Vital differences
On public leadership and societal innovation

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1. Introduction

Significant processes of change

Due to economic urgency and social considerations farmers are developing new strategies in which they increasingly enter into combinations with social services, recreation, nature conservation, energy supply or other agricultural sectors (v/d Heijden, 2005). Globalizing agro-food chains interweave with other economic sectors and see themselves at the same time depending more on confidence of critical consumers who associate food with local identities, with lifestyle and with health. People in densely populated regions keep looking for connections between the city and the green spaces. The disappearance of agriculture as the most important economic base presents rural areas with drastic challenges to develop new sources for vitality and identity. The preservation and restoration of biodiversity induce new developments in nature that should also be of interest to citizens in metropolitan areas, with all the attendant dilemmas. While the concept of space for water is gaining more and more ground in water conservation, the warnings continue to increase, as if we weren't taking the risks of climate change seriously enough.

Under the denominator of transitions or sometimes even system innovations, significant processes of change are in progress (2). When these processes affect major social tasks such as sustainable development, I talk about societal innovation. I am thinking of innovations like space for rivers, care farms, Greenport Venlo, agroparks, 'Healing Hills' ('Helende Hellingen') or the Oostervaardersplassen lakes. Further abroad we can mention innovations like the management of the San Francisco Bay Delta where ecologists and hydrologists staff the control rooms together (Van Eeten and Roe, 2001), the 'ecological city' of Curitiba in Brazil or the public-private partnerships in German developing-aid projects. It is not just about isolated instances of innovation brought about by a few people, but about changes in the way of looking, thinking and acting, with sweeping consequences for the arrangement of organizations, markets, technology, social relations and concepts (Whitley, 2000; in 't Veld, 2005). This puts societal innovation among the second and third order changes (3).

Interaction between societal innovation and public leadership

I am concentrating mainly on analyzing the dynamics behind these processes of change of societal innovation. I am particularly interested in what the government actors contribute to this, from my position in the field of study into public administration. Of course many interventions by government actors have little or even a negative effect on innovation, just as processes of innovation are completed in all kinds of situations without any government involvement. But that is just one side of the picture, and as I will explain later, it is also a way of looking at things. The other side is that citizens and businesses expect a lot from government actors and that public servants and administrators are very ambitious (cf. Selnes & Aalders, 2005). So the question is not whether government actors have to contribute to societal innovation, but more how they do that and are able to do it. My basic assumption here is that social processes of change do not stop at the boundaries of government

organizations and that they always lead to change in public leadership itself. Societal innovation and public leadership can therefore only be considered in mutual interaction.

2.   Changes that produce innovation

For the rest of my argument I would like to work out the example of Greeport Venlo in more detail (4). For many years the Venlo region had the reputation of being the 'Wageningen of the South'. There were a lot of agrotechnical companies and all kinds of activities were happening in the field of research, education and innovation. However, at a certain point a few people from the business community warned that things were not going as well. Knowledge moved away, economic investments dropped and the quality of living conditions deteriorated. The people got together, contacted regional politicians and called the Foundation for Regional Dialogue (Stichting Regiodialoog) into life, a kind of thinktank in which all kinds of people who were concerned about the future of the region got together (Mansfeld *et al*, 2003). They set themselves an ambitious task: combine intellectual, political and financial powers and integrate regional and sector developments, find the added value in town-country coalitions, work across borders and towards the future. The result was an intensive process with all the fuss and bother inherent to something like that. For instance, there was a mayor who put forward the idea of a regional event; initially he was ridiculed, but he persisted. The successful nomination for the 2012 Floriade turned this into one of the first visible successes.

Now we are five years further. Most of the voted administrators have changed places and the region has been designated in the Spatial Policy Memorandum as one of the Greenports. On the principle of the 'new connection', collaboration has evolved between the following 5 areas (referred to in Dutch as the '5 O's' as they all start with the letter O): research, entrepreneurs, education, government and environment. Parties broach new means and new forms of entrepreneurship in varying alliances, based around initiatives like the New Mixed Business (Nieuw Gemengd Bedrijf), the Innova tower, cross-border green or the innovation centre for healthy food. The point where the freeways A67 and A73 intersect has been seized as the location for developing the physical heart. At this place, with a name designed to attract –Four-leaf Clover (Klavertje-4) – links are created between glasshouse farming, innovative businesses, transport and ecology. The regional cooperation is also extending to German regions, Brainport Eindhoven and even to parallel initiatives in China where the concept of the new mixed business has been embraced and will possibly be realized faster than in Venlo. Of course it is a process of searching, of trial and error. For instance, it remains difficult to get more entrepreneurs involved and to keep them involved. That links between businesses are fragile was demonstrated when an entrepreneur had to pull out for personal reasons, causing a project to stagnate. The continuous question of organizing and steering this process also plays a part.

Quest for the other
What this example shows succinctly and what is also obvious in other processes of change in the fields of work in Wageningen, is the quest for something different. It is about issues for which there are no ready solutions in the existing frameworks. More of the same doesn't work any more, not even when it is done more cleverly. Concerned actors search deliberately for new social meanings by doing different

things differently with different actors. But all that difference is also troublesome at the same time, and continually takes the actors by surprise. Although the philosophical concept of the Other is unlimited in principle, I want to concretize that other a little more at this moment (5). I will discuss, in order, other values, other complexities, other relationships, other things that seem obvious and other steering philosophies.

Other values. What we are discussing are problems that affect diverse value systems (6). Thus the late Jaap Frouws (1998) reduced conflicts concerning the country to differences between agro-rural, utilitarian and/or hedonistic value systems and Elsbeth Stassen (2006) emphasized at this point that it does matter quite a lot whether people approach the problem of large grazing animals in nature reserves from the values of usefulness (agro-production), naturalness or lovableness (the pet).

Other complexities. Gone are the days when change tasks could be denoted simply in terms of either technical-scientific complexity or social complexity. New complexities arise from the conviction that problems can only be understood and handled effectively if technical, ecological, organizational, administrative, economic and other complexities are included in mutual connection and interaction.

Other relationships. What does a farmer have to do with a health care provider and what is an innovator from Philips doing at a meeting of the Agro food sector? Players with divergent interests find themselves in each others' company, players who would previously have been amazed about this. Relationships are organized around areas, chains and projects and result in new ideas, new connections between interests and new forms of entrepreneurship.

Other things that seem obvious. For a long time, familiar institutional arrangements took care of the links and the management of the plurality in values and interests and of routines in the mutual interactions. Well-known arrangements are the triptych of research, information and education; the development of policy in the iron triangle of ministry, members of parliament and interest organizations or the relationships, driven by offers, between the parties in the chain. These arrangements were important to the agricultural successes in the last century, but have since been abolished or run dry due to the influence of social criticism. Now that many of these previously so self-evident arrangements have disappeared, people are looking for new networks with new forms of conduct, rules, standards and positions. Some of these alliances develop into institutional arrangements, while others remain more fluid.

Other steering philosophies Ideas about steering are also changing. To approach persistent societal problems in a meaningful way, a growing number of scientific studies have paid attention to concepts such as governance (Rhodes, 1997; Pierre, 200), network management (Kickert *et al* 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn 2004) or deliberative policy making (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003; Fischer 2003). They form a reaction to the restrictions of a hierarchical method of steering that is founded on an instrumental reasoning, the gap experienced between the state and the civil society and the changing interdependencies in a network society (Van Gunsteren 1976; Castells 1996). These concepts are not limited to theoretical exercises. Public servants and politicians also talk more and more often about horizontal steering, interactive policy, chain direction, working from the outside to the inside or other ways of

dealing with the surroundings. In policy practice they give shape to these new concepts of steering while simultaneously still being active within the rules and values of the institutions based on hierarchy and modernity, institutions that reach right into the smallest capillaries of the government system (cf. Grin *et al*, 2004). Societal actors are regularly surprised to see whether they will come across the government in the capacity of controller, negotiator or facilitator.

How government actors deal with variety
As a result of that quest for and simultaneous confrontation with the other, the question of managing variety is coming to the fore. For government organizations that is a recalcitrant issue. In the current practice of steering and change, we can distinguish roughly two extremes, or two pitfalls if you like.

The first extreme concerns the desire to reduce variety by wanting to check and control it. Weber already spoke of the Chinese rigidity, and many of our instruments for steering and change still aim at suppressing variety and freezing anything that moves (Weber, 1968: 184; Schumpeter, 1942: 207; Frissen, 2003; Van Dinten, 1999; Van de Ploeg, 1999; Kensen, 1999). Uncertainty and crisis intensify the political pressure to come up with one picture and to set it fast. One concept for greenports is then provided, one picture of sustainable agriculture, one manual for nature conservation by farmers or one quality system for food safety. The paradoxical thing about control is that it appears to be manageable. In practice it often turns out to be a time bomb. Development becomes blocked if a limitation is set from outside, while there is a lot of variety. Maintaining the stable situation costs a lot of energy. People make frenetic efforts to preserve the existing situation while they actually know that it is not possible. One example of this is refusing custom-designed work in legislation because that would result in the entire carefully constructed house of cards of policy collapsing (Termeer and Kessener, 2006). It appears to be difficult for government organizations not to want to control variety. For example, different from the business community, with the government the emphasis on responsibility has not led to more elbow room, not resulted in more air and space for innovation, but precisely in more rigidity (Van Gunsteren, 2006: 175).

The second extreme is collecting (or bringing together) the differences with the express aim of coming to a consensus. It produces the caricature of talking as long as it takes to reach a compromise that everyone can live with but nobody is really happy with. No-one seems to be able to judge any more that the result actually looks like a lot of 'negotiated nonsense' or simply non-sense (De Bruin et al, 2002; Grin, 2004). Then there is the risk that new variety is grimly kept out for fear of having to break open the beautifully engineered compromise. It is a situation that has been given the apt description of escalated harmony (van Dongen *et al*, 1996: 218). From the more political-philosophical corner it is Van Gunsteren who declares that the biggest danger to democracy is not the endless disagreement but the suffocating consensus (2006).

The alternative is to organize in a way that cherishes difference and variety and uses them to come to innovation. In that situation, innovating is oriented towards investigating multiple realities, negotiating values and linking differences (in 't Veld, 2005; Stewart, 2006; Dougherty, 1996; Wierdsma, 2004). Gergen has called the society that focuses on this method of organizing a second order civility; it is a society in which a vital democracy is based on vital differences (Gergen, 2001).

Central questions
I would like to investigate this alternative in more detail, theoretically and empirically. My earlier question about understanding processes of change concentrated on the role of differences. How can variety be used for vital processes of societal innovation and what does that mean for public leadership? I don't use public leadership here in the sense of the formal bearers of responsibility but more in terms of the unofficial view of leadership (cf. Teisman, 2005). It is about those people in the public domain who actively face up to differences by seeing opportunities, arranging connections and reinterpreting their own routines. They have been described as autonomous leaders who contrast with the 'vote buyers' through their impassioned commitment to making a difference (Wallis & Dollery, 1997) and who stick their necks out in defiance of the institutional context (Vigoda-Gadot *et al*, 2005). They also resemble what the literature calls entrepreneurial leadership (Andersson & Mol, 2002); reformist leadership (Goldfinch & 't Hart, 2003); institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988) or policy entrepreneurs (Kingdom, 1984). In principle, everyone in public administration can develop these forms of leadership.

The remainder of this speech is structured as follows. Firstly I will examine a more detailed conceptualization of processes of change from a theoretical concept that focuses on variation. Then I will present a framework for analyzing public leadership. I sketch an optimistic story in the first part, with a lot of attention for learning while developing in networks, looking properly, experimenting, etc. In the second part I throw light on the darker sides of changing in our post-modern network society, the situations in which people have stopped learning, groups and values are excluded, processes stagnate and energy is devoted mainly to resistance and opportunistic behaviour. These situations require different forms of public leadership. I finish with a few conclusions for an agenda of research.

3. Theoretical perspective

Organizational psychologist Karl Weick's work offers interesting starting points (Weick 1979; 1995; 2000) in a world of multiple realities. He describes living together as making difference (cf. also De Ruiter, 1996). The starting point for organizing is the moment when people experience ambiguity. It is the situations in which differences are an issue that can no longer be understood with the existing routines and schedules. It was the moment in the Venlo region when entrepreneurs saw that things were not going as well but couldn't cope with that yet. They sought contact with administrators who, just like them, did not want to leave it at that. In hindsight, it was then that they started the process of organizing Greenport Venlo.

Weick's ideas about organizing are an important source of inspiration for the school of social-cognitive approaches in change management (7). In these schools of thought, phenomena are considered to be social constructions that are the result of an active process of sense making, in which people make their world logical and meaningful while talking and acting (for example, Gergen, 1999; Hosking, 2002; Chia, 1996; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Erlandson, 1993). Instead of hardened worlds and realities, dynamics and plurality take the foreground. The ambition to say something about the contribution of public leaders to social processes of change needs a refined understanding of these dynamics. To this aim, I have further developed the configuration approach I have used previously (van Twist & Termeer, 1991; Termeer,

1993). This approach has three dimensions for analysis: the micro dimension of sense making by actors, the meso dimension of creating patterns in configurations and the time dimension of continuous change.

Micro dimension: sense making by actors
To do justice to the richness of the concept of sense making (8) I will describe it here on the basis of five qualities:

Sense making as the construction of definitions of reality emphasizes the active character of sense making (Van Dongen, 1996; Termeer, 1993). A social issue is not something waiting to be discovered. People direct their attention to particular phenomena, start to act, create experience through that acting, make sense of it, etc. (Weick, 1979). In this way they construct a definition of reality that is true for them at that moment, and forms the basis of the way they act. Through their acting, they create more new perceptions. This process of the construction of reality does not happen in a detached way, but is rooted in previous experiences stored in rules of construction, also indicated by terms such as frames of reference or causal maps. We can agree about many definitions of reality. You could say that facts in the past are constructed and shared definitions of reality.

Sense making as sense-giving accentuates the profundity of the concept (Weick, 1995; in 't Veld, 1997: 76). Sense is different to words like perception or interpretation. An interpretation can be seen as a product that can be replaced easily by another interpretation (9). Sense is not something that you can eliminate just like that or replace by another sense. Sense-giving affects the formation of identity. Treating a definition of reality as just a perception alongside the real reality can thus be considered a form of exclusion and disregard of identity (cf. Van Dinten, 2002).

Sense making as creating stories emphasizes the retrospective character (Weick, 1995). People often assume a sequential causal relationship between thinking and doing. Studies by Argyris among others describe the often significant discrepancies between what people say they do (theory in use) and what they actually do (theory in practice) (Argyris, 1990). Weick goes a step further. His starting principle is that opinions follow behaviour. If you ask people the reasons for their behaviour, they will develop a reasoning at that moment. In that case, sense making is retrospective. People make sense afterwards of experiences and actions. Narratives have an important part in this: "By constructing stories, actors make sense, to themselves and others, of their actions" (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003: 156).

Sense making as a circular process emphasizes the continuing systemic character and the feedback mechanisms. The double interact is the minimum unit of analysis (Weick, 1979). Expressed in words, this means that person A can only understand what he is doing by experiencing how person B reacts to what he is doing. Because people are involved in more than one interaction, you also get a succession of double interacts. The consequences of one's own actions often only come via intermediate links back to one's own acting. There was for example once a government actor who was disappointed in the passive role of social partners, but in a discussion he discovered that this was a reaction to his own zeal to create wonderful plans.

Sense making as a social learning process emphasizes the social character (cf. Leeuwis, 2003). People do not live in a social vacuum but are continually in contact with other people, varying from dialogue to battle and power play. In interaction with each other they 'negotiate' the meaning they give to their surroundings: what is happening, what do we think of it, what don't we know yet, what does that mean for our actions, which outcomes do we expect, etc. (Termeer, 1993). Besides content, they also develop rules about how they treat each other and their environment: who belongs and who doesn't, who do we assign power to, and what is allowed and not allowed in our relationship (cf. Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

Meso dimension: pattern formation of configurations
Patterns come about in the social process of sense making, patterns that in turn influence the subsequent processes. I use the concept of configurations to describe these patterns. Configurations are social relationships between people who together determine the meaning of what they do. They can be characterized as a connection between a social structure consisting of stable patterns of interaction ("who") and agreed-upon rules of interaction ("how") and a cognitive structure that consists of shared meanings ("what"). Configurations usually don't coincide with existing arrangements like organizations, departments or regions.

Configurations come into being because when interacting with each other people develop shared meanings and because people especially take to people who give the same meanings as they do (Van Dongen, 1996). Value judgments, rules of construction and routines are nested and formed in configurations and then have a structuring effect on subsequent interactions, without determining them (cf. also Giddens, 1994) (10). Social and cognitive structures strengthen each other in the process of configuration formation, spinning around each like a kind of double helix. Take the example of Greenport Venlo. Nourished by a communal concern and the idea that one day they might need each other's means to arrive at solutions, people from the business community, the province, municipal councils and knowledge institutions started a dialogue. They spoke with each other frequently, and developed routines in their contact. And thus a social structure was formed. A cognitive structure issued from it in the shape of communal dreams for the region and concrete initiatives. This cognitive structure then further strengthened the relationships between the initiators, and through that the social structure, etc. (11). That is how a configuration arose that can be given the label 'founding fathers'.

It is always possible to identify more than one configuration concerning areas, chains or societal issues. There is also a variety of configurations around Greenport Venlo. Different meanings about sustainable agriculture, about a livable region or about a flourishing agro food chain dominate in these configurations. They in turn are

linked to different networks of relationships whose rules of conduct vary from sharing knowledge to power politics or commercial contracts.

Most people recognize themselves in the meanings of more than one configuration and interact in more than one configuration. In those different contexts they will also use different realities and rules of conduct. People can find this phenomenon of plural involvement or multiple inclusion difficult because they experience it as inconsistent behaviour. With an eye to opening up variation and innovation it can also offer many opportunities. It is precisely the 'founding fathers'' involvement in different other configurations that makes them able to make connections, generate innovations and themselves continue to change at the same time. If this were not the case, the configuration of 'founding fathers' would risk turning into an introverted group that would gradually ease away from existing configurations and eventually either peter out or degenerate into a grim voice crying in the wilderness.

Time dimension: changing continuously
Configurations are temporary: they come into being, develop, and disintegrate again at a certain point. Change comes to the fore when people try to make sense of situations that are somewhat confusing or surprising for them. Confrontations with different realities, different people or different forms of interaction can be the reason for new meanings and new options for behaviour. Meeting and being surprised by variety is the engine behind change (Termeer, 1993; Van Dongen, 1960). The fuel for this can consist of differences of opinion, a surprise, a harsh survey result, a beautiful design, strange people, unexpected actions, crisis, an unusual meeting, a tremendous conflict or a huge disappointment.

I will now focus on continuous change with this perspective on innovation. Much of the literature makes a distinction between continuous change and change that occurs intermittently (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Continuous changes are often small and are described with terms like 'muddling through', incremental or evolutionary. Descriptions of intermittent or episodic change go hand in hand with terms like dramatic, structural or revolutionary and are often considered to be a reaction to an external development. Seen from a distance, you often get the picture of an alternation between periods of stability and episodic change, while a closer look produces a picture of continuous change.

One description of continuous change is that of a continual process of adapting to and experimenting with daily events, exceptions, chances and unforeseen developments. Short feedback loops promote a continual update of social practices. In this way, people produce changes at a local micro level while improvising. Change is emergent here, which means that new patterns of organizing come into being without a priori intentions. The fact that the changes appear on a micro level does not make them trivial. Each change creates the conditions for further breakthroughs and innovations. Small adaptive changes can accumulate and ultimately generate large institutional change (cf. Rotmans, 2005; Teisman, 2005; Nooteboom, 2006).

4. Public leadership as participation

This theoretical framework sketches a picture of a varied multiple world, of actors who make sense of it in interaction with each other, of value judgments and routines that nest and form in configurations and of innovating as a continuous process of

experimenting with daily events and confrontations with variations of meanings, actors and rules from other configurations.

This way of looking at things offers no place for a government that considers itself to be the central actor that has to get the social process of innovation going, that knows what kind of behaviour is required for that from citizens and businesses and that believes it can control that behaviour using clever instruments from outside. What is more suitable is a form of public leadership that fits in with this varied process of sense making and continuous change. This will shift the attention of government partners from central steering to participating in networks, chains and activities. Participating is not aimed at increasing the likelihood of decisions being accepted, nor is it aimed at improving the chance of consensus. It is therefore not about social parties participating in the decision-making process of the government, but about government actors participating in the processes of societal innovation. This makes participating a way of enabling the continuous adaptation and innovation in an ambiguous world and of being involved in that process (Hosking, 2002: 15).

Strategies
This perspective generates a diversification of strategies for public leadership. These strategies are all necessary, given the variety of social developments (12). I will mention them briefly:

Keying. The strategy of keying has to do with rearranging existing routines as an answer to new problems (Baez & Abolafia, 2002). This strategy displays itself when public and/or private actors develop experiments that threaten to become bogged in existing policy. For instance, more than one hundred rules applied to just the New Mixed Firms project in Greenport Venlo, making short-term realization difficult. What you need in that situation is not public servants who explain once again why a certain initiative really is not possible, but public servants who search creatively for possibilities within the existing frameworks. Special treatment was promised for Venlo in the form of a 'special status'. In more theoretical terms, the public servants' task is to find out whether it is possible to get to a rearrangement of existing routines so that new problems can be tackled.

Improvising. The strategy of improvising is much more active (Baez & Abolafia, 2002). These public leaders approach social experiments by taking initiatives and risks and seeing and using opportunities. In Greenport Venlo they can be found, among other places, in the configuration of the 'founding fathers'. They search out the zone of discomfort, go and look for new relationships, new language, new meanings and new alliances. It is not so much about speaking the language of innovation as about following its course by stepping into it, acting, reflecting upon the outcomes, experimenting again, etc. They focus on new concepts before they have really fathomed what it implies. They solve uncertainty by discovering the meanings of the concept in acting with social actors. For themselves and their social partners they create a situation of minimal structures and maximum flexibility (Barrett, 1998: 611).

Certifying The strategy of certifying is about seeing what is happening with social processes of innovation and telling the world how important this is (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Hosking, 2002). It is a strategy that Minister Veerman uses regularly. In his speech for Greenport Venlo he actually declares that showering compliments on the energy of others is one of his favourite occupations (13). But he does more. At the

same time he makes a link with a number of the spearheads of his policy, such as sustainability, innovation and the steering philosophy: 'from 'looking after to ensuring that'. Certifying is not only recognizing and naming new meanings in experiments and local adaptations, but also framing and reframing them (cf. van Aarts & van Woerkum, 2006; Termeer, 1993). Of course, this strategy also bears the risk of hardening, solidifying. Time will tell whether the designation of Greenport Venlo in the Spatial Policy Memorandum has stimulated or slowed down innovation.

Connecting. This strategy is about organizing meetings with variety, or in negative terms, about preventing exclusion (Termeer, 2001). Social learning processes can be stimulated by bringing people from different configurations in contact with each other. Attending conferences, inviting interesting speakers, organizing debates or temporarily exchanging employees are well known forms. This can happen quite voluntarily from the idea that each confrontation with a third party can be a reason for reflection. More refined methods are also possible from a good perception of configurations, and it is possible to be attentive to exclusion. Because public leaders are often involved in other configurations than social actors, this gives them the possibility of organizing new connections. For instance, a government actor can therefore organize connections between initiatives at a regional level and developments on a national or global level.

Integrating. Strategies like keying, improvising, certifying and connecting will all introduce changes to existing routines. You then need people who pay attention to the translation, repetition and sometimes also upsizing of these changes (Baez & Abolafia, 2002). The strategy of integrating is about connecting the new stories about innovation to the customary stories and identity of the standing organizations. The taskforce for Greenport legislation can of course be given a totally separate status, but it is a missed opportunity if learning experiences are not used for other dossiers. Sometimes it is also necessary to restore harmony and stability to prevent innovations from losing their connection with standing configurations and then fading away. For the progress of innovations it can therefore actually be necessary to legitimize them by connecting them with the activities of the standing organization, and replacing the language of co-innovating for that aim temporarily with the familiar language of programs and year plans.

Basic conditions for using means
Participating cannot be free of obligation. After all, people's interactions are often organized around means (Weick, 1997). The government will want to and have to use its own means in order to participate. The question is how to do that in a way that creates space for change instead of restricting it. An interesting hypothesis was formulated in the scope of a large international project investigating the driving forces behind vitalizing processes of change (Beer & Nohria, 2000). The hypothesis is that it doesn't matter which programs or instruments managers use as long as they contribute to the basic conditions for sense making that are crucial to learning, adapting and changing in a turbulent world. These basic conditions are (Weick, 2000):
1. Animating people and getting them moving and generating experiments that reveal 'unknown' opportunities;
2. Providing a global direction for evaluating these experiments;

3. Encouraging a process of adaptation to local situations (updates) through close attention to what is really happening, with attention to the situational context as well as the meaningful details;
4. Facilitating frank interactions in which trust, reliability and self-respect can develop and through this offer people the opportunity to form a picture of what is happening.

In the elaboration of their work, the researchers came to the conclusion that most programs do pay a lot of attention to one or two of these conditions but almost never to all four of them. That means that people meet an ambiguous world without having the means themselves to manage ambiguity, without options for actions to test their intuition, without a general direction that allows local adaptations, without attention to details and consequences and without lively dialogue that enables them to build up a shared picture of what is happening. This results in stressful situations with the effect that people fall back into old routines that were meant to change with the programs.

Translated into public leadership it means that government actors can in principle apply all their policy instruments, relations or knowledge if these things meet these basic conditions. I am going to examine this hypothesis more closely for its applicability in the public domain. It throws up interesting questions. For instance, take the subsidy from the Ministry of Economic Affairs for biogas plants. Given the violent reactions to the threatened discontinuation of this subsidy, I can deduce that it had essential meaning in some configurations to make investments cost-effective. The abolition of this subsidy by Minister Wijn, who argued that European objectives had been attained, could not count on much understanding and contributed little to respectful interactions. People were less regretful in some configurations around Greenport Venlo. Processes were underway there whereby businesses were inventing strategies together for the sustainable use and reuse of raw materials and residual materials. With these projects a central subsidy could perhaps result in less experimentation and less attention to local details.

5. Public leadership as intervening

The dark side (14)
The above strategies for participation are only meaningful if there is the willingness and the opportunity to develop and to learn. This is not the case in many situations. At many places a process occurs in which people are only looking for confirmation of the existing and are not allowing any variety. In that case people, organizations and networks are no longer capable of adapting their deepest structures to new developments. Variety is excluded, learning processes stagnate and fixations come into being.

From the theoretical framework discussed earlier it is possible to understand this not-changing. A variety of meanings is difficult for many people because they actually assume that people perceive the same phenomena and give the same meanings as they themselves. The fact that diversity of meanings is also subject to dynamics complicates it even more. Moreover, the organizing process of social-cognitive configurations carries the risk of stagnation in itself. Whenever people talk mainly with people who use similar meanings and only assign meanings in those interactions, they can become increasing closed towards third parties as a result. The

internal homogeneity of configurations increases and the external borders harden (15). Other values, meanings, relationships or rules are excluded.

Of course, stabilizing moments are also important (Chia, 1996). Temporarily fixing meanings and interaction rules is even a condition of communal action. People will regularly lock meanings, for instance to swing into action. They construct facts, with each other as it were. In that case stability is a temporarily workable agreement that people agree upon together at that moment in that local situation (see Wierdsma, 2004).

However, when meanings, relationships and rules become so self-evident that it is no longer possible to reflect on them, we talk about fixations. It is a situation in which there is no willingness or possibility to develop and learn. People no longer allow variety and they seek confirmation of the existing, safe contacts without any risk and without any development. Symptoms of fixations are the presence of taboos, repetition of moves, vicious circles, exasperating delays or escalated conflicts. Variety is excluded: "This is how it is", or "That's how we do it and that's final" or "All they want is power".

In anticipation of the perspective of intervention, we can distinguish between social and cognitive fixations. With social fixations it is no longer possible to reflect on the people participating and their mutual rules of conduct. They are safe contacts without any risk and without any development, an addiction to the repetition of moves. People end up in a fixed pattern that they are often not aware of themselves. With cognitive fixations, the contents are fixed and there are no longer any openings for other content.

Counterintuitive intervention
If there are fixations, then specific intervention is the effective strategy. This does not occur from a condemnation of fixations. After all, fixations often arise because they had been an effective reaction to ambiguity for people in a more or less recent past (Miller, 1994). Over the past ten years the world of agriculture has for instance had plenty of confrontation with inertia as an unintentional side effect of previously successful behaviour. However, once fixations form an obstruction to further developments and innovations, interventions become necessary. The aim of these interventions is removing blockades and revitalizing learning processes in doing so. Interventions do not therefore aim at replacing the one stable situation by another, but at restoring disrupted adaptive processes and restarting processes of continuous change (Termeer & Kessener, 2006).

It is difficult to break through fixations (Van Eeten, 1994; Schon & Rein, 1994). Explanations for this difficulty range from the defensive routines of people (Argyris, 1990) to the recalcitrance of institutions (Selznick, 1957). If fixations arise, people are no longer able to reflect and to change their behaviour within the existing context. Learning processes have stagnated. Keeping at it even harder no longer helps. For example, in the case of an interaction pattern that has become stuck, organizing new workshops that have been designed even better won't help, because people will reproduce their fixated patterns of interaction in every setting. A cognitive fixation like a taboo cannot be broken by questioning the taboo itself, as that is precisely what is not allowed. The cognitive side allows no variety.

The social cognitive approaches argue that it is possible to organize the confrontation on the side of the interaction that still allows variety. Because social and cognitive form two sides of the same medal, and because they are connected to each other, unblocking the one aspect will influence the other. And thus by involving a

third party new ideas will possibly trickle through naturally, even if those ideas came up against a lot of resistance previously. Introducing new content can result in parties talking again with each other, parties who previously did not want to communicate with each other. This is the principle of context variation (Voogt, 1991). With cognitive fixation the intervention is aimed at new actors or new game rules, and with social fixations introducing new contents is an adequate strategy (Termeer and Koppenjan, 1997). Context variation is somewhat counterintuitive because many strategies of steering are directed at the thing that is stuck. For instance, if people are evading or disregarding certain rules, the first inclination is to make those rules stricter. However, rather than break it, this reinforces the vicious circle of rules in reaction to clever behaviour.

Who can break through fixations?
Once fixations occur, public leaders can only contribute to processes of societal innovation through specific interventions. Their strategy shifts temporarily from participating to intervening. But this can be problematic if public leaders themselves are part of stagnated patterns. Just as processes of change do not stop at the boundaries of government organizations, neither do fixations. As actors become more intensively involved in processes, it becomes increasingly difficult to see fixations. This involves the mechanism of the 'fallacy of centrality' that declares that centrality is blinding (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, if public leaders themselves play a part in producing and maintaining the fixations, it is theoretically almost impossible to intervene effectively. Only Baron von Münchaussen was able to pull himself out of the quagmire by his own hair. In a favourable case, public leaders recognize these fixated patterns and invite an outsider to take up the role of 'change agent'. The black side arises if public leaders do not recognize fixations and themselves become entangled in vicious circles and self-repeating problems.

6. Finally: about heroes and passionate humility

I have just outlined a picture of public leaders who participate in processes of societal innovation, use a variety of strategies to this aim, put their own means into action, aimed at vitalizing processes of change and if there are stagnations, recognize them and organize interventions. From the perspective of this vision of public leadership it will often be about relatively small changes, or 'small wins' (Weick & Westley, 1996). They might end up generating radical innovations in the long run, but that requires time and patience. After all, people have to have the possibility of experimenting, of seeing how things work out and sharing these experiences. The challenge for public leaders is perceiving these emergent changes, acting in them and being sensitive to the effects that their own actions bring about. It is about leaders who don't only react to what they had thought would happen, but above all also to what unfolds in processes. The emphasis shifts from 'walk the talk' to 'talk the walk'(16).

Public leaders who have an eye for small wins and make use of the agreed strategies for participation and intervention won't become famous very fast for their big heroic acts. That makes this image of leadership contrast with the high degree of impatience to score quickly that surrounds many public leaders. These 'more impatient' leaders often tend to observe stagnations much earlier and use them as a reason for central steering. Their inclination to take the quick option and interfere

centrally means they run a great risk of discarding the most creative innovators, the best innovations and the most adaptive processes (Weick, 2000: 238).

If, despite the pressure to score, public leaders are still able to pay attention to emergent changes and their effects, they can be much more selective in their new policy and new legislation. The challenge for public leaders is to make sense of the small changes in the spirit of what Yanow has so beautifully described as passionate humility (Yanow, 2003: 246).

7. Agenda for research

In this speech I have examined the interaction between public leadership and societal innovation from a theoretical perspective in which difference is central. In doing this I have placed myself on the common ground between change management and public administration and the common ground between analyzing and intervening. Many questions still have to be answered and will be the subject of more detailed empirical and theoretical research. This will involve themes like the interaction between continuous change and episodic change, the more detailed empirical and normative conceptualization of strategies of public leadership, the analysis of patterns of stagnations in the Wageningen domains and their institutional embedding, the further development of intervention tools and the connection between the configuration approach and the discursive institutional analysis (Arts, 2006). I have decided deliberately not to limit myself to one of the work terrains in Wageningen, because innovations usually manifest themselves in border areas where new links emerge between people, activities and meanings.

Issues of difference cannot be captured with a simple methodology. As far as method is concerned I support a large degree of diversity. I regard this variety through two dimensions. The first one concerns alternating between looking at the larger picture and the smaller one. When looking at the large picture, what is important is that you gain an impression of patterns and dynamics on a system level. What meanings are used and by which groups and how did this develop over time? What and who are excluded and what are the reasons for that? Where are the taboos and fixations and where are the dynamics? Because you cannot know these processes in detail, the aggregation level of configurations is an effective pretext. Analysis at this level offers an overview. It is based on a lot of data that is analyzed both with qualitative and quantitative methods (Termeer, 2004; Breeman, 2006; Werkman, 2006). And then you look at the finer details. It is like using a magnifying glass. When you look at the finer details, you zoom in on the developments of particular actions, accelerations or stagnating patterns. It is about precise observations and detailed stories.

The second dimension concerns the relationship between researchers and the people being researched. In my view there is always a subject-subject relationship. People without knowledge do not exist. In continuous interactions people make sense of their actions and use that to develop knowledge. Processes of change and fixations do not end at the organizational boundaries of the university. As an academic I have different ambitions here. The first aims at being able to better understand and analyze processes, the descriptive side of the study of public administration. A certain degree of distance to actors in the social field is possible and desirable. In addition, it is my ambition to be involved in processes of societal innovation, the prescriptive side of the study of public administration. Best suited to these ambitions are forms of

reflective action research, aimed at creating new meanings through an interactive process in which actors act, reflect on their actions and pay attention to the way they are learning (Boonstra, 2004; Eden and Huxham, 1996). Researching and intervening go hand in hand. It is then up to the scholars to connect the insights to actual theoretical developments and make them accessible to a wider professional and academic public.

Seen from the perspective outlined above, the emphasis shifts from research into formal policy and what public leaders say they are going to do to the practice of public leadership and societal innovation. That means that research starts with social processes of change. I want to emphasize this angle, because a review of more than 800 articles about governance showed that most research into governance starts with government decisions and this gives it a top-down character (Hill & Lynn, 2004). Because a lot of research in Wageningen starts naturally as it were with the analysis of social processes of change, there is an interesting niche here for the Wageningen governance research.

Notes

1. For an overview, see also the speech by Bas Arts (2006) in which he gives an overview of dominant perspectives in public administration, being the rational perspective, the network perspective, the institutional perspective and the social-constructionist perspective.

2. For an elaboration of transitions and system innovations, see the work of the Kennisnetwerk Systeem Innovaties [Knowledge Network for System Innovations], Transforum and the Innovatienetwerk Groene Ruimte en Agrocluster [Green Space and Agro-cluster Innovation Network] (see for example Rotmans, 2004; Elzen *et al*, 2004; Grin, 2004; Termeer, 2004).

3. Three levels of changing have been identified (Boonstra, 2004). Most changes can be seen as improvements, or first order changes. They are changes within the existing context. Transitions, or second order changes, are directed to a new desired future that can only be achieved by changing important aspects of the dominant technical, political and cultural systems. It is necessary to critically examine the assumptions that are the foundation of these institutionally embedded systems to achieve the desired future. With transformation, or third order change, what is at stake is the emergence of a totally new situation from the remains of the old one. In contrast to transitions, with transformations the new situation is unknown until it gains shape (Ackerman, 1986). Transformations affect the deepest level of change, they are multidimensional, multilevel and are linked to paradigmatic turns (Levy & Merry, 1986).

4. The magazine Binnenlands Bestuur [National Administration] (2-12-2005), referred to as the Agro Avant-garde, with the subtitle how a problem child became a showpiece. Part of the information for this example is borrowed from this article.

5. In a more philosophical sense, the concept of the Other (written by Levinas with a capital letter) means the ethical principle that there is no space for a simple reality but that it is always multiple. Interactions must offer space for the Other to be introduced, interactions that cannot be known concretely and are in principle always infinite.

6. Various colleagues in Wageningen have worked out these conflicting values further in their research (Goverde, 2000; v/d Ploeg, 1998; Frouws, 1998; Stassen, 2006).

7. There are various approaches to change with intervention perspectives linked to them. They are rooted in divergent paradigms that vary in the extent to which reality can be known and created objectively, the extent to which the behaviour of people is conditioned by external conditions and thus predictable, the extent to which change is regarded as the result of structural conflicts and crises or a more continuous adaptive process and the standards that can be used to legitimize and judge change. This has been described in detail in other places (for example, Boonstra, 2004).

8. The word sense-making has a great force of attraction. Both scholars and practitioners are keen to use the word sense-making. In his book Sensemaking from 1995, Weick speaks of 'an informal, poetic flavor'. Hosking too noted 'an increasingly 'blurring' popularity … in an emphasis on sensemaking' (261) in 2004. Both of them have comments to make about this. 'Although the word sensemaking has an informal and poetic flavor, that should not mask that it is literally just what it says it is' (Weick, 1995: 16). Hosking describes the discourse about 'sensemaking' as important variety but at the same time also as more of the same because 'mainstream discourse of entities and relationships can be said to remain largely unchanged' (Hosking, 2004: 261).

9. More and more approaches to steering and change take the presence of different perceptions of reality as their starting point. This wording suggests that there is a distinction between reality and the different perceptions that people have of it. This discrepancy is expressed in phrases such as with a veiled look, one-sided observation, being prejudiced, having a distorted view, being subjective, stubborn conceptualization.

10. The development of configurations affects the process of institutionalization here. People tend to regard the meanings, rules and relationships of configurations they are included highly in as facts that they have to adapt to. What they once recognized as a socially constructed result of negotiations takes on the shape of an externally determined regulation with accompanying roles and routines. 'It is this institutionalising of social construction into the way things are done, and the transmission of these products, that links the ideas about sensemaking with those of institutional theory' (Weick 1995: 36).

11. Maarten Königs designates this phenomenon with the lovely phrase: group makes plan and plan makes group.

12. When we follow Asby's rule of 'requisite variety', it means that government actors' thinking and acting must be varied enough to be in proportion to the variation and dynamics in social events. After all, only a system that is varied in itself is able to react to a varied environment.

13. Discussion points for the speech of Minister Veerman when the declaration of intent for development of the area Greenport Venlo was signed on 30 January 2006.

14. Recent articles pay attention to the dark side of network management (O'Toole, 2004) or to the undermining of change (Kahn, 2004).

15. Yanow has described this process of closure clearly: 'Through a process of interaction, members of a community come to use the same or similar cognitive mechanisms, engage in the same or similar acts and use the same or similar language to talk about thought and action. Group processes reinforce these, often promoting internal cohesion as an identity marker with respect to other communities' (Yanow, 2003:237).

16. It affects what the strategy literature calls meaning management. That argues that strategic managers have to become storytellers that create context for meaning in the life of the organization by means of symbolic expression, drama, language and vision (Smirich and Stubbart quoted in ten Bos, 2000: 81).

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