

**ORGANIZING GOVERNMENT
AROUND PROBLEMS**

**THE DUTCH PROGRAM MINISTRIES FOR YOUTH
AND FAMILY AND FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES
AND INTEGRATION**

A CASE STUDY

Key Topics Discussed:

WORKING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

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INTRODUCTION

It was a rather busy day for X., who had been appointed two months ago as director of a brand new unit at one of the program ministries created by the new government. She had already conducted three meetings, had read through piles of papers and written dozens of e-mails. She was just relaxing with a cup of peppermint tea when the telephone rang. Her minister's personal assistant was on the other end of the line. "You know of course", he told her for the umpteenth time, "that our minister has promised to achieve tangible change on this tricky subject. He wants to show the public that he cares and understands and that he can deliver the results they so rightfully demand. He is due in parliament next week and would like to deliver a speech about what already has been achieved. So, what's your biggest success so far?" The director leaned back in her chair and thought for a moment. "Well", she answered, "my biggest success so far is that I yesterday finally struck a deal with the other departments about who will be working for me. My staff will finally be in place next week and then I am ready to go!" There was a long silence at the other end of the line ...

All over the world, experiments are taking place with new kinds of organizational structures that facilitate the emergence of practices from society to address social issues. Government agencies are working together across portfolio boundaries to achieve an integrated government response to the wicked, unforeseen and continuously changing problems and dilemmas society faces. They do not seek to solve issues independently, but rather link up, align with or stimulate initiatives by other actors. In Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, this strategy has come to be known as *joined-up government* or the *whole-of-government approach*.

In this case study, we describe two such experiments in the Netherlands under the 2007-2010 cabinet: the *Program Ministry for Youth and Family* and the *Program Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration*. What emerges is a picture of a public administration aimed at creating a resilient society (in which practices emerging from citizens are taken seriously), the way it

functioned in practice, and the dilemmas it faced. The two case-organizations illustrate how new organizational modes (the program ministries) work in terms of day-to-day practice, but also how they work out in living up to expectations. These cases may contain valuable lessons for the transition towards a public service based on resilience and emergence.

The case study consists of three parts. We start with a short definition of the two program ministries, compare them to other similar organizational forms, and explain their origins in the Dutch public service. We then describe each program in more detail, paying special attention to how they worked in everyday practice – and the challenges each faced in meeting their ambitious agendas. We conclude with a comparison of both cases and present lessons in light of the New Synthesis framework.

PROGRAM MINISTERIES: A SHORT DEFINITION

Both program ministries were established in 2007 by the Balkenende IV Cabinet (consisting of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and the left-leaning Christian Union).

These organizational forms were not new: they were part of a rich tradition in Dutch public administration of trying to coordinate governmental and non-governmental actors in the production of public goods, as we demonstrated in an earlier study.¹ Since the 1970s, the Dutch public administration has experimented with ways to facilitate working across boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response. For example, there are ministers responsible for coordinating departments around a given policy area and there are ministers without portfolio. The two main goals behind creating those positions were to increase government performance and to enable the emergence of good practices arising from society. However, coordinating ministers and ministers without portfolio were often not successful because they lacked the power and budget resources necessary to make change happen.

The goals of increased performance and social innovation remained, however, and were joined by a third. This further goal – of which the program ministries were

prime examples - was to contribute to a *resilient society*, in which government organizes itself around a problem, rather than force the problem and its players into the governments' own organizational silos. To overcome the challenges that had faced the coordinating ministers and ministers without portfolio, program ministers were granted their own budgets. They were thus products of lessons from earlier attempts to organize outside the standing regular ministries. After a three-year experiment, the program ministries came to an end with a change of government in 2010.

MINISTRY FOR YOUTH AND FAMILY²

In the last decade, the problems of children and youth have been ever more prominent on the Dutch political agenda. The already-intense debate was further infused by several incidents in which child welfare organizations failed to intervene in cases of child abuse, leading to criticism that the government was not doing enough to protect children. The blame was laid especially on obstructive bureaucracy in the child-welfare system and not on political inattention. These concerns led to the appointment of a National Commissioner for Youth Policy in 2004, tasked with the development of an integrated and output-oriented youth policy. This commissioner was the forerunner of the later program ministry.

TOWARDS A NEW MINISTRY FOR YOUTH AND FAMILY

During the formation of the Balkenende IV Cabinet, the Christian Union – focused on family values - argued that the multiple problems facing the country's children had to be tackled through a concerted effort. National and local government, the child welfare and education sectors as well as other stakeholders had to collaborate closely with a minister in charge to coordinate this cooperation. André Rouvoet, the leader of the Christian Union, was appointed Minister for Youth and Family and Deputy Prime Minister. At the time, this appointment was perceived as a big victory for his party, which had campaigned heavily on this issue. Nobody doubted the difficulty of the task ahead. The new minister had volunteered to deal with a very heated issue in a com-

plex bureaucratic network of public and semi-public organizations, with many professionals and stakeholders involved.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Minister Rouvoet wanted to tackle the issue from an integrated perspective. He had a broad portfolio, with files belonging to other ministries that dealt with youth policy, including family policy, child allowances, local youth policy (including the establishment of Centres for Youth and Families³), youth care, family guardianship, youth protection, policy on young people in the labour market, electronic child records (a referral index for young people at risk), inspection (youth monitoring and harmonization of indications), mental health care for young people, care for young people with minor mental disabilities, and the prevention of unhealthy lifestyles and addictions.

The ministry started out with a budget of almost € 6 billion and was charged with formulating *new* policies on all these issues. However, these policies were to be implemented by four other departments: the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This model forced the program ministry to adopt an integrated perspective to break through traditional bureaucratic boundaries. The minister only had the power to formulate policies on his own, but needed to persuade other actors to help him to implement them afterwards.

Minister Rouvoet had only a small group of civil servants working directly for him in two directorates: the Directorate for Youth and Family and Directorate for Youth Care (formerly part of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport). The remainder of his staff of 120 civil servants was seconded from other departments and worked for the program ministry only part time in addition to their regular work in other ministries. These civil servants came from the Judicial Youth Policy Directorate of the Ministry of Justice, the Directorate Primary and Secondary School of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Child Protection Board and the Social Insurance Directorate of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, among others. See figure 1 for an organizational chart.

Shortly after establishing the new department, the minister published his Youth and Family Program, his policy agenda. The program consisted of three coherent strategies: 1) Confirming the family’s natural role in bringing up children, 2) Concentrating on preventive action by identifying problems earlier and tackling them more effectively, and 3) No longer accepting a permissive, noncommittal approach: everyone – parents, professionals and authorities – were to be held accountable for their responsibilities.

The Minister for Youth and Family not only had his own portfolio but was moreover also involved in policies of other departments. Rouvoets’ colleagues held primary responsibility for those policies, and the Program Minister was left in a poorly defined secondary role. These issues included childcare, non-profit work placements, preschool care, youth detention and probation, youth crime, pupil-dedicated financing, and allowances towards the costs of looking after handicapped children living at home.

nary work done by the Commissioner for Youth Policy. Another initial success, according to the minister himself, was that child welfare finally received the attention it deserved. He said in this period: “In my thirteen years as a Member of Parliament, I never witnessed a debate on child abuse. And as spokesman on child and family matters for my party, I had to deal with six different ministers and junior ministers.”

As a minister, Rouvoet could now tackle these issues – and this time, with a dedicated budget. His position as deputy prime minister also helped, as one interviewee remembered: “This was very important as it increases the political weight the minister and the department carry. Other departments cannot just ignore us and also, the media pays closer attention.”

However, the new ministry also faced serious difficulties. The ministry had yet to be built and there were all sorts of operational delays. It took the ministry months to get started. As one interviewee remembered:

TENSIONS IN THE MINISTERIAL FRAMEWORK

The establishment of the Ministry for Youth and Family was welcomed with grand expectations, forcing the minister to deliver a policy program quickly, even though his precise mandate was not yet clear. He presented the program after only a few months, based on the prelimi-

During the first half of 2007 there were many rather comic situations because all sorts of practical stuff had not properly been arranged. Our intranet did not work and our letter paper did not fit the printers at the other departments. Our ICT-guys had their hands full. And we couldn’t do much without proper facilities. It’s not just the inconvenience, without document management

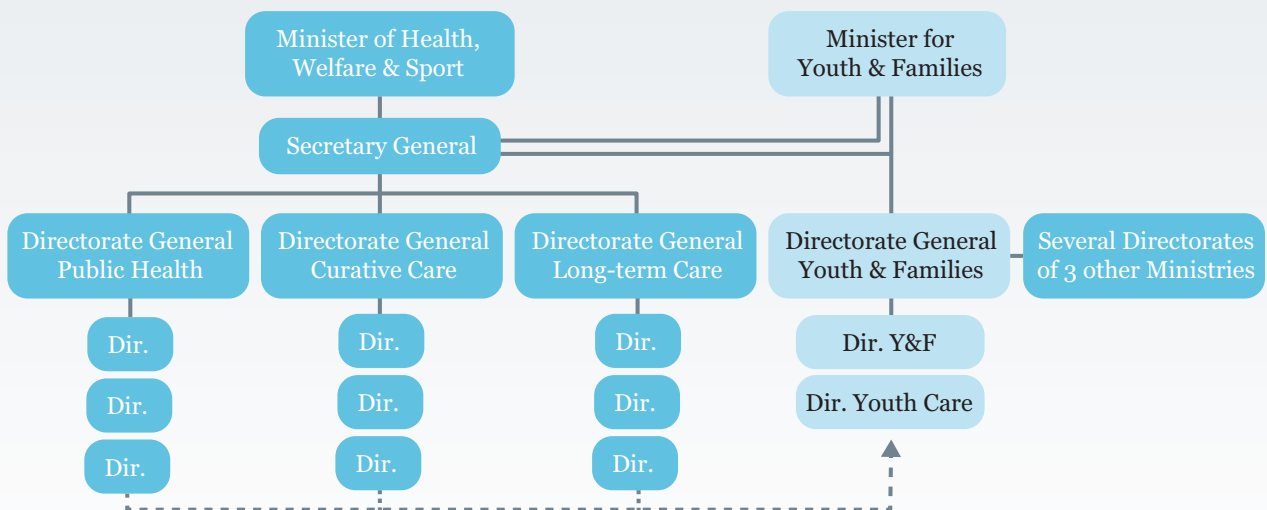


FIGURE 1: Organization chart of the Ministry for Youth and Family
Source: Geut, Van den Berg, and Van Schaik, 2010, 32.

systems, you simply cannot create documents. And you don't exist. These issues came up time and time again. We became good at resolving them. We worked around the system. But it took time and energy away from what we were supposed to be doing.

Several interviewees suggested that these issues could have been resolved by the creation of a new function: a "quarter master" at each department who would take care of all the operational affairs so that the department's public servants could concentrate on more substantial matters. Almost all interviewees point to these early stages and practical problems as typical in implementing any program ministry model.

There was also intense debate about the exact scope of the portfolio of the ministry, which had seemed so clear on paper, but turned out to be fuzzy in practice. One interviewee recalled:

It was obvious with several policy themes that our minister should deal with them. He was in charge and other ministries looked at him to take the lead. Those were the easy ones, but they were few. There were others, such as fighting unemployment among youth, where this was not all that clear. This made it necessary to negotiate with other departments about who should deal with these topics and who should take the lead. And it became political that way. We wanted to do things differently, but we were dragged into fighting turf wars and negotiating with other ministries. Our focus was different, but we couldn't impose our ideas of collaboration on others. We learned the hard way; it is not done once it is settled on paper. You will have to turn it into practice.

These tensions manifested themselves on the political level especially. Rouvoet had to defend his agenda against other ministers who sometimes tried to make their mark by dealing with the same issues. What had seemed to be clear at the start proved to be no more than a new starting position for new struggles. The program ministry wanted to be a collaborative ministry, but it ended up – at least in some issues – fighting other min-

istries over responsibilities, and budget.

A third source of tension was that most of the civil servants who worked for the program ministry also worked for their home departments. And, in most cases, these two contexts had very different interests. One civil servant told us: "I work two days a week for the Ministry of Youth and Family, two days for my own minister and one day a week for the state secretary of my own ministry. Sometimes, they ask me 'who do you work for?' And I say, 'I don't know.' And it's true: I really don't." The situation did not apparently lead to conflicting loyalties, but it did lead to confusion. As another interviewee told us:

Many policy documents have to be submitted to two ministers, which means that you also receive two responses. It is tricky to decide what to do if the two ministers disagree with each other. In the beginning this led to a situation in which we always drafted two policy reactions, one for each minister. We do not do this anymore. Our line now is that our response should be based on what is best both in terms of politics as well as content. However, as you will understand, that is easier said than done.

A fourth source of tension was related to the new form of governance adopted by the ministry: it strived to organize and coordinate the huge network of public organizations working in the "youth-domain" around the problems of individual clients. This proved to be very difficult: the ministry lacked authority to control the organizations and the professionals that did the actual work. And "the client" proved to be a difficult focal point for a network structure, because in practice there were many different clients, all with different needs, many unwilling to participate, and all with different professional opinions of what help they should receive. The ministry was successful in physically moving different organizations into shared buildings and Centres for Youth & Family, but that was not enough to generate concerted effort on youth problems.

One of the conclusions is that there were limits to what can be organized centrally. Local initiative can make all the difference, especially when local partners organize joint operations and are granted professional and

administrative autonomy to organize their own work. But at the same time, self-organizing and decentralized coordination does not always work by itself everywhere. In some Centres, the model worked well, but in other regions, the collaborative effort stalled.⁴ The question for the coming years will be how central government can “organize” these self-organizing networks without suffocation.

That seemed a major organizational dilemma for our interviewees as well: how to encourage and maintain emergence and at the same time manage it so that it fits governmental priorities *and* suits the complex, wicked and fragmented nature of problems.

Was the program ministry experiment a success? It came to an end with a change of government in 2010, and the evaluations are mixed. One professional quoted in a newspaper interview criticized the ministry’s passive stance: “Regional and local institutions are waiting for more precise ministerial instructions. The minister has to take the lead, he has to show who is in charge.” This is a remarkable statement, as one of the program ministry’s main aims was to facilitate emergence of local solutions. Public servants who were part of the experiment are also ambivalent. They saw the dilemma between taking the lead and letting others take it, adding that it might have been too ambitious to try and solve all problems with child welfare within one legislative period. They argue that to solve this problem requires more than a temporary ministry; the response also needs persistence. Many commentators saw the ministry as a temporary solution based on a half-hearted political commitment: it was no “real ministry”. For the future, if program ministries (or other innovative forms of governance) are to be perceived as real, they must show an impact. If they do not, they will have a hard time establishing themselves among longer-standing, more traditional institutions.

MINISTRY FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND INTEGRATION

The integration of non-Western immigrants has played an important role in the Dutch political debate over the past ten years. It was one of the key issues of the 2006

election campaign, just as it was in the 2002 elections. The new cabinet formed after the 2006 election committed itself to a new, less hostile stance on immigration, a stance on which especially the Labour Party had campaigned heavily. The new cabinet decided that integration should be seen less as a legal or judicial affair, but rather as a social issue that had to be tackled at the community-level.

The Program Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration (WWI in its Dutch acronym) was an attempt to translate this political perspective into an organizational form based on an *integrated* approach (with a focus on social and economic dimensions), and a *collaborative* approach that required central government to connect with local communities, municipalities and civic institutions.

TOWARDS A NEW MINISTRY FOR HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND INTEGRATION

The new ministry had a rocky first few months as the coalition partners failed to come to an agreement on how to finance their ambitious agenda. They had planned to claim the necessary funds from the municipalities and the hybrid housing associations, but these actors proved hesitant to part with what they perceived to be “their” money. This dispute not only led to financial discussions but also the loss of support of the two most crucial societal partners in developing a new approach to integration. The bodged negotiations led to antagonism and tension from the outset, in turn leading to lost time. Ella Vogelaar, a former trade unionist and coordinator of the Ministry of the Interior’s Integration Task Force, was appointed Minister of WWI. She resigned in November 2008 after losing her party’s support after several high-profile gaffes and was replaced by Eberhard van der Laan, an Amsterdam lawyer. On February 19, 2010 he resigned in turn, together with all other Social Democratic ministers, when the Balkenende IV-Cabinet collapsed over the withdrawal of Dutch troops from Afghanistan. After that, WWI had a care-taker minister until the elections in June 2010, when the ministry was abolished.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

WWI was called a program ministry but more closely resembled an organization that supports a traditional minister without portfolio. The Minister for WWI had no civil servants and department of his own but was responsible for several directorates situated in another department, the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). The activities for WWI covered about one third of the total activities of this ministry.

For 2010, WWI had a budget of € 3.7 billion. Its highest-ranking civil servant was the Director-General for Housing, Communities and Integration who had five directorates under him, clustered along the lines of the ministry’s portfolio (see figure 2). WWI also housed the secretariat of the 52 commissions dealing with disputes about rents. There also was one directorate each for integration and for communities and a strategy directorate which supported all of the others. WWI also was in charge of the agency maintaining all public buildings and monuments in the Netherlands.

WWI had for the most part been formed by a reshuffle, as parts of the former Ministry of Immigrants’ Affairs and Integration were merged with the Directorate-General of Housing from VROM. The Directorates for Housing and for Integration still functioned along the lines of a traditional department and did not have a program to deliver, and were expected as usual to cooperate with the directorates of other departments in order to achieve their (individual and shared) policy goals. They

were “regular” directorates within a more innovative ministerial structure. Indeed, being part of a program ministry hardly had any implications for them; one of their directors described this in the interview as follows: “For us and our work, it does not really matter what label you put on the ministry.”

The Directorate for Communities was the only program-directorate of WWI. It had been established on a temporary basis to achieve concrete results concerning the quality of life of communities. It was positioned next to WWI’s line directorates and cut right through them. Along with municipalities, its task was to transform forty high-need boroughs (in terms of housing, unemployment, education, integration and safety) into communities where people have more opportunities and feel safe, with a sound infrastructure and sufficient services and amenities. These forty boroughs, and the municipalities in which they are located, were to receive special funding from WWI-programs and were supposed to develop collaborative and innovative means of handling their problems.

The Directorate for Communities had a small staff of about 18 full-time-equivalent positions. Twenty account managers from the Directorate for Urban Planning worked for the directorate two days a week and were to bring its plans into practice on the municipal level. They were fed with information and ideas by several *linking pins* who served as liaison officers in other departments: Social Affairs and Employment; Education, Culture and Sciences; the Interior and Kingdom Relations; Health, Welfare and Sport; Youth & Families; Economic Affairs;

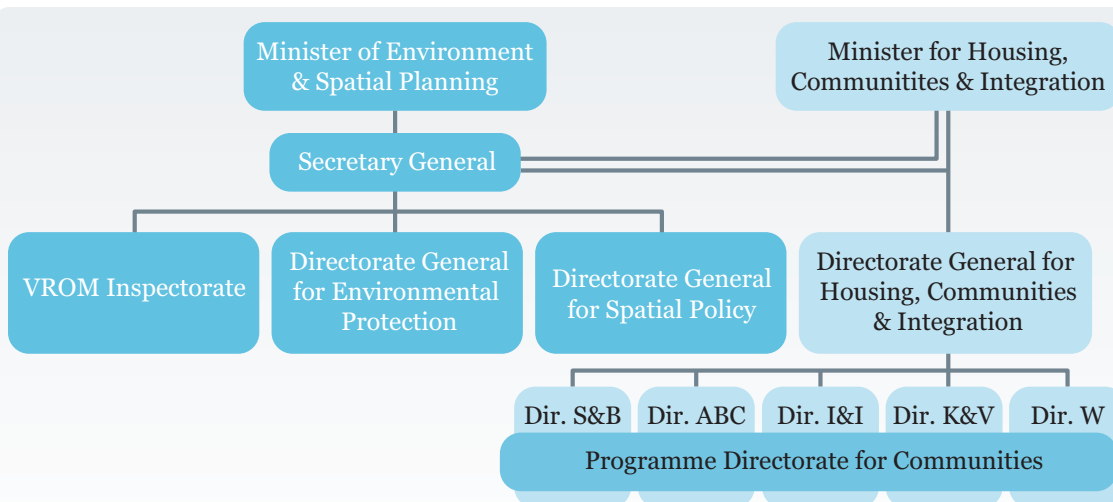


FIGURE 2: Organization chart of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration

Source: Geut, Van den Berg, and Van Schaik, 2010, 2.

Finance and for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The linking pins worked at their home departments and met only once a week, contacting the account managers usually via telephone and e-mail.

The linking pins were recruited mostly from among experienced civil servants who were more interested in tackling societal problems and creating synergy than achieving quick wins for their respective departments. Their perspective on the nature of governmental work was an important factor in their recruitment. They also did not mind operating mostly in the shadows, contrary to what more ambitious younger colleagues might have needed to further their careers. One put it like this in the interview: “I am happy to stay invisible as this is a clear sign that I am doing my job right.” She also hoped to some day make herself redundant: “Cooperating across departmental borders should become one of the key characteristics of civil servants. However, this can only be achieved when cooperation is sought on all levels. You always also need political support.”

TENSIONS IN THE MINISTERIAL FRAMEWORK

There were arguably two main sources of tension in the WWI experiment: one dealing with *cooperation* and the other with *structure*.

One of the linking pins interviewed referred to herself as a “dissident,” perhaps an appropriate description for a functionary who often has to give priority to another, higher loyalty than that to her respective department. This dissident identity can potentially lead to conflict: linking pins not only have to learn how to combine conflicting loyalties but also how to avoid capture. The account managers also had to operate for two masters as they worked at the Directorate for Urban Development but were seconded to the Directorate for Communities two days a week. In the beginning, this torn responsibility led to conflicts between the directors of the two directorates, as the first did not want his people to work for the second’s directorate.

It took the new program ministry a while to get going. The linking pins, for example, still had different e-mail accounts, one from their own department and another from WWI (it was not technically possible to merge the

accounts or to even link them into one accessible inbox). Linking pins literally had to start up separate computers in order to read both of their accounts. As in the case of the Program Ministry for Youth and Family, our WWI interviewees proposed creating a quartermaster or harbourmaster function to enable directors of the new ministry to get to grips with the operational aspects of their work more quickly. Many interviewees had vivid accounts of their attempts to find their way within the new ministry, as basic tasks and procedures differed in each workplace. The same goes for the more operational and strategic dimensions of the work: it took a long time before public servants were familiar with structures to initiate proposals, procedures for memorandums, financial protocols, and the expected types of meeting and other formal interactions among civil servants or with the ministers.

The Minister for WWI arguably had a better starting position than a traditional minister without portfolio as he also had his own budget. Budget provided “mass” for the new structure, but money proved to be only a part of the solution. In practice, the minister carried too little political weight to get his way. Former Minister Vogelaar, for example, found it difficult to get other departments to participate in her communities initiative, even though - on paper - she had the power to do so. Participation by other ministries was stalled and sometimes plainly blocked. These impediments also had a lot to do with political style and technique; Van der Laan seemed better able to collaborate with other ministers than his predecessor. However, both encountered difficulties – perhaps political - in including the housing associations in their plans, key to the revitalization of the boroughs. WWI’s cooperation with the Dutch municipalities seems to have been more successful: over the years, WWI succeeded in building productive relations with most municipalities, both at the political and administrative level.

It is difficult to describe WWI as either a success or a failure. Several sources, including Former Minister Vogelaar herself, claim that there was a lack of political vision and no clear mission when the coalition partners decided to set up the new ministry. According to Vogelaar, her whole program suffered from this lack of purpose and strategy. The Dutch Court of Audit later concluded that the ministry’s policy goals were nonetheless not met.⁵ Yet, since the Court focused on measurable causality and predefined goals, it may have overlooked

factors that play a significant role but are difficult to attribute to the success of a policy measure. Because there was no vision at the start, it is difficult to determine whether the department's policy goals were achieved.

Public perception of the Program Ministry for WWI was mostly negative, however: it came therefore as no surprise that it was dismantled after the new government took power in 2010, led by conservative parties that had criticized WWI's approach in the past as too soft towards immigrants.

LESSONS, DILEMMAS AND PROSPECTS

The creation of two Dutch program ministries was an attempt at organizing government around societal problems, to be able to better support *resilience* and *emergence*. In both cases, the solution to the respective problem had to come from further collaboration between government and civic institutions, other governments (municipalities and provincial governments), private organizations and individual citizens. In order to make this collaborative effort work, so it was argued, the organization of government itself needed to change. The program ministries were an experiment in organizational forms more able to collaborate with external partners.

But do they really represent a useful way of creating a more anticipative and responsive government? They might. In each case, we can identify promising elements as well as problematic findings. More than answers, the experience of the program ministries poses some tough challenges for government organization.

First, it is hard to say what organizational structure is best suited for dealing with wicked problems such as family breakdown and immigration. Structure evidently mattered in the two cases we studied, but it remains unclear what specific structure might have enhanced the chance of success. Both organizations were described as program ministries but each was different: The Minister for WWI resembled the traditional minister without portfolio, for example, although she/he was allocated a budget. Only one of the directorates was a temporary organization mandated to deliver short and midterm results. The Ministry for Youth and Families was more

innovative in this respect; its minister had no civil servants of his own but had to coordinate those seconded to him by four other departments. Whether this has led to more political and societal success is hard to say. The cases tell us that structure needs to facilitate both the interaction with other ministries *and* with other public, semi-public or private actors that emerge as possible solvers of the problem.

However, it is clear that the chosen structure needs to support some sort of interface between both worlds and provide an effective mechanism to function within the network of more classic and New Public Management-bureaucracy. It is this variety of styles that seems to be the most difficult challenge. A workable structure has to be both fixed *and* fluid and work both inward and outward. It needs to provide both solidity and stability *and* allow for experimentation and exploration. It has to be new and old, innovative and traditional.

These are classic dilemmas of organizational design: what may be novel is that the new modes of governance do not so much make an either-or choice, but seek to balance both sides of the dilemma. Instead of "either-or" organizations, they are "and" organizations, hybrids that balance inherently conflicting elements and moduli. The question is how such an organization's structure is best constructed. The program ministries have given us a first glimpse of that hybrid model but have also led to several new questions.

Because of the ambivalence in organizational structure, some key ingredients (such as a clear mission and strategy, a solid budget and the political weight and profile of the minister) seem to be very important. The greater the ambiguity of the structure, the more important is clarity on what needs to be done, what can be done and how the organization ought to be run.⁶ In the case of the Program Ministry for Youth and Family, the mission, strategy and working program were clear from the beginning, in contrast to those of WWI. Lacking clarity, employees and managers of WWI took a long time to develop a coherent program and convince others of their choices. Furthermore, important parts of the budgets of WWI were difficult to negotiate, meaning that the ministry lost valuable time and political capital. And to make matters worse, both ministers' clumsy manoeuvring led to antagonism between the department and the crucial network partners necessary to achieve the ministers'

political goals. More than within a traditional ministry, these factors will make or break success.

The new ministries were designed as innovative organizational ways of dealing with wicked problems that had to function within a traditional bureaucratic context. The cases show how complicated cooperation across departmental borders can be, not least because of simple operational difficulties. Setting up new structures in the public sector can take months: in the two cases we described, valuable time was lost to solve operational hiccoughs, taking energy away from issues that really mattered at a time when there still was a momentum for breaking through the status quo.

Some of these problems lie in the dual nature of innovative organizations within a traditional government context: the program ministries operated in the same context of compliance and performance as more traditional ministries. Ministerial accountability remains important, and program ministries are also judged on their output and outcome in performance-related terms. This focus, however, makes it complicated to facilitate ideas emerging from society and build a resilient public sector. Who is politically responsible for a civil servant from one ministry while on secondment at a program ministry, for example? How can one measure the program ministry's performance when its actions might have added value to the work of other groups, maybe even outside the public sector? How can one establish a clear link between the actions of a ministry and positive effects in society? How is accountability established for these innovative organizational models? These questions apply to many public organizations, of course, but program ministries and other innovative organizational forms that attempt to reconcile very different sets of rules are especially burdened. They must adhere to classic bureaucratic rules, while at the same working according to rules of complex and often horizontal networks.

Finally, there is the issue of possible double binds of civil servants. Those working for the Ministry of Youth and Family were also still working for their "own" minister, just as the linking pins did in the case of the Directorate for Communities from WWI. This matrix model meant that they had to deal with potential double binds, perhaps leading to conflicts of interest and conflicting loyalties. The classical notion might be that civil servants are loyal only to the *volonté générale*, but in reality, they

receive direction from their minister and upper managers inside a particular organizational context. This bind may need to be resolved, mediated or otherwise brought back into balance. Otherwise, organizational life for civil servants may become complicated and perhaps even dangerous. Individual civil servants' careers might suffer from a term in a program ministry.

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE PROGRAM MINISTRIES

The two program ministries described in this study can be seen as first steps in a process towards emergence and resilience as organizing principles in Dutch public administration. It is therefore interesting to discuss the future of this concept: what may these first steps tell us about the road ahead? An important finding is also that the program ministries have not been continued: have the first steps also been the last steps and has the system fallen back into its more traditional ways?

Our observations single out two lessons that concern the transition towards a new phase in governance. First, new organizational forms such as program ministries might be innovative but they nonetheless operate in a context that is much more traditional. As hybrids, such organizations must find productive ways to combine their novel ways of doing things with the more traditional rules at play in the rest of the system. Second, operational systems must be adapted to support these different governance models: the Netherlands' newly created Shared Services Centra initiative may prove to be a viable strategy, even if empirical evidence is not yet available.

Program ministers often lack political authority in comparison with their colleagues at the helm of the more traditional departments. This gap is partly a matter of personal authority, but also relates to the scale, volume and weight of their ministries. Program ministries are exceptions to a general rule: they are anomalies in a system that is dominated by traditional forms and values. The anomaly has to prove itself, while the classic institutions are rarely challenged to prove their efficiency or effectiveness.

A radical solution may eradicate this problem: turn all ministers into program ministers. A more moderate first

step may be to distinguish among departments that keep systems running (such as the health and the education system) and those that deal with wicked, upcoming societal problems. The latter ones could easily be turned into program ministries, while the former are looked after in two or three system ministries.

A NEW SYNTHESIS PERSPECTIVE

Over decades, the role of the state and the relation of the state with societal actors have both changed dramatically. It seems as if we are now entering a new phase in that development: where government was perceived as able to “steer” society, today’s understanding is of a government more oriented towards channelling, enabling, facilitating and following development within society. Society is now not so much the object of state policy, a problem needing to be fixed, but rather a *source* of solutions. In that transition, the core values of the state are shifting from compliance and performance towards resilience and emergence. And there is more to it. The shift from government to *governance* values democratic results (the outcome of public policy done with citizens) above public results (the outcome of public policy done by government for citizens), and acknowledges the decreased predictability of the causes of problems and their solutions. Government in the future will need to adapt still further to follow the complexity and unpredictability of social change.

This new phase remains largely unexplored in theoretical literature. We do not know what organizing for resilience implies, how it happens, and what conditions are needed for success. This is an empirical question that can be answered by a thorough analysis of the experiments that are taking place all over the world. Government organizations on various levels are working together across portfolio boundaries to achieve an integrated government response to a particular wicked issue that supersedes organizational boundaries and bureaucratic categorizations. In Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, this strategy has come to be known as *joined-up government* or the *whole-of-government approach*.

All these examples share the characteristic that they – in various degrees – seek to enable, facilitate and follow initiatives by other actors in society. They are attempts

by government to organize itself in such a way as to align the initiatives of others with government action and managed them. Methods, repertoires and organizational modes that enable governing in the 21st century are not being thought up in theory, but are being developed and tested in practice today.

It is now time for academics to pick up on that practical trail and organize academic and analytic reflection that may lead to conceptual clarity. This paper is an attempt to do so.

REFERENCES

INTERVIEWS

Martine Eenshuistra, Senior Policy Advisor, Directorate of Youth and Family, Ministry for Youth and Family

Merijn van Giessen, Director Policy, Target Groups, Affordability and Housing Corporations, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration

Marilyn Haimé, Director, Nationalization and Integration

Henk van Heuven, Former Director at Aedes (umbrella organization of housing corporations)

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Elly van Kooten, Director, Directorate for Communities, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration (and two of her linking pins)

Katja Mur, Director, Directorate of Youth and Family, Ministry for Youth and Family

Hans van der Vlist, Secretary-General, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment

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ENDNOTES

1. Van Twist, Mark, et al, *Vernieuwende veranderingen*.
2. The authors would like to thank Dr. Mark Pen of the Netherlands School for Public Administration for his excellent work in researching the case of the Ministry for Youth and Family.
3. The Centres for Youth and Families combine services for young children and family support; in 2011, every municipality is to have such a centre. The centres do not provide new services, but combine and concentrate a previously scattered set of services in one location. See also: www.youthpolicy.nl.
4. It is the task of the municipalities to organize their Centre for Youth and Family. The program ministry, and the Minister responsible, cannot integrate the decentralized services independently.
5. Van Twist and Verheul, *Bijvangst van beleid Over ongezochte opbrengsten van de wijkenaanpak*.
6. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*; March and Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions*.

FROM NS6 TO NS WORLD

THE NEW SYNTHESIS PROJECT

The New Synthesis Project is an international partnership of institutions and individuals who are dedicated to advancing the study and practice of public administration. While they hail from different countries, different political systems and different historical, economic and cultural contexts, all share the view that public administration as a practice and discipline is not yet aligned with the challenges of serving in the 21st century.

THE NEW SYNTHESIS 6 NETWORK

In 2009, Madame Jocelyne Bourgon invited six countries to join the New Synthesis Network (NS6), composed of officials, scholars and experts from Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Committed to supporting practitioners whose work is becoming increasingly difficult, this network has engaged close to 200 people from more than 24 organizations. Their efforts have resulted in five international roundtables, five post-roundtable reports, and 17 case studies. Collectively, this work has generated significant insights into preparing governments to serve in the 21st century.

The Network's findings have been captured in the publication of a new book entitled *A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century*, and is available in print and electronic formats from McGill-Queen's University Press. Its signature contribution is the presentation of an enabling governance framework that brings together the role of government, society and people to address some of the most complex and intractable problems of our time.

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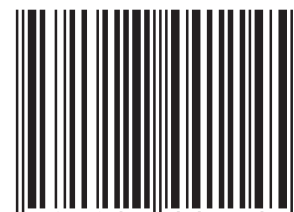
TOWARDS NS WORLD

So where to from here? Reconfiguring and building the capacities of government for the future cannot be accomplished through the publication of a single book. It is a continuous journey which requires the ongoing sharing and synthesis of ideas, as well as the feedback, learning and course adjustments that can only be derived by testing ideas in action.

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Next stages of this work will include virtual exchanges supported by web 2.0 technologies, as well as possible thematic and regionally-based networks and events. But no matter the vehicles, success can only be achieved through the active participation and collaboration of those passionate about making a difference.

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