

Organizing government around problems

A case study of the two Dutch programme ministries for Youth and Family and for
Housing, Communities and Integration

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Abstract

Over the past decades, the role of the state and the relation of the state with parties/actors in society have changed dramatically. According to the *New Synthesis Framework*, we are currently entering a new phase in that development. Whereas the government used to be perceived as, and operated accordingly, the central actor with ability to ‘steer’ society into the best direction, government is now more oriented towards channelling, enabling, facilitating and following development in society. Society is then not so much the object of state policy – or a problem that needs to be solved – but is a source of new solutions for recurring problems and issues. The core values of the state are shifting from ‘compliance’ and ‘performance’ towards ‘resilience’ and ‘emergence’. This is not really a choice made by government. There are developments in society that emerge autonomous of strategic choices by the state. Actors take up tasks that used to be public, not because they are asked or ordered to do so, but because they want to and are able to do so. However, apart from this autonomous movement in society, there is also the growing awareness that certain ‘wicked problems’ cannot be solved by central government policy. This shift from government to governance has been developing for quite some time now and is producing new practices as we speak.

However, in the near future there is more to it than ‘just’ a shift from government to governance. This shift comes with an orientation that puts democratic results over public results and that further acknowledges the decreased predictability of processes that lead to problems and solutions for societal problems. The world is growing ever more complex and that draws heavily on modes of steering and organizing by governments. The ultimate role of governments in the future will be to not only facilitate actions by others but to also organize themselves in a way as to ensure a resilient society. The government will have to adapt its own structures and modes in order to be able to ‘follow’ the developments in society. Government has to become resilient itself to be able to adapt and adjust to unforeseen, unknown and continuously changing problems with a high degree of ‘wickedness’. This is a new phase in the development of government organization and remains as yet unexplored in theoretical knowledge. We do not ‘know’ what resilience is, how it works and what conditions are needed for it ‘to work’. That is currently being explored. We feel that this is most of all an empirical question, which can be answered only by a thorough analysis of the experiments with resilient organizational structures that are currently taking place all over the world. Government organizations on various levels are working together across portfolio boundaries (i.e. in networks, chains or by establishing new, temporary organizations), for instance 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 of government to organize itself in such a way that initiatives by others can be managed and aligned with government action.

Also in the Netherlands experiments are taking place with such organizational structures. We describe two of them in this case study, the Programme Ministry for *Youth and Family* and the Programme Ministry for *Housing, Communities and Integration*. Our focus is to draw a picture of how these new organizational forms function in practice. This is an especially interesting question, as they have to function within a system that still is dominated by the more traditional values of *compliance* and *performance*, with a focus in public results and within a narrative of predictability and performance. In practice this means that new organizational forms – such as the programme ministries – still have to follow the same standards regarding ministerial accountability, efficiency and effectiveness as more traditional bureaucratic structures, which often, as we will show in our case study, interfere with the ‘rules of resilience’.

We not only describe in our case study how the two Dutch programme ministries work as experiments with emergence and resilience, but also how they operate in (and collide with) the system around them which is based on different values. We will show that this leads to several practical operational dilemmas. Besides the practical dilemmas – that become strategic because of their impact on the capacity to deliver of the programme ministries – there also several strategic questions. Knowledge about these dilemmas, operational and strategic, can help to build a public sector based on emergence and resilience as key values.

1. Introduction and outline

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 programme 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 lend 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 resilient organizational structures that facilitate practices emerging from society. Government agencies are working together across portfolio boundaries (i.e. in networks, chains or by establishing new, temporary organizations) to achieve an integrated government response to the wicked, unforeseen and continuously changing problems and dilemmas society today faces. They do not want to solve the issues by themselves, but seek to link up with, align with and/or stimulate initiatives of other actors to solve problems. 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*.

We describe two of such experiments that are currently taking place in the Netherlands: the *Programme Ministry for Youth and Family* and the *Programme Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration* in this case study. By doing so we strive to draw a picture of how a public administration that is aimed at creating a resilient society (in which practices emerging from citizens are taken seriously) functions in practice and which dilemmas it faces. We will use our two case-organizations to study how new organizational modes – such as programme ministries – ‘work’ (in terms of practicalities) and how they ‘work out’ (in terms of living up to expectations). These cases may contain valuable lessons for the transition towards a public service based on resilience and emergence.

This case study consists of three parts. We start with a short and general definition of the two Programme Ministries and show how they can be compared to other, similar organizational forms. We then describe both Programme Ministries in more detail, with special attention to the praxis of these organizations. We do not focus so much on how they are intended, what they are expected to be doing, but look into what they actually do and how they work in everyday practice. We conclude with a comparison of both our cases and present lessons to be drawn from these two cases. What can the two Dutch Programme Ministries add to the framework of the New Synthesis Project?

Our description of the two Programme Ministries is based on the study of relevant documents and literature and several interviews at both departments. See the appendix for an overview of sources. We wish to emphasize that we have not ‘evaluated’ the Programme Ministries and have not set out to come to a certain judgement about their performance and/or the appropriateness of their praxis.

2. Programme ministries – a short definition

Both the Programme Ministries we describe were established in 2007 by the Balkenende IV-cabinet (consisting of the *Christian Democrats*, the *Social Democrats* and the left leaning *ChristianUnion*) but are as such no new forms. They are 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 have demonstrated in an earlier study (cf. Van Twist et.al., 2009). Already since the 1970s, Dutch public administration has experimented with ways of how to facilitate public service agencies working together across portfolio boundaries (i.e. in networks, chains or by establishing new, temporary organizations) to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to a particular issue. There are for example ministers that have to coordinate different departments concerning a certain policy area and ministers without portfolio. The two main goals behind creating these new positions was to increase the performance of government and to be able to better facilitate practices emerging

from society. A relatively new goal, of which the two Programme Ministries are prominent examples, is to also contribute to a resilient society, in which government organizes itself around the problems it wants to tackle, rather than to force them into its own organizational silos. Coordinating ministers and ministers without portfolio often were not really successful, as they lacked the power necessary to prevail. This is why programme ministers were granted their own budget to overcome this shortcoming. Programme Ministries are products of lessons learned in earlier attempts to organize outside the 'standing' regular ministries. In the following two paragraphs we will describe whether this has proven to be a successful strategy and what new lessons may be.

3. Ministry for Youth and Family

In the last couple of years, the problems of children and youths have been placed ever more prominently on the Dutch political agenda. The debate that was already intense was infused by several incidents in which child-welfare organizations failed to intervene in cases of child abuse. Along with these critical incidents, there was also societal distress about other issues, such as behavioural problems among children, the unhealthy lifestyle of some youngsters, children who neither attend school nor work, and the supposed increase in antisocial behaviour among the young. This led to criticism about government 'not doing enough' to protect children and youngsters. The blame was especially laid on obstructive bureaucracy in the child-welfare system, not on a lack of political attention. These concerns led to the appointment of a Commissioner for Youth Policy by the Cabinet in 2004. His task was to develop proposals for an integrative and output oriented youth policy. One of his main 'targets' was the bureaucratic web of organizations. This Commissioner, and his frontal assault on the bureaucratic fragmentation of attention, responsibilities and capacity to intervene in youth-issues, was the front-runner of the later programme ministry.

3.1 Towards a new Ministry for Youth and Family

During the formation of the Balkenende IV-cabinet the ChristianUnion argued that the multiple problems facing the country's children had to be tackled through a *concerted effort*, just as the Commissioner had concluded earlier. National and local government, the child welfare and education sectors as well as other stakeholders had to work together more closely, with a minister in charge of stimulating and coordinating this cooperation. Due to the Christian ideology of the party, the ChristianUnion also argued that families should be strengthened to provide a safe haven for children. André Rouvoet, leader of the ChristianUnion, was appointed Minister for Youth and Family and Deputy Prime Minister. At the time, this was perceived as a big victory for his party, as it had campaigned heavily on family values. The ChristianUnion had 'acquired' an important ministry, that would not only have a deep impact in a heated issue in the debate, but that would also achieve those results by reorganizing a large bureaucratic network of public and semi-public organizations.

3.2 Key characteristics

Minister Rouvoet became responsible for tackling current issues of youth and family from an *integrated* perspective. He had a rather broad portfolio, with issues and dossiers acquired from various other ministries, including: family policy; child allowances and child-dedicated budget; local youth policy, including the establishment of Centres for Youth and Families; youth care; family guardianship; youth protection; policy on young people in the labour market; electronic child records, referral index for young people at risk; inspection, youth monitoring and harmonisation of indications; mental health care for young people; care for young people with minor mental disabilities; prevention of unhealthy lifestyles and addictions.

The Ministry for Youth and Family started out with a budget of almost € 6 billion. The Ministry is in charge of formulating *new* policies concerning all these issues. However, those new policies are 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 forces the Programme Ministry to adopt an integrative perspective and to try to break through traditional bureaucratic boundaries. It has power and capability of its own, but is in the end always dependent on other ministries to implement its policies. It is reliant on some of the organizations that need to change themselves as well.

Minister Rouvoet only has two directorates that work exclusively for him, 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 is seconded from other departments and only works for the Programme Ministry part time, besides their regular work on other dossiers in other Ministries. Civil servants also working for the Programme Ministry for example come from the Judicial Youth Policy Department of the Ministry of Justice, the Directorate Primary and Secondary School of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Child Protection Board and the Social Insurance Directorate of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. See figure 1 for an organizational chart.

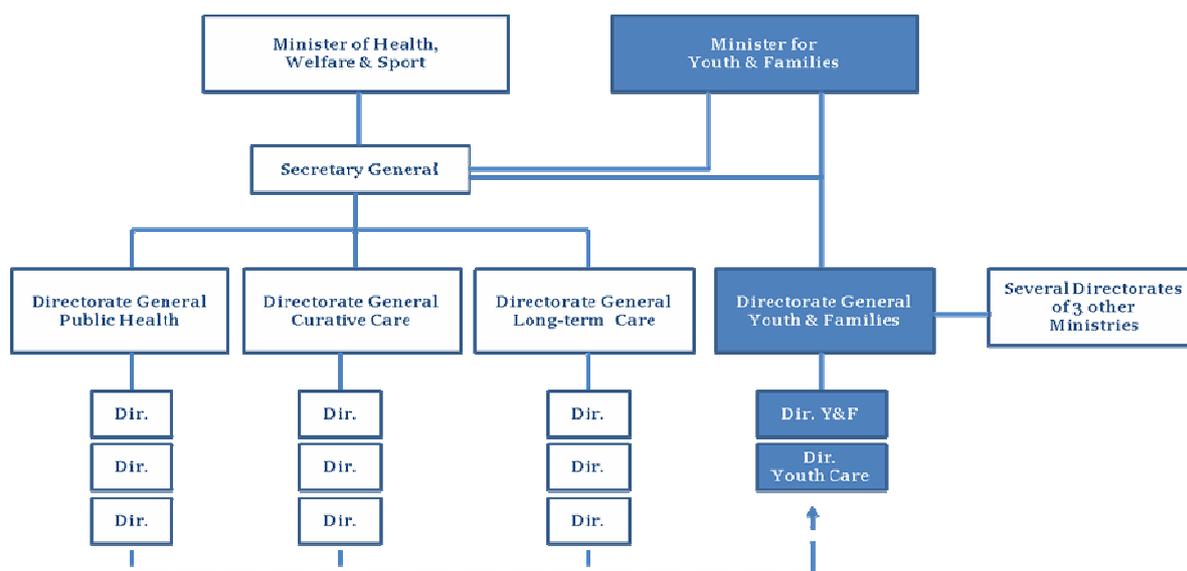


Figure 1: Organizational chart Ministry for Youth & Family (based on Geut, Van den Berg & Schaik, 2010: p. 32)

Shortly after establishing the new department, its minister published his *Youth and Family Programme*, the agenda for the new ministry. The programme represents a new governmental approach: ‘one which uses coordination, cooperation and a focus on the common good for the benefit of young people and families’. The programme consists of three strategies: 1) seeking to confirm 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 – should exercise their responsibilities.

The Minister for Youth and Family not only has his own portfolio but is also involved in policies of other departments that have a direct relation to his field. His colleagues hold primary responsibility for them, with the Programme Minister in a not very clearly defined ‘secondary’ role. These issues include 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.

3.3 Tensions in the ministerial framework

The establishment of the Ministry for Youth and Family was met with grand expectations. This forced the minister to come up with a policy programme as soon as possible, even though his precise mandate was not clear yet. He succeeded in this task and managed to present a programme after a few months, which was based on the preliminary work done by the Commissioner for Youth Policy. Another first success was, according to the minister himself, 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, even more so as he had his own 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 can not just ignore us and also the media pays closer attention.”

However, the new ministry also faced several difficulties. The ministry had literally had to be build yet. There first of all were all sorts of operational delays, as one interviewee remembered: *“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. The do not just make the work ‘easier’; without document management 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. But it took time and energy away from what we were supposed to be doing.”* Because of these issues, several interviewees propose to create the function of a ‘quarter master’ at each department, who takes care of all operational affairs, so that a department’s civil servants can concentrate on more substantial matters.

There was also intense debate about the exact scope of the ministry’s portfolio. The scope had seemed clear on paper, but worked out to be rather 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, and they were few. There were others, such as fighting unemployment among youths, were 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. Our focus was different. We learned the hard way; it is not done once it is settled on paper.”* These tensions especially manifested themselves on the political level. Rouvoet had to defend his turf against other Ministers who sometimes tried to make their mark by dealing with the same issues as him. What seemed to be clear at the start, proved to be no more than a starting position for new struggles.

A third source of tensions concerned the fact that most of the civil servants that worked for the Programme Ministry also worked for ‘their own’ departments. One of them for example 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’. I don’t.”* We did not get the impression that this situation led to conflicting loyalties. Confusion seems to be a better word. Or, as one 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 every 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.”* In the beginning there also were situations in which civil servants tried to play their two ministers off against one another. If one did not see anything in a certain proposal they would submit it to the other. Such behaviour has now been called to a halt.

A fourth source of tensions is closely attached to the new perspective on governance that the Ministry adopted: ‘Y&F’ wanted to organize and coordinate the network of public organizations working in the ‘Youth-domain’. The various organizations that used to work ‘alongside’ each other now had to work *together*, in a massive operation to tie the various elements of the huge bureaucratic chain together. All of the various organizations and actors were supposed to work together in accordance with what the client would need. The literally had to organize themselves around ‘the problem’, in this case individual clients. This proved to be very difficult: the Ministry lacked ‘real’ power to control most of the organizations and the professionals that do the actual work. And ‘the client’ proved to be a difficult focal point for an network-structure, because in practice there are many different clients, all with very different needs, many of them unwilling to participate and with all sorts of different professional opinions of what the ‘help’ should be in different cases. In practice it proved difficult for the Ministry of ‘Y&F’ to coordinate the large network of public or semi-public organizations and professionals. Practice probably has changed for the better, but it remains far from ‘optimal’. One of the dilemmas that three years of ‘Y&F’-practice has revealed is that there are limits to what can be organized centrally, but at the same time ‘self-organizing’ or decentralized coordination does not ‘work’ by itself. The question for the coming years will be how central government can ‘organize’ these self-organizing networks, without squeezing all the life and energy out of them. The question is how emergence can be initiated, maintained and – somewhat – controlled into a flow that *both* fits governmental frames and boundaries and suits the complex, wicked and fragmented nature of problems.

Has the establishment of the Ministry for Youth and Family been a success? Not everyone is convinced. We found a recent article in a prominent daily newspaper that is typical for the dilemma of an emergent and resilient government. In the article, a professional complains about 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 Programme Ministry's main aims was to facilitate emergence. Civil servants are ambivalent as well; they see the dilemma. In the light of the dilemma, they add that it might have been a little too ambitious to try and solve 'all' problems with child welfare within one legislative period. They argue that what is needed to solve this problem is more than a temporary ministry; it also needs *persistence*.

4. Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration

Already for several years, reflected in electoral successes of right-wing populist politicians, the integration of non-Western immigrants plays an important role in the Dutch political debate. It was one of the key issues of the 2006 election campaign, just as it was in the 2002 elections. The new cabinet that was 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 coalition partners decided to remove the integration portfolio from the purview of the Ministry of Justice and to establish a new so-called programme ministry to deal with the subject, which should be housed at the Ministry for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. By doing so the new cabinet decided that integration should less be seen as a legal or even judicial affair, but rather as a social issue that had to be tackled locally, at the community-level. This 'transfer' had to reflect a new focus in the political perspective on immigration issues.

4.2 Towards a new Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration

Quality of life issues in communities were added to the portfolio of the new ministry, as this had been a major issue in the Social Democrats' election campaign. This entailed a new approach to problems in many inner-city communities, such as high levels of unemployment, a Balkanisation of society, problems with drugs, other forms of criminality and antisocial behaviour and the deterioration of public spaces. Later, also the care for greater quantities of better-quality and affordable housing were added to the portfolio of what came to be called the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration (WWI).

The new ministry had a rocky first few months as the coalition partners had failed to come to an agreement on how to finance the rather ambitious agenda. They had planned to claim the necessary funds from the municipalities and the hybrid housing corporations, but they were not willing to go along with some of the terms of the agreement. This was more than just a problem about 'money', the housing corporations were crucial partners in the plans of the new ministry. The negotiation about funding led to a lot of antagonism and tensions right from the start of the ministry. This meant that valuable time was lost and that the ministry was in conflict with some of its most crucial partners. 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 highly mediatised gaffes and was replaced by Eberhard van der Laan, an Amsterdam lawyer. On February 19, 2010 he resigned, together with all other Social Democratic ministers when the Balkenende IV-cabinet collapsed over the withdrawal of Dutch troops from Afghanistan. At the moment, WWI has a care-taker minister, Elmert van Middelkoop, who also is Dutch minister for defence. Its future after the elections planned for June 2010 is unclear.

4.3 Key characteristics

WWI bears the label of a programme ministry but rather resembles an organization that supports a traditional minister without portfolio. The Minister for WWI has no civil servants and department of his own but is responsible for several directorates that are situated at another department, the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). The activities for WWI cover one third of the total activities of this ministry.

For 2010, WWI has a budget of about € 3.7 billion. Its highest civil servant is the director-general for housing, communities and integration. He has five directorates under him, which are clustered along

the lines of the ministry's portfolio. Two directorates deal with housing and urban development and WWI also houses the secretariat of the 52 commissions dealing with disputes about rents. There also is one directorate each for integration and for communities and a strategy directorate which works for all of them. WWI also is in charge of the agency maintaining all public buildings and monuments in the Netherlands.

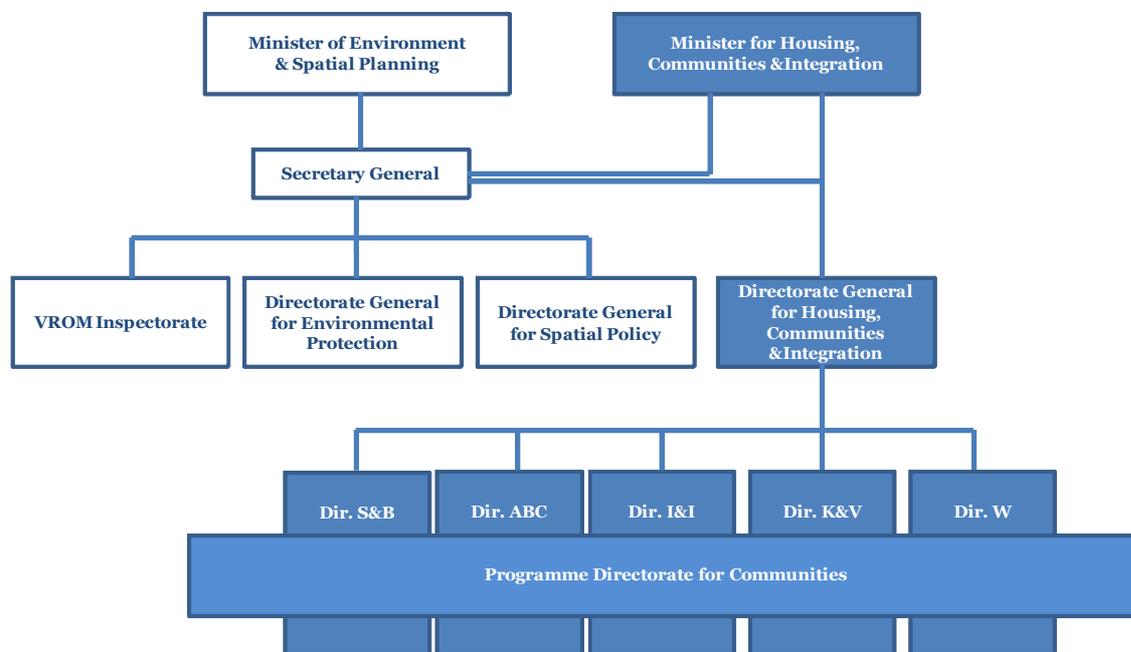


Figure 2: Organizational chart Ministry for Housing, Communities and Integration (based on Geut, Van den Berg & Van Schaik, 2010: p. 42)

WWI has, for the most part, been formed by a reshuffle, as parts of the former Ministry of Immigrants' Affairs and Integration (led by another minister without portfolio at the Department of Justice) were merged with the Directorate-General of Housing from VROM. The Directorates for Housing and for Integration still more or less function along the lines of a traditional department and do not have a programme to deliver. Being part of a programme ministry hardly has 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." Also the directorates for Housing and for Immigration were, however, expected to cooperate with the directorates of other departments in order to achieve their (individual and shared) policy goals.

The Directorate for Communities is the only programme-directorate of WWI. It has been established on a temporary basis to achieve concrete results concerning the quality of life of communities. It is positioned next to WWI's line directorates and cuts right through them. Its task is to, together with municipalities, transform forty boroughs which suffer from the most immediate problems in terms of housing, employment, education, integration and safety (the so-called *aandachtswijken*) into communities where people have more opportunities and feel safe, with a sound infrastructure and sufficient services and amenities, such as shops and sports facilities.

The Directorate for Communities has an own small staff of about 18 fte. Twenty so-called account managers from the Directorate for Urban Planning work for the communities directorate 2 days a week and are supposed to bring its plans into practice on the municipal level. They are fed with information and ideas by several so-called linking pins, who serve as liaison officers with the departments WWI has to cooperate with to achieve its goals concerning communities. These are the departments for Social Affairs and Employment; Education, Culture and Sciences; the Interior and Kingdom Relations; Health, Welfare and Sport; Youth & Families; Economic Affairs; Finance and for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The linking pins do not work at WWI but at their own department and only physically meet once a week. Their contact with the account managers usually takes place via telephone and e-mail.

The linking pins are mostly recruited among older civil servants with a lot of experience who are interested more in tackling societal problems and creating synergy than at achieving quick wins for their own respective departments. They also do not mind, as their younger colleagues might who need exposure to further their career, to mostly operate in the shadows. One of them 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.”*

4.4 Tensions in the ministerial framework

In the case of WWI there were arguably two main sources of tension; one dealing with *cooperation* and the other with *structure*.

One of the linking pins we interviewed referred to herself as a *“dissident”*. We believe this to be an appropriate description for a functionary who often has to give priority to another, higher loyalty than that to his or her respective department. This can potentially lead to conflicts. As all hybrids or boundary spanners, linking pins not only have to learn how to combine conflicting loyalties but also how to avoid capture. They also have to be defended against those particular interests that want to seize them.

Also the account managers of the Directorate for Communities have to operate for two masters as they work at the Directorate for Urban Development but are seconded to Communities two days a week. In the beginning, this 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. In theory, such an arrangement can also be seen as *carte blanche* to dump staff one director wants to get rid of at another directorate, though we have not observed this happening in the case of WWI.

It took the new Programme Ministry quite a while to get going as the structure of Dutch public administration still is in many ways not capable of facilitating cooperation. The linking pins we interviewed for example still have different e-mail accounts, one from their own department and another from WWI. As in the case of the Programme Ministry for Youth and Family, also our interviewees at WWI proposed creating a new function for a *quarter- or harbourmaster* that facilitates the directors of a new ministry with quickly getting to grips with the operational aspects of their work.

The Minister for WWI arguably had a better starting position than a traditional minister without portfolio as he also has his own budget but in practice he still carried too little political weight to get his way. Former minister Vogelaar for example found it very hard to make other departments participate in her communities initiative, even though she on paper had the power to do so. She and her successor Van der Laan also found it difficult to include the housing corporations in their plans, even though they should have played a significant role. This was, we were told, mostly due to bad political management by the ministers which antagonized the sector. WWI’s cooperation with the Dutch municipalities seems to be more successful.

Several sources, including former minister Vogelaar herself, claim that there was a lack of political vision and no clear mission when the coalition partners set up the new Ministry for WWI. This makes it complicated to establish whether the department’s policy goals have been achieved. According to various reports, for instance by the National Accounting Office, claim that they have not. Others however (e.g. Van Twist & Verheul, 2009), argue that those measurements are flawed. The real problem, according to them, is that the new organization is ‘measured’ and evaluated by standards that resemble the classic structure. A lack of ‘clear vision’, and organizational direction and strategic focus that follows from that, also means that civil servants had to work without clear guidelines. Civil servants are of course perfectly capable to develop their own vision and strategy but more backing from especially the prime minister and his two deputies for WWI would not have gone amiss, VROM’s secretary-general claimed when we interviewed him.

5. Lessons, dilemmas and prospects

The creation of two Dutch programme ministries was an attempt to organize government around societal problems in a more *resilient* and *emergent* way. An important question is how these programme ministries can be effective in tackling today's wicked societal matters and coordinate and facilitate activities by other organizations than the government itself. Do they represent a useful way of creating a more anticipative and responsive government? We think that there are a few lessons to be drawn. The lessons do not have the nature of 'clear cut solutions', but more of 'dilemmas' that need further analysis and practical experimenting. They are not *lessons learned*, but *lessons to be learned*.

First, it is hard to say which *organizational structure* is needed precisely. Both the Ministry for Youth and Family (J&G) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Immigration (WWI) are referred to as programme ministry but they are in reality very different from one another. The Minister for WWI resembles in many ways the traditional minister without portfolio, although he has his 'own' budget. Only one of the directorates under him is a temporary organization, which has to generate short- and midterm results. The Ministry for Youth and Families is more innovative in this respect. Its minister has no civil servants of his own but has to coordinate those that were seconded to him by four other departments. Whether this leads to more political and societal success is hard to predict. Both cases make clearly visible that the 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.

More important than the precise organizational structure seems to be a clear *mission and strategy*, a *solid budget* and the *political weight* of the Minister. In the case of Youth and Families the mission, strategy and working programme were perhaps more clear from the beginning than that of WWI. For WWI more preliminary work had to be done. Furthermore, important parts of the budgets of WWI were difficult to arrange. The ministry lost some valuable time when it was started up. For example, the budget of WWI proved to be absent. WWI hoped to be able to command funding from the municipalities and the hybrid housing corporations but quickly learned that it lacked the authority to do so. This clumsy move also led to much antagonism between the department and two actors it badly needed in order to achieve its political goals. There also was, as former minister Vogelaar complained, no clear mission and no clear standards the new ministry could use to measure its success.

The new ministries also had to act in a traditional *bureaucratic context*. Cooperation across departmental borders can be complicated, as every department has its own operational systems and routines. The difficulty is 'political', 'bureau-political', but also of a very operational kind. Changes can take several months, because of supporting systems – such as ICT – that needs to be adapted to the new structure. The political and bureaucratic context of programme ministries is determined by more traditional values such as compliance and performance. Ministerial accountability also is an important issue there and programme ministries are, as all governmental bodies nowadays, also judged on their output and outcome in performance-related terms. This can make it complicated to also try and facilitate practices emerging from society and to work on building a resilient public sector. Why is, for example, ultimately responsible for the actions a civil servant from one ministry takes while on secondment at a programme ministry? And how to measure the programme ministry's performance, as its actions might have added value for other groups, maybe even outside the public sector? How to establish a clear link between the actions of a ministry and positive effects in society? Programme Ministries have to play to various vary different sets of rules: they have to interact and work according to classic bureaucratic rules, while at the same time they have to work according to rules of 'resilience', 'emergence' in networks.

Finally, there are the *double binds* of civil servants. Those working for the Ministry of Youth and Family were also still working for their 'own' minister. The same was true for the linking pins in the case of the Directorate for Communities from WWI. This means that they all had to deal with double binds, which can potentially lead to conflicts of interests and conflicting loyalties. Some people say that there is a third, overriding loyalty for civil servants, that to government and the needs of the citizens in general. This is a noble thought, but in every day practice they receive their requests and commands from their minister and the upper management.

Towards a framework for future Programme Ministries

The two ministries described in this case study can be perceived as ‘first steps’ in a process towards emergence and resilience as organizing principles of public administration in The Netherlands. It is therefore interesting to discuss the future of this concept. Our observations focus on two in our opinion valuable lessons that have to be learned and/or issues that need to be resolved. Both observations concern mainly the ‘transition’ towards the new phase. Organizations that operate according to the new ‘rules’ need to do so within a context that remains dominated by the ‘old rules’. They have to live up to different sets of standards and – for instance – methods of performance measurement. These different cannot be combined without inevitable tensions. The second problem is that the operational supporting mechanisms are vital to the success of these new modes of organizing. Without operational support, the new forms never really take flight.

For being successful a Programme Minister has to cope with a complex internal and external environment. He (or she) often has to tackle major societal issues and generate results within one legislative period, although his / her authority is limited. For solving societal problems a Programme Minister not only needs the *professional support* of his colleagues, but also from the staff of other departments, local governments, societal institutions and private companies. Especially when the minister is relatively inexperienced politically, he or she can lack the *authority* to force others to cooperate. Political weight is one way to create support, another is having a solid and independent *policy budget* for implementing the strategy.

Programme ministers often lack *authority* compared to their colleagues at the helm of the more traditional departments. This is partly a matter of personal authority, but also of scale, volume and weight. Programme ministries are exemptions to a general rule, which makes it difficult for them to earn and keep their place in a system that still is dominated by other, more traditional values than those that are at their heart. A radical solution to eradicate the differences between traditional and programme ministries could be to simply turn all ministers into programme ministers. This obviously leads to a whole bunch of new questions, such as: what to do in case of a change in government? And is it wise to make public administration fluid in the sense that every legislative period sees a whole array of new departments with civil servants being shuffled between them? A possible first step towards a government that facilitates emergence and is more resilient might be to distinguish between departments that have to keep systems running (such as the health and the education system) and those that have to deal with wicked societal problems. The latter ones could easily be turned into programme ministries.

Besides these more strategic notions, there also are more mundane issues that need to be addresses, especially those concerning *operational aspects*. Too often positive initiatives within public administration still strand because of technical limitations. To make sure that structure can really follow strategy, it is in our opinion an imperative to quickly homogenize the operational and managerial aspects of cooperation, such as the introduction of a uniform email address for all civil servants. Working together and moving to another department should become easier, a demand that can also be heard when speaking to top civil servants.

6. Sources

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- Henk van Heuven, former director at Aedes (umbrella organization of housing corporations)
- Theo van Iwaarden, deputy director Nutrition, Health Protection and Prevention at Ministry for Health (seconded to Ministry for Youth and Family)
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