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## Public Management Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors  
and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpxm20>

### From Hero-Innovators to Distributed Heroism: An in- depth analysis of the role of individuals in public sector innovation

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Published online: 04 Jul 2013.

To cite this article: A. J. Meijer (2014) From Hero-Innovators to Distributed Heroism: An in-depth analysis of the role of individuals in public sector innovation, Public Management Review, 16:2, 199-216, DOI: [10.1080/14719037.2013.806575](https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.806575)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.806575>

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## Abstract

Building on the literature on collaborative leadership, this paper explores the roles of individual persons in processes of public innovation. On the basis of a literature review, a heuristic model is developed that consists of roles at different levels (entrepreneurial leadership versus innovation realization) and in different phases (idea generation, selection, testing, scaling-up, and diffusion). The value of this model is explored through an in-depth, longitudinal analysis of a police innovation in the Netherlands. The empirical study underlines the value of the model and shows that, although individual hero-innovators may not exist, distributed heroism does.

## Key words

Public innovation, innovators, entrepreneurial leadership, police

# FROM HERO-INNOVATORS TO DISTRIBUTED HEROISM

**An in-depth analysis of the role of individuals in public sector innovation**

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of individual person in processes of public sector innovation is seen as important but it is still not well understood. Doig and Hargrove (1987, 2) emphasize that much of the literature on public innovation prefers to focus on structural factors since the role of individual persons appears difficult to treat when the researcher's goal is generalization. Although some assume that characteristics of creative individuals could be identified (Roberts and King 1991, 1996), Georgiades and Phillimore (1975) have convincingly argued that the 'hero-innovator' does not exist. This provocative statement, however, does not mean that individuals do not make a difference. Osborne (1998) highlights that the role of individuals needs to be understood within organizational and institutional contexts, and general characteristics of innovative individuals cannot be identified.

Interesting empirical work into the role of individual persons in public sector innovation has been done by Doig and Hargrove (1987) (see also: Schin and McClomb 1998). This research helps to understand the role of entrepreneurial leadership but it puts an emphasis on the roles of executives. Their line of analysis ignores the fact that leadership may be important but, in the end, individuals at the work floor invent and develop these innovations. Little empirical work has been done that connects the roles of entrepreneurial leadership with various other individual innovation roles in the organization. An analysis of this variety of innovation roles can build upon the literature on a distributive leadership (Currie and Lockett 2011; Gronn 2002, 2009; Spillane 2006) that conceptualizes distributive leadership as an activity that is shared, interactive, and emergent. Combining the literature on a public sector innovation and distributed leadership can provide for a richer understanding of the roles of individuals in processes of the public sector innovation.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on the public sector innovation by presenting an empirical analysis of the shared, interactive, and emergent roles of various individuals in the public innovation. To this end, the paper will analyse the micro-dynamics of a public innovation process over a period of nearly twenty years. We will analyse how a new system for engaging citizens in police investigations was developed and implemented and how it became a standard element in the Dutch policing. The analysis focuses on the role of entrepreneurial leadership and of individuals at various other positions within the organization. Overall, the paper will develop a perspective on a 'distributed heroism' as an alternative to the idea of a 'hero-innovator'.

## PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

Innovation in the public sector has long been regarded as 'non-existent' or even 'aberrant' since innovations should come from (elected) politicians and not from bureaucrats (Bernier and Hafsi 2007). This changed in the 1990s with the growing attention for a public management, and the literature on innovation in the public sector has rapidly expanded (Altshuler and Behn 1997; Bekkers et al. 2011a; Hartley 2005;

Korteland 2011; Osborne and Brown 2005; Perri 6 1993; Sørensen and Torfing 2011; Walker 2006). The whole field of innovation studies still pays tribute to Everett Rogers (1995) but the academic understanding of processes of innovation has become much richer. Insights from disciplines such as economy, psychology and business administration have resulted in a variety of theories about innovation.

At its core, innovation is still a disputed term because of its strong normative connotation. Rogers (1995) triggered this dispute by qualifying those who were unwilling to adopt as 'laggards'. The normative orientation comes back in various other perspectives on innovation (for an overview: Brown and Osborne 2005; Osborne and Brown 2011). While Porter (1985) relates innovation to a competitive advantage, Kolb et al. (1979) sees innovation as a form of continuous improvement and Brown and Osborne (2005, 190) highlight that innovation is often regarded as a normative/ideological good that is pursued irrespective of its actual impact on an efficiency or effectiveness. These normative orientations may be useful for practitioners but they are not helpful for the empirical study of innovations. To study innovations in the public sector, we follow Bekkers et al. (2011b, 197) who define this as 'a learning process in which governments attempt to meet specific societal challenges'. The word 'attempt' is important since it underlines that innovations may fail. Bekkers et al. (2011b, 197) indicate that these societal challenges can be met by developing new services, technologies, organizational structures, management approaches, governance processes and policy concepts. Their conceptualization highlights that an innovative public sector can be understood as a desire to create new and meaningful connections between the government and society.

Innovation processes are almost by definition chaotic processes, and stage models should certainly not be regarded as a 'blue print' for the innovation processes. Still, these models have value for analysing chaotic innovation processes since they help to distinguish the different dynamics that innovations run into and, more specifically, they can help to analyse the various roles of individuals in the innovation processes. An important finding in the literature is that there are different dynamics in the various stages of the innovation process (Damanpour 1991; Korteland 2011, 24; Mumford et al. 2002; Oliver 2000; Osborne and Brown 2005, 129), and this idea shows striking similarities with the literature on the phases of the policy cycle (Howlett and Ramesh 1995). Combining these two approaches, we propose the following analytical phases:

- *Idea generation.* In this phase, the idea of transforming the government practices through an innovation is developed. Perceptual barriers play a key role in this barrier: many actors will not be prepared to change the way they have been viewing themselves, others and the world (King 2000, 306).
- *Idea selection.* Out of all the ideas that are being developed within an organization, some are selected for further development. Organizational attention and resources are scarce and hence selection is needed. Political and organizational

barriers are crucial here: the idea needs to compete with other ideas for attention and resources (Morabito 2008).

- *Idea testing.* The idea is developed and tested on a small scale to see whether it ‘works’ in practice (Oliver 2000, 375). In this phase, the innovation runs into a range of technological, organizational and institutional barriers. Does the technology work? Will people in the organization act as was expected? Does the innovation fit within institutional rules (Meijer and Zouridis 2006)?
- *Idea scaling-up.* A successful test will be followed by scaling-up of the idea to get it implemented on a larger scale and embedded in the organization (Lee and Luykx 2005; Van Mele 2006). In this phase, financial and capacity barriers may prevent the process of innovation from moving forward.
- *Idea diffusion.* If the innovation has been turned into a successful commodity it can now be transferred to other contexts: the process of diffusion and adoption can take place (Korteland 2011; Oliver 2000; Rogers 1995).

The model suggests a linear development but the literature highlights that actual innovation processes may move back and forth between various stages and also bypass some of them (Korteland 2011, 26) – the value of the stage model in acknowledging that the dynamics (and hence the barriers and the role of individual persons) differs over time.

## THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL PERSONS IN INNOVATION

The idea of a creative genius who thinks up a brilliant idea that brings a range of improvements is appealing and comes back in all kinds of books and films. On the basis of extensive research, Roberts and King (1991, 1996) built a model of the public entrepreneur or ‘hero-innovator’. This ‘hero-innovator’ is tenacious, works long hour, is goal driven, willing to take risks, confident and skilled in using political connections (Brown and Osborne 2005, 172). Doig and Hargrove (1987, 10) identify three sets of capacities that are associated with successful innovators: a capacity to engage in rational analysis, an ability to see new possibilities offered by the evolving historical situation and a desire to make a difference. More down to earth is Bernier and Hafsi’s (2007) identification of autonomy, innovation, risk taking, pro-activeness, and competitive aggression as the dimensions that underlie the values and behaviors of entrepreneurs. Roberts and King (1991, 1996) argue that not everyone can be a hero-innovator but, at the same time, people can be taught and stimulated to be more entrepreneurial. This idea of the hero-innovator has been criticized. Osborne (1998) highlights that individual traits may be important but need to be understood within the organizational context and argues that a contingency approach is crucial to understanding the role of individual persons in innovation in the public service organizations.

Much of the innovation literature focuses on individual persons at executive positions in the organization, and this is generally referred to as entrepreneurial leadership (Doig and Hargrove 1987, 7). The entrepreneurial leader has to create a climate that is favourable to the development and realization of new ideas. Doig and Hargrove (1987) emphasize that a strong executive leadership is needed to drive innovations in the public sector through rhetorical leadership and coalition-building. Bekkers et al. (2011b, 213) mention three roles for managers: (1) boundary spanning, (2) protection (political protection, money, safe haven), (3) balancing (values, interests), and Osborne and Brown (2005, 180) identify the role of ‘champion’, ‘supporter’ and ‘advocate’ that are all about creating support and ensuring resources for innovation. The literature conceptualizes entrepreneurial leadership as a complex internal and external task that demands both management and political skill to protect and drive innovation processes and, in that sense, this literature connects well to the literature on managing an organizational change (Fernandez and Rainey 2006).

To insert more precision, one can distinguish between the roles of individual persons at different (hierarchical) levels in the organization since these phases provide for different contexts in the process of innovation. While entrepreneurial leadership is important in all phases of the innovation process, different roles for realizing innovations are presented in the literature and different task domains are connected to these roles:

- *Creators*. Creators are the ‘intellectual leaders’ who generate the new idea (Knight 1967). They develop new ways of thinking and manage to break through perceptual barriers.
- *Innovation entrepreneurs*. Innovation entrepreneurs manage to connect the idea to an existing problem (Kingdon 2003; Roberts and King 1991, 1996).
- *Test managers*. Test managers are pragmatic leaders: they manage to realize a successful test of the idea (cf. Shenhar and Dvir 1996).
- *Innovation packager*. Innovation packagers are the individuals who embed the innovation into organizational structures and routines (Lee and Luykx 2005; Van Mele 2006).
- *Innovation diffuser*. Diffusers coordinate the large-scale roll-out of innovations (Chrysochoidis and Wong 1998). They create incentives and support for other organizations that will adopt the innovation.

How can we combine these insights about roles in different phases and various roles of entrepreneurial leadership? Although the perspective of distributed leadership has not been developed for analysing (public) innovation processes – it has actually been developed to study school leadership as being distributed between principals and teachers (Spillane 2006) – it may be helpful for understanding the relations between these innovation roles (for a good overview of this literature: Currie and Lockett 2011). This perspective acknowledges that a school leadership is not about one

individual performing one role but rather about different individuals that engage in various (shared, interactive, and emergent) leadership activities and roles (Gronn 2002, 2009; Spillane 2006). Gronn (2002) distinguishes between distributed leadership activities – concertive action – and distributed leadership roles – conjoint agency. He identifies three patterns of activity in concertive action: spontaneous collaboration, shared roles and an institutionalization of concertive mechanisms over time. Conjoint agency is about the alignment and synchronization of leadership roles across different individuals (Currie and Lockett 2011). When translating these notions to issues of leadership in public innovation, we need to acknowledge that distributed innovators may also work within different organizations in the forms of collaborative innovation (Sørensen and Torfing 2011). In addition, the literature on innovations suggests that the development of concertive action – from spontaneous collaboration to shared roles and, eventually, an institutionalization of concertive mechanisms – may be connected to the progressive stages of the innovation process (Osborne and Brown 2005). A combination of the literature on distributed leadership of schools and theories of public innovation results in a perspective that acknowledges the distribution of leadership roles over various (hierarchical) levels, in different organizations and in different phases of the innovation process. This perspective helps to transform our understanding of the role of individuals in public innovation from an individualized one (great individuals) to a distributed one (great collaborations).

The distributed leadership perspective stipulates that one hero will not be able to do the job: distributed heroism is needed for successful innovation. The idea of an individual ‘hero-innovator’ has been replaced by a collection of heroes who play a role at different levels of the organizations and in different phases of the innovation process (see Bernier and Hafsi’s (2007) and Ansell and Gash 2012, for similar arguments). In-depth empirical research was conducted to provide a more fine-grained understanding of distributed innovation leadership and to explore the validity and usefulness of the ‘distributed heroism perspective’.

## **CASE INTRODUCTION: CITIZENS NET**

To study the role of individual persons in technological innovation, we analysed the development and implementation of an innovation in the Dutch police: Citizens Net. This case selection is biased since we selected a successful innovation but it took a long time before success was realized, and periods of slowing down can provide information about barriers to innovation. The idea for this system originated in Police Department A in the 1990s, and the system was tested on a small scale in 2004 in City A and on a larger scale in 2008 in nine Dutch cities. At the moment, the Citizens Net is being implemented in every Police Department in the Netherlands. The Citizens Net is not only about the use of new technologies but also about substantially different ways of carrying out work processes – existing routines were altered. The innovation fits Bekkers et al.’s (2011b)

idea of creating meaningful connections between the government and society: new connections with citizens are thought to contribute to the coproduction of safety.

The Citizens Net is a network of citizens that can be contacted by the police in real time. The basic idea behind the system is that the police contact large groups of citizens over telephone in the 'golden hour' directly after a crime or need for assistance has been reported to ask for information. Directly after a criminal act has been reported or when a person is missing, citizens are contacted on the basis of their geographical characteristics, and they are asked for information. The following message provides an example: 'Two persons related to raid. One dressed in dark clothes. One wearing a forage cap. One carrying a large bag. One Wearing dark sweatpants. One wearing light sweatpants. If you have any information, contact 0800-011' (Police Nieuwegein, 6 August 2009, my translation). Citizen can call the control room to provide the police with information about the whereabouts of the suspects, and this information can directly be used to locate and apprehend them.

The Citizens Net has been evaluated in 2009, and the results are quite positive (Meijer 2013; Van der Vijver et al. 2009). The level of citizens' engagement is high with an average of 4.6 per cent of the population in the first nine cities signing up for participation in the Citizens Net. This is much higher than levels of citizen engagement that are found in decision-making processes and hence indicates that there is a high willingness to cooperate with the police. Van der Vijver et al. (2009: 41–42) have found that the contribution of the Citizens Net to the police work is substantial since 9 per cent of all the cases that were qualified as fit for a Citizens-Net action are solved on the basis of information from this action. Meijer (2013) emphasizes that the number of 9 per cent seems limited in terms of the total number of actions, but it amounts to more than 50 per cent of the successful police actions. Van der Vijver et al. (2009: 54) also found that participation in the Citizens Net had a positive effect on the citizen satisfaction with the police. The innovation is widely seen as a success and therefore nationwide implemented. This paper analyses the role of individuals in the development of this successful innovation.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research on the development of the Citizens Net started with a thorough document analysis of the Citizens Net to reconstruct and understand its current features. The main part of the empirical research consisted of in-depth interviews with key actors in the process of innovation. Respondents (Rs) were selected according to the snowball method (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) starting with the current project manager of the Citizens Net. The selection of respondents was ended when the respondents indicated that they thought we had interviewed the key leading actors. This selection resulted in nine respondents (see Table 1).

The interviews were in-depth ones and lasted between 1.5 and 4 hours. Questions were asked about their own roles, the involvement of other actors and their contributions to the process of innovation. The interviews were analysed on the basis of a data

**Table 1: List of respondents**

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Relevant positions</i>	<i>Relation to citizens net</i>
R1	Police officer in Police Department A, project manager in Police Department B	Idea generator (1993), initial project manager of Citizens Net (2002–2005)
R2	Police Chief Police Department A, Police Chief Police Department C	Member of the steering committee (2000–2003)
R3	Senior adviser at Police Information Organization	Senior responsible owner of Citizens Net (2008–2009)
R4	Policy Advisers at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Director at Department of Justice	Financial support of Citizens Net (2000–2012)
R5	Police Chief of Police Department B	Member of steering committee (2000–2012)
R6	Police Manager at Police Department A	Manager at the time of idea development (1997–2000)
R7	Project manager Citizens Net	Project manager of Citizens Net (2005–2011)
R8	Police officer in Police Department D	Project manager in Police Department D (2006–2012)
R9	Mayor of City A	Member of the steering committee (2002–2011)

matrix that focuses on phases of innovation, barriers and drivers and the roles of individual persons. The results have been anonymized both in terms of respondents and in terms of the regional Police Departments and Cities. Additionally, names of other individual persons who were involved but not interviewed were anonymized (NR).

The results of this case study cannot be generalized into other processes of innovation. Processes of innovation have their own dynamisms and are influenced by, among other things, the features of technologies, the specific organizational and institutional settings, legal frameworks etc. Nevertheless, studying a specific process can provide insights in the underlying patterns and help to enhance our understanding of the role of individual persons at the executive and work floor levels in the processes of innovation.

## CASE ANALYSIS

### Idea generation (1993–1997)

The idea of Citizens Net was developed in 1993 by R1, a police officer in Police Department A, who was going through a period of illness and had plenty of time to think about improvements to the police work. The idea of Citizens Net followed from his experience as a police officer working in the streets. He indicated how he recognized a pattern in the standard police responses to reports about criminal situations such as

burglaries: after a call from a citizen the police would rush to the crime location to find that the burglar would already have left. The police was always too late and they failed to use the willingness of the people in the neighbourhood to help the police in fighting crime. R1 started thinking about a system for engaging citizens:

'I started to think about interests, incentives and problems. There is a neighborhood full of people en everybody has a telephone. The problem is that the police keep the information to themselves. It should be possible to send them a message that says: we are looking for such a person. Please contact the police if you see something.' (R1)

R1 was no scientist or intellectual but a police officer who liked to think about improving his work. He was someone with an interest in technology and a belief in technological opportunities but he was no technological expert. One of the other respondents (R9) referred to R1 as the archetypical inventor from Donald Duck: 'Gyro Gearloose'. The other respondents see him as the intellectual father of Citizens Net (R9) and the Citizens Net was his 'baby' (R3).

The idea was written down in a formal memo for his colleagues in 1994. The reactions of his colleagues were positive, and they stimulated him to develop the idea further but there was no executive 'sponsor' (Osborne and Brown 2011, 1342). Top management at Police Department A highlighted that they found the idea highly interesting but due to organizational changes – regional Police Departments were being created – they did not see any opportunities to realize the idea. 'The idea ended up in various drawers' (R1).

### **Idea selection (1997–2000)**

In 1997, there was a new opportunity to bring the idea forward: Police Department A had a departmental innovation award. R1 applied for it and the Citizens Net won the award of 4,000 euro. This award did not bring him a 'sponsor': his direct manager indicated that he still had other priorities. R1 did get some support from his district manager but his position within the organization was not strong enough to have R1 realize the Citizens Net in Police Department A. He started looking elsewhere, and R1 and R6 went to the Netherlands Ministry of Internal Affairs to obtain additional funding for realizing the Citizens Net. The civil servants at the ministry were willing to support the idea if more regional police departments so that it could result in national improvements to the police work.

In this phase, R1 can be qualified as a 'prophet' who went around obtaining support for his idea (R7). He contacted people at other regional departments from his personal networks and who, he thought, would be interested in the idea of the Citizens Net. R2, the chief of Police Department C and NR2, senior policy adviser at Police Department B, indicated that they were willing to cooperate in the development of the Citizens Net. They formed a project team and now serious resources were made available: the Ministry of Internal Affairs supplied

30.000 euros for the development of the Citizens Net. R1 started to work in Police Department B because they had more people working on similar developments than in Police Department A, and they were willing to engage in an experiment.

### Idea testing (2000–2007)

City A, in the region of Police Department B, was selected for the pilot project since it was large enough to produce enough interesting situations for the Citizens Net and not too large to create an overflow. While the innovation has thus far been discussed within the police organization, it now moved into a political territory. The mayor of City A was strongly in favour of the Citizens Net and played a key role in creating a political support. Some respondents refer him as a ‘standard-bearer’: a person who publicly shows that he is in favour of the Citizens Net and manages to create political support for the innovation (R3, R4). Standard-bearing was required since, although most members of the city council supported the development of the innovation, there was resistance from the Greens:

The chance is considerable that a ‘big-brother-is-watching-you’ atmosphere is being created, and citizens start mistrusting one another or even endanger themselves. Another probable consequence could be that citizens see themselves as moralists and claim the right to play secret agent. Intolerance, more mistrust and even conflicts can determine the relations. (Green-Left Party 2004)

The mayor of City A managed to convince the majority of the council that these objections were not warranted, and with broad support from the council, the pilot project started in City A in 2004. Administrative and political support for the pilot study had been created, but this did not mean the process moved into silent waters: technical problems became the next obstacle. A small project team consisting of an employee from the control room and a technical person was formed to develop the system, and the project team had to develop a data processing software (with information about citizens and about police actions), communication software (to send voice mail messages to citizens) and a geographical layer (to select receivers for the messages). Because of the technical problems, the start of the project was postponed by a year, and it received much negative publicity (R7).

And after these technical problems had been solved, the project ran into operational obstacles. When the Citizens Net started in May 2004, calls to citizens were only sent out 14 to 17 minutes after the notification. To obtain an up-to-date information, citizens need to receive a message within a couple of minutes of the notification. The control room failed to do this because of other organizational demands. R1 spend much time to convince the control room and superior officers that the Citizens Net would only work if the control room paid attention to these time constraints. He convinced them and managed to bring down the response time back to a few minutes.

All barriers had now been removed and the innovation was put to the test. Citizens Net booked its first success in February 2005: three pickpockets were apprehended with their loot on the basis of information from the Citizens Net. 'This gave a big kick in the control room. (...) I went to the control room with a box with cakes' (R1). More successes followed, and political, management and operational supports continued to grow. The opinions of the citizens were measured in May 2005, a year after the pilot project had started, and all citizens, even the ones who had not participated, had a very positive opinion about the system.

In spite of the success, the steering committee pushed for a new project manager. The steering committee felt that R1 had developed a great idea but was not the right person for realizing it:

He can inspire some people. Others do not like him at all. He can seem rather strange. Especially people higher up in the hierarchy find him a difficult person. He makes remarks that do not fit within their frames of understanding. (R8)

He does not have a connecting style of operating. He is obsessed with his own idea. It is his baby. He was not good at listening. Sometimes a person can be too motivated. (R3)

R1 had a different view on this development and felt that the steering committee took him off the project because they did not want it to be successful. In a dramatic gesture, R1 did not only step down from his position but also resigned from the police force, and R7 became the new project manager of the Citizens Net. The new project manager prepared for slowly scaling-up the project when suddenly it got caught in the national political dynamics.

### Idea scaling-up (2007–2009)

Until the phase of idea testing, the Citizens Net had been relatively low key. In 2007, Citizen Net was given a boost by the fact that it was mentioned in the official declaration of the new government: 'Citizens Net is to be implemented nationwide.' (Government Declaration 2007) R1's membership of the smallest coalition party (Christian Union) and his direct contacts with the leaders of this party may have played a role in putting the Citizens Net on the political agenda (R4, R7, R9). The inclusion in the official government programme dramatically changed the involvement of the ministry of Internal Affairs in the Citizens Net:

Since it was mentioned in the Government Declaration, it became an objective that was discussed regularly in the ministerial staff meetings. Issues that are mentioned in the Government Declaration are of the utmost importance. Ministers are held accountable for these issues. (R4)

It also meant that much more money became available for the project: 2 million euro per year until 2011 and 1.6 million euro programme support per year (R4).

The nationwide implementation of the Citizens Net was to be carried out, and a steering committee was formed with members of the police, the Ministry of Internal

Affairs and a representative of local governments. The successful pilot study in City A was to be followed up by new pilots in nine communities. Due to the success in City A, many local governments were interested, and the preparations for the pilot studies were started.

One could assume that political and administrative support and available funding would facilitate the implementation of the Citizens Net but there was also a downside to it: the political and administrative complexities increased because of the need to discuss all issues in the national coordinating bodies of police chiefs; the external complexities increased because the contract with the IT firm was no longer exempted from the European contracting legislation; financial complexities increased since finances from the regional police departments were difficult to obtain; and technological complexities increased because a nationwide system was needed to be developed. The political, administrative, contracting and financial complexities were becoming too much to handle for R7 and a 'senior responsible owner', R3, was appointed to support him. 'He was tougher at the political game than I am' (R7). R3 had to operate strategically at three levels: in contacts with the IT suppliers he needed to ensure that they would deliver a good system within the agreed costs and timeframe; in contacts with the regional Police Departments he needed to make them start working with the system; and in contacts with the ministries he had to ensure that his project was in line with political demands to ensure funding.

Bureaucratic politics was resolved by creating a new project structure with three distinct levels: operational issues, tactical issues and strategic issues. This phase ended with an extensive formal evaluation of the pilot projects in the nine communities. This evaluation led to positive findings: the Citizens Net contributed to the police effectiveness and strengthened citizens' trust in the police (Van der Vijver et al. 2009). The stage was now set for a massive roll-out of the Citizens Net throughout the whole police organization.

### **Idea diffusion (2009–2012)**

From 2009, the Citizens Net was being implemented in a large number of communities all over the country. The project manager R7 managed the national project and obtained executive level support from NI4. The regional departments developed their own innovation dynamics. The experiences in one Police Department D illustrate the process of obtaining support from the management and police officers at the work floor had to start again, quite similar to the previous process in Police Department A and City A. In Police Department D, they started with a pilot project for the Citizens Net in two cities in 2008 and success in the two pilot projects formed the basis for a roll-out of the Citizens Net in nearly every local community within the police department (R8).

Project manager R8 in Police Department D highlighted that he had limited support from the Police Chief but support from another member of the management team

enabled him to continue. As was the case in City A, obtaining support from the control room and the police officers in the street was crucial to the success of the Citizens Net.

We wanted the work floor level to become involved. We did not want them to see it as something from Police Department management but as a 'blue thing'. (...) No management speak but something that works in practice. (...) We went around and visited all teams to tell our story. (...) Our story was: Citizens Net is about catching criminals. (R8)

In Police Department D, the Citizens Net became embedded in a broader programme for changing the work of the police called 'Direct Police Investigations'. Since technology was taken care of by the national programme bureau, realizing the innovation was an organizational challenge:

It was an organizational and not a technological challenge. We had to get the control room along. And the local governments. The value of the national program bureau was that they supported the technological systems and they facilitated the exchange of experiences between the various Police Departments. (R8)

In 2012, all police departments in the Netherlands have implemented the Citizens Net in most cities but the system has not been rolled out into every city yet.

## THE HERO-INNOVATOR DOES/DOES NOT EXIST

This study provided an interesting insight into the relation between entrepreneurial leadership and innovators in the organization. We found that entrepreneurial leaders do not only seek innovators, innovators may also seek entrepreneurial leaders. After meeting much resistance, the idea generator had to move to another police department to find an entrepreneurial leader who was willing to support his idea. For entrepreneurial leadership, this means that 'scouting' innovators with great ideas may be just as important as facilitating innovations within the own organization. When a match between individual persons at the work floor has been realized, the role of entrepreneurial leadership is to a large extent about creating internal and external supports for innovations. The term 'standard bearer' was often used and is similar to the term 'sponsor' (Osborne and Brown 2011, 1342) and the terms of 'champion', 'supporter' and 'advocate' (Osborne and Brown 2005, 180): entrepreneurial leadership is about protecting and supporting the individual persons actually realizing the innovation.

The findings for the role of individual persons in realizing innovations showed that basically three types can be identified that overlap but also differ from our theoretical model: idea generators (creators and innovation entrepreneurs), idea managers (test managers, innovation packagers and innovation diffusers) and idea fighters (who we had

not identified in our theoretical model). The *idea generator* is the ideal-typical innovator: the individual who thinks up a great idea, and in this case the creator proved to be a successful innovation entrepreneur as well. The analysis showed that this role was crucial in the first two phases of the innovation process but ran into problems in the third phase – idea testing – and was replaced by the idea project manager. The problems may be related not only to his capacities but also to his sense of ownership of the innovation and the unwillingness to accept that the organization needs to appropriate it. The idea manager is not driven by the desire to innovate the police but rather by the drive to manage projects successfully. This type of project management is complicated and consists of ensuring a top-down support (innovation push), making the people to express their enthusiasm about the innovation (innovation pull) and creating productive networks between various organizations (innovation networks). The idea manager's expertise is crucial to the realization of the innovation of the phase of idea testing but he is not capable of doing the bureaucratic fighting that is needed to protect the innovation against external threats. When the external threats become too much to handle for the idea manager, entrepreneurial leadership appoints an *idea fighter* to protect the innovation. The idea fighter's assistance was called for since entrepreneurial leadership did not have the time to be engaged in this type of fighting for the innovation. The idea fighter should therefore be regarded as a temporary aide to the idea project manager but also to entrepreneurial leadership. The case indicates that a process of innovation seems to require a rebel in the early phase of the innovation process to challenge organizational routines, a conformist in the later phases to position the innovation within these routines and a strategist in the middle phase to direct organizational change. This finding nuances Bernier and Hafsi's (2007) observation that individuals mostly make a difference in the early phases since the case shows that individuals also play a key role in the scaling-up and diffusion of the innovation.

The drawbacks of rebellious innovators receive little attention in the literature, which emphasizes positive attributes of innovators. A literature search yielded only one publication that stated a negative relation between innovators and innovation – ex-innovators as barriers to change (Steere 1972). Most literature highlights positive characteristics of innovators and stresses that sometimes innovators do not get a chance because the management forms a barrier to an innovation. Berkun (2010, 78) indicates that the behaviour of the lone inventor is eccentric, and therefore they are tough examples to learn from. In this specific case of the Citizens Net, the management seemed to regard the inventor as a soldier who returns from a war: out of place and difficult to manage. The fact that a role has been valuable but may form an obstacle to further development has been analysed by Lievegoed in his work on organizational evolution. Lievegoed (1973) highlights that a pioneer plays a key role in the first stage of organizational evolution but may form an obstacle to a further development. The conflict between the inventor and the steering committee can be understood in a similar fashion: the steering committee wanted the innovation to be institutionalized while the innovator wanted to develop it further. This type of conflict is typical for the transition

from one stage in organizational development to the next, and it may as well be typical for the transition of one stage in the innovation process to the next. The pioneering phase of the innovation ends, and the institutionalization phase needs a new type of work-floor leadership.

A variety of individual persons at different levels in the organization and in different phases of the innovation process were involved in the innovations, and this study provides insights in factors that play a key role in enabling collaboration between these individuals. The case study highlights three important patterns:

- *Focus on expertise and not on position.* Various persons in the realization of the innovation – R1 and R8 but also an entrepreneurial leader, R6 – show little respect for hierarchical lines. They have more respect for expertise than for formal positions and this attitude helps them to connect in the early phases of the innovation process. This pattern of cross-organizational collaboration that does not follow formal organizational positions has also been identified by Borins (2001).
- *Individual networks.* R1 used his personal networks to obtain support in Police Department A with R6 and when R1 needed the cooperation of two other police regions he contacted two other people from his own network (R2 and NR3). R2 was also a member of an informal, national network with a number of police chiefs to discuss improvements in police work (the Albuquerque Network). Individual networks proved essential to the innovation process (see Lewis et al. 2011 for an in-depth analysis of innovation and networking).
- *Shared perspective on police and society.* The different actors involved also contacted each other on the basis of similarities in their perspectives on police and society. The shared belief in the strength of the idea was important for creating connections between various actors. ‘We both wanted to do something about the decay of society. We felt you can start a movement with citizens to do something about it’ (R8). The role of shared vision has been acknowledged in the literature on innovation in the public sector (for example: Pearce and Ensley 2004).

This case study highlights that innovation is about connections between individuals in organizations: they cannot bring the innovation to a success by themselves, and they need to build meaningful connection to others. These connections cross organizational and hierarchical boundaries and create spaces for innovation or ‘innovation milieux’ (Bekkers et al. 2011b, 202).

On the basis of this research, we would argue that the hero-innovator both does and does not exist. R1 is the typical hero-innovator. He has both the characteristics of a hero-innovator that Brown and Osborne (2005, 172) mention (tenacious, works long hour, is goal driven, willing to take risks, confident, and skilled in using political connections) and the capacities mentioned by Doig and Hargrove (1987, 10) (a capacity to engage in rational analysis, an

ability to see new possibilities offered by the evolving historical situation and a desire to make a difference). R1 made a difference: he selected his own leaders at the management level and managed to move his innovation forward. At the same time, R1 was not capable of realizing the innovation and his faith was tragic: executive leadership removed him from his position and took the innovation 'out off his hands'. The end of the hero-innovator did not mean that the process of innovation ended: other heroes such as the 'hero-implementer' and the 'hero-fighter' took over, and they were supported by the 'hero-standard-bearer' at the executive level. The hero-innovator as an individual person does not exist but the hero-innovators as a collective ones do. Over time, beyond the scope of the case study, this collective ones may expand in numbers as the innovation comes to affect a large segment of the organization's operations. Public innovation will evolve into what Bernier and Hafsi (2007) call 'systemic entrepreneurship' when the process of change becomes embedded in the organization and the small group of 'heroes' acquires many followers. The literature on distributed leadership refers to this as the institutionalization of concertive mechanisms (Gronn 2002).

We conclude that the findings illustrate our idea of *distributed heroism* that was developed on the basis of the literature on a distributed leadership and collaborative innovation (Gronn 2002, 2009; Sørensen and Torfing 2011; Spillane 2006): a series of heroes is needed to bring process of innovation to an end. Individual persons do matter but we should realize that we should not study them in isolation but as collectives of individuals. In line with Brown and Osborne (2005), we found that the role of individual persons should be positioned within a context and the different stages provide different contexts. No single individual is capable of being a hero in all these different phases and contexts but a (multilevel and multi-phase) collection of individuals can bring processes of innovation to a successful end.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank the Dutch Alliance for Vital Governance for the financial support of the research.

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