

Social Entrepreneurship and Cultural Change

The relevance of a public sector experiment for innovative education and learning practices

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Introduction

This contribution reports on collaborative learning innovation in the social sector in the Netherlands. It is aimed at the design of a methodology to better combat social exclusion and poverty. The research comprises a literature study on innovation in entrepreneurship and cultural change in the private sector.

The transformation to the public sector leads to the concept of social entrepreneurship (Thompson, Alvy & Lees, 2000; Thompson, 2002). The research is supported by an experiment in the area of social services for the poor in the Netherlands. This experiment is part of a longitudinal study on social entrepreneurship and cultural change in the social services sector.

The relevance of this research for education is to be found in the use of collaborative learning as essential part in a new approach to get social service counselors ready for a role as social entrepreneur. Instead of behaving like bureaucrats who follow the rules of the system, social service counselors should behave more like entrepreneurs trying to grasp opportunities to support the individual development of clients.

This requires a reorientation of counselors where they not only acquire knowledge about entrepreneurship and skills to perform as required, but where they develop an attitude to take initiatives related to individual qualities of clients. Collaborative learning requires them to build bridges between clients and managers in a way that successful integration of clients in society results.

This research is part of a longitudinal study in monitoring innovations in the Netherlands Social Services System. Starting with the results of studies on entrepreneurship in the private sector and presenting a view on the culture within organizations as formulated by Quinn, a transformation is made to the public sector.

Especially the relevance of private sector innovation characteristics and Quinn's model of Competing Values to the social services sector in the Netherlands, is explained. This leads to the concept of social entrepreneurship as a new methodology for counselors in the social service sector, aiming at the integration in society of poor people who are socially excluded.

An experiment in Zeeland (Netherlands) is used to test and explain the new approach. The research is based on criteria found in current literature on innovation, culture,

entrepreneurship and learning. The new vision and methodology developed in this experiment show promising results for the transfer of experiences from the private sector to innovate the social service sector.

However a second phase in the research project must elaborate on the question whether a generalization can be made about the success of social entrepreneurship and cultural change in a context of collaborative learning. The relevance of this research will be indicated for the innovation of learning practices and innovation of education at (business) schools.

A serious problem in the Netherlands: Over 1 million poor people

Innovation in the public sector through experimenting may lead to social inclusion and thereby to the alleviation of poverty. However, according to the manifest against poverty and social exclusion (Alliance for Social Justice, 2002) the Netherlands account for over 1 million individuals in a situation of poverty, out of a population of 16 million of whom approx. 6 million are active workers.

The 1 million can be divided into several categories, such as immigrants, refugees, patients and handicapped, single parents, homeless people and finally individuals that draw on social security.

This paper focuses on the last group. In the summer of 2003 over 360.000 individuals were dependent upon social security (General Support or Algemene Bijstand) in the Netherlands. They had no or limited perspectives to ever leave the current system of social services. The question arises: is it acceptable, in a welfare country such as the Netherlands individuals are excluded from social participation and are condemned to live in a state of poverty?

The Social Cultural Planning Bureau (SCP, 2000) defined poverty as follows: “ *a forced shortage of requirements, which are deemed socially necessary. The shortage is not a voluntary choice, individuals would rather take care of their own needs*”. According to project leader J.Tas (2003), heading an experiment in the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands, poverty is not so much an income problem, but a problem of dependency, loss of self-respect, isolation and lack of self-sufficiency.

Therefore an approach is required that aims at giving people self-esteem. Stimulating the ambitions of poor people and supporting them to perform accordingly should be the main focus of social security counselors. Entrepreneurship with the focus on the needs of the clients is required instead of the focus on bureaucratic rules.

The main research question is: *what experiences from the private sector can be used to innovate the social security system to offer individuals in a situation of poverty new perspectives?*

First a literature study is conducted aimed at finding the characteristics of innovation and cultural change in both the private sector and the public sector. In the public sector the focus is limited to social security and poverty. By comparing the private sector literature with the public sector literature a comparison will identify criteria that may be used to describe and explain experiments in practice.

The research so far is limited to the first three phases of the research cycle as defined by Van der Zwaan (1999). He identifies four phases: explore, describe, explain and test. The choice implies that this research project will focus on: exploration, description and explanation. The testing will take place in the next phase of the longitudinal study. For that purpose the research findings of the case study (the Zeeland experiment) are analyzed and the conclusions and recommendations are formulated. Finally, the implications for education are formulated.

Innovation and cultural change in the private sector

Key factors for success and failure

In exploring the contribution of private sector innovations in entrepreneurship for the social services sector it is important to find the key factors for success and failure in the field of organizational culture. In today's global economy approx. 80 % of all business activities (both small and large businesses) are service activities and most employment is in this sector (Pine, 2001).

In the Netherlands 84% of the organizations chooses a design approach (top down) for change processes of which, 76% does not deliver the intended results. In fact, 80% of change processes that do work are initiated bottom up (Bennebroek Gravenhorst et al, 2001). As far as the key factors for success in innovation are concerned De Jong (2001) points at: innovative ability, organizational structure and culture, access to means and creativity, network activities and collaborative learning, and market characteristics.

Innovative ability

Based on research by EIM Business & Policy Research (De Jong, 2001), there are a number of important determinants of innovative ability in Commercial Service Companies. These are people characteristics, strategy, structure, availability of means, network activities, firm characteristics, innovation infrastructure and market characteristics. The research is not representative for all sectors but it gives an idea of what to look for when exploring innovative ability.

De Jong, (2001) tested 38 determinants over 8 categories and showed that most categories are suitable to explain part of the innovative ability of service businesses. There are two important criteria. The first is the willingness of employees to take risks (creativity, willingness to co-operate, adaptability and flexibility). The second is the formulation of a strategic mission statement including a focus on innovation and a setting of innovation objectives.

Organizational structure & culture

The same study shows that the organizational structure is best tailored by working in multidisciplinary teams to support innovation and that employees that are autonomous have higher innovative abilities. The culture is most conducive when it is result-oriented and professional in an *entrepreneurial* manner. Companies that apply this rule, give their employees a greater freedom of action. There should be few rules and procedures for carrying out the work. People should be held responsible for their own results.

Access to means & creativity

In the Origin and evolution of new Businesses, Bhidé (2000) describes the ability to secure resources as an important competence of entrepreneurs. That is in line with the EIM study where the determinant of the use of creative techniques to secure means was supported.

Network activities & collaborative learning

Service businesses attempting to improve innovative ability by means of network activities focus on their external orientation (contacts with suppliers, competitors and knowledge institutions) and transfer knowledge in exchange for money (De Jong et al, 2001).

When employees maintain frequent, intensive contacts with the environment, this provides additional information that stimulates idea generation. Developing and implementing external orientation in each job constitutes a major step in creating and maintaining an innovative organization. The enterprise should be open for knowledge that is developed outside.

Market characteristics

Service businesses that operate in markets with high intensity of non-price competition will have more innovative ability. De Jong et al conclude that in a situation of non-price competition, service businesses will have more innovative ability. The same counts for markets where the demand is highly uncertain.

Organizational culture

Robert E. Quinn (1999) describes organizational culture in his 'Competing Values Model'. It enables us to describe and visualize a particular culture in an organization. Also, it allows us to compare the organizational culture in the private sector with the public sector. The model describes flexibility and control from an internal and external perspective.

The description of the Competing Values Model is to be interpreted as follows:

Purpose Culture: the focus of this type of culture is on innovation, personal freedom, intuition, creativity, vision and growth. It can be described as 'entrepreneurial'.

People Culture: the focus of the people culture is on the development of employees, collaboration, acceptance, consensus, teambuilding, appreciation and respect.

Process Culture: the focus of the process culture is on rules and regulations, procedures and the avoidance of mistakes.

Performance Culture: the focus of the performance culture is on market orientation, decision-making, goal setting, production and performance.

Quinn recommends that organizations should aim to strike a good balance in an organization between each of the above named cultures in order to be successful. This is supported by empirical research by Goshal (1999).

Looking at the main characteristics of innovative organizations in the private sector and their innovative ability it can be stated that these organizations are externally oriented, have a purpose and align the internal organization (people) and processes in order to perform well in the market place.

According to Quinn the main criteria for innovations in service businesses in the private sector are:

- (1) Creative recombination
- (2) Strategy and mission for innovation,
- (3) External orientation on customers, suppliers, competitors and knowledge institutions
- (4) Multi-disciplinary teams and employee autonomy
- (5) Creative techniques for securing means
- (6) Idea generation through network activities and collaborative learning.

Further these findings indicate that non-price competition and an uncertain demand foster innovative ability.

The above criteria reflect an entrepreneurial approach to serve customer needs in a market oriented way. Entrepreneurship can be defined as *the active pursuit of opportunities, as a result of which value is created*. The entrepreneur starts with the opportunity and then seeks the resources to exploit it (Molien, D & B. Leleuz, 1997). The hypothesis is that the above criteria reflect the innovative ability of service organizations in the private sector. The question is what service organizations in the public sector can learn from that.

Innovation and culture in the public sector

Traditionally the social services sector is governed by rules and regulations and can be typified as a process oriented culture. It is only until very recently (Serail & Van de Pas, 2002) that the government realized that an approach of 'one size fits all' is not productive in the social activation of individuals who are dependent on government support for a longer period of time, such as individuals in a state of poverty.

Instead, the citizen should be treated as a unique individual and all processes of support (political, managerial and operational) should be redesigned and tailored to offer new perspectives to the non-active individuals for social inclusion and psychological well-being. This fits in an approach where the public sector is redefining its role in society as an answer to rapid changes and to the requirements of citizens, NGO's and businesses.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Work in the Netherlands passed a law in 1996 with a specific article (144Abw) for local governments to experiment on social inclusion and labor participation. The experiments were monitored and the first findings were reported in 1999 (Serail & Van de Pas, 2000). The time period for the experiments was extended until 2002. Both, project leaders and clients, were interviewed in 32 municipalities.

The research objectives were to identify the effects of the experiments on lowering social exclusion and the effects on increasing labor participation. The methodology included personal interviews (500), telephone inquiries (32) as well as questionnaires (373).

Findings of clients

The main findings of these experiments are as follows (Serail & Van de Pas, 2002):

(1) The client must be the starting point

It is important to match services to what the client abilities are and to what the client's aspirations are. Important is the understanding of the clients social system (children, partner, neighbors, friends etc.).

(2) Social activation should aim for realistic goals for the client

The concept of the integration ladder is to be introduced. Starting with social inclusion, activating to work, structural additional work, temporary work and finally regular work. It is considered better to formulate an in-between goal, then to aim too high from the start. Otherwise the client could respond by leaving the program. The experiments have shown that clients can climb more steps on the ladder, as they change their objectives parallel to their personal development.

(3) Clear understanding of clients characteristics

The better the understanding is of client characteristics in terms of social exclusion and distance to the labor market, the easier it is to deliver tailor made services.

(4) Mandatory or voluntary participation

Project leaders are divided on the issue whether voluntary or mandatory participation of clients in programs is required. Some are in favor of mandatory participation in the initial phase of the program (research through in-depth interviews), and leave the participation in a program open to the client. Others are in favor of total voluntary participation and yet others of total mandatory participation. The conclusion that researchers (Serail & Van de Pas, 2002) reached, is that once the client is committed to a program, the commitment is two-way. The social service and the client are mutually committed.

(5) A long but valuable road to social activation

The experiments show that programs of social activation take from 6 months to 2 years. During this time a step-by- step approach between the social counselor and the client and clear agreements on which specific actions to take eases the client ahead to social inclusion, more psychological well being and in a number of cases to voluntary or paid for work. Even if work is not a realistic perspective the effects of an individualized approach on personal development and a sense of well-being are positive.

(6) Continuity, intensity and trust are important criteria

The experiments indicate that the continuity of the counselor is an important factor for success and the intensity of guidance to avoid individuals from dropping out of the program. Trust between the client and the counselor is of key importance. To establish trust is not always an easy matter, as many clients have had negative personal experiences with institutes and their representatives. A counselor must be trustworthy in his behavior and not make any promises that cannot be realized. If such promises are made the client will only become more distrusting. At the end of a program clients cannot be aborted. Follow up is an essential part of the program.

(7) Social activation calls for close collaboration and communication

In most cases more than one organization is involved in social activation programs. Communication about what activities should be performed by whom, is important. Periodic assessment of the process and clear commitment to contributions are essential. Social activation should be part of a planned process where all steps are connected both in time and in content. It is realized that in this respect much can be improved in current programs for social activation and a position for a case manager is recommended to monitor progress and align contributions to the process.

Besides the main findings, which are stated above, there are also lessons to be learned from these experiments (Serail & Van de Pas, 2002). Not all of the clients were fully enthusiastic. 34% of the clients (research base 500) names one or more negative points about programs of social activation. 10% considers the imposed duties as negative and 6 % is disappointed about the content of the program.

This indicates that a better connection between the client's capabilities and the program is necessary. 5% considers the time spent in the program is competing with time spent on leisure activities, social contacts and/or housekeeping. 67% of the clients name no negative points at all (more than one answer was possible).

Clients did suggestions for improvement of the program. 36% of the clients did one or more suggestions. The duration of the program should not be limited to a set period. They would prefer more intensive individual coaching and extra help in finding employment or education. Better financial remuneration for expenses such as travel, better tools and materials, better child support and better administrative procedures are some of the suggestions given. Clients think that better coaching and better financial support are the main criteria for improvement.

Findings of counselors

Besides clients, counselors were interviewed as well. In total 48 counselors responded to questions about factors for success or failure. The results show an overlap with the lessons learned from clients.

The respondents state the following criteria as key success factors:

- Individualized approach tailored to the individuals capabilities and desires
- Local support base to invest in target group
- Willingness to collaborate between organizations
- Expertise and experienced employees, self motivated and committed.
- The counselors also named a number of factors for failure:
- Lack of communication
- Lack of supporting facilities and waiting lists

- Problems with client selection and steering towards programs
- Lack of continuity through personnel turnover
- Client problems become more intense.

Conclusions on cultural change

The general effects of the experiments can be stated as follows. Starting with 12.000 clients in 43 experiments, 54% ended participation within the programs, 29 % passed on to work (paid and unpaid), 19% ended the program in advance (2% continues, 2% completed the program and is non active, and of 2% the status is unknown).

At the time of reporting 46% was still part of various programs. The sustainable effects of the programs are high. The relapse to social security is 12%. The experiments proof that work is an excellent social integrator.

The researchers Serail and Van de Pas (2002) conclude that more attention is needed for different outcomes of social activation programs. Not in all cases work is the only valid outcome. If work would be the only criteria many individuals would not be eligible for the program and remain in a situation of social exclusion. An integration ladder, such as mentioned earlier, may assist in establishing realistic objectives for each client.

The required cultural change in government policy is from the small square (bottom left) to the large square (centre of the model). Figure 4 indicates the desired outcome. The experiments described in this paragraph show a progression towards a better balance between the four types of cultures by putting the client at the centre of attention, setting realistic goals, aiming at a clear understanding of the client and searching for collaboration and communication between service organizations.

The cultural changes thus far take place from process oriented (bottom left) to people oriented (top left) and performance (bottom right) oriented. It is noted that many experiments still lack an overall vision (purposes: top right).

The cultural change is taking place from a focus on bureaucracy (process culture) to a more entrepreneurial culture (purpose culture) focusing on clients needs and involving the organization (people culture) in working together to serve clients better (performance culture).

Based on the above information of approximately 43 experiments (Serail & Van de Pas, 2002) we can list the following criteria for innovating the social services:

- (1) The client must be the starting point
- (2) Social activation should aim for realistic goals for clients
- (3) A clear understanding of client's characteristics is required
- (4) Continuity, intensity and trust are the key factors

- (5) Close collaboration and communication between service organizations is required
- (6) Individualized approach tailored to the individuals capabilities and desires
- (7) Better coaching and financial support
- (8) Child support is necessary
- (9) Connection between client's capabilities and program
- (10) Expertise and experienced employees, self motivated and committed.

The following external criteria are identified:

- (1) A local support base to invest in a target group is required
- (2) As well as willingness to collaborate between organizations
- (3) Political and managerial responsibility is a requirement for taking the problem of social exclusion and poverty serious and to support experiments to learn and to innovate.

Social Entrepreneurship

The culture in the public sector is changing from bureaucratic to more entrepreneurial. In the case of not-for-profit enterprises the term *social* entrepreneurship (Thompson, Alvy & Lees, 2000; Mordecai, 2002) can be introduced as compared to entrepreneurship in commercial organizations.

The main object of social entrepreneurship is to realize a social cause (i.e. to improve social cohesion, combat poverty, defend human rights, improve health services etc.). When social entrepreneurship is practiced, it involves all levels of the organization: political, managerial and operational levels are all in need of alignment, focusing on a particular social cause.

Table 1 Private culture versus public culture in the service sector

Private services sector culture	Public sector (social services) culture	Observations
Innovative service organizations strike a good balance between purpose, people, processes and performance	Experiments in the social service sector show a migration from bureaucracy (process culture) towards a more client oriented and employee oriented culture (people culture and performance culture)	Social service experiments are helping to change the culture. It is noted that an overall vision (purpose) is absent in many experiments

If social service organizations would like to be more client oriented, a cultural change is required (Hibbert, Hogg & Quinn, 2002). The experiments in practice are helping the cultural change process. A comparison between the private sector and the public sector as

showed in table 1 offers information on innovation and culture, which can be translated into criteria for an experiment in practice. The criteria are regrouped in table 2, starting with broader aspects such as dynamics and strategy and finally coming to more detailed aspects as employees, clients and networks.

Table 2 Criteria for observing the initiatives in the public sector

Criteria	Requirements for public sector	Observations
Market dynamics & change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political and managerial responsibility for taking the problem of social exclusion and poverty serious and support experiments to learn and to innovate. - Increasing influence from NGO's active in the field of combating poverty and social exclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central government and local governments are monopoly players. - Clients of social services are in a relation of complete dependency. - The dynamics of a political system and a market driven system cannot easily be compared - The role and influence of NGO's and political parties in defending the public interest need to be taken into account
Strategy, innovation & entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local support base to invest in target group - Social activation should aim for realistic goals for clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It appears that an overall strategy based on clear principles is absent in the social sector -The criteria listed are more on tactical and operational level - No clear connections exist between strategy, organization and operations

Organizational structure & culture	- The organizational culture is changing from bureaucratic to more entrepreneurial through experimenting	- Social service organizations are generally internally focused and partnerships between various organizations are relatively new - Staff turnover is high and experiments lack continuity - Law and regulations govern actions, building trust is not at the core of activities
Employees, creativity and risk taking	- Expertise and experienced employees, self motivated and committed	- Employees in the social sector work with strict guidelines and are not rewarded for creativity, self steering and risk taking
Adding value for citizens as clients	- The client must be the starting point - Clear understanding of client's characteristics	- Rules and regulations are mostly the starting point - Truly getting to know clients characteristics is not part of the usual work process
Network activities & learning	- Close collaboration and communication	- Counselors have a heavy work load and little time is allowed for networking and learning

Based on the observations made in table 2, it is possible to come to the following conclusions:

- (1) *Dynamics*: the dynamics of the private sector and of the public sector are inherently different.
- (2) *Autonomy and complexity*: private service companies enjoy great freedom to design and implement their own strategy, where laws and regulations, which are fixed over time, govern social service organizations. The role of political parties, NGO's and the political system is not easily geared to reform.
- (3) *Strategy and vision*: an overall strategy is lacking for social service organizations. There is no clear connection between strategy, organization and operations. Current experiments

focus more on a tactical and operational level. A vision to guide actions is lacking.

(4) *Orientation and networking*: social service organizations generally are internally oriented. Working in partnerships and network is a relatively new phenomenon.

(5) *Innovativeness and employees*: employees in the social sector work with strict guidelines and are not rewarded for creativity, self-steering and risk taking.

(6) *Client and trust*: truly getting to know clients characteristics is not part of the usual work process

(7) *Networking and learning*: counselors have a heavy work load and little time is allowed for networking and learning.

The Zeeland Experiment

In August 2000 a project team started an experiment in three cities in the province of Zeeland (Netherlands) to mirror the above observations. It is to be considered the first phase of a longitudinal study on innovating social services through social entrepreneurship and cultural change. The cities involved are: Vlissingen, Reimerswaal and Sluis.

The aim of the experiment was:

Develop an overall vision and strategy to guide an experiment where all participants involved, learn and actively collaborate to acquire innovative ability for the benefit of clients who are socially excluded and are in a state of poverty.

The experiment should:

- (1) Create an overall strategy and vision on how to assist clients in becoming socially integrated.
- (2) Solicit commitment from all participants involved on the strategy and vision.
- (3) Design, develop and implement innovative work processes enabling all organizational levels to align in supporting clients.
- (4) Truly get to know each individual client as a unique individual and build a relationship on a foundation of mutual trust.
- (5) Place autonomy on all levels of the organization and stimulate collaboration, communication and learning through social entrepreneurship.
- (6) Allow time for counselors, management and council officials to reflect and learn, thereby creating a cultural change from a focus on rules and regulations (process culture) to a focus on development and growths of unique individuals (purpose culture in terms of social entrepreneurship).

The methodology of the Zeeland Experiment

The first phase of the experiment started in August 2000 and was completed and evaluated in June 2003. The method of working is based on participatory research and collaborative learning. Each step in the process is based on critical inquiry, description and representation of the answers found.

The participants such as administrators, managers, counselors, and clients are all actively involved in the process, allowing them to reflect on current working methods and innovative new working methods. The participants are enabled to learn through collaboration, communication and through practice. The learning effects are evaluated during every step of the process. J. Tas headed the experiment and the authors of this paper conducted the action research aspect. The first phase of the experiment was to set up and conduct a pilot.

Table 3 Steps taken in the Zeeland-pilot

Step/period	Aim	Description	Deliverable
1 August 2001 - December 2001	Identify the problem and develop a vision.	In depth interviews with 30 clients to gain a deep understanding of the problems, ambitions and possibilities of the individuals. Development of vision and overall strategy based on the findings, together with all participants in pilot cities.	Photo album on 30 clients and a preliminary outline of a vision and overall strategy.
2 December 2001 - September 2002	Design and develop an innovative practice.	Organize working conferences to design and develop a new practice. Participatory research and collaborative learning.	Description of a new practice.
3 September 2002 - June 2003	Implement new practice in a pilot.	Select and invite 30 clients, 8 counselors, 3 managers and 3 administrators to actually implement the new practice and reflect monthly on progress made.	Detailed description of the new practice and implementation with 30 clients.
4 June 2003 - July 2003	Evaluate the pilot.	Evaluate the pilot through client interviews, and evaluation of the activities of all participants involved.	A final description of the new practice. An evaluation report, including conclusions and recommendations.

In phase 2 of the longitudinal research the experiment will be expanded to a larger scale in Zeeland. The aim will be to increase of the number of cities and participating clients. This expansion actually started in September 2003. Here we present briefly some of the highlights of the first phase of the longitudinal study on cultural change of social services in Zeeland.

The initial *trigger* for change was an action of a NGO named Splinter. Splinter an organization defending the rights of the poor in the province of Zeeland summoned provincial government and cities in the region to take responsibility for the inhabitants of the province living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion. The province responded by furnishing funds for participatory research and for collaborative learning.

An expert practitioner in the field of social security was appointed to design and implement the practical research. The choice was made to interview 30 clients to describe the situation, analyze the competencies, the personal ambition, the constraints and the effects of the organizations involved.

The interviews were presented in December 2001 to Splinter, to the province of Zeeland and to city officials. The form chosen was a 'Photo album'. This album contains a narrative description of each client and a preliminary vision outlining how to deal with clients who are socially excluded and in a state of poverty. This document was well received and accepted. The project team adopted the preliminary vision and took responsibility for the further steps (step 2 – 4) in the pilot.

Three cities (Vlissingen, Reimerswaal and Sluis) volunteered to adopt the program for participatory research and collaborative learning. Administrators, managers and counselors participated actively in clarifying the vision, officially adopting the principles of the vision on the city council and collaborating in designing and developing a new methodology to serve clients better.

This team worked together in conferences to discuss and develop a document describing the elements of a new methodology, sharing knowledge and seeking consensus. The initial resistance (we are doing well as we are) changed over time in a collaborative process of seeking new and more entrepreneurial ways to address the problems of clients. The deliverable in the form of a full description of the proposed new methodology and the requirements from the organization in terms of competencies and resources was ready in September 2002.

The document was adopted by local city councils and the implementation of the new methodology started at the same moment. The collaborative learning continued through training in communication with professional actors as clients. The actual selection of 31 clients began and the approach was brought into real practice. Monthly internal and project

meetings offered time for reflection and collaborative learning.

It was noted earlier that previous experiments in the Netherlands lacked an overall vision and strategy. The Zeeland experiment is the first to describe an explicit vision, which can be split up in a vision on the role of all participants.

The vision on clients exists of:

- (1) The client is at the centre from start to finish.
- (2) The client is the architect and builder of his/her own future.
- (3) The profit (performance) for the client is clearly defined and includes more than a position of paid for work.

In fact, participation in a social network, elimination of specific problems, and participation in voluntary activities were included in the performance as well.

The vision on counselors exists of:

- (1) The counselor has excellent coaching abilities to guide clients from start to finish.
- (2) Counselors enter into a social contract with clients, including mutual rights and obligations.
- (3) The counselor acts as a social entrepreneur: client centered, flexible and creative in pursuit of opportunities to help clients improve their situation themselves.

The vision on organizational support exists of:

- (1) The city administrators take full responsibility for improving the perspective of citizens in poverty and social exclusion.
- (2) Organizational efforts are directed towards stimulating the ability of self sufficiency of clients, social participation, taking away obstructions and connecting to individual competencies, ambitions and actions of individual clients.
- (3) Actions of any organization involved in the social integration process are guided by a personal development plan, clarifying specific roles and contributions of all participants involved. Clear contracts establish professional relationships for the benefit of the client.

Results of the Zeeland experiment

The main research question stated at the start of this paper is: *what experiences from the private sector can be used to innovate the social security system to offer individuals in situation of poverty new perspectives?*

In June 2003 the Zeeland experiment was evaluated and the first results became available. The deliverables were:

- (1) A vision on how to tackle the innovation of the public sector by introducing the concept of social entrepreneurship.
- (2) A full and detailed description and explanation of the methodology.
- (3) A detailed evaluation of the effects for clients, the process and the collaboration on all

levels of the organization.

(4) Conclusions and recommendations for phase 2 of the longitudinal study.

The experiences from the private sector were transferred to the public sector through participatory research and collaborative learning. In the process participants learned to understand and gain an overview on the existing bureaucratic culture. They acquired a vision on the possibilities of a culture of social entrepreneurship, balancing the values of the four value-systems: purpose, people, processes and performance.

The participants (**) involved, gained insight, overview and foresight as well as new practical competencies. They now know how to shape the future of social services to serve clients better and direct their own actions. The results were presented on a conference in the province of Zeeland in September 2003, where clients, counselors, managers and administrators of the pilot cities each presented part of the outcomes.

Participatory research and collaborative learning proved to be effective instruments to involve all participants in designing and developing a new vision and a new methodology on social entrepreneurship. The team members acquired and shared fresh insights in client's problems, through collaborative learning. They discovered new and more effective ways in assisting clients to improve their own situation.

The process of creation, learning, practice, reflection on actions and description of findings facilitated the team members involved. The findings emerged from collaboration. Each team member is *owner* of the new vision and approach, and knows what is *required* to act as a *social entrepreneur*, based on a client driven approach.

More specific results were the narrative descriptions of 30 clients in the 'Photo album'. This album presented real life information, team members could identify with. A highly qualitative instrument triggered social entrepreneurship as an active pursuit of opportunities to serve clients better in a situation of poverty and social exclusion. The vision (main principles) outlined in the 'Photo album' has proven to be a guide for all further actions and for evaluation.

Social entrepreneurship as a guide for a new approach

All participants engaged in the participatory research and collaborative learning process experienced how a vision can guide creation, learning and performance. It inspires and is a clear guide for communication and collaboration.

The new approach can be visualized as a matrix with methodological steps on the vertical side and client results on the horizontal side (see Figure 1).

The methodological steps for the counselor are:

1 Identification and selection of the clients

- 2 Approach of the clients
- 3 In depth interviews
- 4 Analysis of the situation and formulation of an advice
- 5 An independent diagnosis
- 6 Working on the personal development plan
- 7 Inserting the client to participate in society.

The first three steps are aimed at creating interest, insight and trust. Once this is achieved, the first milestone of a relationship based on mutual trust is attained. The steps 4 and 5 in the methodology are aimed at creating ambition and perspective. They are also aimed at the development of competencies required to become successful.

Once this is achieved the second milestone of a personal development plan and commitment to pursue is attained. The last two steps of the methodology must lead to the third milestone: social integration on the basis of self-esteem and self- support and of fighting spirit.

The above approach was tested and evaluated on 31 clients. An overview of the results is presented in figure 1. Apart from two clients who appeared to be capable of self-sufficiency, all clients started from a situation of exclusion and inability to engage in social activities to add value to daily life and to build self-esteem, psychological well being and competencies to cope for them selves.

Observations/ Exclusion/ inclusion level	2001 O1	Percentage	2003 O2	Percentage	2007 O3	Percentage
D Fully included	0	0%	0	0%	7	7%
C Somewhat included	1	3%	16	64%	47	47%
B Somewhat excluded	17	55%	5	20%	7	7%
A Fully excluded	13	42%	4	16%	38	38%
Total N	31	100%	25	100%	99	100%

The above table presents the results of the study. The percentage of type A fully excluded dropped from 42% (O1) to 16% (O2) and increased to 38% (O3).

Figure 1 The improvement of client’s perspectives in 6 months time

To explain figure 1, it is to be noted that 6 clients left the pilot group due to various reasons: transfer to another geographical location and medical treatment. 25 clients have been assisted of whom 16 build their own future and became socially integrated. They are taking

positive actions to further improve their situation through education, voluntary work, engaging in social networks and (in 3 cases), in paid for work. 5 clients are still in the process of constructing a personal development plan and 4 clients have just started and are still at the stage of building a relationship.

All clients were selected from a group of clients (category 4 in the Dutch system) who are considered impossible to integrate. In fact they were considered as a write off. The results show that this opinion is incorrect and that individuals in a state of poverty and social exclusion can be guided to improve their situation, provided the relationship is build on trust, focuses on the uniqueness of the individual, his or her competencies and ambitions, and on specific actions according to a personal development plan.

Without organizational support (communication, collaboration, coordination, resources) on all levels of the organizations, counselors and clients would not have been able to progress as they did. In the old methodology the way of working was top down through rules and regulations: the administrators instructed managers, who in turn instructed counselors to enforce rules and regulations. Clients had to comply.

In the new methodology the client is at the centre and very soon at the steering wheel of activities. All organizational levels act in concert and in support of the client's endeavors. This way, the organizational culture is in balance between purpose (vision), people (role of all actors for the benefit of the client), processes (clear steps towards social integration) and performance (the improvement of the perspective of individual clients).

In the evaluation of the pilot it became clear that apart from benefits for the clients, local government and local society benefit as well. Local government gets a more human face and gets closer to those in need. For them it is important to make a difference between a relationship based on trust and collaboration, as opposed to the application of rules and regulations.

At the same time, clients make a contribution to society in several ways:

Less use of state facilities such as health services

Less use of social services

Contribution to the bringing up of children

Contribution to mutual aid in social networks

Contribution to voluntary activities

Contributions through paid for work

Discussion

The Zeeland-pilot indicates that participatory research and collaborative learning appears to be an effective way in the practice of engaging social administrators in intensive processes of cultural change if there is a significant **trigger** for such change. The research base however is limited to a small number of clients (31), counselors (8) managers (3) and

administrators (3). Also the actual period of implementation of the approach developed is only 6 months.

The results of the research are indicative of the population taking part in the research. It is not expedient at this time to generalize the results to be representative for a larger population. On the other hand, the results are so promising, that the vision and methodology developed will be tested on a larger scale in the second phase of the longitudinal research on social entrepreneurship and cultural change in the social services sector.

The first phase of the longitudinal research in the Netherlands showed some promising results. In the next phase it is recommended that the research base is expanded to a larger scale and that also the imbalance of power (between social security services and the client) and the limitations of empowerment will be taken into account.

Another aspect that should be explored further is the effect of mutual trust between client and counselor. This seems one of the major reasons why the new methodology may differ from existing experiments in social security and why it may work better for clients. Taking into account the uniqueness of each client, taking time to listen to their life's story, being there to encourage the client to take a hold of their own lives, are aspects that certainly demand further exploration.

In the Zeeland case as presented, there was a significant trigger for change from NGO Splinter. It should be explored how, in other situations, the influence of (outside) triggers can be used to improve social entrepreneurship and cultural change in social services for the benefit of clients in a state of poverty.

A note of caution, however, is required. In our research we did not pay full attention to the possible effects of imbalance in power and the limitations for empowerment. Every individual has its limitations and these limits should be respected. There may always be an imbalance between those in powers and those not in powers.

Seeking a delicate power balance according to rules of mutual respect and humanity will be necessary. Meaning that self-steering and self-development seem good ideas, but individuals do need the basic competencies and ambitions to act accordingly. If not, they need to be nurtured and guided to reach a state at the maximum level of their abilities.

Implications for innovative education and learning practices

A first implication for education results from the nature of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is more than working in teams. The essential characteristics are to be formulated in competencies. A competence is the combination of knowledge, skill and

attitude. Knowing how to be a good social entrepreneur is not enough to be a competent social entrepreneur. Neither is the acquirement of skills, like holding an in-depth interview and stimulating people to formulate a personnel development plan.

It is the attitude that really matters: the way relations are build by participating in a mix of processes, as described by Quinn. It requires a certain amount of freedom for counselors to behave to their own intuition. It must be a personnel drive to succeed in supporting clients to develop the fighting spirit required to take their destiny in their own hands.

A second implication is about teachers in schools. Educational institutions in practice do not differ much from bureaucratic social service organizations. Organizational processes are similar in that decision-making is often top down, management and employees work with strict guidelines and there is no room for entrepreneurship.

From this experiment educational institutions can learn the following:

- (1) Empowerment of individuals is possible when a relationship is based on a clear vision on mutual trust, commitment and development of empowerment.
- (2) Individuals are able to perform and improve their situation if guidance on all levels of the organization (managers, teachers, researchers, and other staff) is aligned and re-directed in a way that all support the student's efforts to become young professionals.
- (3) Participatory research and collaborative learning seem powerful instruments to help shape the future of all participants if there is a significant *trigger* for change. They become owners of vision and approach and in this way they become owner of their own destiny.

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