The Business Case for Diversity in Public Organizations: A Study Using Mixed Methods

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Abstract

This multi-year research adopts a mixed-methods approach. The research lasted for 6 years and comprised four sub-studies, which together answer the central research question. The researcher decided to divide the central research question into four partial studies for several reasons: first, due to the complexity of the subject; second, the research time and capacity available; and third, because of the use of different methodologies, research designs, and analytical approaches. Although answering the central question with separate sub-studies had the advantage of making the process manageable over time, it did present the researcher with the challenge of ensuring the coherence of the various studies vis-à-vis the overall research. While her prior research planning and a thoughtful research approach helped, it was above all her flexibility in research execution that was of greatest value in completing this dissertation successfully and, more interestingly, as a part-time researcher within the scheduled time. The research was conducted in the Dutch public sector, the Netherlands’s largest employer, with more than 1 million employees spread over 14 government sector segments. To conduct high-quality research that was realistic in scope, she worked in phases and did not involve all areas of the public sector in her research. Practically, it was not feasible to incorporate all 14 segments as cases into each sub-study, so the researcher opted for a realistic approach that included the specific public sector segments that were most suitable for each sub-study. This SAGE research method case discusses these experiences of the researcher and other points of interest, such as conducting research in the same organization for which the researcher worked.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to

- Combine different studies into a coherent whole
- Understand how to divide a large study into sub-studies and how to handle the complexity of a large study
- Learn to be flexible to increase the feasibility of the research

The Business Case for Diversity in Dutch Public Organizations

For decades, the policy in the Netherlands’ public sector has been to stimulate and leverage ethnic and cultural diversity in the workforce. Although there can be different motives for public organizations to take up the challenge of implementing a diversity policy, among the most common is to add value. For that reason, the arguments used to promote diversity have become more commercial and businesslike. Within the public sector, diversity in the workforce has come to be associated with improved performance levels across entire organizations. Whether it be education or the police, municipalities or the central government, almost all parts
of the public sector want to use differences among the workforce to increase governmental effectiveness. Oddly enough, however, this effort has only slightly led to interventions that contribute to a government that can adequately solve the problems of society. This approach, known as the business case for diversity, forms the basis of this research.

The very concept of the business case has its origins in the private sector as a point of reference for the profitability of private enterprise. Although the term is frequently seen in policy documents of public organizations, the nature of the added value of the business case for diversity in a public context remains unclear. Another as yet unexplored area is how the overarching motives of a diversity policy translate into daily practice. As a rule, such motives are linked to organizational targets that are to be realized using interventions as an instrument. One overall objective of Dutch public organizations, for example, has been to increase the proportion of employees of non-Western descent. The introduction of a quota system and the use of different recruitment and selection methods are typical examples of interventions used in that sector, but it is noteworthy that these interventions have not led to a more proportional representation of employees of non-Western descent in public organizations, relative to the total Dutch labor force (Çelik, 2018; Çelik & Çelik, 2017).

About 1 million people work across 14 different sector segments of the Dutch public domain, which can be divided into three main categories (see Table 1): public administration, education and science, and security.

**Table 1. Fourteen Dutch public sector segments.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public administration</th>
<th>Education and science</th>
<th>Security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Provincial authorities</td>
<td>8. Senior secondary vocational education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Water authorities</td>
<td>10. University education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Research institutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. University medical centers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures show that the proportion of employees with non-Western backgrounds in the Dutch public sector has gone up by 2.5% from 1999 to 2014; the 6.5% figure from 2014 compares with 9.5% in that year's total active labor force. In addition, more employees of non-Western descent are leaving the public sector than those of Western descent. In 2014, 9.6% of the former left compared with 6.8% of Dutch descent. Over a period of 15 years, the overall outflow of employees of Dutch descent has decreased by approximately
0.7% while the outflow of employees of non-Western descent has increased by only approximately 0.2% (Çelik, 2016). Recruiting and retaining employees of non-Western descent has clearly proved challenging. This raises questions about the link between ethnic minorities and the public sector, and the binding of non-Western minorities with public organizations has been reported as an area of concern (Çelik & Çelik, 2017; Van der Meer & Dijkstra, 2016).

Within the public sector, hardly anything is known about the extent to which diversity interventions have contributed to the realization of organizational targets, as their influences on the binding of employees with organizations have not been investigated. These background realities all serve to inform the central research question: How and to what extent has the business case for diversity been incorporated in and shaped public organizations’ policies and interventions, and what is the influence of those interventions on the binding of employees with organizations?

Research Design, Practicalities, and Method in Action

To answer the primary research question, I crafted a research approach with four sub-studies. There were several reasons why I chose sub-studies to accomplish the overall research goal. First, the Dutch government is the largest employer in the Netherlands, with 14 segments and approximately 1 million employees, which means making valid statements about my central research question is an enormous undertaking. Therefore, I wanted to emphasize the most relevant segments for my research. Second, I wanted to make statements not only on the broad organizational and sectoral levels but also on the individual employee level (see Figure 1), so I used a multi-level approach to analyze the business case for diversity in Dutch public organizations. Third, different public sector segments are at different stages with regard to the implementation of diversity policy. Municipalities, the central government, and the police were actively conducting diversity policies during the period that I carried out my research, so I decided to involve six segments in Studies 1 and 2 (see Table 2). These two studies employed a qualitative case research method, included 31 semi-structured interviews, and were performed at the organizational level.
Figure 1. Research model.

Table 2. Number of respondents of qualitative studies in each public sector segment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central government</td>
<td>2 policy coordinators 2 project leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial authorities</td>
<td>1 personnel adviser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal authorities</td>
<td>4 project leaders 1 policy adviser 3 citizens 2 consultants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water authorities</td>
<td>1 policy adviser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 HRM advisers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 project leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>1 national coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 policy officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher professional education</td>
<td>2 teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 students</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 project leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 policy adviser</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to those reasons, it is important to note that the Netherlands is a decentralized unitary state; each public sector segment is autonomous and makes its own policy choices. Some segments, however, are more influenced by politics than others; ministries, for instance, operate in close proximity to national politics and more influenced by national policies; this is less true of municipalities because they are primarily influenced by local politics. The complexity of the subject and the size of the research object (14 segments), along with the available research time and capacity, forced me to divide my research into small pieces to make the entire research effort accessible and manageable.

Initially, I planned to start by focusing on certain segments that are central to my research question: those conducting active diversity policies that used the term “business case.” Based on my first exploratory insights into diversity practices in several segments, I could readily select segments on which to focus in depth. That was my initial plan, but an excellent opportunity to join a large survey throughout the Dutch public sector suddenly appeared: a truly golden opportunity. I could never organize a large survey in the entire Dutch public sector because of my limited capacity in terms of time and finance, and indeed that would be a challenge for any individual researcher. Thus, I quickly changed my research strategy by adopting a sort of “funnel model,” which meant working from broad to narrow, from the general to the specific. In doing so, I based my Studies 3 and 4 on a large-scale survey conducted among 27,167 employees (with a response rate of 42.5%) across all 14 segments of the Dutch public sector. All I had to do was craft a questionnaire that would be included in the survey.

I completed my four sub-studies successfully but was still faced with the daunting issue of combining them into a coherent whole. The theoretical sections of each sub-study partly overlap, so I combined them to craft an overall theoretical framework for the research effort as a whole. This enabled me to eliminate some
theoretical redundancy among the four studies. In this research, I integrated three perspectives: diversity theories, the literature on public administration, and human resource management. I made clear where the common ground was and where the theories differed from each other. I used this coherent whole to study diversity in organizations.

As for the formulation of my sub-research questions (see below), the question in Study 1 addressed the shift within the Dutch public sector away from a target group approach to diversity policy toward a business case approach and discussed the extent to which the Dutch Cabinet has influenced policies and interventions in public organizations at a national level. Study 2 focused on how the business case for diversity tends to be staged in the public domain. Studies 3 and 4 related to the second part of the central research question and aimed to illuminate the influence of diversity interventions on levels of commitment and engagement among public sector employees. They reflected the roles of leadership and organizational culture, respectively, in the effectiveness of interventions on staff commitment. Figure 1 illustrates the research model and the four sub-studies. Studies 1 and 2 were performed at the organizational level, and Studies 3 and 4 at the employee level.

In this research, I chose a deductive approach (Wallace, 1971), which means reasoning and working from the more general to the more specific, because there is a great deal of international research into diversity and the business case (especially in the United States), particularly in private organizations. It was fruitful to reflect on the differences between the public and private spheres, because the former is more likely to be influenced by the political context. At the same time, it is known that the distinction between public and private organizations is becoming smaller and smaller (Truss, 2008). The question was whether this also applied to diversity policies in public sector. Public organizations show more and different types of diversity policies than private organizations (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). In my research, I first scrutinized the entire public sector using a large-scale survey and then focused on selected segments to uncover in-depth explanations of and commonalities in the business case for diversity.

In the dissertation, I used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Robson, 2002), which allowed me to combine their strengths (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Although they are numbered 3 and 4, I carried out the two quantitative studies first and present them below first.

**Quantitative Research: Sub-Studies 3 and 4**

A quantitative research design was used in Sub-Studies 3 and 4 to obtain insight into the relationship between the different variables. I consulted different research methods books, including Robson (2002), Greene et al. (1989), and Alasuutari, Bickman, and Brannen (2008).

To conduct the survey, first I asked my manager at the ministry to serve as a gatekeeper. She helped me have my questions incorporated into a large-scale questionnaire for the public sector, known as a “flash panel” (Dutch—flitspanel: www.flitspanel.nl). Because I was the substantive expert at the ministry and would develop the questionnaire for policy research again, I could easily use my list of questions for the research in the
flash panel, an online survey managed by an executive organization (www.internetspiegel.nl) on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. The cooperation of the ministry department was crucial; my good relations with colleagues substantially facilitated adding my interview questions to the flash panel.

The flash panel has a reach of 35,000 civil servants who voluntarily participate in surveys. This was a useful avenue for easily obtaining access to a large number of respondents, especially given very limited resources. The members of this panel are representative of the total public sector workforce; they were recruited using a random sample from the administration of the pension fund for Dutch public sector employees. The flash panel contains respondents’ e-mail addresses, employment segment, (managerial) position, job grade, gender, year of birth, and education level. Its members are selected once every 2 months for research by means of a regional test from the overall flash panel of 35,000 employees. As a check, each study asks whether the panel member is still working in the same part of the public sector, which helps keep the panel file up to date. A flash panel survey takes about 10 min to complete and covers topics related to the workforce, well-being, and the management of the government.

The first reason for choosing this approach was practical; a policy study was being conducted on diversity policy among employees of the entire public sector, and it was possible for me to add several questions to this large-scale survey. I could thus obtain the views of employees across the full range of the public sector on diversity policy and the interventions that different sector segments used. Another reason was the opportunity to conduct a large-scale survey on diversity policy across all 14 Dutch public sector segments. I was allowed to include my own questions in the survey being conducted, to examine the influence of diversity interventions on the binding of employees in the public sector. I developed a questionnaire, based on theoretical underpinnings, for this survey and included the following variables: diversity interventions, transformational leadership, inclusive organizational culture, affective involvement, and turnover intention. In addition, I asked respondents about seven specific diversity interventions in the questionnaire: (1) preferential policy, (2) target figures, (3) varied composition of selection teams, (4) diversity trainings, (5) diversity networks, (6) selection methods, and (7) programs for creating an open organizational culture. I categorized these interventions on the basis of the theory on the perspectives for diversity (Çelik, 2016; Ely & Thomas, 2001).

The third and fourth sub-studies were carried out at the employee level. The employees were approached through an online structured questionnaire with closed questions: 27,167 employees were surveyed over a 2-week period in April 2011; a total of 11,557 participants completed the questionnaire for a response rate of 42.5%. Respondents with missing scores on some variables were excluded from the analysis, leaving a final number of 4,310 respondents and a final response rate of 16%. The quantitative data were analyzed using the software AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (see, for example, Byrne, 2010; Landau & Everitt, 2005). Using these computer programs, the presumed links in a causal model can be tested for significance and strength can be estimated.
The third study focused on the influences of the most commonly used diversity interventions in the public sector regarding employee engagement and commitment to organizations, generating the following question: *What is the role of managers in public organizations, especially in relation to diversity interventions and degree of employee commitment?* Commitment to an organization was assessed in terms of intention to leave. This study’s findings indicated that a more transformational leadership style in an organization was positively related to the strength of its employees’ commitment to that organization. Notably, using a transformational leadership style means that business case interventions to stimulate employee engagement, including programs to create an open culture, become less necessary. The research emphasizes the importance of interventions aimed at managers and their leadership style.

**Study 4**

The fourth study’s emphasis was on examining the influence of organizational culture on the effectiveness of interventions, answering the following research question: *What role does organizational culture play in public organizations, especially in relation to diversity interventions and degree of employee commitment?* The study shows that interventions are generally more effective if they encourage an inclusive organizational culture. Interventions of this sort were found to strengthen the bond between employees and their organizations, especially when facilitated by an already-existing inclusive organizational culture. It is thus reasonable to argue that an inclusive organizational culture is an important prerequisite for staff engagement and commitment.

**Qualitative Research: The First Two Sub-Studies**

After the quantitative research had been conducted, I used the qualitative case study method (see, for example, Alasuutari et al., 2008; Gerring, 2007; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2009) for Sub-Studies 1 and 2 to gain insight into the specific motives of public organizations in carrying out diversity policy and into political influence on these efforts. I opted, after a thorough discussion with my dissertation supervisor, for qualitative research to gain in-depth insight into the underlying motives of public organizations for implementing diversity policies. The case study approach has offered me the opportunity to understand how something works in complex environments. I studied the various public sector segments intensively as cases, with a particular focus on mapping out the business case for diversity within the public domain. The cases in this study were the different segments in the public sector; to investigate these cases in depth, I surveyed various organizations in each segment using a structured interview questionnaire. For example, three ministries were questioned in the government segment; for Studies 1 and 2, I examined the influence of three successive cabinets.

The following three criteria, based on the structure of the Dutch public administration, were involved in case selection. I was well acquainted with that structure from my employment duties. First, I chose public sector actors that were known to have a visible diversity policy, such as municipalities and the police. In addition to the spread across different segments, respondents were selected on the basis of their playing an active
role in developing and implementing diversity policy in their public sector segment. Second, a selection was made based on the degree of distance from the segment to the Dutch Cabinet (i.e., politics). In determining the extent of the distance to the cabinet, I used the structure of the Dutch public administration and the relationship of different public sector segments with the local authorities as a guideline. For example, the higher education sector is not part of the Dutch public administration and is further from the government than the municipalities that are part of the public administration. The third criterion was the degree of distance from the public sector segment to society and its citizens, as is found with the police. The last two criteria—degrees of distance from cabinet and from society—have proven to be important in the design of diversity policy (Çelik, 2016). In determining the degree of distance from cabinet, I used the structure of the Dutch public administration as guidelines: I selected segments that are close to the cabinet (e.g., ministries and the police) and segments further away from the cabinet, such as the local authorities (e.g., provinces and municipalities) and higher education. In determining the distance from the organization to society, the focus was on the intensity of interaction of the public organization with Dutch citizens.

In Studies 1 and 2, I examined the added value of diversity for public organizations. Six of the 14 segments were chosen: central government, municipal governments, provincial governments, water authorities, police, and higher professional education (see Table 2). This gave me the opportunity to compare cases in different public sector areas as to their diversity perspectives, policies, and interventions.

These two studies included a total of 31 semi-structured qualitative interviews with civil servants and a number of Dutch citizens. For the respondents in the organization, I have chosen employees and project leaders who were involved in the diversity policy. I chose the citizens and students randomly. Each interview lasted about 1 hr. Special attention was given to choosing equal numbers of respondents in terms of gender and ethnic background to limit the possible influence of a single gender or ethnicity. Table 2 reports the number and positions of the respondents in each segment.

I transcribed data from the interviews in both studies were encoded based on the theoretical model of Ely and Thomas (2001). I linked business case indicators to the theoretical concepts and searched for these indicators in the interview data. For example, the Integration and Learning Perspective was assigned the following codes: creativity, innovation, changing market and services, appreciation and use of differences, organizational culture, better decision making, and performance. This approach made it possible to find out which business cases occurred according to the diversity perspectives, such as access and legitimacy, integration and learning, and labor market (see, for example, Ely & Thomas, 2001; Podsiadlowski, Groschke, Kogler, Springer, & van der Zee, 2013). Subsequently, it was investigated how these business cases were described by the interviewees and whether there were other characteristics in each business case that were not mentioned in the theory. This same coding was used to check whether the perspectives and interventions changed over the course of three consecutive cabinets. This gave me insight into the influence of the cabinet on diversity policies in various public sector segments.

To investigate where there were characteristics other than those in the theory, I re-examined in Study 2 the interview data using open and axial coding (Böhm, 2004). Open coding means that the interview material has
been studied line by line with an open mind. I checked whether there were other types of added value in the data. I assigned a code to each new added value. This provided me to create a list with codes per sector. Axial coding is a method for systematically seeking mutual relationships between codes. I used axial coding to analyze how the separate new codes were connected and whether they could be merged into a meaningful variable. These analyses led to finding a “connection perspective” as a new business case for diversity.

Study 1

In the 1980s, offering equal opportunities for different target groups was the central policy goal of the Dutch government; after the millennium, the priority became the effective and efficient management of a diverse workforce to arrive at a better performing public sector, an approach also called the business case for diversity. This was an important input into the decision to start the first study with the following question: To what extent are the perspectives on diversity within public organizations influenced by the Dutch Cabinet as well as the diversity interventions used? To address this question, I focused on the perspectives and interventions introduced under three consecutive cabinets in the Netherlands from 2009 to 2013 and the public sector segments affected. To gain a representative picture and compare segments with one another, I used a multiple case study: A total of five segments were examined (see Table 2, Study 1). The answer is that cabinet had limited influence on the arguments for diversity of public organizations but greater influence on the actual diversity interventions, especially in three segments: the central government, municipalities, and the police.

Study 2

Given that public and private organizations could well have entirely different ideas of the concept of diversity, they might take varying approaches to the business case for diversity. The second study generated the following question beyond the central theme: How is the business case for diversity implemented within the public sector? The study found that some public organizations might strive to implement several business cases at the same time. In this respect, the access and legitimacy concept (i.e., an organization’s legitimacy and public profile) was the most prominent business case, although the precise emphasis differed across public sector segments. At the central government level, for example, the highest priorities are on making the best possible use of the available labor market resources for the organization’s benefit and on ensuring that diversity contributes to the quality and public profile of government. Within the police organization, the stated primary need was to be able to respond more swiftly to changes in a diverse society. Evidence was also found for the existence of a wholly new, public-specific business case motivated by social responsibility and a desire to establish a sustainable relationship between government and society. From this, the public sector “binding perspective” on diversity has evolved, emphasizing socially responsible objectives introduced in government organizations and characterized by aiming to connect, which means constant and active investment in long-term relationships between a government and its citizens.

After conducting the four sub-studies in the order noted above—the two quantitative studies followed by the two qualitative studies—I needed to work out a coherent whole to ensure that all four parts meshed
with one another. I developed an overall theoretical framework combining the theories on diversity, public administration, and human resource management used in the four sub-studies to cover the theories in separate studies and to clarify the relationship between them.

Methodological Considerations, and Practical Lessons Learned

One of the most important aspects of this research was obtaining access to a large pool of respondents. This was not difficult for me, because during data collection I was working at the Dutch ministry and served as a coordinator for diversity policy for the central government, which meant that I actively participated in policy development and implementation. This position enabled me to have access to up-to-date information and sources (including relevant documents and contacts within the public sector) and enhanced my understanding of the motives that public organizations use to develop diversity policies. This also made it easier for me to find respondents for interviews and to conduct the online survey.

However, any researcher’s position can raise questions about the objectivity of the research in terms of critical distance from the researched object. Researchers are taught to maintain a balance between involvement and distance. Being aware of the risks of being too close to the research object, I preferred to use quantitative surveys. In this way, I maximized my own distance from the respondents. In the qualitative portion, attention was paid to objectivity by conducting semi-structured interviews. I positioned myself as an interviewer and did not offer any personal opinions that could influence the interviewees; furthermore, another researcher, external to the government, conducted half of the interviews. Interviews were recorded and typed out. The qualitative data were analyzed using codes and coding and presented to fellow researchers to obtain feedback on the research and its results.

This is another important lesson I learned from this study: seeking criticism of one’s research and using it to improve the final product. This experience taught me that feedback is a crucial element of any serious scholarly effort. In addition, publishing the four sub-studies in peer-reviewed journals afforded me invaluable external reflections on my research, all of which were of great help in checking the research results and the methods chosen.

For example, reviewers criticized Study 2 because its internal respondents were mainly civil servants whose duties involved them in diversity issues. On a strictly scientific level, these interviewees attributed the results to their own experiences with diversity policies within public organizations. By ensuring that external respondents (citizens and students) were also part of Study 2, I have alleviated this concern. Furthermore, Study 2 focused on the interpretation of the business case. Despite the deliberate inclusion of a variety of respondents (civil servants, students, citizens), socially desirable answers proved a point of special interest, particularly among officials working on the issue, whose views can be influenced by the political and policy context in which they work: the greater variety in respondent types, the purer the results. In research into the interpretation of a theme, it is therefore advisable to interview a sufficient number of people who are somewhat further away from the subject. In Study 2, this was achieved by interviewing students and citizens.
A critical note regarding the quantitative portion (Studies 3 and 4) was that only a few of the existing diversity interventions in the Dutch public sector were selected for the survey, so the interventions examined were not exhaustive. Furthermore, the way in which the interventions were measured can be attributed to the awareness of interventions among the respondents. I asked about the presence of interventions within an organization. Due to their limited familiarity with the issue of interventions and consequent lack of responses, 62.7% of respondents who completed the questionnaire were excluded from the analysis. Moreover, only one item was used to measure a type of intervention, which does not bolster the reliability of the measuring instrument.

Another methodological comment concerned external validity and thus the generalizability of the results. This research was conducted in the Dutch context, while the diversity perspectives were derived from American literature (Kulik, 2014; Pitts & Wise, 2010) and have been intensively employed in American contexts. Statements in the research were made for the Dutch context, and no claim is made that the results are generally valid in other countries. Although there is certainly a need for transnational comparative studies, this research is theoretically important and provides insight into how American research works in a different country.

Finally, when an extensive study is carried out through several sub-studies, a concise and general introduction is absolutely essential to link the relationships among the various studies on the theoretical level. In addition, there is a need for a global conclusion that reflects on the central question, because each sub-study only answers its sub-question. This risks losing the overall picture. There is a need to check overall findings and conclusions and to abstract from and connect the sub-studies with one another and the research effort as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

The central question addressed in this research was divided into four sub-studies, which offered the advantage of making it manageable over time. It also enabled the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, which enhances the overall quality of the research. However, it was more difficult to ensure the coherence of the four studies.

In the first two sub-studies, cases were examined to make statements about different public sector segments. In Study 1, civil servants professionally concerned with diversity were interviewed to examine political influence on their segment. Although these are revealing insights into how policy in a given segment can change, no firm assertions that there is a real influence can be made. Especially in research with a public and political context, other mechanisms also play a role, so drawing rigid conclusions should only be done with great caution.

In the quantitative portion of this research, the questions were included in a large-scale government survey, which is a very simple and efficient way to gather data. Governments conduct many surveys in a wide range
of areas. These often involve large groups of respondents, which enhances the validity of the research. The only dilemma with such an approach is that it is not feasible to conduct a complete questionnaire; a selection of variables must be made, or the questionnaire would become too long. This issue can be overcome by using quantitative methods as part of the overall research plan. Piggybacking on large-scale surveys in the public domain also makes it possible to compare governmental segments with one another.

### Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. How important is it to anticipate the opportunities that arise during your research?
2. How flexible can you be when you design your research with qualitative and quantitative methods?
3. How can you make a large research object manageable on a practical level?
4. How can you ensure coherence among separate studies?
5. How important is a gatekeeper to realizing a large-scale survey in an organization?

### Further Reading


### Web Resources

The Dutch Public Service: [https://kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/media/217631/The-Dutch-public-service-EN_v6.pdf](https://kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/media/217631/The-Dutch-public-service-EN_v6.pdf)

### References


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