

# **Individuals and social interactions in the institutionalization of public policy coordination**

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## **Abstract**

The majority of policies involve shared responsibilities amongst different organizations — agencies of federal and state governments, private organizations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Policy implementation is a fragmented process involving various actors, playing different roles. It requires and depends on coordination, which is manifested to a greater or less extent in the day-to-day actions performed in the public policy arena. However, although the problem of coordination is recognized in the literature, a theoretical framework has not yet been consolidated to effectively explain and identify the determinants of policy coordination. In an attempt to provide greater depth in the understanding of determinants of policy coordination, the paper focuses on the role played by individuals —with their beliefs, political and ideological preferences, mind sets, etc.— and their social interaction in the shaping of how coordination is indeed carried out. Thus the path followed here assumes that policy implementation can be analyzed by a micro angle grounded ultimately in the determinants of human behavior, which include institutions. Institutions, as a system of socially shared rules, are consolidated in the dynamic interaction between individuals in the policy management routine. The paper proposes a twofold analytical approach. Firstly it starts off the individual in an ambivalent relationship with the social environment in which she builds the rules and is also shaped by them. Secondly, the paper explores the social interactions as a key element of the institutionalization of coordination standards and rules, whether formal or informal ones. The hypothesis is that social interactions promote the institutionalization of standards that will be consolidated as organizational routines in policy management. It is believed that this discussion of individuals and their social interactions can contribute to deepen the understanding of the emergence, persistence and evolution of coordination standards in public policy.

## 1. Introduction.

The objective of this article is to analyze coordination in public policy ? networks. In order to do so, the theoretical foundation for the analysis is based on institutions manifested in human behavior and social interactions. Thus, we aim to apply the institutional framework in the context of public policy coordination, and show why this is relevant in order to understand the challenges posed by coordination in public policy.

Demand for coordination has been widely highlighted in policy management literature, starting with the classic study by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984, 133): “No phrase expresses as frequent a complaint about the federal government as does ‘lack of coordination’. No suggestion for reform is more common than ‘what we need is more coordination’”. Confirming the same complaints and suggestions years later, Sproule-Jones (2000) gives that in the public policy field, demand for coordination occurs in all governments, government departments and public-private relations.

We highlight that the concept of networks provides a tool which helps to analyze public policy coordination, while the problem of coordination basically manifests in inter-relations.

This is because the majority of policies involve shared responsibilities among different organizations – agencies of federal and state governments, private organizations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The management of public policies involves a range of interdependent actors, who interact in the decision-making processes of the planning and implementation of the actions. In this sense, the policies are immersed in complex networks that are found in both the public and private sectors (O’Toole, 1986; Peters, 1998; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Sproule-Jones, 2000, Bakvis & Juillet, 2004; Bueren et al. 2003, Park & Rethemeyer, 2012).

Constant interaction between individuals can be found inside these networks. Thus, we believe that the discussion on the production of mental, behavioral and organizational norms helps us to understand the problem of coordination.

Thus, to discuss the creation of institutions in the area of public policies, and their impact on coordination, we propose to focus on the production of institutional standards in two dimensions: individuals (in relation to the organizational environment) and social interactions, the result of management processes in public policies.

With this, we seek to deepen the nexuses between coordination, networks and institutions in the field of public policies. Finally, we aim to present methodological

insights in terms of research designs that make it possible to acquire empirical data on the subject.

## **2. Public Policy administration: coordination, networks and institutions**

In the literature on public administration, the object of study that deals with complex relationships established between parties of different processes and political arenas has been analyzed in different ways, such as: “policy coordination” (Chisholm, 1989; Peters, 1998; Lie, 2011), “colaborative management” (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Lundin, 2007; Dickinson & Sullivan, 2014), “policy networks” (O’Toole, 1997; Bueren et al, 2003; Park & Rethemeyer, 2012), “interorganizational networks” (Ostrom et al, 1994; Imperial, 1998), e “network governance” (Ferlie et al, 2011; Considine, 2012; Menahem & Stein, 2012; Howe, 2012; Verweij et al, 2013; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012).

The demand for coordination –and the theoretical efforts to cope with it— has increased in the last decades due to the changes in the organization of the state, particularly in terms of its role in managing public policies. New government forms and arrangements arose, bringing with them new actors and instruments (Peters, 1998; Bresser-Pereira, 1996; Ferlie et al., 2011), and new coordination challenges.

In this context, we support the idea that the workings and effectiveness of the mechanisms of coordinating public policies depend on the general institutions in vigor, in addition to specific institutions that form during the process of designing, formulating and implementing the policies themselves. It is therefore necessary to understand such institutions, in terms of how they are constructed and how they affect coordination and policy results. First, a short explanation about how we understand the concept of institutions in this study will be presented.

Institutions are understood as social constructions that are sedimented in processes and endow social life with *stability* and *meaning* (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 53). Many authors attribute the stability provided by institutions to their capacity to reduce the range of possibilities from which individuals make their choices. In the words of Berger and Luckmann (1966,53) institutions “*provide a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time*”.

Institutions act as structures that guide daily life, providing constraints and incentives for human behavior (North 1990; Barley and Tolbert 1997), and giving the

social system “*solidity*” in time and space (Scott 2008). On the other hand, they are subject to human action for their reproduction and transformation (Berger and Luckmann 1966; North 1990; Scott 2008; Barley and Tolbert 1997; Hallet and Ventresca 2006) on every scale, from personal to global (Scott 2008). Lastly, institutions may be formal or informal, and they may or may not need external sanctions for their existence (North 1990; Dequech 2009). An adequate synthesis can be found in the definition offered by Dequech (2009,70), according to which institutions are “*socially shared patterns of behavior and/or of thought*”.

The argument developed here is that institutionalized practices and interactions among the individuals, groups and organizations involved in policy management influence the level of coordination achieved. By limiting the extent of the issues to be considered, institutions establish expectations about behavior and restrict the factors taken into account in decision making, delimiting the scope of negotiations and conflicts. In short, they provide a foundation and a context for coordination.

Heymann (1973) agree with that when he says that a real capacity to coordinate derives from formal and informal conventions and rules.

Gupta et al. (1994) corroborate this view, noting that if a “*common logic*” is shared among actors, coordination is more likely to occur without interrupting their routines.

This link between coordination and institutions is the central focus developed by the French school of conventions, or conventionalist school, which emerged in France in the late 1980s. The key idea in this approach is that coordinating the behavior of the actors is not usually possible without coordinating their judgments and interpretations of reality. Conventions are therefore highly relevant in that they establish a “*common context*”, a “*set of reference points*” that individuals construct in the course of their actions to evaluate situations and coordinate with other actors (Storper and Salais 1997).

Along the same lines for the context of policy management, Lindblom (1965) notes that a “*common background*” provides support and standards to guide the decisions of implementing agencies. He highlights the role played in the construction of this background by training and by professional traditions among public administrators, which represent forms of reproduction of the conventions just mentioned.

Thus once the parties have become “accustomed” to interacting, their judgments, views and behavior become more standardized and this gives rise to interaction routines for liaison among organizations. Through these routines, known problems are linked to

known options for action and choices are simplified. However, before concluding that these routines are always positive for coordination it is important to stress that institutionalized routines or standards can be detrimental as well as beneficial in this respect. For example, if they are characterized by efficient communication and shared forms of problem solving, they will naturally be beneficial for coordination, whereas if they are defective in certain ways (e.g. omission, imposition or persistently faulty communication) they will certainly impair coordination.

Regarding networks, the nexuses between them and institutions are also extremely evident. The central argument is that the networks themselves, understood as interconnected relationships, provide opportunities for, yet also restrict, behavior. In addition, the networks as a whole are bound to broader institutional contexts that also mold behavior and influence the impact of interactions.

According to Salancik (1995), instead of considering the interactions that occur within the networks as data - as many studies on the area do - it is necessary to understand how and why they take place. To do so, it is necessary to analyze the interactions inside the networks in the context of institutions, including roles and rules. In addition, the author includes these questions in the context of coordination, asserting that: "*When the interactions are not considered as data, one can begin to model their role in constructing structures of coordination and moving information and ideas from one place to another.*" (Salancik, 1995: 346).

With the aim of clarifying relations between networks and institutions, Owen-Smith & Powell (2008) look to answer two questions: 1) how do institutional forms and practices emerge from the networks? 2) how do the categories and conventions mold the structure and effects of the network? Note that the authors believe in the principle that the networks and institutions are molded mutually. According to these authors, the cognitive categories, conventions, rules, expectations and logics that give these institutions their strength, also condition the formation of relationships, and consequently, structure the network.

The authors refer to the classic article by Meyer and Rowan (1977) when arguing that in the same way that the formal structure of organization significantly reflects the myths of its institutional environment, it is no different in the networks. Thus, networks involve the management of relationships (coordination and control) and the management of myths and ceremonies (management of symbols) (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008)

In a correlating idea, Ostrom (1990) underlined the importance of reciprocity norms and behavioral rules in the formation of the network's identity, i.e. while it is being structured. From this perspective, the network is the fruit of the consolidation and standardization of interactions and relationships between organizations.

However, Owen-Smith & Powell (2008) highlight both sides of the coin: while the institutions mold network structures and condition their effects, the networks generate the categories and hierarchies that help define the institutions and contribute to their effectiveness. It is here that the mutual determination appears. This determination will also be seen at the micro level of the individual and his environment, as follows.

The aim of the discussion presented up to this point was to lay a foundation for the view that phenomena such as the establishment of formal and informal norms, the sharing of logic and values, and the institutionalization of behavior have a significant impact on the networks coordination process. This perspective will be deployed ahead, through the discussion about the relevance of individuals and social interactions in the institutionalization of organizational routines in public policy.

### **3. Individuals and environment: cognition and symbolic universe.**

The idea here is to propose an analytical scheme that connects approaches about the individual and his environment in general, with an emphasis on the individual in the organizational environments, and more specifically, in public policies.

Berger & Luckmann (1966) assert that the human being, soon after birth, is still developing biologically, when already found in relation to his environment. In their words: "*The process of becoming a person takes place in correlation with the environment*" (p.71), highlighting that this is a natural and social environment. Similarly, Chanlat (2007) gave: "*To be fundamentally biopsychosocial, man appears profoundly connected to nature and to the culture that he is both connected to and transforms*" (2007: 27). According to Chalal, the biological, psychic and social dimensions contribute, each in their own way, to the construction of the individual structure and leave their mark on conducts and behaviors.

In the organizational context, the ultimate participants in organizations are individuals, whose interests and behaviors are therefore fundamentally important to an understanding of this universe. People rather than organizations actually decide, vote and act. People create and manage organizations, as well as judging their performance:

hence their relevance to all organizational processes including policy management (Milgrom and Roberts, 1992).

When approaching the *personality vs. environment* dilemma within an organization, Simon (1979) highlights the external influences on personality when confirming that an individual that occupies, for months or years, an organizational post, exposed to innumerable communicative and normative flows, will suffer profound effects on their knowledge, beliefs, habits, hopes, wishes, preferences, fears and intentions.

In this sense there is an undoubted ambivalence between individual and environment, in which individuals' cognition and symbolic universes are shaped and in which individuals shape the structures and rules of the world around them.

The formation of the cognitive structure of the individual is obviously given by the interaction with the environment. The mechanisms through which he understands and interprets the phenomenon that surround him will become ingrained over time from personal experiences.

The concept of mental models refers to this process of cognitive organization. Different terms are used to denominate this idea of the cognitive/mental structuring of the individual, such as "mental schemes", "typifying", or "representations".

According to North (1994), the mental models are an internal representation that the individual's cognitive system creates to interpret the environment. North gives that the cognitive structure of the individual is formed by categories: classifications that organize the perceptions that are in gradual evolution since childhood. These categories serve as a foundation for the construction of mental models, that explain and interpret the environment. Both the categories and mental models are sensitive to the information gained from new experiences, which, in turn, can reinforce the existing categories and models, or lead to their modification. According to North, this modification or reformulation of mental models defines the concept of learning.

Complementing North's affirmations, Sternberg (2000) confirms that knowledge can be mentally represented through "schemes" when they: "*encompass a series of inter-related concepts in a significant organization*" (p. 185). According to Sternberg, the schemes are useful because, when structured, they include information that can be applied as a base to interpret new situations.

Mantzavinos (2004) defines mental models as a coherent, yet transitory (p.26) group of rules, organized hierarchically, that make it possible to make predictions about the environment based on available knowledge. The author highlights the structurally

dynamic character of the mental models, affirming that these are flexible structures of knowledge. He adds that it is possible to form mental interpretations from the creation of "clusters of rules". The author recalls that F. Hayek, in the work *The Sensory Order* (1952), already presented the vision of mind as a "classification instrument", the idea of which is the base of the notion of mental models.

The existence of "mental institutions" can therefore be noted, i.e. groups of rules that help the individual understand the reality. In addition, such rules can result from an individual experience with the environment, or can be transmitted and apprehended between the individuals, thus generating a group of "shared rules", that provide the foundation to understand the world.

Dequech (2009) highlights the mental dimension of the institutions and its influence on the construction of visions of the world shared among individuals. It is possible to cite what the author calls the "profound cognitive role" of the institutions, which denotes the influence of these institutions on the perception of the individuals' reality.

The concept of rationality is strictly related to cognition. According to Spencer and Barros (1993), the concept of reason (logic), understood as an entity that seeks to reach the Absolute or Totality of the world and nature, was, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries substituted by the idea of rationality. This occurred in the most pragmatic way, designating the methodic and systematic activity of understanding the environment, in the continual pursuit to identify problems and propose solutions

Regarding organizations, rationality is intimately linked to decision-making. Ideally, the individual, through a panoramic vision of the available alternatives, consideration of the set of consequences related to the alternatives and the choice of an alternative between those that are available, makes an optimal decision. ). But as presented in Simon (1979) real behavior, even when ordinarily thought of as rational, contains many points of disconnectedness and never occurs in the ideal form of rationality just described. The ways in which people actually make decisions are necessarily limited, as are the information and knowledge they can obtain and the extent to which they can assimilate the environment.

Thus, individual behavior is based on the premises or presuppositions about the questions that arise; such premises will guide the line of conduct and decision-making in the organization. Accordingly, North (1990) affirms: "institutions and the belief structure are critical constraints on those making choice and are, therefore, an essential ingredient of model building" (North, 1994:46).

In the public policy context, these limitations are evidenced by the fact that no policy maker can formulate every single aspect of a policy because it is impossible to draft a legal text that covers all possible contingencies and alternatives, making limited policy-making decision process. In this sense, policy makers allow the individuals or groups responsible for implementation to determine many elements of a policy that are merely outlined during the formulation stage.

Christensen et al. (2007) highlight the importance of considering bounded rationality for public-sector, given that decision makers in the public sector have limited knowledge and cognitive capacity, and base their actions on simplified models of reality. Decision makers have limited time, analytical capacity and attention for the problems they face. They have neither the possibility nor the capacity to review all the goals, all the alternatives or all the potential consequences of the various alternatives. Furthermore, the institutional environment restricts the alternatives to those considered “feasible” or “adequate” for the treatment of a particular problem, so that some aspects receive attention and focus while others are ignored or neglected.

Another increasingly important dimension discussed by studies of the behavior of individuals in organizations is the *symbolic* dimension, which is also forged in the dynamics of interaction with the environment.

It is known that the existent institutions in a determined environment play a relevant role in constructing the individual's vision of the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1996) and this is also true for organizations. Thus, the symbolic representation that the individual has of the organization molds the meaning and the affects the he develops in that environment.

Regarding the individuals' image of an organization, Clegg & Hardy (2006) assert that the organizations are "empirical objects" in that the individuals "see" something when they look at an organization. We must be aware however that individuals can see different things, or see in different ways, as well as seeing different things at different times. The authors affirm that this image, or this representation that individuals construct about the organization, is also fruit of the institutions that exist in that environment. In his words: : *“Indeed, that which is known as such and such a thing cannot be so other than through institutionalized ways of seeing.”* (Clegg & Hardy, 2006: 426).

Lawrence & Suddaby (2006) call the process that describes the relationship created between one actor and the field in which he acts "construction of identity". They also

highlight the organizational transformations that can occur as a result of changes in the image that the individuals have of the organization<sup>1</sup>.

According to Siqueira (2005), the individual's symbolic representations of the organization are the basis for development of the affective dimension in the organizational context, which this author defines as "workplace affectivity".

The idea is that based on this symbolic representation, individuals "elaborate beliefs on the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being" (Siqueira 2005, 85). They also elaborate a "set of beliefs relating to the organization's willingness to perform reciprocal acts" (86). This set of beliefs directly influences individual behavior, especially the degree to which individuals are committed to their work.

In emphasizing the importance of the "individual" to the public management process, it is worth noting that this applies not only to the senior executives who occupy supervisory and leadership positions but also to the many individuals in positions of all kinds throughout the processes of policy implementation and execution, right down to the final delivery of goods and services.

This perspective is stressed by Lipsky (1980, xiii), who developed a theory of "street-level bureaucracy", referring to the individuals who serve as front-line workers in public service delivery at the base of the organizational hierarchy and thus decide the specific operation and execution of policies. As he says, "the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out".

In this sense, according to Ham and Hill (1993), a key concern in street-level bureaucracy theory is the inevitability of a high degree of discretion in public policy implementation. Confirming this point of view, Christensen et al. (2007) argue that public organizations afford opportunities for discretionary judgment and degrees of freedom in assessing what considerations to emphasize, and hence for civil servants to wield influence and power.

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the authors cite various examples. One of the examples given was the research carried out by Oakes *et al.*, 1998, regarding an experience in the Alberta Historic Museums, Canada. The department delegated by the museum's administration - in an attempt to undertake organizational innovations - encouraged those in the organization to see the museum as a branch of businesses, turning them into entrepreneurs as opposed to employees (attendants, teachers, interpreters, curators).

However, although the individual's degrees of freedom and discretion are vitally important to the public policy processes, an analysis of the social interactions among individuals is equally important. To an understanding of coordination, not only the behavior of the individuals concerned, but also the way in which they "act together" are fundamental.

#### **4. Social Interactions**

The process of human interaction is fundamental to the construction of the social system. Everyday reality is presented to the individual as an intersubjective world, a world in which he participates with other men - this individual cannot exist in everyday life without continual interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)

In this paper we choose Chanlat (1994) categorization, who divides social interaction into three categories: face-to-face interaction (individual-individual), interaction between individual and mass (individual-group), and interaction between groups.

In relation to face-to-face interaction, Berger & Luckmann (1966) highlighted the role of "typifications" that individuals construct about other individuals in these situations. According to the authors, in social interaction, an individual "understands" the other via "typifying schemes", establishing, in this way, ways to deal with this "other" during interaction. Thus, they exemplify that an individual can identify the other as "man", "European", "buyer", etc. and all of these typifications continually affect their interaction with this other and their actions towards them.

The typifying schemes that enter into face-to-face situations are naturally reciprocal. The other also makes perceptions in a typified way, and our typifications enter into continual "negotiation", while being confronted with the reality and actions of each individual. According to the authors, the social reality is, however, apprehended in the continuation of typifications that become progressively anonymous while they distance themselves from the "here and now" of face-to-face interactions. In one of the extremes are those with which they frequently and intensely enter into reciprocal action. On the other extreme, are entirely anonymous abstractions<sup>2</sup> (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the typifications made by one individual about a celebrity, with whom he does not have any face-to-face interaction.

In the organizational universe, Brass et al. (2004) argue that factors such as organizational structure and physical proximity influence face-to-face interaction. The influence of organizational structure occurs to the extent that work is shared, job descriptions are formally differentiated in a vertical and horizontal direction, and the means of coordination across different positions are specified. Thus the organization restricts the opportunities for interaction among some individuals and facilitates interaction among others. With regard to physical proximity, Borgatti and Cross (2003) establish a link between physical proximity, interaction and friendship. Their research suggests that physical proximity is more important than personality as a facilitator of interaction. They stress that physical proximity represents a relationship between knowing what others are doing, valuing it, and opportunely accessing the requisite information. In this sense coordination is facilitated by physical proximity, as interactions are more frequent and information flows more easily. Naturally, with the advancement of information technology, face to face interactions occur increasingly in virtual form, ie, at distance.

Individual-group interaction is thoroughly investigated by Olson (1965), in his work "The Logic of Collective Action" (1965). The author makes a distinction in terms of group size. An individual's interactions inside a large group have different characteristics from an individual's interactions inside a small group. In a large group, typical participants feel their individual efforts will probably not have a significant influence on the final outcome and they will be affected in the same way by decisions whether they contribute a great deal or very little to the cause. Thus typical participants may not make as much effort as they would if they could influence decisions more effectively. In a small group, in contrast, individuals perceive that their behavior has more impact on the final outcome of decisions and actions, so that they participate more actively, according to Olson.

According to the author, it is for these reasons, among others, that the organizations frequently consult the small group: committees, subcommittees and small groups of leaders are created, and, once created, tend to perform a crucial role. In agreement with this affirmation, Robbins (2005) suggests that small groups are abler to carry out tasks, while large groups are more productive when seeking solutions to problems.

With regard to the last category (interaction between groups), the literature points to the fact that groups create a logic of their own expressed in their internal rules. According to Robbins (2005), groups establish acceptable norms for behavior, which

are followed by their members since this ensures they belong to the group. In some cases these standards and norms lead a group to adopt defensive behavior toward other groups with different logic and norms, which may possibly conflict with its own. A “group identity” may therefore constitute a barrier to interaction with people who do not belong to the group. This “hostility” may be detrimental to coordination to the extent that rivalry and the existence of “cliques” in an management team intensify information asymmetry and erode trust, fueling uncertainty regarding any agreements that may be established.

One of the challenges of coordination relating to interaction is how links between individuals and groups can change as participants enter and leave. This is especially important in the case of public policy because changes of mandate in public organizations impose constant changes in working groups. On one hand, this turnover in membership can destabilize established relationships and routines, which may hinder coordination. On the other, if relationships inside the team are conflict-ridden and trust is not solidified, the entry of new members may have a positive effect on the construction of new patterns of interaction that assist coordination.

The emergence of patterns of interaction is presented by the literature as one of the main effects or consequences of continuous interaction inside organizational environments. As a result, behaviors become socially shared (Brass et al, 2004; Hallet & Ventresca, 2006; Zucker, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

In fact, there is a chain of institutionalism that affirms that it is primarily in the continual process of interactions, either between individuals or between groups, that beliefs, values, interests and individual and collective universal norms are forged. This is a theoretical perceptive named "interactionism" by Hallet & Ventresca (2006), for which the social interactions are the fundamental pillars in the process of constructing institutions<sup>3</sup>. In interactionist theory, not only the individuals themselves, but the way in which they work together, are fundamental components.

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<sup>3</sup> Belonging to this school, Hallett & Ventresca (2006) affirm that if, on one hand, the institutions supply the "raw materials", and the orientations for the social interactions, on the other hand, the meanings of the institutions are constructed and driven by social interactions. Citing the approaches that consider the institutions as "repositories of knowledge", the authors add that these meanings are born through social interactions.

In agreement with this idea, Scott (2008) affirms that in the social system, the rules, norms and meanings<sup>4</sup> arise from social interaction and are preserved and modified by them. The following definition given by Crawford & Ostrom (1995) clearly states the relationship between institutions: "*enduring regularities of rules, norms and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world.*", and the interactions: "*The rules, norms and shared strategies are constituted and reconstituted by human interaction in frequent or repetitive situations*" (p. 582).

Zucker (1977) and Meyer & Rowan (1977) also argue that it is through continual interactions that "*rationalized myths*" are constructed and maintained (institutions). From this perspective, individuals create institutions through historical processes of interactions that consider the shared typifications, or generalized interpretations and expectations about unfamiliar behavior. The relationships and standardized actions that emerge from this interactive process gradually become "taken-for-granted", so that they in turn configure and shape future interactions and negotiations. The process described above defines precisely the concept of "institutionalization", i.e. the process of "sedimentation" or "internalization" of institutions in a particular social environment.

The continuous process of institutionalization of beliefs, values, views, norms and meanings that occurs through social interaction exerts a strong influence on organizational structures and forms (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Precisely because it influences organizational forms through social interaction, the institutionalization process also plays a key role in the dynamics of coordination.

Thus interaction can be considered the locus for consolidation of the behaviors, behaviors that are forged in a web linking individuals to their peers. The behavior of individuals is a key variable because the essence of coordination lies in the dynamics whereby individuals "coordinate" their behaviors in the different arenas of action. Personal interaction therefore acquires amplitude and reproduces itself on an organizational and interorganizational scale.

Having identified the centrality of individual behavior and social interactions in the context of coordinating public policies, we are presented with a challenge: to build methodological tools that help "lower" the actual level of policies and carry out an

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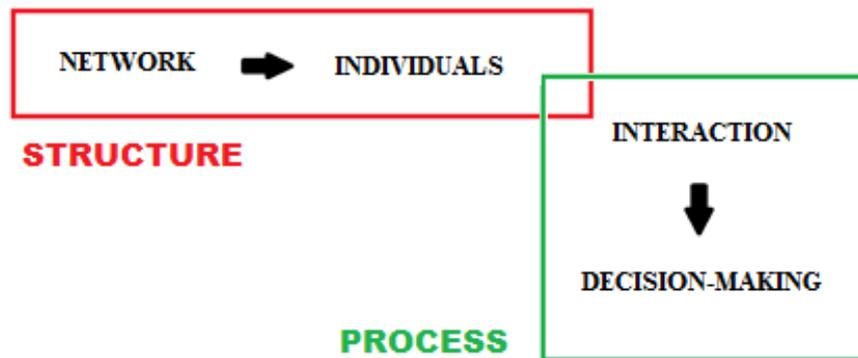
<sup>4</sup> For Scott (2008) rules, norms and meanings are expressions that are summarized in three institutional pillars: the regulative pillar (rules), the normative pillar (norms) and the cultural-cognitive pillar (meanings)

empirical observation of these phenomena. With this in mind, the following section will present insights, showing the first steps taken to face this methodological challenge.

## 5. Methodological considerations

In the sense of constructing an analytical vision for this objective, two different axes can be contemplated. One of the axes refers to the concept of "structure", in which it is possible to include the structural characteristics of the network and the individuals. On the second axis, the idea of "process" can be found, and on it are social interactions and decision-making, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure and Process



On each of the axes and categories previously mentioned, it is possible to include a range of factors relevant in order to analyze the reality of public policies. In this study, we show some of the most relevant factors referring to individuals and social interactions that are related to the field of public policies.

Table 1: Individuals

	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Issues</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	Commitment / Job satisfaction	How the individual sees the organization he works for?
		How the individual realizes the extent to which the organization values his contributions and cares about his welfare? (Perceived Organizational Support)
		How the individual perceives the organization's willingness to issue reciprocal acts of his efforts? (Perception of Organizational Reciprocity)
	Collaborative skills	Has the individual capability of mediation, negotiation, interpersonal communication and consensus building?
		Has the individual the ability to manage plurality and diversity, and building trust?
		Has the individual an interest in collaborative activities?
	Work routine / Extra time for joint activities	What additional time the individual dedicates to joint activities?

Table 2: Social Interactions

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Questions</b>	
<b>Social Interactions</b>	Informal interactions	Are there unofficial relations between the team members?	
	Distance / proximity	What is the ratio of face to face x distant interaction?	
	Trust	Perception of the existence and development of trust between team members	
	Interactions individual-group vs. group size	Individual's perception that their views and interests have an impact on the direction of final decisions of the team.	
	Sub-group / group cohesion	Are there sub-groups within the team? What is the origin of sub-groups (tasks, informal relationships)?	
	Turnover		Perception of changes in the bond of the group with the input and output of individuals
			The head office position of the manager to which he relates has a high turnover?
	Communication		Forms of communication and agreement between the organizations
			Emergence of patterns of communication / consultation by members of the team

## 6. Conclusions

This article underscores the importance of comprehending coordination in the public policy field. In addition, it emphasizes that there is a close relationship between this subject and institutional categories..

The need for more in-depth theoretical research on the subject is required in order to understand the nature of the relationships and structures involved in the coordination process. This provided the motivation for the reflections proposed in the present article.

Issues relating to individuals highlight the crucial importance of the behavior of public administrators in the policy management process. This is not a new argument, but the close correlation between the behavior of these individuals and the dynamics of coordination is worth pointing out. On the other hand, the organizational environment in which these individuals operate is the wellspring for the institutional framework that

molds and influences behavior, offering incentives and constraints for coordination and leading the analysis of coordination to organizational issues.

The second dimension studied shows the social interaction as a locus of the construction of behaviors. Thus, the interactions forge behavioral standards that become institutionalized, i.e. gradually become "automatic", a fact that has a significant effect on the levels of coordination.

It is worth highlighting that a major methodological challenge exists in terms of creating analysis tools that help us understand the institutional categories involved in the coordination process, and observe them in everyday politics.

There are many other aspects that need to be analyzed in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the role of coordination in policy management. Aspects such as program specificities and the dynamics of interorganizational relations are also of key importance but lie beyond the scope of this article. Thus, it is important to note that the elements discussed here are not exhaustive.

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