

Developing government capabilities for the governance of problem- oriented knowledge ecosystems

Observations from the Netherlands

Isabelle van Elzakker

Jos van den Broek

Eu-SPRI, 5 June 2020

Content

- Research question
- Theoretical framework
- Observations
- Discussion

Research question

Which (new) capabilities do governments require to mobilize problem-oriented knowledge ecosystems, and how do innovative approaches succeed in developing these capabilities?

Theoretical framework

Three capabilities for the governance of complex public problems:
(Mayne et al., 2019)

1. Reflexive capability
2. Collaborative capability
3. Analytical capability

Theoretical framework

Capabilities	Routine administrative practices	Complex problem-solving
Reflexive	Ex-post efficiency oriented evaluations; focus on accountability	Reflexive evaluation, theory of change; focus on continuous learning
Collaborative	Top-down, separation of responsibilities between government levels and between public and private sector actors	Multilevel collaboration between governments, strengthened public-private collaboration, quadruple helix
Analytical	'Contractual' relationship between (scientific) research and policy-making; externalization of expertise	Interaction based knowledge development; dynamic knowledge networks; shared agendas

(Authors' own compilation)

Observations

Three cases of attempts to introduce problem-oriented approaches

Main questions:

- What has motivated a change in approach?
- To what extent does the initiative succeed in developing new capabilities?
- What challenges or tensions do we observe?

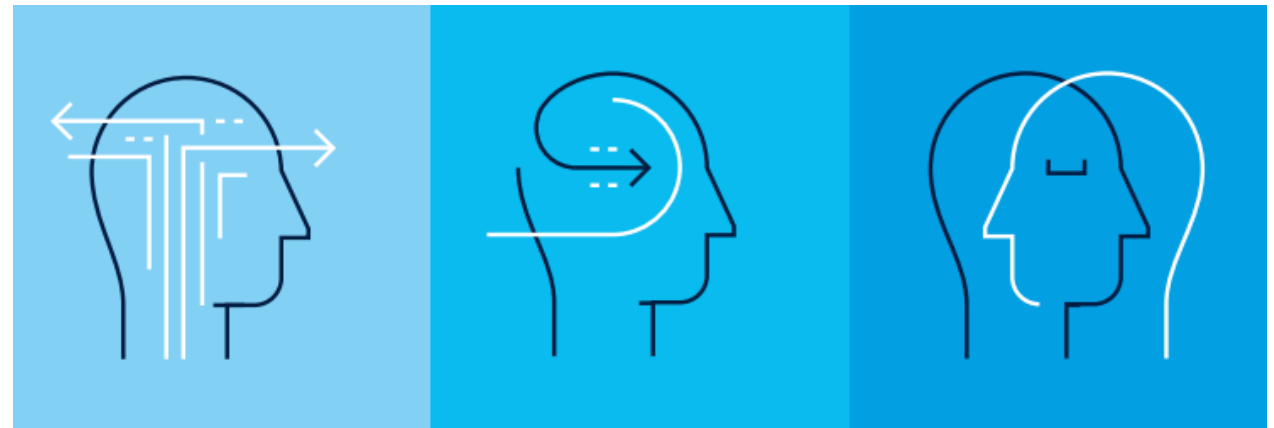
Case I – Revision of the policy evaluation system

How to design an evaluation system that enables learning and is more 'fit for purpose'?

Motivation: policy evaluation insufficiently used to learn and adapt

Initiative: an 'operation' to innovate the current evaluation framework

Main challenge: 'project-based approach' might hamper structural change



Case II – City deals

How to strengthen multilevel collaboration around shared issues?

Motivation: decentralization & the opportunity to tackle complex problems on the local level

Initiative: city deal instrument to strengthen multilevel collaboration

Main challenge: moving from an experimental to a structural approach



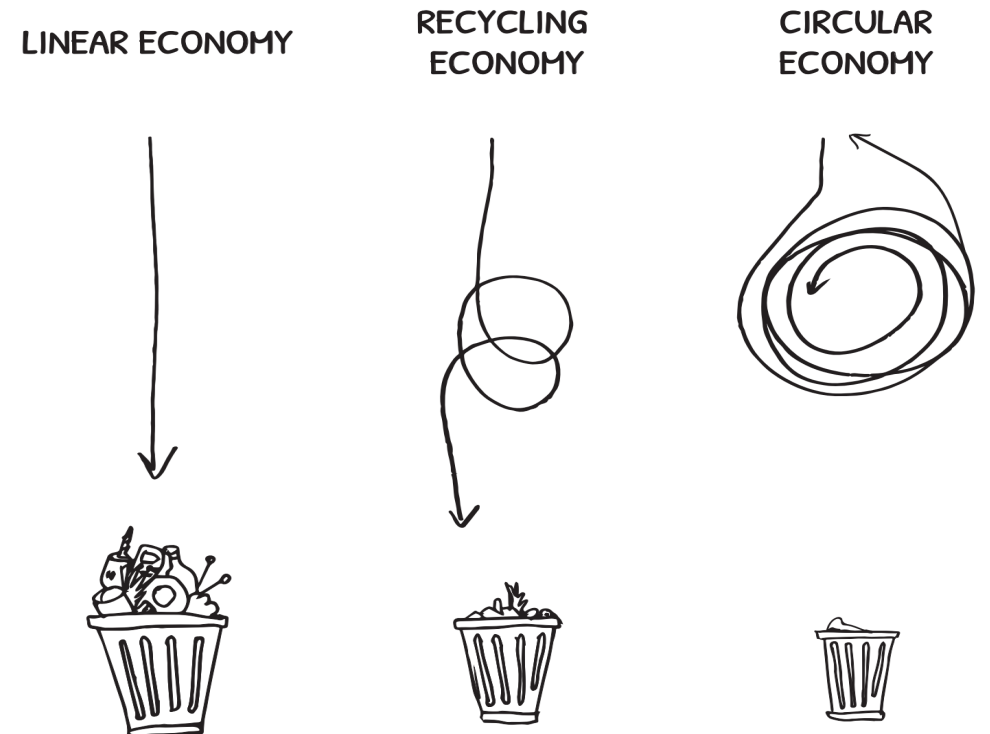
Case III – Transition to a circular economy

How to mobilize a knowledge ecosystem for the transition to a circular economy?

Motivation: lack of shared understanding of what constitutes the knowledge base to guide efforts

Initiative: development of a shared knowledge agenda

Main challenge: overcoming fragmentation within government



Discussion and conclusions

Increasing awareness of the need to change practices, as well as experiments with new practices

But: difficult to structurally build new capabilities next to routine practices

1. Capabilities are interrelated and can strengthen (or weaken) one another
2. How can 'new' capabilities coexist with current structures?
To what extent can they be translated into new structures?
Tension between an agile approach and structurally organizing capabilities?
3. Problem-oriented capabilities as a shift in how government thinks about organizing itself?

Thank you!

Isabelle van Elzaker

Jos van den Broek

www.rathenau.nl/en

i.vanelzakker@rathenau.nl

j.vandenbroek@rathenau.nl

