

# Concern-Wide Information Management with the Dutch Police

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## INTRODUCTION

In The Netherlands, police ICT has always mirrored the organization of the police system. Until 1993, the Netherlands had 144 local police forces at its disposal, which were supplemented by a national police force. Since 1994, when the 1993 Police Act was enacted, the Netherlands has had 26 police forces. Twenty-five of those are regional forces, and one provides a few specialist police services on a national scale. Although the number of forces has declined steeply since 1994, a heavy stress is still put on regional autonomy, as the 1993 Police Act knows no provisions for cooperation among forces.

Until 1993, police informatization was primarily a local matter, but after the 1993 Police Act was enacted, it became a regional affair. The Police Act, therefore, did not put an end to the existing situation characterized by so-called *islands of automation*. The Dutch police still use many different information systems that often are incompatible, which seriously hampers the information exchange among forces.

Because of the sharp focus on regional autonomy and the lack of legal or other incentives to encourage cooperation, it is remarkable that the police have been striving toward the creation of a uniform and concern-wide information management in recent years.

In this article, we argue that with this effort, a federative common pool resource (CPR) is called into being that can be seen as a form of administrative innovation in which horizontal intergovernmental cooperation through self-regulation is the central point. Such horizontal cooperation is of huge importance to the Dutch police system, as it is highly decentralized and as central steering, which often has failed in the past, would come with high transaction costs. A CPR can be defined as a shared facility that supplies goods or services to those participating in it. Characteristic for a CPR is either that it diminishes from use and/or that its creation and preservation depend on the participants' collective actions.

The federative characteristics of the developments we describe are best interpreted by using Davenport's (1992, 1997) typology of types of information management. In this typology, five different models are distinguished: anarchy, feudalism, federalism, monarchy, and technocratic utopianism. Davenport's (1992, 1997) main message is that in practice, many organizations struggle with a shift from feudalism toward federalism, the model that he deems superior to all others, as it enables us to create a common information system without the use of central steering, which is so difficult to many organizations, including the Dutch police. Feudalism, the current situation with the Dutch police, is highly unwanted, as it comes down to organizations not sharing information, which seriously obstructs many activities.

Currently, the Dutch police are undergoing a transformation of the kind Davenport (1992, 1997) describes. Not long ago, its information management displayed strong feudal traits, but under pressure from central government over the past few years, the 26 Dutch police forces collectively have pursued the realization of a uniform concern-wide information management with, in Davenport's (1992, 1997) terms, federal characteristics.

Closely associated with these developments is the rise of a new institutional paradigm that differs strongly from the one currently existing in the Dutch police field and that already is influencing the (legal) base of the Dutch police system.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE FEDERATIVE CPR

In November 2004, the council of those mayors that play the most important role in the Dutch police system (the so-called police administrators) drew up a plan for the innovation of the police's information management in the years 2005 through 2008. This plan and its predecessor (Regieraad ICT Politie, 2001) calls for the creation of a

uniform concern-wide information management for the entire police field. Uniformization, in this respect, amounts to “the gradual improvement of the information management, leading to a concern-wide dissemination of all police information and to the integral accessibility of such information. It means the end of ‘islands of automation’ in the police field” (Regieraad ICT Politie, 2004, p. 42).

The effort to bring about uniform concern-wide information management can be viewed as an attempt to create a CPR, as such an information management can only come into being if every police region participates. If some regions refuse to cooperate, the others will not have access to all the information necessary in order to fulfill their tasks. In this case, whether it will be brought about depends on whether a solution can be found for a specific type of collective action problem that is often called *assurance game* or *coordination game* (Ostrom, 1990). In an assurance game, shared provisions only will come into existence if all potential participants coordinate their actions and cooperate. Now, the creation of a CPR is often impeded by a collective action paradox—a dilemma between individual and collective rationality. As it happens, the creation of a collective facility is in the interest of the collective but does not necessarily serve the private interests of all individual participants. Nonetheless, that the Dutch police field appears to succeed in bringing about a uniform concern-wide information management is the result of the peculiar way in which it managed to solve the collective action paradox.

Davenport (1997) defines information management with federal characteristics as a form of cooperation in which “rational negotiation between central and dispersed groups” is central (p. 69). According to this author, “federalism treats politics including the politics of information as a necessary and legitimate activity by which people with different interests work out among themselves a collective definition of purpose and the means to achieve it” (Davenport, 1997, p. 69). The fact that in federalism binding decisions are brought about through self-regulation after negotiations open to all concerned parties is essential.

## A UNIFORM CONCERN-WIDE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AS A FEDERATIVE CPR

Until recently, the Dutch police system did not account for any financial or legal incentives in order to encourage cooperation among police forces. The council of police administrators, to provide but an example of this lack of incentive, wasn’t even mentioned in the Police Act of 1993 and, therefore, did not enjoy legal status (Wagenaar &

Soeparman, 2003). Autonomy of the individual police forces prevails in the 1993 Police Act. Naturally, such a lack of incentives for cooperation has had an effect on the domain of information management, which, therefore, could be characterized as feudal. Feudal information management, according to Davenport (1997), is the situation in which fragmentation prevails over the making of connections “when business units ... control their information environments like lords in so many separate castles” (p. 72), a lack of cooperation that seriously obstructs the exchange of information often so important to police work. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Dutch minister of the Interior still could write in 1999 that “the police’s information management still lagged behind to that found in most other sectors” and “that broad consensus existed over the fact that the arrears in the field of ICT the Dutch police had run into were truly worrying” (Tweede Kamer, 1999-2000, p. 1).

The solution that was found for the problem was of a highly federal character. Two private law cooperations, of which all police forces are members, bring about ICT facilities for all the police forces together—a CPR. One of the cooperations is called Concern Information Management Police (CIP); the other is called ICT Service Cooperation Police, Justice and Security (ISC). Although the cooperations work together, they have separate responsibilities.

CIP handles the demand-side of police ICT. It develops the information architecture and the logical and functional requirements of information systems and draws up long-term policy plans. On behalf of its members, CIP also acts as principal for the development of new applications. The standardization of data and data interchange is an important part of its range of duties, as well. The members of CIP are the police administrators (Veranderorganisatie, 2001; Concern Informatiemanagement Politie, 2004).

The other cooperation, ISC, acts as supplier of police ICT. The police forces, the CIP, and other parties involved are its customers. ISC is responsible for the technical design, actual realization, testing, implementation, exploitation, maintenance, and project management of police ICT. It also has a consultancy function and advises about standards, support, and training of end users, research, and the best way to facilitate innovation. As is the case with CIP, it is the police administrators who represent the police forces in ISC (Veranderorganisatie, 2001; ICT Service Coöperatie Politie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2004).

ISC’s sphere of action is wider than that of CIP, however, as ISC caters to more than just the police. The idea behind this wider sphere of action is that police information and communication systems are a link in a much longer chain that also includes the police’s partners in the areas of, for instance, criminal justice, security, and immigration. More parties than just the police, therefore,

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