



# The politics of tackling service delivery problems in Quebec

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# The origins of this study

- The Canadian Medicare system was implemented in Québec following the recommendations of the Castongay-Nepveu Commission
  - The content of that report is surprisingly in line with what we know consider being innovative features of performing health care delivery networks
  - But the model actually enacted by the National Assembly July 10th 1970 left aside much of the features of the report
- This observation prompted a question about the current effort to reform delivery systems

# Knowing what to do...

- This question was turned into a two-pronged formal research question
  - What health care delivery service features seem consensually linked with performance?
  - How convergent the recommendations of the past three commissions appointed by the government in Quebec to suggest pathways to reforms the health care system were with those consensual features?
- I will spare you the methodological details but the answer to the last questions is VERY MUCH...

# ...without doing much!

- The analysis shows that the problems of the healthcare system's organization, as well as their solutions, are quite unambiguous. Solutions supported by available scientific evidence were put forward – with admirable consistency – by the three commissions appointed to advise the government on those issues. However, these solutions were never implemented **completely and consistently** enough to achieve the desired results.

# Permanently failing reforms?

- We are surrounded by organizations whose failure to achieve their proclaimed goals is neither temporary nor aberrant, but chronic and structurally determined [p.9]
- Permanent failure sets in when there is little expectation that efficient and effective conduct will be restored ... yet there is little serious disruption of existing organizational patterns.... Permanently failing organizations, we argue, yield benefits that motivate investment in and maintenance of them, but these benefits often accrue to those who are in one way or another dependent on organizations rather than those who legally own or control them. [p.45]
- Meyer MW, Zucker LG. Permanently Failing Organizations. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989.

# The bind

- The neo-institutionalist framework is interesting because it suggests hypotheses about solutions organizations use to resolve inconsistencies between functionalist performance expectations and symbolic conformity to low-performing forms and practices
  - Partial solutions...
  - Long-term solutions...

# Catch 22

- The Wikipedia online definition of 'Catch-22' could have been coined to describe the healthcare system reform process: “a situation in which multiple probabilistic events exist, and the desirable outcome is the confluence of these events, but there is zero probability of this happening”. As our analysis demonstrates, Quebec's healthcare system has faced, since its creation, problems whose programmatic or technical solutions were known but politically impossible to implement. Yet their non-implementation implied the persistence of the original problems, which was equally unacceptable politically.