

Draft

1 Description of Dutch best practice: Reduction of administrative burdens and simplifying procedures for citizens at contact level

1.1 Problem definition

Both citizens and businesses as well as government spend millions in hours and euros every year on complaint, objection and appeal procedures against government decisions. Of the total amount of administrative burdens (red tape) for citizens in The Netherlands 11% is caused by these procedures. The costs of these complaint handling and conflict resolution procedures and the dissatisfaction with them have only increased the last couple of years. Not only has there been a significant increase of subsidized legal aid, also formalistic and written/legalistic complaint, objection and appeal procedures have been selected by the Dutch citizens as one of the top ten most pressing bottlenecks in government services.

As the government determines the rules and the manner in which they are applied, it puts government organisations in a position of power. The higher level of knowledge of the government on rules, regulations and procedures compared to that of the citizens adds to the inequality. Government organisations are responsible for decisions on whether for example an individual can be granted a building permit, has to pay taxes or is entitled to receive income support. When citizens do not agree with such a government decision or do not understand a decision taken, traditionally their only possibility to address this is through a formalistic, legalistic and written complaint, objection or appeal procedure.

1.2 Dutch policy project

The problems mentioned above are addressed in a Dutch government policy project called the Informal Pro-active Approach Model (IPAM). This policy provides a fundamental change for complaint handling and conflict resolution in public administration. The Informal pro-active Approach model can be characterized as a pro-active, personal and solution driven approach consisting of two interventions:

1. Upon receiving an objection against a government decision a public servant ensures quick and direct personal contact with the citizen concerned (telephone call or informal meeting); the public servant uses communication techniques and skills derived from mediation, although no other neutral person is involved and mediation as such does not take place.
2. During the preliminary phase of decision making, before the actual government decision is made, that has negative consequences for a specific person, the citizen concerned is contacted to test, amongst other things, that the information on which the decision will be based is correct and complete in order to explain why a certain decision is about to be made and to explore possible alternative solutions with the citizen. The objective is to invest in the quality of the decisions made plus investing in the underlying relationship between government and citizen in order to avoid future objection procedures wherever possible.

1.3 Results

Research into the effects of a pro-active solution driven approach to complaint, objection and appeal procedures shows a reduction in the number of procedures, saving the authorities time and money (20-30% cost reduction) and increasing citizen satisfaction by 40% and improving job satisfaction for government employees by 20%. In 40-60% of the cases where the informal approach was used a solution was found and the objection procedure was cancelled. It also showed a positive effect on the processing time of objection cases (37% reduction of processing time).

Research clearly shows that it is not only the outcome or the result of a government decision that determines whether citizens feel as if they were treated fairly, but in fact, it is the manner in which the outcome is reached or the process leading to it. More specifically, it is the opportunity of being heard that is essential to citizens, in combination with a fair, transparent and timely procedure.

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1.4 Improvement of the quality of government services

A pro-active personal approach through a telephone call or informal meeting with the use of mediation-like techniques creates the opportunity for government officials to gain insight in what the public needs are, what services cause complaints, what possible solution could be relevant and therefore what would provide a genuine improvement of government services. The Dutch policy has led to several showcases of improvement of government services that can be duplicated and adjusted where necessary by other government organisations. The direct communication and dialogue between government organisations and citizens provides a contact incentive for quality improvement and creates a learning organisation.

1.5 Development of new skills and improvement of internal cooperation and business processes

Handling citizens' requests/applications in a pro-active way instead of a reactive way requires the development of new skills for public officials. Civil servants need to develop advanced communication skills in order to be able to deal with direct communication with citizens in potential conflicts occurring between the citizens wishes and the administrative policies.

This also implies that more and better cooperation within and between government organisations is necessary. A pro-active solution driven approach leads to the lessening of the division between the department handling requests and the department handling judicial complaint and objection procedures. Both departments will be involved and will cooperate in this approach. In consequence the business processes and procedures will be adjusted and simplified to make the informal approach effective and efficient.

1.6 Areas of implementation

The IPAM approach has been put into practice in different sectors within the public administration; it is especially effective in situations where there is a lot of contact between the administration and citizens/businesses and where the administration has to deal with large amount of objections and complaints; this leads to relative high costs in dealing with the procedures involved. Some examples:

At the national level: Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Security and Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health

At the regional and local level: provinces and municipalities, water boards

At the level of agencies: The Dutch Tax Administration, National Security agency, etc.

2 ERT programme for a workshop on: Reduction of administrative burdens and simplifying procedures for citizens at contact level in The Hague, 10, 11 and 12 October 2012, ROI

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and objections.

Target group: agencies and civil servants having direct contact with citizens and SMEs, for instance officials issuing permits or dealing with complaints

Fee: 1300€ per person, including welcome dinner and lunch, excluding travel and accommodation.

Day 1 09.15 – 17.00

Overview of the Dutch administrative system and law including policies on reducing administrative burdens and improving public administration.

Experts to be named later

Lunch

The Informal pro-active approach policy (IPAM)

Dutch context IPAM

IPAM explained: What is it ? How does it work ? What are the results? Drivers for IPAM.

Mariette Baptist

Examples and demo of formal resp. informal approach

Mariette Baptist and other expert/practitioner

Welcome dinner

Day 2 09.15 – 17.00

Transfer to the public administrations of participants

How to use IPAM in own context and on own case: exchanging and working in small groups

Participants experience through a combination of theory and exercise how to put the IPAM into practice and what its effects are

Lunch

Necessary mediation-like techniques and importance of interest-based approach

Role-play

Day 3 09.15-16.30

Introducing IPAM: organisation and critical success factors

Further work on case: organisational aspects

Brief presentation on critical success factors : from idea to plan, change strategy, the role of the project manager, creating commitment from management and staff, dealing with resistance, embedding in the organisation

Lunch

Group work by participants

Roadmap for the development, implementation and anchoring of a pilot

Closing session with discussion and questions