliances which it implies can be contested at any moment. Translation becomes treason”. Callon (1986) employs the term “dissidence” to define the disparity between the “expected” behaviour of represented actors with respect to the interests expressed by their spokespersons and their actual behaviour. He then shows how some actors place their short-term interests ahead of their long-term interests, even when the latter are widely known and demonstrated, and how others fall into a kind of scepticism that ultimately undermines the commitments voiced by their spokespersons.

It thus emerges that the success of an innovation stems from a balance between the number of allies associated with a project and the transformations required to carry it out (Latour 1987, 1988) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The trajectory of an innovation



Source: Adapted from Latour 1988.

In synthesis, the translation theory offers an explanatory framework to understand the trajectory of management devices by simultaneously considering the actors, the devices and their successive transformations. Therefore this framework was selected to study the management device implementation in a French Region.

### 1.32. Research Methodology

In line with the principles and guidelines of translation theory, our understanding of how a management device develops requires us to grasp the changes in such devices by examining the interactions between the actors and the device throughout its construction. It is therefore a matter of exploring the process whereby a technique (in this case, a policy assessment tool) and a social entity (a public body) are formed. To do this, according to the methodological guidelines suggested by Latour (1987) with regard to studying the constitution of technical artefacts, we must either be present at their creation or reconstruct for ourselves the mechanisms that led to their creation.

This research was originally based on the idea of studying the creation of the device by being involved in its development on the basis of action research (Whyte, 1991; Greenwood and

Levin, 1998). The initial plan was to be engaged in collaboration with the management control department at their request for the duration of the one-year project. Such collaboration with members of various departments in the *Région* studied allowed us to take part in the main stages of building and implementing a management device—these stages being defined in partnership with the *Région*'s management controller:

1. The first stage set out to establish an inventory of existing devices and practices within the *Région*'s administration pertaining to monitoring public policies. This was carried out through individual interviews with department heads, group meetings and examination of internal documents.
2. The second stage aimed to gather data on the needs tied to creating a policy assessment tool for the *Région*'s employment policy and to mobilise actors in favour of such a project and likely to support it and even get involved, with a view to constituting a work group responsible for the device's development.
3. During the third stage, the management controller, in meetings of the work group, outlined the first steps to take in formalising the tool in light of the expectations of the actors previously identified.
4. Lastly, the final stage consisted in implanting the tool within various departments.

In this position we were able to gather data through meetings, formal and informal interviews, and by means of accessing the *Région*'s documents. Data collection was carried out in 18 individual interviews, 6 group meetings and a study of internal documentation.

However, the decision by the *Région*'s president to shut this project down before the fourth stage was complete forced us to end the intervention research we had set up. As a result, in a second phase of research we needed to adapt the research methodology to enable after-the-fact reconstruction of the mechanisms that led to the device's revival.

The second phase of this research therefore derives from two interviews with the *Région*'s management controller. Following the project's mothballing and its subsequent revival, we needed to reconstruct the mechanisms that led to the device's return to favour. These two encounters aimed first to describe the new management device implemented and then to understand the reasons that had driven the *Région* to bring this device back to life. Other actors in the *Région* were contacted to comment on the project's revival (the deputy director of administration and elected officials), but they declined to discuss the topic. Consequently, the management controller's account of how this management device was brought back to life constitutes the only material gathered from this second phase.

Both phases of research were carried out with the same goal in mind: namely, to analyse interactions between the actors and the device in the course of the project's various stages.

### 1.43. Building and Implementing a Management Device

The four main stages that characterise the development of this device (the emergence of a need, the creation of the device, its subsequent mothballing and ultimate revival) are presented in this section. Studying how the need associated with this device emerged leads us first to analyse the problematization by the set of actors surrounding this project. Second, in accordance with the principles and guidelines of translation theory, we examine the controversies that arose in order to understand the process of actor intersement and the formalisation of the device over time, from the original idea to its manifold transformations.

#### **3.1 The Emergence of an obligatory point of passage**

Following the 2004 elections in the *Région*, a new president was elected and the political majority heading the *Région* changed hands. With this radical change came transformation in many working methods and political orientations.

Among the main priorities laid out by the president, employment was one he wished to promote. He set out to develop new schemes and initiatives to address employment issues. These included a scheme designed for youths between 16 and 25 years of age taking the form of grants to support company start-ups, the promotion of mentoring schemes in the *Région*'s companies, and development aid for project incubators in the environmental and eco-industry sectors. The president's stated goal was to create 5,000 jobs during his mandate.

Employment is both a sensitive and important political issue for the *Région*. Access to employment is a cross-party, multi-departmental issue attracting the interest of a large number of the *Région*'s elected officials responsible for a variety of public policies on which employment has a direct or indirect impact. Moreover, issues surrounding employment and its corollary, unemployment, within the *Région*'s territory go beyond its borders (comparisons between *Régions*, with national figures, etc.). It is for this reason that the president demanded that precise monitoring of the achievements of employment policy go hand-in-hand with any initiatives undertaken.

With this goal in mind, the *Région*'s president assigned a new project to the management control office: implement an instrument to monitor and assess schemes relating to employment policy.

Within the *Région*, this project problematized a large number of actors (Figure 2). Members of management control found in this project a means to develop and supplement existing monitoring tools. Furthermore, their involvement helped to develop and bolster their department's position within the *Région*'s administration. As the department head emphasises, *“the device can enable us to position and anchor the management control department in the organisational chart of the Région”*.

Likewise, within the *Région*'s other administrative departments, this project also appears to have created a buzz. After finding out about this project, various heads of administrative departments and technicians in these departments expressed strong interest because they sought closer monitoring of the policy (inventory of expenditures, remaining credit on projects, etc.) and found in this project a means to computerise informal procedures and arbitrary practices within the organisation relating to public policy monitoring more broadly. For administrative technicians in the *Région*'s departments, the management device was to become an aid to organising and coordinating their work: *“currently, we lack close enough monitoring of claimant files”*; *“Here, instruction mainly consists in looking at whether overall form is compliant, so a device that works to this end would be satisfying”*; *“the challenge facing us would be to check that any applicant files received are eligible and fall under this policy”*. For these actors, the device must enable them to ensure that the procedures they apply are compliant with the policy set out by the *Région*. They therefore associated the device with a monitoring mechanism based on checking compliance (in the sense of verification).

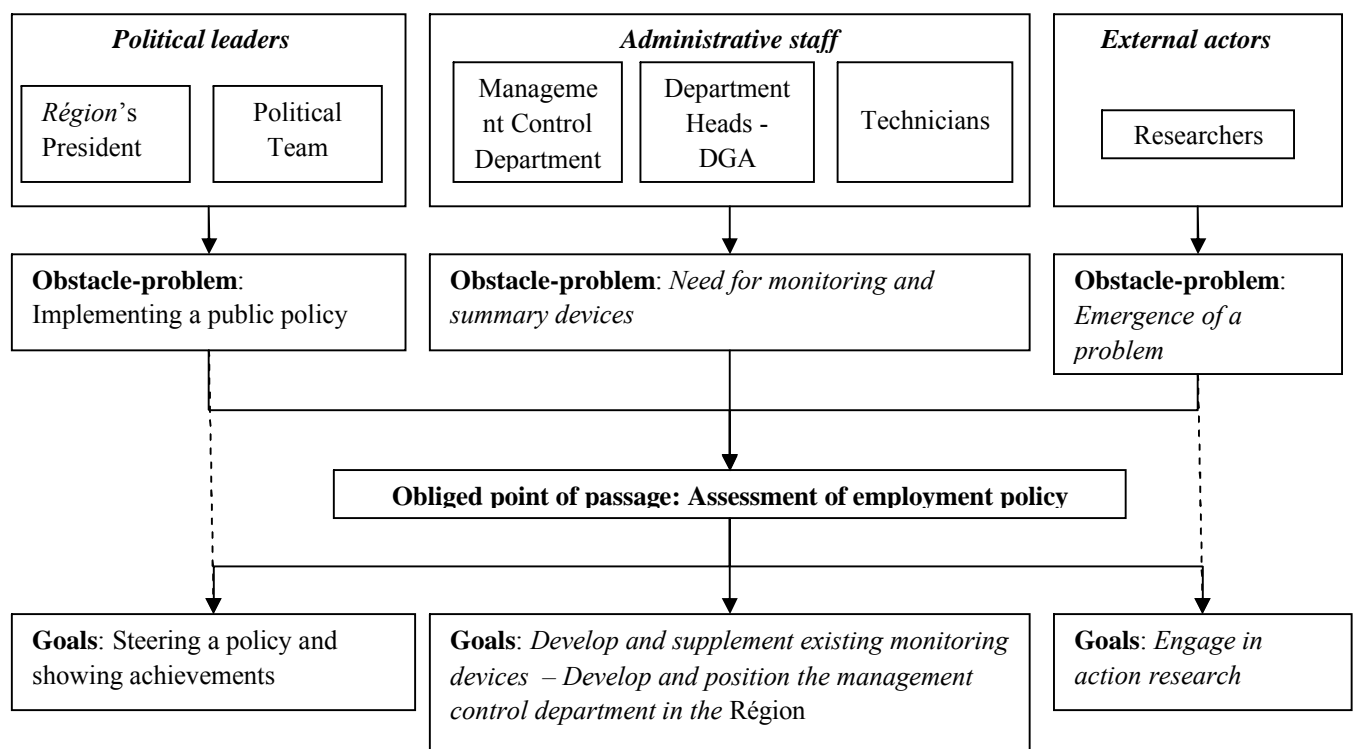
Department heads shared this vision and viewed the device also as a means to steer policy, i.e. as a way of reacting to possible deviations in relation to the goals set by the president: *“our goal is to assess policy in one year's time. We will therefore have to determine the indicators. The goal will be to reassure top management on how the grants are being used”*; *“the policy's interest for us is understanding its impact on citizens and adapting accordingly”*; *“the device must become a way of judging the territorial fairness of the policy but also its impact on employment in the eco-industry”*. Above and beyond compliance verification, these actors viewed the management device as a means to monitor opportunity, to set up control of

the policy by seeking, for instance, to assess the extent to which the goals set by the *Région*'s elected officials have been reached.

In light of his position as the intermediary between elected officials (who define public policies) and administrative departments (responsible for carrying out public policies), the *Directeur général adjoint* (DGA)—the head administrative official newly appointed following the president's election—required devices designed for the elected officials that summarised policy implementation and enabled him to ensure that concrete achievements were meeting expressed expectations. Furthermore, he viewed this project as a means to innovate and to showcase his own dynamism and sensitivity to issues of public management for the newly elected officials.

Last but not least, the director of the management control department called upon two researchers to support him in creating this device. For them, this device provided a rich opportunity to engage in action research.

**Figure 2: An assessment tool for employment policy, a response split between differing needs**



Developing a tool for assessing public policies problematized a set of actors and thereby became an obligatory point of passage. Identifying both the actors involved and their interests

led to their interest and subsequently to their enrolment in the steering group and the work group set up for this project by the management controller. This work group included, in addition to the management controller and the two researchers, three department heads and four administrative technicians from the *Région*'s departments with missions tied to the issue of employment. Under the supervision of the DGA, this work group consequently became a “research collective”, a “laboratory” with the goal of providing solutions in response to the shared need.

### 3.2 Building the tool or translating actors' interests

During the first work meeting, the management controller, in his capacity as chair of the group and given his experience, put forward the formalisation of an assessment tool for employment policy that he equated to a “*Tableau de bord*”<sup>1</sup>—i.e. a summary document that is clear and concise, based on indicators and providing elected officials with a degree of responsiveness. The first controversy arose out of debate surrounding the form and the function of the device. Indeed, members of the work group developed their own particular rationales and attributed different purposes to the tool. Two visions of the device stood in stark contrast:

- For administrative technicians from the *Région*'s departments focused on a rationale of compliance verification, the tool could be materialised in the form of a database at their disposal that should indicate key figures from the various stages of validating a user's file: “*the idea would be to develop a database into which the financial monitoring would be integrated to follow up on progress in payments*”; “*in the database that we want to set up, we would like to list the essential information on the files*”. Here, the device's interest lies in verifying a predefined procedure;
- For department heads seeking to steer the *Région*'s employment policy, the tool should also enable “self control” and sufficient responsiveness in regional initiatives: “*the tool should introduce more regular monitoring*”; “*developing a tableau de bord would allow us to control changes in this new policy*”; “*as far as I'm concerned, the tool should allow me to modify my actions in order to reach the goals set by the elected officials*”.

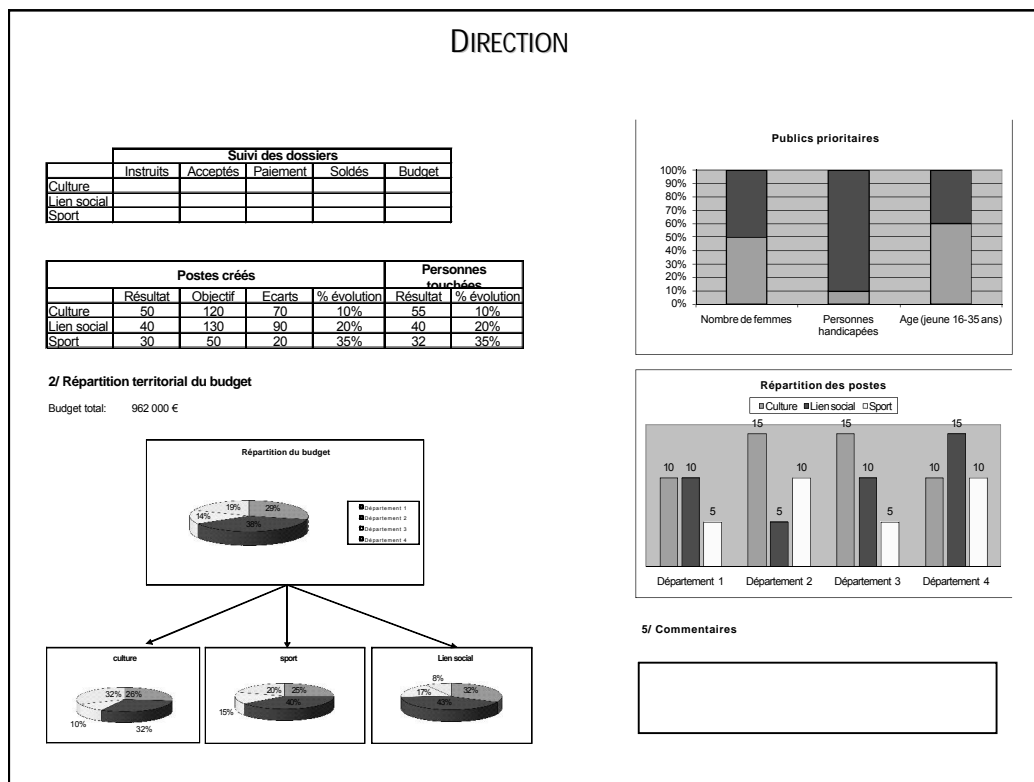
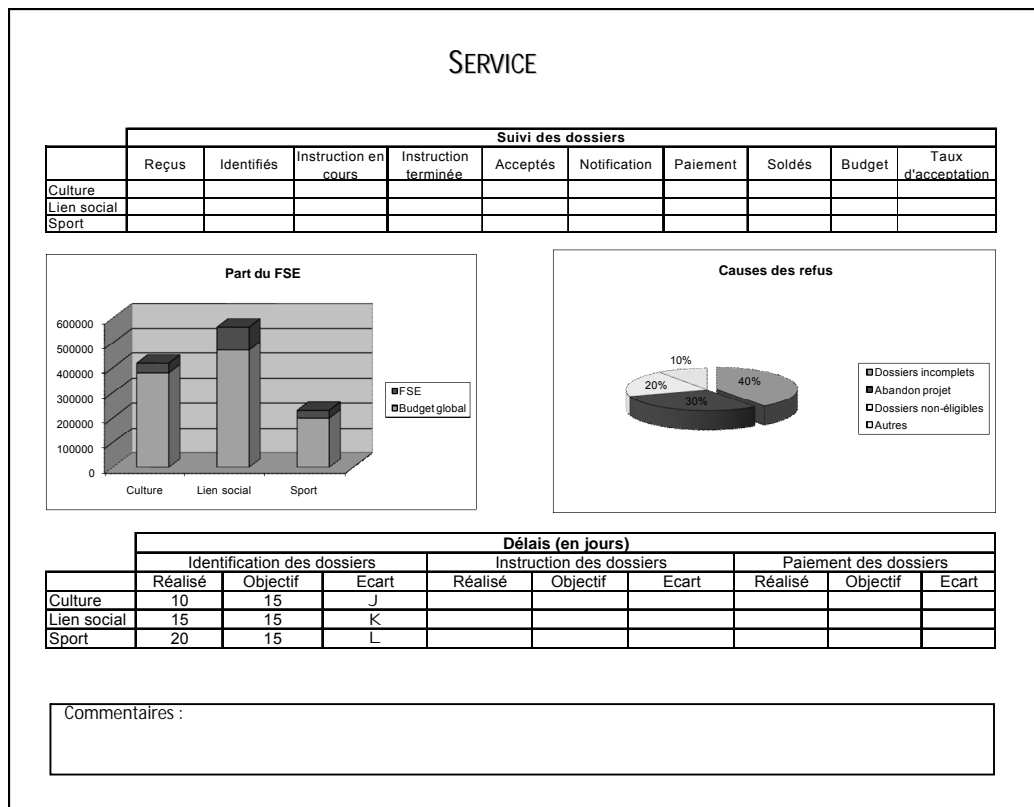
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<sup>1</sup> The French “tableau de bord” can be compared to the Balanced Scorecard of Kaplan and Norton. The objective of this management device is to create a mode of representation that can help managers in their decisions (Bourguignon et al., 2004).



Reconciling these two viewpoints, a consensus then emerged around a system of three summary tables enabling responses to the differing expectations of the actors involved: a table for verifying procedures designed for administrative technicians; a summary table monitoring the implementation of employment policy within the region to meet the needs of department heads; and finally, a table presenting policy achievements aimed at top management (Figure 3).

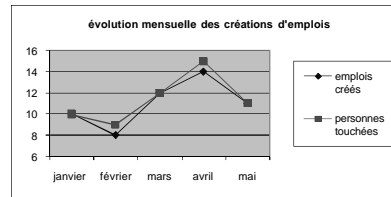
Figure 3: Formalisation of the monitoring tool, version 1.



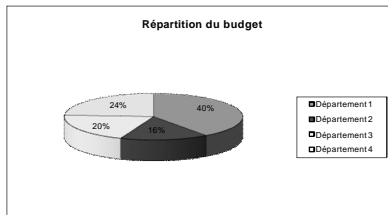
## DIRECTION GENERALE

### 1/ Impact des dispositifs en terme d'emplois

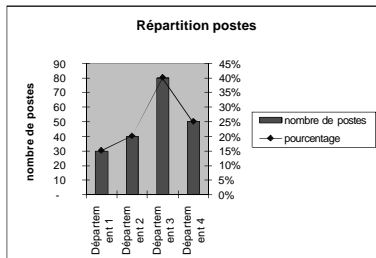
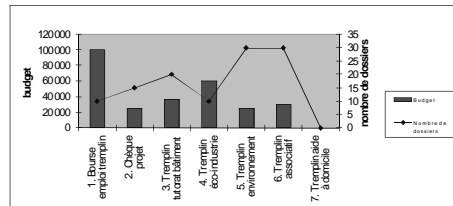
	Réalisé	Objectif annuel	Ecart	% Dossiers acceptés
Emplois créés	600	1000	400	
Personnes touchées	650	-	-	



### 2/ Répartition territoriale



### 3/ Ventilation par dispositif



### 4/ Commentaires



The actors equated this tool to a “*tableau de bord*”, taking up the idea of the head of the management control department. This terminology played a decisive role in the emergence of a consensus. For actors in the work group—whether technicians or department heads—the *tableau de bord* referred to a positive image of the device. Among the benefits mentioned: the tool can take into account the differing needs of actors (using a *tableau de bord* system); it allows an assessment of public policy through the use of a great wealth and variety of indicators; and it also introduces responsiveness into future decision-making relating to employment. Moreover, the idea of a *tableau de bord* seduced the DGA because he found therein the formalisation of an innovative device, highly prized in the private sector and emblematic of modernisation in the *Région*’s management.

Such a formalisation of the device brought the set of actors involved in this project together as allies and translated their expectations in the device. Gradually, a network of actors formed around this tool. Yet, as Callon (1986) points out, it is only one step from translation to betrayal.

### 3.3 Mothballing the project: the political dissidence

Two months after formalisation of the device, the DGA announced that he would no longer back the project and that it was to be mothballed on the request of elected officials after they had become aware of the tool for two main reasons:

- First, shifts in political priorities led to a reorientation of the management control office: *“our president remains very interested in management devices. However, it has been decided that these tools should focus more on cost control of administrative activities”*;
- Second, the DGA became aware of the political fears regarding the limitations of an evaluative rationale and of apprehensions relating to the potential negative consequences for the *Région* in the event that the device is misused.

Indeed, implementation of a tool to monitor the *Région*'s employment policy equally problematized a number of external stakeholders, even though they were not directly involved in the decision to implement this device, such as citizens and the *Région*'s *Chambre régionale des comptes* (CRC). For citizens, implementation of such a device provides an opportunity to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in how public monies are spent and to assess the transparency of public management, according to the classical principles of the “three E's”—namely, the principle of economy aimed at ensuring the good use of expenditure, the principle of effectiveness with measurement of results achieved in relation to goals set, and the principle of efficiency enabling outcomes to be viewed in light of the financial means employed. As for CRCs, their mission is to scrutinise the management of local authorities. They thus monitor compliance, quality and honesty in local public management and, by observing management and providing budgetary opinions, contribute to the balance in the public finances. CRCs have the legal competence, beyond classical verification of local management compliance, to assess the quality of local management. Hence, the CRCs are compelled either to encourage local councils to implement assessment devices for their public policies or to turn to assessing certain policy initiatives themselves. As a result, elected officials saw this device as embodying their fears of being subjected to any assessment that “greatly cramps” policy and that may one day be “held against them”.

At this point, elected officials called into question the consensus surrounding the device reached by members of the work group. A controversy emerged relating to the purposes

attributed to implementation of such a management device. Whereas administrators equated the device created to a rationale of management and assessment, elected officials viewed it more as a tool for their communication. This backlash caused a major breakdown in the project: one year previously, the elected officials had instigated it but they now withheld their approval to deploy the tool in the administration's departments. The end result was that politicians blocked implantation of the management device.

This turn of events can be explained by the non-representative nature of the "spokespersons" involved in the project. Indeed, although elected officials provided impetus to the project, they did not play an active role in the process of building the device. Representation of their expectations and translation of these in the tool took place on the basis of the appropriation of their needs by members in the work and steering groups. The politicians' abrupt change of mind therefore translated failure in the process of mobilising these actors; they did not remain aligned resulting in the network becoming more fragile.

### **3.4 Revival of the project: a new enrolment process**

Despite this setback, which brought the project to a grinding halt and resulted in the dissolution of the work group, the management controller did not fully abandon the project and, one year later, he put forward a new version of the device. This version took the form of a summary table indicating, for overall employment policy and for each initiative undertaken by the *Région*, the number of beneficiaries and the percentage of women. The initial goals set no longer appeared in this table, which now aimed to be solely a yield table for external use, and no longer a monitoring table.

This table first won over the DGA and then the president of the *Région*, who subsequently took the decision to extend its use into other areas of regional policy (Figure 4). Today, this device can be found on the *Région*'s Internet site.

Figure 4: Overview of the final version of the tool

ACTIONS RÉGIONALES : Suivi mensuel 2006- 2007											
		Année	Janvier	Février	Mars	Avril	Mai	Juin	etc...	Cumul	% de femmes
EMPLOI	Dispositif 1	2006									
	Nombre de bénéficiaires	2007									
	Dispositif 2	2006									
	Nombre de bénéficiaires	2007									
	Dispositif 3	2006									
	Nombre de bénéficiaires	2007									
	Dispositif 4	2006									
	Nombre de bénéficiaires	2007									
EDUCATION	Nb de permis B	2006									
		2007									
	Nb bourse	2006									
		2007									
	Nb voyage éducatif	2006									
etc.	...										
FORMATION	Nb stagiaire	2006									
		2007									
	Nb chèque formation	2006									
		2007									
etc.	...										
ENVIRONNEMENT	...	...									

How can we explain the subsequent revival<sup>iv</sup> of the tool? Three points contribute to an answer:

1. Simplification of the tool: the first point that may explain how the dissidence of elected officials was overcome can be found in changes in the device's content. Indeed, several significant modifications took place: the diverse panel of indicators chosen to foster closer management and assessment of policy for each level of the hierarchy was abandoned in favour of a single dataset: the number of people benefitting from financial support from the *Région*. Breakdowns for each department, including information relating to the budget and even to the public concerned by the policy—all sensitive political issues—no longer appeared. This simplification of the device responded to the needs of elected officials by facilitating communication on the achievements in employment issues and, at the same time, by fostering transparency in the *Région*'s administration.
2. Misuse of the device: the intercession of elected officials in the transformations of the tool resulted in its misuse—i.e. in the radical transformation of its role. The device shifted from an internal rationale of management support to an external rationale of communication conducted by elected officials. However, these transformations of the device required that the actors previously mobilised remain aligned.
3. An alignment effect: it emerged that administrators would leave aside the expectations that they had placed in this device (notably, in terms of management) to develop a tool

that responded first and foremost to the needs of elected officials. They were fully aware that the tool created was now far removed from the purpose it was attributed in the private sector (responsiveness, updating of indicators, short term, view of global performance, etc.), yet it would still allow them to increase the awareness of elected officials with regard to how one of the *Région*'s priority policy domains was being managed. The elected official/administrator relationship allowed the actors in the project to remain aligned.

## DISCUSSION

This paper brings to light the main translations and controversies that marked the development of a management device. In the course of this trajectory, the actors appropriate the approach for themselves and gradually the device takes shape. Our study of the process of creation does, however, draw out breakdowns, stalemates and setbacks that reflect the fragile and intricate web that grows from the process of actor intersement and in its impact on the management device created. What stands out from the case study is that successive translations enable controversies to be overcome and lead to the transformation of the device. Indeed, the initial purpose for which the tool was designed have been transformed due to the non-representative nature of spokespersons (administrative officials) and to their incapacity to translate the expectations and the interests of the elected officials they “represent”. During the second phase, the translations necessary for reviving the process of implanting the device also transformed the device in the process. New translations were developed in order to engage elected officials more actively in the process of building the tool and to bring all the actors together in consensus. Although this mechanism enabled the tool to be “reborn”, it also significantly modified it. Indeed, in Version 2 of the device, the goals set by members of the *Région*'s administration to incorporate the diversity of actor needs in the instrumentation, to implement a wide panoply of assessment indicators for public policy and to introduce responsiveness disappeared in favour of a single goal: to highlight communication indicators that can give account of the policies carried out by the *Région*.

In the end, successive translations occurring in the course of building the device resulted in elected officials having greater awareness of the consequences of building such a tool. These translations enable the development of a common and shared view of the device. Shifts in both the form and content of the device, resulting in transformation of the initial perception of

the tool, should rather be viewed as a means of reaching shared meaning, directly generated by new translations and fostering the intersement of new actors.

How is it possible to explain the evolution of this management device? Confronted to the transformations of the tool, is it possible to speak of failure since a second translation process made it possible to exceed the controversy created by the confrontation between the management device and the elected officials? At the end, can one say that the construction process of the management device is a success since these transformations led to the redefinition of the initial aims of the management device?

Akrich et al. (1988) characterise the diffusion of an innovation as a whirlwind on which multiple socio-technical negotiations shape the innovation (Figure 5).

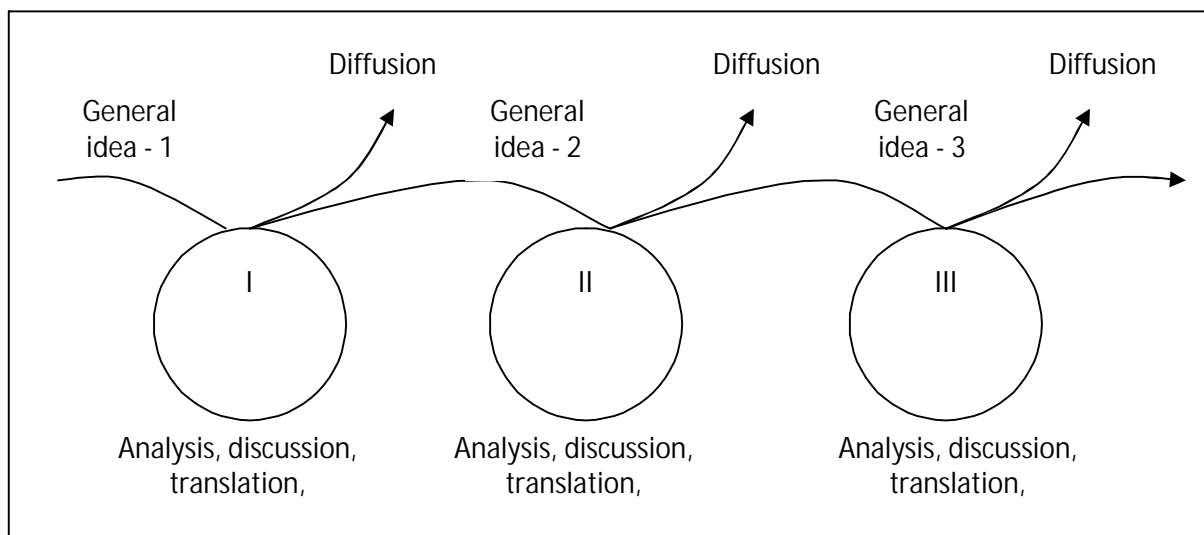


Figure 5: The whirlwind model, adapted from Akrich and al., 1988, p. 21

Figure 5 stresses that an innovation continuously transforms itself in various loops according to the trials to which it is submitted, thus redefining its properties and its public. It emphasizes that the original aim of the project is displaced or 'detoured' as a result of the numerous actors that adopt and, at the same time, adapt it in order to accomplish their own goal. It is not because this whirlwind will stop (because of the abandonment of the project or because of a common agreement is reached) that this stop is definitive. This case study stresses that what can be seen as a failure (the political decision to stop the development of the evaluation system) is in fact just the start of another loop.



Thus, maybe it is possible to speak of the success of an enrolment process around an innovation. As stated by Latour (1988, p. 35), “the feasibility, credibility or absurdity of a project depends entirely on the stitching and knotting made by the strategist. Neither reality nor time explain the evolution of a project, they are both dependant variables”.

At a certain level, this case study is banal: it is just the ‘success story’ of the successful development of a management device in a local government. But the question of the success of the management device is not so banal and common. Thus, this article emphasizes that success of a management device is a delicate construction which is obligatory link to the transitory alliances of different actors with divergent interests.

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<sup>i</sup> The French regional government studied here will be referred to as the "Région". The French State is divided into Region which are divided into Departments which are divided into municipalities.

<sup>ii</sup> And, equally, of a fact, an idea, an artefact or any other innovation, whatever its form.

<sup>iii</sup> For a critique of translation theory, see notably McLean and Hassard, 2004 and Whittle and Spicer, 2008 for analysis of the epistemological, ontological and political aspects of actor-network theory.

<sup>iv</sup> We make the assumption here that it is a matter of revival because, first, two elements indicate that a continuity exists between the two devices:

1. The first element is tied to the issue under scrutiny: the impact of the *Région*'s employment policy. This issue is omnipresent and is a federating principle in the first management device and it can also be found, among other things, in the new version of the tool;
2. The second element stems from analysis of the indicators present in the two instrumentations. Similar indicators can be found in both devices.

Second, this assumption is consistent with our goal to study innovation as a process of diffusing an idea that is carried by a network of actors who will gradually transform (sometimes in a radical way) the original idea (Latour, 1986, 1987; Akrich, 1998; Akrich et al., 1998).