Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 30 September 2013

Reviewer: marleen bekker

Reviewer's report:

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.

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?

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.

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?

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.

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.
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.

4. The Blurring the Boundaries alignments and actor scenarios on page 19 should be elaborated more.

5. the frontstage and backstage descriptions: frontstage 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.

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.

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.

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 organisational level could, if deemed crucial, engage in promotional activities building a new of 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.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.