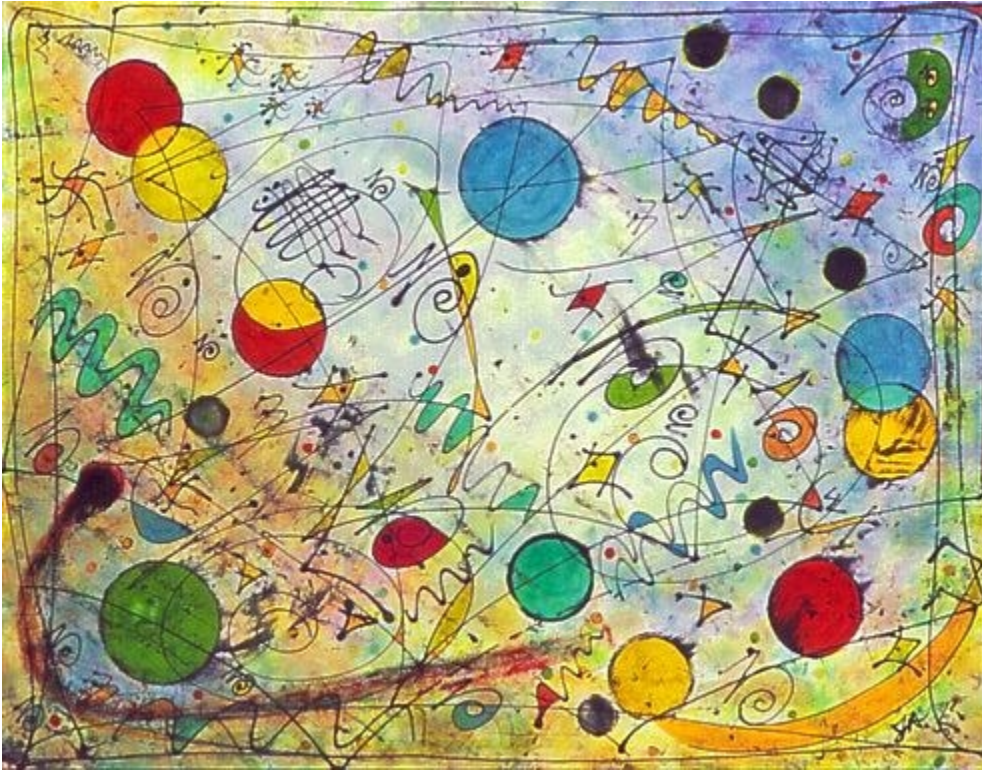# Readjusting Government:

A comparative study of Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

This final thesis marks the end of my study of Public Administration at the Erasmus University. Already during my study of Economic History I got interested in the question how governments organize themselves *vis-à-vis* societal problems, adopting strategies varying from heavy intervention to a more extreme forms of *laissez faire* non-interventionism. The convictions of how state and society should interact not only differ geographically and culturally, but also over time. For instance, during the 1960s and 1970s optimism about the abilities for social engineering was dominant in most Western countries. These hopes were severely challenged during the 1980s and 1990s and (amongst other factors) called for a readjustment of the role of governments. Two of these reform operations are the subject of this thesis.

The structure of this thesis as follows. Chapter 1 will provide an introduction, the problem analysis, the theoretical framework and the methods of inquiry. Chapter 2 is about the theory and practice of reform, examining some dominant trends in public administration reform and assessing the factors that can hamper and facilitate reform. Chapters 3 and 4 are the two case studies of this thesis; the Belgian Copernicus program and the Dutch *Andere Overheid* reform program. The final chapter, number 5, will provide a comparison between the programs and conclusions on the main and sub questions. It then moves on to lessons and recommendations and finally a reflection on the research as it was conducted.

I would like to express my thanks to Dr. van Nispen for his support and assistance during the course of this project and the master as a whole. I would also express my appreciation for the people of NSOB where part of my research was conducted. The opportunities that were provided by them are much appreciated. Special thanks go to Martijn van der Steen, who accompanied me during my internship and Prof. dr. Kickert for his willingness to be the second reader. Finally I would like to thank everybody who gave me time and effort during interviews and with their comments.

Jan-Jaap Harkema

SUMMARY

The central question of this thesis is:*'How can the functioning of the public service be improved?*. For this goal a comparative case study is conducted between the Belgian Copernicus and the Dutch *Andere Overheid* program. The following sub questions are answered in this thesis:

1. In which context (political, socio-economical etc.) were Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* launched?
2. What were the contents of the reform packages?
3. What was the trajectory of the processes?
4. To what degree were the programs successful in terms of the set goals?
5. What were the causes for successes and failures?
6. What (reciprocal) lessons and recommendations be drawn?

The findings are summed up in table 0.1.

Table 0.1   Comparison between Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* on various aspects

	Copernicus	***Andere Overheid***
Period	1999-2003	2003-2007
Aim	• Transform government into a better service provider and employer	• Less bureaucracy, more own responsibility, more civil society
Ideological inspiration	• New Public Management	• Several, including NPM, the 'participatory state' and 'modern citizenship'
Relevant documents	• Bouillion paper (1999), • Copernicus paper (2000)	• Cabinet vision *Andere Overheid* (2003), • Program *Andere Overheid* (2004)
Main contents	• New organizational structure • New HRM policy • New ways of	• better service provision • less and different tasks adopted • better internal

	Copernicus	*Andere Overheid*
	operating • New management culture	organization of central government • renewal of the relations with provinces and municipalities
Political leadership	• Minister for Administrative Reform and the Prime Minister	• Minister for Administrative Renewal, sub projects delegated to other ministers
Approach	• Top down leadership by Vandenbossche and Verhofstadt, ministerial cabinet	• Small project team, network building within central and decentral branches of government
Succes factors	• Holistic and coherent approach towards reform • Decisive IT management	• Network style initiatives had a 'trickle down' through decentral branches of government • Connecting with existing projects
Failure factors	• Political complexity and lack of support in politics, civil service and the unions • Top down approach • Too much in a short time	• Fading political support • Wide variety of initiatives with little prioritization • Small program team • Lack of coherent vision
Reform directions after the program	• Move to a more low profile, incremental reform pace 'Neo-Weberian approach' More focus on forging consensus for reform instead of a top down process. • Installation of a minister for Administrative Simplification ('Q'), success of Kafka	• Continuation of the movement '*Andere Overheid*', especially on the municipal level • Continuation of many iniatives from the program, e.g on the IT level • No decisive breakthrough on the elements of tasks debate and departmental redesign • Important reduction in staff announced on the

	Copernicus	*Andere Overheid*
	initative • Continuation of successful ICT initiatives ('authentic registrations')	central level

(Thijs& Pelgrims, 2006; own findings).

Conclusion

Analyzing both case studies has learned that administrative reform is never a managerial and political-neutral matter. Instead it is much more about political vision, determination and leadership. Improving the administrative sector should therefore move away from the 'easy' attempts to improve efficiency of the administration but requires also political reform. The recommendations section elaborates this statement.

Lessons & best practices

A first lesson that can be drawn from both reform operations is the need for a clear and consistent vision on how the reform needs to be designed, implemented and carried trough along the way. This calls for a strong actor such as a minister for Administrative Reform. The second lesson is that this person should enjoy a broad support base within the cabinet as well as in the administration itself. A third lesson is the need for realistic time frames. Especially in coalition governments such as in the researched countries terms in office usually last four year at the most, while major reform operations require far more time. Therefore announcing a radical reform that will be implemented in four years is likely to be counter productive.

Recommendations

For the past two decades criticism and subsequent reform has always targeted the administrative system. Real improvement however requires also changes for politicians and their relationships with the administration. This thesis provides recommendations for administrative reform on four levels: internal organization

of the civil service, the relationship with elected officials, the relationship with parliament and finally the relationship with society. The internal organization of the civil service requires a flexible and network like style to cope with societal variation and increasing differences. Therefore new modes of democratic control are necessary, with emphasis on horizontalization. Regarding elected officials strengthening the position of the prime minister is recommended, next to the installation of a Minister for Administrative Simplification. The challenge as well as the need for parliamentarians to leave the 'ancient' reflexes of the primacy of politics and the zero-sum game of power in favor of a more horizontal democratic control on main issues. With regard to society recommendations are two-fold; an (increased) investment in the analytical functions, including a structured approach on citizen initiatives an referenda. Secondly a (further) application of the 'law of requisite variety' would improve the working of government in present day society. Old monolithic and hierarchic structures and trichotomies between state, market and (civil) society should be replaced by innovative alliances and variable intervention in society.

Chapter 1:   **Introduction, Problem Analysis and Methodology**

This introductory chapter will start with a global overview of trends in public sector reform. It then moves on Belgium and the Netherlands, providing a cross national comparison and a brief account of the administrative reform in both countries. The chapter continues with the aim, problem analysis, theoretical framework and the methods of inquiry of this thesis.

1.1   Introduction

For the past two decades New Public Management was the label under which many reform efforts were done. Beginning as an Anglo-American fashion it made a rapid spread to other parts of the world. This leads to the thought that before and during the 1980s the 'old model of public administration' was under pressure both in the Anglo-American countries as in other parts of the world. Indeed three forces can be identified that challenged existing ideas of the state and gave way to new ways of governing. At first there was the issue of increased government expenditure. Accompanied with lower economic grow than expected it fuelled fundamental debate about the effectiveness of large public bureaucracies. In the OECD countries government spending per capita almost doubled between 1980 and 1990. Increasing social burdens (unemployment, ageing population) led to the thought that governments should have to be reduced in size, to work more efficient or to do both. A second pressure towards NPM was the (perceived) quality of services provided by governments. In a world where citizens were increasingly defined as customers, unflattering comparisons with the private sector were made. Third and last pressure was the wave of NPM ideas itself that spread the world during the 80s and 90s. It gave policy makers the opportunity to implement solutions to the problem of improving and at the same time reducing the state. An alternate explanation for the swiftness of the adoption of the NPM ideas by the 'policy élites' is that it gave them the opportunity to retain power at the centres while distancing them from the problems of policy implementation at the decentralized levels (Minogue, 1998: 19, 20).

Examples of recent reforms

In 1993 the Clinton Administration launched the National Performance Review,

aiming at a 'government that works better and costs less'. Similar operation were launched before in the American context but this time they were for the first time put in a coherent programme (Maas & van Nispen, 1999). In continental Europe, two holistic reform programmes were launched in Belgium and the Netherlands. These programmes, respectively labelled Copernicus and *Andere Overheid,* also rely heavily on NPM rhetoric. As stated in the promotional brochure, the Copernicus '*makes the federal government decisive and thus a better service provider for citizens and a better employer for civil servants. Copernicus assumes that the citizen plays a central role in the state. Therefore he deserves an optimal service. To cope with this, the government should adjust itself to the pace and demands of today's society'* (Brochure Copernicus, 2002). In the so called Bouillon paper[1] the Belgian Minister for Civil Servant Affairs and initiator of the Copernicus programme, Luc Van den Bossche, had earlier exposed his views. Reform should focus on eight principles:

- increased autonomy of governmental services
- increased accountability for public managers
- focus on results
- customer (!) orientation
- transparency
- plainness of lawmaking and processes
- safeguarding of output quality and
- the extension of performance indicators to make outcomes of governmental action 'measurable' (Van den Bossche, 1999).

The Dutch *Andere Overheid* programme states that '*a decisive government means less bureaucracy and rule making. The maximizing of the effectiveness, decisiveness and 'audative' capacity are central themes.'* The Dutch Cabinet wants the government of the future to be '*more modest in their ambitions, give more space to civilian and private organizational initiative, safeguarding the public interests and rule of law, and deliver high quality service if a public tasks cannot be delegated to the market or civil society*'. (Ministerie van BZK, 2003).

Of course the programmes are more comprehensive than this short

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1   Bouillon was the village where the paper was written

characterization, but the orientation in both Copernicus as well as *Andere Overheid* is striking. Common themes and 'spirit' can be seen in both programmes. In the following Belgium and the Netherlands will be further compared. First a cross-national comparison will be made, after that recent reforms in public sector will be described (from 1980 onwards). This section has the goal to determine to what degree Belgium and the Netherlands, and subsequently Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*, are comparable cases.

Path dependency

Decisions made in the past affect and constrain reform capacities in the present. Previous choices have led to certain investments and can therefore cause instances of *policy-lock in*. This concept leads to *path dependence*; the idea that political choices made in the past restrict current political options. But path dependency not only occurs at the implementation level, but also at the policy making level itself. Governments inherit policy from their predecessors and are often bound to uphold existing laws and practices. This is closely connected with the ideas of *policy paradigms*. Routines and standard operating procedures are deemed to be values determined by the idea of what is acceptable to deal with problems and what is not. As soon as actors are inculcated with the norms, values and ideas of a certain paradigm, they are unlikely to act in contrast with those existing practices. Moreover, they tend to suggest changes that fit within that paradigm (Bannink & Resodihardjo, 2006: 6). So when contemporary administrative sector reform is being studied, change operations from the past should be taken into account.

1.2   Cross-national comparison

Comparing two nations can be done on numerous aspects. One could consider national history, economy, social, political aspects and then analyse to what degree these variables are alike in the other country. However, since this thesis is about two specific reform programmes one should try to pick out the most essential elements that can best show the degree of comparability between the Belgian and Dutch cases. Here the choice has been made for the *political system, management and political ideas* and *the administrative system²*. Of course these factors make up for a large part of the context in which the programmes were

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2   These features can also be identified in figure 1.1 of this chapter.

launched. A more extensive analysis of that context will be given in the actual case description. Here the goal is merely to establish whether the two neighbouring countries have sufficient similarities to speak of 'comparable cases' while researching administrative reform.

With respect to the political system Belgium and the Netherlands differ while at the same time share characteristics. Belgium is a federal state with decentralized power at the level of communities and regions. Three lingual communities can be identified; the Flemish, French and German. Next to that three regions 'divide' the country: the Flemish, the Brussels Capital and the Walloon. Furthermore, there are ten provinces and 589 communes. The Netherlands can be characterized as a unitary yet decentralized political system. The political system is in that sense less complex than that in Belgium where all these communities and regions have their own separate elections, governments and parliaments. What the countries share is the fact that government is always coalitional with multi party governments, often consisting of Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists. The position of the Prime Minister in the cabinet does not differ; they are both the *primus inter pares* and head of a collegial government (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; 216-217, 270-271; Lijphart, 1984).

During the 1980s, many OECD countries were receptive for the Anglophone, business-origin management ideas that were introduced into the public sector. This was also the case in the Netherlands. In Belgium a remarkable discrepancy was seen. The Flemish ministry was influenced by the NPM principles and acted accordingly with respect to organizing and reform of government. The Walloon community, as in France, remained far more reluctant and applied an own strategy for reform. This resulted in separate reform efforts, existing next to each other, in both the Flemish as well as the Walloon community. The Copernicus programme marked an important discontinuity in this practice; a generic reform on the national level but clearly dominated by the 'Flemish' approach of reform. Partly this was because the responsible minister, Van den Bossche, based his reform initiatives for a great deal on his experience with reforming the Flemish administration (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; 216-217, 270-271).

Since authority in both Belgium and the Netherlands is fairly centralized, power of the national ministries is shared at lower levels of government and autonomous bodies. A major difference with the Netherlands however is that the Belgian administrative system is far more politicized than in the Netherlands; politicians tend to maintain a balance of party political power within the administrative system. The Dutch system is far less partisan. Both Belgium as the Netherlands saw recently the creation of a senior civil service. In Belgium a mandate system was introduced, in the Netherlands the *Algemene Bestuursdienst* (ABD), a General Administrative Service was created.

Now that a cross-country comparison has been made, it can be concluded that the similarities of *consensualism, multipartyism, (New Public) managerialism and decentralism* can be found in the two countries' politico-administrative system. This will obviously influence reform efforts as it has done in the past. The following section will therefore focus on recent reforms since 1980 to see which reform efforts preceded Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*.

A brief history of Belgian reform

Since 1980 the Belgian federal civil service saw several reform initiatives. Unlike many other OECD countries in that decade, the debate on privatization was not dominant. Instead, most of the reform projects in the 1980s took place against the background of stringent cutbacks on public spending and attempts to decrease the general public debt. In the first half of the 1980s, under Prime Minister Martens, the modernization of the civil service and the changes in staff were inspired by these cutbacks. The party political ideas on reform, whether Christian Democrat, Liberal or Socialist, were merely focussed on meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria. As a result, the Belgian debate about reform was not about the (future) role of the state and the privatization question was not as prominent as it was in the Netherlands. For the 1980s, downsizing of the public sector was the core theme (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004: 218-219).

The 1990s: bridging the gap

From 1991 and onwards, the focus of reform shifted. Minister Langendries installed the *Radioscopie*, a gradual X-ray of the various business processes

within the federal public services. These scans would eventually lead to a reorganization of the federal administration. Though aimed at reform of the administration, the *Radioscopie* resulted in the reduction of public sector staff (Thijs & Van de Walle, 2005: 47). In 1992 a new government took office, explicitly stating in their coalition agreement that the trust relationship between citizens and public services should be restored. This meant an important discontinuity in reform between the 1980s and 1990s. Operations in the prior decade focussed on economy and input side of the civil service. From the early 1990s on, the motivation for reform shifted to remedy citizen's distrust in government. The rise of extreme right in the 1991 elections shocked the political establishment and made 'the citizen' the centre of political discourse. In his influential *Burgermanifest* (citizen manifesto) of 1991 the liberal politician (and later Prime Minister) Verhofstadt pleaded for the emancipation of the citizens from '*the political, administrative and fiscal powers that suffocate him*'. Several initiatives were launched to improve legitimacy and to bridge the perceived gap between citizens and government. In 1993 a service charter was introduced, followed by laws organizing the right to access official documents (1994), protection of privacy, law on the formal motivation of administrative decisions (1991), the possibility for a preliminary injunction before the Supreme administrative administrative court and the installation of a federal ombudsman (1995). Compared to similar Charters in other countries (such as the UK Charters of 1991 and 1997 and the French '*Chartre des services publics*' of 1992) it is remarkable that in the Belgian case the concept of 'democracy' is the central theme. The British and French Charters placed emphasis on respectively 'market' and 'state'. '*The Charter, which is considered to be a permanent instrument for improvement, takes the political and administrative modernization as its operational framework. Therefore, government as well as the citizens should focus on rights and duties simultaneously*'. (Thijs & Van de Walle, 2005: 47, 48). Most of these initiatives of the early 1990s were launched on an *ad hoc* basis and lacked an overall strategy. As a result, these attempts to restore the citizen's trust shared a goal, but lacked coherence (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004: 219).

Administrative modernization

In the 1990s three other important efforts were made to modernize the

administration. The first one was a change of statute of the civil service. In 1991 the old statute, dating back as far as 1937, was replaced and finally approved in 1994. The reason for doing had to do with the process of federalization. From 1988 and on, each region had an autonomous personnel policy. The new statute only provided some general principles at the central level. Also in 1994, a mandate system for top officials was introduced, aiming at giving these civil servants more responsibility. The decision to create this mandate system was in line with a tendency dating back to the 1980s to create a corps of top civil servants. This system was put into effect in 1999. A third and final important administrative renewal in the 1990s was the creation of a Ministry for Administrative Reform in 1995. Until then administrative reform was a responsibility of the Ministry of the interior. In 1997 the new governmental department became fully operational as an horizontal ministry, providing services to other ministries and responsible for human resources policy.

Reform in the Netherlands since 1980
Under the first centre-right coalition of prime minster Lubbers (1982-1986) the ideological *Zeitgeist* of less emphasis on government and more on market influence also began to change the Dutch civil service. The extensive governmental intervention in the economy and society became increasingly criticised. Inspired by the political and social reforms in the United States and the United Kingdom the so called 'great operations' were announced. The aim of these operations was to adapt the functioning of government to the changing ideas about its role and scope in society (Van Mierlo, 1998: 328).

The 'great operations'
The first 'great operation' was decentralization of public tasks to lower levels of government (provinces, municipalities) or to other functional public institutions. Other operations during the 1980s aimed at reducing central government spending, deregulation (also in order to reduce costs), reorganization of the Civil Service and a decrease in the number of civil servants. The final 'great operation' was meant to privatise government tasks. Notable examples of this practice are the Postbank (10,500 staff), Posts and Telecommunications (PTT, 95,000 staff), Royal Mint and the Fishery Port Authority. These four main state-owned

companies were all, whether wholly or partly, sold off (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004: 272). In the 1980s the dominant form of decentralization and/or (semi-) privatization was the ZBO (*Zelfstandig Bestuursorgaan*), an independent public body. Many of these were created during the Lubbers cabinets. By 1992, 18 per cent of total state spending passed trough these ZBOs. Some of these were long-established (e.g. universities and the Central Bank), but more than 40 per cent of them were created after 1980. The majority of the ZBOs performed public tasks in the field of social security (Kickert, 1998: 29-31). Reform proved to be intensive during the 1980s. It is however difficult to asses these reforms. Some argue that the reforms undertaken by the Lubbers cabinets were indeed a re-examination of the position and significance and role of government in the economy and society.(de Kam & de Haan, 1991). Others point to fact that the 'great operations' were merely cosmetic in order to economise of staff and expenditure (Kickert, 1998). In assessing the 'great operations', van Nispen points to three important factors regarding reform: the combining of reform efforts in a holistic project, the political will for reform and thirdly the participation of civil servants, closely connected with culture (van Nispen & Noordhoek, 1986; 33, 34). All of these factors were crucial for the success of the 'great operations' but proved to be difficult and sometimes hampering reform. Implementing the operations would have been helped by an holistic approach but, as Tjeenk Willink in the same volume states, they shared a common perspective but not an operational mutual consistency.

Reform themes in the 1990s

After the 'great operations' of the 1980s conducted by the consecutive Lubbers-cabinets, reform continued during the 1990s. Focus however shifted to three main themes; decentralization in the format of creating *agencies*, the creation of *core departments* and finally a counter movement of the 'rediscovery of democratic government'.

Decentralization remained the prominent theme in the reform of the Dutch civil service. In 1991 the Ministry of Finance distinguished three categories of reorganisation. The first one was *internal privatization* in which privatization takes place within a department. Second was *external privatization* trough

functional decentralization. Third was the *external privatization* by creating companies operating under market conditions and principles. In the first mode of privatization the concept of the agency is recognizable. The other two are respectively the ZBO and the 'ordinary' privatization. In the 1990s it was the agency that quickly became the popular format for decentralization of administrative authority. Between 1991 and 2002 the number of agencies went up to 23 (Verhaak, 1997: 168).

The Dutch process of agencification (from 1991 onwards) was influenced by the *Next Steps* program of the United Kingdom. The newly created bodies were granted more freedom than the ministries themselves. The choice for agencies also indicated a growing dissatisfaction with the more radical form of autonomization of the 1980s, the ZBO. In the Dutch political debate concern was growing about the lack of political control over the ZBOs. Therefore focus was laid on 'the primacy of politics' over the newly created (semi-)autonomous bodies. The agency as a form of decentralizing authority was perceived to be more controllable by politicians than the ZBO (Pollitt et al., 2001).

In the early 1990s the reform agenda was heavily dominated by the process of autonomization and the most suitable format of doing so. However, in 1993 a new issue was added to the process of transforming of the civil service. The autonomization of ZBOs and agencies gave impetus to the debate about the distinction between policy and execution. The agreement of the first Kok cabinet of 1994 stated that the autonomous organizations should focus on their executive taks while the departments were to focus on their core business. Departments should therefore be smaller, more efficient and more effective (Verhaak, 1997: 170). The large agencification as had happened in the United Kingdom (were by 1995 75% of the staff worked in an agency) did not took place in the Netherlands. But of the 160,000 central level government staff, only around 20,000 were the real policy makers. The Wiegel-committee therefore proposed the idea of *core departments*. In the picture that the committee painted departmental The Hague would consist of a just a few dozen directorates-general each with only around a hundred staff. During the formations of cabinets these 'small blocks' would easily be built into new departments. The core departments should cope with the

problems that rose with the rapid creation of ZBOs and agencies. 'Steering at a distance' and 'steering on main lines' became the new buzzwords in civil service reform. Some departments had by the end of 1990s created a central unit for the relations and communications with the independent bodies, but most of them had not (Kickert, 1998: 38, 39).

Compared to the previous decade the 1990s showed the beginning of a counter movement towards a different approach of civil service reform. One could argue that in the 1980s reform was inspired by the typical neo-liberal *Zeitgeist* of that decade, mirroring similar operations in the United States and the United Kingdom. The two centre-right cabinets (1982-1989), consisting of Liberals and Christian-Democrats, adopted to a high degree the convictions of downsizing the public sector and revitalize the private market sector. By the third Lubbers cabinet the Liberals were replaced by the Social-Democrats. Reform became less influenced by an economic rationale in favour of a more neutral, juridical and managerial approach. The focus on privatization and self-management decreased, and more attention was given to the legal status of newly created bodies like the ZBO. The shift to agencies (1991) and core departments (1993), reform became increasingly inspired by managerial and political frames of reference. Two critical reports about the autonomization trend that had for many years dominated the civil service reform agenda underlined this change in Dutch reform policy. Parliament made a clear stance for a tighter form of political control. This marked an important discontinuity in civil service reform. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a retreat of the State, a shift from the public to the private and emphasis on 'steering at a distance'. By the mid-1990s, voices rose within government and parliament that the State should steer more firmly and that the 'primacy of politics' should be restored. Concerns about certain prior privatizations were spoken out. This leads to the thought that after many years of an economical and managerial approach towards reform, the concept of democratic governance has been rediscovered (Verhaak, 1997: 173, Kickert, 2004, 33-35).

ABD

One final reform that will be mentioned here is the *Algemene Bestuursdienst* (ABD), the General Administrative Service. Inspired by the generalist character of

the British 'Civil Service' the idea was to create a corps of top level officials that would frequently change from one department to another. This interdepartmental mobility was supposed to oppose the sectorization (Dutch: *verkokering*). The concept had a long a protracted history. After experiments with the idea in the 1980s and several advisory comities (Wiegel and Deetman) the ABD became a reality in 1995. The intended increase in mobility seems to have been realized; estimates show that in 1981 75 percent of all directors-general had been recruited from within the department, while in 1996 this figure has dropped to 61 percent. However, critics point to the fact that generic management now dominates substantive professionalism (Andweg and Irwin, 2005; 160 and Kickert, 2005; 341-342).

Comparing recent reforms

Now that some important reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in both Belgium and the Netherlands have been described, some similarities and differences can be observed. Both countries reformed their administrative systems with cutbacks in budget and personnel during the 1980s. In Belgium this was done via the *Radioscopie*, in the Netherlands the 'Great Operations' were used control the costs of the public sector. However, while the Dutch debate was also about privatization and the role of the state, the Belgian reform efforts were merely focussed on economizing.

In the 1990s the electoral success of the extreme-right in Belgium became a catalyst for all sorts of reform initiatives, sharing the common goal of 'bridging the gap' between the citizen and the administration. The Citizen Charter, initiated by Verhofstadt in 1993, is perhaps the most eloquent example of this. In the Netherlands, the reform agenda of the 1990s was much more about the configuration and the internal relations of the civil service. A shift can be observed from drastic privatization and putting at distance of governmental institutions through agencies and *ZBOs*, to calls for the restoration of the 'primacy of politics' in the second half of the 1990s. In that same period, in both Belgium as well as the Netherlands, a long protracted wish becomes realized with the creation of a *corps* of top civil servants. In Belgium, administrative reform is put high on the agenda and gains political momentum with the creation of a Minister for

Administrative Reform in the period between 1995 and 1997. In the Netherlands a similar minister was installed in 2003.

1.3   Aim

Scientific relevance

This project starts from the extensive 'body of knowledge' about public and administrative reform. This will be discussed in further detail in the second chapter on the concept and practice of reform. The aim of this project is to provide a comparative case study between Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*. It seeks to describe, compare and analyse both programmes. The exploration of factors that influenced success and failures, weaknesses and strengths of the reform efforts will then provide a better insight in the process of administrative reform.

Societal relevance

But next to an explanatory goal this thesis also seeks to provide recommendations for reform. The results of the comparison between the programmes will also offer reciprocal lessons and best practices. The fact that the two programmes and countries are to some extent 'comparable cases', increases the probability of transferable ideas and practices. Next to lessons for reform the recommendations will also focus on the process of 'benchmarking'. Here the aim will be to identify a certain part of the reform package or a certain practice that functions good, comparing this with the counterpart in the other country and then analyse how the superior performance is achieved in order to learn from it (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; 118). Finally the conclusions of the final chapter will lead to guidelines for future reform programs, including additional paradoxes and 'tricks' that have been encountered in earlier efforts.

A common problem with the chosen method is that the perceived similarities between the selected cases prove to be illusory. However, as George and McKeown (1985) state, the power and relevance of case study analysis increases when the adopted method is structured and focused. To achieve structure and focus, choices have to be made. Regarding the structure, a similar approach is chosen as have Pettigrew et al. (1992) have done with their analysis of change in the large and complex organization of the National Health Service in the United

Kingdom. To avoid the danger of describing and comparing cases as two isolated 'moments in time', the Why, What and How of reform will be discussed, respectively *context*, *content* and *process* (Pettigrew et al., 1992, 7). With respect to focus it is necessary to pick out the most essential elements of reform. Here the choice has been made to centre the attention on three aspects of the programmes which the author deems to be the most important and essential. In figure 1 these choices are shown.

1.4 Problem analysis

The public sector reform era began during the 1980s in many OECD countries and has not slowed pace ever since. In that period it was realized that there was a problem with the public sector; it grew from 25% of GDP to over 45% (OECD average) in a few decades. The poor performance of the public sector (both real and perceived) called for reform strategies. The search for improved performance was conducted by reshaping the public sector. Others took the opportunity to come up with a complete questioning of the welfare state. In any way, the search for improved public sector performance has been done with respect to all kinds of public spending, including but not exclusively those making up the welfare state (Lane, 1997; 2). As the survey in Chapter 2 will show, many OECD countries launched reform schemes, often inspired by the Anglophone NPM rhetoric.

This process continued in the first years of the 21st century. As Kickert (1997) observed, the swift adoption of NPM in many states of Continental Europe is remarkable. Differences between one the hand European state traditions *vis-à-vis* Anglo-Saxon public management methods and on the other hand differences between European countries themselves limit the transport of ideas and techniques between countries. However, this does not mean that separate communities cannot learn from each other. Experiences and implementations of reform in one country can provide valuable lessons for another and vice versa. Therefore two reform operations, Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*, will be described, analysed and evaluated.

Following early described similarities between of Belgium and the Netherlands, it can be argued that differences in the structure of the political system affect the

nature, swiftness and intensity of public management reforms. Majoritarian, single party systems enable rapid changes in policy, but also quick reversals and alterations. Contrary to consensualist systems, majoritarian forms of government have to deal less with vetoes and have a greater capacity to impose losses on particular interest groups (Pollitt, 2002). In that sense reform is likely to be harder to achieve in Belgium and the Netherlands than for instance in the United Kingdom or the United States.

The central research question that will be leading in this thesis will be *'How can the functioning of the public service be improved?'* Some additions have to be made to further narrow the goal. The focus is on the public service, or government, at the national level. Second, the main interest is in holistic (large scale, aiming at affecting the entire governmental system) reforms. Therefore the case studies have been selected on the basis of these two criteria. Sub questions that adhere to the central question are on the descriptive, evaluative and explanatory level.

1. In which context (political, socio-economical etc.) were Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* launched?
2. What were the contents of the reform packages?
3. What was the trajectory of the processes?
4. To what degree were the programmes successful in terms of the set goals?
5. What were the causes for successes and failures?
6. What (reciprocal) lessons and recommendations can be drawn?

1.5   Theoretical Framework

This thesis fits into the extensive literature on public sector and administrative reform, further discussed in Chapter 2. Here it can be stated that for the past two decades, one very dominant pressure for reform was the introduction of new public management (NPM) ideas. Many observers speak of a 'paradigm shift' from the 'old public administration' with the previous welfare assumptions of the state towards an entrepreneurial model of government. A rather enthusiastic summary of this new approach can be found in Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the*

Public Sector in which they argue that the 'entrepreneurial government' will be both 'worldwide' and 'inevitable' (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993: 35-328). Others (like Hood and Dunleavy) point out that, instead of a one single NPM model that would conquer the world, futures in that area are more likely to be multiple (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). Despite the loose and broad usage of the NPM term some key points of the model can be pointed out. The generic vision of a government according to the NPM model consists of a smaller public sector, intensively focused on efficiency and continuous improvement. Emphasis is laid on small core ministries, responsible for strategy, combined with a range of specialized, semi-autonomous agencies (responsible for the operational part). Clear performance frameworks will be used with specified budgets and expected results. There will be widespread usage of market and market-type mechanisms along with frequent cooperation with for-profit and voluntary sector organizations (Pollitt, 2002: 474). Summarized in a few points the 'paradigm' consists of:

- *A shift in the focus of management systems and management effort from inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes*
- *A shift towards more measurement, manifesting itself in the appearance of batteries of performance indicators and standards*
- *A preference for more specialized, 'lean', 'flat' and autonomous organizational forms rather than large, multi-purpose, hierarchical bureaucracies*
- *A widespread substitution of contract or contract-like relationships for hierarchical relationships*
- *A much wider than hitherto use of market or market-like mechanisms for the delivery of public services (including privatization, contracting out, the development of internal markets, etc.*
- *A broadening and blurring of the 'frontier' between the public and private sectors (characterized by the growth of public/private partnerships of various kinds and the apparent proliferation of 'hybrid' organizations*
- *A shift in value priorities away from universalism, equity, security and resilience and towards efficiency and individualism* (Pollitt, 2002; 474).

Earlier it was concluded that the two programmes that serve as case studies in this

thesis, are to a great deal determined by the NPM 'doctrine'. Both reforms will be described and analysed via the three dimensions of *context, content* and *process* (Pettigrew et al. 1992). The reason for this is the conviction that only by starting from the 'context' learning is possible. The criticism is shared that many NPM doctrines are too universalistic presented, such as Osborne and Gaebler (1993) did. Authors such as Kickert (1997), Hood (1991) and Pollitt (2000, 2002) have denounced the universalistic claims of NPM. Moreover, context should be a starting point given the many differences between countries. It is only through such a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) that cases can provide valuable lessons. The context will be described with the use of the model of public management reform as developed by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), to be seen in figure 1. Next to the push for reform as provided by the NPM doctrine, other forces also contribute to the momentum for change. The model shows these forces and puts emphasis on elite decision-making. Since many (if not all) public sector reform is top-down, the role of politicians and top officials should be stressed when one aspires to give an accurate description of the change events.

Figure 1.1: A model for public management reform
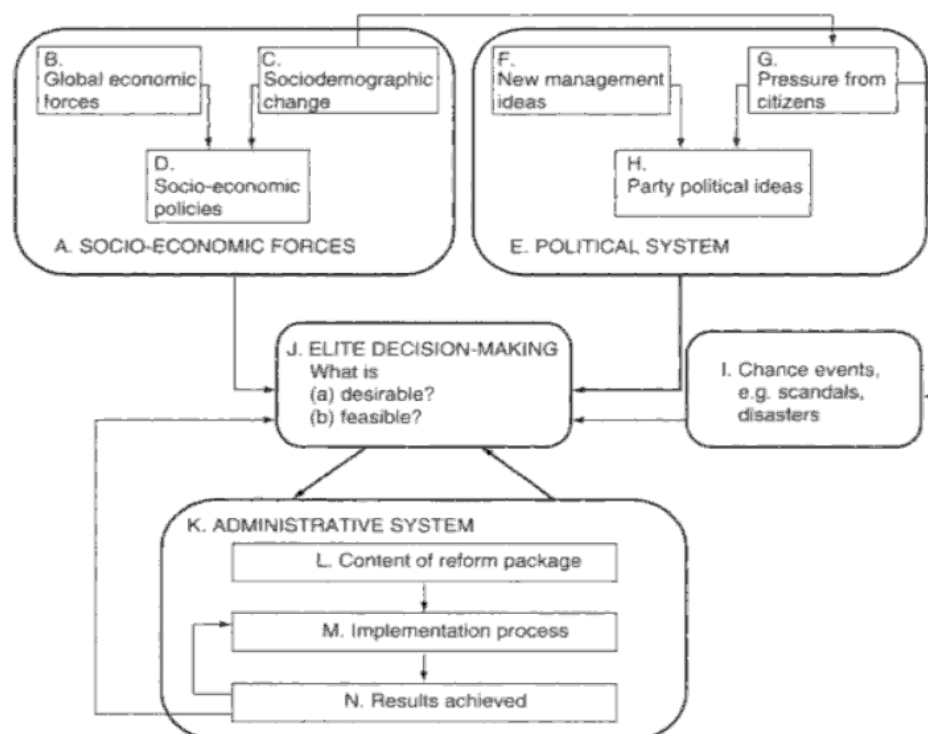
(Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004)

Related to this is the concept of 'policy streams', 'policy entrepreneurs' and 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 1995). Figure 1 is helpful in explaining how administrative reform can occur and which factors come into play. It lays emphasis on the various factors (socio-economic forces, the political system, chance events, the elite decision-making and the administrative system itself) influencing in a complex interplay the content, implementation and results of public management reform programmes. Change and reform occur when the streams of problems, politics and policy collide (figure 2). Important political figures and government officials are here often of decisive importance, the so called 'policy entrepreneurs', creating a 'window opportunity' or 'policy window' for decision making. Eventually this can lead a change the adoption or change of a certain policy.

Figure 1.2: The multiple streams model of Kingdon
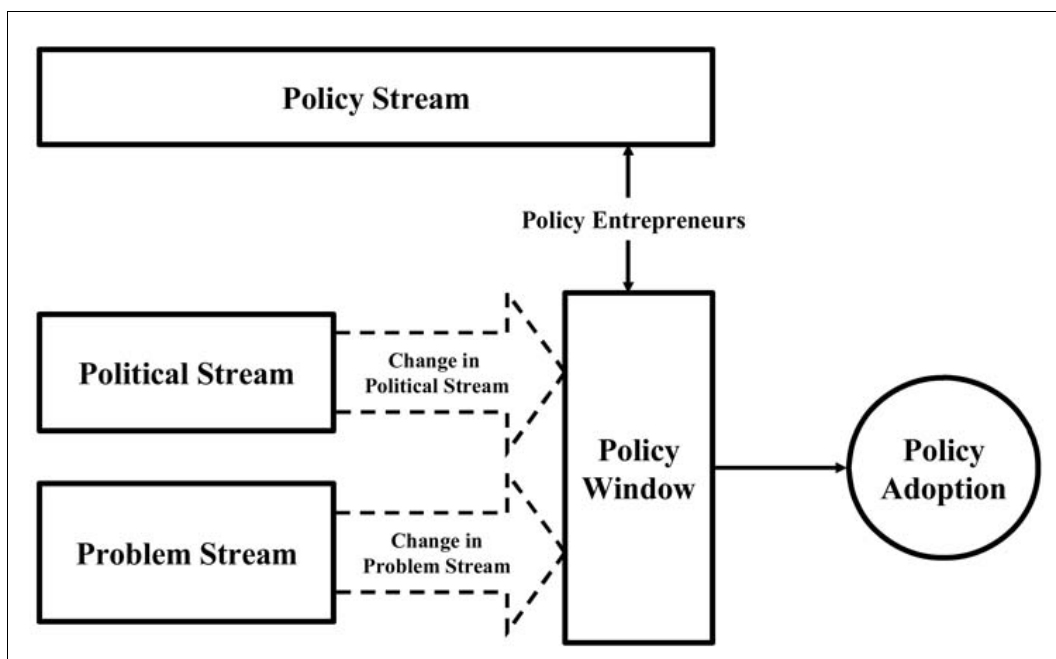
(Kingdon, 1995; Felix, 2007)

Relation between the figures

For this thesis figure 1 will serve as a tool for describing the context (socio-economic, political and chance events) in which the programmes were launched. To avoid the danger of analysing the reforms as isolated units, these country specific variables demand attention. Figure 2 will serve as an instrument for

describing how the reform became implemented. Both figure 1 and 2 thus serve as context description and can be found in figure 3 under the label *Why/Context*.

Figure 1.3: *context*, *content* **and** *process* **of the reforms**

• **Dimension/ Programme**	• **Copernicus/** *Andere Overheid*
• **I Why/context**	• Pressures for reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004)
	• The emergence of a 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 1995).
• **II What/content**	• Core elements of reform, changes proposed by the progam designers
• **III How/process**	• Actions • Reactions • Results

(Pettigrew et al. 1992; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Kingdon, 1995)

The programmes themselves are to be found in figure 3 as dimension II, *What/Content*. This is about the actual contents of the two programmes and it can be seen on which three core elements they will be analysed, the same as the label L in figure 1. The implementation (figure 1 label M and figure 3 label III) will deal with the question how Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* were put into action, how they were received and what results were. The final build-up of the study will eventually take the form of figure 4.

Figure 1.4: Flow scheme
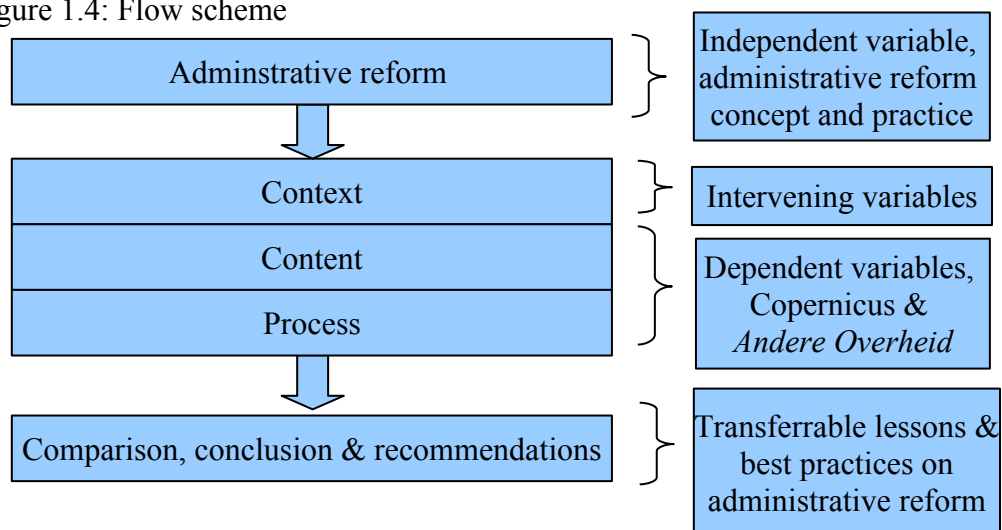
1.6 Methods of inquiry

In collecting data, this project will use multiple sources of evidence. As recommended by Yin (1994), the conviction is that more than one source or method will improve the quality of the research as seen in figure 5. The goal here is to become as close to 'the facts' as possible and avoiding social desirable answers and/or particular views of certain actors.

Figure 1.5: Convergence of multiple sources of evidence
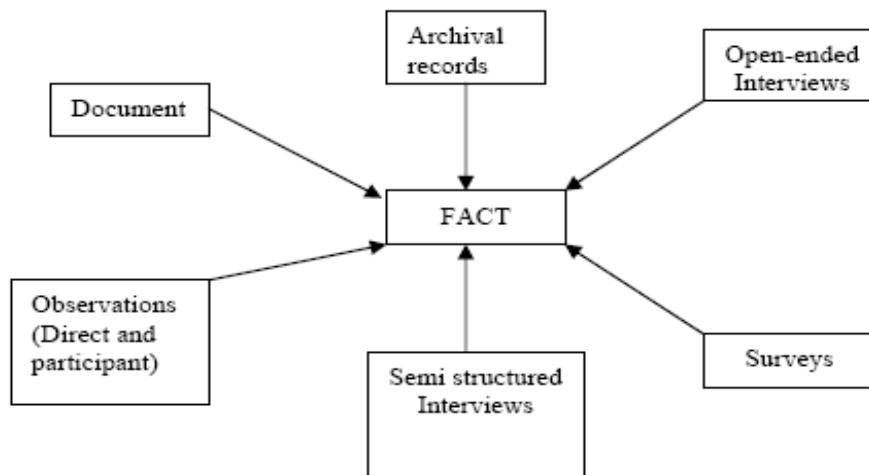
(Yin, 1994:93)

Because not all methods are suitable for the object of this study, the focus will be on documents and interviews. The interviews will posses an open-ended structure. The reason for doing so is that the goal of the interviews is to provide the interviewed person a chance to share his of her view on the subject. Answering the questions is not likely to be in the form of a plain 'yes' and 'no' but deviations and uniqueness in answering is to be expected. Furthermore, a person directly involved in a reform programme should be questioned different from an independent scholar. In the first case, the answers will be more about personal experience, actions and *Hineininterpretierung*. When interviewing a more independent actor, answers will be more about unique views and classifications of event. In this case, the respondent becomes more like an informant. This however poses a pitfall in the sense that this person is able to influence the research because of an overly dependence on this source. By combining interviews with

research based on a wide variety document this danger should be avoided. Literature study will be done in two ways. One the hand literature will be studied about reform in concept and practice. The case studies will also be analysed via literature study (official documents, brochures), completed with interviews. Finally, the internship at NSOB is a form of observation, contributing to insight in the process of public sector reform.

Chapter 2: **Theory and Practice of Administrative Reform**

2.1 **Introduction**

Before attention is turned to the practice and process of administrative reform, it is important to briefly discuss the concept of the 'administrative organization'. Often the words 'bureaucracy' and 'administrative' system are used at the same time for the public sector and not without reason. Weber (1956) defined bureaucracies as organizations with specific features and many governmental bodies have these features. For instance a task division within the organization, a hierarchical structure, rule and law based decision making and no discrimination of persons. The members of the organization are professionals hired on the basis of education and experience. Professionalism, continuity and equity are important values for a bureaucratic organization (Ringeling, 1993;146, 147). Starting from this definition the concept of bureaucracy can be applied on governmental organizations. Bureaucracy is in the light of these values the most suitable 'tool' for politicians to execute their policies. The mentioned definition of what a bureaucracy is and how it works has no normative bearing. The vision on bureaucracies has been altered over time since Weber wrote about it in the 1920s. Since then several scholars have labelled the concept with varying appreciations. Weber stated that the specific features of a bureaucracy enlarge the reliability of the organization because equal rules are applied to specific cases and thus create equity. Others (for instance Niskanen, 1971, Thompson, 1975) are far less enthusiastic and point to the poor performance of public bureaucratic organizations *vis-à-vis* the private sector and the non-empathic, rational character of the bureaucracy. These bad characteristic give little reason for enthusiasm or compassion. Further in this chapter the specific relationship between bureaucracy and innovation will be addressed.

After this brief introduction on the administrative system as a bureaucracy this chapter continues with a survey of recent reforms in various OECD countries. This will give insight in how these countries have transformed their administrative systems since 1980. Common trends can be observed and this will put the cases of this study (Belgium and the Netherlands) in a broader perspective. Next both theory and practice of administrative reform will be discussed, with special

attention to obstructions and facilitators for reform.

Concept

Since for the past 20 to 25 years reform has been a characteristic of the OECD countries, the concept has somewhat eroded. It has become a somewhat sober, yet still explicitly political term, referring not to a *total* innovation of the administrative system but to the reshaping of something that is already there (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; 15). As Giddens puts it: '*The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly re-examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about these practices, thus constantly altering their character*' (1990; 38). But it is not just the 'incoming information about these practices' that initiates change and reform. Sometimes a certain set of beliefs ('ideology') can initiate reform. In other instances symbolic goals are chased. Reform is hardly ever a matter of a coherent set of actions based on objective information, but rather the outcome of a debate between different participants. '*Claims about policy reforms are products of frames of reference; that is, they are systematically related assumptions that provide standards for appraising knowledge claims*' (Dunn, 1993; 270).

So although reform attempts are the product of certain frames of reference, the actors involved initiate change intentionally. A certain overall goal is set that has to be achieved and/or grand schemes are designed. For most of the attempts in the recent past 'efficiency' was the Holy Grail of administrative reform (Maas and van Nispen, 1997). Other, but closely connected 'meta-goals' are the reinvention of government (the National Performance Review during the Clinton Administration'), the creation of a *different* government (the Dutch case of *Andere Overheid*) or making the administration revolve around the citizen instead of the other way around (Copernicus). To conclude; the concept of administrative reform can thus best be understood as not a reaction to objective information about the performance of the government, but rather as certain visions and goals that actors want to achieve. That goal is of course to make some positive changes and adaptations to the administration. So if we combine the observations that administrative sector reform starts from dissatisfaction with the current state of the administration, leading to the intended positive change via a set of ideas (a

programme) the definition 'd*eliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organizations with the objective of making them (in some sense) to perform better*' seems fit. (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; 8). This dissatisfaction is not necessary the same as 'bureaucrat bashing', but it can take the form of a wide variety of improvement attempts.

A common theme regarding administrative reform has been the unflattering comparisons with the private sector. Especially during the 1980s and 1990s there was a widespread belief that the private sector was a model, if not the ideal, for the public sector (Löffler and Vintar, 2004; 9). For instance Osborne and Gaebler speak of an 'entrepreneurial spirit' that will change government. It draws on the idea that private firms can only survive the competition when they work efficient and espouse good management. Since public organizations, and government as a whole, does not have to face market competition they are perceived to deliver not the best 'value for money' (cf Niskanen, 1971; Nozick, 1974). Further in this chapter the benchmarking of the public sector against the private will be further explored.

2.2   Survey of recent reforms

Even when narrowed to the OECD countries, administrative reform in each of those is a unique case involving all kinds of variables, events and actors (see figure 1 of chapter 1). The point is that reform within a specific administration cannot be understood without looking to the particularities of e.g. the socio-economic situation. This however does not mean that all of the reform efforts of the past two decades in the OECD countries are too unique to compare. In fact, common trends and classifications can be observed. As the OECD itself states '*a new paradigm for public management has emerged, aiming at fostering a performance-oriented culture in a less centralised public sector*' (OECD, 1993). A short survey of recent reforms in the OECD countries will follow, derived from Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004; 98-100).

The first and most prominent class of reforming countries is the one adopting the Anglo-American trend of 'new public managerialism', also known as the NPM marketizers. Australia, New Zealand and the UK are the most prominent examples

of this group, and to a lesser extent the US. All of these countries share (at least) the belief that techniques and practices from the private sector are the key to improvement of the public sector. The second main group that can be identified is known as the Continental European modernizers. Here we find Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden and Germany (on the level of the *Länder*). These countries continue to lay focus on the state as the '*irreplaceable integrative force in society, with a legal personality and operative value system that cannot be reduced to the private sector discourse of efficiency, competitiveness, and consumer satisfaction*' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; 98). So in this second group government is not seen as the problem (as Reagan so boldly stated in his inaugural address) but still as an important actor for societal solutions.

This second group is however not homogeneous. Here a further distinction can be made between the 'central Europeans' and the northern ones. Central European states such as Belgium, Germany and Italy have lagged with their reform efforts when compared to the 'northern Europeans' such as Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. As a whole it can nonetheless be stated that the Continental Europeans have, contrary to the NPM marketizers, a much more positive approach to the intervening (future) role of the state, more reluctance for blaming the public services for failures and less enthusiasm for private contributions in the public sphere (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; 99).

In a recent publication, the OECD assesses the results of two decades of reform. The introduction of the study, *Modernising government. The way forward* (OECD, 2005), lists what has emerged from two decades of reform. The first conclusion is that in that in the OECD countries the governmental role has not diminished, but has altered. Society's expectations have in fact increased instead of lowered. The nature of the public policy problems as well as the nature of interventions however have constantly changed and continue to do so. This second conclusion is closely connected with the way society and the relation between government and society has evolved. Through many privatisation schemes governments have disengaged themselves from both commercial activities (e.g. The Dutch Postbank or the French *Crédit Lyonnais*) as well as the service ownership and provision of

energy, water and telecommunications. On these fields governments have increasingly become creators and regulators of markets. But also on many other terrains (pollution, health, safety, corporate governance, internet traffic etc.) regulation has expanded. Societies have become more complex and forced governments to adjust. At the same time technological developments have enabled governments to better acquire information about those parts of society that needs to be monitored. Concluding this observation, the OECD states that '*governments face more new and complex problems that cannot be dealt with easily by direct public service provision, more ambitious policies require more complex interventions and collaboration with non-governmental parties*' (OECD, 2005). A third conclusion about past reform efforts is that there are no significant changes in government expenditure. When corrected for cyclical effects, the general government primary outlays have stayed fairly constant[3] (figure 1).

Figure 2.1: Total government spending, % of nominal GDP, 1986-2005.

	Belgium	Netherlands	Euro Area	OECD total
1986	58,9	56,9	49,3	40,5
1987	57	58,4	48,9	40,2
1988	55,1	56,6	48,5	39,5
1989	53,4	54,5	47,9	39,2
1990	53,4	54,8	48,7	40,1
1991	54,4	54,8	50,1	41,4
1992	54,7	55,8	51,3	42,5
1993	55,7	56	53	43,1
1994	53,4	53,6	51,8	42,1
1995	52,9	51,4	51,4	42,1
1996	53	49,6	51,5	41,7
1997	51,4	48,2	50,2	40,5
1998	50,7	47,2	49,3	40,1
1999	50,1	46,9	48,9	39,8
2000	49,4	45,3	47,1	39
2001	49,5	46,6	48,1	39,9
2002	50,5	47,5	48,3	40,3
2003	51,4	48,9	49	40,7
2004	49,9	47,7	48,4	40,3
2005	50	46,9	47,9	40,1
Average	52,74	51,38	49,48	40,66

(OECD, 2005; 218, 219, own calculations.)

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3   The OECD countries and the Euro area have remained fairly constant in terms of government outlays. Belgium and the Netherlands have converged to their numbers over the years, coming from a percentage well over 50%.

Yet, and this is a fourth observation, an upward pressure on expenditure remains. Mainly on pensions, education and health care expenditures are more likely to go up than to decline given the problems of ageing populations. Finally, the OECD states that reform cannot substitute for hard political choices. Improving cost-effectiveness and performance certainly helps to reduce pressure on spending. But, with the budgetary and fiscal challenges that lie ahead in mind, politicians will to have to make hard and unpopular choices.

The OECD study paints thus a rather bleak picture about the past two reform decades. As the study clearly indicates, more new and complex (societal) problems demand new solutions. Administrative reform is therefore likely to stay on the agenda. The challenge for politicians is to continuously adjust the administrative system to the dynamics of modern society. The two programmes of this study, Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*, both aim at doing this; bring government up to speed with the demands of nowadays society and citizens. But before attention is turned to the cases the practice of reform will be discussed. Why is (successful) reform often so hard to accomplish?

2.3   Reform in practice

When assessing administrative reform it is not hard to identify the many constrains on public sector reform. An intuitive sense amongst many politicians, civil servants and citizens alike is that change within the administration is very hard to achieve. Classics of organization theory, like Mertons's 'Bureaucratic Structure and Personality' and Crozier's *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (1964) all underline the difficulties of organizational change. Many ambitious programmes are developed at the top of organizations but fail due to problems at the implementation phase. On this Pressman and Wildavsky state that '*the view from the top is exhilarating. Divorced from the problems of implementation, federal bureau heads, leaders of international agencies and prime ministers in poor countries think great thoughts together. But they have trouble imaging the sequence of events that will bring their paths to fruition. Other men, they believe, will tread the path they have so brightly lit the way*' (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; 126, 127).

So what are these barriers that can hamper successful implementation? The purpose here is not to fully analyse institutional reform in general but to make a specification on the difficulties of reform within governmental organizations. Kelman, who experienced the practice of reform first handed being a senior procurement official under President Clinton, describes this in his recent book. In *Unleashing Change. A Study of Organizational Renewal in Government* (Kelman, 2005) he sums up the particular constraints to reform within bureaucratic and/or governmental organizations. The specifics of a bureaucracy relates negatively with innovation. The concept of bureaucracy is defined by standard and repeating procedures and rules. But, as Weick wrote, '*A standard operating procedure is a frame of reference that constrains exploration*' (Weick, 1969; 156). Other studies, such as done by Hage and Aiken (1967) show a clear negative relationship between innovation and bureaucracies. In the hierarchical build-up that bureaucracies posses, deviation of these standard rules is either not possible or generally not appreciated. It is thus clear that rules limit the ability to innovate or ameliorate bureaucratic procedures. But these rules also form a certain mode of protection for bureaucrats. When a crisis or disaster occurs (despite the proper compliance with the set rules), the bureaucrat cannot be blamed. Crozier underlines the benefits that are provided by the bureaucratic rules and the people working in it stating that they provide '*protection against too harsh treatment in case of error*' (1964; 195).

2.4   Additional difficulties with governmental bureaucracies

Governmental bureaucracies contain additional features that makes reform even harder. Civil servants have to deal with the wishes of politicians. But they also know that an ambitious politician, planning to reform the administration, is dependable on the next elections to stay in office while civil servants generally have far more longer careers within a ministry . In case of political turmoil, that same politician could very well not even last the standard term of for instance four years.[4] Career civil servants of course know this and therefore can posses '*a well-developed actuarial sense, know that it will not be long before this particular madness is over*' (Warwick, 1975; 174). Compared to the private sector, these life

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4   In the case of *Andere Overheid* it is clear that the short term that Thom de Graaf served as minister for Administrative Reform (less than two years) affected the programme. We will further discuss this in the case itself.

long civil servants are harder to dismiss because of an often special legal status. This is also a second important hampering factor for reformers. Life long employees are more likely to resist change than 'fresh' staff. And because of the fact that governments employ relatively more people with long tenures than is customary in the present day private sector, this affects the ability to change negatively. Thirdly, the environment in which governmental organisations operate tends to punish failure far more intense than it rewards success. Authors such as Ringeling (2004) and Rayner ('*failure is always noted and success is forgotten*') (quoted in Kelman, 2005;29) show that the government cannot live up to the high standards it is judged by. Therefore it is not surprising that a culture of risk avoidance exists in many parts of the administration. Governmental organisations tend to avoid failure and disaster far more than pursuing excellence. In such an environment innovation is not likely to happen; change means taking risks. Contrary to the private sector, where risk taking is encouraged and (in case of success) often highly rewarded, governmental bureaucracies tend to 'keep things as they are'. Finally, the nature of governmental tasks limit the abilities for change. Civil servants perform their tasks but were not elected to do so. The politician remains responsible for the functioning of the administration. This limits to a high degree the ability for civil servants to make individual choices. In other words; the specifics of the traditional, Weberian hierarchical bureaucracy encourages civil servants to simply follow the rules and to do what politicians tell them instead of making independent and innovative decisions. Additionally, by law civil servants are obliged to treat every 'subject' by the same standards. By applying universal rules the equal treatment of citizens is safeguarded. This obligation further limits the ability for civil servants to innovate or make independent decisions.

2.5 The private sector as model for reform: a critical approach

Earlier it was stated that the private sector is often seen a beacon for the public sector. Especially in the countries that earlier in this chapter were labelled 'NPM marketizers' the introduction of business-like techniques (e.g. in the UK the 'competing for quality' and 'market testing' initiatives) are perceived as the key to improve governmental performance. Benchmarking against the private sector, although widespread, is however a far too simplistic approach when trying to improve the administrative system. The above described 'additional difficulties' of

governmental bureaucracies makes the functioning and management of governmental organizations fundamentally different than in the private sector. Wolf (1993) has listed some of these factors that should be taken into account when markets and governments are to be compared. Unlike private firms, governments apply equity considerations and are thus forced to apply non-economic considerations in their decisions (Okun, 1975) They cannot choose or reject their customers, but have to service different sorts of users with divergent interests (Löffler and Vintar, 2004; 10). This is closely connected with the another factor; governmental organizations have to deal with social and political dimensions, mainly regarding concepts as participation and accountability. Public organizations operate in a multi stakeholder context and can therefore not focus exclusively on 'customer' needs (Löffler and Vintar, 2004; 10). Prendergast (2003) shows that bureaucratic efficiency often gets bad press, but is inherent to the tasks that bureaucracies have to carry out. Examples of more efficient working governmental bureaucracies would be to let students pay for their grades (of course a higher grade would be more expensive than a lower) or criminals paying a price in order to escape prosecution. The most efficient immigration service would be the one that either grants every asylum seeker admission or refuses them all. Of course no one would seriously plead for improving efficiency in this way. University grades would lose their meaning and wealthy criminals would become immune for the rule of law. And the question whether a foreigner can obtain citizenship is in the first place a matter of politics, not of efficiency. Still, these examples show that efficiency in governmental organization has it's limits and that *policy paradoxes* lie at the heart of reform. These paradoxes will be examined further in this chapter.

Concluding it can be stated that the improvement of public management and organization is far more complex than just simply injecting an 'entrepreneurial spirit' in the government. Kickert writes that public management is highly influenced by the reciprocal relationship with the social and political environment. It consists of 'the steering within complex networks of multiple actors, such as national, provincial and local government, political and societal groups, interests and pressure groups, societal institutions, private and business organizations, etcetera. Government is in these networks no longer a mono centric and mono

rational force but has to deal with the multiple and sometimes contrary interests (Kickert, 1993; 192, 193).

The point that will be made here is that the private sector, serving as the Holy Grail of efficiency for administrative sector reforms, can only serve to a certain degree as an example for governmental organizations. The unique features of government, combined with the complex environment in which it operates, makes administrative reform much more than just about managerial reform in order to enhance performance. Given these unique features, administrative reformers encounter *policy paradoxes* when they try to improve administrations. Wright (1997) has listed these paradoxes.

The first one of them is that the most radical reform programmes are implemented in administrative systems and countries that are belonging to the most effective and efficient countries in the world. Reform 'frenzy' has caught on the most in the OECD countries with already good functioning administrations. In countries with poor performing administrations, plagued by for instance widespread corruption, there are far less (quantitative and qualitative) reform activity. The second paradox is the already mentioned preference at reformers to look to the private sector as model for the public sector. The fundamental differences and recognition of the divergence in tasks between the two are often overlooked. The third paradox has to do with the role of top bureaucrats as one of the principal drivers for reform. This is paradoxical because in the public choice literature (for instance Niskanen, 1971) these top level civil servants are depicted as inefficient, conservative and only applying rules. Their main goals are perceived to be budget maximisation and bureau expansion. However, top bureaucrats are not allergic to reform and are often propelling it. Another paradox is all about the quest for transparency. The desire for increased transparency is often intended to cut costs, but can in fact turn out to be the opposite. Previous hidden disparities are exposed thus creating pressure for litigation. The result can therefore be that ignorance and obfuscation leads to increased transparency with defined rights and expensive litigation. The costs of these can very well rise above the initial situation. Paradox number five is the push for transparency is translated into clear managerial goals and targets. This is often accompanied with greater managerial autonomy with

problems for the political accountability. In other words; managerial autonomy blurs the political responsibility of elected officials. In the Netherlands this has led to calls for 'the primacy of politics' over agencies and ZBOs. The sixth paradox that Wright mentions is the earlier discussed quest for efficiency, denying the ever existing 'big trade-offs' between efficiency and equity (Okun, 1975). The final paradox that will be mentioned here is the conviction of reformers to *reduce* the role of the state while at the same time successful reforms require a strong state for the initiation and implementation of these plans. In addition, several reforms encompass increased state activity. Evaluations, performance indicators and all sorts of visitations by government committees increase the work load of both the government as well as the organizations that are scrutinized.

Taken these paradoxes into account it is clear that administrative reform is much more complicated and contradictory than often proclaimed by reformers. It can be seen that easy rhetoric such as '*Run government as a business*' (quote derived from Ringeling, 1993;198) is not very helpful. The nature, tasks and environment in which public organizations operate is fundamentally different that those of the private sector. The famous aphorism by Sayre, made famous by Allison still is viable: *'public and private management are fundamentally alike in all unimportant* aspects' (Allisson, 1982). It is also important to be aware of the discrepancy of values between public administration and public management. Lane (1994) has summed these differences up and can be found in table 2.2

Table 2.2 Value differences between public administration
and public management

Public administration approach	Public management approach
Rules	Objectives
Due process	Efficiency
Anticipation	Adaptation
Responsabilty	Direction
Formalism: case	Innovation
Openness	Secrecy
Complaint: voice	Exit

Legality	Effectiveness
Vocation	Self-interests
Public interest	Profit

(Lane, 1994; 144)

One could say that the Weberian public administration approach has lost terrain in favour of the public management approach. '*The managerial revolution has crept into the public sector, increasing the role of managers, on the one hand, and reorientating governance towards the management philosophy, on the other'* (Lane, 1994; 147). This chapter has dealt with both the particularities of bureaucracy and how the concept has evolved since Weber to the public management approach. Many administrative systems, especially those in countries that were earlier classified as the Continental European modernizers, have now adopted a hybrid and/or blurred form of these two approaches.

Moving away now from the concept, paradoxes and changes in approach this chapter will end with a brief overview of how reform can actually happen. What are some facilitators for reform?

2.6 Facilitators for reform

Taking the rather impressive list of blocking factors and paradoxes into account, the abilities for administrative reform seem very limited. Yet reform has happened in the past. The history of governmental administrations, especially after 1980, is full of reform efforts with varying results. In any case, '*one can't say any more at this moment that nothing is going on in government, or that working in the bureaucracy is boring or dull. A lot is happening these days under the label of administrative reform, that may be undertaken to introduce institutional change or to implement cut-backs'* (Maas en van Nispen, 1997). So what are the main facilitators for reform? Three main factors can be distinguished that accustom reform that are dominant in the literature as summarized by Heyse et al. (2006; 8-11).

The emergence of a crisis is an often used explanation for reform. This idea is closely connected with the growing influence of the media on the policy-making process. A certain issue can 'catch fire' via media coverage and leads thus to a change

in existing an policy or institution. This sudden discontinuity is the contrary of the ordinary situation where long periods of stability are characterized by incrementalism (Lindblom, 1959). An important notion with crisis as an explanatory factor for reform is the fact that crises can both be real (for instance in the case of a disaster) but also deliberately constructed by actors aiming for reform. These actors can then use certain crisis rhetoric to strengthen their claim. Van den Bossche, the Belgian minister who initiated the Copernicus programme stated: '*announce the Apocalypse, make the unthinkable thinkable, question the general agreed principles of the organization, bring the abyss closer. Or in other words, define the burning platform for the reform*' (quoted in Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 422). The second factor is that of a 'window of opportunity', often but not always provided by a crisis. In such as situation the moment of diminished barriers for reform need to be seized by a so called 'policy entrepreneur', an actor that could be a politician, but also a civil servant or another outside actor. Thirdly and closely connected with this is the factor of 'leadership' at explaining reform. A reformist leader can emerge in the form of a policy entrepreneur, making use of the window of opportunity generated by a crisis, but can also operate without a crisis.

Unfortunately, reform literature does not provide clear cut recipes for success. The three facilitating factors as described above are a much too easy explanation and there is of course a lot of context and variables that need to be taken into account. But it can be concluded that although (successful) reform is difficult to achieve, it is not impossible. Yet the question remains how reform programmes can improve the performance of administrative sectors. Therefore this thesis now moves away from generalist observations about reform and continues with the following two chapters that will provide in-depth case studies of two administrative reform programmes. These case studies will be carried out trough the methodology as stated in chapter 1. Respectively the content, context and process of the reforms will be described, followed by a chapter conclusion.

Chapter 3:   **Copernicus**

This chapter will provide a study of the Belgian federal reform project, Copernicus. It will begin with a description of the context in which the program was launched. Secondly, the focus moves on to the content of Copernicus. What was the goal of the program and what were the contents of the 'package' to achieve these goals? Following the process of the reform will be discussed, including a chronological record of the most important events, the reception of the program and the results. Finally, the legacy of Copernicus will be examined, including the new direction that administrative reform in Belgium has taken.

3.1   Context

The Copernicus program was launched after a turbulent decade in Belgian (political) history. The results of the 1991 elections were baptized as the 'Black Sunday' because the sudden success of the extreme right was a direct manifestation of the so called 'gap' between government and the citizen. One of the first measures to counter this gap was the Citizen Charter, discussed in Chapter 1. Next to an electoral shift several incidents and crises intensified '*an overall feeling of distrust in the political, judicial and official elite'* (Maesschalck et al., 2002). The next elections (1995) were dominated by the Agusta-Dassault affair; the illegal financing of the socialist party (PS) via defense contracts. In 1996 probable the most intense scandal hit the country. In August of that year the pedophile Dutroux was arrested but the whole affair showed major inefficiencies at both the police and the judicial system. In October 1996 'The White March' in Brussels expressed the large dissatisfaction of the public with their government. About 250.000 to 300.000 people demonstrated against what was perceived as the 'old political culture' (Thijs, 2005; 67, 68).

Apart from all the societal turmoil and outrage about the various incidents, the fiscal and budgetary condition of the state was sound. But unfortunately, in the election year of 1999, another crisis hit the country. What started out as a small food incident turned out the be an economic catastrophe. The toxic substance of dioxin was found in Belgian chickens, presenting a danger for national health. Soon the 'dioxin chickens' began to dominate the elections and added up to the

already widespread feelings of national crisis and loss of legitimacy of governmental institutions. In this context a government was surprisingly quickly formed. After just one month a 'purple-green' coalition was forged, consisting of liberals, socialists and greens. The prime minister was the Liberal Guy Verhofstadt, who earlier initiated the Citizen Charter. Given the past years of incidents and lack of confidence by the public, the government aimed no less than to make Belgium 'a model state'. The coalition agreement states that '*for the past years our country has undoubtedly suffered from regrettable events which have severely diminished the confidence of the population in the institutions. The recent crisis which struck the food sector, the companies, agriculture and all consumers, has once more made clear that the working of the state severely falls short*'. (Federal Government, quoted in Thijs, 2005;72, own translation).

Consequently, the first chapter of the coalition agreement was completely about the 'intense reform of the administration'. Luc Van den Bossche (of the socialist party, SP/SP.A) was installed as minister for Administrative Reform and charged with the modernization. A first blueprint of the reform efforts was published in the so called Boullion paper, named after the village of Bouillon were two groups consisting of prime minister Verhofstadt, minister Van den Bossche, members of cabinet and external consultants gathered to redesign the organizational structure as well as the human resources policy. This paper would prove to be the basis from which the Copernicus reform would depart. Before going into the **content** of the reforms, two more contextual aspects of Copernicus cannot go unnoticed. The first one was the direct schism in reception between Flemish and Walloon parties. As long as the plans would remain vague, no problems rose. But especially the Walloon heavily resisted any alterations on structures, particularity on the special legal position of civil servants (Thijs, 2005 ;75). Traditionally, the socialist union of civil servants has the strongest position in Walloon and maintains direct ties to important figures in the Socialist Party. The socialist union therefore possesses a considerable amount of blocking power (Interview Hondeghem, 23/05/2007). In the already complex Belgian (political) situation this initial tension was no good omen.

The second aspect that will be mentioned here was the so called Copernicus survey.[5] In June 2000 the government sent a copy of a brochure containing the reform plans along with a questionnaire to every Belgian inhabitant aged 16 or older. Immediately after the initiative there was severe criticism from various sides (scientific, political, press). Political opponents pointed to the fact that it was all a big PR stunt with large costs[6], while some scientists thought that the chosen method of inquiry was unjust. One newspaper agreed that the reform plans as such were good, but the survey was not. Another stated that the whole initiative was meant to be 'the crowbar' which the government could use to make inhibitive ministers go along with the reform. In July 2000 Van den Bossche presented the results. Only 9% of the population had responded, about 750.000 people. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of them agreed with the statements of the government that the administration should be more customer oriented. Prime minister Verhofdstadt spun the results saying that '*the widespread approval among the population allows us to implement the Copernicus plan faster, in any case during the current term'* (Thijs, 2005 ;78, own translation).

Concluding it can be stated that the context in which the reform plans were launched was one of a juncture. Several affairs in the 1990s gave almost every Belgian a sense of urgency that something had to be done. Several of the 'forces at work' from figure 1 of chapter 1 can be identified. The new management ideas regarding New Public Management were already embraced by Verhofstadt and Van den Bossche prior to the Copernicus reform. For instance, the service charter of 1993 and the Bouillion paper can be considered as preludes to the large scale reforms later. Also to be found in figure 1 (under the label G) the pressure from citizens is observable, especially during the White March. That demonstration added up to the already deeply and widespread feelings of urgency and the need for administrative change that were fed during the many incidents and crises. These events, to be found under the label I in the same figure, provided eventually the 'window of opportunity' in which a full scale reform plan could take place. Socio-economic forces were far less an influential factor; during the 1990s the fiscal and budgetary situation of the Belgian government had improved. Unlike

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5   The (Dutch) text of this survey can be found as APPENDIX II.
6   The costs were estimated around 2 million euro.

the 1980s, when financial problems and the need to meet the Maastricht criteria dominated the reform agenda, Copernicus was not about financial tightening. It was the working of the state that was perceived to fall short. Verhofstadt en Van den Bossche (amongst others in government, but they were the leading figures) seized the opportunity to implement a ambitious reform program aimed at making the government a better service provider and a better employer for civil servants. The citizen should no longer serve politicians and the administration, but the other way around. How this Copernican revolution should be realized will be discussed in the next section on the ***content*** of the reform plans.

3.2 Content

In order to have a good understanding about the contents and aims of Copernicus, one should take into account the Bouillion paper, the earlier mentioned 'blueprint' of the reforms. In this document Van den Bossche mentions the changed (and changing) relationship between the government and it's citizens. It says that *'in some respects the difference with the private sector blurs*' and the administration should move away from the 'ancient' bureaucratic model to a 'customer-oriented' approach. Van de Bossche (1999) continues by stating the eight principles that should be leading in the reforms to come:

- increased autonomy of governmental services
- increased accountability for public managers
- focus on results
- customer orientation
- transparency
- plainness of lawmaking and processes
- safeguarding of output quality and the extension of performance indicators to make outcomes of governmental action 'measurable'.

Right from the very beginning, the Copernicus project was presented as a radical and ground breaking reform. The atmosphere of crisis in the country allowed for such a revolutionary approach. The traditional habits of the Belgian federal administration that Van den Bossche denounces should undergo a total redesign on all aspects; *structure, process*, *staff* and *organizational culture*. This following section aims to give a brief overview of the main changes that were directed on

the various aspects. The structure of the federal government would be completely redrawn. The aim was to create coherence between the various policy areas within a ministry. The name of a ministry would also change into FOD (*Federale overheidsdient*, Federal Governmental Service). Next to this, the ministerial cabinets would decline in number while the FOD would gain power by the introduction of preparatory policy cells and councils. Belgian ministers were always surrounded by their own (small) cabinets helping them in formulating policy. Copernicus aimed at reducing their role to evolve (in the words of Verhofstadt) to a 'Dutch model'. Ministers would in the future be left with only a small secretariat (Pelgrims, 2005;154-164). But perhaps the most important structural alteration was the creation of the virtual matrix. Both horizontal and vertical governmental services would be created to steer on main policy lines with their equivalents in the staff services of the various FODs (Thijs and Pelgrims, 2006).

Regarding process the emphasis laid on simplification and improvement of the services. The tool that was deemed suitable for this was the concept of Business Process Re-engineering (BPR). Also the use of ICT as a whole and the internet especially (e-government) would play a large role.

A new HRM policy (the 'staff aspect' of the reform) would focus on competencies instead of the rigid system that was in place before. In the old situation at every department, section etc. there were precise prescriptions on how many staff there was (and should be), what they were doing. Every change in this had to go through the whole political and juridical treadmill. As a result, the system was merely focussed on filling up numerical staff gaps instead meeting the needs of a certain department (Scheepers and Parys, 2005; 261-264). The new staff policy would make an end of this situation by giving a newly created selection organ, called Selor, the ability to recruit and reward civil servants on the basis of competencies (Thijs and Pelgrims, 2006).

Finally, a new management culture was meant to be created. The keyword here was 'responsibilization'. Top officials were to have a certain management plan that they would have to carry out and be the subject of evaluation afterwards. To

increase the required managerial capacity within the government, also external managers were encouraged to apply. Here also the emphasis would be on competencies with respect to recruitment.

The above is a short characterization of the Copernicus plans as they were presented in the year 2000 after the elections of 1999. The aims and aspects of the reforms can schematically be found in figure 1.

Figure 3.1: the four pillars of Copernicus
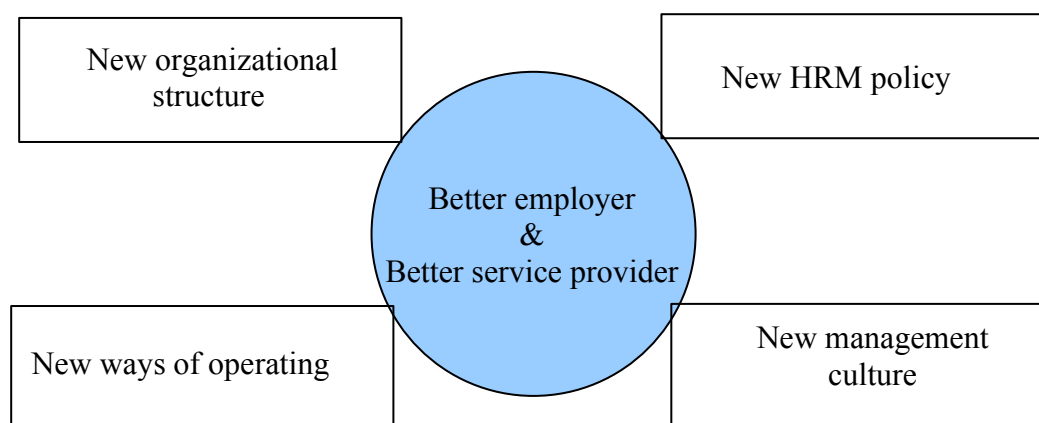
(Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; xxv, own translation)

3.3   Process

Now that the content of the plans are discusses it is time to give attention to the process of the reforms. Copernicus was set into action in 2000 and ended three years later. The following paragraphs do not aim to give an extensive evaluation of those three years but rather try to analyze the most relevant aspects of the reform process, bearing in mind the central questions of finding best practices and transferable lessons to improve the working of the administration. The focus is on three aspects of the process, also to be found in figure 3 of the first chapter: *actions, reactions* and *results*. Regarding *actions* the focus will be on the most important acts by the actors involved. *Reactions* will be about the reception of the initiatives by the various stakeholders (the political arena, the civil servants, the unions, press). *Results* finally will not be an extensive *ex post* evaluation of Copernicus but rather an overview of what is left of Copernicus since the end of it in 2003. In the last chapter of this thesis, the section on conclusions and

recommendations will focus on the (transferable) lessons learned and best practices, combining Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*.

Top-down reform

First it can be firmly stated that Copernicus was carried out as a top-down process. The vision that was developed for the reform, written down in the Boullion paper was the work of Van den Bossche and external private consulting firms. According to one secretary-general the paper was in fact already written before the seminar in Boullion started (Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 418, 419). The elite character of the reform was a deliberate choice of the minister stating that '*the reform is something elitarian (...). With the implementation there will be indeed a need for organizing a maximal engagement. But the fundamental vision does not emerge from a discussion with 60.000 man'* (Van den Bossche, quoted in Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 418, own translation). The chosen approach meant a clash between top officials and the ministers. Van den Bossche tried to attract managerial expertise and skills from outside the administration and did not think that the college of secretariat-generals could not attribute to constructive change. Moreover, they were seen as part of the system that had to be changed. One of these top officials declared that the strategy of the minister was based on distrust for the current top officials, was not aimed at forging consensus and sometimes lacked respect. Difficulties at attracting external managers worsened the situation (Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 419).

The unions as impeding power

Related to the troublesome reactions of the top officials to Copernicus was the reception of them by the civil servants at large. Just as was done with the entire population another survey was conducted to learn about opinions and reactions of the civil servants towards Copernicus. In this survey, called Artemis, many of them expressed their worries about their individual future. Because great attention was given to the 'big picture', in that early stage it was not yet possible to give in detail clarity about the future of each individual civil servant. As for the unions, Copernicus became quickly politicized. The influence of especially the Walloon socialists party as an impeding power became imminent. Their dominant presence as a union reminds of the Dutch pillarization before the Second World War.

Generally speaking one could say that the unions were a slowing factor for reforms, with varying degrees from Flemish Christian Democrats unions who were the most open for reform to the Walloon Socialist union being the most conservative. Ultimately, it was the resistance of the unions that made some of the reforms not feasible and forcing to diminish the pace. (interview Thijs, 19/06/2007).

Political support

The same cleavages as became apparent in the support or obstruction from the unions also emerged in the political arena. Here also a clear dividing line was to be found between the Flemish and Walloon politicians. The main drivers behind Copernicus were both Flemish (Verhofstadt and Van den Bossche), while the Walloon ministers in the cabinets were far less enthusiastic. One minister declared afterwards that Walloon politicians perceive the administration as a natural employer while in Flanders it is seen as the natural service provider. In the Artemis survey Dutch speaking civil servant also showed more familiarity with the managerial Anglo-Saxon culture than their Walloon counterparts. The political resistance allowed for the top officials to strengthen their objections *vis-à-vis* Copernicus. Some of the secretariat-generals gathered support to block (some of) the reforms by first turning to their own minister, their union, politicians of their party, the press and finally the Council of State (Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 420-421).

Press

Copernicus started off with a large PR offensive via the survey among all adult Belgian citizens and attracted by result media coverage. Little response however, and criticism about the costs of the survey gave Copernicus a bad start in the press. Soon it became apparent that most citizens had lost their interest in the reforms and attention in the newspapers flawed. The 'quality papers' continued their covering but attacked the program because rhetoric did often not match reality. Van den Bossche received criticism from a colleague minister for the chosen method of large media exposure. That minister declared that it would be better to work in silence and wait with presenting something to the press when most of the work is done. Copernicus worked just the other way around: Van den

Bossche brought deliberately attention to the project before it was even started. Because of this chosen media strategy, failures became more exposed to the public, putting pressure on the cabinet and diminishing support for further reform.

3.4   After Copernicus: from New Public Management to New Public Service?

In may 2003 new elections took place in Belgium. Van den Bossche did not return in office but his position was taken over by Marie Aréna. After just one month being in office she declared via a press communiqué the end of Copernicus. In her statement she underlined the urgent need for a social dialogue and communication. She declared that her predecessor had too much confidence in the private sector and the competencies of the people working in it. As a consequence, one of her actions was to stop the (expensive) contracts with the consultancy firms. Reform became a less media covered and more internal affair. Instead of the strong New Public Management emphasis that dominated Copernicus, Arena took a more traditional, Weberian approach towards the administrative system with equity and objectivity as core themes. For example, the increased payments for new managers were altered. But Copernicus was also changed in many other respects. The coalition agreement of the new government stated for instance that civil servant should be more directly involved at the reforms. The HR policy moves back to a more centralized and uniform system. The Business Process Re- engineering (BPR) project continued, yet with a far greater role for civil servants. Arena summarized her change of course by saying that '*the change cannot be done by only cabinets and consultants. The change can only take place when everyone is able to give his opinion, be proud on the administration and on himself. The political government should also be implied with the aim of creating consensus for the proposed changes. And this for one of the most beautiful matters: the common good and the spirit of public service'* (quoted in Hondeghem and Depré, 2005; 425-427, own translation).

After Copernicus (in 2003) a minister for Administrative Simplification (dutch: *Administratieve vereenvoudiging*) was installed. This minister, Van den Quickenborne, soon headed off with his 'Kafka-brigade'. The goal of this initiative was to eliminate and/or simplify administrative burdens for both citizens as well

as companies. The main guideline for the process was the principle that for every new rule another policy measure had to be deleted, apart from an overall reduction. A recent study (Marneffe, 2006) has shown that administrative burdens, in any case regarding costs, have dropped since Kafka was initiated proving the success of the 'Q' method.[7]

3.5 Copernicus and ICT

In 2003 a major Belgian newspaper *(De Standaard)* wrote that *'when the Copernicus reform would be undone, e-government will perhaps remain as the most important achievement*' (quoted in Snijkers, 2005; 373, own translation). It is indeed remarkable that almost all elements of the Copernicus reform met heavy resistance (e.g. from the unions, politicians), but the efforts under the labels of ICT and e-government were fairly successful. A Dutch commission consisting of several notable figures in the field of public administration[8] presented in 2003 a rapport on innovation in the public sector. Their chapter on ICT was labelled 'The Belgians do it better' (Docters van Leeuwen et al., 2003).

What made the ICT and e-government projects of Belgium so successful? First it can be stated that the astonishing growth of the internet has major implications for our societies and thus for governments as well. Many observers (such as Castells (2000) , Stehr (2002) and van Dijk (2006) speak of our time as the 'information age' or 'knowledge society'. Without spending too much time on the concept and importance of the internet and ICT as a whole, the internet has proven to be a transformative technology, able to enhance tasks and activities in a more efficient way but also to reform entire processes (Snijker; 2005; 374).

Prior to Copernicus every ministry or federal governmental service had their own ICT policy. This had led to the creation of many 'IT islands'; the phenomenon that different branches of government develop autonomous, non-standard applications and standards. Over time this will mean that these different branches have trouble to communicate and/or exchange information, thus increasing sectorization and

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7   In newspapers etc. the name of Van den Quickenborne was soon abbreviated 'Q', adding up to his already innovative and unorthodox image.
8   The authors were Arthur Docters van Leeuwen, Wim Deetman, Ivo Opstelten, Marco Pastors and Roel in 't Veld.

lack of co-operation. Copernicus lifted the ICT policy from this distributed level to a federal model. In other words; a general and central ICT policy was formulated on the basis of subsidiarity. For this purpose a federal ICT manager was installed (Snijkers, 2005; 373-380).

Several ICT initiatives have been launched under the flag of Copernicus or were emphasized during the reform period. Some notable examples will be given here. The first and perhaps most impacting is the creation of the so called 'authentic registrations'. These are singular and trustworthy registrations of data on citizens, companies, buildings etc. The basic idea behind 'authentic registrations' is that various governmental organizations can 'harvest' data about a citizen or company from a centralized database. This is meant to prevent that various parts of the administration keep asking for the same data. This idea has been realized on the field of the 'ordinary' population register, the register for business (*Kamer van Koophandel)* and social security. By law it is forbidden for one segment of the government to ask information of a citizen that another part already requested. A board of privacy overseers guards the proper use of information while the reliability of the services (both for citizens as for the government) is guaranteed by an electronic ID (the e-ID card), which can be used at all levels of government (Snijkers, 2005; 378-384 and Docters van Leeuwen et al., 2003).

The previous section did not aim to give a full overview of all ICT initiatives that were initiated by or emphasized by Copernicus. Several other projects on the *front office* side (the portalsite belgium.be, the ability to do taxes on line (tax-on-web) have been launched with varying success. The point however that will be made here is that the ICT initiatives on the *back office* side (the authentic registrations) were a revolutionary and successful breakthrough in e-government.

3.6   Chapter summary

In this chapter the case of Copernicus has been analysed via the theoretical framework as provided in the first chapter (figure 1, 2, 3). Here a brief summary of the chapter will be given, connecting the framework with the findings of the case. The pressures for reform are heavily dominated by the events of the 1990s. Several scandals led to a deeply felt feeling of distrust in the government. This

provided a large 'window of opportunity' for a large scale reform, incorporating ideas that had dominated literature and practice of public management reform for several year prior to Copernicus. The most important actors of Copernicus, Verhofstadt and Van den Bossche found in the accumulated crises a unique opportunity to implement their ideas about the public sector. These ideas were very close connected to those of the New Public Management wave that had spread the OECD countries since the 1980s.

The core elements of the reform were fourfold: a new structure (organogram), a new management culture, a modern HR policy and new ways of operating (with a large emphasis on ICT and the internet). The relation between government and citizens would alter via a shift to a much more service orientated culture in the government. The relationship between the government and the civil service changed the most with the intention to abolish the ministerial cabinets. The goal was here to create only a small secretariat for ministers, similar to the Dutch model. Changes within the civil service incorporated several businesslike initiatives; the introduction of BPRs, a large role for (external) consultants, a HR policy focussing on skills and attempting to attract external managers. Also ministries were transformed into FODs and a virtual matrix was introduced.

The process of reform was a deliberate choice for an integral and radical reform. The whole administration was to change and would do so within one legislature. Next to that Van den Bossche was clear in his other choices; the reform was a top-down, elite designed process with a large role for external consultants and a far smaller input for (top) civil servants. Further a sense of distrust from the part of Van den Bossche towards the administration and a clear choice for the New Public Management convictions on the public sector can be identified. These views became already apparent in the Boullion and Copernicus papers that served as the blueprint for the reforms. Resistance from several stakeholders eventually led to a change of course in the reforms. It became more low profile, less New Public Management and more 'neo-Weberian' with the 'spirit of the public service' as a core theme. The reduction of administrative burdens (the Kafka brigade) of minister Van den Quickenborne was fairly successful but also here a practical, 'hands-on' approach was adopted instead of part of a large-scale reform.

ICT as part of the Copernicus reform deserves special attention. Several factors made these efforts successful. A centralized approach prevented (or ended) the creation of 'ICT islands' within the administration. Secondly, a decisive choice for 'authentic registrations' enhanced cooperation between the various parts of government and diminished administrative burdens for both the government as well as the citizens. This has proved to be successful realization of the Copernican idea of 'putting the citizen central'.

Chapter 4:   *Andere Overheid*

In December 2003 minister Thom de Graaf, responsible for administrative reform, launched the program *Andere Overheid*. For the first time in the Dutch 'reform history' there was no commission installed, but an internal team got the assignment to lead the process of modernizing government. In this chapter this program will be analyzed in the same way as was done with the Copernicus program. Context, content and process will be addressed, followed by a chapter conclusion.

4.1   Context

Andere Overheid was, contrary to Copernicus, no direct reaction to a series of scandals and incidents that had hit the country. However, the program was indeed induced by the much discussed lack of trust in government. The rise of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 was by many observers (politicians, press and citizens) perceived as the manifestation of a gap between 'The Hague' and the rest of the country. Fortuyn claimed that politicians were unaware of the 'real' problems of 'ordinary' people and was successful with his criticism on the quality of the services delivered by the public sector (for instance Fortuyn, 2002). The confidence in the public sector has dropped from a steady two-third approval rate in 1998, via a equal number in 2000 to a sudden one-third rate in 2002 (Becker and Dekker, 2005: 344). The goal here is not to give an extensive explanation about the decline in trust in government. The point here is that *Andere Overheid* was launched in an atmosphere where the achievements of government were under pressure. The diminishing trust in government is however no unique Dutch phenomenon, nor can Fortuyn be considered as a single explanatory factor. In almost all Western democracies a crisis in representation has become apparent, including the so called 'gap' between government and citizens. Contributing factors such as individualization, 'rising expectations', globalization and Europeanization all accumulate to widespread feelings of uncertainty and distrust in government (Hoekstra et al., 2006).

It can be stated that all these discomforting factors erupted in the 2002 elections. The murder of Fortuyn in that same year did not end the 'peat fire' (Dutch:

veenbrand) that has been going on for years. The years after the Second World War (1945-1973) were a period of great optimism about governmental on the field of societal steering. With the economic crises in the 1970s this changed. Feelings of disillusion and aversion against governmental intervention grew. In the 1980s and 1990s various governments adopted a more neutral and managerial character. The welfare state became gradually less extensive. In chapter 1 the transformation of the role of the Dutch government over the years has already been discussed. Concluding one could say that several long lasting phenomena, culminating in the 2002 election year, created a sense of urgency that something had to be done. The gap between citizens and 'The Hague' had to be closed. *Andere Overheid* was the programmatic response to these developments. The following section will deal with the contents of the program.

4.2   Content

The coalition agreement of the second Balkenende cabinet and the following vision on how government should change already showed some of the elements that *Andere Overheid* would depart from. The vision of the cabinet on *Andere Overheid* is dominated by the concepts of the civil society, reduction of bureaucracy and modernization of citizenship. The cabinet points to the necessity of modernizing government accompanied by an alteration of the relation with society. In short, the government envisions the state of the future in four characterizations:

- more modesty in ambitions,
- more opportunities for civic initiatives,
- safeguarding of the public interest and constitutional demands and
- delivering high performances when certain tasks cannot be executed by the market or civil society (Ministerie van BZK, 2003).

The actual program *Andere Overheid* (Ministerie van BZK, 2004) is a more hands-on approach on how this vision should be realized. It consists of four major elements:

- a better service provision towards the citizen,
- less and different tasks to be adopted by the government,
- a better internal organization of central government and

- a renewal of the relations with provinces and municipalities.

These four elements are all 'dressed up' with a wide variety of initiatives[9]. An important aspect of all these projects is that they, as well as the four elements, are not *new* but rather a unification of existing ideas and projects. Some speak of a *node* of modern innovation attempts (Noordegraaf and Van der Meulen, 2005; 5). Here a brief overview of the initiatives will be presented, grouped alongside the four elements.

Under the label of *improving service* the leading principle would be that citizens and businesses may not be impeded by the way the government has organized itself. 'Efficiency' en 'customer friendliness' should characterize the contacts between government and citizens. Four main activities are connected with this label. The enabling of 65% of governmental services via Internet by 2007, getting citizens more involved with policy formulation, strengthening the demand-driven character within government and stimulating 'best practices' and innovation via conferences, publications and experiments.

The second label is that government will adopt *less* and *different* activities. Departments should eliminate their own interfering rules. Secondly, the administrative burden for citizens should decrease by 25% as stated in the coalition agreement. Connected to this a 'bureaucracy examination' was to be introduced, aiming at keeping these two prior goals intact. Fourth, the government commits itself to think of alternative lawmaking procedures. Finally, the government want to draw the attention of 'Brussels' to the sometimes non complementarity character of European and national laws.

The third element consists of *better internal organization of government*. Here the protracted discussion on 'core tasks' becomes relevant again (cf for instance Verhaak, 1997). Also a decrease and improvement of the advisory system is part of this label, alongside a departmental redesign. With regard to the execution of policy a scrutiny is to be launched on the autonomized branches of government,

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9   For a full list see http://www.deandereoverheid.nl and search for 'Actieprogramma' or access directly via the URL http://andereoverheid.hosting.tamtam.nl/NR/rdonlyres/A548A21F-AFA3-4ED8-A78B-CAC5B3B667E2/0/actieprogrammaandereoverheid.pdf

with special attention for efficiency. A reformulation on the role of government as supervisor and enforcer should be done. Finally, the management of public organization would be improved.

The fourth and last set of actions is labeled *renewal of intergovernmental relations*. An important initiative here is to move from specific spending guidelines to a more general transfer of funds. This means that central government no longer prescribes in detail what provinces and municipalities need to do with their finance but they will enjoy greater freedom with respect to the spending of it. Additionally the government urges for 'chain management'; (Dutch: *ketenregie*) putting the client/patient central instead of the organization. Transparency and performance measuring and indications must enhance (via benchmarking) the working of organizations and make them better accountable.

4.3   Process

The previous paragraphs have provided a summary of what *Andere Overheid* intended to do. This section will focus on the process of the program. Which actions were taken, what were the reaction from various stakeholders and finally; what can be said about results?

Actions

The program *Andere Overheid* (PAO) is a story in three parts. During the period the program was in action three different ministers were responsible for Administrative Reform. Respectively De Graaf (May 2003-Marc 2005), Pechtold (March 2005-June 2006) and Nicolaï (June 2006-Februari 2007) held the office and left their specific mark. The next paragraphs will deal with their actions regarding PAO. It will be based mainly on accounts by Steur (2007), De Graaf (2005) and an interview with Steenbergen (26/07/2007).

After his installation as minister De Graaf headed off with the production of the documents that would serve as a starting point for PAO. On December 1st of 2003 these documents were published and followed by instant criticism from the two decentral branches of government (provinces and municipalities, gathered in the organizations of IPO and VNG). Both IPO and VNG claimed that they have not

been fully engaged with the design of PAO. This was particularly striking due to the fact that the fourth aim of the program was to renew the relationships of the central government *vis-à-vis* the provinces and municipalities. The project team that was installed was rather small, charged with three objectives. They could *execute* certain projects themselves, *facilitate* new ones or *boost/support* already existing projects. Next to this it was intended that the project team would induce a 'spirit of renewal' within government through speeches, conferences and the special website. Both the minister as well as the project DG (Lex van den Ham) would serve as the 'anchormen' of *Andere Overheid*. In total 64 initiatives PAO consisted of 64 actions with little or none prioritization.

The 'false start' that was made regarding IPO and VNG was repaired in April 2004 when the three branches of government (central, provinces and municipalities) joined in a mutual agreement on administrative reform. Around that same time De Graaf had announced the core task analysis of government. For a total of nine policy areas[10] commissions were installed to determine whether the government should continue doing these tasks or that the market or civil society could also employ them. The commissions were composed of a wide variety of stakeholders; not just civil servants of the concerning departments but also people from the private sector and from the decentral branches of government. The aim was that the output of these various commissions would serve as guiding lines for a redesign of the public service. However, the unexpected leave of minister De Graaf[11] meant a change of course of *Andere Overheid*.

His successor, Pechtold, was less interested in these task analyses and departmental redesign but rather in the implementation of concrete measures that would directly serve citizens. Therefore Pechtold's focus moved away from departmental redesign and task analysis to (municipal) service provision. Furthermore, when the commissions that were charged with their task analysis presented their findings (September 2005) they concluded that the government was already doing the proper things. They stated that it was no longer the question

10 Security policy, risk analysis/hazardous materials, spatial policy, intertwining governmental competencies, coordination of EU policy, economic market arbitrage, foreign policy, departmental culture and communication.
11 De Graaf left office due to the fact that his proposal for the elected mayor did not make it through parliament.

which tasks government would adopt, but rather *how*. Efficiency gains could be made by decentralizing certain tasks, letting the different parts of government better cooperate with each other and work in different ways. Earlier the parliament had already urged for a similar focus; *Andere Overheid* was to concentrate on three aspects.

- Enhance the quality of service provision (by 'authentic registration' and a multi channel approach),
- reduce bureaucracy and rule making (by cutting administrative burdens) and
- a redesign of the departments and a task analysis.

It can thus be stated that in the 'Pechtold years' PAO gained focus with regard two the first two priorities while the last aspect lost urgency and attention. This shift became notably apparent through the efforts of the municipalities (gathered in the VNG) to make the municipality *the* gate to all governmental services. A commission (Jorritsma) stated in June of 2005 that this goal has to be reached within ten years. Here the VNG adopted an ambitious and accommodating role, eventually resulting in the 'Kloosterhoeve agreement' of June 2006. Here seven[12] large municipalities, in close cooperation with three DGs of the ministry of Home Affairs agreed to enhance and modernize municipal service provision. Benchmarks, charters, contact centers and the use of personalized Internet pages were to play a large part in this effort (Ministerie van BZK, 2006b)

Yet another political crisis meant a new responsible minister for Adminstrative Renewal. This time Nicolaï of the liberal VVD took office, in Juli of 2006. The fall of the third Balkenende cabinet also meant new and earlier elections. For PAO this meant that all initiatives had to be shortened with half a year. Nicolaï had little choice but to make a further prioritization and decided to focus on the aspects of the progress report of PAO, the proposals for redesigning the departments in general and the Brinkman-report especially. The latter was a pledge to merge the department of Home Affairs and Justice in order to create a Ministery of Safety. On the redesign of the departments Nicolaï sent in October 2006 his paper 'Het resultaat is de maat' (Ministerie van BZK, 2006a) to

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12 Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Dordrecht, Enschede, Leiden and Zwolle.

parliament. This paper stated that international comparative research on administrative reform had shown that 'grand designs' and the 'one-size-fits-all' approach is not compatible with the complex environments in which governments operate nowadays. Instead the paper proposes three directions in which the civil service should evolve: political steering on societal results, a flexible civil service and more space for the execution of policy. Meanwhile the campaigns for the elections of November 2006 became well underway, resulting in rather marginal attention for 'Het resultaat is de maat' on the political level. In December 2006 the last progression report of PAO was sent to parliament. This report states the successes that were made under the labels of enhancing the quality of service provision and the reduction of bureaucracy, but also the notion that choices have to be made on the field of task analysis and departmental redesign (Tweede Kamer, 2006). In february 2007 (when a new government took office), the program team ceased to exist but with the explicit statement that 'the movement continues'.

After this brief account of the historical events of PAO it is time to examine the various reactions on the program. This will be done via an overview of the stakeholders politicians, civil servants, scientists and press.

Politicians

With the start of PAO the political support within the cabinet was fairly strong. One attributing factor for this was the fact that De Graaf was, next to minister for Administrative Renewal, also vice-prime minister. The other vice-prime minister (Zalm of the liberal VVD) and prime minister Balkenende (CDA) were also convinced of the need for administrative reform and put in their weight to pressure other members of the cabinet as well as civil servants to constructive cooperation (Interview Steenbergen, 26/07/2007). However, the broad political support for *Andere Overheid* shrunk over the years. After De Graaf left office, his successor Pechtold was no vice-prime minster but also not much appreciated by his fellow members of the cabinet[13]. *Andere Overheid* became more politicized and could no longer enjoy the full backing of the other two coalition parties.

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13 Amongst others due to some highly controversial statements on the functioning of Balkenende and the hidden, but 'dirty ways' within politics.

Criticism from parliament targeted the perceived lack of vision of PAO, including calls for clear leadership of the program. A wide variety of change initiatives (64 in total) without coherence was deemed to fail inevitably (Noordegraaf and Van der Meulen, 2005;5). When Pechtold assumed office a focus and prioritization could be observed, but the broad character of all sorts of initiatives remained making one member of the program team speak of a '*decorated, but falling Christmas tree*' (Steur, 2007; 20).

Civil servants

PAO made a uneasy start with the troubled relations with the IPO and VNG, but soon recovered this flaw. For the rest of the program it can be stated that it was actually the provinces and municipalities that were most enthusiastic about *Andere Overheid*. Departmental The Hague adopted a much more suspicious approach, starting from the impression that De Graaf left that few things had been done right by the ministries (Steur, 2007; 10). But it was also the Damoclean sword of downsizing central government that provoked distrust. Although the program team of *Andere Overheid* never proposed a reduction of staff, a smaller government was hinted by Nicolaï in 'Het resultaat is de maat' and continues to be a prominent theme now PAO has ended[14].

Scientists

Scientific criticism towards PAO focused on the points that were also made by members of parliament; lack of vision, leadership and focus (for instance Noordegraaf and Van der Meulen, 2005; Rouw and Schillemans, 2005). Van Nispen made the parallel between the program and the book of Osborne and Gaebler (1992) which also bundled a wide mingle-mangle of innovations. Other points of criticism that can be observed are 'too much in a short time', the small scale approach of the program team and an 'utopian' perception of society. Tjeenk Willink pointed to the fact *Andere Overheid* lacked thorough analysis on what the problems are that need to be dealt with (Raad van State, 2007). In short, almost

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14 In April 2007 the fourth Balkenende cabinet (consisting of CDA, Socialist PVDA and Christian CU charged Roel Bekker with the task to reduce central government with about 15.000 staff.

everyone agreed on the necessity of civil service reform. It were however the adopted methods of *Andere Overheid* that attracted criticism.

Press

Apart from the professional magazines, who followed PAO intensively, the attention from the regular press was limited. Unlike Copernicus, were the launch of the program was spun into a media event, the program team chose for a low profile and a turn to the media only when certain accomplishments were indeed made (Interview Steenbergen, 22/07/2007). The result of this was however that *Andere Overheid* was quite invisible to the greater public.

Results

Now that the reactions from various stakeholders have been discussed it is time to look at some results of *Andere Overheid*. The aim is not to give an extensive *ex post* evaluation, but rather an overview of the most essential elements that have been realized.

When assessing the results a distinction has to be made between actual 'hands-on' achievements and reports that may or may not influence the future of the civil service. The first category consists of those initiatives that are mentioned in the program (Ministerie van BZK, 2004) and focus on the priorities that were stressed under Pechtold. In his final letter to parliament (Tweede Kamer, 2006) Nicolaï reports on these initiatives. With regard to *the improvement of the level of service provision* several ICT-related projects have been realized or are well underway. Here it has to be noted that *Andere Overheid* is not solemnly responsibly for all the actions (some of them were already initiated before the program started) but PAO did in some case take care of coherence and broadening of certain projects (Steur, 2007; 28). Every Dutch citizen has the ability to obtain an electronic ID (the DigID) with which one can communicate with a growing number of governmental branches. Related to this are two other initiatives; a personal Internet page (the PIP) and a contact center (CCO), designed as a one-stop-shop for all government related questions. The latter two are still in development but are likely to go 'live' in the near future. The overall ambition that 65% of all

government services are to be accessed by Internet in 2007 is is to be reached. So called 'i-teams' are installed to translate all initiatives towards the municipalities.

Considering the *reduction of administrative burdens* the goal was a reduction of 25% for citizens as well as businesses. The final letter to parliament proves of confidence that this goal is to be accomplished by the end of 2007. Mirroring the Belgian success of 'Q' (see chapter 3) a similar 'Kafka-brigade' was installed by Nicolaï in October of 2006. A bureaucracy examination is adopted to measure (and fight) too high levels of bureaucracy. Finally the '25%' goal is to be realized via the reduction of inspections by the various supervisory agencies to a maximum of two times per year.

Regarding the last label, *task analysis and departmental redesign* achieving actual results proved to be much harder. Two commissions had been installed (De Grave and Verhoeven) but have not (yet) led to a an actual removal or transfer of tasks. Here two factors hampered an decisive reform; the political turmoil and upcoming elections marginalized political attention for the proposals regarding departmental redesign. Secondly, the all too familiar powers of bureau politics came into play, limiting the abilities for actual reform and 'departmental reshuffling'. The program team worked as part of the ministry of the Interior which had an own DG Management Public Sector. This proved to be a point of tension. The program team was several times 'in competition' with this DG. In other instances it had to present itself as an independent team, while other departments continued to see them as part of the ministry of Interior (Steur, 2007 and Van Twist, 2005).

4.4 Looking back on PAO

After three years of *Andere Overheid* it can be stated that many initiatives are successfully implementation or well underway. Especially on the municipal level (the Jorritsma-commission and VNG '10-year plan', resulting in the 'Kloosterhoeve' agreement) impressing results have been achieved. The rather a-political discussions and progress on improving service and reducing administrative burdens contrasts with the much harder to achieve task removal and departmental redesign. On the first two aspects results have been shown and that movement will continue for the years to come. In 2005 minister De Graaf

declared in his keynote speech for the EGPA conference (De Graaf, 2005) three critical factors that would determine the success of *Andere Overheid*;

'- Firstly there has to be a political commitment of the highest order, which means that the leadership of Cabinet and parliamentary parties have to be involved and committed. It is far too risky for the project to just relate it to one minister or one political party. If such a modernisation-program is monopolized, it will be seen as a toy, of one party or one politician.

-Secondly one has to overcome the quit logical cynicism, the atmosphere of: "I've been there, I've seen it before", which can easily dominate the feelings within the civil service as well as in politics and media. Why should this government, this minister, succeed in modernizing government, reducing bureaucracy, deregulate the enormous amount of rules, improve efficiency and reorganize the classic and conservative structure of administration? Why should there be a success while other attempts failed in the past and proved to be nothing more than theoretical exercises?

-Thirdly there has to be a way to win the loyal support and positive energy of the top civil servants. That is not an easy task, because the bureaucratic elite never is overenthusiastic when politicians makes them a political issue. One way is to build upon activities and initiatives which are already undertaken by permanent undersecretaries of the ministries in order to get a mutual interest and a common goal, at least on major items. In my view it is necessary to create a sense of urgency and a high profile for the reform-program towards a broad public. If you want to regain the confidence of the public, it is needed that anyone actually can see what you are doing. Political marketing demands to dramatise the problems and enlarge the solutions. A very important part of my public speeches and appearances on the modernisation of government however was to point out the first responsibility of politics, not the civil servants, for what is inadequate, inefficient and too expensive. Politicians who accuse the civil service do so mostly unjustified and normally end up being very ineffective.'

In retrospect it can be stated that it were exactly those fears that were realized during the process of reform. The political commitment faded along the way with the two coalition partners. Immovability, cynicism and bureau politics emerged on the aspects of tasks analysis and departmental redesign (while at the municipal level pragmatic action could be observed and continues to be). Civil servants remained a lukewarm enthusiasm towards the program, especially when departmental downsizing was hinted (though this was never an explicit goal of PAO) and the program stayed fairly invisible for 'the broad public'.

4.5   Chapter conclusion

In this final section the findings of this case will be connected to the theoretical framework of chapter 1 (figures 1, 2 and 3). The pressures for reform can be identified as the immediate coercion that was posed by Fortuyn and the chaotic events of 2002, but also the more fundamental 'gap' between citizens and government. For many years a disparity had been growing between expectations and actual achievements of government which had to be adjusted. The dramatic events (especially the murder of Fortuyn) provided the 'window of opportunity' The ideological basis for doing so was the idea of transforming the welfare state into a 'participatory state' which would redefine the relation between state, market and civil society. Improving the working of the civil service would restore the trust in government while at the same time redefine the tasks that would transfer from the government to the market or civil society. Initially the reform was to take place via four actions (a better service provision towards the citizen, less and different tasks to be adopted by the government, a better internal organization of central government and a renewal of the relations with provinces and municipalities) which were later reduced to three labels. That reorientation resulted in the focus towards enhancing the quality of service provision, reduction bureaucracy and rule making and a redesign of the departments and a task analysis.

With these concluding remarks a final comparison between Copernicus will be the final chapter providing conclusions to the central question and the sub problems adhering to it.

Chapter 5: Comparison & Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter will deal with a comparison between the two programs, followed by conclusions. These conclusions will answer the main question as well as the sub questions as formulated in chapter 1. After that the chapter moves on to a section about lessons and recommendations. The final two chapters will deal with other observations about administrative reform and a reflection about the research.

5.2 Comparison

A quick overview of the comparison between Copernicus and PAO can be found in table 5.1. The answering of the sub questions draw further on these observations. The purpose of the table is to give an overview of the most striking similarities and differences observed on the basis of the concepts of context, content and process.

**Table 5.1 Comparison between Copernicus and *Andere Overheid*
on context, content and process**

	Similarities	**Differences**
Context	• Political events and crises provided a window of opportunity for reform • Decreasing levels of trust in government, a trend that was apparent for many years	• Belgium was hit harder by scandals and other crises than the Netherlands • Belgium socio-political context more complex than the Dutch mainly due to lingual cleavages
Content	• Aim to modernize government • Enhancing the service level as provided by the government • ICT as a important factor in reform initiatives • Attempts to redesign departments	• Copernicus as an holistic, reform attempt, but the goal was a fundamental reform on the *federal* level. Radical reforms proposed regarding the departments (virtual matrix concept), attracting new managers and private sector techniques (BPRs)

		• PAO aimed at reforming all levels of government, including relations with provinces and municipalities • Debate on which tasks the government should continue to employ.
Process	• Special assigned minister for reform initiating the reform program • Difficulties in forging and maintaining sufficient levels of political support	• Copernicus enjoyed direct support from the assigned minister plus the prime minister • Copernicus was a real top down approach with only a limited role for (top) civil servants • PAO had diminishing support from the coalition partners along the way and was affected by changes in ministers • PAO was a more network style reform attempt, deliberately trying to involve civil servants of also the decentral levels of government.

Now that the most striking differences and similarities have been examined, the final chapter will provide conclusions answering the sub questions. The answering of these sub questions will further analyze the various factors that are mentioned in the two tables above.

5.3 Conclusions

In which context (political, socio-economical etc.) were Copernicus and Andere Overheid launched?

Copernicus was launched in a period of a sharp decline of trust in government. This provided a great 'sense of urgency' and 'burning platform' for reform. Consequently a large 'window of opportunity' was provided. The context of *Andere Overheid* had less 'sense of urgency' than Copernicus, but also in the Netherlands a need was felt to restore trust and 'auditive capabilities' of the

government. Both programs shared the characteristic that were no fiscal and/or budgetary necessities for reform but departed from a more ideological basis and design.

What were the contents of the reform packages?

Copernicus consisted of four elements: a new organogram, a new managerial culture, a modern HRM policy and new ways of operating. The 'meta-goal' was that the government would become a better service provider and a better employer. The citizen would no longer 'circle' around government, but the other way around. *Andere Overheid* was also a fourfold reform program: it aimed at better service to the citizen, a government that would adopt less and different tasks (creating cadres instead of detailed steering), have a better internal organization of central government (departmental coordination) and a renewal of relations with provinces and municipalities.

What was the trajectory of the processes?

Copernicus started off as an ambitious, large scale and top-down reform. Heavily dominated by NPM ideology and business-like techniques. Soon many conflicts rose, and the program suffered mostly from opposition of the unions and (Walloon) politicians. Copernicus ended in 2003 with a change of course to a more low profile, Weberian approach on bureaucratic reform.

Andere Overheid started of as the first reform commission from 'within' the administration. The program suffered from political turmoil during the years and changes in responsible ministers. The political support that De Graaf enjoyed disappeared when Pechtold took office. PAO begun with about 70 initiatives to innovate government, later this became reduced and more focused. The program ended in 2007, but several initiatives that will continue in the coming years making *Andere Overheid* more a of movement instead of a program with a specific time frame.

To what degree were the programs successful in terms of the set goals?

Copernicus showed a mixed picture. The reversal of several reforms by Aréna made some of the achievement undone. Regarding the two main goals of Copernicus (to become better employer and better service provider) it can be stated that specifically the employment part stranded on the political and lingual specifics of Belgium. Also the attraction of external managers did not go as planned and encountered serious setbacks. The 'better service provider' part of the

program provides a brighter picture. The Kafka-brigade of Van den Quickenborne proved to be very successful in diminishing the administrative burden (although this was post-Copernicus). The ICT initiatives that were launched or emphasized under Copernicus were successful, mainly on the back office side, making good use of the principles of 'authentic registrations'.

For *Andere Overheid* it is hard to asses a movement with numerous initiatives. Successes mainly outside The Hague (municipalities), '*hated inside The Hague, loved outside*'. Little progress on the field of task analysis (core-task debate), better results with political less salient initiatives: e.g. reducing administrative burdens, DigID etc.

What were the causes for successes and failures?

For Copernicus the causes for failures are in the first place to be found in the complexity of the Belgian socio-political situation; deep dividing lingual and cultural cleavages. But also the specific approach of Van den Bossche can be mentioned: bold, top-down, (perceived) arrogance in reducing the role of (top) officials. Next to that the program embraced too much in too little time (in four years an entire new administration would be realized). Finally it can be said that there was limited (political) support for Copernicus in both the government and parliament as well as within the administration. The best performing 'child' of Copernicus proved to be the various ICT initiatives. The reason for the successes on this terrain were an early and decisive choice for ICT as a tool for administrative reform. A central ICT manager was installed, responsible for the whole administration. This central approach prevented the creation of 'ICT islands' within the administration. Also a sound choice for important back office projects (the 'authentic registrations') instead of focusing on quick front office wins, was a major contributing factor for success.

Failure factors for *Andere Overheid* are multiple. In the first place there were many initiatives, but only a small and relatively powerless DG and program team. PAO became increasingly seen as a 'toy' for D'66 with an over time diminishing support from the cabinet, especially when De Graaf was replaced by Pechtold. The unclear relationship with the department of Home Affairs attributed to the image of an ambitious program that lacked real political ánd official vision and leadership. *Andere Overheid* was a gathering of many initiatives with a strong incremental and pragmatic character but lacked the backing of hard political

choices about the future role and tasks of the government. Real political leadership and communication about the fundamental changes that a *different* government would make. PAO has remained too much of a technocratic renewal program and did not take the form of a groundbreaking alteration of the relationship between government and society as the cabinet vision of 2003 had proposed. The successes of *Andere Overheid* are therefore not surprisingly to be found in areas that are not particularly political sensitive; the ICT initiatives and the transformation of PAO into the municipal level. The program team had intensively invested in forging networks with the other (decentral) branches of government which paid of in that respect (relationships with municipalities).

Central question

The main question of this thesis, '*how can the functioning of the public service be improved?*' is a question that encompasses many elements. Copernicus and PAO clearly showed that improving administrative systems is in no way a technocratic, political neutral matter. It requires strong political vision and leadership, not only with regard to starting reform programs, but more importantly, guiding the process and bring it to good ends. It requires political decisiveness to make very clear which tasks the government continues to adopt and which it will 'return' to society (whether named 'civil society', 'private initiative' or 'the market') or will be done in (hybrid) relationship with one of these entities. In any case, improving and readjusting government is far more than improving the informational and communicational capacities of government but requires determination. Both programs that have stood central in this thesis were to a large degree attempts to restore trust in government. But the problem is that politicians too often try to '*ward off attacks and to deflect criticism of their incapacity to solve society's pressing problems, they turn[..] their wrath on their own state and on the way it was being managed* (Suleiman, 2003;4). Improving the functioning of the public service is therefore not only an adjustment of the administrative system and the processes there, but also very much a matter of political reform, choices and leadership. The recommendations in this chapter will further go in to that statement.

5.4   Lessons & best practices

Critics of *Andere Overheid* pointed to the lack of vision in the program. Although the vision text of the cabinet acknowledges the present-day 'knowledge society' and aims to move to a 'participation state', the program itself is a bundle of a wide variety of initiatives to innovate government. Strong and coherent political vision and leadership lacks. The lesson of Copernicus is that a powerful vision and holistic approach helps in creating consistency in the reform efforts. However, another lesson is that there is tension between 'vision-based' reform and the network-like nature of both society and the government. This paradox will be further addressed in this chapter. Adopting a top-down, monolithic reform approach is likely to be counter productive. There is also a clear mismatch between such a reform approach and the complex networks in which governments act. Moreover, governments are increasingly complex networks themselves, making a top down reform approach impossible. The tension between guiding reform base on vision and letting the various parts of government autonomously innovate, poses another important reform paradox.

A broad support platform in both the administration as well as the political arena (parliament and cabinet) is essential. The Dutch approach in forging networks in the whole of government can serve as a best practice here. However, the small scale approach of the Dutch *Andere Overheid* team contrasted with the large scale ambitions. Reform should always be accompanied by a broad support base; political (both in the cabinet and in parliament), in all layers of the administrative system and finally in society itself. With respect to the public every reform operation needs good 'marketing', maintaining attention and support of the citizens for the program and the overall goal of improving the administrative system.

ICT can be a powerful tool in the realization of a government that works efficient and user-friendly. It should however not be forgotten that approaching the citizens as *just* a customer that needs better service can be undesirable. Not every function of government can be transformed into an optimal user-supplier relationship. However, in reducing administrative burdens for citizens the Belgian approach can serve as a best practice. The centralized role of ICT thus preventing 'ICT islands' within governments and a consequent and good use of 'authentic

registrations' have given Belgium on this aspect a head start *vis-à-vis* the Netherlands.

The success of the Belgian Kafka brigade can serve as a lesson for the Netherlands. Already some forms of imitation have been adopted (eg www.lastvandeoverheid) but the political 'weight' of a minister helps in creating political momentum and societal focus to the process of administrative burden reductions.

Reforming only at the central level is not likely to have very much effect. Copernicus aimed at a reform of the federal administration, but only 7% of all civil servants worked there. *Andere Overheid* had, after a slow start, the aim to alter all levels of government (ministries, provinces, municipalities). Since the goal is to create a better government as a whole, this makes sense given the set goals.

Finally there is the lesson of the time frame. It is easy to become cynical about the limited effects and results of reform efforts. But the merits of reform can often only be proper judged in the light of many years. *Andere Overheid* closed with the statement that a movement had been started; not that a different government had been realized. Also Copernicus had, apart from all the adversities, successful and long term lasting effects. The lesson here is that, especially in consensus democracies such as Belgium and the Netherlands, public sector reform is always a protracted process.

5.5 Recommendations & discussion

Finally, after analyzing the two case studies of Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* it is time to asses the central question on how to improve the functioning of the public service. Both programs aimed at adjusting government with present-day society. Both programs were also launched in a sphere of declined trust in government. However, all reform attempts of the past 25 years have focused on the civil apparatus. It is however the tripartition of elected officials, civil servants and society that needs to be revised. Recommendations on how the administrative system can be improved will therefore focus on these three elements.

Internal organization of the civil service

The Belgian attempt to transform departments into FODs is an initial step to create a more function based design of the civil service. In reorganizing the civil service the starting point should be the organization of government around problems (quote by Tony Blair). This will mean less and smaller departments, in with a strong focus of connections between them. Here again the government should try to mirror societal variety and network-like organization. The Belgian example of the virtual matrix could be a fruitful design here. A modern department should be on the continuum of the centralized, top-down steering of the 'classic department' and the flexible network character of a virtual matrix. By doing so it can maintain security and stability while gaining flexibility and innovativeness (cf Mintzberg, 1983). Parallel to this new modes of democratic control over departments are necessary. Again it needs to move away from (but not entirely abandon) the top-down steering model ('primacy of politics') and evolve to a more horizontal modes of regulation. The condition however should be that politicians need to 'let go' and trust on horizontalization as a way of safeguarding public values. By doing so an adaptive an innovative 'spirit of experimentalism' can emerge in the various departments, enabling better responses for societal problems (Rouw & Schillemans, 2005). On the more practical level the 'best practice' of a Belgian IT commissioner deserves imitation. Here a centralized approach delivers undeniable advantages; efficiency, elimination of 'IT-islands' in the whole of government and better mutual communication as well as with citizens trough uniformity of communication systems. An additional recommendation is to oblige every branch of government to make use of open source software. Here the benefits are twofold. One it will mean an enormous reduction of costs, while at the same time the government would set a great example of innovative IT solutions.

The relationship with elected officials

'*Every government is being affected by the information revolution and the global economy. Yet, parliament and cabinet still function much as they did twenty years ago'* (Bourgault and Savoie, 1998; 16). This was true ten years ago and still today no real democratic institutional changes have been made. While aware of the

political sensibilities surrounding the subject, a strengthening of the role of the prime minister would be helpful to enhance the coherence of policy. This would mean the end of the 'primus inter pares' praxis of Belgium and the Netherlands, giving the prime minister a coordinating role for every minister, including the abilities of sanctioning and firing. Analogue to the Belgian best practice of a minister for Administrative Simplification, a Dutch counterpart should be installed. Connection of this minister to the prime minister would express the political weight and priorities for reducing administrative burdens. An alternative would be to install a commissioner for this purpose, analogue to the position Tjeenk Willink adopted in the first half of the 1980s or Van Eijk in the past years.[15] Adopting a more *networked* style of government (see next paragraph) could in time make a reduction of the number of minister feasible and desirable.

Relationship with parliament

Parliamentary democracy is increasingly under pressure by new forms deliberative and interactive democracy. Democracy becomes more and more horizontal and socialized (Dutch: *vermaatschappelijkt*) (Wesseling et al., 2007). Given this phenomenon, democratic problems arise. As Goldsmith and Egger put it '*With authority and responsibility parceled out throughout the network, the problem of accountability is one of the most difficult challenges of networked government'*. Parliaments today however operate little according to the principles of networked government but far more in the 'ancient' fashion of verticalization. Parliaments continue to treat ministers and their civil servants in terms of vertical authority ('primacy of politics') and the 'zero-sum game of power' (In 't Veld, quoted in Van der Steen and Zouridis, 2007). Therefore it would be both an improvement as well as a major challenge for parliamentarians to transform their role into part of the policy network, providing democratic control on main lines (instead of the all too much seen 'incident hopping') aware of the fact that social steering is a growing impossibility in today's society. Moving away from the strive for equality in a society that both individualizes ánd forges new collectivities request acceptance of difference and the political ability and courage to release (Frissen, 2007).

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15 Respectively responsible for the reorganizing of the civil service and youth policy.

Relationship with society

Copernicus and *Andere Overheid* both aimed at adjusting government to present-day society. Departing from the conviction that society's needs had been analyzed, plans were made to reinvent government to meet those current needs. But modern society is at it best hard to comprehend, if not unknowable (cf Van Gunsteren en Ruyven, 1993, Frissen, 2007). We know that we our societies increasingly adopt the form of *networks* (social, economical, virtual) yet is at the same time more and more impossible to oversee these networks. Reform operations accompanied by the statement that the time for analysis is over and that action is necessary, usually mean that previous recommendations are being implemented (Raad van State, 2007). Two things therefore need to be done regarding the relationship of the civil service with society. In the first place, the civil service should invest far more in their analytical functions, preferably by forming networks with advisory councils and think tanks. Also a more structured approach should be designed to cope with (and make use of!) citizen initiatives and referenda, further strengthening the auditive capabilities of government. Another recommendation would be to further apply the 'law of requisite variety' on government. Concretely this means that every good regulator (government) of a system (society) should be a model of that system (Contant and Ashby, 1970). An effective civil service should try to adapt to the network character and 'unstructured order' of present society instead of maintaining the old monolithic and hierarchical habits that are intuitive for government. Instead of rigidly 'dividing' tasks between the trichotomy state, market and civil society, tasks can be done via innovative alliances between the three. Constant analysis, alliances with all sorts of societal actors and variable intervention should be guiding for the future relations of the civic service with society (Peeters & van Twist, 2007; Van Twist et al., 2007).

5.5   Other observations

Both case studies have shown some additional paradoxes regarding administrative reform (in addition of those formulated by Wright in chapter 2). In future reform programs these paradoxes are likely to return.

- The first one is the paradox between the need for a centralized reform approach (top-down) versus the reality of the network society and the wide

variety of actors, values and tasks of government.

- Second, the tension between the need for innovation versus the need for stability, certainty and predictability of government.

- Another paradox is that of the need for quick results (wins) versus the long term objectives of administrative reform. In both Belgium as well as the Netherlands governments are four years in office (at the most) while reforms can easily take ten years.

- A final paradox that will be mentioned here is the widespread conviction that government has to be modernized versus the political reality and impossibility of reaching consensus on the way to do this.

Apart from these paradoxes that are likely to emerge again it is also informative to briefly look at 'tricks' that have been employed in the past regarding public service reform. The first one is masking staff reduction of central government by transferring employees to governmental bodies such as ZBOs or agencies. This meant a numeric reduction of people working directly for the central government, but by no means a subsequent cut in tasks or costs. Another much espoused 'trick' that has been used before (also in the case of *Andere Overheid*) is the natural tendency of producing reports to delay or put off actual reform. In the Dutch case for instance, the idea of small core departments has already been proposed by the Wiegel commission more then ten years ago. One consulting firm advertises with the slogan 'Results, not reports'.[16] Observing public sector reform it can be stated that the opposite is often true.

'*In Belgium [...] and the Netherlands ministers are not far-sighted strategists- their political success and survival depend upon their skills and creativity in putting together coalitions of support to steer through particular programmes'* (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; 151). In an environment dominated by paradoxes, the contents of reform are best served when they are depoliticized. A strengthened prime minster, more elevated above party politics, could be a way out of that situation. A prime minister should therefore build on and make use of a network of actors to design, implement and steer reform. In this way a strong actor can successfully reform without having to make use of an ineffective, top-down and

16 Bain & Company.

centralist reform approach. He or she should build on consensus and safeguard continuity of reform apart from party political differences.

5.6   Reflection

The theoretical framework that has been used for this thesis focused mainly on the 'inner context' of government. New (managerial) ideas about government and the organization of the public service. It would however been wise to incorporate also more of the 'outer context' of government. More knowledge about the rapidly changing society, the increasing network style character of it and all the implications this has on the governments operates would help for a better understanding of reform and improve recommendations. The theoretical framework was in that respect not fully adequate. Also the framework dealt not extensively with the political aspects of reform. An important observation has been that reform operations can never be clean technocratic and political neutral. It would therefore have been helpful to include more theoretical material about political leadership, the power of vision and feasibility of reforms.

The results of this research are to some degree applicable to reform operations in other countries than Belgium and the Netherlands. The explicit choice for 'thick description' and the focus on context defines to a large extent the conclusions. These findings are thus derived from two consensualist countries with still relatively large government and governments spendings (see also table 2.1). In that respect it can be stated that the conclusions have no general and universal character but are more country specific. If another research would be done a 'most different' comparative case approach would be interesting. It would be intriguing to examine the results when recent reform operations in for instance the Netherlands and Great Britain. Moreover because here one of the recommendations from this research (a strengthened prime minister) could be seen in action, compared to a consensualist and coalitional reform approach. Including more countries in the comparison could further enhance the general applicability of the research on how the functioning of the public service can be improved. Although that would be a vast work, examining several recent reform operations in many countries would unquestionably deliver more and probable better results on the problem than this thesis has done.

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APPENDIX I: **Alphabetical list of interviewed persons**

- Hondeghem, A. *Professor at Leuven University*.

- Noordegraaf, M. *Professor at Utrecht University.*

- Steenbergen, B. *Former member of the PAO program team.*

- Thijs, N. *Researcher at EIPA*.

APPENDIX II: Copernicus survey questions

1. In de folder bij deze vragenlijst staat de basisfilosofie voor de modernisering van de federale overheid omschreven.
In welke mate gaat u akkoord of niet akkoord met dit voorstel?

helemaal akkoord

akkoord

geen mening

niet akkoord

helemaal niet akkoord

2. Hoe zou u in de toekomst het liefst met de overheid communiceren?
Geef punten van 1 tot 8, waarbij 1 de hoogste score is.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

brief

telefoon

internet thuis

internet in bibliotheek

internet in het postkantoor

interactieve teletekst

via de gemeente

persoonlijk contact

3. Waaraan hecht u het meeste belang in de houding van de dienstverleners?
Rangschik van 1 tot 4, waarbij 1 voor u het belangrijkste is.

1   2   3   4

klantvriendelijke behandeling

luisterbereidheid

gelijke behandeling van iedereen

respect voor de privé sfeer

4. Welke verbetering is an de overheidsdienstverlening is volgens u prioritair?
Rangschik van 1 tot 4, waarbij 1 voor u het belangrijkste is.

1   2   3   4

snelheid van de dienstverlening

kwaliteit van de dienstverlening

eenvoud van formulieren en procedures

bereikbaarheid van dienstverlening

---

5. De bevordering van het personeel moet objectief en gedepolitiseerd verlopen. Waarmee moet men het meest rekening houden?

Geef uw prioriteiten van 1 tot 3.

1   2   3

selecteren op dienstjaren

selecteren op diploma

selecteren op bekwaamheid

Wat is je algemene indruk over deze vragenlijst? Waar liggen de hiaten? Hoe zou jij het eventueel anders aanpakken?

Geef aan in welke mate u akkoord of niet akkoord gaat met de voorstellen uit het plan:

1. De regering moet de krachtlijnen vastleggen, maar voor de dagelijkse werking mogen de ambtenaren zelf beslissen.

helemaal akkoord

akkoord

geen mening

niet akkoord

helemaal niet akkoord

2. De topfuncties uit de administratie worden aangesteld voor een beperkte tijd (mandaathouders).

helemaal akkoord

akkoord

geen mening

niet akkoord

helemaal niet akkoord

3. De overheid wil de meest bekwame medewerkers aantrekken voor deze topfuncties en moet deze topfuncties openstellen voor kandidaten binnen en buiten de administratie.

    helemaal akkoord

    akkoord

    geen mening

    niet akkoord

    helemaal niet akkoord

4. De personen met een topfunctie moeten beoordeeld worden op basis van hun bereikte resultaten. De resultaten die zij moeten bereiken worden vooraf vastgelegd.

    helemaal akkoord

    akkoord

    geen mening

    niet akkoord

    helemaal niet akkoord

5. De kabinetten worden afgeschaft en vervangen door beleidsvoorbereidende cellen binnen de administratie en een klein persoonlijk secretariaat voor iedere minister.

    helemaal akkoord

    akkoord

    geen mening

    niet akkoord

    helemaal niet akkoord

6. Elke federale overheidsdienst moet kwaliteitsgaranties geven over de dienstverlening.

    helemaal akkoord

    akkoord

    geen mening

    niet akkoord

    helemaal niet akkoord