

CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE DUTCH INSPECTORATE: BRIDGING THE GAP

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SUMMARY

The Dutch Inspectorate has developed a strategic methodology for capacity building of its inspectors. It is a three-year plan where – based on setting capacity-objectives per working field – step by step the knowledge gap is closed. An Academy consisting of six employees is set up to facilitate 550 inspectors on their way to becoming better-qualified professionals. After five years of intensive work, the Dutch Inspectorate Academy has had a number of successful initiatives to build-up knowledge within the Inspectorate.

1 INTRODUCTION

Every country that is serious about environmental compliance should have professional inspectors. The Dutch Inspectorate, existing in the present form since 2002, followed a European Committee Recommendation to professionalize its inspectors. In this paper, the capacity building methods of the Dutch Inspectorate and the funding of its Inspectorate Academy are examined.

The VROM-Inspectorate was organised in its current form in 2002. It was aggregated from the Environmental Inspectorate, the Inspectorate for Housing, the Spatial Planning Inspectorate, and two Intelligence Clusters of the Ministry.

2 THE ORGANISATION

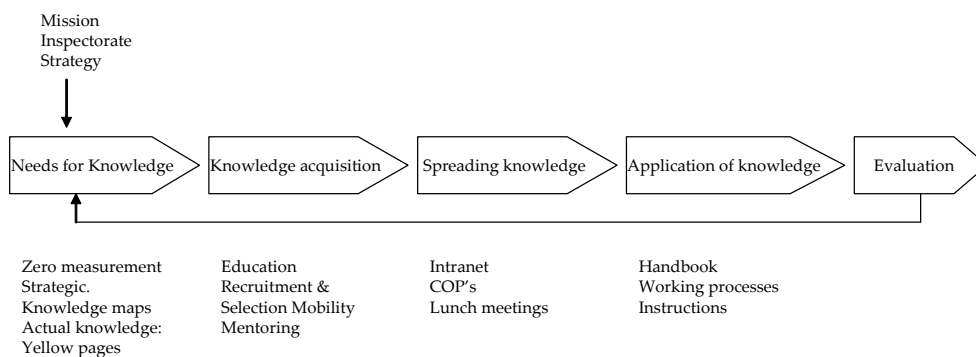
The Inspectorate Academy is part of the VROM Inspectorate and Staff department. Currently, it consists of six persons. It started with two permanent staff members and four contractors, with the need to prove that six full-time staff members were necessary to do the job right. After three years of hard and consistent work, the Academy managed to establish itself as a valuable part of the VROM Inspectorate, solidifying the need for its existence.

3 CONCEPTUALISATION

The Inspectorate Academy was practically invisible to inspectors in the field during its first year. The Academy started working on building an initial concept that would form the base for the Academy in the following years.

To increase its visibility, the Inspectorate Academy embraced the very practical “knowledge-value chain” model of Professor Mathieu Weggeman was embraced. The “knowledge-value” chain provides a structured framework for reaching a goal. This includes the knowledge process composed of the following elements: creation, sharing, application, and evaluation. Applying this model to the mission of the Inspectorate results in the following five steps: (1) investigate what knowledge the Inspectorate Academy must obtain (what are the needs?); (2) acquire the needed knowledge for the organisation; (3) develop methods to disperse the knowledge within the Academy; (4) invest in the application of knowledge in the daily work of the organization; and (5) make sure to take time for evaluation (are we really professionalizing?). The focus of the rest of this article will be on the steps of this model.

Figure 1: The Knowledge Value Chain Model: © Mathieu Weggemans



4 NEEDS FOR KNOWLEDGE: NEEDS ANALYSIS

4.1 Zero Measurement

The Dutch Inspectorate started an intensive investigation to establish the needs for knowledge. In the initial compliance measurement (referred to as the zero measurement), the Dutch Inspectorate investigated if the organisation was ready for knowledge management. The starting point was the wish of the Management to invest only in a very practical way of capacity building and—in doing so—to get as close to the working needs of the fieldworkers as possible. As a result, no deep and long investigations occurred. Starting a large and elaborate process of establishing knowledge management within an organisation requires an open-minded and mature organisation. Thus, picking the right moment is essential at this point.

The zero measurement took place one year after the founding of the VROM-Inspectorate. An electronic questionnaire was used to find an answer to this question. The test results pointed out that the organisation was not ready yet

to focus on knowledge management. As a result, the Dutch Inspectorate had to wait one or two more years to give the organisation time so settle down. A final evaluation will occur in 2009, the same measurements on knowledge management will be done again to see the readiness of the organisation for knowledge management has progressed.

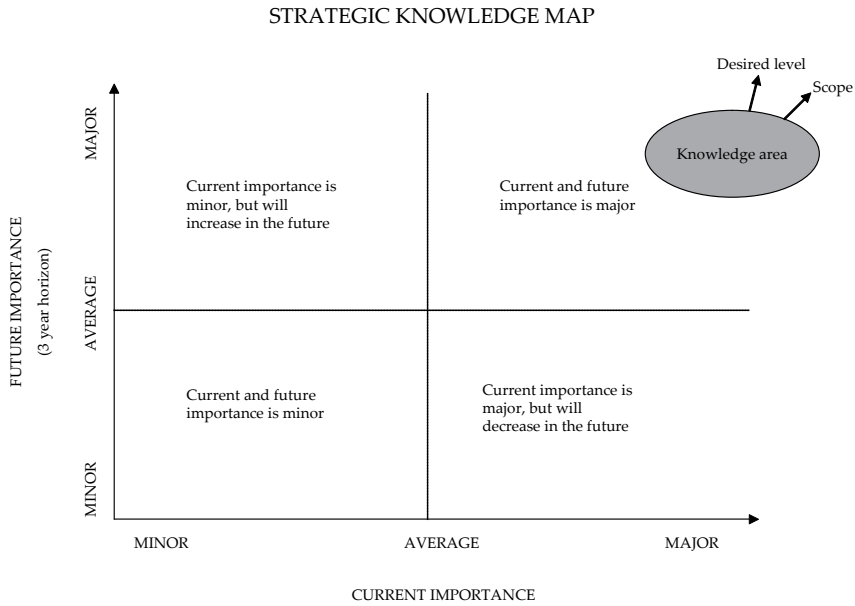
4.2 Strategic Knowledge Maps

In the “silent” years between the zero measurement and the coming out of the Academy, we started to develop so called “strategic knowledge” maps. The Inspectorate staff was divided in several working field clusters. Groups including inspectors working on Waste Management, another group on Safety / Risk management, Intergovernmental Supervision, Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards, Intelligence and Tracing Service, and more. Within each cluster several meetings were planned in order to develop (in a bottom-up process) a strategic knowledge chart. During each meeting a group of five to eight inspectors were invited to develop this chart. Additionally, an external facilitator was present.

During the first meeting, the strategic environment of the working field was viewed. The following three questions were evaluated: (1) what will happen on strategic / political level; (2) what new legislation is expected; and (3) what new technologies are expected? After these questions are answered, the competences necessary to meet with these strategic challenges must be established. Competences include knowledge, skills, and the right attitudes. The second meeting focused on evaluating these competences. The competences from the first meeting in a 2 x 2 matrix, in which we distinguished the urgency:

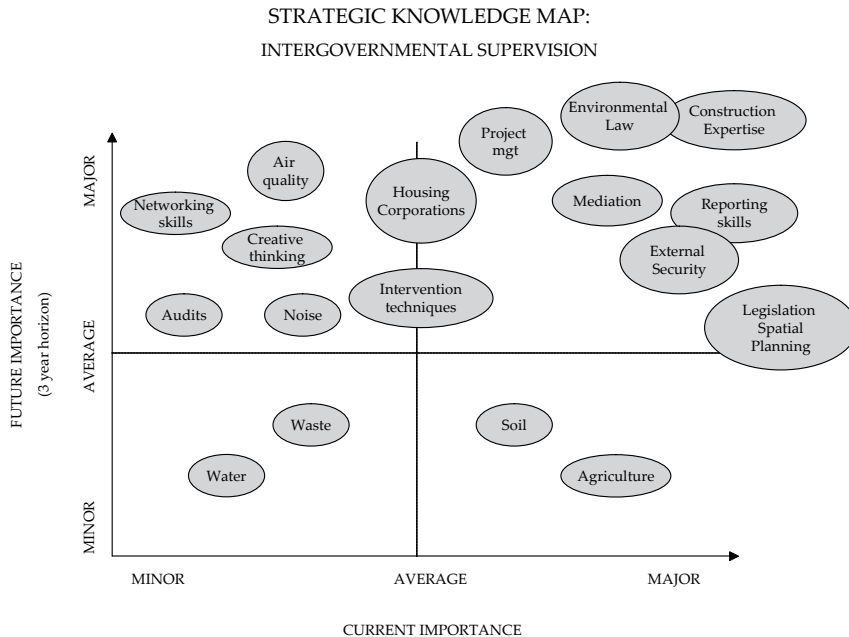
- Current and future importance is major: already existing professionalization programmes (pick the existing programmes and improve them).
- Current importance is minor, but will increase in the future: new programmes have to be developed.
- Current importance is major, but will decrease in the future: no more effort necessary, eventually use the existing programmes.
- Current and future importance is minor: no development necessary.

Figure 2: The Strategic Knowledge Chart: Knowledge Fields and Importance for the Organisation



Source: CIBIT

Figure 3: The Strategic Knowledge Chart: Working Field Intergovernmental Supervision



Source: CIBIT

The Dutch Inspectorate also discerned three levels per mentioned competency, including operational, specialist, and super specialist. We asked the inspectors what the content and scope of the three levels should be, including what are the final qualifications to be met within the following three years and how many inspectors of each level should attend the professionalisation track. As a result, the competences were discussed on a more detailed level than occurred during the first meeting.

In a final meeting, the inspectors were asked which colleagues / potential institutes could be contracted to build up the wanted competences. All the meetings were facilitated by the consultancy group CIBIT that had developed this model of a strategic action plan.

4.3 Yellow Pages

Additionally, the Dutch Inspectorate mapped the “personal knowledge charts” of each inspector. We asked them to classify their own level of knowledge (based on the strategic knowledge maps). We are aware of the subjectivity this exercise would imply, but it was a quick way to establish knowledge levels. For example, when the total results of one regional office were published and each member saw what their colleagues had filled in, a more objective levelling out took place. Each inspector is the holder of his own knowledge chart and he/she is the only one who could change the content. And we noticed that quite a few did change their knowledge charts.

Twice a year a large “knowledge chart” campaign was organized. All six members of the Academy visited the regional offices and assisted the inspectors to fill in their charts. Meanwhile, we promoted the benefit of the charts (*i.e.*, what is in it for you) and what the Academy could mean for them if most colleagues – including themselves - have filled in those charts. This process allowed the inspectors to get to know the members of the Academy and we were able to gain their insights and advice. In short, it was a promotion tour that paid off, and was well worth the effort put in. The Academy now has a yearly update of the personal knowledge charts. As a result, we created the so-called “Yellow Pages” of the Dutch VROM-Inspectorate. In the last two years, 70 percent of all Inspectors have filled in their knowledge charts.

5 KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

The Academy now possesses two large databases on Inspectorate knowledge - the strategic knowledge charts and the yellow pages. Comparing the knowledge from the strategic knowledge maps with the actual knowledge results in identify a method to bridge the gaps. Further, we developed the so-called “learning streams” for each working field. These are three-year programmes, with all kind of educational forms to obtain the needed capacity. This was accomplished mostly in the form of courses and training, and also internships and mobilisation / job

rotation. The latter two were not done by the Academy, but by the HRM-advisor and the management of the Inspectorate.

A learning stream is a package of learning possibilities that an inspector within a certain working field cluster can utilize to professionalize himself/herself. The actual form of learning he/she will actually utilize will be determined in close consultation with his/her manager.

Because we have good pictures of what we have and what we want, the acquisition of knowledge from outside the Inspectorate by recruitment and selection procedures could be more focussed. This would be another way of bridging the gap.

Quite a different way of knowledge acquisition is obtained by the use of “super specialists.” We have fourteen super specialists, spread over all working fields, who get time to specialise in one field of work. The Inspectorate, the policymakers, and other public administrations consult them for the extensive knowledge and competences they have. They can spend half of their working time to obtain this extensive knowledge and competence level. The way they acquire this intensive knowledge level is by attending courses on state of the art, self study, reading, consulting with other specialists (national and international), developing Inspectorate procedures, and more. Additionally, part of their job is to share their knowledge throughout the Inspectorate.

6 SPREADING OF KNOWLEDGE

Once knowledge is obtained it should be spread throughout the whole organisation. Our slogan is: “Knowledge is power, sharing knowledge gives empowerment!” The Academy has dedicated effort to develop well-designed and accessible home pages in the intranet of VROM. But, electronics are not always the ultimate tool. As put in the last paragraph, a nice way of spreading knowledge in a non-electronic way is by a Community of Practise (COP); for example, the super specialists organise meetings and seminars to inform their colleagues. Additionally, regional level lunch meetings are efficient, practical, and inspiring ways of knowledge sharing. During these meetings, colleagues share good practices and discuss the problems they have met.

7 APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

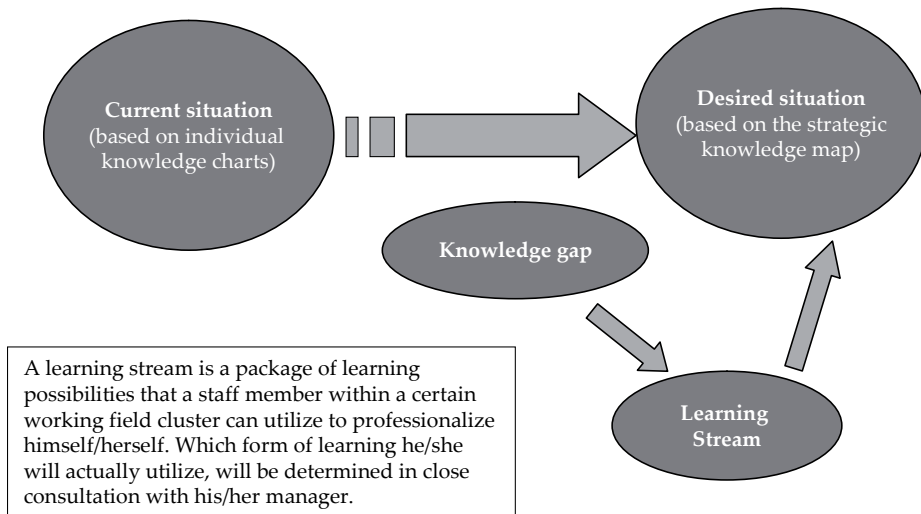
While spreading knowledge, it is important to think of several ways to capture all the knowledge of the inspectors. Once it is captured, it becomes information that is no longer subjected to one person. The recording of the information can be done by describing the inspectorial procedures in instructions and handbooks, making it easy to disseminate knowledge among all the inspectors.

Recording the lessons learned and best practices is of the utmost importance. It seems very obvious to do so, but recording the obtained knowledge is the one trammel in the chain that often gets little attention or is forgotten. Another important point of attention in application of knowledge is to see to it that the information is well assessable, otherwise it will not be used and all the encoding effort is all in vain.

8 EVALUATION

After some time it is good to look back and investigate if the effort put in capacity building is effective. Such an evaluation will be started this year in the Netherlands. Managers will be interviewed and asked whether they notice a measurable better performance in the Inspectorate work. If so, is the increase in efficiency due to the educational programmes or are other factors at stake? Has the Academy bridged the gap? What other efforts are needed to obtain the objectives put in the strategic knowledge maps? Are we still ahead of what will be expected in our working field? Are there new developments to come? After six months, the trained inspectors will be asked similar questions.

Figure 4: Bridging the Gap



9 THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DUTCH INSPECTORATE ACADEMY: WHERE DO WE STAND NOW?

After approximately five years of intensive work, the Dutch Inspectorate Academy has gained a strong position within the Inspectorate and has earned a well-deserved role as the capacity building institute within the Inspectorate. This is

demonstrated by the establishment of a current staff of four permanent workers and only one contract worker.

We have developed Academy procedures and handbooks with practical “do’s and don’ts” to do our work effective and costumer oriented. We learned that strong public relations are essential; the creation of an appealing brand mark (that is seen all over the Inspectorate) gives us a face. As a result, members of the Academy are encouraged to take time to become visible and approachable. Further, our greatest success factor is that we listened to the needs of the inspectors in the field and developed ways of learning that can be directly applicable in the day-to-day practice.

The bottom-up process of generating the strategic knowledge maps was an innovative part of this effort. There was a risk in not getting the managerial approval for applying the results. But, due to the well-based investigations and the personal approach of the separate managers to get the approval, approval was finally granted after a six month process. It is clear that a strong managerial is essential for a successful Academy.

Within the Inspectorate a certain amount of money (€ 1098) and a certain amount of time (ten working days) per inspector is assigned for capacity building on a yearly base. A large amount of capacity building money was trusted to the Academy (70 percent of the total amount). Quarterly management reports on the use of the funds, the number of courses, the evaluation of the courses, and the number of attended inspectors monitor the progress of the three-year capacity building process in a quantitative and qualitative way. During the year it is possible for the management to reallocate funds, courses, and inspectors. As a result, external (strategic) factors can be directly translated in an up-to-date capacity building programme.

Another success factor is the use of the already built-up knowledge within the Inspectorate. For instance, while developing the strategic knowledge maps, trusting and honouring the knowledge of the inspectors makes them dedicated co-workers of the Academy. Also, utilizing inspectors in training programmes is cheap and effective way of knowledge transfer. It is our experience that this is an effective method of transferring knowledge from one inspector to the other, resulting in a large impact. Additionally, the Academy uses our super specialist very often as teachers in training programmes.

In developing training programmes and courses, we always work in teams consisting of Inspectorate content professionals and some educationalist. As a result, we remain assured that the new training programmes will be an educational right and are as close to the day-to-day practice as possible. The evaluation results of each training are communicated with the content professionals in order to improve the courses and training programmes time after time.

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Excerpt from the Proceedings of the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement's (INECE) Eighth International Conference, Linking Concepts to Actions: Successful Strategies for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, held 5-11 April 2008, in Cape Town, South Africa.

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