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**Title:** Changing the Nature of the Beast: how organizational socialization contributes to the development of the organizational role identity of Dutch veterinary inspectors  
**Issue Date:** 2016-06-02
THE CASE OF THE NETHERLANDS FOOD AND CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY AUTHORITY
3.1 INTRODUCTION

The salmonella outburst (2012), horse meat scandals (2013), and the fraud with passports of horses (2015) are just a few recent examples of the scandals with which the food sector has recently been confronted. Such scandals always gather a great deal of media attention; and ignite public and political debates about the functioning of the inspection service in this field: The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). The NVWA is tasked with, among other things, the monitoring of the food production chain and safeguarding values, such as public health, animal health, and animal welfare. This implies that inspectors performing inspections in this field need to have substantial knowledge about veterinary medicine. Therefore, the Dutch food safety services employs trained veterinarians to perform the inspections. These veterinary inspectors are the focus of this research.

As said in the introduction, this research makes a comparison between the socialization of the veterinarians in the Dutch food safety services and its Belgian counterpart, the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV) in chapter 8. The FAVV in this research is used as the case with which the NVWA can be compared to gain a better understanding of the impact of institutionalized socialization tactics compared to individualized socialization tactics on the learning moments of inspectors. Therefore, the discussion of the case of the NVWA will be followed by a discussion of the case of the FAVV, while chapter 4 further elaborates on this comparison. First, however, the NVWA as an organization is discussed.

The NVWA as an organization is constantly confronted with important changes. In the last decade, two themes seem to typify the NVWA and its development: (1) the changing perceptions, especially political perceptions, on inspection and enforcement, and (2) continual cutbacks. The first theme of changing political perceptions appears to be characterized by contradictory perceptions. On the one hand, there is a public call, especially after scandals, for stricter inspections. On the other hand, there is the more general trend in the direction of lessening the burden for companies subject to inspection by working more efficiently (Inspectieloket, 2014; NVWA, 2014). This lessening of
the inspection burden relates strongly to the second theme of constant cutbacks and pressure on inspection services to work more efficiently, as it is often used as a political legitimization for the cutbacks. This shows that the development of the NVWA as an organization is intertwined with the political administrative environment in which it operates. Though this is not the focus of this research, it is nonetheless important to be aware of the role of lobby groups in influencing the national policies in the field of meat production (Lowery, 2013). For example, an article from 2008 stated that “the problems with meat inspections are the consequence of cutbacks that were implemented after an intensive lobby from the meat sector1.”

3.2 THE NVWA: VETERINARY & IMPORT DIVISION

The responsibility for the NVWA as an agency is divided among two different ministries which makes accountability a complex issue. The personal and financial issues of the NVWA fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The political responsibility of the Dutch food safety services, however, falls under two separate ministries. The themes of animal welfare and animal health fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, whereas the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport issues assignments regarding public health. This also impacts the financing structure as the NVWA receives money from both ministries for their respective areas of responsibility. Besides the funding allocated by these ministries, the NVWA also receives income from the inspections performed at the inspected facilities, as these facilities pay directly for these inspections.

The NVWA consists of five divisions: (1) Consumer & Safety (Consument & Veiligheid), (2) Veterinary & Import (Veterinair & Import), (3) Agriculture & Nature (Landbouw & Natuur), (4) NVWA intelligence and investigation department (NVWA inlichtingen- en opsporingsdienst), (5) Customer Contacts & Services (Klantcontact & Dienstverlening). Besides these five divisions, there is a department of ‘Operational management’, ‘Department of staff’ and a ‘Risk assessment and research development department’ (Risicobeoordeling en

1 http://vorige.nrc.nl//economie/article1873795.ece/Vleeskeuring_faalt_door_bezuiniging
onderzoekprogrammering). The organization is headed by the Inspector-General and the Deputy Inspector-General. The Board of Directors comprises both Inspectors-General and the directors of the different divisions and departments. For an overview, the organizational chart can be found in Appendix 1. In total, in 2013 the NVWA employed 2,358 employees, of whom 68% were male (NVWA, 2014). The demographics further show a considerable age gap between men (on average 52 years and 4 months) and women (on average 46 years and 7 months) that are employed.

In this research, the focus is on the Veterinary & Import division which is the division employing the veterinary inspectors. These inspectors are trained veterinarians who audit the food production chain where living animals are involved. This professional training as veterinarian is pivotal as the rules and regulations in the fields of food safety, animal welfare, and animal health are very technical and require extensive knowledge about the physiology of animals. This makes the NVWA the largest employer of veterinarians in the Netherlands, employing circa 400 veterinary inspectors, who are mainly employed within the Veterinary & Import division. The tasks of these veterinary inspectors range from inspecting slaughterhouses to certifying livestock transports at different farms. The organization chart for the Veterinary & Import division is depicted in figure 3.1.

Within the Veterinary & Import division, the focus is on the departments of inspection implementation slaughterhouses and livestock. Inspectors that work in these departments are confronted on a daily basis with tensions between public health, animal health, animal welfare, and economic interests. The department of inspection implementation in slaughterhouses can be (sub) divided into three different units related to the focus of inspection: red meat, poultry, and audit. Furthermore, I take into account the livestock teams that perform the inspections for certifying exports. Teams in both departments consist of 20–30 inspectors, each led by a team leader. The teams also contain two senior inspectors tasked with coaching the inspectors and helping them in the field during inspections if necessary.

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2 The audit team is beyond the scope of this research as the inspectors do not work in the inspected facilities on a daily basis. This results in a different dynamic compared to the slaughterhouses and livestock inspectors.

3 The role of senior veterinary inspectors is addressed in greater depth in chapter 6.
Figure 3.1 Organization chart Veterinary & Import division (source: B. van der Linden, presentation September 2014)
Veterinary inspectors can be employed either as civil servants holding a permanent position or on a self-employed contract basis (practitioners). Practitioners are used as the flexible part of the workforce, and often perform inspections at farms or small slaughterhouses. Most practitioners still have or work for a private veterinary practice alongside their engagement in the Dutch food safety services. Although these two groups of inspectors have different employment relations with the NVWA, their main tasks, besides the coordinating tasks of civil servants, are roughly the same. In both, the department of ‘inspection implementation slaughterhouses’ and ‘inspection implementation livestock’, three main (inspection) tasks performed by veterinary inspectors can be distinguished:

1. The ante-mortem inspection in which the animals are inspected before slaughter aims to cull unhealthy animals. Animals that show signs of illnesses can be killed and destroyed, preventing them from entering the food chain when the illness means a substantial risk for public health;

2. The post-mortem inspection during which the animals and their organs are inspected to check for illnesses invisible at the moment of ante-mortem inspection. As the speed of the slaughter line is high, inspectors are supported in their work by slaughter line inspectors who are employed by a private organization. This organization is called KDS which is an abbreviation for ‘Kwaliteitskeuring Dierlijke Sector’ (quality inspection meat production sector). The veterinary inspectors, in turn, inspect the KDS; or as this construction is referred in the NVWA: inspecting the inspection. When the KDS suspects illnesses, the carcasses and organs are put aside for further inspection by one of the veterinary inspectors. An exception is the poultry sector, were trained employees of the slaughterhouse perform the slaughter line inspection. In turn they are inspected by the veterinary inspectors.

3. The certification of livestock for export is the third task. During these inspections veterinary inspectors check whether the requirements set for the transport of animals are met.

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4 To be cleared for certain inspections, practitioners have to follow different NVWA courses. When practitioners pass these courses, they have the same mandate as civil servants.

5 There is also the possibility that only parts of the animal that pose a substantial risk are rejected (e.g. an infected leg).

6 This will change as at the moment of writing the Secretary of State has decided that the KDS will become part of government again.
The next section focuses on the development of the organization from 2005/2006 to the organization in its current form. As there have been a large number of (major and minor) changes this overview is not even close to being exhaustive. However, it provides the reader with the most prominent changes in the recent history of the organization.

3.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DUTCH FOOD SAFETY SERVICES

3.3.1 STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE NVWA

The merger of the ‘Keuringsdienst van Waren’ (KvW; Inspection Service of Goods) and the ‘Rijksdienst voor de Keuring van Vee en Vlees (RVV; Governmental Agency for the Inspection of Animals and Meat) leading to the establishment of the VWA in 2006 is taken as the starting point for this section. This merger signaled the start of different rounds of reorganizations and mergers, which would result at the start of 2012 in the NVWA in its current form. The reorganization in 2006 went hand in hand with the implementation of the “Andere overheid” (“different government”) reform program initiated as an effort to modernize government and improve service delivery as appears from the annual report of the VWA (VWA, 2006:8). In its 2005 policy document “minder last, meer effect” (“less burden, more effect”), the Dutch government presented its general perception on surveillance, based on trust in the business community, denoting good surveillance as risk-based inspection that contributes to societal goals yet puts less burden on the companies inspected (BZK, 2005).

Another important development for the NVWA, and more specifically for the role of the inspectors, was the gradual transition from criminal law to administrative law in 2004. Instead of infringements being dealt with by the special investigating office or ‘Algemene Inspectiedienst (AID)’, veterinary inspectors themselves now had to write official reports resulting in standardized fines. The focus of veterinary inspectors therefore shifted more and more from inspection to enforcement. At the same time this shift was accompanied by an increase in responsibility for the meat producer through the use of HACCP Systems (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points –Systems) (OvV, 2014).
The merger between KvW and RVV into VWA was followed up with the merger of the AID, VWA, and PD (Plantkundige dienst; botanical services) into the nVWA. The nVWA was a temporary organization, until in 2012 the merger was completed and the organization was named NVWA. These mergers went hand in hand with cutbacks. While in 2007 the organization still employed 3,000 full-time equivalent (FTE), the number of FTE was aimed to be reduced to 2,300-2,500 in 2011 (Kleinmeulman, 2008). In 2011, the organization only had 2,162 FTE left, of which the Veterinary & Import division held 446 FTE (NVWA, 2012). These cutbacks had serious consequences for the work of veterinary inspectors. Since fewer support staff were left and the regional offices were closed, inspectors now had to travel longer distances to the nearest NVWA office and face-to-face interactions with colleagues decreased dramatically (NVWA, 2012).

In 2013, the 'Rekenkamer' (General Accounting Office) published a report on the effects of the merger between VWA, AID, and PD. More specifically, the General Accounting Office evaluated whether the merger indeed reduced administrative pressure and led to a reduction in the costs of inspection (which was part of the cutbacks in the three organizations). The report’s main conclusion was that the consequences of the merger were not considered thoroughly enough; the decision was based on general arguments and expectations that the merger would increase efficiency, yet its costs, benefits and time span were not mapped out clearly (Rekenkamer, 2013). The Minister reacted in October 2013 to these findings by stating that she would try to gain insight into the effects of different enforcement methods on the compliance of companies, and also write a plan of action to strengthen the enforcement by the NVWA (Rekenkamer b, 2013).

3.3.2  CHANGES IN PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS INSPECTION

Besides the major structural reforms mentioned above, the NVWA had to deal with significant changes in the attitude, in particular the public attitude, towards inspection and enforcement. As the organization struggled through several mergers and cutbacks, a number of crises and scandals took place, increasing the already intense public scrutiny of the NVWA. In 2007 there was an intense public debate after several infringements had been published in the press. A transport that got stopped on the highway because blood was leaking out of
the truck is one of the most illustrative examples of these scandals (Volkskrant, 2007). While the discussion started on the issue of transport, it quickly moved to other aspects of inspection such as the functioning of slaughterhouses. The discussion focussed mainly on the lack of self-regulation in the meat industry and the shortcomings of the NWA’s enforcement, or as public administration scholar, Yesilkagit, stated in the NRC “the conclusion has to be that government has had a naïve trust in the meat industry” (Yesilkagit, 2008). As already been touched upon, one could also argue that this is the result of a very intensive and successful lobby from the meat sector (NRC, 2008; Lowery, 2013).

No matter the specific cause, these scandals have resulted in the NVWA becoming more and more focused on how to improve inspections and enforcement and accordingly, on fostering a strict enforcement attitude among its inspectors. The debate on the enforcement attitude of veterinary inspectors was further fueled when an internal NVWA report was leaked at the start of 2008. The report - ‘Modernisering activiteiten levende dieren en levende producten’ (Modernizing activities relating to living animals and living products) - addressed problems within the sector. In response to this report, the Minister asked the Hoekstra Commission to determine the extent to which the leaked report reflected reality (Hoekstra, 2008). This commission established that the internal report indeed adequately represented reality; however, the commission was unable to determine the extent of the problems. This became the main task of the Vanthemsche Audit Commission. This audit has had a huge impact on the organizational policies of the NVWA; in particular the conclusions about the lack of enforcement, the inadequate education of inspectors, and lack of manpower have led to changes within the Dutch food safety services. One such change is the implementation of a training program and selection procedure (Vanthemsche, Matthijs, Landuyt, & Van Vlaenderen, 2008).

In 2011, the Vanthemsche Commission conducted a follow-up audit (Vanthemsche, Landuyt, Van Vlaenderen, & Vanoverschelde, 2011). The main conclusion of this follow-up report was that although the NVWA had made major improvements, amongst others in the training of its inspectors and the strengthening of inspectors’ enforcement attitudes, the NVWA was still lacking on inspection and enforcement in middle-sized and small slaughterhouses. To improve this, the NVWA published a report in September 2013 with regard
to the improvement of inspections in middle-sized and small slaughterhouses. This report distinguishes between five different situations that appear to be tenacious problems for the NVWA (NVWA, 2013):

- Inspectors do not always recognize offences due to lack of awareness about the prescribed inspection activities.
- Insufficient coordination and tuning of all inspection and enforcement activities at the level of the NVWA.
- Deviating interpretations and applications of rules and regulations, and consequently differences in how situations are judged, and inadequate application of intervention policy.
- Inadequate (options for) peer review and collegial attuning.
- Lack of a good and easily accessible database for employees of the NVWA to use for inspections and risk analysis.

At the same time, the authors of this report asked themselves the question why the recommendations from the earlier reports had not resulted in more significant improvements in these situations; especially as investments had been made by the organization, in the form of:

1. Schooling and refresher courses having been intensified not only for the civil servants, but also for the practitioners working for the NVWA; and

2. A recruitment, selection, and introduction program for new veterinarians being developed and introduced in collaboration with a consultant (Bureau Leeuwendaal).

The reports\(^7\) above show a picture of an organization employing institutionalized socialization tactics. To better understand the impact of the institutionalized information settings and information sources on the socialization process of...
employees, the NVWA is compared with its Belgian counterpart, the FAVV, which is an organization that can be considered to employ individualized socialization tactics. The FAVV as an organization is discussed below and chapter 4 discusses the function of this comparison in the overall research design.

### 3.4 THE BELGIAN FEDERAL AGENCY FOR THE SAFETY OF THE FOOD CHAIN AND ITS COMPARABILITY WITH THE NVWA

The rules and regulations on food safety, animal health, and animal welfare are decided upon at a European level in the European Commission. This means that the rules and regulations are the same across member states. All food safety services in Europe are obliged by law to employ trained veterinarians for auditing the food production chain where living animals are involved, as rules and regulations in this field are very technical. In Belgium, the authority tasked with these inspections is the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV). The FAVV in its current form is a direct consequence of the dioxin crisis in 1999 in which the toxin dioxin accidentally entered the food chain. One of the outcomes of the parliamentary commission was that an important cause of this situation could be found in the lack of communication and cooperation between different inspection services. Consequently, even before the commission published its results, policymakers decided on the foundation of the FAVV as an agency with a clear focus on food safety (De Baets, De Keulenaer, & Ponsaers, 2003).

The FAVV is part of the Belgium federal government. The FAVV comprises inspections services both from the ministry of agriculture as well as health (FAVV, 2007). The agency is financed by the federal government, levies paid by actors in the food chain, income from the European Union, money gained from fines, or contractual determined fees (FAVV, 2007). Although the FAVV, just like the NVWA, has responsibilities in many different fields such as plants, in this research I focus on the parts of the organization that monitor living animals in the food production chain which can be found in the departments of the primary and processing sectors embedded in the DG control. The veterinarians working
in these departments have work environments (i.e. slaughterhouses, farms) comparable with their Dutch counterparts.

The department of inspection within the FAVV, DG Control, contains eleven Provincial Control Units (PCU) tasked with performing inspections in the meat production sector (see organizational chart in Appendix 2). The main difference between Dutch and Belgian veterinary inspectors relates to the employment of the veterinarians. In contrast to the Dutch veterinary inspectors, who can be both self-employed (i.e. practitioners) or employed by the Dutch food safety services (i.e. civil servants), the Belgian equivalent of veterinary inspectors “veterinarians with assignment” (DMO) are all self-employed. The FAVV also employs veterinarians as ‘civil servants’ or inspectors as these veterinarians are called, however, their tasks differ strongly from those of the DMO’s and veterinary inspectors in the NVWA as they do not work on a daily basis in the slaughterhouses or at farms. Therefore, this group falls beyond the scope of this research. There are strict conditions which veterinarians have to meet if they want to work for the FAVV as DMO. The main goal of these conditions is to prevent veterinarians becoming dependent solely on the FAVV as a source of income. There is a maximum number of hours that DMOs are allowed to work for the FAVV, as well as requirements about additional sources of income outside the FAVV (e.g. in a veterinary practice).

In contrast to the NVWA, the FAVV only minimally structures the socialization process of its inspectors. For example, the DMOs need to self-study the rules and regulations (‘lastenboeken’). In these ‘lastenboeken’ specific sets of tasks are described for particular inspections, for example, at slaughterhouse or certification. There are eight different ‘lastenboeken’. When veterinarians want to perform the inspection described in one of the ‘lastenboeken’ for the FAVV, they have to pass the exam in which their knowledge about the rules and regulations in the specific ‘lastenboek’ is tested. Only once they have passed the exam, are veterinarians allowed to perform these inspections. Moreover, DMOs are required to follow a minimum number of courses every two years which have to be approved by the FAVV. The main criterion for this approval is

8 Dierenartsen met Opdracht (DMO).
9 The interviews show there is doubt within the organization as to what extent this requirement of independency is honored.
that these courses are of added value for the veterinarians’ job as DMO.

At work floor level there is one important difference between the Dutch and Belgian case that has the potential to influence the socialization process: access to other veterinarians. Contrary to the Dutch inspectors, Belgian inspectors inspect the meat product at the slaughter line, while in the Dutch case veterinary inspectors monitor the KDS (slaughter line inspectors which are employed by a different organization) at the slaughter line. As a consequence there are more veterinarians around on the work floor in the Belgian case compared to the Dutch case, which makes colleague veterinarians a more easily available information source in the Belgian case. However, while this dissertation was being completed, the Secretary of State determined that KDS should become a government al organization10.

In a comparison between both food safety services, the Dutch food safety services exhibits characteristics of institutionalized socialization tactics in which the organization actively tries to shape the socialization of its employees (e.g. training programs, internships). In the case of the Belgian food safety services, limited structures are present for shaping the socialization experience of employees, which indicates an organization employing individualized socialization tactics (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1997; Jones, 1986). This does not mean that no institutionalized information sources or information settings are used in the case of the Belgian food safety services. Chapter 4 shows the categorization of the information sources and information settings deduced from the interviews for both the NVWA and FAVV.

The next chapter focuses on the research design of the study. The relation and contribution of the different methods in this study are discussed extensively. Moreover, the chapter elaborates on the technicalities of the methods used in the study, and the operationalization of the different variables used in the quantitative analyses of this study.

10 http://www.nu.nl/politiek/4146701/vleeskeuring-weer-taak-van-overheid.html