Author's response to reviews

Title: Analysing the contributions of a government commissioned research project: a case study

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Version: 3
Date: 14 January 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
To the Editor in Chief of the Journal "Health Research Policy and Systems"

14 January 2014

Re: Submission Revised Research Article (MS: 2085251874988150)

Dear Editor,

You sent us the review of our manuscript entitled 'Analysing the contributions of a government commissioned research project: a case study' (MS: 2085251874988150) on 18th October 2013. Please find enclosed our revision of this manuscript.

We revised the article taking into account the reviewers’ comments and suggestions. We again highly appreciate the efforts by dr. Marleen Bekker and dr. Joyce de Goede to comment the revised manuscript and to provide us with further suggestions for improvement. We hope that the reviewers are satisfied with our second revision and that all their concerns are solved. We submit our point-for-point responses to the reviewers’ concerns in the Annexes I (response to dr. Bekker) and II (response to dr. de Goede) of this cover letter.

We also fully adapted the format of our manuscript to the journal style. The revised article now includes a main text with tracked changes, four figures and an additional file: we changed the former Figure 4 into an additional file, since this Word-file exists of more than one page and we added an extra figure on request of the reviewers (Figure 4 Timeline). Finally, we decided to use consistently the shorter and more often used term 'risk model’ instead of 'risk-ranking model’.

We hope you will find this revised manuscript to be suitable for publication in Health Research Policy and Systems.

All authors participated in the concept and design of the underlying study and read and approved the final manuscript. All authors declare that they have no competing interests. The manuscript is original, has not already been published in a journal and is not currently under consideration by another journal.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

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Response to Review HARPS 20131018

Response to Reviewer’s report (dr. Marleen Bekker; 5342505941095119)

In general, the article has been revised according to the comments in the first review round. It is much better readable, and the added value of new insights becomes clearer. There are still some suggestions for revisions, offered below.

Response: Dear doctor Bekker, Thank you again very much for your comments on the revision of our article. Please find our point-for-point response to your concerns below.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. Your referral to 'contributed knowledge products' as a form of contribution I do not quite understand, nor can I agree. Kok et al refer to contributions as contributions to actions or abilities. Knowledge in itself is, as I have read it, not considered a contribution unless it is applied in subsequent different projects or practices. As the models are kept confidential on the Inspectorate's request, they cannot be reproduced like that. Could you please clarify?

Response: As we describe in the Study Framework part, Kok & Schuit (2012) distinguish four categories of contributions. The first category indeed refers to the change in the ability and actions of the investigators and linked actors resulting from the research activities. The second category contains knowledge products that are added to reservoirs of codified knowledge and the research domain. The third category contains the contributions to action through utilization of the knowledge produced by the investigators or linked actors. The fourth category contains indications of contributions realized through utilization by non-linked actors. Based on Kok & Schuit, we regard the contributed knowledge products as a contribution of the second category to the Inspectorate’s work. In a meeting with both authors, Maarten Kok and Jantine Schuit, we discussed your question and our interpretation. They confirmed that they consider a knowledge product as such as a contribution in the second category, as we did. Although the models were confidential, they were at the disposal of the Inspectorate and as such, they were added to the Inspectorate’s reservoirs of codified knowledge. We admit that this contribution is often disappointing to investigators, but we also found that these contributions, the knowledge products as such, were considered important by the inspectors. We hope that this explanation solves your question.

2. I mostly agree on how AE are identified, yet I often do not understand how the AE is labeled between brackets. These labels could be better removed and left to be introduced later on in the analysis section, where they do seem logical and valid from the observations. Also I wonder whether the hindering elements for contributions could be labeled as AE. These are presented as non-negotiable and therefore system or institutional elements rather than AE. These would require institutional alignment, but is not so in itself.

Response: Because we inductively identified the relevant alignment efforts based on the results, we decided to put the description of the categories in the discussion part. We acknowledge that it is not clear to the reader what the name of the AE category implies at the stage of the results section because also the other reviewer, dr de Goede, mentioned this. In this second revision, we decided to leave out the category name of the AEs in the results section and to indicate only the fact that an AE was identified. We also wanted to indicate where we recognized the need for alignment efforts because of hindering elements for contribution by the code AE, but we acknowledge that this may be confusing for the reader and we removed these indications for hindering elements.

3. The actor scenario returns in the analysis and discussion sections. Could you elaborate a little more on this concept, how does alignment relate to actor scenarios?

Response: We agree that the actor scenario is an important concept in relation to alignment and alignment efforts. As you suggested, we added text on the relationship between actor-scenario and alignment efforts in the description of the study framework.
Minor essential revisions:
1. The first sentence of the first paragraph (Background) should clarify the direction and purpose of the article in order to introduce reader to background. Introduction to RIVM and Inspectorate could be shortened to one paragraph.
   Response: We acknowledge that Background-part could be shortened and we revise it according to your suggestions: The first sentence now clarifies the purpose of the article. The introduction to RIVM and Inspectorate has been shortened.

2. While De Goede offers a descriptive model, Kok et al provide a method for analysis. That could be clarified more explicitly in order to justify the decision to use CM. Discussion of De Goede et al could be shortened since it is not directly adopted.
   Response: To the Study Framework part, we added that CM also offers a method for analysis. We shortened the discussion on the model of De Goede et al. We maintained the figure to the clarify the focus of our study (Figure 2).

I like the broadened scope of analysis and referral to other theories, but:
3. Institutional redesign does not only imply formalisation of alignment, but also removal or adjustment of existing and impeding institutional arrangements.
   Response: In the introduction part of the Discussion, we rephrased some sentences to introduce better ‘institutional redesign’.

4. The Blurring the Boundaries alignments and actor scenarios on page 19 should be elaborated more.
   Response: In the part on Alignment Effort ‘Tasks and authority’ we added some text on the importance of blurring the boundaries with respect to alignment to actor scenario’s

5. The front stage and backstage descriptions: front stage hardly existed because the Inspectorate requested confidentiality and a denial of publication rights. This also puts pressure on the backstage because the Inspectorate by no means can be, nor is kept accountable for doing something with the models. As you have described under 4, page 20.
   Response: Thank you for your analysis. We revised the order of the alignment efforts as you suggest in your following comment no. 6. This means that we added some text in the text on Alignment Effort Consultative structure to indicate that the confidentiality of the risk model influenced the front stage.

6. AE label Relevance (section 6) if this is applied mostly dominantly, then it should be presented as one of the first AE. The added value of the analysis then shifts from what has been done to what has not been done, and can be made visible with the CM evaluation method.
   Response: Thank you for this suggestion. Initially, we aimed to describe the alignment efforts in the chronological order they appeared or could be expected in the project. We agree that it makes sense to start with the alignment effort that was predominantly done and to continue with the alignment efforts that we consider important but were often missing in the Risk Model case. We revised the Discussion part accordingly.

Discretionary revisions:
1. For the discussion part:
   Alignment is considered to be a precondition to a contribution. Is that always the case? It might also be true that in some cases a research contributes without specific alignment by the investigators. For instance, policymakers were convinced of the added value of the research by the introductions of a significant third party. Or, new policy directions enter a specific setting (i.e. inspectorate) which urges them to look into new sources of knowledge that were considered less relevant before. So, there are also contextual elements in explaining contributions. If investigators, or initiators of research, are aware of those changing circumstances, they could anticipate and respond to them, and use them in their advantage to promote old or new research.
   Response: In the meeting with Maarten Kok and Jantine Schuit mentioned above, we discussed your question on alignment as a precondition for contribution in relation to the concept ‘alignment effort’. In our view, alignment is indeed a precondition to a contribution. We agree that in some cases, alignment does not need specific effort but just exists or is initiated due to contextual elements. However, specific actions are often needed to create alignment and we call these alignment efforts according to Kok and Schuit (2012). When investigators are aware of changing circumstances and
anticipate and respond to them, we consider this also an alignment effort. To recapitulate, alignment is a precondition to a contribution and an alignment effort is often, but not always needed to create alignment. Your question drew our attention to the fact that we did not use the concepts in a consistent way and we checked the text for their correct use. We revised some wordings in the last paragraph of the Study Framework, in the Discussion section and in the Conclusions and Recommendations section. We hope this rectification solves your question.

2. Recommendations: I doubt that intensive meetings discussing the historical relationships between organisations will help to remove obstacles and invalid frames. Rather, it should be part of managing specific projects whenever and wherever it seems relevant. On the other hand, the strategic organizational level could, if deemed crucial, engage in promotional activities building a new or other organisational image in order to increase trust, legitimacy, and, in the end, business. That would also complement the last sentence of the article: that alignments not only enhance project contributions, but also trust and legitimacy in a broader sense.

Response: we agree that meetings to discuss the historical relationship alone will not remove all obstacles and invalid frames that it should be part of managing projects. Nevertheless, we recommend to make the historical relationship explicit for investigators (and if possible also for involved actors) to create awareness and to make it possible to act on it in alignment efforts and to manage the project effectively. We also agree with your suggestion that the strategic organizational level should focus in their alignment efforts on the organizational image and we gratefully added this in the recommendations.

Final remark to dr. Bekker:

Thank you very much again for your helpful review. It contributed to a better article.

On behalf of all authors, Ingrid Hegger
I believe that the authors have made a big improvement on the earlier version of their paper. I agree with their choice to let go of the barriers as analytical tool and focus on the CM approach of Kok et al. The paper is easier to read and the research steps taken are easier to follow. I have however some additional suggestions for the authors which I like them to consider.

Response: Dear doctor de Goede, Thank you again very much for your comments on the revision of our article. Please find our point-for-point response to your concerns below.

1. In the result section alignment efforts are described (AE). However it is not obvious, for me as reader, what the categories imply (for example "consultative structure" or "vertical alignment"). In the discussion part these categories are explained but I think it should be better that the categories are described in the beginning in the theoretical framework section.

Response: Because we inductively identified the relevant alignment efforts based on the results, we decided to put the description of the categories in the discussion part. We acknowledge that it is not clear to the reader what the name of the AE category implies at the stage of the results section because also the other reviewer, dr Bekker, mentioned this. In this second revision, we decided to leave out the category name of the AEs in the results section and to indicate only the fact that an AE was identified.

2. I believe it would be very helpful if timelines were draw for both knowledge products. In this way it becomes visually clear when, which phases take place at what time. As far as I understand it there are two products and each product has its own formulation, production and extension phase. Subsequently formulation phase is not possible. It is formulation phase 2 which took place in the third year. If you draw a time line readers understand this at a glance. Additionally, the implementation of the first knowledge product is still extension phase 1.

Response: In your comment on the initial article text, you already suggested to include a time line. Because we expected the time intervals to be clearer in the revised text, we did not yet include such a time line. Since you now indicate that such a time line would be helpful, we included a time line in Figure 4. We hope this provides the clarification you ask for. We choose to mention the implementation of the first risk model in the third production phase since an explicit knowledge question was formulated for the implementation.

3. The result section is still extensive. The illustration by quotes is nice; however it gives me the feeling that topics are mentioned double. I noticed throughout the text phrases like "as mentioned before". I know it is difficult but if the authors would critically reflect on this, it would be much appreciated.

Response: we checked the text again and left out some sentences to avoid doublings. We hope this solves your objection.

Small remarks:
* Page 18; De Leeuw et al identifies 7 theoretical models. One of them is institutional re-design.

Response: We agree that De Leeuw developed 'seven conceptual categories suggesting different action modalities'. However, these categories exist of several theoretical models and can be grouped into three groups. One of these seven categories is 'Institutional Redesign', another category is 'Blurring the Boundaries'. Moreover, the category 'Institutional Redesign' is the only category in the first group. We refer to De Leeuw et al (2008; page 9):
  - "Nearly 30 different theoretical frameworks specifically dealing with actions at the nexus emerged. For analytical purposes we grouped them into seven categories, which could then be put into three groups (Table 1)."
  - "Table 1. Three groups of seven categories theories addressing the nexus between research, policy and practice"
  - "Institutional Re-Design → theories about changing the rules of the game"

We checked the wordings in our article and we are convinced that we correctly refer to de Leeuw et al. We hope this explanation solves your remark.
Response: The front stage / backstage metaphors were originally introduced by Erving Goffman (1990) who employed the metaphor of theatrical performance as a framework. This metaphor of Goffman was used by Bekker et al (2010), Wehrens et al (2011) and van Egmond et al (2011). We initially did not to refer explicitly to Goffman, since all authors refer to him in their article, but we added a reference to Goffman in response to your remark.

Final remark to dr. de Goede:
Thank you very much again for your helpful review. It contributed to a better article.

On behalf of all authors, Ingrid Hegger