

Institutional Isomorphism at BKPSDM of Southwest Papua Province: Formal Conformity Without Substantive Effectiveness in an Affirmation Region

Ignatius Randhy Frieder ^{1*}, Badu Ahmad ², Muh. Akmal Ibrahim²,

¹ Doctoral Student of Department of Administration Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia]

² Department of Administration Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: randhylysa18@gmail.com

HOW TO CITE: ABSTRACT:

Ignatius Randhy Frieder, Badu Ahmad, Muh. Akmal Ibrahim (2026). Institutional Isomorphism at Bkpsdm of Southwest Papua Province: Formal Conformity Without Substantive Effectiveness in an Affirmation Region. International Journal of Special Education, 41(15s), 1533-1541

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

The Regional Personnel and Human-Resource Development Agency (BKPSDM) of Southwest Papua Province, as the personnel institution of a newly formed autonomous region under affirmation status, faces a tension between the demand to meet uniform national bureaucratic standards and the need for contextual adaptation. This study analyzes the pressures of institutional isomorphism—coercive, mimetic, and normative—in the design and practice of civil-service HR management. A qualitative single-case-study design was used; data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation, then analyzed with the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña using isomorphism as an analytic lens. The findings show that coercive pressure forces the adoption of a uniform institutional typology and design before capacity is available; mimetic pressure drives the copying of modules, procedures, and system governance from other regions without substantive adjustment; and normative pressure turns officials' educational homogeneity into a uniformity of outlook that narrows the space for contextual approaches. Together they produce formal conformity with national standards but no substantive effectiveness—a symptom of forced decoupling arising from a capacity deficit. The three pressures lock one another and produce a consistent gap between high formal conformity and low effectiveness; in the affirmation context this gap risks widening the very distance it means to close.

Keywords: institutional isomorphism; symbolic compliance; affirmation region; decoupling

1. Introduction

Strengthening the institution of BKPSDM in Southwest Papua Province, an affirmation region, faces a fundamental tension: meeting uniform national bureaucratic standards becomes the measure of institutional legitimacy, while the

affirmation mandate demands room for adaptation so that civil-service HR management is genuinely contextual and effective. This tension is institutional, not merely technical, because what is at stake is whether institutional strengthening yields substantive working capacity

or merely a formal conformity that satisfies national administrative requirements.

Three uniformizing pressures work simultaneously. **Coercive pressure** forces institutional design to follow a uniform format without regard to capacity readiness: Government Regulation No. 18 of 2016 and Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation No. 5 of 2017 push the formation of regional apparatus with uniform typologies, so BKPSDM adopts a Type A structure even though its job- and workload-analyses (Anjab-ABK) are not yet prepared, functional positions remain vacant, and available civil servants number only about 10% of the ideal. Coercive pressure on an organization without capacity tends to produce *decoupling*—a separation between a formal structure that appears compliant and a working practice that stays weak (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). **Mimetic pressure** drives the imitation of outside practice under uncertainty: BKPSDM adopts training modules from other provinces without substantive adjustment, and a joint training evaluation with LAN Makassar (September 2024) showed more than 60% of participants struggling to grasp material that was too technocratic. Imitation without appropriation capacity yields symbolic adoption (Andrews et al., 2013; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Pritchett et al., 2013). **Normative pressure** homogenizes outlook through educational networks: more than 80 active civil servants in 2024 pursued advanced study at the same university concentrating on public administration, narrowing the diversity of perspectives and reinforcing patron-client patterns that weaken the merit system (Frumkin, 2004; Scott, 2014).

Theoretical justification

Several frameworks operate at the level of external institutional pressure. *Institutional Logics* (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) recognizes resistance among competing logics but is hard to operationalize in a regional bureaucracy whose logic boundaries are unclear. *Legitimacy Theory* (Suchman, 1995) aptly explains the motive for adopting Type A but not why homogenization occurs across organizations. *World Society Theory* (Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) is strong at the macro level but too far from the meso-organizational dynamics at issue. *Institutional Isomorphism* (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) is chosen because it works precisely where BKPSDM's problem is rooted: it explains in an integrated way how regulatory pressure, imitation of other regions, and professional homogenization simultaneously produce structural convergence without substantive effectiveness. The framework's fit is reinforced by several studies (Andrews et al., 2013; Bromley & Powell, 2012; Frumkin, 2004).

The three mechanisms are operationalized as follows. *Coercive isomorphism* refers to pressure from regulation and external authority forcing the adoption of structures as a condition of legitimacy, regardless of capacity readiness. *Mimetic isomorphism* refers to the imitation of practices of other organizations deemed successful when uncertainty is high. *Normative isomorphism* refers to the homogenization of outlook through professional standards and educational networks. All three are analyzed in the arena of BKPSDM's institutional design and HR-management practice (Figure 1).

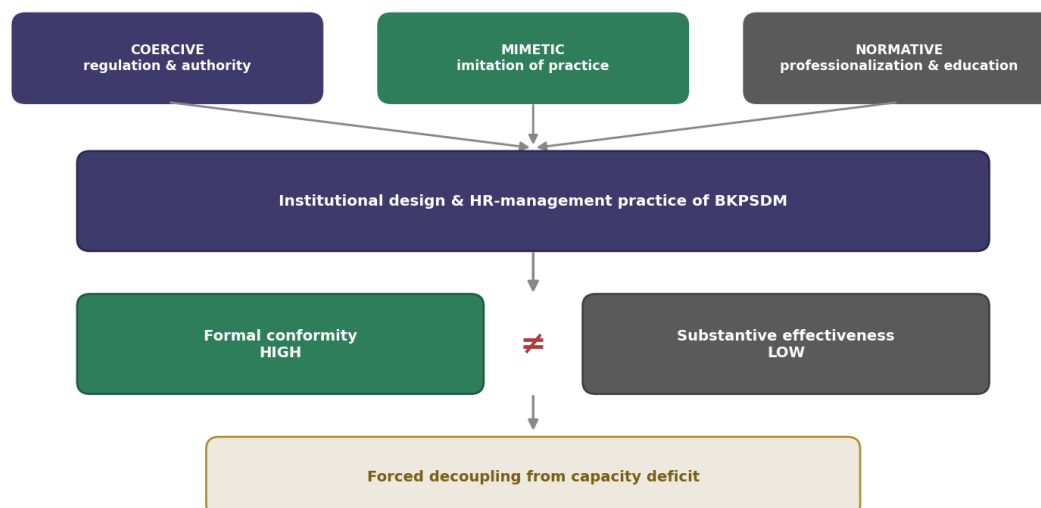


Figure 1. Analytical framework: three isomorphic pressures and their outcome

2. Methods

The study uses a qualitative approach with a single-case-study design to explore in depth the isomorphic-pressure mechanisms at work on BKPSDM in the affirmation context. The locus is BKPSDM of Southwest Papua Province in Sorong City, chosen for its position as the personnel institution of a new autonomous province operating under an affirmation mandate. Primary data come from the head of BKPSDM, structural officials, and a representative of the Regional Office of the National Civil Service Agency directly involved in setting the institutional design; secondary data come from national regulations, organization-information documents, and personnel reports.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, documentation study of regulation and policy, and observation of institutional practice reflecting the organization's response to institutional pressure. Analysis used the interactive model of Miles et al., (2020)—condensation, display, and conclusion drawing—with isomorphism as the analytic lens for identifying pressure patterns and their effects. Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation of five informant groups, six groups of secondary documents, and observation.

3. Results

Coercive pressure: uniformity through regulation and authority

BKPSDM's institutional design is heavily shaped by national regulation on regional apparatus that pushes uniform nomenclature and typology, narrowing the room to design institutions to fit local conditions. Document review shows that the needs assessment—which should be the basis for design—was in fact prepared *after* the structure was set, not before. This regulatory dominance is agreed as fact by all informant groups but judged differently: for policymakers and external supervisors it is a compliance necessity during province formation, while for implementers it is a source of difficulty because the uniform design is hard to run. Coercive pressure thus shaped the institutional framework before organizational capacity could be considered.

The finding is reinforced by three mutually supporting elements. **First**, dependence on central authority: strategic functions such as setting formations, managing civil-service data, and part of transfers still await central determination, so BKPSDM executes decisions more than it makes them, with the lag between regional proposal and central determination as a marker. **Second**, typology uniformity: BKPSDM adopted a large typology (Type A) as used by provinces with far heavier workloads, even though Anjab-ABK was not yet prepared when

the typology was set, so the number of officials is far smaller than the positions created and many functional posts stand vacant. **Third**, the mandatory use of national personnel systems

(SIASN, e-Kinerja) that collides with limited infrastructure outside Sorong and officials' digital capacity, so the systems are formally active but not yet substantively functional (Table 1).

Table 1. Findings matrix for coercive pressure

Sub-finding	Evidence base	Level
Regulation's effect on design	Formation documents, nomenclature guidelines; three informant groups	High
Dependence on the center	Formation documents, civil-service change data, implementation reports	High
Typology uniformity	Typology determination, Anjab–ABK, position map	High
Mandatory national systems	System implementation & technical-guidance reports	High
Formal–practice gap	Cross-reading of structure documents, data, and reports	High

Source: compiled from research, 2026.

The joint effect of these elements is a gap between a formal structure that appears compliant and actual working practice: the structure provides positions but they are unfilled, systems are available but not fully operationalized, procedures are set but not consistently run. Cross-reading of structure documents, personnel data, and implementation reports consistently reveals the distance between what the formal documents depict and what runs in practice—the core of coercive pressure: the organization appears to meet standards, but that fulfillment is not yet functionally meaningful.

Mimetic pressure: imitation of other organizations' practice

As a new organization facing much uncertainty, BKPSDM tends to seek references from others deemed established. The trace is recorded not only in oral testimony but in documents: procedure formulations too similar to be coincidence, plus minutes and reports of comparative visits to other regions' personnel agencies during early formation. Imitation was chosen deliberately as faster, safer, and more

defensible—a natural response of a young organization to uncertainty.

Imitation appears in training modules adopted almost without adjustment (evaluation reports record participant complaints about material that is too technical, especially in units working near indigenous communities), in recruitment and selection procedures that follow the national format without technical guidance for strengthening candidates within the affirmation frame, and in information-system governance that borrows another region's framework without regard to infrastructure differences. Across aspects, the copied share far exceeds the adjusted share—organizational structure about 85% copied, training modules about 80%, system governance about 75%, and recruitment procedures about 70%.

The common pattern is that imitation stops at form and never touches fit. The proof lies in something *absent*: not a single adjustment-study document explains how the copied practices were adapted to the Southwest Papua context. This absence is itself the evidence that mimetic pressure yields symbolic adoption—practices are

used and procedures run, but none changes the organization's substantive working capacity (Table 2).

Table 2. Findings matrix for mimetic pressure

Sub-finding	Evidence base	Nature of imitation
Imitation under uncertainty	Procedure documents, visit minutes/reports	Deliberate
Training-module imitation	Modules, delivery-evaluation reports	Unadapted
Recruitment-procedure imitation	Selection notices, technical guides, affirmation documents	Unadapted
System-governance imitation	Governance guidelines, system implementation reports	Unadapted
Imitation without adjustment	Absence of any adjustment-study document	Symbolic

Source: compiled from research, 2026.

Normative pressure: homogenization through professionalization

Most officials who pursue advanced study concentrate in the same field and university—public administration and government management—as recorded in education-history and study-leave data. This homogeneity extends into a uniformity of outlook: meeting minutes show discussion tends to stay within an administrative-procedural frame and rarely brings socio-cultural or territorial perspectives. Notably, this uniformity is not seen as a problem by actors inside the organization—it is felt to ease communication—and is read as a limitation only by external supervisors.

Homogenization spreads into practice. The influence of professional and alumni networks appears in some placement decisions, revealed by incomplete competency-assessment documents that should be the basis—when the basis is incomplete, considerations beyond competency gain more room, so the merit system does not always work fully. Meanwhile HR development is technocratic (stressing procedure and technical measures, with success stated as counts of activities and participants), so amid an abundance of technical planning documents not one program is designed specifically around the character of the affirmation region. Together these four narrow the space for contextual approaches (Table 3).

Table 3. Findings matrix for normative pressure

Sub-finding	Evidence base	Category
Educational homogeneity	Education-history and study-leave data	Strong
Uniform outlook	Meeting minutes, planning documents	Strong
Professional/alumni-network influence	Placement documents; incomplete assessments	Medium
Technocratic orientation	Competency-development plan documents	Strong
Narrowed contextual space	Absence of affirmation-based approach documents	Strong

Source: compiled from research, 2026.

Cross-pressure synthesis

The three pressures produce one consistent pattern: across all HR-management functions, formal conformity ranges 82–90%, far exceeding substantive effectiveness of only 38–55%, with an average gap above 40 points (Figure 2). The gap is widest at needs planning and competency

development (about 50 points)—documents and programs are complete but not yet matched by adequate officials’ capacity—and narrowest at administrative services (about 31 points), most supported by nationally standardized digital systems.

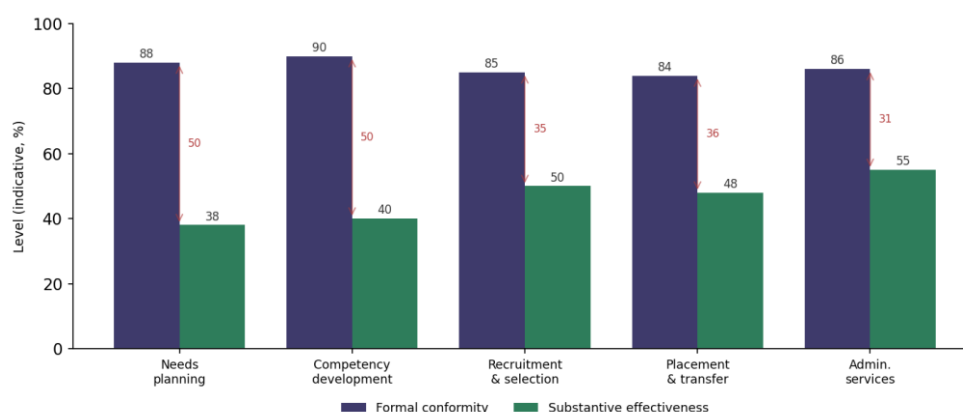


Figure 2. The gap between formal conformity and substantive effectiveness

Source; BKPSDM Southwest Papua Province (2026).

The synthesis also shows the three pressures do not stop at formal conformity but continue into three mutually reinforcing consequences—rigid procedure, dependence on the center, and

fractured coordination—which cumulatively weaken BKPSDM’s institutional capacity (Figure 3, Table 4).

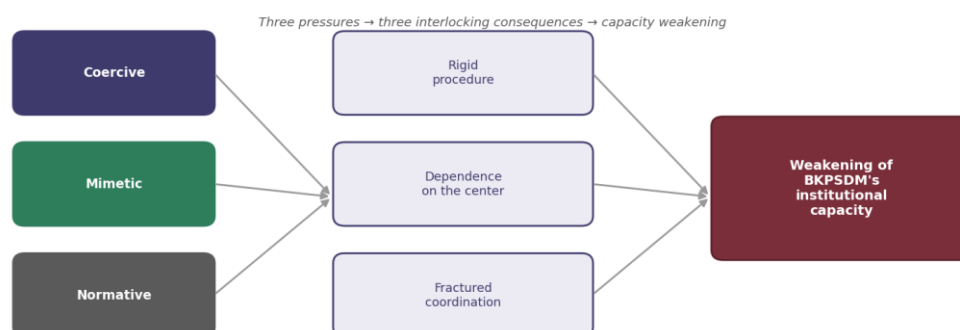


Figure 3. The chain of consequences of isomorphic pressure

Table 4. Synthesis of the linkage among the three pressures

Pressure	Core finding	Joint effect
Coercive	Regulation & central authority shape a uniform design	Formal conformity without capacity readiness
Mimetic	Copying of modules, procedures, governance without adjustment	Symbolic adoption without capacity change
Normative	Homogeneity of officials’ education & outlook	Narrowing of the contextual-approach space

Source: compiled from research, 2026.

4 Discussion

The first striking thing about how BKPSDM stands is that meeting regulation runs far ahead of readiness to carry it out: the Type A structure was set before Anjab–ABK, functional posts were left vacant, and officials number only about a tenth of the ideal. In Powell & DiMaggio, (1991) reading, this is the purest face of coercive pressure—form adopted not because it is efficient but because legitimacy demands conformity to an external authority’s format (Codagnone et al., 2015; Frumkin, 2004; Leiter, 2005; Suchman, 1995). Yet what matters more happens after the format is donned: the structure looks complete on paper while practice is lopsided, systems are available but barely used. This symptom demands Meyer & Rowan, (1977) term, *decoupling*. And here the case departs from the classic picture: in the literature decoupling is usually a deliberate choice to protect room to maneuver; at BKPSDM it is *forced* by the gulf between a mandatory format and a capacity that simply is not there, deepened by dependence on the center for strategic functions (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Tistad et al., 2022). Because the root is form preceding capacity, the door to improvement lies in reversing that order—preparing Anjab–ABK first, filling the vacant functional posts, and renegotiating authority.

On imitation, up to a point nothing is wrong; imitating is a natural way a young organization learns. The problem appears only when we ask how far imitation goes, and the answer lies in something absent—not a single adjustment-study document. Imitation stops at form and never descends into adjustment; the result is symbolic adoption (Andrews et al., 2013; Frumkin, 2004; Pritchett et al., 2013). What makes it more than inefficiency is where the impact lands: more than sixty percent of trainees struggle with material too technocratic, felt most in units working near indigenous communities. Here imitation without adaptation collides directly with the affirmation mandate—Sarjito, (2025) warn that in Papua’s affirmation regions, unadapted HR development widens the very competency gap it should close. The way out is not to stop imitating but to revive the lost adaptation stage.

The third pattern works more quietly, and perhaps for that reason is hardest to address. Educational homogeneity extends into a uniform outlook, reinforced by professional and alumni networks and a technocratic orientation (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2014). What most deserves reflection is not the uniformity but that it is not felt as a problem from within—it is even felt to ease things—and is read as a limitation only from without. This gradient of awareness explains why normative pressure is so hard to resist: it works at the *taken-for-granted* level and is strongest precisely when not recognized as pressure. The effect narrows in two directions: the space for contextual approaches shrinks (Frumkin, 2004) and—more ironic—the influence of alumni networks on some placement decisions erodes the working of the merit system (Andrews et al., 2013). Pressure born in the name of professionalization ends up eroding one of professionalization’s own core principles.

Set side by side, the three patterns support one another: coercive pressure sets a form beyond capacity; mimetic pressure fills that form with copied practice never adjusted; and normative pressure homogenizes outlook so the mismatch goes undetected from within. All three flow into rigid procedure, dependence on the center, and fractured coordination, which cumulatively weaken capacity. Here lies this study’s contribution to the literature, and it lies in context: isomorphism studies in Indonesia largely rest on capacity-established regions, where isomorphism generally breeds inefficiency. In a newly formed autonomous region under affirmation status with a resource deficit, the effect differs qualitatively—the formal conformity achieved risks *widening*, not narrowing, the very gap the affirmation policy set out to close.

5 Conclusion

BKPSDM of Southwest Papua Province undergoes coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures that cumulatively weaken—rather than strengthen—its institutional capacity. Coercive pressure produces a form beyond capacity (Type

A before Anjab–ABK, vacant functional posts, officials at about a tenth of need), so decoupling forms—here not a strategy but a forced consequence of the gulf between mandatory format and absent capacity. Mimetic pressure fills that form with copied modules, procedures, and governance that stop at form—evidenced by the absence of any adjustment-study document—so the mismatch collides directly with the affirmation mandate. Normative pressure homogenizes outlook through educational homogeneity and alumni networks, narrowing the contextual-approach space and even eroding the merit system, its character strongest precisely when unrecognized.

As a result, formal conformity and real capacity do not move together but drift apart, and in the

References

- Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2013). Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). *World Development*, 51, 234–244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.05.011>
- Bromley, P., & Powell, W. W. (2012). From Smoke and Mirrors to Walking the Talk: Decoupling in the Contemporary World. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1), 483–530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2012.684462>
- Codagnone, C., Misuraca, G., Savoldelli, A., & Lupiañez-Villanueva, F. (2015). Institutional isomorphism, policy networks, and the analytical depreciation of measurement indicators: The case of the EU e-government benchmarking. *Telecommunications Policy*, 39(3–4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2015.01.005>
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (2000). The iron cage revisited institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 17. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-3322\(00\)17011-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-3322(00)17011-1)
- Frumkin, P. (2004). Institutional Isomorphism and Public Sector Organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 14(3), 283–307. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muh028>
- Leiter, J. (2005). Structural isomorphism in Australian nonprofit organizations. *Voluntas*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-005-3230-1>
- Meyer, J. W., Boli, J., Thomas, G. M., & Ramirez, F. O. (1997). World Society and the Nation-State. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(1), 144–181. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231174>
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363. <https://doi.org/10.1086/226550>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, Johnny. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Powell, W. W., & DiMaggio, Paul. (1991). *The New institutionalism in organizational analysis*. University of Chicago Press.
- Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M., & Andrews, M. (2013). Looking Like a State: Techniques of Persistent Failure in State Capability for Implementation. *Journal of Development Studies*, 49(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2012.709614>
- affirmation context this risks widening the very gap it means to close. Improvement must target each pressure source specifically: for coercive pressure, restoring the reversed order (preparing Anjab–ABK first, filling functional posts, renegotiating authority); for mimetic pressure, reviving the adaptation stage by subjecting every copied practice to an adjustment study that meets the character of the affirmation region; and for normative pressure, opening the uniform outlook by widening recruitment and development sources, enforcing documented competency assessment as a counterweight to network influence, and cultivating reflective awareness—because an invisible pressure can only be addressed once it is made visible.

- Sarjito, A. (2025). Transparency of Papua's Special Autonomy Funds: Is It Possible? *Journal of Governance Innovation*, 7(1).
- Scott, W. Richard. (2014). *Institutions and organizations : ideas, interests, and identities*. SAGE.
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>
- Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (2008). Institutional Logics. In *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* (pp. 99–128). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849200387.n4>
- Tistad, M., Wallin, L., & Carlström, E. (2022). A comparison of three organisational levels in one health care region in Sweden implementing person-centred care: coupled, decoupled or recoupled in a complex organisation. *BMC Health Services Research*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-07548-8>
- .