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Public Leadership and processes of societal innovations

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ABSTRACT

Societal actors can come against problems that cross the traditional boundaries of sectors, organisations and routines. Processes of societal innovation are started on the way to an unknown future, creating new solutions and new corporations. In this paper I focus on the question how public leaders can contribute to these processes of societal innovations. I will present an analytical framework that consists of a further conceptualization of public leadership, suggestions for useful strategies and a set of values for justifying them. I will argue that in this framework there is no place for central steering. Public leadership is more that of giving power to changes by participating and using strategies such as keying, improvisation, reprising, certifying and coupling. However, when fixations arise, public leaders must be able to recognize them and to organize interventions that aim at unblocking stagnations and revitalizing innovation processes. I close with some concluding reflections on the identity of public leaders and their competences.

Public Leadership and processes of societal innovations

1. Introduction

Various societal innovations such as CIDA University in Johannesburg, care farms in the Netherlands, Silicon Valley or the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil have in common that they cannot be understood as the result of planned change or central governmental policy. These kinds of innovations come into being in interplay between a variety of public and private actors. Many actors are involved and bring with them a large variety of values, realities and interaction rules. Relationships are organized around areas, chains and projects and result in new ideas, new connections between interests and new forms of entrepreneurship. Both public and private actors can start processes of societal innovation. Examples can be found in all kind of policy domains like developing sustainable agriculture, restructuring city districts or revitalizing rural areas.

Political scientists describe these ways of organizing as a shift from government to governance (Edelenbos, 2005; Fischer 2003; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Kickert et al 1997; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1997). They follow Castells' analysis of the rise of a fragmented network society existing of complex and continuously changing mutual dependencies between parties. A society where hierarchical and well-institutionalized forms of government are replaced by less formalized forms of government and in which state authority makes way for collaborations between different mutual interdependent actors.

This way of looking at processes of societal innovation offers no place for public leaders who consider themselves to be the central actors who have to get the social process of innovation going, who know what kind of behaviour is required for that from citizens and businesses and who believe they can control that behaviour using clever instruments from outside. Nevertheless, citizens and businesses still expect a lot from government actors and public leaders are still very ambitious. So the question in this paper is not whether public leaders have to contribute to societal innovation, but more how they can do that: How can public leaders make sense of their ambitions to make a difference?

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.

Societal innovation 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. When these processes affect major social

tasks such as sustainable development or reducing poverty, I talk about societal innovation. 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. Social innovation and public leadership can therefore only be considered in mutual interaction.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First I examine a more detailed conceptualisation of processes of innovation from a theoretical concept that focuses on sensemaking, social-cognitive configurations and continuous change. Following this framework two situations are distinguished which require different strategies of public leadership. In the case of continuous learning the role of public leadership is that of giving power to changes by participating (section 4). In the case of stagnations, where people have stopped learning, the role of public leadership is more that of intervening (section 5). I close with some concluding reflections on the identity and competences of public leaders. Before launching into these theoretical concepts I would like to start with an example of societal innovations in a multi-sector setting.

2. Differences that produce innovation

Greenport: a case of regional development:

For the rest of my argument I would like to work out the example of Greenport Venlo in more detail (1). For many years the Venlo region had the reputation of being the 'agricultural innovation centre' of the South of the Netherlands. 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 business people got together, contacted regional politicians and called the Foundation for Regional Dialogue into life, a kind of thinktank in which 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 National Spatial Policy Plan 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, 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 links are created between glasshouse farming, innovative businesses, transport and ecology. The regional cooperation is also extending to German regions, Brainport

Eindhoven (alliance of Technical university, high-tech firms, Philips factories and local government) 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.

Dealing with variety

What this example shows succinctly and what is also obvious in other processes of societal innovation, is the quest for something different. It is about issues for which there are no ready solutions in the existing frameworks. Government, business and civil society actors come against societal problems that cut across the traditional jurisdictions and routines of organizations and cross the traditional boundaries between sectors. 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. As a result the question of dealing with variety is coming to the fore. For government organizations that is a persistent 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; Frouws, 1998; 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. 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. There seems to be no-one left who can still pass judgment about the result actually looking 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).

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 retrospective, 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 (2). 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; Van Dongen *et al* 1996). 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 distinguish 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.

Sensemaking is a rich concept with many characteristics (3). It's active, retrospective, ongoing, social and grounded in identity (Weick 1995). 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). Because people don't live in a vacuum they are continuously interacting with each other and 'negotiate' on 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. By constructing stories with others, actors make sense, to themselves and others, of their actions (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003). Besides shared meanings, in interactions they also develop shared rules about who they include, who they assign power to, how they deal with third parties and about what is allowed in their relationship. In processes of sense-making both realities and interaction-rules are constructed.

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 (4). 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”) (Twist and Termeer, 1991). Configurations arise because people not only develop shared meanings in interactions but also often lean towards people with similar meanings. It’s a causal circular process in which a group of people (a social structure) produces content (a cognitive structure) and vice versa content produces a group. 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).

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. 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 social 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.

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, 1996). 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.

In this way I conceptualise innovation as a process of continuous change. Much of the literature makes a distinction between continuous change and change that occurs intermittently (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

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. A 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. Teisman, 2005; Nooteboom, 2006).

4. Public leadership as participating

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 public leaders that consider themselves to be the central actors or for those who prefer to reduce variety by wanting to check and control it. 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 and also not on 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 social 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 for participating

This perspective generates a diversification of strategies for public leadership. These strategies are all necessary, given the variety of social developments (5). 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, because more than one hundred governmental rules need to be applied to just the New Mixed Company in Greenport Venlo, short-term realization becomes very difficult. What the Greenport alliance needs 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 juridical 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 the Dutch Minister of Agriculture 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 National Spatial Policy Plan has stimulated or slowed down innovation.

Coupling. This strategy is about organizing meetings with variety, or in negative terms, about preventing exclusion. Bringing people from different configurations in contact with each other can stimulate social learning processes. 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 couplings. 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 coupling will all introduce changes to existing routines. You then need people who pay attention to the translation, repetition and sometimes also upscaling 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.

5. Public leadership as intervening

The dark side (6)

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 increasingly closed towards third parties as a result. The internal homogeneity of configurations increases and the external borders harden (7). 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 questioning the taboo itself cannot break a taboo, 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.

Once fixations occur, public leaders can only contribute to processes of social 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 Münchhausen 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 social innovation, use a variety of strategies to this aim 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’(8).

Public leaders who have an eye for small wins and make use of the suggested 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. Moreover, when they opt for central steering or control 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).

Notes

1. Information for this example is based on my experience as an advisor of Greenport Venlo and on articles in magazines.

2. 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).

3. The word sensemaking has a great force of attraction. Both scholars and practitioners are keen to use the word sensemaking. 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).

4. The concept of configuration refers to a set of variables. The configuration concept became known in organizational science through Mintzberg (1979). In Mintzberg’s work, these variables are pre-coded. In the process approach we are talking about, configurations are always a snapshot in a dynamic process and they are deduced by researchers, sometimes in cooperation with people involved. The configuration concept indicates that the mutual relationships between the parts (people, groups, cultures) affect those parts in such a way that they end up belonging to the characteristics of those parts.

5. 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.

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

7. 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).

8. 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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