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ABSTRACT

During the last decade in Belgium and the Netherlands, comprehensive reform of primary education emanated from central policy. In both countries the national authorities set up a program to encourage and facilitate the new primary school concept. This paper reports on 25 schools in the Netherlands and 52 in Belgium that acquired special funding and assistance. Research was based on the assumption that the school's response manifests itself in three ways: in the nature of the implementation agenda; in specially arranged structures to conduct the implementation activities; and in steering the flow of implementation work. Data were collected from interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document analysis. Respondents included principals and staff, external change facilitators, school inspectors, and policy makers. The first part provides an overview of national policy at the local school level, with attention to school/national policy interaction. Part 2 outlines and illustrates a profile of steering functions--direction/concept clarification, directional pressure, assistance/support, and latitude definition. The concept of implementation as an intervention in the ongoing school organizational processes is examined in part 3, which describes the local concerns generated by comprehensive mandates for change. Part 4 accounts for differences in the two national repertoires of policy inducements and addresses the question of how a central policy program presents itself locally. A profile of policy inducements from the school's perspective is articulated. Two figures are included. (29 references) (LMI)

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Schools implementing a central reform policy

Findings from two national educational contexts

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SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING A CENTRAL REFORM POLICY:
findings from two national educational contexts

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Introduction

In Belgium and the Netherlands during the last decade comprehensive reform of primary education has emanated from central policy. Innovations of a radical nature affected the local school, both in classroom practices and, particularly in the case of the Netherlands, in its organizational arrangements. The new policies, being centrally determined, are presented as complex innovation concepts and which are laid down as general guidelines, leaving autonomy with the schools as to how they are to be achieved. However, schools have to develop their local innovation efforts with reference to the broad national policy of primary school change.

In both countries, the national authorities set up a program to encourage and facilitate the implementation of the new primary school concept at the local level. In this paper, reporting from research conducted in both countries, we deal with schools that acquired from central authority special funding and assistance in return for efforts to implement their version of the national reform concept. From the perspective of the policymaker, and in the context of radical eductional change, these schools were (implicitly) viewed as local implementers of national policy aims, as 'implementing organizations'. In our terms, these schools became contractors-for-change.

Our research focused on the local school's response to inducements from external policy to change its educational and organizational practices. Central to our research is the notion that the school's response to the policymaker's inducements manifests itself in three ways:

(a) in the nature of the school's *implementation agenda*: the set of locally stated innovation goals selected in response to central policy aims; the items on the agenda reflect what is 'at stake' for the school;

(b) in specially arranged structures to conduct the implementation activities: the temporary *structural arrangement* of task groups, work procedures, roles in the service of implementation; and

(c) in steering the flow of implementation work: the *steering functions* established in the life of the school for coordinating, assisting, providing guidance and directing the innovation efforts throughout the organization. Our studies dealt with these processes of agenda-setting, structuring and steering.

Background and purpose of the study: The data base is from research carried out separately in Belgium (Dutch-speaking part) and the Netherlands. Both projects focussed on the school as an 'implementing organization' and had in common an interest in the school's response to external policy inducement for major change.

Though our research in the Netherlands (25 schools) and in Belgium (52 schools) was conducted separately, we afterwards integrated our data sets within the same framework. That is, given the commonality of focus, we tried to conceptually frame our data, using concepts and notions developed in the separate research projects. This paper reports on the leading concepts of our framework, using at the same time data from several empirical studies.

Both research projects had a mixed quantitative and qualitative design. Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, observation and analysis of school documents. Respondents were principals and staff, and also external change facilitators, school inspectors and policymakers. The qualitative parts involved longitudinal on-site study of schools to register (through observation and interviews) their daily implementation work on the workfloor. Questionnaires of (semi-) standardized format were administered to teachers and principals to map both the process of implementation and the effects of their efforts.

The details of design and data are published elsewhere: Verhagen, Bastiaans, Corten, Knip & Van der Vegt, 1986; Vandenberghe, 1988a; Vandenberghe, D'Hertefelt, Wouters en Van Dooren, 1989; Van der Vegt & Knip, 1988 a,b, 1990; Knip & Van der Vegt, 1991; Vandenberghe, Verhoelst, Staessens, D'Hertefelt & Wouters, 1990; Staessens, 1991 a,b,c; Vandenberghe & Staessens, 1991.

Design and focus of paper: In Part One the context of the study will be introduced, with special reference to the school-national policy interaction. In Part Two we deal with the steering of implementation work seen as a response by the school to the external policy inducements. We outline and illustrate the profile of the steering functions for implementation, and present some empirical validating evidence from our research work. In Part Three we elaborate the idea that implementation can be conceived of as an 'intervention' into ongoing processes of the school organization. Finally, since the studies were carried out in separate institutional settings, we had to account for differences in the two national repertoires of policy inducements. The question arises how a central policy program presents itself locally. In particular, what does it represent or contain for a school conducting its contracted implementation work? By integrating our research notes, we started work on articulating the profile of policy inducements, particularly from the perspective of the implementing school. In Part Four we briefly deal with this question.

PART ONE: National Policy at the Local School Level: an overview

The Setting

Comprehensive, large-scale change. The innovation policies in both countries cover a broad spectrum of educational and administrative activities in primary schools. For example, the objectives include curricular differentiation in the major teaching domains and the improvement of the school's capacity to meet a wider range of students' needs.

In the Netherlands, national policy for primary education had the format of institutional change: the mandated creation of a new system for young people between the ages of four and twelve which would be entrusted to a new type of school. The kindergarten (pre-school) and the elementary schools were required to colloborate in implementing that policy at local level. Thus, the reform not only included comprehensive educational change. Local schools had also to develop a new organizational and school leadership structure that would reflect the integration of the two subsystems. Formally speaking, this new integrated structure is in operation since 1985. Since then additional national policy programs aim to support schools in further implementing the underlying innovation concept for primary education.

In Belgium, central authority advocates and facilitates the implementation of broad and far-reaching innovative objectives, but unlike the Netherlands, the proposed improvements do not affect the legal-institutional structure of primary education. However, in both countries the agendas-for-change are very similar, in content as well as in scope. Although the legal status of the primary school in Belgium is different from that in the Netherlands, for all practical purposes, the policy environments in both countries with regard to current reform objectives are broadly equivalent. (This applies particularly to the Dutch reform policies after 1985.)

In both countries, the national Departments of Education challenge the school to give comprehensive (or multi-dimensional) objectives a programmatic and a locally workable shape. For example, schools are expected to increase their 'service capacity' in meeting a wider range of students' needs. This service capacity is a central feature of the new school concept in both countries. It relates to activities such as enhancing the integration or interdependence between pre-school and primary school; increasing individualization, particularly as to reading and arithmetic; improving the remedial capacity of the school by developing diagnostic-remedial facilities and installing these in regular school life; and putting more emphasis on the socio-emotional development of students.

Local schools confronted with such comprehensive 'innovation bundles' try to control the import of innovative concepts from the policy world. Objectives get reduced, filtered, down-sized and schools differ in their choice for specific components: their agenda's-for-innovation differ in scope, in content, in ambition; and as a result, the stakes vary (Knip & Van der Vegt, 1991; Vandenberghe, 1987). As indicated above, we view the local innovation agenda as a reflection of a school's response to external

policy. However, the schools in both countries not only responded to objectives advocated and induced by policy, they also had to respond to programs or schemes, set up by the national Departments of Education, in order to promote and to facilitate schools in conducting their implementation work.

National policy programs for implementation. The demanding and large-scale character of the proposed changes caused the policymaker to anticipate implementation difficulties at the local level. Thus, in Belgium and in the Netherlands, schemes were set up to stimulate and to facilitate implementation efforts by schools. Under these schemes, schools could apply (and compete) for funds and assistance made available to them under conditions specified by the central Department of Education. Our research dealt with schools that were successful in acquiring special funding and assistance in return for efforts to implement their agenda-for-change, i.e. the school's version of the overall reform concept.

In order to obtain special funding and assistance schools had to submit a proposal, committing themselves to implementation activities that they themselves specified, and indicating what aspects of the national innovation agenda they would agree to implement. In both countries the funding scheme was mildly competitive; proposals could be turned down or modifications requested. Morevover, candidate schools in Belgium were assessed not only as to the relevancy of the items they had put on their change agenda, but were also required to participate in a rather thorough school-based review procedure to check and possibly improve their capacity for implementation work (Depoortere, De Soete & Hellyn, 1987).

In return for their implementation work, the schools received special resources. These included (temporary) extra staff for remedial purposes, training of principals to improve their leadership skills; extensive in-service programs for staff with a curricular, didactic or school-administrative content; external assistance by facilitators for school-focused support for substantive educational matters as well as for the management of innovation; facilities for workshops at the school level. Schools, having considerable autonomy, could 'negotiate' and develop their own *repertoire of (external) resources*. On the other hand, the schools that entered this type of arrangement had to accept that they would have to report regularly on the progress they made towards achieving their innovation goals.

These schemes, and procedures attached to them, reflect the view of the national policymaker: the *local school as an implementing unit.* Consequently, the school is seen and treated as party-and-partner in a national reform process. The school which successfully applied became 'a contractor-for-change'. Such schools 'bought into' the change process as a deliberate decision (though most likely with a diversity of motives: pragmatic, opportunistic, idealistic) and in the context of a relationship in which they saw gains for themselves: the school acquired what we term 'contract status'.

Contract status and the dynamics of school life

Having acquired contract status means that the school becomes an 'implementing organization'. When a public bureaucracy bestows contract status on a school it involves the school in a public policy process, and tries to achieve the school's commitment to implementing that policy: the local school as a contracted party for reform work in a national policy context.

Contract status can be seen as an 'intervention' in the daily life of the school organization. What gives it the intervening quality? In what way does it affect the life of the school? Contract status (a) creates *policy linkage*, and (b) induces a *project-format* for the conduct of implementation work (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1990).

Policy linkage means that the school will be more strongly connected to the actuality of its external policy environment. Concretely, the school becomes more intensely tied not only to developments in the (educational) policy domain but also to prevailing bureaucratic-administrative procedures of the national Department of Education. This will result in an increase in the school's external dependency.

Project-format means that the school will have to pursue its implementation efforts through a focused but temporary work structure, designed to accomplish specified tasks. Specifically, in both our national contexts the project-format is induced by aspects of contract status such as: (a) the requirement for a local agenda-for-implementation, containing specified and substantive items (the mandated school-based review procedure, as applied in the Belgian context, is very much focused on reality-testing in agenda-setting); (b) an agreed time period for accomplishing the contract; (c) a set of pre-defined tasks and obligations, with report-outs at pre-established times; and (d) a statement to crucial sectors of the school's environment regarding the proposed changes (a quest for legitimization). Thus, through the induction of the project-format the effect of contract status is to provide an action framework which focuses, legitimizes and makes salient activities related to implementation.

In short, contract status has a (more or less effective) 'change inducive' nature: (a) it imports current public policy standards for innovation into the school organization; (b) it carries new educational ideas into the local school (see policy linkage); (c) it generates and expects focused project-framed work; and (d) it poses the school with issues of redefining its internal and external relationships i.e. dependencies (see also Part Three). An overall effect of contract status is to put the school into a 'motivational state', that is, a state of readiness which pressures the school to prepare itself for implementation.

Regulating the implementation efforts

How do schools prepare themselves for (contracted) implementation work? How do they respond to their contract status? As indicated above, the responses will be expressed not only (a) in terms of the stakes they put in the local change agenda, but also (b) in the project-structure created to carry out the implementation, and (c) in the functions developed for steering the flow of implementation activities. We view the way a school organizes (structures) and steers its implementation process as an important indicator for its basic response to the policymaker.

Both the structural arrangement and the functions developed for steering the flow of implementation work can be seen as regulating mechanisms: they *organize and steer* an unfamiliar set of (implementation) activities within the pattern of familiar organizational relationships and linkages of the standing organization.

Structural arrangements for implementation work. The arrival of contract status impinges on the school's customary work patterns and linkages. Are they adequately geared to the implementation of complex change and particularly of a high-stakes agenda? Do they suffice for dealing effectively with contracted change?

In essence, a (temporary) structural arrangement serves to deal and cope with innovation tasks - which by their nature are new and unfamiliar- and to which the standing organization may not adequately geared. Its very status as a temporary structure within the school organization provides people with opportunities for unfamiliar and non-traditional ways of working and relating.

Comprehensive and contracted implementation activities may have an unsettling effect on the existing linking patterns of an organization. For example, the setting of an agenda-for-change, agreeing on change goals and deciding how to approach the comprehensive change program puts the (usually weak) linkages among people, procedures and structures within the school under a certain pressure. Under conditions of contracted change there is pressure to strengthen, to revise or to restructure the internal linkages. Schools are then faced with designing *new structural devices*, e.g. a special work arrangement of taskgroups, coordinating roles, new work procedures, information and support networks, which all seek to establish new connections (linkages) between specific organizational elements. This (temporary) structural arrangement can be seen as a 'transfer system': it harbours and delivers the innovation in place.

Again, schools respond in different ways. For example, an agenda with reduced national policy aims hardly requires new and specific structural arrangements: a down-sized innovation can be easily [illegible] boarded, using the customary and traditional linkage patterns of the school. On the other hand, the implementation of a high-stakes agenda may imply building up an elaborate set of taskgroups and developing a specific information network, that is, radically substituting new linkages for putting the innvovation in place.

In our research we were interested in (a) the *design* of the temporary (project-)structure, and in (b) its degree of *prominence* in the school organization.

As an aspect of design, we tried to identify the complexity of the arrangement in terms of number and diversity of elements and ingredients (e.g. a simple versus a diverse and complex arrangement of taskgroups, procedures and roles). Bringing together the notions of our research projects, made us distinguish four components of an implementation arrangement. They are: (a) a structural component: a configuration of taskgroups and (newly defined) roles for getting things done; (b) a procedural

component: a set of new ways of working, information exchange or decison-making for putting the innovation in place, and of allocating resources throughout the implementing organization; (c) a facility (or capacity) component: a repertoire of resources and facilities for encouraging and doing the new; and (d) a legitimizing component: a set of values (norms) and responsibilities that serve to endorse and authorize implementation, i.e. to establish legitimized influence and authority for doing the 'uncustomary things' in the school, as implementation implies intervening in ongoing organization processes.

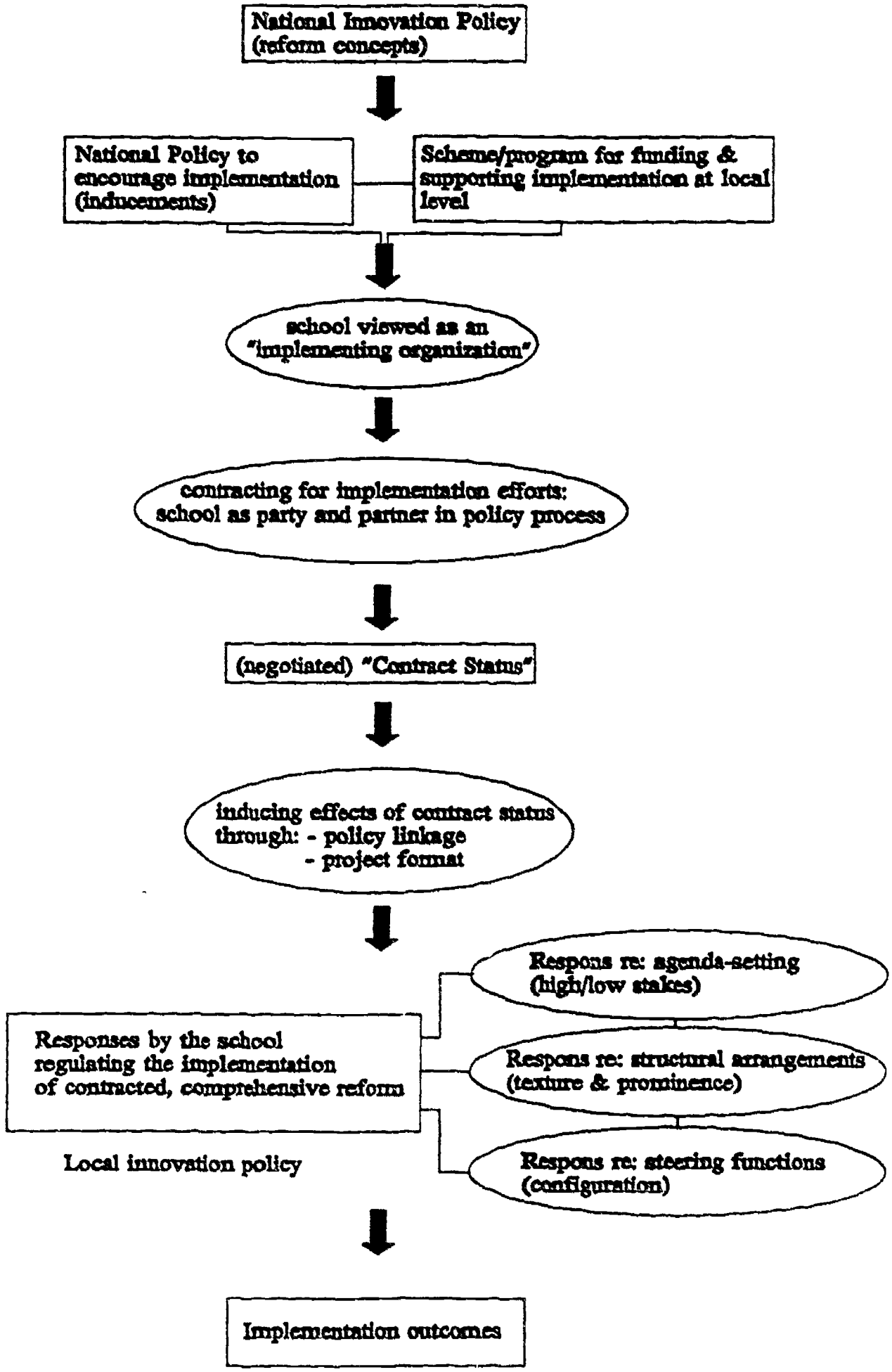
Prominence relates to the question: Where did the school situate the temporary structure in its organization? How central or how peripheral is it positioned in the daily life of the school? An important aspect of prominence includes the connection between the temporary arrangement and the core processes in the school, that is, its *proximity to the actual delivery operations*. In our research, we observed and interviewed teachers as to the extent they introduced concrete matters from their daily classroom practices into, for example, the meetings of the temporary implementation structure: To what extent were specific decisions made in these meetings with regard to practising innovative ideas in the classroom, and were classroom experiences brought back for evaluation? We assume that situating the temporary structure close to the daily core practices would likely result in a relatively high impact of the implementation activities on the actual teaching behavior (Verhagen et al.,1986; Van der Vegt & Knip, 1990; Vandenberghe et al.,1989).

In our research we related the aspects of texture and prominence to outcomes of the implementation efforts; these effect measures concern classroom- and school-level operations.

Functions for steering the flow of implementation work. The first regulating mechanism relates to the structuring; the second, as indicated above, concerns a set of functions for steering the implementation efforts. Our perspective is that the school, in coping with major change, is presented with the demands for steering the activities which pose a challenge to the customary influence (regulating) patterns of the school. The existing, customary steering mechanisms in use within the school may not be geared to complex and demanding implementation work. Thus, a new set of steering functions has to be developed, or existing ones to be overhauled and re-defined. From a managerial point of view, contracted and comprehensive reform requires specific steering functions. How will complex reform work be steered; can specific steering functions be identified, and to what extent do they relate to implementation effects? These questions are central to both our research projects and we come to deal with these in Part Two of this paper.

In Part One we presented an overview of our leading concepts. They came to serve as an integrating framework for our research (see figure 1). The *figure* summarizes the flow of our presentation and outlines the framework. It is clear from figure 1 that the way we conceptualized the linkage between a national innovation policy and the local school also provides a framework for the analysis and

Figure 1



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evaluation of a particular large-scale improvement project.
Part Two focuses more in detail on the steering functions for implementation, using illustrations and research data from the projects in both countries.

PART TWO: Steering Functions for the Conduct of Implementation

Overview of Part Two

We start with a brief summary of our research on steering the process of implementation. We then define and identify the steering functions. This is followed by a more detailed presentation of the profile of each of the four functions, illustrated by short case vignettes which were taken from our research on innovating primary schools in Belgium and the Netherlands. In describing the functions we also include some research evidence from our other studies, in an attempt to validate our notions on steering.

Research projects on steering functions: a summary

We began this research with some conceptual notions on processes of change in educational organizations and about the management of change in schools. These notions were further articulated in a systematic in-depth (qualitative) case study which involved four schools and lasted for about one year. These sites provided us with a host of data on steering behaviors of principals and staff, and each school was documented in detail in terms of the operating steering functions. Extensive cross-site analysis helped to sharpen and refine our notions.

A research instrument was then developed to measure the degree to which each of the steering functions is actually present in implementation work. The functions were operationalized into five-point scaled questions for school personnel about behaviors of principals related to the state of affairs of each function in that particular school (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1988). For example, the extent to which appreciation is expressed for teachers' investment in innovation work or the extent to which they get practical advice and direction. Thus, the steering functions were recast into questionnaire format. This questionnaire was finally administered in a few research projects. The data served to establish the degree of operation in the school of each of the steering functions. More work is certainly needed to improve the conceptual and psychometric status of this research instrument. In the meantime, other and improved versions of the questionnaire were developed.

Currently, in the process to conceptually integrate our findings, we work on the (conceptual) *validation* of the steering functions. This is to be achieved by confronting our findings on steering with empirical data from our (recent) studies which are based on different though -possibly- related theoretical concepts. We come to illustrate this below.

Steering the flow of implementation

The schools in our research dealt with ambitious plans for innovation. As contractors for change they were involved in a complex change process, though with varying degrees of involvement and commitment. Further, the realization of their plans had to be sustained over lenghty periods of time (in the early 80', up to four years).

As indicated in Part One, complex innovation work poses an organization with demands for steering the flow of the implementation activities: from a managerial perspective, *implementation requires regulation*. As we saw, the customary regulating mechanisms, such as procedures for coordination and decision-making, leadership approaches, support activities, may not be geared to demanding innovation activities. In other words, they may well need to be overhauled to accomplish implementation since the school usually is not fully equiped to deal with complex innovation work in a project-format. Thus, a new set of steering functions may have to be created, while existing or dormant ones will have to be re-defined.

Steering implies the *exertion of influence* to regulate the workflow. In the first place, this is the task of the principal, obviously because of his/her position in the school. Research has shown, that the principal can importantly influence the work flow of innovation (Leithwood, 1988; Van der Perre, 1990). On the other hand, activities of many principals are fragmented and not sufficiently focussed on continuity of innovation work. The role of the principal as an 'instructional leader' is in general limited (Dwyer, Barnett & Lee, 1987). What a principal does under the heading of 'instructional leadership' is a small part of the daily work. Attention given to all his/her interventions, to the coherence or lack of same is just as important.

Nevertheless, there are others in the school who can influence the innovation process such as, steering groups, coordinators, and individual teachers (second change facilitators: Hall & Hord, 1987). It is therefore important to check what and how others besides the principal can contribute to the innovation process. For example, we noted that in some schools the remedial teacher has an implicit but definite influence on the other teachers. Remedial activities often result in teachers' changing their practice because the results of the pupils have dramatically improved.

However, not only tangible behavior is of effect. Procedural provisions can also influence the work flow, such as planning schemes can keep up the momentum, and working in small task groups can result in peer support and consensus building.

Consequently, diverse as they might appear, certain interventions and also procedures and structures can be identified as having a *common effect on the flow of implementation*. Such a cluster with its specific (facilitating) effect exerts a 'function' in the implementation process. For example, the principals closely checking the individual teachers as regards the progress of their innovation tasks in their classrooms and also a formal report-out procedure, no matter how diverse, may result in people knowing that targets are for real and that implementation is taken seriously (see below the steering function we term 'Directional Pressure').

We present an illustration from our research projects.

'The principal has conducted an ongoing information campaign on the introduction of a radical new reading program from the 2nd to the 4th grades. He has been able to convince the teachers. In the first project year, the principal personally draws up the innovation plan. It is a concrete, detailed plan of action for 'individualization'. All the teachers received this plan, wherein indications were also made which would apply specifically to their own classes. Throughout the school year, he regularly summons the teachers together in small groups in order to prepare and evaluate the activities in the 'individualization' framework and, if necessary, to make adjustments. At the close of the first project year, these groups were assigned to evaluate the year's activities and to offer a proposal for the following school year. Based on these reports, the principal devised a plan for the coming year.'

It is clear that the principal, by his specific interventions, initiates and steers a number of innnovation activities. He creates the scope (and the framework) in which this work can be conducted. Through his interventions, the teachers' actual activities in their classrooms continue to be linked with aspects of the innovation concept (goal region). The innovation is thus, as it were, piloted into the class not only by concrete directing behaviors but also by planning and reporting procedures that push the flow of implementation efforts. Again, this diversity of behaviors and procedures together comprise a 'steering function', which we term 'directional pressure' (see below).

Profile of the steering functions

We came to delineate the following steering functions: Concept Clarification/Direction; Directional Pressure; Assistance/Support and Latitude Definition.

We contend that it is possible, by means of the steering functions, to describe an important part of the reality of innovation work at the school level. The functions become valid in tangible work activities. All in all, they can be very varied and differ greatly from school to school. For a school involved in innovation, it is important that these steering functions will be developed. The functions which have and have not been developed, and the manner in which they are expressed in daily innovation activities, determine to a great extent the progress of implementation in the life of the school.

Direction/Concept Clarification

This function deals with investments in (a) providing teachers with a clear vision or image of what will be achieved by implementation, and in (b) grounding this image in professional knowledge and skills of the teachers. Are teachers clear on the rationale behind the efforts they are asked to make? Can they visualize the immediate future which they are working to bring about? These questions point to a search for a *cognitive grasp* of the direction and meaning of the efforts. Essential is a concept of the desired state of affairs that served to focus attention and energy. The central question is whether will be invested in delineating and *articulating the goal region*, that is, the region in social space one wishes to move into.

We distinguish between two aspects. The first relates to articulating the goal region: drawing an image of the future state. We found that it may imply too strong an emphasis on long-term vision

building which, as a matter of fact, is not strategically contingent with the more short-term incentive perspective of teachers (Lortie, 1975).

The second aspect, and crucial in our view, implies making clear how concrete, perhaps mundane, implementation activities relate to the goal region. For example, in our sites we noted the importance of principals' making believable linkages between concrete and present tasks of teachers and particular components of the goal region. Can practical implementation work in the here-and-now be related to future achievement in the there-and-then? If so, the day-to-day activities receive a frame of reference which provides direction and motivation. It is in this practical and direct manner that implementation acquires perspective and significance.

By way of illustration

'In a primary school, three task groups of teachers meet weekly in order to work on radical change in their reading-language teaching. At the beginning of the project, the principal expressed, in his own rather penetrating manner, the essence of reading-language teaching to 4-12 year olds. At team meetings and in individual discussions, he strongly expressed his views on this innovation. He distinguished between three sub-processes in reading-language teaching and, using these as a base, divided his team into three task groups, each being given its own assignment. He then drew up a step by step schedule from week to week, outlining what is expected of the task groups.'

It is clear that a *rationale* for innovation has been discussed in this school. There is something of an innovative philosophy which is vigorously propagated and acknowledged by the principal. This philosophy is not only a distant vision but one which, furthermore, is given concrete translation in the (structural) plan for the practical implementation work: the three task groups represent the three distinguishing sub-processes of the encompassing view on the teaching process which has to take shape at this school. The structure for implementation work, and also the practical work in each of the groups, is thereby coupled with the overall, leading innovation concept. The principal expects that this leading concept will form a framework for the concrete implementation efforts. This philosophy has also shown to be an important steering mechanism at a later stage of the innovation process. The principal firmly executes adjusting interventions, with continual reference to the 'basic philosophy'; in this way, he justifies his directing and clarifying actions.

'Teachers report that their principal keeps a close eye on the innovation scene. "He reads the literature and keeps a close eye on all the developments." The teachers state that the principal looks into and sifts things carefully, gaining information first, before giving the teachers the all clear to begin something new. In this sense, he only permitted use of the computer on the condition that one of the teachers followed a supplementary course and was able to demonstrate use of the computer in class could be justified. When it was first brought into use, he was also present in the classroom in order to follow the proceedings very closely. He also gained information on the didactic value of the new programs.'

Here again it is not just a far-off innovation philosophy. The principal's view is clearly linked to a number of tangible activities which have to be undertaken. Contrary to the previous case, the influence of the viewpoint to innovation work is not visible in certain work structures (ref.the three work groups) but in his daily activities. The result of the principal's behavior after a time is that the teachers know exactly what he has in mind for his school.

Validating evidence

From two separate research projects on education innovation, we found (validating) confirmation of the importance of 'conceptual clarification'. Firstly, in our research into the principals' influence on the innovation process, we pay attention to such facets as strategic thinking and purposeful coordination (Verhoelst, 1988; Vandenberghe, 1988a; Hall, 1987; Vandenberghe et al, 1990). In this research we started from the assumption that principals differ in their 'strategic thinking'. Their long-term viewpoints differ; they also vary in the extent of attention paid to linking present, tangible activities to the targeted goal region. Some principals are very much focussed on the here-and-now; others again have a clear image of how their actions of to-day can contribute to the realization of the long-term goal.

In the same research, strategic thinking of principals was divided into two categories: day-to-day management and a planning based on (long-term) vision. In day-to-day management there is little or no attention given to future developments. The principal's intervention is mainly dealing with problems which arise daily; they have no in-depth knowledge related to their innovation project. The principals with a vision-based planning have a long-term perspective of the policy for their schools. They are highly focussed on activities relating to tangible professional work.

Both categories of this 'strategic thinking' variable were operationalized into a written questionnaire for teachers. In this way it was possible to differentiate principals. We found that principals from the high-implementation schools differed (statistically) significantly from those of the low-implementation schools. The first ones scored significantly higher on 'vision and planning', compared to the latter ones.

Other results comparing innovation-orientated schools (n=21) and non-innovation-orientated schools (n=24) confirmed these findings (Staessens & Vandenberghe, 1989). The principals from the high-implementation and innovation-orientated schools scores were significantly higher for vision and planning, whereas their colleagues from the low-implementation and non-innovation-orientated schools scored significantly higher in the category day-to-day management.

We can also illustrate the importance of the steering function 'conceptual clarification' by referring to recent research into the link between school culture and the innovation process (Staessens, 1991,a,b). The articulation of a viewpoint on innovation, expressed by the principal and accepted by the teachers, is an aspect of a professional culture which clearly influence the implementation flow in the school. The vision acts as a guideline to evaluate the daily innovation efforts. It is clear that this steering function not only relates to a 'cognitive grasp of the goal region' but also contributes to the creation of a supporting and motivating climate in the school.

In one related project, we focussed on the relationship between the explicitness of goal orientation (for innovation work) and implementation results. We found differences as expected: high-implementation schools score higher in the presence of an articulated goal region than do low-implementation schools (Centrum voor Onderwijsbeleid en -vernieuwing, 1985).

Directional Pressure

In the previous function, 'direction' referred to a cognitive grasp. Here it refers to operational mastery of implementation together with *pressure to achieve*, hence Directional Pressure. It is concerned with bringing about conditions in the school under which people know that implementation work is taken seriously, that action and investment are expected, and that deadlines are for real. The innovation agenda is kept alive and active; work is for keeps.

Directional Pressure impacts heavily on *influence patterns* in the school. As implementation proceeds, people have to be assigned new and unfamiliar tasks, and made accountable for them, which requires the exertion of influence. The very design of this function reflects the manner in which a school could cope with the influence-authority issue, an issue which by its very nature is induced by implementation work (see Part One, and also Part Three).

This function can be designed in various ways. It can be highly personalized, with directional pressure emanating from the principal. Alternatively, it can exist in a highly formalized, that is, under the guise of plans, procedures, time schedules. More usually, there are combinations; for example, the principal justifies his/her influence attempts by referring to formal procedures and delivery dates. His/her pushing and pulling, or 'project chasing', receives legitimization by linking tc the formalized work design. Often in small social systems with an egalitarian structure, application of directional pressure is a sensitive issue. Activities which perform this function are apt to have influencing overtones.

What is the relationship between 'Conceptual Clarification' (Direction) and 'Directional Pressure'? The term 'direction' can lead to a misunderstanding. We emphasize again that by use of the first 'direction' is implied, a cognitive grasp on the innovative concept and the goal region. The latter involves the *operational-managerial* work towards the goal region; it relates to a narrower sense of innovation management.

By way of illustration

'The principal puts the innovation work into a strict regime: the tasks are defined and the leading questions are provided for the task groups, the planning is detailed. The principal's planning is obviously the most important steering mechanism. He can indicate accurately where the task groups are and what has to happen. He combines personal persuasion with conscientious use of such formal procedures as schedules and agendas. He is demanding and has too high a work tempo for some of the teachers. In this way, after some time a degree of tension creeps into the school: his manner of directing causes some of the teachers to doubt themselves.'

Clearly, this principal is putting pressure on the team members in order to direct their implementation efforts. In this way, he creates conditions such as planning, agenda planning, meeting appointments, whereby it is made clear to the teachers that they are expected to invest in implementation work. This leads to 'mucking up the system'.

We note, firstly, that this directional pressure is ~~exited~~ EXPRESSED in tangible behavior in the school, in the above case, the principal who prepares all the activities ready for use. This steering paves the way to the goal region. Secondly, this function can also be expressed in a more procedural manner. Usually both aspects are highlighted: 'we have drawn up a plan; we would like to work it out during the first

trimester, and so may I exert pressure in order to carry out these activities in class as from now'. As has been said, the directing activities are thus legitimized by a planned project design.

This can give rise to tension entering into the work relationships, which can lead to discomfort between the team members, particularly since most of our primary schools function as small social units with an equalitarian-collegial structure. In this context, we noted that in the early stages of an innovation project schools predominantly applied formal steering procedures limiting the risks of personal confrontation.

Validating evidence

It is clear from above that an important aspect of this function is related to the principal's leadership style. An aspect of our research was the link between leadership style - particularly support behavior - and the implementation of the innovation (local agenda-for-change). Principals' styles can vary in their daily interaction with teachers. They can either be overly concerned about their teachers' problems or, bind them strictly to the execution of the innovation tasks, being under the impression that this is a stimulating force (Vandenberghe, 1988a; Hall, 1987).

We differentiate two foci: in the framework of an innovation project, a principal can interact either in a 'socially-informal or 'formal-professional manner'. Socially-informal principals feel it is their task to deal with their teachers' immediate concerns, paying no attention to the long-term consequences. Their attitude is friendly and easy-going; they try to find solutions to problems immediately. We assume those principals' behaviors are not representative of the steering function 'directional pressure'. We emphasize that this function in particular represents the operational and regulating management aspect of innovation work, and this does not suit their management style wherein they wish to create their own personal easy-going atmosphere. Principals who behave in a formal-professional manner give less attention to immediate personal concerns; their behavior is aimed at the achievement of innovation objectives. We assume these principals support the implementation activities in a way which is representative for 'directional pressure'.

What are the results of our research? As far as the socially-informal category is concerned, no difference was found between the high- and low-implementation schools. With regard to the second category, namely formal-professional, the principals from the high-implementation schools scored (statistically) significantly higher than those from the low-implementation schools. Assuming that principals from the latter category practice more directional pressure, we tentatively conclude that this influenced implementation positively.

We briefly introduce another project that might contribute to validate our notions with respect to directional pressure. In this research, we clustered the principals' interventions into 'functions'. One of these functions we labelled 'purposeful coordination' via planning (Vandenberghe, 1985). The next two questions (used as guiding questions to analyse the interview data) were applied to this variable. Firstly: do we find a clearly explicit image as to how the innovation program best can be implemented (with the goal region in mind)? Secondly: are activities developed relating to the steps of the planning

process and are provisions made to carry out the proposed innovation activities (=operational aspect of directional pressure)? Several things were noted from the research: that schools differed greatly in planned coordination of implementation efforts, and only a few schools (4 of the 24) realized this complex function satisfactorily. Three of these four schools belonged to the high-implementation schools (a total of 7 schools).

Assistance/Support

Generally speaking, Assistance/Support relates to the school's capacity to mobilize resources and expertise for innovation work, ingredients necessary to reach the goal region.

The texture of this function is complex. In our study we distinghuish between four sub-functions, namely:

(a) facility support: supplying (mobilizing/allocating) staff, materials, finance.

(b) social-emotional support: provision of encouragement, confidence; building trust and safety.

(c) technical assistance: assurance of technical expertise and know-how, and grounding it in existing professional knowledge by way of e.g. training, advisory activities, feedback on performance, coaching.

(d) operational-administrative support: attention given to removal of hurdles e.g. outdated procedures and practices inhibiting the progress of implementation.

These sub-functions can have been more or less developed initially; they can further develop during the process of implementation. All four sub-functions may be underdeveloped before commencement of implementation, e.g. little staff support as regards information, instruction and social-emotional climate, or one sub-function can be prominent and the others hardly recognized, e.g. the principal attaches more importance to a good atmosphere rather than firm instructions as regards implementation.

By way of illustration

'In a primary school innovation work is strongly supported by technical advice from the principal. His control is directly linked to tangible help and support: he supervises, holds the course of work and gives immediate personal assistance on location. Social-emotional support has not been fully developed. A few teachers are highly strung because of the high standard demanded, without their receiving sufficient social support. It would appear that they cannot express their feelings of doubt and uncertainty as to whether they can maintain this high standard. The strong work- and achievement-ethos, supported by the principal, pushes the emotional support into the background.'

'At another primary school, the teachers do experience strong social-emotional support from their principal. He encourages and gives undivided individual attention to his staff. He is undemanding as regards the implementation and quality of innovation work. The majority of the team agree as to how they should work with the children. There is a good team cohesion; this gives rise to a homogenous socially-supportive climate. However, in this climate, innovation is difficult to achieve, not only because the goal region is insufficiently highlighted but also because technical support is lacking.'

When comparing the two above cases, it is evident that in the first instance a high degree of technical support is given but social support has not been sufficiently developed, this at the expense of implementation work. In the latter, a high degree of social support is given which detracts from the incentive to implement the innovation. In both cases, development of both steering sub-functions are

out of balance.

Validating evidence

The above mentioned support is not only dependent on the principal but also on the *collegial network* within the school. In one study, we studied the professional relations between teachers and the degree of implementation of their innovations. 'Professional relations' were defined as regular contact between staff, wherein various educational and didactic subjects are dealt with and which results in being well informed of mutual implementation efforts. We paid particular attention to determining the extent of their knowledge of each others' implementation efforts (Centrum voor Onderwijsbeleid en - vernieuwing, 1985).

In this study, we categorized the schools according to the extent of their implementation effect; we distinguished five categories. In each of those categories we found teachers who experienced their professional relations as being positive and supporting. However, on studying category 1 (highest implementation) to category 5 (lowest implementation), we noted an increase in the number of schools in which professional relations were experienced as being non-supportive. Generally speaking, we must conclude that the relationship we found between 'professional relations' and degree of implementation deserves further clarification.

In another research project on school culture and implementation effects, attention was given to professional relations between teachers (Staessens, 1991,b). We assumed that the variable 'professional relations' includes communication and collaboration as two basic processes of the school culture. In other words, a mutual interest in work and therefore communication, and professional support in that the teachers know that they can help each other (technical support through collaboration). Data analysis determined a factor which confirmed the importance of professional relations. This factor can be described as 'absence of professional support'. Absence of professional support was expressed in mutual lack of (professional) trust: teachers were afraid to ask for advice; they found it difficult and embarrassing to raise questions at meetings. There was also a lack of structural provisions for support; no network to provide support for each other; no institutionalized communication channels for exchange of views on educational matters. This indicates that support is not only a relational process but also deals with structural provisions.

In the study where innovation-orientated schools were compared with non-innovation-orientated schools, the results were clearer (Staessens & Vandenberghe, 1989). The differences were significant both in professional relations and 'lack of professional support': teachers of innovation-orientated schools make clear that they experience more communication and collaboration in their schools than their colleagues in non-innovation-orientated schools, whilst the teachers from the latter express clearly that they lack professional trust and have no means of structural support.

Latitude Definition

Latitude Definition relates to the extent of specifying the range of acceptable *paths to the goal region*. How much flexibility or discretionary power do teachers have to shape the tasks they have to do? This function deals with the extent to which (the execution of) the implementation tasks are checked against, what is considered as, the very nature or essence of the innovation concept. In other words: the degree in which considerations of the goal region enter into the definition of the teachers' autonomy in conducting their implementation activities. This checking can be loose, so teachers will have a good deal of freedom with regards to how they want to perform their innovation tasks; confrontation with goal region considerations will impinge but little on these tasks. However, if this type of checking is frequent and sustained, there can be very narrow latitude for personal discretion. Work then has a prescriptive nature and may be characterized by tight surveillance, not only, 'how are you getting on?' but also, 'let me have a look and let's check'. In essence, Latitude Definition implies that the school has to deal with the important issue of defining the autonomy (discretionary power) of the teachers with regard to their renewal tasks. In defining and delineating this, there may be arrangements for *surveillance* of the work, for corrective ~~active~~ ACTION, and also for sustained support and trust. Thus, the functions of Concept Clarification, Latitude Definition, Support, and the corresponding behaviors of the principal, may be closely connected.

By way of illustration

In the following cases, we indicate that steering functions form a specific pattern or configuration.

'In a primary school, there is strict surveillance of task implementation. Margins and deviations are closely watched and accurate instructions are given as to what must be achieved by the task groups. Surveillance is narrow but open. Deviations are noticed and this is steered in, what is regarded by the principal, the right direction. However, these control and steering aspects are accompanied by work suggestions and technical work support. Work specification and surveillance are accepted by all teachers ('a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down'- Mary Poppins). However, the three task groups of implementing teachers differ in autonomy (discretionary power) and this is dependent on the amount of trust given individually to each task group by the principal'.

This case contains the ingredients of this steering function, namely work specification, surveillance, dicretionary power. We also see that limitation-by-control is closely connected to support offered: this principal gives little autonomy (discretionary power), but within this marked path to the goal region he offers deliberate and differentiated support.

'In a primary school, the goal region is vague, underdeveloped. Under these circumstances, there is no point in discussing the delineation and distribution of responsibilities and tasks for innovation work. The innovation agenda is minimized; there is no point in asking how much innovation work should be executed by the staff at their own discretion. The little they do can be done within the normal routines and procedures. However, the teachers are given exact instructions as to how they should approach and deal with other schools in the neighborhood. Surveillance in this respect is quite strict: in this way, the school builds up its defences against 'disturbing innovation impulses', which it feels may intrude into the life of the school.'

From the above, it is clear that the steering function Latitude Definition is 'unnecessary' if the goal region is weakly developed. However, we wish to emphasize another aspect. Complex innovation projects, particularly in an external policy context, can give rise to limiting surveillance of *'boundary*

behavior' of the school, that is, how the school presents itself to the outside world (Smyth & Van der Vegt, 1992). This is a variation of Latitude Definition which, as it were, is a natural effect of confrontation between national innovation policy and the local school.

Validating evidence

What is the relation of this fourth steering function to the implementation effects? Our case studies provided a few indications (Verhagen e.a., 1986). However, more and systematic research is necessary as this relationship is as yet not empirically altogether clear.

In the follow-up research of the 24 schools, we did discover schools in each of the five implementation groups where this function had been well developed (Vandenberghe, 1985; Centrum voor Onderwijsbeleid en -vernieuwing, 1985). Consequently, more research is required.

Earlier on in this paper, we indicated the necessity to analyze this fourth function in relation to the other three. After all, Latitude Definition, with aspects of surveillance, in an uncertain or unsafe innovation environment, can be easily experienced by staff as Support. On the other hand, delineation and limitation can be experienced as Direction/Concept Clarification, as signposting to the goal region. Factor-analysis showed that this function is related to the other functions (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1988; Van Tulder & Veenman, 1991).

In conclusion

Schools differ in the presence and prominence of these steering functions. They also differ in the *configuration* of these four functions. We have indications that the presence and nature of these functions help determine the degree of implementation of the innovation. As mentioned before, together these functions may act as a framework for the analysis and evaluation of innovation work by schools involved in a comprehensive national innovation project.

PART THREE: On Concerns about Implementing Comprehensive Change

Introduction

In Part One, we identified three basic responses of an implementing school to external policy inducements, namely in terms of setting the agenda-for-change, and structuring and steering the flow of implementation work. In this Part we return to these notions.

However, we will shift from the school's responses to its pre-occupations, that is, to the underlying *concerns* of a school, engaged in (contracted) implementation.

What are possible pre-occupations of implementing schools? What, in varying degrees, may 'worry' them? Generally speaking, a concern has a substance, that is, a *theme* (one is concerned about 'something', vague or undefined though it may be), and that theme demands one's attention.

Obviously, here a theme refers to the dynamics of implementation, insofar as these impact on social interaction processes or linkage patterns of the school. A concern usually has social-emotional overtones, e.g. people become concerned about the adequacy of their professional competence and thus develop doubts about their social status and professional acceptance in the school.

We came to identify these implementation-concerns by closely registering what people expressed as their pre-occupations with innovation work, in their classrooms, in the principal's office, in staff sessions. Unlike the steering functions and the structural arrangements we studied, the concerns identified lack, what we consider, a proper empirical data base. However, our interest in the *texture of implementation work* led us to tentatively situate the concerns in the context of the school's threefold response.

Concerns generated by implementing comprehensive innovations

As indicated above, we view implementation as having an 'intervention quality' and as such it may induce a set of concerns into the life of a school. We will sketch how, and what, concerns may be generated in the life of the school, because of its engagement in complex innovation.

We assume that implementation-concerns have three sources. Concerns are brought about by:
(a) the very nature of the implementing efforts;
(b) the possible impact of implementation on the organizational dynamics, particularly in schools with a high-stakes' agenda; and
(c) the innovative concepts (programs) which may import social-emotional themes into the school.

The very nature of the implementation efforts. Implementation tasks typically are, by their very nature, highly concrete: 'putting new things in place on the shopfloor' and as such, it is a 'frontline activitity'. Because of the concreteness, implementation implies *direct experiential contact* with the innovative concept (program) as opposed to the more abstract, 'ideal' (cognitive) grasp of an overall vision that characterizes the process of adopting innovative concepts. Implementing, more than adoption, is 'for real' as it means actually doing things, particularly, doing the new things for the first time. Consequently, implementing is an activitity in the here-and-now, as contrasted to the there-and-then (anticipating) perspective of adoption work. In other words, the implementation activities are usually 'close to the bone', involving concrete change in one's working practices and in the immediate work conditions: the realities of change begin to bite (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1990), and, to some extent, people's professional identities will be at stake.

Furthermore, the implementation task typically provides the first feedback about how the innovation is taking shape. Among the data that begin to feedback are items on how the new program fits into or clashes with existing practices, how it accommodates to organizational structures and on the incentives and disincentives it contains (Smyth & Van der Vegt, 1992).

Terms like here-and-now, for real, close to the bone and first feedback point to *concreteness and*

immediacy, being basic characteristics of implementation work. These may give rise to a *competence concern* on the part of the implementers ('Will I be able to do the new work?'), which may unsettle the level of safety and trust within the school ('Is our school a safe place to express feelings of inadequacy? Will somebody support me/us?). From a managerial or school leadership perspective, a related and prominent concern is: 'How are we going to organize ourselves for implementation work?', because the routine and existing work structures and procedures might not fit the new task demands.

In summary, concerns are likely to arise because of the immediate and experiential nature of the task of implementing.

Impact on organizational dynamics. Implementation means 'work on location'. While working on site, staff and school leaders are confronted with mundane organizational dynamics. For a number of our schools, implementation implied mildly uprooting their existing structures and work procedures; in some extreme cases, it meant dismantling existing practices to build up a new organization that exemplified the innovative concept. Particularly, in schools with a high-stakes' agenda, we noted that this process could (temporarily) lead to structural looseness and to some unpredictablity in organizational decision-making ('Who is going to take charge of coordinating the diversity of new tasks?'). In short, implementing comprehensive innovations loosens up, sometimes even uproots -albeit it temporarily- the existing organizational structures, whereby even the 'nuts and bolts' of the organization can be at stake. Elsewhere we note that the dynamics of implementation particularly affect the power and authority relationships in the school, bringing about important *influence issues, e.g. status and incentives are at stake* and customary leadership patterns are 'at risk': all this may be a matter of concern to those concerned. (Van der Vegt & Knip, 1990; Vandenberghe & Van der Vegt, 1992).

We briefly mention another point. An organization, in transacting with its environment, gradually establishes its identity, an image of what it looks like and what can be expected from it. However, by accepting the status as a contracted party for implementation the school puts itself, as indicated in Part One, in the arena of public policy (policy linkage). Contracted innovation may thus lead to redefine the pattern of interplay between the organization and its external environment. Implementing radical change means the school's engagement in a process of re-defining its identity and, consequently, re-negotiating its position (its niche) in the environment: to engage in comprehensive innovation is to put the organization's identity at stake. This may arouse concerns about the *legitimacy* of the endeavor, about the investments to be made, as well as about the endorsement and acceptance by relevant professional bodies (Smyth & Van der Vegt, 1992).

Innovative concepts importing social-emotional themes. We mention a last characteristic of implementation which may trigger off concerns within the life of the school. Complex innovative concepts or programs contain multiple ingredients: objectives, an underlying theory, methods and

usually, an ideological rationale. However, they also carry implicitly social-emotional themes dealing with *interpersonal values* between members of different professions or between teachers and their students, e.g. trust, recognition, acceptance and self-esteem. In the process of implementing the innovative program these themes are imported into the school. There they may confront or unsettle value patterns which, until then, regulated the relationships among staff or between teachers and students. For example, the new program may induce control and trust concerns among the teachers vis a vis their students, unsettling the established pattern of interaction, in particular, the authority pattern (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Elmore, 1987). Consequently, the organization may be posed with new and sometimes unexpected social-emotional (value) concerns.

In conclusion, these characteristics of the implementation process may give rise to concerns in the life of the school.

Implementation concerns and the school's responses

We tentatively delineate six concerns-about-implementation work. These are:

(1) Legitimacy and endorsement: concern about the impact of implementing comprehensive change on the school's (present/future) identity; that is, on its positioning -its niche- in professional and policy environments ('is implementing this innovative program a wise, justifiable and responsible act?'). Elsewhere we label this as a 'boundary issue': an issue which links the implementing organization to its environment: Smyth & Van der Vegt, 1992).

(2) Organizing and structuring: concern about designing and organizing the new work flow; that is, nagging questions about shaping temporary structural arrangements to conduct the innvovation work in an existing organization with vested interests ('how to build a work structure to do the uncommon job of implementation effectively?').

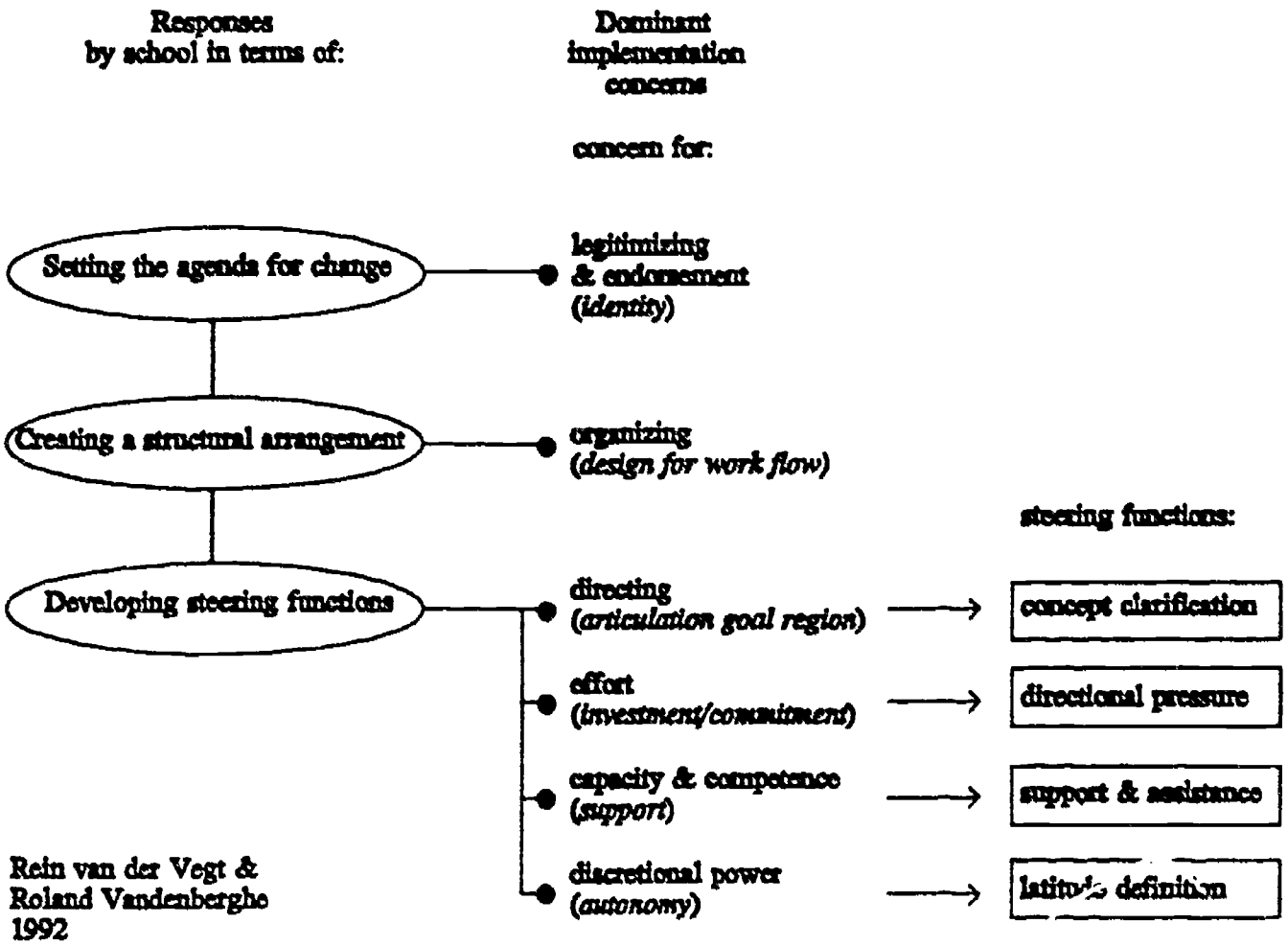
(3) Direction: concern about the uncertain future state of the organization; that is, doubts, uncertainties and feelings of insecurity about an unknown region and niche in the new territory ('how will things develop and appear; in what way can we grasp the future and come to terms with some of the anticipatory anxieties?').

(4) Effort: concern about to how much to invest in concrete implementation activities; that is, considering and wondering about the degree of commitment and engagement in innovation work, and concern about mobilizing energy and focusing efforts (will we, and how, invest in coordinated efforts towards bringing about the change?').

(5) Capacity and Competence: concern about whether the implementation tasks can be realistically carried out in terms of (perceived) competences and capacities; that is, doubts and fears regarding adequacy and efficacy, relating to mobilizing of technical and social-emotional support and allocating material assistance ('are we really able to do the work; are we provided with the necessary instruments and are we sufficiently equipped; is it a safe place to do these uncommon things?').

(6) Discretionary Power/Autonomy: concern with degrees of freedom in conducting and contributing to

Figure 2



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the implementation process; that is, fears but also hopes about the effects implementing will have on people's autonomy or (felt) power in controlling one's immediate work place ('can we do things as we see fit; do we have to give up, or gain, autonomy?').

In *Figure 2* we relate these six dominant concerns to the school's responses (or to the school's local innovation policy).

The *legitimacy concern* is considered a 'boundary concern'; that is, it mainly deals with the outside world: the implementing school must demonstrate its commitment to engage in major change. Consequently, we link this legitimacy concern to the response 'setting the agenda for change', because this response speaks to the policy and professional world of the school.

The *organizing concern* clearly relates to what we -in Part One- described as the response of 'creating/developing a structural arrangement for the conduct of implemention work'.

The *next four concerns* are embraced in the response of the steering functions we introduced in Part Two.

PART FOUR: On Comparing National Innovation Policies

Introduction

We conducted our research separately in two different contexts at national level. Because of this, we had to take into account the differences in the respective educational innovation policies for primary education. Part Four deals with the contributions external national policy can render to local innovation work.

We contend that external national policy can be contributary to the development and operation of the four steering functions for implementation work at school level. In particular, the structure of the policy, that is, its composition would ideally be a reflection of the four steering functions at local level. The steering functions thus can be regarded as data points around which one collects data on the contribution of national policy to local implementation efforts. To put it differently, the steering functions can be given the status as reference points (indicators) when analyzing the effectiveness of the national innovation policy.

We will illustrate briefly that national innovation policies, different though they may be, can be compared in a meaningful way. This set of data points - or: reference points - allows for systematic comparison of different innovation policies as to their effects on local implementation work (Vandenberghe & Van der Vegt, 1992).

Comparing (national) innovation policies

The four steering functions can serve as a basis for comparing (national) innovation policies. Using the set of *steering functions as data or reference points*, innovation policy can manifest itself within the school as follows:

(a) as Conceptual Clarification/Direction: the extent to which policy contributes to the clarification of scope and contents of the innovative program (clarifying the goal region);

(b) as Directional Pressure: the extent to which policy contributes to the exertion of pressure in order to keep a continual focus on the realization of the innovation;

(c) as Latitude Definition: the extent to which policy contributes to specification of discretionary initiative of the school (defining the scope for local interpretation of the innovative program);

(d) as Support and Assistance: the extent to which policy contributes to the local implementation efforts in terms of facilities (staff, funding) and technical know-how.

The main question is: to what extent does external policy contribute to each of the local steering functions and, how are these contributions kept in proportion and balance? For example: from the school's point of view, the policy can barely direct attention to the presentation and articulation of the innovation concept; school staff are left wondering how they should interpret their innovative efforts: contribution to the development of a local steering function of Direction is weak. However, policy can be forcefully regulating and administratively-prescriptive: policy contributions in terms of administrative regulations can be felt on the shop floor. At the same time, however, policy contributions can be either generous or frugal in allocating resources for the local implementers.

The case of Belgium and The Netherlands: What is the state of affairs of national innovation policy in Belgium and The Netherlands, as regards those four reference points? A brief summary follows.

Conceptual Clarification/Direction. In The Netherlands we see two aspects: (1) there is a noticeable (national) effort to communicate and articulate the innovation concept; and (2) the school is presented with a generalized (local) innovation strategy.

As to the first aspect, we see a great deal of attention being given to the development and dissemination of the concept of the New Primary School, which is expressed through various information- and advisory networks. In this way, schools are not left wondering about the essential features of the new primary education. Initially, national and regional school consultation agencies are widely involved in translating innovation to the local school. In propagating the new primary school, local schools in The Netherlands were invited to apply for project-funding to chart as pioneers the new territory of primary education in the country (see Part One). This aspect is less pronounced in Belgium than in The Netherlands, the reason being that the Belgian innovation policy does not imply basic institutional reform as it does in The Netherlands.

The second aspect is a more operational. The policy maker recommends an approach or a strategy of conducting the local innovation work. In the early stages of the educational reform, for example,

Dutch schools were presented with an organization-development approach as guideline, which was substituted around 1985 by a more prescriptive-programmatic approach, with emphasis on part-innovation.

For Belgian schools, this second aspect is rather prominent. The (mandated) School-Based Review presented these schools with a definite method and work procedure.

Directional Pressure. The contribution of external policy implies: exertion of pressure to maintain continual focus on the targeted innovation goals by principal and teachers. This is most clearly expressed in planning requirements: task plans should be drawn up and procedural accountability times arranged. For example, the School-Based Review procedure in Belgium demands a self-analysis from the school so that an assessment can be made of conditions and capacities necessary to conduct the innovation project.

All these things, planning, phasing of time, specification of work procedures are more or less forcefully determined in the national policy. If this is so, the hoped for effect is, that the school recognizes the time frame and available facilities and is realistically guided by those.

The essence of this reference point is: to what extent does the policy pilot conditions into the school, in order to make people aware and to experience that their innovation efforts are important, that is, 'for real'?

Latitude Definition. How great is the discretionary power lent to the school and what degree of (external) surveillance is exerted by the policy maker? The answers to these questions are strongly dependent on the institutional relationship between local schools and national policy. Yet, within this institutional frame, the innovation policy can be more or less strict with regard to the interpretation by the local school of the innovative concept (program). What are the margins? National policies may differ in alertness and the degree of practical surveillance and control as to what happens on the shop floor.

Clearly, this contribution in particular is very close to the relationship between national policy and the autonomy of the school. Both in Belgium and The Netherlands, the educational system knows a delicate political balance, which does not permit the policy maker to prescribe in detail how the innovation should take form at local level. Given this balance, this kind of contribution can easily generate controversy. There are limited possibilities to influence the school in 'important innovation details'. The contributions of Latitude Definition will be from a distance, restricted and, moreover, very likely linked to Direction and Support (see Part Two).

Support & Assistance. This is probably the most eye-catching and (possibly) most grateful conctribution of the policy maker to the innovating school. This reference point relates to concrete matters such as the assignment of temporary extra staff, the allocation of financial resources and technical assistance. This 'repertoire' of contributions to an important local steering function is predominantly instrumental: the (contracted) implementing party is, in varying degrees, equiped to conduct its innovation task.

This support-repertoire can be analysed in terms of (a) its scope: the amount of help given (generous or limited); (b) its diversity: the variation in the repertoire (e.g. funding only, or also consultancy services for teachers, in-service training programs, study conferences); (c) its coherence: the degree of integration (tuning) of the components of the repertoire (loose, rhapsodic or closely knitted); and (d) its availability: the degree of approachability (the easiness in claiming assistance; high/low thresholds). As to this reference point, the two policies differed in their support-repertoire.

IN CONCLUSION

Our research was (and is) focused on the texture of implementation work. In this paper, we outlined some of the research projects and their related concepts. Our current work attempts to validate and articulate our theoretical notions on the implementation process in schools involved in a comprehensive, national educational reform.

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