Delivery driver as boundary spanner: Dealing with conflicting stakeholder expectations in an urban logistics supply chain

Full paper

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Based on exploratory qualitative research conducted in partnership with REGA, a HoReCa beverage distributor in eastern France, this research aims to understand how specific boundary spanners of last-mile logistics in an urban context manage conflicting expectations from multiple stakeholders. By being at the crossroads of multiple urban stakeholders, mainly their employer, the customers, residents, and local and national authorities, delivery drivers act as boundary spanners. Although they are often considered as executing links without any real strategic dimension in the supply chain, the results of this work show that the delivery drivers manage conflicting stakeholders' expectations through individual strategies (avoiding contradictions, deciding between expectations, and absorbing contradictions). In this way, they help their company to develop in a field where incompatible institutional logics coexist - logistics efficiency and customer service - with societal-specific one - employee well-being. By doing this, they enable the company to meet logistical expectations in an urban context while meeting contradictory stakeholders' expectations.

Keywords: urban logistics – boundary spanner – delivery drivers – stakeholder – institutional logics

Introduction

In addition to managing different internal expectations, logisticians must also manage the inter-organizational relationships inherent in the existence of multiple stakeholders. More precisely, managing a supply chain today, especially in the context of urban logistics, means taking into account multiple stakeholders with sometimes conflicting expectations (Bjørgen et al., 2021; Przybylska et al., 2023). Generally speaking, logisticians, like all organizational actors, have to develop within a specific institutional field traversed by different institutional logics, i.e. "*the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to*

their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). By encompassing both practices (the typical way of doing things) and the underlying belief system (ideas and guidelines) that influence the actions and thinking of individual actors, institutional logics determine why and how actors behave as they do (Smink et al., 2015). They determine what answers and solutions are available and appropriate (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

The academic literature in marketing and supply chain management has already examined how to manage these inter-organizational relationships, but the work and role of role-specific actors in buyer-supplier relationships deserve more attention (Tangpong et al., 2010). Managing inter-organizational relationships is about dealing with divergent logics that are often forced into association. In this case, a central question emerges: How do organizations manage conflicting stakeholder expectations stemming from multiple and contradictory logics? Institutional theory mentions the phenomenon of 'boundary spanning actors', who engage in 'strategies to manage cross-boundary linkages' (Zietsma, C. & Lawrence, T. B., 2010, p. 194), highlighting these individuals who act as an interface between their organizations and partner organizations (Dubinsky et al., 1985; Leifer & Huber, 1977; Olk, 1998). Due to their strategic positioning between internal and external expectations, boundary spanners can play a key role in enabling a productive interplay between "incompatible prescriptions" of different institutional logics (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Williams, 2002).

This research aims to understand how specific boundary spanners in the supply chain manage conflicting expectations from multiple stakeholders. More precisely, this study focuses on delivery drivers of the last-mile, who link the last intermediary actor of the supply chain to the final customer. By being at the crossroads of the institutional logics of their field and the different expectations of the stakeholders, the delivery driver plays a central role in last-mile deliveries as a boundary spanner. More precisely, this question

remains: how can a boundary spanner manage multiple and conflicting stakeholder expectations to ensure last-mile delivery in an urban logistics context? This study is carried out within a French SME involved in the HoReCa (Hotel, Restaurant and Catering) distribution of beverages. Firstly, multiple conflicting expectations of several stakeholders were identified. Secondly, several individual strategies for managing conflicting expectations were highlighted. Individuals either opt for a particular expectation (due to their own or a third party's decision) or take steps to avoid conflicting situations (thanks to anticipation, absorption, or dialogue).

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we present the boundary spanner concept and we integrate it in a logistics context. The second section introduces the research site and the methods applied. The third section presents the findings of the qualitative case study. Finally, the paper closes by discussing implications and suggesting avenues for future studies.

1 Literature review

1.1 Urban Logistics (UL) institutional logics and stakeholders

Urban logistics (UL) has been studied by many researchers for many years. Gonzalez-Feliu et al. (2014) define UL as "*the pluridisciplinary field that aims to understand, study and analyze the different organizations, logistics schemes, stakeholders and planning actions related to the improvement of the different goods transport systems in an urban zone and link them in a synergic way to decrease the main nuisances related to it*". As the United Nations calls for sustainable development (United Nations Member States, 2015), cities and urban areas must focus on developing a more sustainable urban ecosystem (Corbett & Mellouli, 2017). This should include a focus on the UL (Przybylska et al., 2023) as transport-related problems such as greenhouse gas emissions, congestion,

air and noise pollution and road accidents are on the rise (Ranieri et al., 2018; Visser, J. et al., 2014). Overall, UL is the most expensive and polluting part of the entire supply chain and is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation of freight flows, the use of smaller vehicles, and low-capacity utilization.

Previous literature has highlighted the multiple challenges of UL in terms of technology, infrastructure, and logistics costs (Bosona, 2020). Beyond these physical dimensions, the management aspect of UL becomes a complex part for companies. UL is characterized by uncertain and dynamic conditions where coordination between supply chain stakeholders is difficult (Gómez-Marín et al., 2018) while remaining the most important factor for an effective UL (Rześny-Cieplińska et al., 2021). Due to their own objectives, the conflicting interests of stakeholders such as city councils, residents, dealers, carriers, and suppliers are some of the factors that make UL more complex (Pronello et al., 2017; Taniguchi & Tamagawa, 2005). On the one hand, modern consumers need agile, lean and just-in-time logistics, on the other hand, to be profitable, retailers may be forced to reject some delivery orders depending on the characteristics of the demand and the logistic route (Cleophas & Ehmke, 2014).

The urban logistics sector is characterized by multiple practices and belief systems i.e. institutional logics, coming from various stakeholders, either core or supporting to the UL processes as categorized by the stakeholders theory (Bhattacharya & Fayezi, 2021). In this context, the question remains: how to manage the different expectations of multiple stakeholders who tend to respond to incompatible logics? Even if there is an increasing number of studies on UL focusing on environmental and economic aspects, there are only a few focusing on social aspects (Strale, 2019). It is necessary to help companies manage stakeholders' expectations while meeting their own economic, environmental, and social objectives to develop a more sustainable supply chain.

1.2 Aligning institutional logics as the Art of boundary spanners

Inter-organizational relationships depend on recurrent personal interaction between individuals from partner organizations, which means that this relationship is influenced by their behavior (Andersen & Kumar, 2006). These inter-organizational relationships are established and maintained by individuals, the boundary spanners (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), who act as the interface between their organizations and partner organizations (Dubinsky et al., 1985; Leifer & Huber, 1977; Olk, 1998). Boundary spanners engage in "job-related interactions with a person who is considered part of environment" (Peter J. Robertson, 1995, p. 75). Boundary spanners may occupy different positions in the organizational hierarchy at the operational and corporate levels, but boundary spanners are fundamental to managing inter-organizational cooperation regardless of the level at which they operate (Fagundes & Gasparetto, 2023; Janowicz-Panjaitan & Noorderhaven, 2009). They include not only salespeople but also all customer-facing employees (McNeilly & Russ, 1992; Russ et al., 1998; Singh, J. et al., 1996). Boundary-spanning employees are responsible for the delivery of quality products and services, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Mulki et al., 2012).

The relational dimension, as a key success factor of supply chain management, has been highlighted by previous research in the logistics literature. Indeed, the presence of socialization or relational processes is considered a crucial factor that can enhance cooperation and coordination between buyers and suppliers (Cao & Lumineau, 2015). Such processes enhance the quality of the relationship through improved information sharing, smoother problem solving, and curbing unethical use of power (Mahama, 2006). Consistent with social exchange theory and relational views (Dyer & Singh, 1998), researchers confirm the positive effects of trust and relational norms (Liu et al., 2009),

organizational virtuousness (Cameron et al., 2011), and relational governance (Wacker, J. G. et al., 2016) on performance.

When organizations with divergent logics are forced into association, institutional theory refers to the phenomenon of the “boundary-spanning actor”. This particular actor engages in “strategies to manage cross-boundary connections” (Zietsma, C. & Lawrence, T. B., 2010, p. 194). In this stream of literature, boundary-spanning individuals are seen as 'pivotal' in the management of inter-organizational relationships (Williams, 2002). Boundary spanners perform tasks that are useful to multiple stakeholders and play a distinctive role that would be difficult or impossible for other actors to play (O’Mahony & Bechky, 2008). They stimulate “collaboration by articulating how the organizations” interests diverge and by reinforcing their convergent interests” (Jolink & Niesten, 2012, p. 155) and thus “help actors collaborate across different worlds”(O’Mahony & Bechky, 2008, p. 452).

Delivery drivers are stakeholders of the UL as they actively contribute to the deliveries of goods to the customer. They can either be internal stakeholders of an urban freight operator or they act as for-hire independent actors. By being at the middle of the last distribution center and the customer place, they act as a boundary spanner, crossing the boundary between buyer-supplier by delivering the goods, providing related services and maintaining customer relationship (Claye-Puaux et al., 2019; Ledesve et al., 2023).

Our research aims to show how specific actors at the individual level in the supply chain can act as boundary spanners, thereby contributing to solving key urban logistics challenges by managing the conflicting expectations of multiple stakeholders responding to incompatible logics. Our research also provides insights by detailing how non-executives can actively contribute to supply chain management.

2 Method

To achieve our research objective, a case study was carried out within a local beverage wholesaler in the French HoReCa market involved in the distribution of beverages located in the Greater East region in France.

2.1 *Empirical context*

Beverage distribution in the French HoReCa market is mainly carried out by wholesalers. In France in 2022, there are 907 companies defined as beverage wholesalers for a total of about 13 500 employees (OPCO Mobilités, 2022). 93% of these companies have less than 50 employees (Observatoire des métiers, 2021). They can be related to a beverage productor as France Boissons is part of Heineken. They can be independent and part of a network of beverage wholesalers (either the C10 or the Distriboissons) or part of a more polysectorial logistics and supply chain network.

Beverage wholesalers (BWs) are the final intermediaries in the supply chain for the supply of beverages to the HoReCa (hotels, restaurants and cafes) markets. BWs are both buyers and suppliers: they buy items from beverage manufacturers on pallets for trucks, and they deliver these items on heterogeneous pallets to HoReCa outlets. As such, BWs are key players in the supply chain, doing more than just selling a wide range of beverage products. They build long-term relationships with the outlets by offering a range of services at no extra cost, such as delivery of the order, free storage or loan of furniture, advice on wine lists and drinks menus, advice on business management, investment in coffee and beer machines, etc. As described on the website of the OPCO Mobilité (French organization in charge of professional formations of this sector), “Out-of-home consulting distributors, also known as beverage wholesalers, are service providers whose core business is the marketing and delivery of beverages to all types of out-of-home consumption customers. Beverage wholesalers provide a wide range of high value-added

services to both their customers (cafés, hotel restaurants, chain stores, local authorities, etc.) and their suppliers (brewers, dowsers, soft drinks producers, winemakers, roasters, etc.)." (OPCO Mobilités, 2022, *trad. by the authors*).

In beverage distribution, the delivery driver (DD) plays a very central role. DDs represent 39% of all employees of this sector (Observatoire des métiers, 2021). As described in the job description found on the sector observatory website (Observatoire DCHD et al., 2024) DDs are at the crossroads of the clients and the warehouse with many skills and responsibilities. DD is in contact with the warehouse logistics managers to load his lorry and to organize his delivery rounds. The DD is also responsible for delivering to the warehouse everything that was collected from the customer (empty beer kegs, returnable glasses, etc.). The DD is in regular contact with the customers he delivers to, usually once or twice a week. They are usually the main point of contact between the customer and the distributor. Finally, the DD interacts with public services, the police, etc., especially when making deliveries in the city. The DD is also sometimes in contact with passers-by on the street.

The company studied, *Rega*, is one of the leaders in the distribution of beverages for the HoReCa market in Eastern France. *Rega* is a member of C10, one of the two main French beverage distribution networks. *Rega* has a total of 5 warehouses and generates a turnover of around €50 million. It has about 160 employees. This case study focuses on one warehouse with the cities of Metz and Nancy in its catchment area. This case study was made possible by the employment of one of the researchers by the company.

2.2 *Data collection and data analysis*

To explore our research question, we relied on primary data sources. Our empirical data collection consisted of participant observation as the early exploratory stage of our research then individual interviews were conducted to focus the study on specific

questions while participant observation continued. The participant observation was made possible by the presence of one of the researchers as a permanent employee in the company as CSR Project Manager. For one year, she actively participated in internal meetings, attended external meetings with stakeholders and other beverage wholesalers, reported on informal discussions, and observed the different actors within the company. During this first stage, two observations of delivery rounds of one day each (6 am to 2 pm) were conducted. The first observation aimed to discover the profession of DD, and the second observation day aimed to work on an internal project.

Interviews were conducted with six DDs from the beverage company to collect more specific data. As previous work shows, trends and variety can already be stated with few but suitable collected interviews (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Dean & Dixon, 1951). The explicit aim of these interviews was to understand how they deal with specific events daily. The DDs were asked to talk about their work, the challenges they face daily, how they manage to maintain a good relationship with clients, and how they deliver services with the same level of results every day. Table 1 gives a brief presentation of the DDs interviewed. The seniority ranged from 1 year to more than 20 years. The age of the DDs interviewed ranged from 18-24 years to 55-59 years. One had always worked as a delivery driver for different sectors. The others had worked as temporary or permanent employees in different jobs or sectors: factories, construction, etc.

Table 1. Profiles of interviewed delivery drivers

Name	**Seniority**	**Age**	**Job history**	**Duration of interview**
David	> 20 years	50 - 54	Worked different jobs before being DM	00:34:02
François	> 15 years	55 - 59	Worked in a factory before being DM	1:00:48
Gérald	> 20 years	50 - 54	Worked in building construction before	00:45:39
Julien	> 5 years	25 - 29	Worked different job as a temp before being DM	00:50:18
Robin C.	2 years	35 - 39	Worked as a delivery man in different sectors	00:32:47
Robin Z.	1 year	18 - 24	Worked in a factory before being DM	00:40:31

In terms of data analysis, our analysis was characterized by an inductive, qualitative approach deriving insights iteratively from our two main sources of data previously described (Kreiner et al., 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss, A. & Corbin, J., 1998). Field notes were reviewed two times. The first time, common questions and issues were identified and led to the need to understand more the role of the DD in the UL of such a company. The second time, they were used to explore and understand what is expected of DD and to what extent what was observed in the company and said during interviews were true for the whole sector.

Our main data analytic process concerned the interviews with DD. To abstract the most relevant themes ("codes") from the data, the interview transcripts were coded. We aimed to offer a systematic analysis of interviews based on a flexible coding grid derived inductively from interviews to capture the evocated themes (Miles et al., 2018). The first themes were identified with the notes taken during the interviews and with field notes taken during the participant observation. Then the transcripts were reviewed and the list of themes was extended. We then constructed matrices to summarize the different themes in the rows and the different data sources in the columns. Following this work on the primary data, theorizing was undertaken to move from first-order data to second-order data and finally to third-order data (Gioia et al., 2013) by categorizing the different themes. This process was led three times as the results obtained raise sub-research questions. Each time they resulted in the production of a table presented in the next section. In parallel, field notes and meeting reports were reviewed multiple times, to feed the interview analyses, compare DD declarative with observations, and identify to what extent what was observed and said in the company and interviews were true for the whole sector.

3 Findings

Our findings reveal the existence of three institutional logics - logistics efficiency, customer service, and employee wellbeing - that inevitably lead to conflicting stakeholder expectations. The strategies used by delivery drivers to perform their jobs while meeting these conflicting expectations are then highlighted.

3.1 Emergence of two major categories of paradoxical expectations of stakeholders

3.1.1 Multiple stakeholders' expectations

Delivery drivers (DDs) are responsible for delivering orders to customers following delivery terms. In the beverage distribution industry, orders range in weight from a few kilograms to tens of tonnes and are usually a mix of different items. DDs check and load orders in the warehouse, deliver customer orders, usually to the cellar, and collect empty packaging (such as kegs and glass bottle crates). They print and pass on the delivery note with the invoice, including the empty packaging deposit, and manage the collection of the order, if scheduled. Back at the warehouse, DDs unload empty packs, check the day's deliveries, and report any conflicts or difficulties. DDs are responsible for the vehicles they use (fuel loading, maintenance, technical inspection). Software-based scheduling of delivery rounds is rarely used by BWs, so optimizing the delivery route is part of the DDs' job description.

For example, Gérald describes his day as this:

> That's how it starts. It's better to load the day before for the day after. It's simpler because otherwise, you waste too much time in the morning. So it's better to load the day before. All you have to do in the morning is get the truck keys and the terminal. [...] Then you start taking the truck and off you go. [...] I make a loop to get back as close as possible to the warehouse. So I do the town center. After that, I'll start with the outskirts and work my way back as close as possible to the

> warehouse. That way I'm not wasting fuel and time for nothing. In other words, the customers are waiting for items. So they have their hours, and you have to respect them. […] Back at the warehouse, I unload empty packaging, hand back the summary of the day's deliveries. Then I sort out client's orders for the day after.

To optimize the delivery route, DDs take into account many constraints: delivery times, location of facilities and distance between them, delivery conditions for each facility including security conditions, volume and type of items to be delivered, road traffic, road rules, availability of parking spaces, fuel consumption, etc. David explains:

> I look at where clients are so that I don't have to go back and forth and drive for miles. Especially sometimes, for example, Verdun or Thionville, some customers are really far apart. And there's the journey time too. It's to avoid going back and forth because there's diesel, there's all that, you have to be careful. [...] I'm careful, I pretend I'm the one paying for it.

Orders are delivered to the storage area of the establishment. This storage area is usually a basement, accessible either from inside the building or from the street without delivery equipment. The cleanliness, accessibility, and tidiness of the basement and its access are up to the customer and have an impact on the delivery time and the safety of the delivery driver. David explains:

> There are certain customers, they don't respect anything. You've got staircases that are all cluttered, you can't get through. [...] We do a bit of tidying up. You have to, otherwise you can't get through. And if you don't, you can fall, you can... And it's always the same clients. In the corridors, where you have to go through, it's always the same clients. [...] And with every customer, it's a waste of time. If it takes us 10 minutes to clear one place so we can get through, and then 10 minutes another... by the end of the day you've wasted an hour. [...] Sometimes I feel like saying to the customer "Listen, I'm leaving all this here, we can't get through, it's...". But no, I do it anyway, because it's part of the service.

As the previous quotes show, DDs have to deal with stakeholder expectations daily. The wholesaler expects DD's logistical efficiency to meet delivery times and processes, minimize costs, maintain the company's image, and maintain customer relationships. Customer relationships are maintained by responding to customer requests and being flexible with delivery times. It is about customer service. Being flexible is also necessary when faced with new urban regulations and changes to road plans decided by local authorities. Local authorities and road users expect them to minimize the impact of deliveries on road traffic in terms of pollution, congestion, and safety. DDs have to comply with the regulations or they will be penalized with tickets or fines, or they will have to deal with angry road users. The main DDs' stakeholders are the wholesaler, customers, road users, local and national authorities. They also have to deal with their own and their family's expectations daily. They want recognition, health, and work-life balance.

3.1.2 Paradoxical expectations

The expectations of the occupational stakeholders fall into two main categories: logistics efficiency and customer service. In addition to these two main considerations, there is also the issue of the safety and welfare of DDs mainly issued by DDs themselves and their close ones. Logistics efficiency expectations aim to ensure the delivery of orders while minimizing costs and complying with regulations, conditions, or processes that affect the delivery process. Customer service expectations aim to ensure the longevity of the company by maintaining customer relationships and the company's image. This may include responding to any customer request related to delivery service.

For example, François explains:

> I wanted to put the kegs directly at the bottom of the ladder. But she got angry...
> "No, the kegs, you must take them, you have to carry them over there."

This can lead to lost time and delays in subsequent deliveries. The customer's request can also come through a manager call, as happened to Robin C:

> Sometimes things happen. For example, the manager calls us and says, "I've got a customer on the phone who wants his order now, because he'll be gone soon. In that case, we try to work things out, we get there when we can. But after that, there's also the risk of not delivering a customer at the end because he'll be in the middle of a service.

As he explains, DDs have to find a way to respond to unexpected requests without risking their ability to deliver other orders.

DDs deal with constraints daily. These constraints are daily actions that reflect operational challenges. These challenges are operational translations of stakeholder expectations. For each stakeholder expectation, Table 2 shows the constraints that DDs deal with daily, the stakeholders associated with them, and the corresponding challenges. Compatibility or incompatibility between challenges affects the optimization of the delivery route or the management of unexpected events. A challenge can be either neutral, aligned, or conflicting with another challenge. Alignment occurs when one challenge reinforces the other. Conflict occurs when it is impossible to meet both challenges. Neutrality is when none of the above occurs. Some challenges are only in conflict when dealing with unexpected events such as delays. For the sake of simplicity, these relationships are considered to be in conflict. These compatibilities or incompatibilities were highlighted by DD during interviews, encountered during the observations, and shared by other company employees, stakeholders, and other wholesalers' representatives during meetings. Table 3 shows the compatibility matrix between the challenges faced by DD and the stakeholders' expectations.

Table 4 shows the number of compatibility relationships of each type between challenges from Table 3. The majority of challenges are neutral or aligned with other challenges.

However, 24% of the relationships are conflicting or potentially conflicting. For example, being healthy vs. minimizing traffic impact. Minimizing traffic impact usually means parking far away from the customer's premises. This would mean pulling or carrying items a long way or increasing road risks, as Robin C. explains:

> With the road works, I have to use the pallet truck more and I often have trouble parking. Last week I had a customer and we went around the block 3-4 times before we found a place to park.

Table 2. Categories and expectations of stakeholders associated with constraints dealt by delivery drivers

Expectations	Challenges	Constraints	Stakeholders
Logistics efficiency	Being flexible	Adapting to momentary changes in delivery schedules	Client
		Adaptation to new urban regulations and road plan modifications	Local authorities
	Complying with delivery processes	Collecting order's payment if scheduled	Employer
		Respecting delivery-related administrative processes	
	Complying with delivery terms	Respecting "no delivery" hours	Client
		Respecting opening hours	
		Respecting client delivery conditions	Employer
		Delivering every order's items to clients	
	Complying with regulations	Respecting mandatory breaks (HGV drivers' regulation)	National authorities
		Respecting road and specific HGV regulation	
		Respect the rules of road-sharing	Road users
	Minimizing costs	Minimizing fuel consumption	Employer
		Respecting working hours	
		Limiting accidents	
		Ensuring vehicle integrity	
	Minimising traffic impacts	Park in delivery parking spaces	Local authorities
		Keeping traffic flowing (do not block traffic)	Road users
Customer service	Complying with client requests	Using delivery equipment as requested or authorized	Client
		Using requested or authorized storage access	
		Delivering items in storage areas	
		Cleaning storage access if necessary	
		Organizing storage area as requested	
		Keeping the integrity of their establishment decor (floor, walls, stairs, furniture...)	
	Maintaining company image	Conveying a good company image	Employer
	Maintaining client relationship	Being client-friendly	
		Collecting clients' information and feedback	
DD Wellbeing	Being recognized and appreciated	Wanting to be respected	Delivery driver and relatives
		Getting paid for every hour worked	
	Being healthy	Keeping physical integrity (limiting the impact of work on the body)	
		Keeping mental integrity (limiting the impact of work on mental health)	
		Having breaks (time to drink water, eat, breathe, restore)	
	Having work-life balance	Spending time with family and friends	
		Respecting working hours	

Table 3. Compatibility between stakeholders' issues

	Being flexible	**Compliance with delivery processes**	**Compliance with delivery terms**	**Compliance with regulations**	**Minimizing costs**	**Minimizing traffic impacts**	**Compliance with customer requests**	**Maintaining company image**	**Maintaining customer relationship**	**Being recognized and appreciated**	**Being healthy**
Compliance with delivery processes	neutral										
Compliance with delivery terms	neutral	aligned									
Compliance with regulations	conflicting	neutral	neutral								
Minimizing costs	conflicting	neutral	conflicting	neutral							
Minimizing traffic impacts	aligned	neutral	neutral	neutral	conflicting						
Compliance with customer requests	aligned	neutral	conflicting	neutral	conflicting	conflicting					
Maintaining company image	aligned	neutral	neutral	aligned	neutral	aligned	aligned				
Maintaining customer relationship	aligned	conflicting	neutral	neutral	conflicting	neutral	aligned	aligned			
Being recognized and appreciated	aligned	aligned	aligned	neutral	aligned	neutral	aligned	aligned	aligned		
Being healthy	neutral	neutral	conflicting	aligned	aligned	conflicting	conflicting	neutral	conflicting	neutral	
Having work-life balance	conflicting	neutral	neutral	neutral	neutral	neutral	conflicting	neutral	conflicting	neutral	neutral

Table 4. Number of compatibility relations types between stakeholders' expectations

Compatibility	**Number of occurrences**	**Percentages**
conflicting	16	24%
neutral	31	47%
aligned	19	29%

3.2 How to deal with these contradictions? DD's Individual strategies

Delivery drivers, as boundary spanners of the supply chain, have to deal with a wide range of constraints daily. These constraints are daily actions that reflect operational challenges. These challenges are operational translations of stakeholder expectations. This leads to a fundamental question: how do delivery drivers deal with paradoxical expectations and contradictions daily?

3.2.1 From delivery drivers' stories…

Delivery drivers routinely plan their delivery route before loading the goods into the vehicle. The purpose of this task is twofold: to organize the order of items in the vehicle and ensure their accessibility under delivery conditions, and to conceal any expectations and avoid contradictions. To achieve this, they use their knowledge gained from experience or consult experienced colleagues. The objective is to sort the orders based on the customer's delivery times, the customer's location and distance, and the delivery conditions. The delivery conditions are more important than the volume to be delivered. For instance, if the warehouse is accessible by pallet trucks, the volume becomes irrelevant as the entire load can be transported quickly. However, if the storage area is a basement that is not easily accessible, a smaller volume may take longer to deliver.

Time is a crucial factor in delivery activities. However, various factors can cause delays, such as road works, congested access to the customer's warehouse, unfamiliarity with the delivery conditions, or inaccessible parking spaces. These events require immediate action but result in wasted time, such as parking far from the delivery site or having to tidy up/clean access to the storage site. Other actions, such as double parking or parking too close to the pavement, increase the risk of harm. These actions may also result in negative consequences, such as damage to goods, tickets for illegal parking, or customer irritation.

An event can often present a challenge to a driver by highlighting a contradiction. For instance, if there are roadworks, the driver may need to find an alternative route or a different place to park. If they attempt to park, they will have to manage conflicting expectations, such as minimizing the impact on traffic, complying with regulations, and possibly meeting delivery conditions, while also preserving their health. To maintain their health, they will attempt to minimize the effort required to deliver the goods. The law may prohibit or specify the extent to which parking close to the delivery point can be achieved. To limit traffic congestion, it is important not to park on a one-way street and block the whole lane. Anticipating the need to be on time for other deliveries is also crucial. Delivery drivers often prefer to park as close as possible, even if it means double parking. If they are caught by the police and issued a ticket for illegal parking, they may try to negotiate to avoid the fine and explain the nature of their job. This example highlights the use of two strategies: prioritizing between conflicting expectations and utilizing dialogue and conflict resolution.

Faced with a delay, the driver may choose to call his customers to warn them of the delay and/or agree on a new delivery time. Others may decide not to take a break at all to 'save time' or to 'hurry up'. It is also possible that the customer is responsible for the delay. Some customers warn the driver, but most just don't show up. The driver decides whether to wait a few minutes, call the customer (if he has their number), or make another delivery and come back. Some drivers prefer to call their manager and let him decide for them. These examples show that the choice between two expectations can be made by the driver or by someone else, such as the customer or the manager. Sometimes drivers also prefer to deal with the loss of time themselves: they skip their breaks in the hope of limiting the loss of time.

3.2.2 To strategies to deal with Stakeholder Paradoxical Expectations

Delivery drivers deal with the paradoxical expectations of stakeholders in two times. First, they avoid contradictions by planning their delivery route and anticipating any foreseeable contradictions. In a second time, when unexpected events occur, they have to deal with the resulting contradictions. Drivers usually re-plan their route. In doing so, they deal with contradictions in two ways: deciding between expectations or absorbing the contradiction.

In summary, there are three strategies used by delivery drivers. Table 5 presents the strategies identified and illustrates them with quotes.

Avoid contradictions. To avoid highlighting conflicting expectations, they plan and anticipate potential issues. When delivering to an unfamiliar customer, they learn about delivery conditions and customer representatives from colleagues. They also warn customers of potential delays to anticipate conflicts. If the volume is too large to handle alone without disrupting the usual route planning, they arrange a meeting with another colleague. Orders may be transferred to a colleague with a closer route or lighter workload. Such arrangements are sometimes made by the drivers themselves before informing the manager. The manager expects this as he cannot be aware of every delivery condition for each customer. However, he usually plans with an LCV driver to assist if a delivery assistant is not available or required for each delivery of the day.

Deciding between expectations. They can decide for themselves and take responsibility for the consequences. They can also choose to have someone else decide and own or share the responsibility. Letting the customer decide will help maintain the customer relationship while logistical issues are dealt with. Letting the manager decide will protect him from any anger from the customer ("It's not my fault, I'm just a delivery man.") or professional blame.

Absorbing contradictions. They may use soft skills such as dialogue, conflict resolution, or empathy to reduce tensions resulting from their previous decisions. At times, they may opt not to make a decision and rely on their soft skills to manage conflicts in human relationships. They may prioritize logistical or service expectations over their well-being by skipping breaks, rushing, and being hypervigilant to prevent accidents.

Table 5. Strategies used by delivery drivers to deal with paradoxical expectations.

Major strategies	Strategies	Exemplary quotes
Avoiding contradictions	Planning	“Yes, I plan ahead. Then I don't mark my numbers on my sheet or anything, because now I always have the same [customers]. As I always do the same sector, I now know practically in what order we're going to do them. You need to know in what order you're going to load anyway. I'll probably start with this one or that one, so I'll put them there. Then I'll do this one or that one because they open between this time and that time.” Robin C.
	Anticipating	“There are even clients who gave me their keys so I can deliver early in the morning while they'll start after. I deliver the items, I take the empty packaging. They trust me completely.” François “We arranged with clients so there is someone early in the morning.” Robin C.
	Acquire knowledge with colleagues	“For routes, when I have the sheet [...] I always ask someone. Because sometimes there are restaurants that I don't know or that I've only been to once. Sometimes there are routes I don't know, or that I've only done once.” Robin Z.
	Arranging meetings with colleagues to do delivery faster	“Tomorrow, I'm going to give a colleague a hand. [All I have to do is park my truck.” Julien “You see, Alain asked me about tomorrow morning. [...] I'm giving him a hand; we're doing 3 or 4 customers together.” David
	Pass over an order to another colleague	“Sometimes a truck delivery driver will say to me, "Don't you want to do that customer for me?” I'll take it and I'll do it.” David
	Warning customers of potential delay	“By default, I respect his hours and then I know that there are hours that can't be exceeded. So if I'm in that time slot, I let him know.” Julien
Deciding between expectations	Deciding by themselves	“I keep the order in the truck, I come back to the warehouse, I unload the empty packaging and keep the order in the truck. Then when I come back, I go warn the managers: "Me, I skipped a client, I couldn't do it because I was already too late for the others, so I will do it tomorrow.” François
	Deciding with the customer	“If I see that I still haven't got to the customer's establishment, and that they're open from a certain time and I'm still not there, I'm going to call them, I'm going to say "either I'm going to be late, or, if I come at that time, will you accept the delivery?". Some people will say yes, others will say no. Those who say no, I tell them "I won't be able to come back because if you want me to come back in the afternoon, we'll already be back to the warehouse.” Robin Z.
	Deciding with the manager	“I call [the manager] to see what I'm doing, I tell him "either I'll come back later, or I'll bring the customer back". And he says, "Confirm with me again" or "Call me back to let me know if the customer is in". Sometimes I wait 10 minutes. But when I see that it's taking too long, I call the manager and I tell him "either I'll come back later, or I'll see and I'll go back, if he refuses me, he refuses me".” Robin Z.

Absorbing contradictions	Using soft skills such as dialogue, conflict resolution or empathy	“When I'm doing the Globe, I can't park near the school, I have to park in the lane. So there's only one lane left out of the two. The police arrive and say "What are you doing here". I say "I'm delivering, I can't do anything else, I've got one, I'm on my own". They reply, "How long will it take? For 2-3 minutes?" "I'll be at least half an hour. I've got to take the goods down, I've got to go down into the cellar, I've got to come back up with the vacuum." "You'll have to hurry up a bit" So straight away, I pull out my thing [shows his disabled worker's card] and then I say "Disabled worker, how do you want me to go faster? Give me a hand, maybe it'll go faster!" They understand straight away. They say "It's OK, do what you want". And then they leave.” François
	Taking upon themselves by skipping breaks, hurrying up, and being hypervigilant to avoid an accident	“Normally, us, delivery drivers, have a mandatory break. After 4h30 of driving and/or working, we must take a break. And me, I cannot do it because if I do, I will arrive too late at client' sites.” François
		“As far as I'm concerned, there are some cellars that don't comply with standards. And there are cellars where certain customers shouldn't go down. It's too dangerous. [...] I deliver, but I'm careful. But if it was just me, I wouldn't go down there.” Robin Z.
		“We have to hurry just as much on the road to get to the customer as we do to deliver to him [while he's in the middle of his shift]. So there's a risk on the road and then there's the personal risk of an accident at work.” Julien

Delivery drivers have to deal with a wide range of constraints daily. These constraints are daily actions that reflect operational challenges. These challenges are operational translations of stakeholder expectations. These expectations are sometimes contradictory. Delivery drivers have to deal with these contradictions, especially when unexpected events occur, such as special customer requests or delays. They use three strategies to do this: avoid situations where contradictions are highlighted, choose between expectations (or let someone else choose), and absorb contradictions.

Conclusion

This exploratory research was conducted in partnership with REGA, a HoReCa beverage distributor in eastern France. The aim was to show how delivery drivers can act as boundary spanners and use individual strategies to manage the conflicting expectations of multiple stakeholders responding to incompatible logics therefore contributing to solving key urban logistics challenges. The results of this work show that, although they are often considered as executing links without any real strategic dimension in the supply chain, the delivery drivers play a central role. Based on our study, we have identified how delivery drivers, by implementing specific strategies, manage the paradoxical imperatives arising from the expectations of the various stakeholders operating in this sector, which is subject to two logics – service and logistics – to which is added another societal logic – well-being – that can be contradictory. The role of the delivery driver seems to be becoming more and more crucial due to the development of logistics in the sector. We observe an increase in tensions and contradictions between the expectations of stakeholders as a result of recent developments concerning the ever-increasing constraints of last-mile logistics in an urban context, as well as the emergence of new CSR concerns. By acting as boundary spanners, delivery drivers are key players in resolving what might sometimes appear to be Gordian knots.

From a theoretical point of view, this paper brings together neo-institutional theory and the concept of the boundary spanner by providing a fresh look at the micro-approach. Until now, the management of conflicting logics has been addressed either at the macro-organizational level with the question of organizational hybridity or at the micro-level with the concept of embedded agency (Garud et al., 2007). However, even the latter approach attaches great importance to institutions, which in this view continue to shape and determine the interests and behaviors of actors (Clemens & Cook, 1999). This research shows that while institutions may influence the expectations of stakeholders in the field, they are far from influencing the behavior and decisions of delivery drivers.

In addition, this research complements previous work focusing on the 'decoupling' strategy (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Pache & Santos, 2010) for managing conflicting expectations. Decoupling occurs when managers intend to apply institutional norms, which they have reproduced in the form of procedures, but fail to apply them under pressure from operational staff, who produce their own rules. In this case, the results do not show a discrepancy because the operational staff are subject to conflicting instructions and it is up to them to find a way to reconcile them. In this context, the lack of decoupling is not due to refusal (Kellogg, 2009; MacLean & Behnam, 2010), but rather to the fact that the operational staff do their best to find a solution to the tension that has arisen. It can be observed that by working on existing tensions, employees help to legitimize the company's strategy of complying with two institutional logics that are nonetheless incompatible.

Finally, this article serves to highlight the predominant role of operators in stakeholders' management, whose role is generally accepted in the literature as being to apply the prescribed rules or, at most, to refuse to do so. It is very rarely mentioned that they can also produce rules themselves. In general, only general management or top management

seems to be able to choose between decoupling or introducing hybridity to manage conflicting institutional logics. Only very rarely is the production of autonomous rules by low-skilled operators shown. Here, however, it is possible to show how the agentivity of delivery drivers makes it possible to break out of the classic pattern of norm reproduction from the top (institutions) to the bottom (operators) by not acting exclusively as socially embedded agents (Zietsma, C. & Lawrence, T. B., 2010).

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