

# TRUSTING ASSOCIATIONS

A Surgent Approach to Quality Improvement  
in Associations



**Peter Noordhoek**

**Tilburg University, the Netherlands**

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# Colophon

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Prof. dr. J.B. Rijsman and Prof. dr. ing. T.W. Hardjono

Drs. Dirk Pieter (“Peter”) Noordhoek  
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Maarten Boffé

**All other illustrations:**

see the table of contents

**Address:**

Oosthaven 15-16  
2801 PC Gouda  
The Netherlands

T 31-182 684545  
M 31-6-53488078  
E info@meerdannu.nl  
W www.meerdannu.nl

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# Summary

## *What is this thesis about?*

This thesis starts with the following question: is it possible to (re)gain trust in an association by introducing, for instance, peer review between the members of an association?

This thesis uses and compares three case studies to link the three concepts of trust, associations and quality. It describes how a proposal comes to be made in the General Assembly of the association on peer review and the likelihood of it being accepted. It also shows how the history and context of the association and its members influence this decision and how this can suddenly turn. This is done to get a better grip and provide answers on the more general questions that underlie this thesis: the what, how and why of associations and how trust can be(re)gained through quality interventions.

## **On Associations: *What Questions***

### *What is to trust in associations?*

Trust is not a rational term, though it can be approached in a rational manner. As such, it is hard to determine whether trust can be (re)gained in an association after crisis, transformation and incidents. Within an association, it is easier to determine if members have trust in the way their board improves trust. This study shows that it is possible to have all the members agree to a quality approach even though they may be individually against it. This ‘surge’ of support seems a condition for a renewal of trust.

### *What makes trusting associations important?*

When faced with a crisis and serious incidents, it is often at the level of associations that a collective effort can be made to change the image of a sector in a way individuals and their organizations and institutions cannot. For governments and other parties, associations provide a collective address for individual problems. For members, the association provides a reputational shield, a chartered construction for our social needs. If only for this, associations have added value, though they may be far less stable than before.

### *What is an association?*

An association is a horizontal group that acts as a collective actor, with a structure recognizable by relatively high entry-and-exit conditions and relatively closed standards of behavior for its members. In “classic” associations, the borders of the group are recognizable by symbols and registrations. In modern “social media” associations or “transsociations”, these distinctions hardly apply, and the association is recognizable by its large proportion of members sharing a similar goal.

Associations need to be distinguished from “contract-based” organizations (government or business) on the one hand and by vertical, “invitation only” networks and corporations on the other hand.

*What do we know about associations?*

Far less than we commonly think. Statistical information on the number of associations is unreliable or ill-defined. Worldwide there must be millions, with the largest numbering millions of members. Within a life-cycle approach, it is clear that people collect different association memberships throughout their lives, be it in a social or occupational role. There is an impression that membership of associations is declining, accompanied by aging membership. However, the evidence for this is not conclusive and it seems that in the developing world associations are on the rise.

Though associations are studied in parts of the law and in the context of voluntary and other civic initiatives, on the whole, we should be speaking about a great neglect of associations as a phenomenon. This also why it is hard to deal with the kind of groupthink and other “pathologies” that make many doubt the possibilities for change in or through associations. By looking at associations both from an institutional angle and by using a processional approach – what happens when in time – new perspectives and patterns emerge.

*Where do associations come from?*

Looking at their historical roots, we see that from earliest history onwards, the shape and impact of guilds or associations is mostly the result of interaction with parties in power; governments, churches, and businesses. They rise on the flanks of institutions. For a while, especially the new United States of America, as described by De Tocqueville, was a fascinating experiment in having associations as the dominant institution. Nowadays, civic initiatives, often in digital shape, are seen as rejuvenation of that idea. In fact, most associations are split off from other associations. There is little evidence of completely new associations. Even in the digital domain, groups tend to develop into more classical associations.

*What kind of associations are there?*

The thesis looks mostly at associations using two main dimensions: the height of entry-and-exit criteria, and the measure of openness or closeness of the standards as they apply to members. Going back to Durkheim and other sociological writers on groups, again, a need is seen to take a fresh look at associations, including the way they are classified. For this classification, a proposal is made. The thesis looks in depth into three cases; one with the public domain (public libraries), one both public and private (notariat), and one private (real estate agents). All face a double threat of economic crises and the transformative effects of digitization. In all cases this leads to incidents and deep insecurity. One has no government oversight, the second does, the third partly.

## On the Quality of Associations: How Questions

### *How to reach consensus on quality?*

Quality is the consensus achieved after making implicit definitions explicit. It requires, 1) making implicit definitions of quality explicit, and 2) having an intention to maintain or reach consensus on this explicit definition. In many ways, quality is “an undetermined concept, impossible to define” (Vinkenburg, 2017). It is the effort to define it and to reach consensus, that can create new realities. In this study, it is found that – even when a majority of the members seem against a certain quality initiative – in a very short time a majority can be reached under the right circumstances and the right kind of association leadership, understanding the ‘politics of quality’. This is called a “surge”.

### *How to use quality interventions?*

Over time, the issue of quality has translated itself into various approaches. After describing the debate, the researcher translates the different schools or paradigms into four mindsets: 1) objective, 2) system, 3) professional, and 4) divergent. The first two hold the instruments that most know from quality management: International Standard Organization (ISO) standards, the Baldrige/EFQM/INK award scheme, and others. Associations work most from the first mindset, it often being part of their ‘business model’. This thesis gives an oversight of all these interventions and shows how most of them have a tendency of controlling quality in associations, not “moving it.” In the end, it is doubtful that as such they will contribute much toward trusting associations. The mindset is more aimed at the right motivation and the importance of relations between all involved. This can translate itself into a form of inter-collegial or peer review, however the case studies show that even a general agreement at the moment of introduction, does not have to translate itself into an agreement by the members when asked. For this “the politics of quality” has to be understood.

### *Will quality emerge or surge?*

Perhaps all these interventions take the eye too much away from what is really happening, and where the interests of members truly lie. And how they see them. At least one of the case studies shows that even when the added value of interventions is shown, it does not touch on the underlying issues—also of (dis)trust—that determine the behavior of members on their boards. The ratio behind most interventions is in itself not strong enough to get a decision. All cases show that it takes a strong and long-term effort to come to a positive decision on quality initiatives like peer review. At the same time, a gradual approach will in the end not work to get consensus among the members because of both internal and external trust issues. The pattern of activities that ‘emerges’ is one of inaction at the same time the demand for action is high. The result in all cases is a crisis in the board.

The one way to counter that is a 'surge' to consensus when the association leadership finally takes the issue to the members. There was a "surge" in two cases where a decision on peer review had to be made by the general assembly and the association leadership went to the members in order to explain the need. In a third case consensus "emerged" under pressure of the coming of an external oversight body. Analyzing this, it has to do with a combination of changes in society and the role of associations on the one hand, and acceptance of actions from the board on the other hand, once criteria are met. In this indirect way, it can be assumed that it is possible to (re)gain trust within the association and that this again has an effect outside the association.

## On Trusting Associations: Why Question

*Why "trusting associations?"*

This thesis answers the question of why it is important to look at the issue of trusting associations as follows: public authority is dependent on respect for that hierarchical authority; the market functions best with competition but cannot solve collective problems very well. Social networks and other forms of cooperative institutions are flexible but often not stable or open enough to make lasting agreements. For reasons such as these, associations and their standards are the logical platforms in times of crisis and transformation. However, their collective nature also makes them vulnerable for pathologies that make them less than rational in the eyes of others and less trustworthy than needed. More recognition of the position of associations and more research into their nature may also show how to amend that, leading to "ratio in associations".

# Samenvatting

## *Waar gaat dit onderzoek over?*

Dit onderzoek start bij deze vraag: is het mogelijk voor een vereniging om vertrouwen te (her)winnen door bijvoorbeeld het introduceren van intercollegiale toetsing ('peer review') tussen de leden van een vereniging? Dit onderzoek gebruikte en vergelijkt drie casussen om de drie concepten van vertrouwen, verenigingen en kwaliteit met elkaar te verbinden. Het beschrijft hoe een besluit naar de Algemene ledenvergadering gebracht wordt ten aanzien van de introductie van peer review en hoe waarschijnlijk het is dat daar positief op wordt beslist. Het laat ook zien hoe de geschiedenis en de context van de vereniging en haar leden dit besluit beïnvloeden en hoe dit plotseling om kan slaan. Dit wordt gedaan om zo meer grip en antwoorden te kunnen krijgen op de vragen die onder dit onderzoek liggen: het wat, hoe en waarom van de vraag hoe vertrouwen kan worden (her)wonnen door kwaliteitsmaatregelen.

## Over verenigingen: wat?-vragen

### *Wat is er te vertrouwen aan verenigingen?*

Vertrouwen is geen rationeel begrip, al kan het wel rationeel worden benaderd. Als zodanig is het niet eenvoudig om aan te tonen hoe in de samenleving vertrouwen in verenigingen kan worden verkregen na een periode van crisis en transformatie vol incidenten. Binnen de vereniging is het eenvoudiger om te bepalen of er voldoende vertrouwen is, vooral door te kijken naar de mate waarin besluitvorming door het bestuur wordt geaccepteerd als het spannend wordt. Dit onderzoek laat zien dat het mogelijk is om de leden in te laten stemmen met een kwaliteitsbenadering, ook al zijn de individuele leden er in hoge mate tegen. Deze 'vloed' ('surge') van steun lijkt een voorwaarde voor het verstel van vertrouwen.

### *Wat maakt dat vertrouwen in verenigingen belangrijk is?*

Op het moment dat het crisis in de samenleving is en ernstige incidenten het vertrouwen ondergraven, is het juist op het niveau van verenigingen dat nog een collectieve inspanning kan worden gepleegd om het beeld en de reputatie van een sector of professie te herstellen op een manier waar mensen, organisaties en instituten zelf niet toe in staat zijn. Voor overheden en andere partijen vormen verenigingen een collectief adres voor individuele problemen. Voor de leden kan de vereniging de reputatie helpen beschermen en ondertussen een erkende constructie zijn waar we onze sociale behoeften kwijt kunnen. Alleen al om deze redenen hebben verenigingen 'meerwaarde', al kan het best zo zijn dat verenigingen een stuk minder stabiel zijn dan vroeger.

### *Wat is een 'vereniging'?*

Een vereniging is een horizontale groep die acteert als een collectief, met een structuur die herkenbaar is door relatief hoge entree en exit barrières en relatief gesloten normen voor het gedrag van haar leden. In 'klassieke' verenigingen zijn de grenzen van de groep zijn herkenbaar aan hun symbolen en registratie-eisen. In moderne 'social media' verenigingen oftewel 'transsociaties' valt dit onderscheid nauwelijks te maken en wat overblijft is dat een groot deel van de 'leden' een vergelijkbaar doel met elkaar gemeen hebben. Verenigingen moeten aan de ene kant onderscheiden worden van groepen die samenwerken op basis van contracten of overeenkomsten (bedrijven en overheden) en aan de andere kant van verticale 'enkel op uitnodiging' gevormde netwerken en coöptaties.

### *Wat weten we over verenigingen?*

Veel minder dan we gewoonlijk denken. Statistische informatie over het aantal verenigingen is er niet of is onbetrouwbaar of slecht gedefinieerd. Wereldwijd moeten het er miljoenen zijn, waarbij de grootste miljoenen leden hebben. Binnen een levenscyclus benadering is het duidelijk dat mensen verschillende lidmaatschappen verzamelen door hun leven heen, dan weer in een sociale en dan weer in een beroepsrol. De indruk bestaat dat het lidmaatschap van verenigingen aan het dalen is, net zoals er sprake zou zijn van vergrijzing. Het bewijs hierover is echter niet sluitend en het lijkt erop dat op wereldschaal, zeker in de zich ontwikkelende landen, verenigingen juist in opkomst zijn.

Hoewel verenigingen object van studie zijn in delen van het recht en in de context van vrijwilligers en burgerinitiatieven, kunnen we ook spreken van verwaarlozing van verenigingen als het gaat om de bestudering ervan als fenomeen op zich. Dit is ook een reden waarom we niet goed weten om te gaan met de ziekteverschijnselen van verenigingen als bijvoorbeeld groepsdwang. Dit is ook reden om velen te doen twifelen aan de kansen om door of via verenigingen verandering te bereiken. Door naar verenigingen te kijken vanuit een meer institutionele optiek en door een 'processuele' benadering te gebruiken – 'wat gebeurt wanneer in de tijd' - kunnen nieuwe perspectieven en patronen verschijnen.

### *Wat is de oorsprong van verenigingen?*

Door naar de historische wortels te kijken, zien we dat al heel vroeg de impact van gilden en verenigingen vorm krijgt als gevolg van de interactie met machtige partijen: overheden, kerken, bedrijven. Ze trekken zichzelf omhoog langs de flanken van de grote instituten. Gedurende een tijd werd er in de vroege Verenigde Staten een door De Tocqueville beschreven boeiend experiment uitgevoerd met verenigingen als de dominante organisatievorm. Tegenwoordig zouden burgerinitiatieven, een vernieuwing van dat idee kunnen betekenen. Er is weinig bewijs dat het echt tot nieuwe organisatievormen gaat komen.

Zelfs in het digitale domein van de sociale media lijkt het er op dat alles uiteindelijk weer tendeert naar de klassieke verenigingen.

*Wat voor soorten verenigingen zijn er?*

Deze studie kijkt naar verenigingen vooral langs twee dimensies: de hoogte van entree & exit-criteria voor het lidmaatschap en de mate van open of gesloten zijn van normen zoals die van toepassing zijn op zittende leden. Terugkijkend naar Durkheim en andere sociologen in hun denken over groepsvorming, valt te zien dat het nodig is om opnieuw naar verenigingen te kijken, inclusief de wijze waarop deze worden geclassificeerd. Voor deze classificatie wordt een voorstel gedaan. Het onderzoek richt zich daarnaast diepgaand op een drietal casussen; één in het publieke domein (de openbare bibliotheken), één gemengd publiek-privaat (het notariaat) en één privaat (de makelaardij). Allen krijgen te maken met een dubbele bedreiging van een economische crisis en het transformerende effect van digitalisering. In alle gevallen leidt dat tot incidenten en vergaande onzekerheid. Eén casus kent geen externe toezichthouder, een tweede wel, de derde gedeeltelijk.

## Over de kwaliteit van verenigingen: hoe?-vragen

*Hoe krijg je consensus over kwaliteit?*

Kwaliteit is de overeenstemming (consensus) zoals die wordt bereikt na het expliciet maken van impliciete definities. Het vereist 1) het expliciet maken van impliciete definities van kwaliteit en 2) de intentie te hebben om consensus op deze expliciete definities te krijgen. In veel opzichten is kwaliteit een “onbestemd concept, onmogelijk te definiëren” (Vinkenburg, 2017). Het is de inspanning om het te definiëren en consensus te bereiken die nieuwe werkelijkheden kan scheppen. In dit onderzoek is gebleken dat – ook al lijkt een meerderheid van de leden tegen een kwaliteitsinitiatief als peer review – in een hele korte tijd een meerderheid kan worden bereikt onder de juiste omstandigheden en met een goed lezen van de ‘politiek van kwaliteit’. Dit is de eerder genoemde ‘vloed’ (‘surge’).

*Hoe kan aan kwaliteit worden gewerkt?*

In de loop van de tijd heeft het denken over kwaliteit zich vertaald in verschillende benaderingen. Na een beschrijving van het debat, heeft de onderzoeker de verschillende benaderingen of paradigma’s vertaald in vier denkhoudingen: 1) objectief, 2) systeem, 3) sociaal en 4) divergent. De eerste twee omvatten de instrumenten die omvatten de instrumenten die het meest bekend zijn vanuit kwaliteitsmanagement: certificering en accreditering op basis van de ISO-normen en de INK Onderscheiding en -Prijs. Zeker de eerste wordt zeer veelvuldig toegepast binnen verenigingen en maakt vaak onderdeel uit van het ‘verdienmodel’. Deze thesis geeft een overzicht van alle mogelijke interventies en laat zien hoezeer de meeste gericht zijn op de “beheersing” van kwaliteit en niet op het “in beweging brengen” van de kwaliteit.

In die zin kan de vraag gesteld worden wat de toegevoegde waarde ervan is voor het verhogen van vertrouwen in verenigingen. De sociale denkhouding is meer gericht op professionele autonomie en het onderhouden van de relaties tussen alle betrokkenen. Dat kan zich ook vertalen in een vorm van intercollegiale toetsing of peer review, maar de casussen laten zien dat, zelfs als er in algemene zin consensus lijkt te zijn over de invoering van zo'n interventie, dat nog niet tot instemming van de leden leidt als het er in een ledenvergadering op aan komt. Om hier mee om te gaan moet de 'politiek van kwaliteit' goed worden begrepen.

### *Komt kwaliteit geleidelijk naar boven of komt het als een vloed?*

Wellicht leiden alle interventies te zeer af van wat er in werkelijkheid binnen een vereniging aan het gebeuren is en waar de werkelijke belangen van de leden liggen. En hoe zij deze zien. Ten minste een van de cases laat zien dat zelfs als de meerwaarde van de interventie hard wordt aangetoond, dat dit nog niet de onderliggende zaken raakt – en het daaraan verbonden wantrouwen – dat het gedrag van de leden en het bestuur daadwerkelijk bepaald. Alle casussen laten zien dat het een langdurige en krachtige inspanning vergt om tot een positieve beslissing te komen over iets als peer review. Tegelijkertijd werkt een geleidelijke aanpak niet om zo'n beslissing binnen te halen, dit vanwege zowel interne als externe vertrouwenskwesaties. Het patroon van activiteiten zoals dat 'tevoorschijn komt' ('emerges') is er een van gebrek aan actie op hetzelfde moment dat de vraag om actie hoog is. In alle casussen is het resultaat daarvan een ernstige bestuurscrisis. De enige manier om daartegenin te gaan is naar het lijkt een 'vloed' ('surge') veroorzaken om tot consensus te komen door naar de leden toe te gaan en de kwestie aan hen voor te leggen. In twee gevallen was er een vloed op het moment dat een beslissing over een peer review aan de algemene ledenvergadering werd voorgelegd. In een derde casus ontstond de consensus ('emerged') onder druk van de komst van de externe toezichthouder. Uit een analyse blijkt dat er sprake moet zijn van een combinatie van veranderingen in de samenleving en de rol van verenigingen enerzijds en de acceptatie van acties door het bestuur aan de andere kant. Op deze indirecte wijze, kan aangenomen worden dat het mogelijk is vertrouwen te herwinnen binnen de vereniging en dat heeft vervolgens weer effect buiten de vereniging.

## **Over vertrouwen in verenigingen: waarom?-vraag**

### *Waarom "vertrouwen in verenigingen"?*

Deze thesis beantwoordt de vraag waarom het belangrijk is om naar het thema van vertrouwen in verenigingen te kijken als volgt: het overheidsgezag is afhankelijk van het respect van burgers voor haar verticale autoriteit; de markt functioneert prima bij stevige concurrentie maar is niet goed in het oplossen van collectieve problemen; sociale netwerken en andere vormen van coöperatieve instellingen zijn flexibel maar vaak niet stabiel of open genoeg voor blijven afspraken.

Juist omdat verenigingen deze nadelen niet of minder hebben, zijn verenigingen en hun normen de logische platformen in tijden van crisis en transformatie.

Echter, hun collectieve aard maakt verenigingen ook kwetsbaar voor kwalen – pathologiën – die hen minder rationeel lijken te maken dan andere vormen en minder vertrouwenwekkend dan nodig. Meer (h)erkenning van de positie van verenigingen en meer onderzoek naar hun aard kan mogelijk aantonen hoe dat anders kan, leidend “tratio” in verenigingen.



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My son Twan did not turn into the reader and writer I am. Good for him: his practical mind now provides people with food. The question "What is better?" is one question we fortunately do not have to answer.

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Peter Noordhoek  
Gouda, The Netherlands, Januari 2019

# INTRODUCTION



# Introduction

*“The art of associations then becomes, as I have said before,  
the mother of action, studied and applied by all.”  
- Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America*

## 1. Questions

This thesis is about what may happen in an association—like that of the public libraries, the notaries and real estate agents—when external circumstances such as financial crises or digitization, lead to an internal crisis. Many reactions are possible, but the most common reaction is a demand for action, mostly in the shape of a quality initiative, to ‘do better,’ or to improve. In any case, something needs to be done or improved. More specifically, the issue of quality needs to be addressed. But in what way and how? This uncertainty, in combination with the internal demand for action by members and board, can very well lead to issues of trust. How to address these issues of trust and how to use quality initiatives in this respect, are the problems that are central to this thesis.

This researcher works or has worked as an outside consultant in many fields, including many government agencies and oversight bodies. For the past two decades, his work has also been concerned with the development and implementation of sector- or association-wide quality initiatives. He was and is responsible for assignments in this field and so is in a position to overview developments. He reflected on what he saw and used this to develop new approaches. After bringing his experiences together in a book (Noordhoek, 2011), describing different efforts at ‘Sector-wide quality,’ a need was felt to go deeper into the question of how an association can respond to the issue of trust. In the end, three specific and complex assignments proved to be very helpful in addressing this question and gave much inspiration for the main study of the dissertation. In it, this question about action and effectiveness has come to stand on the shoulders of a larger question: what are associations and how do they respond to change? Underneath this question looms a further one: Why bother? What is the relevance of associations in an age in which memberships seem to decline in numbers and reputation? In other words: why should we care about trust associations?

These last questions are difficult to answer directly, apart from freewheeling columns, tweets and other expressions of opinion. In this study, the researcher tries to answer questions like these in as systematic and factual a way as possible, indicating where necessary when more research is needed.

As there are thousands upon thousands of associations—we do not really know how many—a sample of only three case studies can never be representative of them all. But by going deeper than usual and focusing the study on a single representative moment in the development of an association, much can be deduced from that. What emerged from the case studies is this litmus test, posed as the central operational question of this study:

*Do a majority of the members say ‘yes’ to a proposal by the board of the association for a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?*

Without this general consent for a quality initiative, it is assumed that no real steps are being made toward more ‘trust’ in or outside an association. This is not just about the decision as such. The question is also important because it says something about the ability to come to a consensus about a decision that can easily be perceived as against the interest of the individual member. If, for instance, the decision is about a quality initiative like modern ‘peer review,’ the member might well feel that other members should be audited, but not him or herself. Resistance like this should be overcome by the leadership of the association. When it does, it says something about the capability of an association to come to a decision of general interest or public value, which is at the very least a basis for trust.

One of the observations made in the case studies is that a gradual or a wait-and-see approach in these circumstances does not seem to work, and even well-thought-out proposals may come up short if and when the position of the members is not well understood. These misreadings or tactical errors would lead in all three cases to an internal crisis. The three case studies will all show that a ‘surge’ is needed of support for the initiative in order to avoid (the next) crisis. In public or private settings hierarchical decisions might make it possible to avoid the need for a surge, but in associations, it seems unavoidable. This raises the next operational question:

*Why does it take a surge to let the members decide ‘yes’ to a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?*

In order to answer both questions, it takes two sets of added ‘what’ and ‘how?’ questions. One deals with quality initiatives and one with associations.

Questions on quality:

1. What is quality?
2. What quality initiatives are there in the context of associations?
3. What are their characteristics?
4. What can be learned about their effectiveness, also in regard to the different paradigms in the thinking about quality?

5. What can be said about the relative effectiveness of internal quality initiatives in relation to external oversight activities?
6. What can be said about their acceptance and the required change strategy?
7. What can be said about the future of quality initiatives in associations?

The first question is the most vital in terms of understanding what the role of quality initiatives is or can be. It will lead inevitably to the answer to the last question. In between, much knowledge that is already there will be shown in a new light.

As described in chapter 18, in recent literature a debate has risen on the value of different schools of thought in quality approaches. An 'emergent' approach or paradigm is proposed (Kemenade & Hardjono, 2018) as an alternative to empirical and other approaches. This author also identifies the need for a new approach but thinks there should also be room for a 'surgent' approach in what he calls 'the politics of quality' (Kemenade & Hardjono, 2011a).

Questions two and three are multidimensional in their answers because their answers refer to different paradigms and are fundamentally of a theoretical nature. Questions four, five, and six will be answered in the context of the case studies and summarized in the main study. Part of the answer to question two is an oversight of quality initiatives. They can be found in attachment A4 (in Dutch) and summarized in Part III of the main study.

#### Association questions:

1. What is an association?
2. What are its characteristics and categories?
3. What are the dynamics of an association?
4. How do associations deal with pressures?
5. How will associations develop, given these pressures?

These association questions are, at first glance, more one dimensional compared to quality questions. They concern questions dealing with data about the number of associations and members, their impact, and the way they can be categorized. They are also about historical descriptions of where associations come from in terms of quality and oversight, about how they develop and how they try to show through quality initiatives and the change strategies that come with them, that they can be trusted.

To give an answer to the first question of what an association is, the other questions need to be answered if we are to get an idea about the fundamental 'nature' of an association. It is much more than a legal entity with members. In many ways, this is about new definitions about what a 'group' is and where its borders lie in the modern world.

This first question cannot be fully answered without more answers on the other ones, but as there are limits on time and resources, the first question especially, is most of all ‘agenda setting’—more research needs to be done to end the “neglect of associations,” hopefully leading to a new generative theory (Gergen K. J., 1994) about the nature of associations.

The main study starts with the many association questions (part I and II) and will then go on to the quality questions (Part III). They will be brought together in the end (part IV). Meanwhile, the three case studies are summarized and interspersed in the main study (last chapters part I and II). The full cases are in the attachments. Each attachment has its own summary (a warning though: they’re written in Dutch). In the concluding chapter, we will end with an answer to the first two questions about the decision of the members and the reasons for a surge.

There are no questions here about the exact nature of trust. Here, trust is more a condition for an association to have an effective relationship between an association and its members and with the outside world; it is not an object for research itself. The central operational question can be considered as the final test of there being trust or not, but, in fact, it is extremely difficult to use trust as a defining concept because the concept can be approached in so many ways. Some of the ways trust can be defined and used, also in terms of literature, will be addressed in this first chapter. The reason why trust is still in the title of this study has to do with the wish not to write about associations or quality as static, unchangeable concepts. Exactly because associations and quality have been around now for such a long time, is a good reason to want to see them in motion. Nothing better for that than issues of trust. Trust is present, or it is not. Just like a rational approach is there, or it is not. The presence or absence of these terms gives a needed dynamic to the study, but they are not treated as forces in their own right. There is trust in an association when people say there is, just as the reverse holds true: there is no trust when people say there is none. The title ‘Trusting associations. A surgent approach to quality initiatives in ‘associations’ could be interpreted as normative: it is important to have trust in associations and that an approach through a surge of support for a quality initiative is the likely way to go. However, it is better to read the title like a report on ongoing questions on how to deal with trust issues in associations. Here, quality initiatives take center stage. There are others.

Before tackling the questions, we start with an indication of the academic and practical relevance of this study. As this relevance is ultimately not in the hands of the researcher but of the reader, some assumptions are made as to what the reader will find relevant. After this, more methodological remarks are made as to the way the cases are written and to the way this ‘reflective practitioner’ has observed basic ground rules in writing this study. The introduction ends with both a written and visual structure for the whole of this study.

## 2. On Relevance

When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the “Art of Association” in his book about Democracy in America (Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1839), he did so in admiration for the seemingly easy way in which Americans came together to build their communities. The equality between people stunned him, as did the democratic way in which people took decisions in their associations and deliberative bodies. How different to how things were done on the old continent of Europe.

There can be little doubt that things have changed a lot, both in the United States and in Europe, since De Tocqueville rode around on horseback, making his observations, writing them down. But his observations are relevant up to the present day. De Tocqueville wrote an appendix to his book with some of the notes he took, but mostly with further masterly reflections on what he had seen and heard. He was an observer with an academic eye, testing his assumptions and not just quoting others (Tocqueville, 1996 (1839), p. 384). At the same time, he was also a social-constructionist avant-la-lettre in his attempts to translate his observations into lessons, noting for instance “how difficult it is rationally and logically to fit together all the machinery of legislation.” As a future politician, you can sense the reflective practitioner at work (Tocqueville, Democracy in America., 1996 (1839)). And at the same time, because or in spite of his efforts, “Faced by so vast a subject, I feel my vision hazy and my judgment hesitant” (Tocqueville, 1996 (1839), p. 703). He went on anyhow, perhaps primarily driven by a search for relevance, caring about the rigor of his thinking, not in which academic tradition it stood. And he thought associations very relevant.

We still have associations. Much more probably than in his day. But they are far less omnipresent. They are more a given, often considered to be rather out of date in terms of organization model. This study is an attempt to look with fresh eyes at the phenomenon of associations. It has to be done by riding digital horses and meeting other, stricter standards for research. But then, there are so many more resources available than in De Tocqueville’s day and age that there is no reason for complaints. The one thing that is the same, is the question of relevance. Here come the findings that in the eyes of this researcher are most relevant in terms of both academic and practical relevance.

### Academic Relevance

This study is broad, in the sense that it not only covers many subjects but also tries to combine insights from different academic fields and disciplines. The danger of interdisciplinary research is that by trying to touch everything, nothing is truly touched.

It is the proposition that this study produces insights and knowledge on several levels: in terms of a direct increase in knowledge, in terms of conceptual development, and in terms of agenda setting. Each finding on its own, and in its entirety, should provide ample opportunity for further research and study.

### *Knowledge Increase*

- At the base of this study are three case studies, representing a wider experience and study by the researcher, also going back to the earlier book of 2011. Each case is described in great detail from both a long-term historical perspective (roots of the profession or sector) and a short-term perspective, the latter mostly a description of the decision-making process in an association around the acceptance of a quality intervention in the shape of 'peer review.' This is fitting to approaches like that of Bouldings' social dynamics (Boulding, 1970) and especially Abbotts' processual sociology (Abbott, 2016).
- In general, studies of associations seldom go very far back and rarely as far back as the guilds of the middle ages. Here, trying to go further back in the history of public libraries and the notariat function, a different perspective arises on the reasons why one group of people has its status raised and the other not. Proximity to power is a factor in this, raising or lowering entry-and-exit criteria for membership.
- Another possibly unique insight in a case, that of the notariat, shows how over two consecutive periods of forty years each, the members of the profession are endowed with a public function by a foreign power, doing well with this, but ending up with a damaged reputation and both external and internal crises. Because of the specific circumstances, this may well be an atypical example, but in its extremity, it can show well how associations deal with a breach of public trust. It can also show the added value of a historical approach to the research into associations.
- Because of significant differences in the way associations develop, this approach gets more value when a comparative perspective is added. This study started with a comparison between two, at first glance, very dissimilar associations. Both the public library association and the association of notaries face an estimated decline of 40% due to digitization and economic factors (A1, A2). Both plan a quality intervention to do something about it. The public libraries are without a public oversight body, the notariat gets one. The comparison shows how this makes a difference in terms of change.

Through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, a comparison in effectiveness is made between the internal quality initiative and that of the outside oversight body. These can be all contributions to the study of governance, oversight and self-regulation.

- A number of observations are made, or confirmed, regarding, for instance, the nature of quality initiatives (strong tendency to stabilize and not to increase dynamics), the duration of audit cycles (decreasing) and the most effective method for doing peer reviews (inductive, not deductive). These observations are, as yet, new or only partly dealt with in other studies.
- Much of this study is dedicated to the study of associations itself, and the lack of clear data over the total of associations (there often is much data available on the level of individual associations). This is about, among many other things, data about the actual number of associations, the number of members, the number of associations people belong to and their impact on individual lives, economy and society. For probably the first time, an attempt is made to get comparative data on a worldwide basis, showing great diversity (it exists at the level of international NGOs, but not at national levels).
- A third case was only added after the general assembly of the real estate agent association, deeply conflicted about a quality initiative in the shape of peer review, asked the board to prove that peer review has 'added value' for its members. Based on the conceptual insights from earlier research and the first two cases, a research design was applied to over a hundred pilot cases, resulting in over seventy direct and indirect points of possible added value. Both results and design were validated by a third party. The final report not only showed clear and specific added value but also brought new insight into the way associations are made responsible for functions and factors that are, in fact, outside the scope of an association to do something about. No comparable design or construct has been found elsewhere in social and organization literature.
- Even so, the general assembly preferred to ignore the results of the study into added value, validated or not, in favor of personal ideas and feelings about peer review. This touches very much upon conceptual developments surrounding quality initiatives, leading to a possibly new approach.

Based on the experiences of this practitioner, and detailed descriptions of the way introductions of quality initiatives lead to crisis and resolution, it leads to ‘the politics of quality,’ in which issues of ratio and sentiment, trust and distrust, play an important role. Part of this is based on the observation that quality interventions do not just ‘emerge’ after a rational debate between board and members. A ‘surge’ is necessary to conquer resistance. In academic terms, this might mean contributions to the thinking around quality and organization sciences. Though this study is focused on associations, its findings could be relevant to public administration and political sciences as well.

### *Conceptual Progress*

On a number of fronts, this study had to make conceptual breakthroughs in order to proceed, though it should be added that most of these have come about as a result of dialog with practical findings and not so much with academic literature (for reasons that partly have to do with the agenda-setting part of this study, literature on quality excepted). The following are some of the most important ones:

- How to define associations? The classic definition of associations, as for instance defined by Latin law, US fiscal codes or UN classification codes, turns out to be inadequate in the face of digitization and other changes. Existing literature on associations (management) focuses mostly on the function associations fulfill, not on their boundaries or essential nature. A crisis in the case of the library produced a breakthrough in the shape of an ‘association matrix,’ putting standards as a defining characteristic of an association. This matrix generated more and more insights, leading to several applications. Yet standards are not the only way to look at associations. It is possible to produce a multi-dimensional view of associations where every element is fundamentally linked to the other elements.
- Associations have been defined in the same way for many years. The codification done by the UN and other statistical offices has basically remained unchanged for decades. This does not mean that the quality of the data has been upheld. To the contrary. Due to changes in society, in the way in which sectors and professions develop, and to the impact of digitization and the network economy, the categories no longer fit. Rethinking the concept of associations must also lead to a new categorization of associations, for which here the base is formulated.
- The thinking about quality is and has been dominated by empirical, stability-seeking initiatives like the certification of products and services, or by attempts at integral quality.

In associations, this is often part of the ‘business model,’ also because associations are big in the certification and credentialing or accreditation of permanent education. For a long time, writers and researchers on quality, including this one, have argued that overly rational approaches are often inadequate and can turn counterproductive. This has led to much writing about alternatives, but their impact has been limited. It is argued here that defining quality has for too long been defined as an effort to reach consensus or formulate a standard. In the interpretation of this researcher, defining quality is at least as much a way of dealing with, and confronting, a lack of consensus. Seen through this prism of ‘the politics of quality,’ it forces the observer to see what is actually going on and connect this with more rational or trust-based approaches. The result is a new conceptual addition to the different ‘schools’ in the literature on quality.

- One of the observations made in the case studies is that there seems to be no gradual way to get any quality initiative accepted when it really comes close to the members themselves. Change is mostly sought from outside. Only after a board crisis, always accompanied by fundamental debates about the course of the association, is there chance of a quality initiative being adopted, and then usually in a ‘surgent’ (not ‘emergent’) manner. This study makes the analysis as to why this surge is necessary.
- This study fundamentally alters the way ‘horizontal’ (internal audits, including inter-collegial, peer review) audits are to be done. In practice, audits are done in a deductive way: a set of standards is applied to an audit object. The object (auditee) complies or not. In this respect, internal audits are no different from external ones. However, under certain conditions, an inductive approach is much to be preferred. For this, it is necessary to look first at the situation of the auditee and only then determine which (set of) standards should be used to give advice or judgment.
- Inductive auditing may also help in order to get a clearer image of the added value of audits. As mentioned above, the association matrix helps to gather and diagnose information on the added value of audits. It also acts as a foundation for further research into the different dimensions of associations.
- This research is not about defining ‘trust’ as such. Though interested in the concept of trust, this study does not claim to use current academic insights in that respect or tries to measure trust by surveys or other direct means. It does use a conceptual approach developed and published by this researcher in the 1990s,

born from observing too many quality initiatives in which the value of a systematic approach was considered self-evident—it never was. Two tensions come together: between rational and emotional, between trust and distrust. These combined tensions can be endlessly used to explain how, for instance, the quality of politics works. It is hoped others will start testing their use too.

### *Agenda Setting:*

- The neglect of associations. In 2011, this researcher published a book about ‘sector-wide quality.’ In it, many observations about quality initiatives were brought together. However, there was a lack of useful data and literature about associations. To be sure, at the level of individual associations and disciplines, there are masses of data, but what there are in the shape of synthetic studies, are at the level of general management or legal publications, not in terms of meta-studies. In the years after publication, research was expanded to other (international) sources. Exact data about the number of associations (let alone members) is not available and/or hard to interpret. There was no time or resources to commission research by others, but there can be little doubt that associations are seldom the object of research—in sharp contrast to what we know about businesses, government or even civil initiatives and volunteer activities. As such, this study provides more questions than answers, but they are provided in the hope of starting a new research agenda for others, to do something about the neglect of associations.
- The politics of quality. There is much naiveté, or worse, when it comes to the use of quality initiatives. A dominant logic of strict standards, preferably applied by outside parties, takes the eye away from the kind of skills it takes for the leaders of an association to get truly effective initiatives accepted by the members. In every case described in this study, there are many years in which the board lurches from crisis to crisis, not really understanding why this happens. Meanwhile, trust is not restored. Looking at quality as the result of an interplay of internal and external forces, unique to associations, might help in having more successful initiatives.

### **Practical Relevance**

Practical relevance is gained in terms of knowledge, in terms of new concepts and in terms of agenda setting. This study was, unlike the book of 2011, not written with practical or immediate relevance in mind. For that reason, for instance, there is no chapter on change management in this study. Still, there is much to be found in terms of practical relevance.

### *In Terms of Knowledge*

- In countries like the United States, the leadership of an association is considered a separate profession, including credentialing, accreditation and permanent education. In most countries, this is not yet the case. The literature available for leaders and professionals is non-academic and derived from management and organizational insights, plus the necessary knowledge in terms of legal, financial, IT and other sources. This is fine, of course, but if the profession is to grow, the object of that profession needs to be better known and understood. Studies like these are necessary from this perspective.
- It should come up with better data on the number of associations and their members. This is necessary in order to make lobby efforts for associations more impactful.
- In terms of policy making, the tendency is to choose external oversight above internal measures and/or quality initiatives. This study is not conclusive, but it is very likely that:
  - Internal quality initiatives such as peer review are more effective than external oversight bodies. Especially for associations that have many 'lonely members,' the added value of peer review can be significant.
  - But the presence of external oversight means more speed is taken to make decisions on quality initiatives and ensures commitment.
  - In short, associations have use of a vertical 'keg' on a horizontal 'slate.'

### *In Terms of New Concepts:*

- The most relevant concept of this study might be that of the 'politics of quality.' The chairman, members of the board and their supporters, especially, need to understand what happens when they bring a quality initiative to the table. An association is neither a business nor a government body, NGO or foundation. It has its own dynamic. This study describes that dynamic, with special attention to its horizontal or democratic nature.
- In line with this, the condition of having a 'surge' in support from the members as a precondition for a quality initiative, can be of great practical relevance. In its most basic form, it means that the chairperson has to leave the boardroom and go out to the members to make his or her case for the initiative.
- Each case study shows new insights into the way a quality intervention like peer review can be used. Multiple practical insights emerge from this, including statements on how to assess colleagues without the availability of 'hard' sanctions, the

frequency, methods and terms of audits and how to give audits maximum impact. Most relevant of all, could be the shift towards an 'inductive audit'. Instead of starting an audit with the rules and standards to which the members have to comply, an inductive audit starts with the actual position the member is in. Starting from that the relevant rules and standards can be selected, never letting more existential questions for the member get out of sight.

*In Terms of Agenda Setting:*

In the eyes of many, the problems of society are either solved by business initiatives or government efforts. It is certainly not true for the whole of the world, but in the West, associations seem to have a low status, with declining membership and relevance (in fact the number of associations is probably relatively stable, but in demographic terms associations are graying). The public and private value of associations are probably underrated, but this observation alone means little in practical terms. Understanding the 'politics of quality' and discovering the practical value of how a surge works are probably of more direct value.

### 3. The Structure of the Study

This study is structured around three themes and three cases. The three themes are trust, association and quality. The three cases are associations in the field of public libraries, the notariat and that of the real estate agents. Trust is a general theme that will return again and again. In this introduction, more will be written about the way trust plays a constant role in this study, but it is seldom an object of research itself. Most of the attention will go to the concept of associations and that of quality. Together they make up the three parts of this study.

The structure of the main body of this study aims to be a step-by-step approach to tackling the issue of trust in associations as a whole. The elements of the study come together in Figure 1.2 and in the table of contents.

The first part is the part in which many questions come up on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research object: the associations. It is a story of few available or used sources of knowledge and the title of part I reflects this: “On the Neglect of Associations.”<sup>1</sup> Then, all the elements that determine the matter of trust will be reviewed in Part II, called “On the Nature of Associations.” The third part brings the questions of change to the fore, under the title of “Quality of Associations.” Together, the three parts will lead to a sense of the dynamic of associations that might hold an answer to the question of trust, as discussed and described in the main study. A combination of the matrices used in the study will illustrate this. In the fourth part, it will all come together. The three cases will be compared to each other and be reviewed in light of the findings of the different chapters. One of the findings is about how decisions in the case were actually made when it was finally up to the members to agree or not agree to the proposal for better quality. Do the members trust the board of the association enough? This surge will be analyzed in detail before finishing the study with the conclusions.

In Figure 1.2, it is shown how the three case studies feed into the main study. In the case studies, the actual method used depends on available primary sources (observations and state of the moment data) and secondary (literature) sources and data on the one hand, and the depth of the historical research on the other hand. Progressive insights by the researcher also played a role, though it can be said that chance played a role too; as it happened, each assignment for an association lent itself more to validation. The main study was written after the case studies, although drafts were written from early on (the 2009 book can be considered a draft).

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1. As understandable as it is to read the title in a normative way, this researcher regards it more as a statement of fact and certainly an invitation to more research.

The matrices are born from the case studies, but it is in the main study that they provide the backbone and the leading questions for the study.

This study, its cases, and preliminary studies have known many questions, hypotheses, statements, and other forms of operationalization, in an attempt to shape up to a more traditional methodology. Some of them can still be read in the main cases. However, many of the questions and hypotheses proved in time to be too limited in their scope. In this study, most answers superseded the questions. It does not feel honest to reconstruct them in retrospect. This does not mean this study is not systematic. It is, very much so. A systematic intellectual journey, inviting the readers to come along, with insights on every page.

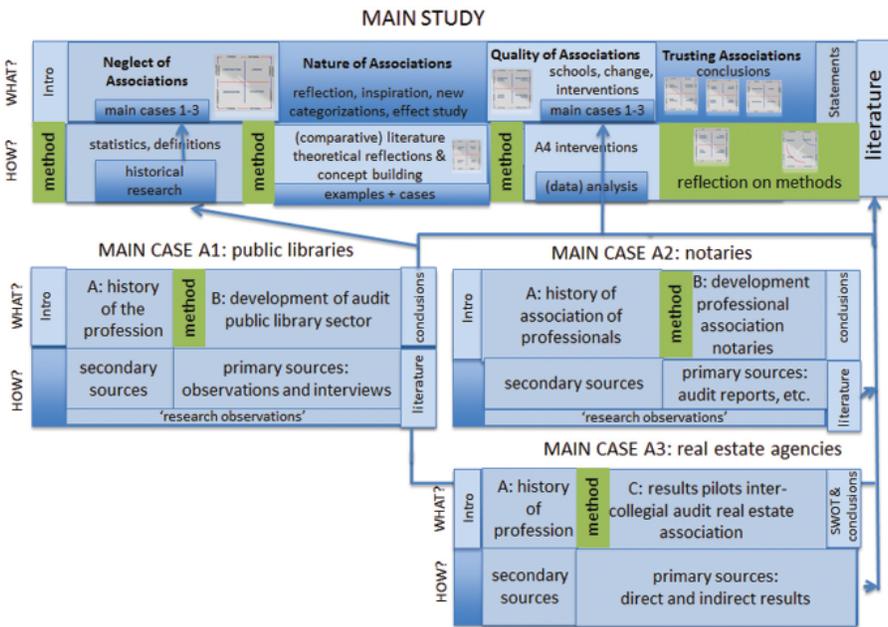


Figure 1 Structure of the Study

## 4. Three Themes: Trust, Associations and Quality

There can be little doubt that this study is broad in its scope and complex in its subject matter. Reading this study works best when remembering that it is about three concepts and three cases. On an abstract level, all are connected through one conceptual image in the shape of a 3D-matrix. This chapter is about the themes or ‘words,’ ‘terms’ and ‘concepts’ that dominate this study (Grood & Medendorp, 1993).

When an economic crisis hits, when digitization undermines old ways of work and when the newspapers are full of incidents concerning members of your association, then the reaction will never be one that can only be described in rational terms. In trade and professional associations (better named as “occupational associations”), it is clear that a likely loss of income will translate into a loss of position and esteem, which can touch deeply on feelings and emotions. In voluntary associations, there does not need to be a loss of income, but the impact can still be felt deeply. There is no better word that captures this combined threat of income, position and status better than the word ‘trust.’ The size, cohesion or fragmentation of an association can best be seen through the lens of this word. Yet, translating this word into a meaningful concept is hard. The research here describes trust mostly in terms of a ‘fuzzy system,’ using human emotions as a dynamic system that holds enough keys to be measured. A specific key in the three cases is the vote of the introduction of peer review – more emotional than it appears - and this again is set against the background of an historic sociological approach to get closer to the issue of trust (Abbott, 2016). This study uses two other concepts to raise enough issues to be able to say something about trust or trustworthiness: ‘associations’ and ‘quality’.

The next theme is that of ‘associations.’ It concerns the seemingly passive vessel within which mutual trust can blossom. In reality, associations are far from stable institutional vessels for trust. A cumulation of ‘incidents’ that may hurt the association both from within (bonding for the in-group) and from the outside (bridging for the out-group), may hurt the public and private added value of an association. Evidence for this can be the loss of membership, lobbying power and revenue. However, getting adequate data for this is one of the challenges of this study. For instance, the ‘economics of trust’ states that trust always affects two measurable outcomes: speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed will also go down. This could well be translated as the speed with which the membership of associations grows or the speed with which decisions are taken. These data may be found at the level of individual associations or their individual members, but not at any collective or national level.

The last theme is that of ‘quality,’ and the way this is actively, by intervention, used to address issues of trust. This second concept carries with it a seeming rationality. In practice, you could argue that every time a new standard is set for the behavior of the members, or a code of governance or conduct is approved, the association is building trust. However, the question is whether these interventions are followed by a perceived—inside and outside the association—change in the actions of the association and its members. In practice, any meaningful form of quality will create differences of opinion, resulting in resistance against change and other effects which may appear less than rational in their cumulative effect.

## Trust

These are the combined approaches through which the theme of trust is operationalized:

- a. measurement of trust in professionals
  - b. the use of a historical perspective
  - c. describing an ‘incident and intervention’ perspective
  - d. association-as-a-construct perspective
  - e. network and ‘social capital’ perspective
  - f. combining trust and ratio perspectives: seeking ‘tratio’
- a. *Measurement of trust in professionals*  
For some trades and professions, there are trust indicators through repeated survey methods. They provide rankings in terms of status (II, 4, table 5.2). Though the surveys provide indicators of trust and how they can be measured, they are too limited in their scope to be used for associations as a whole. They do provide some specific perspective for the cases of notariat (A2) and real estate agents (A3). In all three case studies, there are also evaluations and satisfaction measurements available on the changes in the association and the effects of quality initiatives. These will be brought together and compared in part IV of this study. However, these measurements are mostly relevant in the sense that they show how survey statements and actual voting behavior can differ over time. Though much progress is made in the field of trust measurement, there is still too much progress to be made to use them directly for this study.
- b. *The use of a historical perspective*  
Not by design, but because of questions that arose during the case studies, there is a strong historical perspective in this study, which may also say much about the issue of trust.

Comparing two cases (public libraries and notariat), there was much about the nature of the associations that could not be explained from just an economic crisis or the threat of digitization.

It made the researcher dive into the history of the sectors and professions in the first part of each case and become aware of historic and international forces behind the development of associations. In the second part the micro history was followed of the introduction of a quality intervention, each time leading to crucial 'events'. This again is much in line with Abbott's idea of "processual sociology" (Abbott, 2016), even though criticized by Wilterdink (Wilterdink, 2018). Partly, these forces can be explained by aspects like power distance and the ownership of information, but it is also about the kind of bonding and bridging that does or does not take place. Recent literature on the 'history of trust' (Hosking, 2014) (Uslaner, 2018) shows a renewed interest in vital questions about the role of trust in society. This study is not directly aimed at giving answers to this, but it may contribute to the mechanisms behind it, especially when through the use of the matrices, a new perspective is described on how associations rise, fall and rise again.

- c. *Describing an "incident and intervention" perspective*  
in this study, it is implicitly assumed that the best way to show trust—or better, its lack—is by testing that trust. The test comes when abstract notions about crisis and change leave the pages of magazines and the far away images from media channels, and become real, and hit close to home. A local library that suddenly closes its door, a notary you know personally is arrested because of his involvement in a money-laundering scheme, the real estate agent from which you bought a house goes bust. Some of these 'incidents' can have such an impact that it seems to stand not just for an individual member, but for the whole of the profession and its association. In that sense, they have a symbolic meaning (Elchardus, 2005) and are often described as "the rotten apples that hurt the whole cart." (Scholten & Ellemers, 2016) They have a character that cries out for action. And this is where it gets interesting. Each incident cries out for a response. A response that has to be put into rational language, if it wants to convince. It also requires a response that has legitimacy, if it wants to distinguish itself from the kind of behavior that caused the incident. It is here that quality interventions come into play, as they can be generally described as an intervention in the status quo and carry with it the legitimacy of certification; or aspects like these should make it possible to say enough about trust in associations when this 'incident and intervention' mechanism goes into action. When and if the members agree to the operational question to start with a quality intervention, this may not prove that all the members trust the board to improve the association or even stop incidents from happening, nor will it in any way immediately restore trust with the wider audience, but it can be enough of an

indicator of (regaining) trust within the association itself to use for this study.

d. *Stability perspective*

Associations—“classic associations” is the term that will be used here – are bodies or institutions based on and disciplined by, both internal and external laws and regulations. Their governance is not like that of businesses or (semi)-public bodies, but even the smallest has checks and balances built into its structure.

A strong law is in itself not evidence of trust in an institution like an association. Quite the contrary. It can be seen as evidence of mistrust in the self-governing capacity of the (members) of the association. This is one reason why it is interesting to observe whether an association with an external oversight body like the notariat (Case A2), has more trust issues than one without, like the public library association (Case A1).

The speed with which institutional laws change, or better, the lack of speed, can be considered evidence of trust. In the case of associations, we see little or no fundamental change in the laws governing them (Ch. 1.4). In that sense, associations are seen as stable, trustworthy institutions indeed. This point is one of the reasons why this study finds it less interesting to look at the structure of associations as such but is interested in the changes in standards within that system of (classic) associations. On the whole, it must be understood that this makes associations more relevant from the perspective of stability than that of change. This can be very relevant at the moment members and other stakeholders look for associations to bring change! Associations are “stability engines,” the places where you are “being heard” (Cefkin, Melissa & Anderson, 2007). They bring into practice what Luhmann (Luhmann, 1979) wrote about trust leading to complexity reduction and reduction of information costs. Other writers have expanded on this reasoning. In the Netherlands, for instance, Zijderveld (Zijderveld, 2000). But again, what if associations are the only vehicle available for individuals and small entrepreneurs who are confronted with scandals and other breaches of trust. How do you “reconceptualize” that?

e. *Network and ‘social capital’ perspective*

Behind the general observations that can be made about associations and issues of trust, there should be an awareness of the fact that for most parties involved, associations are but a means to an end. The time is truly past that only through a walk up the association’s ladder can esteem be realized. People and professionals can look for sources of position and status by other means than through official membership of an association.

In some ways, people try to return to the days of De Tocqueville, where there was no strong government and no dominant businesses. Mutual interdependence produced then the total trust or distrust you get when sharing is key to a good life. Nowadays, the context is very different, but there is a new need for collective action in the shape of network activities, civil society activities, voluntary or other participation activities (here, for now: network activities). The actual volume of these activities is huge—and clearly giving a new dynamic and perhaps an alternative to the classic way of associating. The motives or sources for this urge to form new networks or communities is diverse: group dynamics, the goal of the group, its organizing principles or system, culture, symbolic or power aspects all play a role. (DeKeijzer, 1996) (Cohen A. , 1985) (Godfroij, 1981). Even a short look is enough to see that the amount of scientific research into these network activities far outstrips that of the research into classic associations. To this researcher, this is one more reason to keep some distance to network activities as the object of this study. This too because it seems, strangely enough, even more necessary to do research into classic associations than it is into network activities. There is also a more material reason, which has to do in with their different dynamics, which again translates itself into different ways of decision making and the consequences for the issue of trust. It is assumed here that trust becomes visible the moment all members have to decide on the same issue or intervention. It is assumed that the rules of coming to a consensus in an association differs from a network and so do issues of trust.

To this, perhaps one exception can be made. This is the concept of “social capital,” as initiated by Putnam (Putnam R. , Democracies in flux. The evolution of social capital in contemporary society., 2002) (Putnam R. , 2015), and from different angles expanded by the likes of Murray (Murray, 2012) and Silva (Silva, 2013), translated into trust issues by Nooteboom (Nooteboom, 2006-35) (Nooteboom, 2005) and economic growth (Schaik, 2002) (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2009). Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1995) (Fukuyama, 2011) (Fukuyama, 1999) comes with his dimension of ‘kinship’ also close to the concept of social capital, though he seeks it against an historical background of orientations toward power and not in the context of small communities. Gaining social capital is relevant to all activities in life, independent of the structure within the activities take place. There is a strong argument to be made that the divide between rich and poor in societies is as much due to social as it is to financial capital (Franklin, 2018).

Even so, social capital remains, somewhat like trust, an elusive concept. It is hardly ever an issue when soliciting a job in the world of business and government.

Money, that form of ordinary capital, remains king when it comes to the everyday calculations of status and even trust. This is not the case in most, if not all associations. Not only because volunteers play an important role in most associations, including leadership positions, but also because even in purely professional associations, activities are done with the mindset of volunteers. Here, status is likely to beat money as a motivator. Some, like Haidt (Haidt, 2012) with his moral foundations theory, suggest this is linked to the specific morals people have come to hold dear. This is a very wide interpretation of Kahneman's analysis of our thinking processes (Kahneman, 2011) and it probably shows that social psychologists are still not finished with the way group formation and socialization processes are actually done and never will be. New insights, though, are coming up, see for instance Ellemers and others. Here we also look for organization sociological insights. If, as the brothers Heath state, community building is about 'The power of moments,' this might provide a reason why classic associations are in decline, as is evident from the case studies presented here that in each case the rituals and moments of symbolic importance—causes for trust—have declined in number and importance, making place for more businesslike approaches. Relevant too might be findings like that from Lindberg (Lindberg, 2017), showing that as people go through life, the number of relationships decline and, in effect, our social capital declines, an explanation for increasing loneliness, but also for a decline in trust. But whatever the sources or daily use of the social capital concept, the implications for the issue of trust are twofold. On the one hand, it can be assumed that by gaining social capital there is also an accumulation of trust both in the person and the association he or she represents. On the other hand, it must be assumed that there is more to lose when there is a lot of social capital invested in an association. This will not be something to investigate directly, but it is important to keep this in mind when looking at the dynamics of an association. Most of all when it becomes 'crunch time' and a decision has to be made among the members to decide on something that could be good in the long term but might hurt in the short run. Why should I trust the board to be right?

- f. *Combining trust and ratio perspectives: seeking 'tratio'*  
Getting a grip on issues concerning associations and quality took many years. A conceptual approach, developed in the 1990s by this researcher, was important when looking at the reality of change programs born from system approaches (which are still the dominant approach, associations included, see Part III and A4). Many of the leaders of the organization he audited stated to be very much in favor of some kind of logical and systematic change program but behaved as if they were under siege from a dangerous enemy. The people in the organization could be blamed for their resistance to change, but it appeared that the systematic approach itself was a big part of the problem. Other elements of power and favoritism also played roles. In line with much modern thinking, the

underlying causes of resistance to change (Rijnja, 2012) became a source of new insights. It came together in a number of articles, of which two written together with Prof. Saner (Noordhoek & Saner, 2008) (Noordhoek & Saner, 2011), were a critique of the New Public Management (NPM) movement. Central to the article was a matrix by this researcher in which, on the one hand, a line was drawn from trust to mistrust and on the other hand a line from rational to emotional. The resulting matrix has specifically been used and tested in this study for the variant of association standards (Part II), but other matrices have also been derived from it, including the important matrix on four schools of quality approaches (Part III).

Trust and its counterpart distrust are brought together, with rational and emotional as counterparts. There are many kinds of rationality (Bouwmeester O. , 2017) (Bouwmeester & Tack, 2017) and emotionality can very well also be considered a kind of rationality or logic (Cornelis, 2000), but because of the likely common perception of the term “emotion,” this is a better counterweight than “irrationality” or “a-rationality,” though the latter two terms might be more correct. The term “distrust” can be a natural counterweight for “trust,” as this term already carries the necessary negative weight with it<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the terms are not used in a “descriptive” sense (Grood & Medendorp, 1993) (Ahaus, 2006), as much as in a “conflicting” sense; creating clarity through looking at perceived opposites.

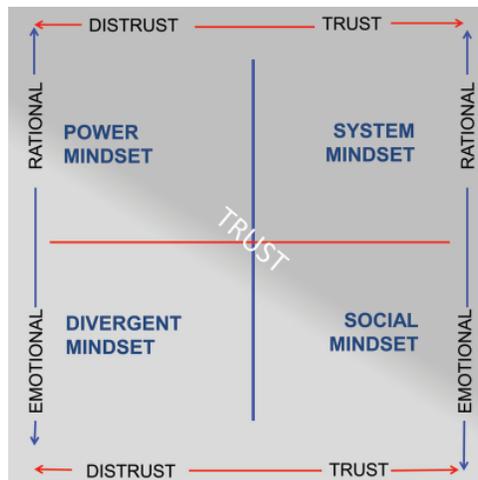


Figure 2 T-Matrix on Trust

2. The concepts of trust and distrust are paired in this research as on a line. Research into the concept of trust and distrust has shown that both can exist also alongside each other; you can trust and distrust at the same time. Accepting this, for the purpose of this research it is enough to present it as a dichotomy.

As will be seen, an “association matrix” plays a vital role in answering the question of what the dynamics of an association are, yet over time there are other matrices, which were developed: for the concept of quality (Q), the added value (V) of the activities of associations, the way an association positions itself and promotes its own position (P), and the efforts at governance of associations both from within and from outside (G). All of them might help with understanding the dimensions in which human beings work together to form an effective association. Not all matrices can be fully described within the confines of this research. Attention will most of all be given to the association matrix and to the way quality interventions are used (leading to a translation into different “mindsets” from which quality can be approached). The others will receive far less attention, though there will be referrals to publications outside the research presented here. Even so, what there is will be brought together in one more matrix. Together, the six matrices lead to a three-dimensional picture of the concept behind associations. This then, together with all the observations coming out of the three case studies and other sources, will be the methodological base behind the final conclusions for this study. The terms within the matrix will be defined later, but the reader is, of course, very welcome to try and come up with their own meaning or test the validity of the concepts developed here.

## Associations

Writing this study also required knowledge and understanding of two rather different disciplines: the study of associations and the study of quality approaches. The first is, surprisingly enough, rather new and in many ways still unrecognized. Though there are whole universities and faculties dedicated to the study of businesses and public administrations, and there are chairs dedicated to the study of co-operatives or corporations and of network and other co-optive initiatives, the study of associations is only recognized as a separate discipline within parts of private law. It knows no chair or other source of research beyond this.

This is one of the reasons for calling the first part of the main study “On the Neglect of Associations.”

The second discipline is the study into quality approaches, which has a history and a true body of knowledge, but is as such not a big discipline, and so far, not aimed at quality practices within associations as such.

‘Associations’ are the object of this study. But how to approach it? The single term ‘association’ gets 27 million hits on Google Search (November 14, 2018, query in English). The second step is to delete from this number all references to verbs like ‘to associate’ (to connect or to link), even though they can have much to do with the object.

The third big step is to delete all references that have only to do with a single association and not with associations as such or with any observations on associations that are helpful from a historic, economic, social or comparative perspective—and from a perspective of trust. During this research, a great many searches have been done, but only enough to know that more needs to be done in order to get a sharp sense of where associations stand today. In the context of the search for answers to the question of ‘trust in associations’ it is illustrative that, looking through the databases available to Tilburg University Library, there were only 207 sources found, of which only thirteen could be considered relevant to this study. The significance of this query is limited, as this study will show that there are many more relevant titles to be found than just thirteen, but it is an indication of the struggle for adequate sources into a concept with such self-evident meaning as ‘associations.’ Associations, as entities, can be described as a known-unknown: it is often used, but less is known than is generally assumed. That brings with it a lot of work and thinking for this study. This will ultimately result in an ‘agenda’ to pay more attention to associations as an object of study. Before that, a serious attempt is made to define associations and seek knowledge as to what they are, what they do and how they work and develop. This, in turn, will bring with it a renewed categorization of associations and, more importantly, a description of the new dynamic of associations in times of transformation.

### *Definition*

We start out by seeing an association as a group or social unit recognizable by five conditions: 1) voluntary entry and exit are by achievement and not by ascription; 2) the group decides on issues in a fundamentally democratic nature; 3) there are autonomous standards through formalization and specialization; 4) it is recognized as a legal entity and 5) as an association it shows self-similarity to other associations.

This is in line with definitions by others (see ch. 3). In order to look at changes in the way associations develop, those five conditions are brought back to the democratic decision-making nature of an association and its standards and the connection to an overarching goal.

Much more on this in part I and II, including the reasons for this approach as the basis for a definition and questions related to its standards for entry & exit and the use of closed or open standards. Knowing there are many kinds of associations, an earnest effort will be made to encompass all kind of associations. This includes trade and professional associations, but also more private and voluntary driven associations (the US Internal Revenue Service recognizes twenty-seven different kinds of nonprofit entities for exemption status (IRS, 2018, p. 557)). Many of these are active in, or share characteristics with, civil action and network activities. Nevertheless, this study starts and ends with associations that in some measure are named as and are recognizable as associations and fit the approach taken here.

Network activities get another place in the association matrix and are part of a wider dynamic. The same goes for purely market-driven associations like co-ops or corporations, though much of what is written here applies to them as much as for more ‘meeting- or link-driven’ forms of association. The explanation for these borders comes with the introduction of the association matrix and are not directly a consequence of legal boundaries.

### *Knowledge and Sources*

Knowledge of associations can be brought together at several levels. Sometimes there is too much literature available, or too little. Resources have been considered at several levels.

On the first level, there are the individual associations. Gaining knowledge about individual associations is usually doable, if only for the fact that certainly classic associations have a strong tradition of celebrating their jubilee and strongest achievements and that there are often older members willing to write about the history of an association. Increasingly, economic and financial institutions do detailed research at sector level about the performances of collectives like associations in their field studies. In the context of this study, histories and sector studies have been used, especially in the case studies. At the beginning of each case, a long-term historical perspective is used. After this, there comes a detailed description with a timeline of the decision making within an association on the introduction of a peer review approach.

On a second level, and exclusively concerning classic associations, there is a body of literature of a legal nature. It is quite remarkable how stable this is (note that this study is mostly based on Dutch and American sources). In every country studied here, there is a limited group of legal handbooks that cover the legal aspects of each group that chooses an association as a legal entity.

The nature of this legal entity is marked by one specific item—members—and is the subject of private laws, including fiscal laws. As the laws around legal entities change, so do the handbooks, but when comparing for instance the handbook of Van Dijk of 1979 (when this researcher studied law at Leyden University), with the edition of 2013 (Dijk & Ploeg, 2013) and with the new handbook edition of 2018 (Schwarz, Zaman, & (Red.), 2018), the similarities are much stronger than the differences between the editions. The whole body of private law has changed, but not the essential nature of association law (In the Netherlands: Book II NBW). The same goes for the American situation, with the important note that the status of an association seems very much dependent on fiscal codes and that possible changes in that code require constant vigilance on the part of the associations (witness, for instance, ASAE’s weekly policy brief (ASAE, 2018)).

The one condition the IRS states for qualification under section 501(c)(3), is that “the association must have a written document, such as articles of association, showing its creation.” (IRS, 2018).

On a third level, there is also a significant amount of knowledge about the tasks and functions of associations, including leadership issues. This is gathered quite effectively in the context of executive association societies like ASAE in the United States and DNA in the Netherlands, and in a most innovative way by the Dubai Association Centre (DAC). Most of this literature has been read or is known by the researcher. However, almost all literature has the character of general or ‘management’ literature, not of academic literature. There is a great lack of quantitative data and lack of more fundamental studies. Except for a single dissertation like that of Van der Rijken (Rijken, 2011) in the Netherlands, associations as such are no object of Ph.D. studies.

On a fourth level, this study has put effort into the counting of associations. Part I describes how different sources at the national and international level cannot provide an accurate count of the number of associations, let alone of its members. Some research is there, and cries out for more, but it is limited (Grote & Lang, 2006). More research needs to be done, but what this researcher has been able to count, indicates that the number of associations is much larger than is generally assumed. It is also likely that, whereas in the Western countries the actual number may be in decline, on a worldwide scale, the story might be different. From several conversations this researcher has had, it looks like, at the moment, no public or private party, research institute or association is interested in quantitative research into associations. It is hoped that this study will lead to more research, by connecting better to, for instance, studies on volunteers (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs, Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, & Oppenheimer, 2018) (Dekker & Hart, 2009) and possibly by connecting to life-cycle statistics like that of Lindberg (Lindberg, 2017) because it seems important to move from numbers on the institute of associations to that of the members and their motives for entering, staying or leaving associations.

Also, in order to get to a fifth and more fundamental level, this study goes back to the ‘group’ nature of an association and the standards involved. This also means a going back to the original thinkers and sources of sociology. Most of all: Durkheim (Durkheim, 1897). This could well be the most challenging part of the study, as it basically means covering all of sociological thought (including economic and other subdisciplines). To limit the scope, here literature is used regarding groups and their borders and added literature on trust in associations, and sources on formal categories for associations.

There is a sixth and last level of gathering knowledge about associations. The effort to categorize associations in a better way, using the association matrix, leads to an unavoidable test; how balanced is the way we look at associations and define them correct? How do different standards and tasks lead to different associations? This means looking into associations by sector and standard. This also means using sector knowledge to a high degree. Care has been given to use literature that is as representative of the sector as can be, but no doubt interesting titles will have been missed. Even so, it is worth pointing out one other fundamental aspect of associations that was brought to life this way: the fundamental right of people to gather themselves into associations. This is a fundamental human right, laid down in treaties, that seems to get very little attention nowadays. An important point for an agenda that gets longer as more knowledge is gained and missed.

### *Understanding the Dynamic*

Most of the research done about associations in this study concerns the what? and how? questions. This is unavoidable in order to make progress. Nevertheless, this study, including its case studies, is about change, about the possible dynamics in associations. Are they but relics of the past or do they have a future? In the combination of the case studies and insights from the main study, the question of ‘why associations?’ will be answered as much as possible, given the limitations in research and the constant changes in society to which associations both have to respond and contribute. This will be done by looking deep into the operational question of coming to a decision on a quality intervention that is proposed in general and opposed when it becomes specific. Here, the association has to prove its added value to the members—and indirectly to society at large. Again, the case studies are important here and are also indicative of successful strategies to get the desired dynamic. Still, to have the kind of validation this question of added value deserves, there can be no doubt more research needs to be done—or perhaps we should accept that De Tocqueville was right when he spoke about “the Art of Association.” An art, not a science.

## Quality

In contrast to the study of associations, there is no lack of thinking or of sources when it comes to ‘Quality’ as a concept. Different ‘schools’ or approaches can be found in the literature and are used here. Within the context of this study, interest goes primarily to the use of the concept as a response to ‘incidents’ that can damage the position or reputation of an association. In other words, quality is not the object of this study, but its way of studying it. A perceived lack of quality asks for a response or measure. This will or will not come in the shape of a ‘quality intervention’; any method of change that has in it the perspective that it raises quality in a prescribed way.

As loose as this definition sounds, in fact, there are only a few generally accepted ways of intervening in the quality of an association and its members, none more so than certification and accreditation. The inevitable question is then: does it help? Does it change the perception of the association in the eyes of the members and the outside world? Though, in fact, not that much is written on the use of quality interventions by associations—by far the most is written with individuals and their organizations, meaning businesses and (semi-) public bodies in mind—there is no shortage of sources. Associations are perhaps their biggest user. Certification of products and services is often done at association level, including the formulation of standards. Certification, as part of the ‘permanent education’ of associations, is more often than not part of the entry requirements of an association. The internal disciplining of members is also done on the base of quality standards. Last, but not least, the knowledge transfer about quality approaches mostly takes place within the context of association conferences, workshops and training. Much more, for instance, than in the world of universities or schools of applied science. Given all that, how much could be expected from associations when an answer has to be given to economic or digital challenges and a surplus of incidents? How resilient are associations? This study, written after a book by this researcher on ‘Sector-wide quality’ (Noordhoek P. , 2011), is written on the assumption that regular quality interventions like product and service certification and the internal disciplining systems, are not enough to keep the effects of crisis at bay. Raising standards is not enough when the way standards are set themselves becomes the problem. More is needed, different approaches are necessary.

### *Definition*

The way we talk and write about ‘quality’ is often intuitive. Something, a product or service, is considered “good” and the word quality is mentioned. An appointment is kept, and it shows a person’s quality. As the context in which the word quality is used changes, so does its specific meaning, at least in the eye of this researcher. To many in the world of associations, there is less doubt about its meaning. Almost always a standard has to be met to be certifiable, almost always a measurable effort must be made in order to get accredited. Yet this study is written with a crisis in the background and a noticeable need for change in the foreground. This makes room for other ways of looking at the meaning of quality. In Part III an approach to quality is given that certainly differs from the classic empirical or systemic way of looking at it. At the same time, it builds upon an intense debate among a small group of professionals in the Dutch field of quality, among them Vinkenburg, Van Kemenade, Hardjono, Van Schijndel and others, like this researcher, about the different minsets from which to think about the concept of quality. This study hopes to bring this debate further with some fresh insights on the actual effect of defining quality and putting this in the context of issues of (dis)trust and (non-)ratio.

### *Different Interventions*

Connected to the different views on quality are the different interventions that can be made in order to influence the quality, however defined. They concern the interventions that are already known in associations, but also many more that are not or less known. This goes far beyond the kind of interventions that can be expected in empirical forms of quality like certification or the more systemic ones like TQM or award schemes like Baldrige or EFQM. The more important distinction is here between quality interventions aimed at controlling quality and those aimed at bringing more dynamic into quality efforts. In this study, a second look is taken at source material from 2011 and earlier on quality interventions and what happened with them. All can be found in attachment A4. Sources come from both current literature and from information gained by the researcher.

Specific mention must be made of quality interventions that involve the members of associations themselves in the role of auditor or reviewer. It concerns so-called 'horizontal' inter-collegial 'peer' review or 'visitation.' For this, use is made of available literature, but most of it builds on research done by the researcher in the context of fourteen associations with inter-collegial approaches.

There are three terms in the literature that can lead to misunderstandings: internal audits, governance and academic peer review.

Internal audits are often done in the context of financial or business control. Most literature on internal audits comes from accountancy and controlling professions. It is relevant, but concerns professionals who are dedicated to their control function on an often full-time basis, and not part-time colleagues who do their review more based on their knowledge of the sector than that of the audit profession. Governance can also be a misleading term here, as it does not concern reviews by board members who are placed in a permanent position of authority. Governance is also a term more applied to foundations and nonprofit institutions with their checks and balances than in the context of associations with their board structures. Within associations, board members cannot be auditors at the same time. Nevertheless, the literature on governance can and does provide insights on quality initiatives like peer review, but a translation must be made for associations. The final and perhaps most confusing aspect about the term 'peer review,' especially in the context of a dissertation, is that with academic peer review. On the surface, the difference is clear. Academic peer review concerns publications and can be done without a meeting between author and reviewer. Peer review as discussed here, involves a visit to the auditee. In practice, the difference is greater. Academic peer review has a clear objective of objectivity and neutrality, peer review as written about here is consciously inter-subjective. It would be interesting to write more on the differences between both, also because there is a heated debate on the merits and demerits of academic peer review, but here this researcher simply concurs with all those who say that peer review is the least bad of all other alternatives.

## 5. Three Cases: Public Libraries, Notaries and Real-Estate Agents

Out of many different quality initiatives in associations he has been involved with, this researcher has selected three to describe in depth. In the main study, they will be summarized in two parts; the first at the end of part I, the second half at the end of Part II. They will be brought together and compared with each other in the final part of the study.

Their first half will be presented at the end of part I. Since most of the cases are in this half, this is about their background and history. They help to illustrate the complex dynamic of associations as described in the rest of the first part of this study, describing and analyzing events “as the social process evolves over time” (Abbott, 2016). How associations have come about may explain much about the way they formulate entry-and-exit conditions and standards. This development hardly ever goes in a straight line. There will be some surprising developments to discuss.

After Part II, on the “nature of associations,” the three cases are revisited to assess their resolutions in Part III. As this part is about the “quality of associations,” it is fitting that three cases are about just that. Each will conclude in such a way that it contributes an answer to the questions on change; first of all, at the level of the case itself, but also on the question of change within associations as a whole. In the final part of the main study, the three case studies will be compared with each other and connected to the insights from the chapter on quality and associations. Here the subtitle of this study becomes visible: a surging approach to associations.

It must be said that the summaries in the main study are not as rich as the case studies themselves. All three have required extensive research effort and are extensively provided with observations and relevant literature (which is the reason why the case summaries have no literature referrals. But they have been written in Dutch. Readers who have not mastered this language can ask the author for a (part) translation).

As such, all three studies can stand on their own. The second case study, on the development of notaries, will, at the request of their board, be published separately by the Stichting ter bevordering voor de Notariële Wetenschap (Foundation for the Promotion of Notarial Sciences) and Kluwer Publishers, as part of their “Ars Notariatus” publication series.

To get to where this researcher is now, a whole host of specific methodologies have been used. This is especially clear with the three case studies. Also, because they have been written before this main text, they illustrate best how this study has grown from a methodological point of view.

## The first case study as a very reflective practitioner

The case study of library services is probably a typical example of a study where a “reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1983) (Brookfield, 1998) goes on a “journey” and makes observations while “participating” (Lewin, 1948) and applying “double loop learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The reader is led step by step through the process of getting a new approach to an audit system accepted by the public libraries. The role of the researcher is an active one, with a critical reflection on the quality approach already in use and bringing a new, peer review-driven approach to the context of libraries. What is developed within this context is also relevant to the other cases. The new approach got off to a promising start, with seemingly broad support among people working in the sector. However, in an unforeseen manner, the proposal was voted down in the general assembly of the public library association. This crisis became a crucial learning experience not only for this but for all three case studies. For a short time, his assignment was on the line, and he was searching for how to deal with it. It was also then that, for the first time, the idea of doing a case study came about; the first step on the way to this thesis. In the words of Giddens, it has started out as “primarily an exercise in clarification in logical issues.” (Giddens, 1976)

After this crisis, this expert was to resume his role, but less as the creative expert and more as a process manager and advocate of the new approach. His observations and the idea to turn it into a case study, also make him look at another assignment, that of the notaries. The world of notaries seems different at first glance, but the similarities are certainly there. One element is certainly different from the other case study: the libraries have no form of external oversight, but the notaries do. Does this make a difference for the (speed of) change? This aspect and others are added to the observations. In the end, the expert may seem a bystander in his own process, but that is not how it felt during the process, which asked for constant vigilance. It must be said that the expert operated in a team that provided great opportunities for reflection and coordination.

## The second case, as a historian and constant observer

The role of the researcher in the case study of the notaries is less active and more distant than with the libraries because the notariat has a well-functioning audit office. However, though the involvement of the expert is much longer with the notariat than with the other case studies, he personally had been less involved in the policy-making surrounding the quality initiative. This has turned him into more an observer than in the other cases. This is also the only case for which formal interviews have been done. All his insights and reflections come together in the text of the case as [Onderzoekers (“researchers”) observations], recognizable by the square brackets;

[OO: ]. Far more important than the interviews will be the time he spends in the library of the Foundation for the Notariat scientific. Aided by the staff and others, a chronology is made of the development of the notaries<sup>3</sup>. This includes a remarkable repetition in the dynamic, not yet observed (or liked) by the people within the notariat who heard or read it. Still, it helps to inform the wider dynamic in the associations of both notaries and libraries. So, in this second case study, literature becomes markedly more important than in the case of the libraries, and especially literature of a legal nature. The study of secondary literature and the direct process observations (including interviews) together make for a detailed case study. This is also because it is possible to apply insights from the library case study, including a matrix that shows off well the dynamic, into the case study of the notariat. Even so, there are problems coming to an answer (a quantitative one) to one of the most pressing questions concerning the effectiveness of peer review, especially compared to the results of the oversight body. There is detailed insight into the results of the audits as performed by members of the association, but not on the work of the oversight body, and most of the results are more of a qualitative than a quantitative nature. In that regard, there is something with this case that is, from a methodological perspective, not as satisfying as it could be.

### A third case, as an outside expert

Unexpectedly, a third chance came along to have a case with a solid methodological base. In again the role of independent expert, this researcher wrote a design for a system of peer review for the association of real estate agents (NVM). As such, this process went very well, but it was clear that there was a lot of resistance within the group of 4000+ brokers against the coming of the peer review. The researcher was asked to write an “expert report” on the outcome of the twenty-two pilot audits after the first three months, to be used as a source of information and as a base for decision making. However, and mostly for other reasons than the audits, the only decision that was taken was to extend the pilot, do more audits and have the debate again later. One of the members at the board meeting also asked the following question: “Can we get more information on the added value of these audits for the members and the association?” Hard pressed to answer this question without repeating what the expert report already said, there came the idea of showing as many perspectives to the added value question as possible and where relevant. This became the report that is now the main part of the third case. It is both a validated and representative survey of all aspects of the proposed audit approach. It uses as conceptual framework many of the things learned in the other two cases and elsewhere.

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3. “Notaries” is the generic description used here. The full description of the function of a notary can differ from country to country. In the United States, we would only talk about the “public notaries.” In the Netherlands, all notaries are by definition public notaries, appointed by the crown, but they are responsible for their own income, and as such are entrepreneurs.

The feedback from the audits, the numbers, and findings on the pilots was gathered by people other than the expert.

Each audit has been evaluated with the aid of a standard evaluation form.

Extra statistics were gathered from available sources by the audit office.

The report has been distributed to all of the members and has been intensively debated at official and informal meetings. This case has been written as it appeared that the proposal to have peer review throughout the association was too controversial to make. At the time of writing, the decision by the members has been made, and it is a positive one.

As the three cases unfold, this researcher steps from 1) the role of reflective practitioner to 2) that of an observer using many sources, and finally, 3) into a straight research role. The conceptual aspects of the three cases are taken up again in the main study.

For the record: in all three cases, this researcher was commissioned as an independent outside consultant. This also goes for the writing of the report in the third case, that of the real estate agents' association. In the other two (larger) cases all research and writing have been done in the researcher's spare time, without payment. The main study has been written without outside commission or contribution.

**PART I**  
ON THE NEGLECT  
OF ASSOCIATIONS



## 6. To Associate or Not to Associate

How strange. In every time and age, we say something along the lines of “information is worth its weight in gold.” If that is true, then why are most of our libraries so poor? Think about it. For most of our history, the art of reading and writing must have been magic to most people. The few who could read or write had much to treasure. None more so than the ones who were tasked with safeguarding the written records of a village, a clan, or a nation. Written records that were revered or feared, but always collected, until there was a need for a separate room or building to house them all<sup>4</sup>. In them would be bookcases: bibliotheca. The ones who guarded the records must have known they guarded the most valuable information there was. It must have felt like a special vocation. There must have been a race going on: who had the biggest, most modern library? From Egypt to China: there is evidence of the special position of librarians everywhere. Nowadays, we still know about the library from Alexandria, the most beautiful in the world. It burned, and it probably burned because it was so important; full of volumes of papyrus scrolls, as valuable as gold, or more. Therefore, to an alien visiting this planet, what could be more important than a library? Who could have more authority than a librarian?

Meet Alice the Library Lady. She wears glasses, carries her hair in a bun, and goes to and from her work by public transport, saving her meager civil servant’s salary for more important things than a car. No, she is not the most powerful person in the world. Unfortunately, she has become the living cliché of a harmless, powerless, book-loving person. For all we know, she is the nicest possible person and a great strength to her family and place. So, without a trace of cynicism: a warm person and a good professional. Still, exactly because of this, we have to ask ourselves: what happened?

Maybe not that much. People with influence will always recognize the value or danger of knowledge and will want to own it. It was others who started doing something with the information: the nobles and their sons, the lawyers, the doctors; they started gathering and using all that was written. The keepers mostly kept, copied, and sometimes printed what was given. And were beholden to those in power. A society built around libraries never really came about, except in fiction (Rothfuss, 2007). Of course, there were exceptions to the rule. Over the centuries, remarkable “keepers of the books” reached prominence in universities and city libraries, as reading books became seen as the best way to increase the education of the people. Many buildings still attest to their influence. The story of the libraries and their librarians did not become a story of gathering books in order to limit the access to that knowledge and make it more exclusive and thus expensive. Librarians did very little to bond across distances and borders in order to standardize and control the flow of books.

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4. For notes: see A1

Human history would have been quite different if that had happened. Kings and bishops would have had to bow to the librarians—or probably would have become kings and bishops themselves. Instead, we have libraries that are more sympathetic than powerful and more about service than about knowledge. Together they are what? A sector, or branch? Their librarians are heads of organizations or activities; more civil servants or employers than identifiable as professionals with a common cause<sup>5</sup>. Sometimes an association just does not happen when you would most expect it. Strange.

Strange indeed, because elsewhere something rather different began<sup>6</sup>. Slavery was far from unusual at the time when libraries became important but some of those slaves could write, perhaps learned before being taken as a slave. They were in demand in order to write down, for instance, the slave owners' inventories or take stock of the harvest. They were asked to take "nota." Together with others who were not slaves (a not insignificant number, it must be said (Cohen D. , 1955)), they were called "notarii": those who take notes. And though there seems to be no direct link between the notarii and the later "notaries" of the Italian city-states, the connection is clear. And, somehow, these Italian notaries became the forerunners of the modern European notaries. The notaries made themselves indispensable in the business of exchanging information: in the end, only deeds and statutes written or recognized by notaries received legal status. They did so by aligning themselves to figures of power: bishops, kings, and emperors. And on the side, they started writing deeds for the layperson as well. The result, after centuries of changes in status: an intriguing combination of public status and private freedom. So much more than the librarian workers, they reaped wealth and status from their profession. Yet, at the same time, they did so by providing their services to office holders: first bishops and kings, later to other public office holders, and, in the process, becoming themselves at least in part public-office holders. In this development, their professional association played a big role; both for better and for worse, but always recognizable.

Why would one group of people, whom history has dealt all the chances of the world in purely strategic terms, fail to organize itself, while another, at one time bound in slavery, succeed? These are probably the kind of questions that can never fully be answered. At the same time, we have very good reasons to try and get some answers, and not just the pragmatic ones of fighting incidents within a profession. Too easily, we talk of transformations and this day and age is no exception, but it is true that the pace of change is growing rapidly.

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5. It is extra intriguing to know that the oldest Dutch branch organization is the "National Association of Booksellers". Over 200 years old, they still play a key role in, for instance, keeping the price of books constant. It is extra intriguing to know that the oldest Dutch branch organization is the "National Association of Booksellers". Over 200 years old, they still play a key role in, for instance, keeping the price of books constant.

6. For notes: see A2

Now both of the library services and the notaries experience great change: estimates are that each faced a shrinking of its size of about 40% in the crisis of 2008–2016, mostly caused by the digitization of its primary services: the lending of books and the passing of housing formalities. An extreme challenge for both, requiring in the mind of this researcher a “transsociation.” And what goes for these two, also goes for all of those hundreds upon hundreds, if not thousands of other sector, branch, and professional associations. How to deal with wrenching changes like these? History partly provides the answers. The question about the different fates of librarians and notaries can probably be traced back to the sixteenth century, when people like Erasmus and Martin Luther used the invention of the printing press to its utmost, spreading a message that the Bible should not only be read in Latin but also in the people’s own writing, in the process spreading books all around and making them part of every man’s possession. A technological revolution if ever there was one. It was the same age that guilds and professional associations came into their own, leading to the formation of a guild for the notarii, but not for the librarians, stuck in their monasteries. It would take until the time after Napoleon Bonaparte and before central government and businesses were so well-developed that they started to take care of the books for those needing reading skills for reasons of ideology or charity. Both the public and private domain claimed the libraries. How different it was for the notaries, close but not too close to the people and power, and free enough to form associations to better protect their interests together than they could alone. So, the development of associations can be both the start and the result of great historic processes, with true technological transformations as a driving force of change. But then, how to translate that to what is happening in the world of today, when associations seem to be declining in both status and numbers? When there is evidence that they are not trusted to play a constructive role in society or the market?

Before answering such “big questions,” let us first deal with some basics. Alexis de Tocqueville had a sharp eye but was quite wrong when it comes to his idea that “associations,” as the mother of action, “are studied and applied by all” (Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1839). Just the first paragraphs of this study will show this is not true, except for some limited aspects of the phenomenon. What are we talking about? What is an association? Or perhaps, even more fundamental, what is a group? Some answers are given here, partly based on historic and literature research and partly through observations by the author. The latter leads to several case studies.

Though the intention is to write on a global level, it must be said that much of the research by this author is, first of all, based on Dutch records and experiences, and secondly on knowledge of and experiences in the United States of America. It starts here with an attempt at answering the question of “what is an association?”

## 7. What Is an Association?

What is an association? In essence, the dictionaries say little more than that associations are an organized group of people who have the same job, aim, or interest. Added to it, several definitions try to say something about the way the group is “organized” (Dictionary.com, sd): it needs to have a structure or a “connection or cooperative link between people and organizations” (Grammarly.com, 2017), with “an established body of members and protocols” (Grammarly.com, 2017). When debating this definition, more questions than answers arise. Where to draw the line?

### Developing a Definition

For instance, seen from a historical or anthropological distance, clans, tribes, and even gangs can seem a lot like associations. They have rituals, meetings, inner and outer circles, they honor and expel. They also have a goal, dreams even, not the least of them earning respect. A goal that can also take them to crushing other tribes, clans, and gangs (Voeten, 2018), but in what respect is that different from a sporting association? What makes it extra hard to distinguish them is that official definitions of the associations of today are very open and elementary when just using the legal construction as its base. Neither Continental European law<sup>7</sup> nor the US Fiscal Code<sup>8</sup> demand much in the way of definition, and still, associations seem relatively easy to recognize as legal entities from others like the foundation, the cooperative or the participation. Still, the legal definitions do not really answer the question as to what makes them distinctive or why, for instance, it is so special that the right to form an association is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under Article 9 (see also Ch. 14, p. 119). It seems up to the more general social sciences to come up with better or more complete distinctions.

This starts here with the Dutch author Jolles (H.M., 1959) (Jolles, *Verenigingsleven in Nederland. Bijdragen tot de sociologie van het verenigingsverschijnsel*, 1963) (Jolles H., 1978). Mentioning him is also a nod to someone who in the 1960s actively pointed out the importance of associations in modern life<sup>9</sup>. Jolles warned that there is a continuum between “situations” where people meet and interact for a very short time and the “collectives” or even “social categories” where the interhuman relations become inescapable and enduring.

7. See for instance: (Dijk & Ploeg, 2013) (Ploeg, 1978) (Tonkelaar, 1979) (Leeuwen, 1979)

8. See for instance: (IRS, 2018) (ASAE, Membership, 2016)

9. Jolles work and that of others was done justice in an article by Fassaert (Fasseart, 1987) from the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam in a publication on “Associations and Change”. This author almost missed this article because, as with so many other articles connected to associations, its title was connected to research on the history of “harmony” of “brassband orchestra” associations so it looked like a single aspect title. One more reason not to mention libraries, notaries or brokers in the title of this thesis.

Describing this continuum is what this part of the study is very much about, but first, here comes a more extended definition of a group and what conditions then turn that group into an association.

Starting with a general definition of a group as “a social unit in which interhuman relations have formed around a goal and that show themselves to be reasonably steady, enduring and immediate”. Jolles comes to four general conditions to be formulated before a group can be called an association:

- *voluntary entry and exit are by achievement and not by ascription*
- *the group decides on issues in a fundamentally democratic nature*
- *there are autonomous standards through formalization and specialization*
- *it is recognized as a legal entity*

The last condition, that of being recognized as a legal entity (in Dutch: rechtspersoon) is in normal life the main condition and where the question of recognition usually starts and ends. The other conditions are at least as significant. The first condition makes a distinction between those group memberships to which you belong because of birth or other family relation or because of other traditions. With associations, there is presumably always a choice or an endeavor involved. The condition is less clear than it may seem at first sight: when a baby is baptized in a church, it often automatically becomes a member of that church. It is presumably the parents that make the choice, not the baby itself.

The fundamentally democratic nature of an association<sup>10</sup> is also a condition that is not always understood or valued enough. Together with political institutions, associations form the only inherently democratic group of groups in society. For two reasons this is important to realize. For one, though associations are democratic, their members may not be and can take their more autocratic tendencies with them into the association, often leading to false assumptions. For instance, other than what is assumed in businesses and government, general assemblies are not “the boss” of the board. Both have, by law, a collective responsibility. For another, this might also explain why governments or public authorities are often tempted to see associations as extensions of themselves.

The autonomous standards might have the most impact on the actual functioning of associations. Not only on the associations themselves, but also on the members and their products and services, as it is mostly associations that set standards through instruments like certification and accreditation. Much more on this, starting in this chapter.

To these four conditions, one extra element can be added that may help in distinguishing associations from groups in general.

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10. See also Ch. 14, p. 128 and further, and (Adriaansens, 1979).

Inspired by Abbott (Abbott, 2001) and the “emergence paradigm” of Van Kemenade, it can be argued that if one looks at a large number of associations and compares them with each other, there emerges a fractal-like pattern that shows that:

### Associations have strong “self-similarity”

Almost everywhere in the world, there is the trinity of chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. There is always a contentious relationship between the board and members and other similarities. As associations split and merge across the globe, the same ways of organizing and deciding come back time after time. For something that has such an open structure and so few legal demands, this is quite remarkable and suggests that something more fundamental is going on than can be explained from the disciplining by private law or by the work of the notaries and other lawyers involved.

When, around 2012, a new association was formed of digital “community managers,” many within the world of associations were curious as to how the new generation would go about creating a new association. As it turns out, in the standard way, including the holy trinity of chairman, secretary, and treasurer. (Noordhoek P. , 2011)

It is presumed that it is the fundamental horizontal and democratic<sup>11</sup> nature of the decisionmaking that is of influence here. In the long run, the relations between the main elements and players of an association may level out. It may also lead to a stronger need to come to truly collective decision-making—as expressed by the general assembly and not just by the board<sup>12</sup>. In this again, associations differ from almost all other organizations. So, before moving on to other ways of looking at associations, it is good to see how others tried to write about associations. One of the things we shall see, is a dissatisfaction with the way associations have been studied at a general level.

### A Small History of Writing about Associations

The first idea, that there was something that set associations apart from other forms of organization, must have come with Alexis de Tocqueville study of Democracy in America (Tocqueville, 1839).

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11. The democratic nature of associations suggests the sort of democracy we know from political parties, but this does not need to be the case. For more, see Ch. 14 and publications like (Fung, 2003) (Warren, 1999) (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993) (Rosenblum, 1998).

12. The difference with the position of shareholders is that they can or cannot assent to a decision by the board. Voting rights can differ. In the case of associations, board and general assembly are one collective, all in principle with the same voting rights.

What he wrote would have a big impact and we will come back to it later (esp. Ch. 14, p. 122 and further). In the American context, much must be put in the context of the development of democracy and the strength of civic action, as described by Schudson (Schudson, 1999) and others.

The Americans themselves almost did not seem to know how special what they were doing was, but it opened the eyes of others in several countries, including Germany. An initial stream of studies on the “Verein” started to appear as part of new “sociological” sciences, led by Tönnies (Tönnies, 1887), and including an essay by Max Weber at the first ever Sociologists’ Day to start “eine Soziologie des Vereinwesens im weitesten Sinne des Wortes” (a sociology of associations as wide as possible (Weber, 1911)). But it seems other developments were more urgent for the sociologists and so the German wave of attention came to an end. Earlier historians started to write about the history of certain kinds of associations, mostly the elite kind of “societies” and “circles.” All the different shapes and terms for associations were noted down and described in detail (Schmalz, 1995). Nowadays, we would sooner call them networks, including the sometimes nasty odor of conspiracy around the term (Ferguson N. , 2017). Or we would simply see them as good for a nice nasty rhyme<sup>13</sup>:

*There are yacht clubs, golf clubs, clubs for luncheon,  
Clubs for flowing bowl and puncheon,  
Clubs for dancing, clubs for gambling,  
Clubs for sociable Sunday ambling,  
Clubs for imbibing literature,  
And clubs for keeping the cinema pure,  
Clubs for friendship, clubs for snobbery,  
Clubs for smooth political jobbery,  
As civilization onward reels,  
It’s clubs that grease the speeding wheels.*

In the Netherlands, the interest in societies waned after the introduction of the first modern law on associations in 1855 (Wet op de vereniging en vergadering, 1855). As the appreciation of the public for associations grew, the interest of the historians grew less, not to return till after 1930 and then mostly in the context of interest for specific cultural or “traditional” (volkse) associations and guilds<sup>14</sup>. Especially J.A. Jolles would do much to increase the knowledge about this kind of associations in the Netherlands (Jolles, 1963). In fact, they are more what Tönnies would call *Gemeinschaften* (communities) in contrast to the *Gesellschaften* (corporations).

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13. Ogden Nash, *The Very Unclubbable Man*, 1961. Geciteerd door Fassaert (Fasseart, 1987, p. 57)

14. The Meertens Institute in the Netherlands is specialized in the study of the culture and traditions of the Dutch people, including the way they are organized. It was one of their researchers, Fassaert, who provides many of the sources for this part of the text, at least until 1987 (Fasseart, 1987). His publication was almost missed because it was mostly aimed at the history of harmony or brass band associations.

It is a contrast that is perhaps an echo of what around that time, Durkheim wrote in France about, “mechanistic” and “organic” ways of organizing (Durkheim, 1897) (for both: see also Chapter 12).

Unfortunately, though the likes of Tönnies, Weber, and Durkheim did much to lay the foundations for the social sciences, it would take till long after the Second World War before the interest in associations as a specific form of organization grew again. This, in spite of the fact that after this war, a new and optimistic period of growth for all of the social sciences had started, helped by an impulse from American literature that was as heavy as the German influence was before the First World War. The American approach was recognizable by a more empirical and detailed way of looking at social and economic issues. This did not always put associations in a good light. However, in the Netherlands especially, there were probably more associations than at any time in history and they played a vital role (were “pillars”) in the accommodation of tensions between different religions and parts of the population (Lijphart, 1975). At the same time, associations were more and more seen as institutes that slowed the economy and social life down. Associations were considered not open enough to fit into a modern growing society that could deal with the threat of communism. In that context, in Britain, Popper, writer of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, would launch an attack on Durkheim because of his “closed” vision of communities (see also Ch. 12).

In the Netherlands, it would take till the end of the 1950s before there came some serious interest in the way organizations behaved, including associations. Jolles led the way in the Netherlands, Bardey in Germany (Bardey, 1956), Kruithof in Belgium, and Meister in France (Meister, 1972). From the United States came publications on voluntary associations from for instance Sills (Sills, 1968). In 1959, Jolles (Jolles, 1959, p. 18) wrote that “Like in Germany, we cannot point out any thorough study of phenomena, attempts at classification, any structural or functional analysis or deeper study into the specific relation with other phenomena.” There is anger about that because he considers associations so central to the social sciences. Research into associations can tell us more about “the sociology of communication, small groups, social control, use of power, social participation, institutionalization, social change, etcetera.” His anger would lead for a while into new activities and publications (Abma, 1962) in the circle around Jolles. However, in 1972, Jolles would conclude that both in the Netherlands and abroad not much had changed.

Maybe Jolles gave up too soon. The sixties and seventies became a testing ground for all kinds of new ways of organizing; less hierarchical, more democratic. That could have meant a revival of interest for the association. But perhaps the traditional association, with its structures and constraints did not appeal to many anymore. These were the years that the pillars broke down, churches started emptying, and amateur sports made way for the first time for professional sporting clubs.

What grew, partly in reaction to the more functional and empirical time of the 1950s, was an interest in cultural-sociological issues, inspired by the work of Norbert Elias (Elias, 1976) and others on “insiders” and “outsiders.” It probably helped to make existing associations more democratic but was also at odds with their mostly steady culture.

As far as associations were concerned, the revolution passed most of Europe by. As there is a lack of sources that look wide enough, it is hard to say how it compared, but it is likely that the management revolution in the period 1982-2002 did more to change associations than anything that went before—until it was followed almost immediately by the internet revolution. This most of all for trade and professional association, but also for voluntary associations and their alternative of networks. It is in fact not clear what the impact of these revolutions has been on associations, as there is not enough data to go on. But there are a number of developments that seem quite evident:

- Management issues have come to the fore. Like the public sector, associations started to borrow from management literature when it comes to using data, marketing, and targets for their membership and activities.
- Quality issues became much more important, mostly based on TQM (empirical, see Part III) approaches and with certification and accreditation becoming vital for the association and its business model.
- Leadership and HR of associations became prominent issues and have led to the first professionalization of associations, including professional associations in the Anglo-Saxon countries and later in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Gulf region, with much more permanent education activities and their credentialing.
- As the position of associations changed, including that of their members, the need to “be good and tell about it” became much greater, giving rise to lobbying, public affairs and public diplomacy efforts, supported by professional communication efforts and events.

In this, “the sciences” played at best only a limited role. Quick and immediately relevant management literature became the standard, supported by newsletters and, in time, by websites and social media. The importance of data increased for sure, but membership and business-driven data, and not for general knowledge. Because of this, it must be said that in terms of general knowledge about associations, the situation is essentially no different from before the management revolution, and maybe worse.

## Captured in Context: Economists, Politicians, and Lawyers

A definition can never tell all about the object it defines, nor can a list of conditions do the job. A history of the object, or its writing about that object, can never fully tell what the situation in the here and now is. With associations, the situation might be even worse. They may be self-similar in many ways, but each has a different goal and has to work in a different context. It is quite easy to think that if you have seen, one, you have seen all others. The reality is that too much is assumed about associations, which does not cover the whole of this vast collection of collectives. Because of this, we get only glimpses of the whole of the world of associations and, in that way, underestimate the impact of that whole.

For instance, associations reflect most of the ways in which people cooperate—or not<sup>15</sup>. Through associations, we both incorporate and differentiate between people along the lines of our activities. In this way, people are embraced and repudiated as they show their talents and limitations. As such, associations are not only the great lever between individual and common activities, creating permanent places where both bosses and regular employees can meet as equals; they are also one of the primary engines for the ranking of people according to their status or station in society. Often, there are courses to follow and exams to be taken and there are always board functions to distribute or members to honor. Take both aspects of an association together and get a rather paradoxical effect for something that was just described as essentially horizontal and democratic. A similar paradoxical effect can be found when it comes to the wider goals of the association. On the one hand, an association usually has goals aimed at both improving the skills and future of its members and at making society better. On the other hand, it can do so by exclusion of others and by preventing new things from happening if they do not seem in the interest of the members. Can both be true?

Paradoxical effects can be hard to handle. It is easier to take just one side of the coin. And this is what can be seen when diving into the different professions that could be expected to have a view on associations.

Many economists tend to do so. They regard associations suspiciously, as in macroeconomic terms it is often assumed, starting from the times of Adam Smith (Norman, 2018), that competition is limited by them. It is one reason why texts on competition law can be found in most trade and professional associations<sup>16</sup>. In reality, this danger of cartel, with high entry barriers for competitors, is only one part of the equation.

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15. In the Dutch standard work on “oversight” by Ruimschotel (Ruimschotel, 2014), he reflects that it is not easy to define what the term oversight means. Yet, even so, it is relatively easy to write a scheme saying what it is in the common understanding, and what it is not. This study is evidence that it is the same for associations.

16. To keep up to date in the American context: <https://www.asaecenter.org/resources/topics/legal>

In economic terms, it is also important to see that competition is at the heart of the very existence of associations and certainly not only for sporting associations.

If the assumption is true that “market failure” can be caused by associations, then it is probably also true no market has ever risen without a rise in the size and number of associations. Evidence of both is hard to come by. And what are the cause and effect here? Could it be that no competition is possible without some form of association? It is not part of this study, but economic history seems to suggest that the growth and size of associations are, in the long term, a better indicator of wealth than the growth and size of business<sup>17</sup> (Piketty, 2014). Regardless, there can be little doubt that associations can regulate and contain competition. Whether this is a bad thing really depends on the context, as we shall see. And, meanwhile, it is to be hoped that economists will take a fresh look at the impact of associations, leading to more insight into, for instance, the “transaction costs” of the membership of associations compared to other forms of organization and, for instance, to compare the different effects of “social capital” (see for instance Ch. 12) to that of other forms of capital. Perhaps that might lead to different definitions of associations.

Politicians also tend to take just one side of the coin. This time it is usually a favorable one: associations are a great way to get like-minded individuals together in significant numbers. For this reason, even autocrats love them and will come if invited. It is highly likely that many politicians will have had their training in democratic processes in the context of associations, just as it is likely that there are many board members who go into politics and vice versa. Beyond these more pragmatic considerations, there is more going on (see also Ch. 14, p. 128 and further).

There is a political line of thought that puts associations and other communities literally and figuratively in the middle of their ideology.

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17. By the way, there are, of course, many associations in the field of economics, including the World Economics Association. However, it is hard work finding studies of the economic impact of associations as such, outside the numerous publications on antitrust issues and other forms of “collusion.” Books that are or have been part of the curriculum to help students with their introduction to economics, do not mention the role of associations (Arnold, 2015) (Lipsey & Steiner, 1990) (Phelps, 1985), though they often come close when talking about “social economics.” Perhaps most promising is the field of institutional economics. Though less persuaded by his recommendations than by his research, Piketty, in the quantitative part of his work (Piketty, 2014), makes a convincing argument that the institutional growth in fields like education after World War II made a sizeable contribution to the lessening of income equality, which in turn is an indication of growing wealth (Stiglitz, 2012). Though interesting in their arguments, there is very much a political agenda here. More interesting are analyses like those by David S. Landes, who recognizes for instance the limitation of trade by “Guild”-like collectives, but also shows that there were always other collectives that brought the dynamic back into the economy; an innovative process of better use of manpower (Landes, 1998). Landes quotes Keynes, quoting Malthus in a letter to Ricardo, saying “that the causes of the wealth and poverty of nations, should be the main object of all research in the field of political economics.” Agreeing with them all, it still seems one piece of the puzzle should get more attention.

Communitarianism (Etzioni, 2005) and Christian democratic thought align in this respect. From this perspective, associations are places where morals are thought and transferred, which again could align with more general ideas and research into morals and social behavior (Ellemers, 2018). Here it is about groups that build morals and morals build groups.

There is also an institutional line here, which puts associations in the heart of the “role-playing” that goes on in society. Or as Runciman puts it, “Associations are informal collectivities of persons sharing a common interest relative to one or more institutions, but at the same time internally differentiated by roles internal to themselves... The study of societies is the study of people in roles, and the study of people in roles is the study of the institutional distribution of power.” (Runciman, 1989, p. 3)

‘The problem with putting the stress either on ideology and morals or on institutions and roles, is that in themselves these characteristics do not distinguish between associations and other forms of organization, whether we are talking about networks or, for instance, startups’. The dynamics may differ, but the direction is roughly the same. The context determines the force of both position and effect.

Lawyers have probably a double attitude toward associations<sup>18</sup>. On the one hand, they are not that excited by associations. They are not the place to go to for a career or high salaries. Because of the self-similarity of associations, especially when it comes to their structure and standard regulations, much legal work may seem dull and repetitive. But enough lawyers know there is another side to associations. The issues the members confront are diverse and challenging. Lawyers helping associations are often the forefront of developments in a branch, sector or profession and can make a difference. Enough is written for associations and their lawyers to tackle the basics (Herold, 2017) (Jacobs J. , 2012) (Olfers, 2008). Fields that are always relevant have to do with discipline, oversight, liability, and trust issues. New issues have to do with privacy and safety. All of them can be defined in terms of risk for the association and its members. It is in this that associations run the risk of being captured by a legal way of thinking that stresses risks and promotes standards that seek to prevent or mitigate risks. Because of the horizontal nature of an association, in which the weakest member can cause maximum damage, this may lead to behavior in which speed, innovation, and flexibility suffer. It will be hard for any lawyer in an association to avoid the risk of running too little risk.

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18. Also based on work as initiator of the network of association lawyers, the Dutch National Association (DNA).

## First Definition

Both conditions and context define what in real life an association may look like. But this is not enough. Self-similar as they may be, in real life associations differ a lot because of their activities and member population. And everywhere are networks, startups, civic initiatives, chatgroups, gangs and other groups that may look like associations, but are not. In order to tackle this and have a definition from which to start, it is better to speak of a continuum and not of any sharp divide between associations and non-associations. With an eye on the issue of trust, two elements or “pillars” will be leading.

It is proposed here that **an association can be recognized by how much it is: 1) a collective with a goal, democratically arrived at, and 2) defined by relatively high and closed standards for its members.**

Those two pillars give the study a working definition.

The first pillar can lead us to the heart of the defining moments of an association: when the collective, assembled in a general assembly or congress, come together and decide in a democratic manner on issues that matter to the association as a whole and to the members themselves. This is about trust. The second pillar is the issue that provides us with yardstick that can slide high or low, closed or open: standards. Perhaps this can touch on the issue of distrust. The most important and recognizable standards are those that regulate the entry or exit from an association and its members. The higher the standards, the more classic the association. These, as will be debated in chapter 12 and further, can also be very symbolic in nature. The other standards regulate behavior and expectations once the collective is there and action starts. Important here is the distinction between closed – leaving little room for interpretation – and open standards – leaving much room for interpretation. Somewhere along the line from high to low and from closed to open, an association is an association no longer.

Before moving on, it is not unimportant to go beyond the technical aspects of a definition for a moment. Belonging to an association can make a difference; from a sideshow to a life-changing experience. Taking on a function, like that of chairman, can be a chore, to be avoided. It can also mean the fulfillment of a lifetime. Could it be that one of the reasons memberships are declining in the more settled Western countries is the fact that the people there try to avoid the social confrontations that come with the membership of an association? Or is there increasing distrust of institutions? These are all possibilities. One possibility, not part of this study, but a question to make you realize that underneath the almost old-fashioned character of the average association, there are real and relevant issues to be addressed. Both pillars must bring the study closer to answers.

## 8. How Many are There?

### Counting Problems

How many associations are there? The answer is almost easier to give at world scale than on a national scale. The Union of World Associations (UIA) publishes a “yearbook” (Union of International Associations, 2016) that lists almost 70,000 associations that work on an international basis. This includes NGOs and other “civil society” initiatives. Not all are active; about 32,000 are “dormant” and the UIA does not pretend to be complete or accurate in the description of the activities of its members. For this, they refer back to national data. However, the 1200 associations that are each year entered into the database give an indication of growth. Again, the 70,000 we are talking about here are mostly NGOs and large-scale associations.

If the numbers that are used for the larger countries in the world are any indication, this researcher would not be surprised to come to a count of many millions of associations; from hard-nosed trade associations to churches and sporting clubs. For instance, the number of associations in the United States numbers, according to their fiscal statistics (each association needs a fiscal number) 1,800,000 associations<sup>19</sup>. The USA has a strong civic culture (Schudson, 1999), but otherwise, they are not the most highly organized country in the world. Assuming they are average in that respect, we would come up with 42 million associations worldwide. In the US only 64,000 are counted either as trade or professional associations. On a worldwide scale, we would then come to something like 1.5 million associations of this kind. To compare with the same US-based method, these associations could then have 115 million companies worldwide as potential members (Quora, 2013). Far more than are registered worldwide as companies according to the World Bank (EconStats, 2017). It does not really add up. Still, even if we said that the US is far from representative when it comes to the degree that businesses and professionals want to be represented by an association, the numbers would still be huge and relevant from a socio-economic point of view.

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19. There are two important fiscal codes governing the American statistics for associations. In essence, without the accompanying fiscal status, there is no association. Another important statistical source is the American Labor Office. As in other countries, the problem with both sources of statistics is that they do not distinguish between headquarters and local, regional or functional offices. Statistics about the number of members are not to be found, though in combination with survey’s on how people spend their time, the indication is that it is a substantial number (Lindberg, 2017). It is clear that the American Society for Association Executives (ASAE) would want more reliable numbers, but without extra funding this is not a priority. Something that is also the case in a country like Australia.

Counting the number of associations is truly full of pitfalls. As Joel Fischer of UIA wrote to this researcher after several inquiries, “Accurate data on associations in a given country—this is a problem which vexes researchers of all types. In part, this relates to a deficiency in national legislation (around the world) which tend to lump all non-commercial entities into one or two legal/fiscal categories.” (Email to author, 7/4/2017.) Of course, a warning like this is a great incentive for a researcher to dig in, but he brings one of many methodological points to the table that is hard to address. There is also something paradoxical about it, certainly in the American context. When trying to describe “civil society,” social scientists tend to look at “voluntary associations” as the unit that can most readily be identified, as they are structured and have a fiscal identity. The problem is identifying the volunteers themselves. In other countries, including the Netherlands, the problem might be reversed: there is much information on the number of volunteers and far less on their associations, giving rise to both counting and definition problems. In all cases, there seems to be a missing link between voluntary and other associations (Dekker P. , 2014) or between occupational associations and other associations. Trying to add them up to a “nonprofit” or “third” sector (Dekker P. , 2013) is, again, not the same as identifying the number of associations. In sum, many elements are there, but they do not add up.

The regular way to find out how many associations there are is by asking the government body that gathers economic statistics. Unfortunately, as I already found out when writing the first book on this subject, in Europe the statistical services have either not started or have stopped counting the number of associations (Noordhoek, 2011, p. 31, checked again in 2017) (Eurostat, 2017) (CBS, 2017) or they do so now according to the SBI-codes as categorized by the UN and used by Chambers of Commerce. This concerns a rest category of “other services,” comprising several groups of associations, all of a different nature (with some extra statistical categories to be found elsewhere in the table).

## The Complicated Case of Dutch Association Statistics

When using the statistics for the country in which most of the main cases of this study are described, the Netherlands, the statistics are either not consistent or hard to explain. Starting with the numbers of the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) for 2017, the following can be found:

Sector codes SBI:		Number
941	Employers and professional organizations	2230
9411	Sector and employers organizations	1795
9412	Professional associations	435
942	Employee organizations	60
9420	Employee organizations	60
949	Civil society organizations	10340
9491	Churches and other inspirational organizations	930
9492	Political organizations	175
9499	Hobby, sport and other organizations	9235
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12630</b>

Table 1 CBS Statics on Associations in the Netherlands

The number of 12,630 associations, of which only 1795 trade associations and 435 professional associations, is too low to be believable. Some explanation for the statistics being so low might possibly lie in two reasons. The first is that the CBS probably count sports associations like the Football Association as only one association. The second is that in the Netherlands there is a preference for the legal form of “foundation” (stichting) instead of that of vereniging (“association”). But even if this is true, the number is still low and just a fraction of what for instance is found in Germany or France (an insurer in France that publishes a yearly report on the number of associations there, says it has counted an increase of 3115 trade associations in 2015 alone (Malet & Bazin, 2016)). This makes no sense when compared to other countries. It is interesting to see that for a study done in 2014 by authors connected to the CBS in 2014 (Kloosterman & Coumans, 2014) the authors have to rely on data outside their own organization.

A better source could be the Chamber of Commerce as they are an integral part of a system through which associations report themselves to the Chamber for registration, among other reasons, because this is a precondition for getting insurance<sup>20</sup>.

20. Though the Dutch Chamber of Commerce is a centralized executive agency of the government, getting statistics from their systems means having to deal with a very commercial part of their organization. It sells addresses, not data or statistics, and the selection of addresses is both expensive and a black box, with no expertise or understanding behind the telephone. This is where the research had to stop (for the time being).

In the same year, 2017, their number is higher: 142,128 divided over four categories: associations of owners of building with multiple apartments (a legal requirement in The Netherlands<sup>21</sup>), associations with a limited legal liability, associations with full legal liability (the difference is that limited associations cannot own or inherit assets) and fourthly church societies.

Type	Number
Employers and professional organizations	2230
Sector and employers organizations	1795
Professional associations	435
Employee organizations	60
Employee organizations	60
Civil society organizations	10340
Churches and other inspirational organizations	930
Political organizations	175
Hobby, sport and other organizations	9235
Total	12630

Table 2 Dutch Chamber of Commerce (KvK) Statistics of Associations in the Netherlands

There are a number of problems with these statistics. Two of the problems are crucial. The first is the problem that the numbers do not make clear whether we are talking about one association or about the main office or legal entity for what, in fact, are multiple local associations, operating independently. An evident example is the statistic of “religious societies.” If, for instance, the Protestant church of the Netherlands (PKN) or the Roman Catholic Church each only count as one, it does not do justice to the many church communities under that umbrella that are considered to behave as separate associations. At the same time, it is likely that many (migrant) churches have not registered with the Chamber of Commerce. The same goes for many associations of the other categories.

Interestingly enough, a third government agency, the Bureau for Social and Cultural Planning (SCP), trying to write a report on the state of “civil society” (defined more or less like SBI 949), is forced to limit its research to the fifty largest associations, as measurement problems bedevil the research wished for (Posthumus, Ridder, & Hart, 2014).

Fortunately, there are always other sources of statistics to be found. For example, the consultancy firm Berenschot concluded in 2013 from the passing of notarial deeds<sup>22</sup> that the number of associations remained more or less constant even in the midst of the crisis, with on average one association added and one deleted each month.

21. And providing another example of why official numbers should be treated with care. A firm active in this market gives a much higher number of associations of apartment holders. It looks likely the number here applies to associations with more than nine apartments/members.

22. A request to get information from the notarial registers was declined by the KNB. The request will be repeated.

Looking at the how and why, Berenschot states that by far most new associations are in fact splits from already-existing associations (Rijken, VM, 2013). There is ample evidence of many member uprisings during the recent years of crisis (shown by this study too), but this is probably not the only cause. Even new associations that were formed in consequence of the digital revolution were, in fact, the result of a specialization within an existing group. For instance, the Dutch “association for web-research journalists” was founded by a number of members of the Dutch association for journalists.

In his dissertation, Tim van der Rijken (Rijken, 2011, pp. 12-15) shows that in The Netherlands there has been wave upon wave of consolidation between trade associations (“branch organizations”), including trade unions, with at least 1% of all trade associations involved in a merger from the year 2000. It is interesting that he quotes research (Aldrich & Ruef, 2008) (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994) that in the United States there has been a steady rise in trade associations, from about 200 in 1900 to 7600 in 2008 and with only a late wave of mergers.

A first thought then, is that the number of associations in a graph would form an S-curve, with a plateau after a certain post-war time, speeding up in the 90s, and a top where temporary disassociations balance out with the number of new or reformed associations. What happens after that? A decline is not unlikely. The reason behind that, as will be shown, is partly a matter of looking again at the classic definition of an association.

A thinktank like the Bertelsmann Foundation, Berenschot Consultancy, the societies of associations themselves: naming them is an indication that the best information on associations is probably to be found outside of government. This is true. In fact, probably the best information is found with insurance companies—of which the internationally operating AON re-insurer is the prime example—publishers, IT, and consultancy firms. The problem is that they are understandably guarded about sharing (all of) that information and do not make it publicly available, with Berenschot a rare exception. As someone who is involved in several professional activities for associations, this researcher shares their dilemma. A conviction that publishing actual numbers is important clashes with demands of confidentiality. Probably the simplest way to go about it is to give estimates of the real number of associations from multiple sources but without any claim of verification. However, the numbers are interesting enough to publish, as in the way they digress from official numbers or those gathered by Berenschot, Macif, or Bertelsmann.

In the Netherlands, the author comes up with a number of 120,000–180,000 associations. Of these, about 250 of them—both trade and professional associations—are visible as major institutions (koepels), with often more members than the total of the members of all political party members. They each have professional staff, ranging from five to hundreds (but not thousands).

All of them are represented in key governance networks such as the Federation of Employers VNO-NCW, or that of the unions, or otherwise represented in what the Dutch call “de polder,” where all social-economic compromises are worked out. Some 2 to 3,000 have a less visible role, but they each play a vital role in their sector. This number is more or less consistent with the CBS number, but they are not the same. Another 10–12,000 can be considered to play a role in the field of trade and professional associations.

### Counting the World’s Associations

Problems with statistics are not just limited to the Netherlands. It is a European problem; it is a worldwide problem. In other continents, the quality of government statistics varies too. In the Gulf region, this information seems to be considered strategic and statistics are for that reason not provided. Elsewhere it is more haphazard, but statistics can be gathered from many primary sources. It is good to look, for instance, at the legal or tax status or membership of a Chamber of Commerce of an association. Most traditional associations conform to a legal entity that is based on their character. In Germany and the Netherlands, the status of Vereinigung or vereniging is widely recognized and can be traced through both the notarial deed and membership of the Chamber of Commerce. In the United States of America, subsections of the 501 Tax Code exemptions offer an indication of the number of associations. See Table 3 for statistics from the US. The numbers are big, as the reader can gather from the statistics. However, in order to give them some meaning, vital information about the membership, the number of volunteers involved, the size of the staff, and other impact indicators still have to be added by others. Collecting those data seems an incidental activity in most countries, with publications only once every few years. It helps when there is a strong association for association management, like in the United States with the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). Still, though the data look very complete. They are quite at odds with the numbers as provided by the American census from 2007 and 2012. A matter of definitions. As always, Canada, through its Canadian Society of Association Executives (CSAE), has a record of data gathering too, with its numbers more or less in line with those of the United States.

	Total number of associations	Number of trade and professional associations	Number of non-trade or professional associations	Number of associations gathered under national umbrella	Number of professional staff	Number of volunteers	Total payroll	Total revenue	Total assets
USA 2016	1,800,000	63,866	1,237,094						
USA 2010		92,331	1,280,739	21,000	1,200,000	18,000,000	47,000,000	130,000,000,000	245,000,000,000
USA 2007		88,071	1,128,367						
Sources USA:	Total number of members can only be indicated. Largest association (AAPP): 40 million, number of participants conferences 2010: 205,000,000 IRS Data Book 2007, 2010, 2012, 2016: 509 (c) (3) and (6), ASAE Foundation Association 990 Database								

Table 3 Number of Associations USA

A first glance at the numbers for the Americas and those of Europe shows an equilibrium or slight decline in the number of associations in Western countries for the last few years, except for possibly France. This does certainly not seem to be the case in, for instance, Asia, India, the Gulf region, and other upcoming countries and continents, but figures are hard to come by. What to make of that?

It is interesting to see what is happening in Germany, with data as gathered by the nonprofit Bertelsmann Foundation. The number of associations in Germany has gone up, but with by far most of them coming from East Germany, after the “Anschluss.”

The number of associations in West Germany has stabilized. So, a rise in the number of associations can be an indicator of economic or social growth. There does seem to be a cap in the rise of associations.

This is quite different from France, where through the reports of an insurance company called Macif they are able to show the ups and downs in membership very precisely (Malet & Bazin, 2016, p. 4):

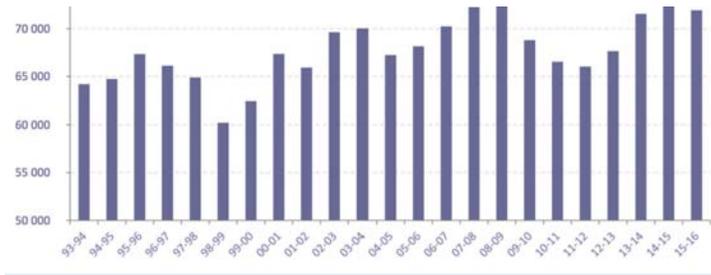


Figure 3 Changes in Membership, France

Also, because other numbers diverge (the total number of associations per citizen seems definitely higher than elsewhere), other causes of growth and decline must be there, possibly, because of the difference in social climate in France. Interestingly, the increase in total employment within association staff is much more stable (Malet & Bazin, 2016, p. 11):

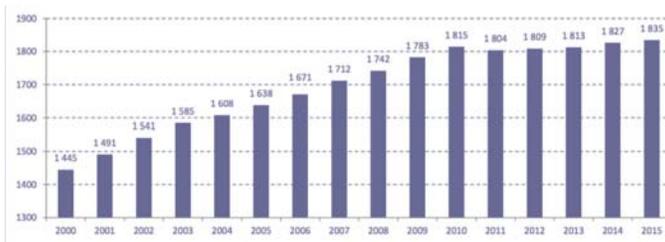


Figure 4 Changes in Employment Staff, France

Still, the answer to the question “How many are there?” remains rather elusive. Curiosity heightens as questions multiply. This also happens because the better studies also give some idea of the economic impact of associations. These are almost all indirect indicators: the number of people employed, the number of volunteers, the gross income, total salaries, etc. It sometimes leads to information that can be of use to association leadership. For instance, on average, people working as professionals in associations earn slightly more than people in comparable jobs elsewhere in the labor market. This though, in a country like France, where 69% of staff are female and 68% of leaders are male (Archambault & Tchermonog, 2012). But, on the whole, the indicators do not tell the reader much about the impact of associations in terms of social or economic capital. The fact that associations hold a lot of assets (245 billion dollars (ASAE, 2010)) is hardly interesting—the relevant question is what they do with it—but the real impact should be related to the economic and social power the members of the associations have and what the association adds to that. This researcher found far less quantitative data on associations than hoped for. And this while, in the experience of this researcher, even in the depths of the Sahara-desert you find Bedouins belonging to more than one association. Here a true research agenda presents itself, but one preferably handled by institutions or researchers better qualified than a parttime researcher. It remains remarkable why a phenomenon that is so widely spread, remains so below the radar of economic or social research.

	Total number of associations	Number of trade and professional associations	Number of non-trade or professional associations	Number of associations under national umbrella	Number of professional staff	Number of volunteers
<b>World</b>						
United Nations Statistical office	no data					
International Organizations	69252					
<b>Americas</b>						
USA 2017 NAICS 813	145,606				1,366,046	
USA 2016 IRS Data Book	1,800,000	63,866	1,237,094			
USA 2010 IRS Data Book		92,331	1,280,739	21,000	1,200,000	18,000,000
USA 2012 Census Gov 813	887,218	81,636	805,582			
USA 2007 IRS Data Book		88,071	1,128,367			
USA 2007 Census Gov 813	107,546	83,633				
Canada		70,000				
<b>Total</b>						
<b>Europe</b>						
Germany 2015	598,210					
Austria 1960	42,269					
Austria 2010	116,566	685			230,000	
France 2015	1,300,000	3115	76763			
Britain			259			
Netherlands SBI 94 2017	12630	2290	10340			
Netherlands, own estimate	180.000					
<b>Total</b>						
<b>Gulf region</b>						
<b>Total</b>						
<b>Asia and Australia</b>						
Australia	3.500				10.000	

Table 4 Number of Associations Worldwide

Total number of members can only be indicated. Some numbers:

Source Worldwide: UN UN offers ISIC Rev. 94 code for 'activities of membership organizations'. No numbers, referral to national data (email Statistical Classifications CHOL UN 13th July 2017)

Source World: UIA Union of International Associations (UIA). Website and email exchange July 2017

Sources USA: 2017 NAICS 813 private Membership associations and organizations, US Total. Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 5 2018; IRS Data Book 2007, 2010, 2012, 2016: 509 (c) (3) and (6) + ASAE 990 Database + (2007 Gov census 63866 + 6992) en (2012 census: 17028 +) 81391 en 81392 code.

Source Canada: website CSAE and CSAE Canadian Association Census, February 2016, management summary

Source Britain Wikipedia. Figures from 2014: 132 chartered and 127 non-chartered professional bodies

Source Germany Bertelsman Stiftung, 2015

Source France Edith Archambault et Viviane Tchermonog - Quelques reperes sur la associations en France aujourd'hui, www.associatheque.fr, 2011. Different sources, incl. CNRS-CES

Source Austria	Zentrales Vereinsregister; Prof.Dr. Ruth Sima und Dr. Doris Schober - Nonprofit Organisationen in Österreich
Source Netherlands	SBI 94 code, CBS, KvK
Source Australia	Connect Web, Source of Australian Associations

Table 4.6 shows the statistics or at least some of them<sup>23 24</sup>. In terms of members the largest one must be the AAPP, the American Association of Pensioners. It could be that there are larger one in China, though the actual number of (recognized) associations might be less than 300. But what is there in terms of data, usually only concerns the number of association and not their number of members or other specifics. It must be said, the numbers are almost too undefined and incomplete to be published, other than as an illustration of the counting problem. This author has formatted an Excel sheet with data from different countries, including the American ones shown above, from ASAE. There is unfortunately too little standardization in official and unofficial publications to be sure of the numbers or be able to do some reliable benchmarking.

The estimates provided in Table 4.6, must be considered a very first base for further research, but the waiting is for more and better data. But in order to get the data, it's not just the definition of the indicators that needs to be aligned, other changes to the way associations are defined also have to be considered.

On this, more in the next paragraph and in chapter three, more concerning the tasks of associations and especially in Part II, which is largely dedicated to new approaches of defining and categorizing associations. And, finally, subtle adjustments have had to be made to the working definition of “a group of people bound by common interest and intent.” We are certainly talking about much more than something bound within a legal or fiscal entity. We are talking about something that can be the object of trust, the subject of this study.

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23. It is likely that more numbers can be found through consultancy and insurance parties. In the USA, consultancies like Association Metrics, Inc. (AMI), Macif in France and in the Netherlands Van Spaendonck's benchmarking services can provide more information. It would be a big step if social research institutes, including the World Bank, would start to pay more attention to associations and their numbers.

24. In June and August 2018, the researcher has been in further contact with experts from ASAE. He has been shown better ways to find data concerning the number of associations and its members, especially through the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as the statistics provided by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) give less insight. However, the problem remains that most data do not make a distinction between for instance headquarter and chapter of an association and there is more that is difficult to find. There is a wish to find better data, but unfortunately there is no budget in the short term. In contact with a representative from Australia, there was basically the same news, though Australia has a long history of research into associations.

## Counting the Members

Counting the number of associations is not the same as counting the number of members of those associations. This researcher cannot come up with any reasonable “total number”<sup>25</sup> based on the sources as discussed above. They count the associations as institutions or legal entities. There are good reasons for this. One of them is that there are no standards for the way members are enrolled in an association. Each is free to choose its own way to administer them, from a simple handwritten list to the most modern SEO-system. How then to assess the impact of associations? Depending on their definition of an association—see the following paragraphs—people can count themselves as member of more than one association. Still, in that way lies probably the best route toward an estimate of membership, in combination with the life-cycle approach as described in paragraph 1.6. You could say that almost immediately after being born, in most countries you will become a member of your first association, usually a church, confirmed with a baptism. Later, the child becomes a member of a sports club or joins scouting, one of the largest associations in the world. In the years of youth there is a probably a first spike in membership, as next to the sports clubs come the student associations, the fraternities, perhaps a political or other association from ideological considerations and maybe already membership of a professional organization. Activities for a trade organization can also take place, depending on the membership of the company they start to work for. Membership during the professional years is also full of association activities, though time may be more restricted, so a lot of the old membership may stop. Then again, these are the years of working groups, board membership, and other intense activities. As careers wind down, most memberships will stop, except for the ones in which friends, honors, and other attachments may be a reason for retention. Some new memberships will come; the old people’s sporting clubs (Golf, Bridge, it used to be) and perhaps a renewal of church membership and other volunteer activities. All in all, it is not unlikely that someone is still a member of several associations at the time of death.

All in all, this would suggest that each man or woman in this world is on average always a member of at least two associations: we are talking billions of members here.

At the same time, it is likely that higher-educated people (or their parents) will enroll in more memberships than those who are not. It is also likely that in developed countries there will be more associations in the formal sense than there are in less-developed countries.

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25. An exception must probably be made when looking at sporting associations, also because every sport that is or wants to be recognized by the Olympics is required to keep detailed statistics. See for instance member statistics NOC-NSF (NOC-NSF, 2017).

As the world is developing fast, it is no surprise that it is visible that the attention paid to association management in developing countries is increasing fast, as evidenced, for instance, by the increasing number of attendees from these countries at ASAE conferences and other indications (see Chapter 1.5). In the same way, attention to issues of diversity and gender is likely increasing memberships, for which the high number of females working in the association profession could be an indication (see above). It would not come as a surprise to this researcher that women are gaining fast on men in terms of membership of associations. However, this increase is uneven. Membership is probably going up in the developing world and among specific groups but might very well be declining in the developed world<sup>26</sup>. In a survey done by the “XYZ University” among American associations (Sladek, 2011) a 62% decline in membership is reported. In other countries, including the Netherlands, there are also drops in membership reported. Sporting associations report a drop in during the crisis years of 2008–2015, but now show a slight increase (NOC-NSF, 2017). When corrected for the increase in population, the trend is still negative. It is likely something rather fundamental is going on, at least for those associations that represent activities not of a physical nature; a combination of digitization and the way this influences how new generations communicate with each other, not needing the classical way of association to feel enough part of “a group with a goal.” Awareness of this goal and how it works through in society, also seems to help members stay in the association (Misener, Shier, & Rogalsky, 2018). But how this works is still not fully understood and wrong assumptions can be made. In a trend analysis of the Netherlands on leisure activities from 1975 to 2005, Van Ingen and Dekker examine whether or not it is recognizable that individualization and informalization processes have taken place. They do so by analyzing the social context of a wide range of activities. They state, “We find that the choice of a particular leisure context is dependent on education, gender, year of birth, age, and time pressure. We find evidence for informalization, but—contrary to popular belief—not for individualization. The informalization trend follows a pattern of cohort replacement and is also caused by a rise in the average education level in the population” (Ingen & Dekker, 2010).

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26. This might be with the exception of many of the states who were under the Communist regime. The sudden shift from a state controlled to a market-oriented society, has not led to a strong position or much trust in associations of NGOs. Obligatory membership during much of the Communist period may have much to do with this. An indication of its negative effects can be had by looking at the effectiveness of getting European subsidies in for example the Horizon 2020 project. While Western countries are very effective in getting subsidies through associations and other forms of cooperation, Central and Eastern European countries fare far less, in such measure that the EU has adapted its program demands in order to get more requests from these countries. However, it remains a problem, especially for associations with an NGO status. As Eastern European countries become more autocratic again, as is the case in for instance Hungary, these NGO's are treated with distrust by the government. There is still a long way to go before the right culture is there for associations to flourish.

The authors warn that the simple fact that people no longer have to be formal members of an association does not necessarily indicate that they have become less social. Yet, when you are a board member of an association that is faced with a loss of membership, you do have to face the reality that it is harder to bind people. And this could be exactly what is necessary when faced with trust issues and the introduction of a quality intervention like peer review.

How far this trend goes, is not easy to measure. A way to go about it is by drawing a parallel with the number of volunteers active in a society, which has a better tradition of measurement. Again, it differs from country to country, also depending on the strength of civil society. In countries where civic nature is strong, it seems the number of volunteers remains reasonably stable, though there are significant shifts caused by structural reasons (demographics, individualization, participation, secularization) (SCP , 2017) (SCP , 2009). In countries with a weaker civil society structure or a weaker welfare state, like in Anglo-Saxon or former communistic countries, the numbers will be more unevenly distributed, with, especially in, the (larger) cities a breakdown of participation. Yet, associations are not just an aspect of civil society as such. Business membership of trade associations also seems more widely under pressure (AON, 2012), with more free-rider behavior. Though at this point it is worth pointing out older research into the differences in collective action (lobbying) between small, medium-sized and large enterprise associations. Grote and Lang (Grote & Lang, 2006) are right to make this distinction, and the difference this makes on the impact of associations. They rightfully quote how “group size, especially in rational choice accounts in the Olsonian tradition (Olson 1965)(Wilson, 1973)(Moe, 1980)” refers exclusively to the effective or potential number of members of an association. Though also beset by methodological (counting) problems, the comparison of 96 trade associations from different countries shows how size matters in terms of influence. All this certainly suggests that the “business model” or added value of associations is under pressure, and for reasons that will not go away soon. The human experience shows that when something goes down, there are always those who want to give the extra push. Incidents are never incidents, but confirmations of a trend. In this respect, the image, certainly in Western countries, is not good. Yet, we are talking about something so vast, with numbers so huge, that something as wide as associations cannot be caught in a single snapshot.

## Do the Numbers Matter?

Does it matter that the number of associations differs from country to country? That the US has many more associations in health care than Norway, or that Ireland has many more IT-related associations than France, or Dubai more associations than Thailand? Or that associations with large members have more chance of getting heard than those with smaller members?

In answer to the questions by the researcher, there was little interest in question or answer, nor were funds available to do the necessary work. So, it does not mean anything? Are associations irrelevant indeed? In an indirect way, the numbers and what they stand for certainly matter. Consistency in the numbers gives us an indication of the size and structure of associations. This, in turn, gives us an indication of something that is crucial for every modern, knowledge-based economy.

If we accept that the competitiveness of a country's economy depends, in the end, on its knowledge infrastructure, we should look further than the usual knowledge institutes of universities or research institutes. Associations are a different way of organizing and multiplying knowledge. Maybe history will judge that they make their own effective contribution. Regardless, it is argued that for achieving successful competition it is necessary to have an economy that is "complex" enough. The diversity and interconnectedness of knowledge institutes should be able to match those of other countries and preferably organized in such a way that interaction is almost automatic. To bring this debate further, two indicators are interesting (WRR, 2013).

The first is the Opportunity Value Index (OVI) (Hidalgo & Hausman, 2009) . The idea is that it is easier for a fruit farmer to try and grow a new kind of apple than it is to produce a new lawn mower, especially if the fruit grower is a member of an agricultural association where he can share with farmers with similar interests. In the same way, a member of, say, an association of retailers, will try to look for a new way of doing retail when he sees his colleagues all acting the same way. It will be different, but not so different that it becomes too complex. The OVI expresses, in the form of an indicator, how far a country is in producing another kind of products and services than it does already and how complex they are (WRR, 2013, p. 62). The information for this "product space" then also becomes a measurement for a second economic indicator: The Economic Complexity Index (ECI). In the ECI, two indicators come together. One for the complexity and one for the diversity of the whole export package of a given country (Hidalgo, Klinger, Barabasi, & Hausmann, 2007). It expresses the amount of "productive knowledge" present in a country. Hausman and Hidalgo assume that more than 40% of the variance in income growth can be explained from this indicator (WRR, 2013, p. 63).

Both OVI and ECI are relevant when looking at the added value of associations, especially trade associations.

Here it is not necessarily the total number of associations that is most relevant. The question is if a country can match or surpass the number of similar associations in other countries. Can it match or surpass the level of knowledge transfer within and outside the association? More to the point: can it facilitate its members to do so? In that direction lies the path to growth.

This is not necessarily a new insight, as the term “innovation clusters” indicates. Again, the point is that it usually aims for the education and R&D facilities around an economic cluster. Policymakers, businesses and investors usually know the data on those factors. But how can they know what associations can bring if their numbers and capabilities are not known or understood?

This research is not aimed at filling this lack of knowledge. The need for extra research is becoming obvious, including a reassessment of the role of associations. Here it is important to answer the question of the relevance of numbers in order to assess why change is necessary. Further on, , more will be said about the tasks of associations in term of public affairs for their members or of providing services for them. Still, the greater relevance to change and to raising standards lies in this goal or matching and raising the knowledge infrastructure for its members and for society at large.

### Data-analysis as next step for research

There is a remarkable lack of non-survey data on associations. The one consolation is that all through history people have experienced trouble counting them, even their own. An anecdote written down by Weiland, and quoted by Fassaert (Fasseart, 1987), tells of the small village of Beemster in Holland where there is the habit of posting an advertisement in the newspaper when ever there is a house move naming all the association of which one is a member, since “When you are a member of 30, 40 associations, it gets kind of hard to thank them all personally.”

This is not to say it is impossible to find data, especially when looked at from a network or social media perspective. In fact, you can find huge amounts. Look for instance at the two images below. In this big data application, a pattern shows itself between 1) the creative communities in the town of Mannum, South Australia (source: Google), and 2) of all the connections between researchers’ co-authorship network map of physicians publishing on hepatitis C in the period 2008–2012 (Lima, 2017). The point is, though much more of these data-pictures should be made and analyzed, that it is always connected to a specific association or sector. It does not add up to a picture of the whole of the world of associations. All the more so because it is hard to make distinctions between an association and a (more hierarchical) social network without more research.

Given the likely outcome of data-pictures like these, for this research an extra algorithm should be added to distinguish collectives from each other.

For associations, conditions should be added like goal distinctions, nature of the standards applied, (democratic) nature of decision making. This, in line with the definition given in Chapter three. Meanwhile we should see more of the self-similarity appear that Abbott predicts.

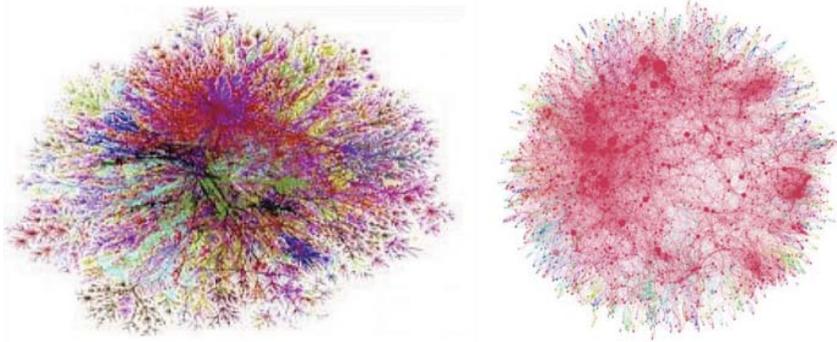


Figure 6 Co-authorship Network Hepatitis C

In his book *The Square and the Tower*, Ferguson creates a dichotomy between networks and hierarchies (Ferguson N. , 2017). Networks arise from the natural bonding between people; responding to our tendency to look for people that are the same as us (“assortiveness”). As positive as this sounds, it is also exclusive and can be the base for conspiracies (with freemasonry as the ultimate secret society). Yet, its logic seems almost inescapable. Hierarchies, with their connotations of authoritarianism, do not sound positive to a modern Western audience, though many can feel fine with the social security a strong dictator can bring. Democracy is its admirable but often difficult alternative. Ferguson tells how the pendulum swings all the time from square to tower and back again, in the end describing a world full of figures like those above, which should be met with distrust as self-interest dictates either the right of the strongest or the most secretive, leaving in the opinion of this researcher (too) little room for other drivers or motives like altruism or idealism. It also leaves too little room for other, more organic ways to evolve (Aldrich H. , 1999) or to simply copy themselves because that is what groups seem to do (Abbott, 2016).

Dichotomies can bring clarity, most of all in dilemma-like situations when one must make impossible choices. But more often they obscure realities that are far subtler and less dramatic. It makes for boring reading, but most forms of organization come from imitation or other ways of making decisions as easy as possible. Pragmatism often rules, and this is fine. The goal of this study is to see what there is to see and not to make unnecessary distinctions. Or distinctions that are plain wrong. Look again at Figures 5 and 6. The colors are different, but both seem to be round: not rakes, not hierarchies, but globes, networks. Or are they? On second glance, the image on the left is more centered, with branches spreading out from dense nodes. The image on the right is not only less dense, but also less centered. You can see nodes (“the soft links”, in network jargon) connecting horizontally, between nodes of the same color. With a little imagination, it is possible to see what looks like a network in the figure of the creative communities. It is, in fact, a model of the spread of government subsidies; so, hierarchical in nature.

The figure on the right might, in fact, also hold a hierarchy; that of an association with its rules and system of peer review. The difference between the two figures might be bigger in practice than the similarities, while both might be perfectly satisfied with their own arrangement. The creative communities sound like fun to be part of. Still, is it really enduring to build an existence on subsidies and public money? We know far less about the impact of the association structure on a group of researchers. What if such a group is struck by an incident destroying the confidence in hepatitis C research? How do they regain trust in their own eyes and that of others? In other words, to the conditions of an association, even more elements should be added to the algorithms to come to meaningful outcomes.

## 9. Trying to Measure Trust

### Trust in Professions

It is not the same as counting associations and their members, but in order not to end on a note that is unnecessary negative, it can be said that there is quite good survey data on trust available in professions and this, over a longer period, even on a “worldwide scale.” In this survey by the GfK-Verein (GfK-verein, 2016), for instance, a worldwide/European comparison is made for a number of professions. But, wait a moment, there is a big difference between worldwide and European perspectives. Why are the Europeans (founders of most trade and professional associations) so skeptical? See Table 5.1 for a worldwide/European comparison of “trust in professions,” based on twenty-seven countries worldwide, eleven of which are in Europe (GfK-Verein, 2015).

Trust in Professions Worldwide		
	All countries	European countries
Firefighters	90	93
Nurses	89	90
Teachers	89	85
Doctors	88	84
Pharmacists	86	87
Farmers	86	83
Paramedics	85	88
Pilots	85	83
Engineers, technicians	84	78
Soldiers	82	78
Craftsman	79	76
Train, bus, metro drivers	77	79
Architects	76	74
IT & Software specialists	75	66
Judges	70	61
Bankers, bank clerks	67	42

Source: GfK Verein, 2015.  
Averages (weighted by population size) from countries surveyed: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Netherlands, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA.

Table 5 Trust in Professions Worldwide

And there is more survey data that can raise eyebrows. Table 5.2 displays some results from Dutch research done by the association of homeowners (Vereniging Eigen Huis) into trust in a number of professions, with many in the business of real estate (Vereniging Eigen Huis, 2017). Look at the percentages for two of the three cases that are in this study: notaries and real-estate agents. Notaries can be considered significantly more trusted than real-estate agents (46% to 6%), but the notaries still would still have less than half of all their clients’ trust in them—in a line of work that is built on the premise of trust. And the real-estate agents? Can 6% reflect reality? Probably not. The only thing that probably should be said about these data on trust in professions is that some associations have people’s sympathy and others not. Most likely more influenced by media reports than personal experience. Perhaps on this point, there is no neglect, but some rate of scepticism is justified.

Trust in Professions in the Netherlands		
	% 2017	% 2013
Nurses	85	77
General practitioners	77	69
Teachers elementary school	71	61
Electricians	57	48
Carpenters	56	48
Policeman	51	43
Notaries	46	37
Plumbers	46	53
Painters	46	39
Gardeners	40	46
Roofmakers	38	38
Installers	37	37
Architects	32	3
Window cleaners	29	35
Handy men	28	31
Journalists	27	24
Chimney sweepers	26	32
Suncollector advisors	20	20
Building contractors	20	18
Taxation specialists	19	
Alderman	17	
Kitchen salesman	15	
Energy suppliers	10	
Politicians	10	6
Car salesman	10	9
Mortgage advisors	8	8
Bankers	7	7
Insurance salesman	6	6
Real Estate Agents	6	11
Project developers	4	4

Source: Vereniging Eigen Huis based on 666 respondents

Table 6 Trust in Professions, the Netherlands

These figures on trust in professions do not change all that much through the years. The association(s) representing the professions will have to deal with the effect of both a good or a bad reputation. This, while knowing that any (change in) reputation only produces a relative number: the fact that window cleaners went from 35% to 29%, will probably not mean much to the profession; not even a change in fee. The continued low ranking of bankers (below car salesmen!) is a problem for a profession based on trust. But not even a high ranking, like that of nurses or policemen, is in itself a reason for confidence from the members or a guarantee for a pleasant life in the association. It is the experience of this researcher (who admittedly never asked for an easy assignment) that the position of trust, high or low, does not correlate with a stable association. In the case of a profession with low trust (including the main case of the real-estate agents), it is likely that the members will challenge the board of the association to act and increase trust. In the case of a profession with high trust (including the main case of the public libraries), the board will want action by its members because they will feel the public pressure earlier than individual members, but many members will want action too. In the case of intermediate trust (including the main case of the notaries), it may lead to a divided association, as both members and boards come to different conclusions on the need for change. These are all assumptions, however, backed up by limited experience and common sense. Associations can certainly be stable institutions for (Luhmann, 1979), but when the 'Noble Lie' (Popper, 1962) (Straus, 1964) of the exceptional status of the association is called into question, trust can evaporate overnight.

## Trust in Institutions

Trust in Institutions						
More trust in courts and businesses than in government and churches.						
Institutional trust, persons of 18 jaar and older, 1991-2016/'17 in percentages*						
	1991	1998	2008/'09	2012/'13	2014/'15	2016/'17
Courts	47	34	44	41	40	44
Businesses	28	31	33	32	34	36
Government	17	26	23	17	15	18
Churches	24	30	19	13	13	12

\* Named are the percentages '(very) very much trust' as answer to the question 'How much trust do you have in ...?'

Table 7 Trust in Institutions, the Netherlands

The data in Table 5.3 comes from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). World Bank indicators give no comparable data. SCP has been asked to provide the researcher with comparable data from other countries. In its survey, SCP has asked for the level of trust in four categories. The category “churches and religious organizations” does not distinguish between churches and (other) associations. In the text, SCP warns readers to be careful with the leading question. They give percentages, but only for “the government.” In later figures in that chapter, there are no references to churches anymore, let alone associations. By the deadline of this thesis, there had been no answer to the uncertainties. It looks like another instance of the need to think statistics through from the perspective of associations and issues of trust.

What we do have, are general indicators of trust. To finish this part about measuring trust, it is good to look at some data from Edelman Associates, which is slightly more dynamic than that of instance the Eurobarometer Data Centre called Gesis (Gesis Leibnitz Institut für Sozialwissenschaften, 2018).

In the 2018 trust barometer, data are given about trust in four segments: business, government, media and NGO’s. NGO’s are not the same kind of institutions as association, though often they use its legal shape and have characteristics in common. As they are more internationally oriented and often have a more outspoken mission than other associations, the data should not be taken at face value, but here it is probably the most extensive data available (for method: p. 51 and further (Edelman Associates, 2018).

Edelman observes that ‘trust in NGO’s’ is on the decline from 2017 to 2018, with an average degree of trust around 50. Though questions may rise on what a score of 50 actually means, we can be certain there is still a lot of trust to be won.

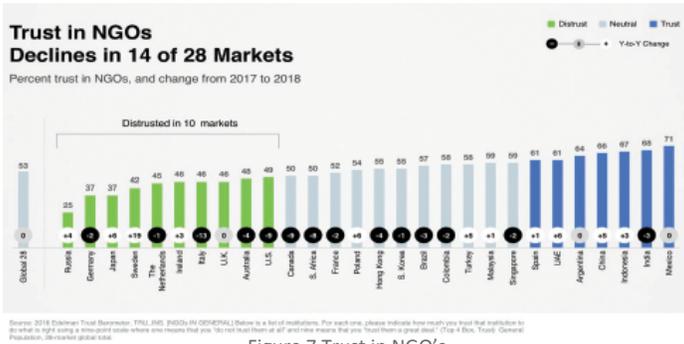


Figure 7 Trust in NGO's

For the full picture, in terms of trust in all four segments, is here the comparison between 2017 and 2018 for the general population, including a “trust crash” in the U.S. Edelman also measures the “gap” between the “Informed public” and the “masses”. This gap is growing, with on average a 16-point difference, 1 up as compared with 2017.

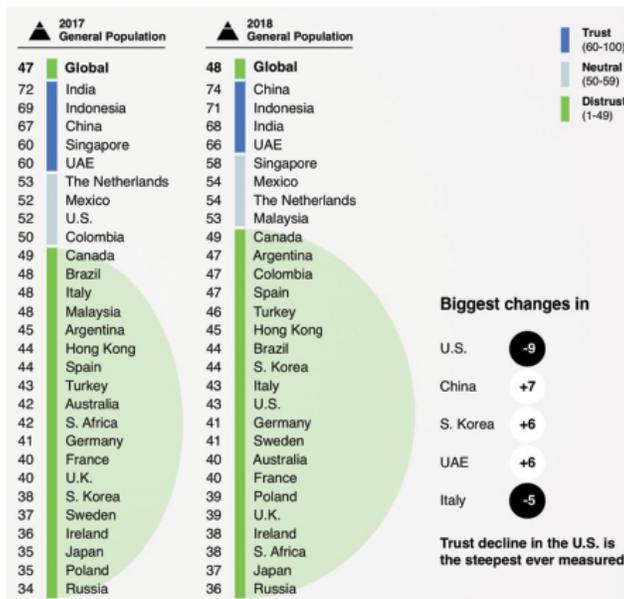


Figure 8 Trust Compared, Worldwide

A final figure is an interesting one from the perspective of quality initiatives, especially that of peer review. In who's word do you trust?

## Peers Now as Credible as Experts

Percent who rate each spokesperson as extremely/very credible, and change from 2016 to 2017

**“People in this country have had enough of experts.”**

— Michael Gove,  
Member of Parliament, U.K.



Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer (2016-17). Below is a list of people, in general, when forming an opinion of a company. If you heard information about a company from each person, how credible would that information be—extremely credible, somewhat credible or not credible at all? (Top 10 list. Very Generalized Credible General Population, 25 country global total, rounded down to half the sample.)

Figure 9 Credibility of Peers and Experts

## Trust and Nation Building Through Associations

So, trust is a vital factor in how people perceive others in their own group. Such a group can be a country and it can be an association. Within it, trust can grow, and it can decline over time. In his book ‘The History of trust’ Hosking (Hosking, 2014, p. 43) assumes that trust is the ‘default’ position in most of our social relations. This can be debated (Seligman, 1997) (Gambetta, 1988) (Uslaner, 2002). In his critical review of Hosking’s, Uslaner (Uslaner, 2018) counters this assumption by stating that “cross-national surveys consistently show that in only a handful of countries do a majority of people believe that ‘most people can be trusted’”<sup>27</sup>. The people from the Nordic countries, the Netherland and several Anglo-Saxon countries are more trusting, those from African and Asian countries the least. Translated by this researcher into the world of associations: the higher the income equality, the more trust and the more, the better the association. Based on this, the assumption can be made that associations are stronger in the former group of countries than in the latter. Yet, nowadays it does not stop there. In as much globalization spreads wealth around the globe (Noordhoek P. , 2017), it should be assumed that with it comes a rise in the number of associations and their membership.

Partly this is true, as can be observed from the rise in activities around association management issues. Attending the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) conferences over the years gives a clear sense of the growth of the international activities (ASAE, 2018). Possibly this will involve into a worldwide or international society of association executives. Even so, it is not clear at all that things are going well with associations in the western countries, even when they have a strong history in association development. Neither is it clear that the development will go in the same direction.

27. People can be trusted, but the main representatives of “the” people, the politicians, are trusted least, in any case less than real estate agents, bankers and journalists (Ipsos-Mori, 2018)

Western associations seem to want to learn to go from high barriers for membership and closed standards to lower, more informal barriers and more open standards, making themselves more attractive that way to new and younger members. It seems that certainly the trade and professional associations that now find a new role in the world are aiming for closed barriers, as evident from their strong desire from their intense use of certification schemes and their preference for clear credentials. If they seek an increase in trust, they seem to seek so through formal means and formal structures. It will be truly interesting to see which road to nation building through association is the more effective in terms of trust.

## 10. What Are We Talking About?

### Associations as a Basic Form of Social Organization

Associations, as we know them now, are the result of an evolution of groups as long as that of the humanoid race. In chapter 3 the history of associations is told through the lens of the social sciences and social history (Abbott, 2016). Other elements and viewpoints matter too. Geography (Huntington, 2006) (Schama S. , 1995), climate (Landes, 1998) and conflict (Morris, 2014)—they all contribute to the way primates like human beings behave ourselves. This is a matter of basic biology, translated in the way we think and act (Greene, 2013) (Fukuyama, 1999). Power struggles, religious beliefs (Armstrong K. , 2006), differences in knowledge about the world (Landes, 1998) (Gleick, 2011) and other matters that determine trust or distrust among people (Fukuyama, 1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2011) deepen the need to find forms of cooperation, including forms of conflict prevention or resolution<sup>28</sup> or simple solidarity when in need (Andriessen & Zijderveld, 1981). These forms, nowadays, usually take the shape of a dichotomy: the shape is either public or private. In the public “domain” you can find the government and its executive or judiciary players. In the private “domain” you find business. It is a dichotomy that is as dominant as the distinction between “left” and “right” in politics, no matter how often research shows that the distinction is problematic. It is, after the big two, that we get the world of non- or not-for-profit, which within most countries is the legal distinction between a foundation, which has assets but no members<sup>29</sup>, and an association, which has members and often also assets. In the following paragraphs, an important distinction is made between “classic” associations and “digital” ones, and the way the latter work in societies where the numbers are getting bigger and bigger, leading to “flock”-like behavior. The distinction is also made because we seem to reach the limit groups have been categorized until now. For this it is still worthwhile to go back to the vision of Durkheim, because in the end:

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28. Adding these authors as literature references to this sentence was a joy. The authors have definitely influenced the researcher and sharpened his mind. At the same time these footnotes were added after the sentence was made and the references rather mangle its rhythm, which goes rather against a proper use of footnotes. (Grafton, *The Footnote* \*, 1997). It is the consequence of how this researcher writes: out of his head, after much reflecting and associating, and seldom straight from a source. As memory serves this researcher no better than it does other people (except when it comes to audits, then everything is remembered) it makes his sentences more original but not more reliable. References then are first of all a line of defense against the danger of bad memory and secondly a source of referral for those who want to do further reading (or check me up).

\*A curious history.

29. It does so happen that foundations describe participants to their activities as “members.” In a legal sense, this is not correct. In the Netherlands, they should be called “aangeslotenen” (“attached” or “connected”).

*“A society composed of an infinite number of unorganized individuals, that a hypertrophied State is forced to oppress and contain, constitutes a veritable sociological monstrosity.”*

*—The Division of Labor in Society, Emile Durkheim*

## Complications in Classic Associations

As mentioned, the SBI code for businesses and other organizations provides a category of “other services”; the kind you do not know what to do with. This is where associations go. It gives evidence that the answer to the question “What are we talking about?” can be hard for statisticians as well. And any categorization will remain contentious. Abbott (Abbott, 2001, p. 25) makes this remark: “It has now been elegantly shown that occupational categories are socially constructed by census makers, often with implicit political agendas – making women’s work for instance invisible”. It is clear that the products and services of the members of associations can be found in the earlier categories, but the point here is that associations also play a separate role in the economy. It is SBI-category 94.1 that is of primary interest to this study, though in this context words like “branch” or “sector” are missing. Employers and employees have their own category 94.2. I guess it depends on which country you are, whether they have a separate role, or, like in The Netherlands, a sort of superior and regulating role. In fact, what they have in common, is their role in the “self-regulation” of the economy (see chapter 17 and in the case studies). The 94.9 codes do not have that role, though 94.92, concerning “political organizations,” is very much involved with it. All others seem most relevant in social contexts, more than economic ones—but can those two really be distinguished? It seems like it is time for a new code. Meanwhile, there are complications to deal with that the BSI codes do not even address:

- Economic activities are identified by their products and services. However, this ignores the so-called public goods and activities connected to them. The reality of modern associations show that many have a strong public identity: police, prison workers, tax inspectors, etc. many of the older associations may have started out as (part of) an effort to represent the interests of employees (MRP) or employers (VOB), but they have developed into something more. Others have never shared that union background and are mostly aimed at sharing professional challenges within a public setting (NVVB).
- The distinction between an association and an economic (or public) sector can be hard to make. If a sector is dominated by leaders who see each other as professionals, they will probably also behave like a professional association.

- Strong examples can be found within the health care sector but also, for instance, within less recognizable sectors like tax collection where the tax collectors can form a strong guild-like association.
- A single institution can be so big—take for instance those of the police or prisons—that here there is also evidence of association-like behavior by the leaders and professionals within the institute. One of the stronger associations in the Netherlands is that of the tax collectors. In this study we see both the directors of the public libraries and the notaries behave like employees and like members. Sometimes both at the same time.
- The distinction is between associations that ask for a commitment, financial or otherwise, from their members and those that consider members mostly as a resource or reflection of their own importance. In other words, associations that expect members to work and band together and associations that at heart ask nothing more than support, more or less in the way a foundation works. In long-term socio-economic effects, this is likely to make a significant difference.
- Some associations define their task so narrowly that their impact appears limited. Think, for instance, of an association that has as its only goal the lobbying of a single government department. Chances are that no one will ever hear from it. Smaller associations can be much more visible if they perform tasks that bring with it much visibility on TV or social media. Associations with a strong task in charity are an example of this. A task does not define an association as such (see Ch. 4), but it can make a difference in perceived impact.
- Some associations are considered part of “civil society,” while others are not. In sociological studies, including studies about trust (Hosking, 2014) (Posthumus, Ridder, & Hart, 2014) (Lewandowski & Znoj, 2008) (Hetherington, 2002), or in connected studies about volunteers (Hal, Meijs, & Steenbergen, 2004) or citizens’ participation (Rowe & Frewer, 2005) (Dekker P. ., 2005) or the functioning of democracy (Warren, 1999). Trade and professional associations are usually mentioned and then excluded. This is debatable (with especially Hosking making some sharp remarks on this), but not changing it. It could even be argued that civil society achieves its greatest impact exactly in these “purposeful” associations. In a country like the Netherlands they are the blocks upon which the “polder” is built, an amalgam of state employers and employees, that for a long time was (and is) considered the strength of this economy.

These are complications (or questions) that point to an underlying truth about associations: they are purely human constructs and behave according to the situation (groups of) people find themselves in. It is interesting to think about the way the form of the association adapts to human behavior, or if it could be said: to the “human condition.” Still much about the associations as described above is institutionalized; human acts lead to patterns that start to take on a life of their own (Andriessen & Zijdeveld, 1981, p. 9) Abbott (Abbott, 2001, p. 12) speaks of “self similarity: no matter what the level at which we inspect them, we find the same pattern repeated. In which fine detail recapitulates gross structure, taking cultural systems with them.” It is recognizable through legal frameworks and formal rules of entry. They have a logo, use a “true lie” or wield other stories and symbols. There is an address and someone who picks up the telephone or answers the mail. Yet, though human behavior may stay basically the same, and history puts a stamp on everything, the context in which people behave has become quite different since the 1990s. This is, of course, about the transformation coming from globalization and digitization<sup>30</sup>. The point here is that many associations no longer fit the classic mold and with this transformation, the definition of an association also has to change – and its leadership (Waal S. d., 2018).

### **Associations and the Professional-service Firm: An Inter-actionist Perspective**

From this perspective, it is also interesting to look at the difference between the (professional) association and the new phenomenon of the professional service firm (PSFs). At a distance, the “traits” can look the same, even when it comes to the profit motive, but as authors like Sonnevile and Zielstra (Sonneville & Zielstra, 2010) state in a handbook on PSFs (Otterlo (Ed.), 2010, p. 371), from their world of academic theories on professions, professionalization, and PSFs are getting stuck. These theories are often ahistoric—meaning not based on factual developments and the realities of the working place—lack an empirical basis and have not taken into account the Dynamics aspect enough. They advise to stop trying to use “traits” as a defining characteristic (DeLong, Gabarro, & Lees, 2007) (Kwakman, 2007) and look at the world in all its complexity. Starting to look at the world or organizations in all their heterogeneity, we have a starting point for reflections from an “interactionist” perspective. It is only after a long process of observation, of seeing how possible PSFs interact with customers, stakeholders and each other, that categorizations can be temporarily useful in a world that is never stable: “It takes variety to control variety,” as Weick and Sutcliffe state in the context of the “High Reliable Organizing” approach (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999) and as commented on his PhD-study by colleague De Bruine (Bruine H. d., 2018).

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30. Lewandowski and Znoj (Lewandowski & Znoj, 2008) edited a book on “Trust and transitions,” which is aimed at countries making the transition from communism to democracy. Very interesting, but outside the scope of this study.

The perspective from Sonnevile, Zielstra, and others is interesting, but there are two aspects to this argument that should not be forgotten. The first is that the attention on PSFs is relatively new, starting with the impressive rise of legal and consultancy firms in the eighties. It is probably good to correct the tendency to categorize by trait. Associations, on the other hand, are a very old social and economic phenomenon and it looks like we have sort of forgotten to look at its traits while at the same time the nature of associations may be fundamentally changing. The other aspect is that just observing does not seem enough for an interactionist approach. If there is to be observation, it should also be in reaction to changes and interventions. In other words, the perspective should be more active.

## Digital Ways of Associating

Probably the first association of the new kind was built by software from LinkedIn. On August 4, 2009, it opened the possibility of starting a group. Within a very short time, everyone who had an account on LinkedIn joined a group—and then another, and then another, until many people (including this researcher) hit the maximum of fifty groups. Users could be forgiven for thinking, “Why did I ever bother with the old way of associating?” Worldwide more than 8000 new groups a week were created in 2013, with an average of seven groups per person on LinkedIn (500 million users as of 2017, 4% of total social media use according to the source (DMR, 2017)). There is no data on later years and somehow the group phenomenon seems to have disappeared—to be replaced by groups created by Facebook and others, but also by a host of web-based “chat groups” and subsets of WhatsApp. The numbers? Millions and millions of groups that somehow fit into the definition of an association as “*a group of people bound by common interest and intent,*” rendering the definition in many ways meaningless for the purpose of describing a socio-economic phenomenon. When in doubt, try thinking about the concept of “blockchain,” which is usually described as a “distributed ledger” ensuring data-exchange and verification based on consensus (Noordhoek P. , 2016). Apart from the complicated technique, how is this different from an association?

The Dutch association of insurers (“Verbond van Verzekeraars”) organized a meeting to demonstrate the relevance of blockchain. Groups of insurance agents formed the “nodes” around which a blockchain was formed. They did so in order to demonstrate that building a blockchain requires the cooperation of many parties and people (Verbond voor Verzekeraars, 2017).

There are two ways to go about solving this. The first is simply ignoring all things digital and sticking with just the associations that are registered as such by a government or public body.

The second is by changing the definition. The first is self-defeating, certainly for the purpose of this study, which tries to show the capability of change for an association. The second carries the danger of doing effectively the same as the first way of dealing with it, as it will be too easy to focus on the classic associations that appear to carry the most economic weight. And then there is the reality of many classic associations that are already very far in their adaptation of digital means. How to judge those hybrid creatures? Two suggestions:

1. Accept that a transformation is going on, a “*transsociation*”<sup>31</sup> Do not try to define it away.
2. Understand that there are different dynamics for classic and digital ways of associating.

As far as the first point is concerned: talking about “transformation” will always carry the danger with it of a term that has crossed the threshold of a becoming a cliché. A transformation here basically turns on a) the concept of replacing face-to-face and written contact between members with digital contact, and b) having an *extreme reduction of the barrier to membership*. The second point about the dynamics has to do with the realization that the interaction between members is both more direct and involves a much greater number of members than in classical associations. As Shirky states, “Here comes everybody.” (Shirky, 2008) The result being, that members start behaving less like individuals and exponentially more like collectives demonstrating the behavior of herds, school, swarms, or flocks of people. Choosing from a wealth of metaphors, here the metaphor of a flock of birds serves best; a so-called murmuration, with birds drifting from side to side, up and down. People are not birds. Locked behind desks, living in houses, working in buildings, they use information differently when meeting each other, with more time for thinking and planning. Yet the metaphor of a flock teaches us something about how people behave when they interact across the—literally—worldwide web on streams of social media.

## The Rules of Murmurations

Research into the mechanisms of a flock suggests that any one bird watches no more than seven or eight birds at the same time. So not the whole of the flock, just the birds closest to them, with special attention for any bird changing course, no matter which bird this is.

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31. The term “transsociation” came to this researcher as he was listening to a lecture about an unrelated topic. However, it is not totally new. Markus Kaiser (Kaiser, 2003) treats it as a concept explaining counter-processes to nation building, following Appadurai (Appadurai, 1996), who even sees it as a gradual dissolution of the concept of society as something territorial bound. This will come back in chapter four.

This is the first law of a flock:

watch the birds closest to you (not that, as a bird, you have much chance to do otherwise) (Ball, 2004)<sup>32</sup>.

As a rule, birds try to create a sort of balance in the distance toward each other: not too far away, not too close. Experiments suggest that it is important for each bird (we are talking sparrows here) to be able to see a piece of sky at all times. But keeping the same distance while in flight is not an easy thing to do, especially when birds of prey are around. Then the second law applies: seek safety in the center of the flock. There is always one bird that reacts first. In a fraction of a second, the birds closest to that bird follow suit, followed by... etc. (Adler, How just one bird can urge an entire flock to change directions. The equations that describe these movements are equivalent to those that govern waves., 2014)

Then the third law comes into play: do not crash. Not into each other, not into the ground, or into a tree. Go sideways, evade and fly away—but not too much: keep on keeping an eye on the birds closest to you, keep on flying in the same direction, but do not get too close.

There are more laws and insights into the behavior of flocks (Hemelrijk & Hildenbrandt, 2011) (Hemelrijk, Zuidam, & Hildenbrandt, 2015). They have for instance to do with the width of the wingspan, which dictates how wide the curve is when birds change direction. The three laws as formulated by Bell, “Look at the birds next to you,” “Go to the center of the flock,” and “Don’t get too close!” are the most intriguing. They give an image of movement that is essentially leaderless and mostly a collection of stimulus-response movements. Now, this is an exaggeration, certainly for birds like the sparrows, who can have a canny sense of direction. It certainly is exaggerated for people, so the analogy cannot go too far. Yet, look at the way people behave in situations like the Tahrir square in Egypt in 2011, or at Maidan in Kiev in 2014: essentially leaderless, evading opponents, but still moving in the same direction.

All this to suggest that digital ways of associating are different from classic ways of associating. They have less intent than classic associations and are more leaderless, more stimulus-responsive, and need more room to maneuver than the classic association. Classic associations are far more static, though not necessarily without movement. There is one thing they still are: a group. With a view to the subject of this study, the question can be asked: where is the concept of trust here? Most of the literature on trust is based on the development of societies through mutually beneficial interactions. In other words; time and its availability play a big role. Within a flock, there is more of a “stimulus-response” relation.

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32. The author who inspired this researcher with his flock analogy, Philip Ball, also provides his readers with an analogy for the capacity for humans to form alliances. Using landscape theory, a specific form of statistical physics, he demonstrates how players in a game are like gas particles on the point of condensing. It could be that only one big droplet will result from this, but it is more likely that several smaller droplets occur. Forces of attraction and repulsion come into play. The resulting push and pull produces an aggregate of alliances. The attractiveness of this analogy lies in the more two-dimensional nature of this game (Ball, 2004, p. 342).

The digital transformation throws us back onto more basic human habits, including that of “flee or fight.” It may well be that over time (exactly this point of time again) digital interaction will become more like non-digital behavior.

This is a fascinating time for studying how different, digital and non-digital, interactions lead to groups, lead to trust and associations, etc. As Hosking says, “There never was a golden age of trust. Trust and distrust have been pervasive features of all human societies, but their nature and context change along with social change.” (Hosking, 2014) The point is that the speed of this social change is exponential now. How interesting. Later in this study, in part I, we will continue with a question like, what turns a group into an association? And what are all the characteristics and dilemmas of associations? But first, it is time to, as one might say, shake the tree, and scare the birds away.

## 11. Pathologies and Remedies

The description of associations in the paragraphs above is as factual as possible. This is not saying much. Big holes have fallen in the knowledge of associations or have been there all along. It looks like associations are one of the lesser-known phenomena in social science, almost “hidden in plain sight.” Or, as Abbott (Abbott, 2001, p. 30) states in a more general context: “Specialists in knowledge tend to withdraw into pure work because of the complexity of the thing known tends to get in the way of the knowledge system itself. So the object of the knowledge is gradually disregarded.” Unfortunately, this lack of knowledge about associations does not mean there are no images connected with associations. The associations connected to associations are often not good. Available literature is often about the failings of associations. This is so consistent that instead of speaking of “problems,” it is probably better to speak of “pathologies,” of diseases that are hardy and recurrent. The message: there is something sick about associations, stay away. The introduction already provided the reader with an oversight of these “pathologies.” Here, they return, ready to be put in the context of the “association matrix.” This researcher has been collecting critiques about associations for quite some years, and these are the recurrent themes or symptoms. It seems logical to presume that for each pathology there is a remedy, and, yes, there is. Immediately, this is followed by the realization that a full recovery across the board is less than likely and probably not enough to erase the memory of the pathologies as long as the brain is hard-wired for new dangers (and it seems likely that positive message requires less energy of the brain than negative, making the brain think longer and harder on negative messages (Rozin & Royzman, 2001)). Most of the time it seems to hold true: “The negative stands out.”

### Pathologies

Starting with this “negative bias,” the questions come fast: what are these negatives? How far do they stand out? What are their characteristics? Once again, it is hard to get answers. There are a great number of surveys, and they do often say something significant. For instance, the insurance company AON, which reinsured many associations on an international basis, again and again, comes back with appreciations of associations, which are, in the end, good enough (6–7 on a 10-point scale), but only so-so. It is usually the lobbying on behalf of the members that is appreciated most by the members (but least known, it must be said), and the price/benefit ratio of membership is appreciated least, at least with members of business associations. There are more surveys that get done. Almost all professional and many volunteer associations do them, and there are “associations of association executives” and there are several commercial parties providing benchmark services that are getting better and better.

These surveys sometimes give clear warnings about a certain situation, but on the whole, they are not alarming.

For the purpose of this research, trying to tell a deeper story about the development of associations, it is assumed that these “happiness ratings” are far from the full story. It is not enough to paint this picture by numbers, it needs some extra color. In this chapter it will be applied, only to be left here till the end of this study.

In the past ten years, ever since starting this researcher’s book on “sector-wide quality,” there was something evading analysis. Books and magazines are often written by association professionals, including consultants, and though sometimes quite frank about the problems in the past, have a tendency to tell more good news about the present and future. Articles in the mainstream media could be devastating about one association or another, but they usually focused on incidents and catfights without bothering to tell a more balanced story. Membership of all associations are supposed to go down, but do the numbers really indicate this, and is this trend forever?

One of the true privileges of this researcher is that he can often accompany audits. Not just within (international) associations, but also for sectors and individual organizations. In almost all audits, especially in the first round of an audit system, there will be talk about the association and its functioning. This can have many dimensions and is certainly not only critical, but it does add extra insights, especially when incidents that have been in the media echo in the offices of the members. Based on these conversations and many other signals, though not in quotable form from literature, two pictures emerge. One is of persistent problems in trusting an association, both from the perspective of the public and from the members themselves; sitting board members not excluded. The other is one of great and fundamental appreciation for what associations bring, even up to the point that they are what make people have trust in society. The first picture is big and dark, full of pathologies, staring in the face of the beholder. The second picture is small and nice, but easy to miss.

These are some of the most persistent problems in trusting associations, their “pathologies”:

### Problems with Groupthink

Some symptoms:

- groupthink leading to closed minds
- groupthink leading to extreme views (group supremacy)
- groupthink reinforcing conservative tendencies, discouraging renewal

Groupthink is a serious risk everywhere, but it should be remembered that it is always a strength turned into its opposite. The thinking about its serious negative consequences has evolved from the first studies by Janis (Janis, 1982), who defined specific conditions (high group cohesiveness, structural faults and situational context) under which it could occur, to a point where it is almost assumed that wherever people work together in groups, groupthink is the inevitable result. It is no accident that research was published showing that groupthink leads to exclusion (Hutchinson, Abrams, & Christian, 2007) and even very extreme thinking (Quiggle, 2016). In other words: it lays the ground for terrorism by ISIS adherents, one of many ideologies that claim supremacy of the group above the individual. In fact, groupthink is a serious factor and should be analyzed accordingly (Esser, 1998) (Tsoukalas, 2007) (Rose, 2011) (Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 1997). In the field of risk management, researchers such as Weick and Sutcliffe (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obtsveld, 1999) are doing important work on risk prevention and containment based on sharp insights into groupthink (including the one where people place trust on written procedures). Even so, as with many social phenomena, it is also dangerous to speak in absolutes when it comes to groupthink. Baron's ubiquity model shows that the common interpretation of it is too rigid or deterministic (Baron, 2005). A writer like Ball suggests that the size of the group matters a lot before there is "critical mass" for groupthink (Ball, 2004). Culture, including power distance, plays an important factor as well, bringing many psychological insights with it. From this research, it must be assumed that groupthink is not an inevitability, and though associations are undeniably more vulnerable to groupthink than say, competitive businesses, associations with a healthy atmosphere of debating issues are not very vulnerable to groupthink and may, under the right circumstances even deliver antidotes to groupthink. Think for instance of the groups and associations helping communities after terrorists have struck and the media have gone. Again, this does not mean that there is no problem, as we will see when we look at the way quality projects are introduced and the politics behind them. When the in-group is in accordance, the social identity has hardened (Tajfel H. , 1974). It is very hard indeed to change a course once set (see also, inwardness). But is it impossible? Or are there conditions where it might work? This is definitely the subject of the text, more specifically, in the next chapter.

### Problems with Polarization

Some symptoms:

- problems with members, which lead to conflicts or slowness of decisions
- problems with members, which lead to politicized decision making
- problems with members, which lead to mediocracy

The danger with closed standards, as proposed by classic “Kantian” associations, is that rules must apply to everyone and that this results in a sort of minimum standard which does the opposite of stimulating members to take responsibility for his or her acts. The idea that “as long as you meet the standard it is alright” is, in the long run, deadly for members of every association and many associations are at the end of their long run. It also influences the way members make decisions. The final pathology is that of a kind of politicization of decision making that brings out the worst effects of polarization; not being able to decide and all the while making positions more extreme. Result: no decision, a slow decision, or a meaningless compromise. With this pathology, you may also expect an amount of “goal shift”; not the original goal of the association being the focus of decision making, but the formulation of standards that are least burdensome to the members. If and when (government) rules from outside the association play a part in the formulation of internal standards, which they often do, debates easily become politicized as the interest of members diverge. Unable to make distinctions between members or to have more open standards, the inevitable result is mediocracy or worse. Especially when membership of an association is mandatory, formally or in practice, creating excessive social control, members (and even societies) can become obstructive, looking for ways to lower or avoid standards. This can turn into a struggle that will result in limitations on the democratic nature of an association. There are many examples of associations where boards get smaller and the involvement of members becomes less and less. It can also turn into a demand for a strong leader. In its most extreme form, already observed by De Tocqueville, the gathering of members will turn into “the democracy that destroys democracy.”

### Problems with Market Failure

Some symptoms:

- acts that limit or end competition
- acts that limit the spread of knowledge
- acts that make an association hide the faults of their members

Every association creates by its very nature an “in-group”: some are members and others are not. Those who are not, belong to the “out-group.” To this out-group, there is a horizontal aspect when it concerns colleagues or competitors in the same line of activities. There is also a vertical aspect when it concerns the customers, clients, or the general public that has to work or deal with the activities of the members of the in-group. When the members of the in-group together set standards for their activities, this can have an impact on both groups on the outside. No matter the motive, this is seen as a disruption of the market and as such harmful, especially with trade associations.

From the “robber barons” in nineteenth-century America on down, or earlier still, whole libraries have been written on the harmful effect when monopolies or oligopolies (and associations can work like both) “exploit the people.” Marx wrote his books and pamphlets on the assumption that this exploitation was inevitable and should lead to a revolution. He was talking about a historic movement.

All this is usually very far from the mind of the average member of an association when he or she tries to work together with his colleagues—because this is likely the way the member will feel. Still, somewhere there is a line between working together and starting a conspiracy against outsiders or the consumer, and all governments have taken it upon themselves to prevent the wrong kind of “collusion” between economic partners. Their “market regulators” are often large and powerful, though in the eyes of the public often not powerful enough. No matter how, associations that are active in a market, will always have to deal with accusations of unfairness and it is very hard to counter them; they are “guilty unless proven innocent.” And proving innocence is almost impossible to do.

### Problems with Inwardness

Some symptoms:

- increasing impact of exclusionary practices
- increasing impact of antisocial or illegal practices
- increasing impact of conservative views

Not really different in what has been formulated above, but important enough to deserve a separate mention, are some of the effects of the inwardness caused by both being an in-group and the possible effect of groupthink. The reason for mentioning them explicitly has to do with the impact of modern (social) media. Over the past few decades, television and other media have also been playing their part in holding associations to account when it comes to “misguiding the consumer.” Now social media is putting extra pressure on associations to give an immediate response when something appears wrong. In fact, for an association, it can be very hard to take away this idea that having an in-group automatically leads to behavior that hurts the ones in the out-group. The problem is compounded by the fact that when one member seems to misbehave, the association needs to be careful with its own members and not to treat them as guilty when inquiries are still ongoing, and there are also demands in the realm of privacy to be met. In other words, the association has only limited opportunities to operate as fast as modern media seem to demand. It also becomes harder because transparency is not easy to achieve when the group of members is diverse and with different interests, as is often the case. Nevertheless, much is expected from the board of an association to counter the wrong “frame” or “image.” It often is a thankless task.

Taken together, all these problems become pathologies, something apparently endemic to associations. As a result, there is a lack of trust: the conviction with all involved, both in- and outside the group of members, that there is a basic level of competency and trustworthiness within the association and its representatives. If not, there is a need for change. However, all problems seem to point in one direction: great difficulties with the ability to change, or perhaps an impossibility to change.

*"As the line above is written, a news flash on the computer of this researcher quotes a member of the Dutch Parliament: "When I think of accountants, I think of scandals."  
(FD, 2017)*

If these are the pathologies of associations, we should understand that they are the pathologies of our human behavior. The shape of an association only carries them, just like it carries the behavior that makes them often indispensable. Just like businesses and governments each in their own way carry their pathologies with them, there is always a remedy walking within them: those same human beings.

## Remedies

These are some of the main reasons why associations are so important, and why they are "remedies" for much of the ills of society:

### *More Togetherness*

- It brings minds together
- It dampens extreme views
- It creates a free space for creativity

### *More Cohesiveness*

- It leads to decisions that are supported
- It leads to a more democratic decision making
- It supports the average person, and most of us are average

### *More Sharing of Knowledge and Ideas*

- It creates markets, a platform for collective action
- It is where most knowledge is born and preserved
- It makes it possible to correct mistakes

### *More Strength*

- It combines the power of those who would otherwise be weak
- It is the platform where best to correct wrong behavior
- It protects what is valuable

These remedies can be translated into other forms of which the best always have the word “true” in them. At their best, associations are “truly” or a “true” meeting of minds and institutional means.

Philosophers may have a lot to say about the true nature of truth (Ayer, 1936), but the word here is simply used as an indication of the expression people may express when seen or experienced.

The problem is, that though everyone could in principle agree on the reasons why associations are so useful and fantastic as remedies for social ills, or even make it part of your political ideology like many center-right parties do, turning it into a reasonable assumption that our welfare state is built on associations and their volunteers (Andriessen & Zijdeveld, *Vrijwillig initiatief en de verzorgingsstaat. Cultuursociologische analyse van een beleidsprobleem*, 1981), they will probably not weigh as much in the public mind as do the points that make up the pathologies of an association. Not many write on the pros and cons of associations, but when it’s done, the accent lies firmly on the cons; on the pathologies of associations. So, on these positive points this researcher will not expand, or not here. Except for one point, that needs pointing out: there is, in essence, no hierarchy within an association, which makes the faults of one member the fault of all its members, and vice versa, the strength of all its members the strength of all its members. It is trust that binds or unbinds, not hierarchy.

## Consequences for Change

In a way, in the eyes of this researcher, the remedies are as irrelevant as the pathologies are. This is because associations are one of the few “engrained” states of social cooperation. Human beings will at some point in time always use this shape of working together, just as at another time they will prefer that of informal cooperation, of a market activity of a public body. Change moves through these shapes, changing each shape as it happens, making it more or less irrelevant, but never making it totally dominant or making it fully disappear. The shape of an association may now be the smallest it has ever been—though that remains to be seen—but it will be there.

All this does not mean that shape or change cannot be influenced. On the contrary. As human constructs, they can (Gergen K. J., 1994) (Laloux, 2014) (Livne-Tarandach & Bartunek, 2009). But there will always be questions when it comes to speed, direction, and maneuverability. In order to get a handle on this, we need to make constructs or models in our minds and that is what this text has occupied itself with all along. Given the challenges, including the pathologies, what can be done in the most rational way and given our need for trust? Can associations change? What if we put this question to the test through some case studies?

## 12. Three Case Studies and an “Association Matrix”

### How Much Change Is Possible?

How much change is possible? It is assumed here that a total “cure” of all problems or pathologies is not possible, or the dissolution of an association should count as such, but even that is not true, because then certain important functions in society may not be fulfilled. It is also assumed that there are remedies against the problems, but none will change the fundamental nature of an association, otherwise, it would have through the kind of digital transformation that is now taking place.

Therefore, change will only be possible within certain bounds. The goal and the nature of the association and the context within which the association operates, will determine the definition, direction and the possible amount of change.

In this study, the question of trust in associations will be discussed from many angles, as the result of an interplay between many factors. Trust, here, is not something that can be plucked from thin air. It needs a conviction or trustworthiness, usually built up over time. In the introduction and later, more is said on the element of trust, including applicable literature in what is a fast-growing field of study, but here it is assumed that once trust is lost, it will take time and much evidence of trust before it can (again) be taken for granted. In this first chapter, on the nature of associations, two of the main aspects of this study will be used as parameters for the ability to change in one direction or another. The goal of the matrix is to show how or what the nature of an association is after a proposed change. An association is not something static, with only one face, or one condition. In fact, it can show many sides and some of them lying next to something that is not the same as a classic association. But then, what is it? Here the proposed change is analyzed in such a way that it tries to show the underlying nature of the association. This in turn may help using the right intervention to help change the association. The three main case studies will show how this works. In the following chapters, there will be discussion of how an ambition to change was formulated and an intervention was planned to increase quality in and for the association by setting up a system of peer review or inter-collegial audit.

### Three Cases

The three cases were not selected beforehand by the researcher. They happened. All three were assignments on the recommendation of third parties. Still, it would have been very hard to find three cases both so similar in assignment and different in their context. Of course, the three are not representative of the whole of all available associations.

There is no representation from hard industrial associations, health care, charity, sports, and what have you. Neither is there a direct need for that, as the author is familiar with a great many more associations than can be written about here, see for instance the more than fifty examples from his book from six years earlier (Noordhoek P. , 2011). The three selected cases are most of all complementary in these aspects:

Anticipating on two aspects that stand central in the chapter on the nature of associations:

- a. When it comes to the level of entry and exit of members (see 10–11): one is low in terms of ordinary membership and high when it comes to institutional membership, one is high, individual, even lifelong membership, and one is medium.
- b. When it comes to the measure in which standards are open or closed (see 12): one has open standards (and wishes them to be more closed), one has, in the main, closed standards, and one has a mix of open and closed standards.

Anticipating the kind of change that can be expected:

- c. When it comes to the kind of quality intervention and the means for change: one wants a peer review on certification criteria, one wants peer review on all of its laws, and one wants an audit on its code of honor.
- d. When it comes to the setting of the association: one is (kind of) an association in a public setting, one is a hybrid public-private professional association, and one is a business association in a private setting.
- e. When it comes to the structure of the association: one is a hybrid association of public bodies, one has the structure of a professional association, one a structure more of a business association.
- f. When it comes to the balance between horizontal or vertical oversight: one, the public one, has no body of oversight; one has an oversight body very close up, and one has part of its activities on close oversight and the rest at a distance.

All three cases raise questions of definition, impact and decision making. All three are, as this researcher found out somewhat to his surprise, under more influence of their past than they realize themselves. And all the people most in favor of change, have big worries on how to get enough members along with the plans, no matter the arguments.

And last but not least, all three think of themselves as modern but classic associations, even when the evidence suggests they are not. This sometimes makes it very hard for them to create the right conditions for change and show the added value of any road to change. In order to illustrate these last points, it is important to introduce an “Association matrix,” or at least part of its structure. In the chapters after the first part of the case studies, the main elements will come back.

## Central Question of Change

All three organizations involved have made plans to improve the workings and the position of their association by making an intervention in the form of a modern quality approach requiring a form of audit or visit to a member. Here the question of change will not be answered by researching the effectiveness of the intervention. Apart from all kinds of measurement problems, including finding a proper “point zero,” the moment to have a true measurement of the effectiveness still lies in the future with all three cases in some way or another (a typical system of peer review is done with a commitment for three rounds or nine years, or longer).

The question to be answered here is *whether or not all stakeholders make a commitment to the intervention, or most of all the members. For the commitment of the members, an agreement is needed by means of a formal decision by the highest representative body of members of the association.*

Of course, agreement must not be so conditional that in effect it is a “nay.” Nor should there be doubt as to the real opinion of the stakeholders because of abstention or lack of interest in the debate prior to the decision or too many “pocket vetoes.”

It can safely be said that in all three cases, these criteria are met. Even so, change is defined here by both the moment of change, its manner, and direction. There is no going back.

The reason for this central question is that a decision like this has shown itself to be hard to obtain. All hopes and fears come together in the decision, forcing the different parties to vocalize their reasons for support and dissent. Another reason is methodological; the researcher can follow what is happening in this phase very well, but not later on. There is a risk of bias, as discussed earlier. As the case descriptions in two of the cases in this regard are very detailed, with regular meta-observations by the researcher, the reader can judge whether or not this has been a problem.

## Association Matrix

This central question of change, in the way of a formal yes or no on wanting a quality system including some form of peer review, takes place in a dynamic setting. This setting must both be described and explained in order to capture the nature of the decision to change. For this, a model is used in the shape of a matrix. Knowing full well the methodological drawbacks of any model and the simplifications and other distortions that can come with it, it nevertheless is useful in the eyes of this researcher as something that supports the broader analysis like a tent pole in a tent (metaphors have their drawbacks too).

The association matrix will be introduced here, but not without saying that many of its elements will later be used and demonstrated in both parts of the cases. It will also return in the paragraphs on the vertical axis of “entry and exit” of associations (11–12). On the horizontal axis, it will return in the form of the question whether standards are formulated in a “closed or open” manner (13). It must also be added that this matrix is one out of six matrices the researcher has formulated to have a three-dimensional idea of all the forces that can come to bear on an association. If only for brevity’s sake, not all will get a similar treatment to this one.

Using a preliminary definition of an association as “a group with a goal, recognizable by its entry or exit criteria, and/or standards that make sense to its members,” here the first matrix A1 is shown in its main manifestations.

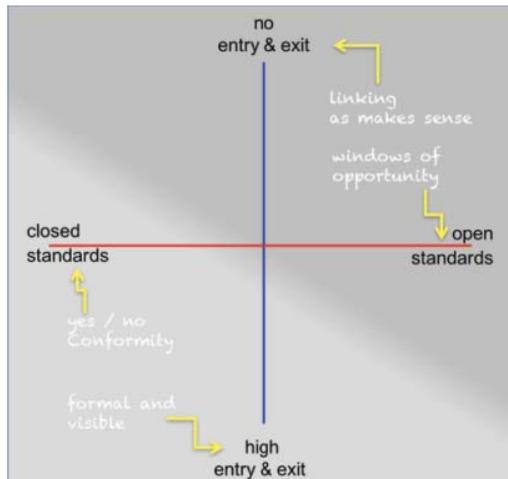


Figure 10 Association Matrix as a Choice

What we see here is not just a representation of an association or its world, but of that of all forms of “associating:” the coming together of people, their meeting.

This can be for all kind of reasons; from exchanging money, doing a transaction, or having a drink together to becoming a member of a formal association or starting a business. These reasons become choices for one form of group membership or another. The dynamic and the differentiation come from two elements:

On the vertical axis, there is the element of entry to, or the exit from a group. In Part II of the study, chapters eleven and twelve, much more will be said about it, including its roots in Durkheim and its reflection in Gergen. On the horizontal axis, there is the element of standards: the rules, regulations customs, and habits the member has to abide by during his or her membership. These can either be closed (very specific, limited, stable) or open (fluid, open, changing).

Translating the effects of both elements, we see four main ways for people to form a bond (again, this is rough).

In the bottom, right-hand corner, you see the most basic, least regulated form of coming together, there is; through cooptation, an informal request on behalf of a group to someone to become part of that group. The results are (social) networks. This can be full of associative action, but it lacks the combination of barriers and relatively closed standards as a basis. There are “hard-core” informal or even secretive ways of co-opting members (Ferguson N. , 2017), which can give them a less than democratically accepted image, but their function of binding people to each other is no less important for that, if only for their resilience (Zolli & Healy, 2012). But for every “hard-core” way of co-opting members, it must be supposed that there are soft-ones. In the (political) eyes of some, this will lead to a cooperative society (Schmidt, Meeren, & Beemer, 2008) (Putten & Beekers, 2014) (WI, 2013) (Noordhoek P. , 2000). Both associations and co-optations or social networks are “social action systems” (Godfroij, 1981), but in associations, the will to make these systems more permanent give them a different dynamic. Research suggests that a rise of cooptation activities or participation in social networks is not necessarily an indication of individualization but can be evidence of “informalization” (Ingen & Dekker, 2010). Membership, as stated before, is but a limited indicator of social activity.

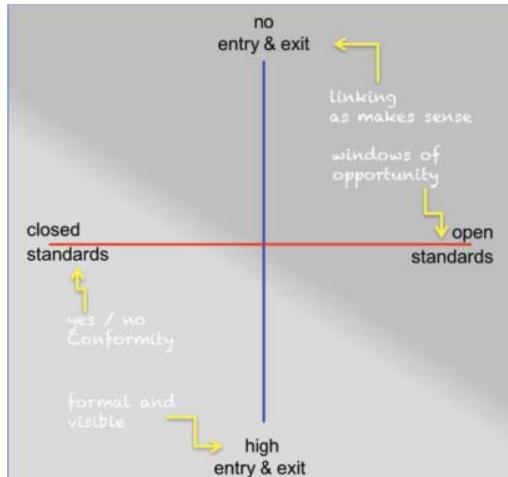


Figure 11 Association Matrix as a Result

Moving to the left, we land in (more) classic association land. Here, for outsiders, recognizable formal barriers to entry and exit exist, based on relatively closed standards. The more the reader goes to the left-hand corner, the more it is the terrain of the “classic” association, the main focus of this study. Again, it is the combination of barriers and standards that characterize an association, not so much its “structure,” though an association at its hard is recognizable by its horizontal relations.

When we go to the upper left-hand corner, we come to the world of market transactions, which always has at least two sides in agreement, translated into an (informal) contract with each other. This does not mean that associations cannot move to here, or to any other corner. It does mean they will use some form of contract to deal with each other as members and with the outside world. Much of what you find here can be described as “the market,” but the groups active here, are not just businesses. Governments and other semi-public hierarchies play a role in which associations have to accommodate.

It is in the upper right-hand corner that the nature of the group changes quite dramatically in terms of a group’s boundary. Here it can be enough to “like” something and become a member of a group, after which you receive a richness of information and entertainment no member of a classic association could dream of in the past. For this, it is not necessary to get the other members of the group in person. In fact, it could well be that what you see from the members of the group is not the real identity, as there is no formal test. It is enough that it somehow makes “sense” to become a member; it does not need to have “use.” As easy as it is to enter a “group,” it is easy to leave.

Yet, be aware of the fact that no formal entry or exit criteria exist and no or few formal standards are set, does not mean necessarily that the interaction between the members can't be rich and intense indeed<sup>33</sup>.

The label “transsociation,” should be especially attached to this domain. Here we are very much in the world of digital and virtual communication. Yet, there is always a need to give a group a more permanent or qualified status. Here we go back again to the cooptive dimension and do so through network formation. As they develop, they can either become a hierarchy or a move toward the classic association.

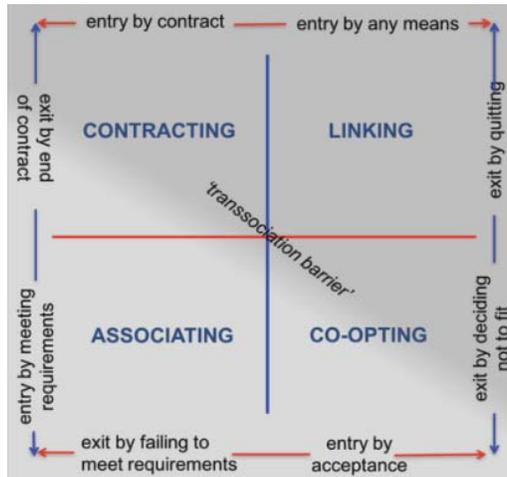


Figure 12 Association Matrix as an Outcome of Variables

Here we see in 13, in fact, the same scheme as before, but this time with explicit mention of how people come in or leave a group in the different domains. For each domain, there is a different way to enter or exit. A “transsociational barrier” runs across the scheme to indicate that there is no smooth transition from one form of group formation to another; it is “a different ballgame.”

33. Here, it is necessary to refer to Hirschman’s characteristics of “exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect,” as they are regularly used to describe this interaction and their sources (Hirschman, 1970) (Dowding, John, Mergoupis, & Vugt, 2000) (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous III, 1988). However, in this study they will get less attention than they deserve, as the focus will be on “quality interventions.” For an application to the situation in The Netherlands, read Niesink (Niesink, 2014–2016).

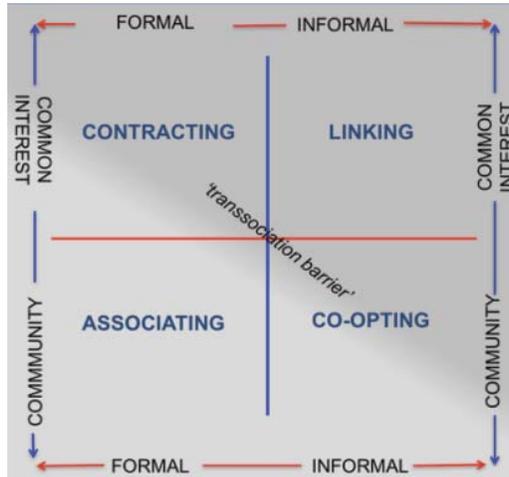


Figure 13 Association Matrix as a Verb

In this fourth version, the matrix is made more active, trying to show the forces that drive people together and make them go for one of the domains of cooptation, associating, contracting, or linking.

Lastly, a version of the association matrix is shown here in which the pathologies and remedies come together. The exact descriptions matter less than the fact that, in this way, the tensions and dynamics within the matrix become fully visible.

It should be clear that this matrix is “made of change.” Change is a constant here, moving essentially all the time from one domain to the other, in time also going over the transsociation barrier. Looking at this version of the matrix, it should be clear that the change from quadrant to quadrant is much more than a change of legal identity, or even a simple matter of organizational change. In many ways, it is a change of *paradigm*<sup>34</sup> in what defines a group (see also Part III). Looking from within, it is always hard to imagine there can be another reality from that where you are staying. The quadrants seem to exclude each other, while in reality there is movement from quadrant to quadrant all the time. The movement out of a quadrant may signify a lessening of cohesion—of “trust”—the movement toward a quadrant a strengthening of the groups moving there, and a building of “trust.” The word “trust” is here put in quotation marks, as this is all just a supposition, a working hypothesis.

34. Much more on changes in paradigms in part III about changes in paradigms in the way we look at quality (Kuhn, 1962) (Spencer, 1994).

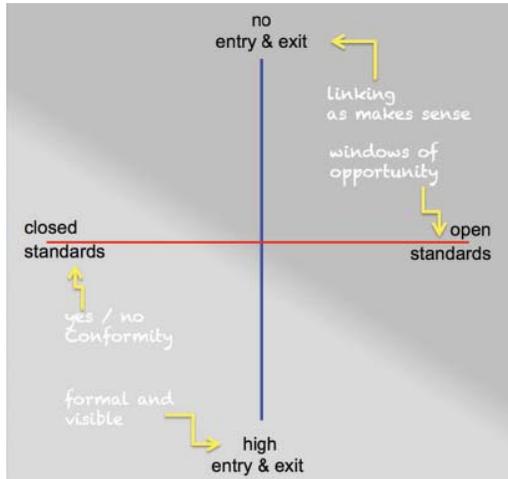


Figure 14 Association Matrix as Pathology and Remedy

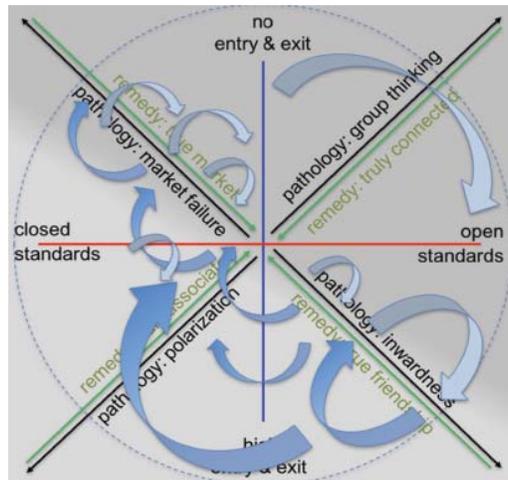


Figure 15 Association Matrix as a Dynamic Whole

It is worth noting once again that in this matrix, the movement starts at the level of cooperation or social networks, then becomes “hard” in terms of entry-and-exit barriers and standards that are relatively closed. The assumption is that an association wants to move in the direction of the center, increasing its options as it does so. However, while doing so, it also enters or is influenced by, elements that are contract-driven and bilateral by nature. This implies that associations come under the influence of market forces. These forces will change the nature of associations, especially in the light of new possibilities that arise with technological change. As closed standards and high barriers make a place for open or non-existing barriers—speeded up by the nature of digital processes—the nature of an association turns, becoming in many ways the opposite of a classic association.

That is until new networks of digital contacts coalesce around goals and get a more permanent aspect. First informally, through networking and cooptation, then formally, the need for an association is felt. A chairman is chosen, statutes are written, standards are fixed, barriers described and raised.

## Once More, A Definition of an Association

In conclusion, we come to the next definition of an *association*:  
*An association is a group of people and entities bonded by trust and recognizable by its barriers for entry and exit, and standards, applying equally to all its members.*

Here, the working definition from chapter 3 is translated and connected to the issue of trust and the standards to the importance of democratic decisionmaking.

In line with this comes the definition of a *classic association*:  
an association is a group of people and entities bonded by trust, recognizable by high barriers of entry and exit, and closed standards, applying equally to all its members. Other aspects flow from this definition: its democratic nature, with meeting members as a goal in itself.

And that of a *transsociation*:

A transsociation is a group of people and entities recognizable by immediate entry and exit, and standards, applying equally to all members.

It must be said of the latter definition, that this comes very close to the definition of a kind of social network. The distinction is connected to the word “equally.” It is trust that binds most of all, not just common interest, and this is also in contrast to the more hierarchical nature of cooptation like (social) networks.

A critique of these definitions could be that within them, an oxymoron is being used. After all: barriers can be defined as types of standards and vice versa. However, the standards here apply to the time of membership and not before or after. Also, that the elements of entry and exit have another, more symbolic meaning of making a member recognizable to others.

And here we leave the first visualization and conceptualization of the content of this study. Actually, this ran far ahead of where this study is probably going to land. Soon, much more will be said on the definition of an association, by looking into its actual nature. Now is the moment to start talking about the three case studies. This includes going all the way back in time, to history.

## 13. Development of Associations: Case study—Public Libraries (Part One)

To make it all more specific, we will test the working of the matrix on three case studies. In fact, the matrix was born out of the first, thought through in the second, and validated in the third. This chapter does not tell the full tale of the three cases. Fitting for a chapter that deals with the nature of associations, a historical perspective is given on each case in such a way that the reader can understand the kind of association we are dealing with and what pressures come to bear on it. These will not be rosy stories on “the hidden strength” of an association. Each association is under serious pressure to adapt to its times and surroundings, including surviving the crisis of 2007–2015. Nevertheless, serious attempts are to be made to change and improve the position and image of the association and its members. How this is done will be the focus of the next chapter on quality interventions. In other chapters, other aspects will be described, including the interplay between the efforts the association itself is making and the efforts over inspectorate and oversight bodies. But that is for later. Here we enter the world this researcher loves perhaps most of all, that of books.

### Library Services: A Complex Assignment<sup>35</sup>

In 2017, the sale of books in The Netherlands increased, while that of e-books dropped (CBS, 2017). How can this be in this digital age? Someone is rumored to have said “Because we want to own things.” He or she could be right. Still, it feels like a trend against the trend, this increased selling of books. The first major case of this study plays in a time when the estimate was that, as the director of a library said, “Books would have a place in an old tree museum, but nowhere else.” More serious policy documents estimated that the sector would shrink by at least 40% in five years. This case study plays out in the period of 2013–2015, the depth of the crisis, with many libraries closing and more cuts on the horizon. At that time, something needed to be done that appeared routine, but was not routine at all. The public libraries had a certification scheme. Experts reviewed every four years whether or not the library was run according to its standard.

After seven years it was time to look at the way certification would be done for the next round of four years. As evaluations showed, the present system was OK but rather cumbersome, with too many standards being applied. Could it not be done more efficiently? Just asking. At the same time the composition of the committee that was to review the system or the time it took to write its mission, showed that it was not really routine.

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35. For notes and literature: see the full case study in A1.

Half of the committee was composed of representatives from the Dutch public library association (*Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken*, VOB), which included the chairman. The other half was composed of representatives from the Dutch Association of Municipalities (*Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten*, VNG), the powerful association of local government. The certification scheme was, up until then, run by a number of certification experts, all of them more or less known to the libraries.

In a letter, a central group of experts had let it be known that they wanted to increase the level of scrutiny in order to make certification more relevant. This would mean turning the scheme over into an accredited ISO:9001 scheme, together with raising the number of experts from one to two experts for each audit. The organization made responsible for certification—the Foundation for Certification of Public Libraries (SCOB), a delegated body from the foundation supporting the public library sector (SIOB)—understood what the experts wanted, but there were two reasons not to go along with it. The first was simply the cost of the scheme at a time of cutbacks. The other was the clear feedback from the libraries that they wanted an approach that was less burdensome in preparation (using self-assessments with over 120 criteria) and more relevant to their day-to-day business. Not having the expertise, SCOB wanted an independent expert to review the possibilities and support the committee. Enter this researcher, who took with him, among other experiences, the idea to have a form of peer review within the library sector. Colleagues appraising each other and touching upon issues of existential meaning for the future of a library in each audit.

For this researcher, it was his first chance to apply some of the ideas he had developed in his book on sector-wide quality (Noordhoek P. , 2011). Before the first meeting of the committee, a test was done on the question “How much is the need to change felt within the public libraries’ sector?” The assumption being that for more than incremental change, a high level of pressure would be necessary. The findings then were translated into several scenarios

Other tests from the book were also applied. This in order to assess in more detail the pressure, or the lack of it, under which the association operated. Later, in the context of this Ph.D., the researcher looked extensively at how realistic these findings were. In hindsight, the conclusion was accurate in the sense that pressure from outside (public, media) was lacking. There is no active inspectorate or another oversight body (important, see chapter four). Pressure from stakeholders was indeed there, which in the end would keep the process going. Pressure from the internal stakeholders, the members, was there indeed, but in hindsight, a better analysis should have been made of the direction of that pressure; it was, for instance, not consistent with the feedback given in response to the evaluation of the last round of certification.

Nevertheless, at the time, the analysis helped to focus the mind and debate several scenarios to deal with the challenge of creating a new quality effort that did not lessen and did not lower standards. Before telling the story of what we came up with, how brilliant it was, and how stupidly it set us up for a conflict with the members of the library association, first some more insight into the dynamics of the public libraries. For this, some historical insight can be of value. Please, readers, who have come this far already, read on and start with a visit to Fjaerland, Norway.

### From Book to Bib

One of the nicest little associations is that of the “association of book towns.” Book towns are little places with a very high percentage of first and second-hand bookstores. Of these, this researcher probably likes Fjaerland the best. It is a truly small village on one of the northern arms of the Sognefjord in Norway. Enclosed by steep mountains rising from the water, it can only be reached by cars coming from the south-east. Coming from the west, you go by boat. Twice a day, the ferry delivers a small load of visitors. In the only street, they find houses and shacks fully loaded with books. Sometimes someone’s there, but often not. They obviously trust the visitors to lay down some money when they have found a book they like. No matter how gray and damp the days can be, it is a book lover’s paradise. Or is it? That morning, at the height of the summer season, my wife and I were the only two visitors. Is this what the end of the road looks like for books? A wonderful little place with houses and barns full of bookcases, surrounded by mountains. Empty. The end of such a long road.

In this day and age, there are still many people not able to read and write. This is a disaster for all involved, as all modern societies function on the assumption of people being literate. There once was a time when the assumption was that there was only the spoken word and our ability to memorize. Families and tribes raised each other on stories, told and retold over time. Into this oral tradition comes reading and writing, come books. We think that our digital revolution is a truly big event, but most of this is because of the speed with which it goes. In comparison to the coming of literacy, we are experiencing now little more than a hiccup in history. As with all major examples of Schumpeter’s creative destruction, mankind usually wins in the end, but along the way, there are many losers and winners, or at the very least people that change place. You would expect that those who actually have the books, would be among the true “winners,” but this is not what happened in the end.

Maybe it was just like with Bill Gates and Steve Jobs; people who were “nerdy” enough to understand the value of what the true nerds were up to but made their money by exploiting their concepts. We do not know.

What we do know (see A1 for notes) is that the houses where books were held were recognizable as such, and that most held something like chests and a table for distribution—and when you open your eyes thousands of years later, till long after the Middle Ages, this is still the case with most of the books preserved in monasteries and other religious building, plus the new phenomenon of universities, with reading and writing still a matter for the elites. The book printers began their own guild, but the books themselves only found their way to buildings with big walls. That is where the libraries were and for a long time remained.

Then a first important step was taken to spread literacy. When the monk Luther spiked his demands to the door of a Roman Catholic Church, one of his main demands was to let the Bible be read in the language of the members of that church, and not just in Latin. In the splitting of the church that followed, creating the Protestant church, one of the longer-term changes was to let every household have its own Bible. A single book does not a library make, but it definitely proved to be an important step toward more literacy for the whole population. This was helped enormously by the arrival of the printing press, a technological revolution second only to the coming of the book itself. It is doubtful if the act of Luther would (or of his great predecessor, Erasmus) have had the same effect if the printing press had not been there. As it was, Luther alone wrote and published 533 books and other publications, on his own, completely dominating the market in the years 1518–1525, and often afterward in middle Europe. A generation of noblemen was raised with his publications (Ryrie, 2017), p. 42). He himself narrowly missed the fate of all martyrs, and through a remarkable course of events ended up as the founder of the Lutheran church, which was in many ways run as a guild, allowed to grow under the protection of the rules of the day.

Of course, the spread of literacy among the people was never the same everywhere. In Britain, the rise of parliament stood as symbol for the spread of literacy among the classes, but the class system remained recognizable in who read how much and what. In the new United States, revolution and freedom brought with it a great civic culture, helped along by almost overactive printing presses. The revolution in France brought about a freedom to read that soon enough was crushed. Perhaps the freedom to read whatever one wanted was biggest in the Low Countries, but even there, large shares of the population lived by the Bible alone.

It was only in the nineteenth century that books really left the walls of buildings and houses of the well to do. Public libraries came into existence. The “public” character must not be misunderstood. It means “open” to a larger public, but not necessarily funded by government. It would turn out this way, but at first, it was primarily a matter of charity, of rich people giving “something back for society.” Most prominent of all was a poor Scottish boy who had moved to America and made a fortune there: Carnegie (Manguel A. , 2006).

Not forgetting the lessons a teacher had given him in his native Scotland, he decided to build libraries. In the end, there were more than 2500 “Carnegies,” as the libraries were simply called. Libraries, and not the least the building of them, became a matter of great prestige, as remains visible to this day. There can be little doubt that much has been achieved through the motive of charity, but in reality, it was the local communities that created most libraries, and local government that had to step in for funding. In countries like the Netherlands, something happened in large cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht; cities where there was a lot of poverty and illiteracy. A group of eight directors in local government, also director of the library in their city, started a powerful movement to have great “public libraries” (openbare bibliotheken). They did so for ideological reasons too; libraries were to be a main instrument to “raise the people” (volksverheffing). Linked to, or perhaps at the roots of the socialist movement, they really got something done. Like their capitalist colleagues, they also liked big buildings but also built infrastructure that was not by charity alone. They professionalized libraries. They, as directors and employers, also founded the first association of libraries.

[Observation: Hold there for a moment. Why not in the shape of a professional association of librarians? Perhaps because to be a professional, you need to have a unique claim to knowledge (definition by author). People visiting a librarian sometimes depended on the librarian to find them “a good book,” but librarians did not decide which books people would read (censorship, of which there could be much, was done out of sight or by the board). People depended on librarians to get them or find them books. In other words, their job was in logistics, they were good “process managers.” They did have a unique source of knowledge, but it does not look like it was ever used to give the profession extra status. This has to do with standardization, in many sectors of a huge source of unique knowledge. In the case of libraries, a system came about of “cataloging” that in other sectors might have become a source of professional power, but again that did not happen for librarians. The same goes for the education. Up to this day, it has proven very hard in the Netherlands to keep and maintain special courses for librarians going.]

One of those founding fathers of the Dutch public library was a director who in his days was called “Mr. Public Library.” He envisioned a librarian as a true professional, including an obligatory academic degree, but his successor turned back the clock by opening the functions within the library, in principle, to everyone (the role of the volunteer is controversial, to this day, which is not surprising due to reasons of salary competition). A small but important network of librarians transformed slowly into a group of civil servants whose primary network would lie in the local community and not with the peer group.

## Who Determines What?

So as the public library system expanded beyond the big cities, a system grew that on the one hand was determined by the libraries themselves, especially at the directors' level, and on the other hand, was very much determined by local government. In the case of the Netherlands, there is a situation where the budget for all of local government is proportionally divided by central government across the cities, towns, and villages. Only about 10% of the budget is truly determined by the local government itself, much in the field of culture and education. Because of the fact that libraries have people working for them, the library budget is usually the highest part of this "free" budget. And, of course, it is never enough, not for the libraries or for those in the local government. For this reason, added resources are made available through central and regional governments, for instance, to help libraries with their digitization or to keep libraries open in rural areas and in large city neighborhoods.

Taking a leap in time and landing in 2012, the committee that has to write a proposal for a new quality approach, needs to work in a complex situation. As this is research into the nature of associations, the first question to answer is: where or what is the association that is the object of this study? The answer is twofold. First, you have the VOB, as an association of libraries, as one of two parties that take part in the committee. Members of the VOB are the public libraries themselves, represented by their directors. Members of the VOB can also be other parties, like specialized libraries for the blind, but also the regional library associations and private parties that for instance supply the books. Secondly, you have the association of public library directors. This is not an association of professionals, as such, but an association of employers, which is necessary in order to have a proper negotiating partner when it comes to setting salaries for—the sector. The sector refers to all who have to work in or deal with the public library system, including employees. At the time of the committee, part of the association of public library directors—on the orders of central government and the associations of provincial and local government— has transformed itself into a sector support organization, doing all the tasks the public libraries cannot do independently. This is because basically, these parties had earlier lost their belief in the ability of the members of the VOB to get their act together in a timely fashion and decide on issues like a common IT-infrastructure or an approach to issues of quality.

Classic tensions between large and small libraries and personalities had been compounded by very complicated debates on what standards to apply when. In situations like these, associations show their worst face. The lowest common denominator sets a tempo that is far too low, so politics intervened through the ministry for education, culture, and science. As a result, in 2008, a "steering group for library renewal" was set up to speed up change, mostly funded by central government.

Members of the board were representatives from central, provincial, and local government. Representatives from the VOB only had “observer” status. The association had lost control. But this was only temporarily. None of the leading parties in the steering group had the intention of really running the library sector (it’s remarkable how an association can get a new lease of life because of how unattractive it is to “manage” a sector). The activities of the steering group would get a follow up in, for example, 1) for the first time in more than a century a new law on public libraries, 2) the split-up of the supportive activities from the association into a foundation giving support to the sector (SIOB), and 3) the aforementioned certification scheme. Both central and provincial governments would step aside, with central government writing the new law. They would leave it basically to the libraries and local government to further reform the library sector. The certification scheme would be supported by SIOB, with SCOB responsible for the objectivity of the scheme. After two runs of the scheme, a third was necessary but, as described, there was dissatisfaction with the way it was run from several sides. A committee was needed, with input from both the library association and the association of local government, supported by an independent expert. And here we are again.

## Forward as What?

The reader is kindly invited to continue reading about this case in the next chapter, which is dedicated to the quality aspects of an association. Together with the other main cases, things will be learned about associations, which are vital to their “chances of change.” How vital and difficult this is, may be gathered from this first historical description of the case. You could say that this association of libraries is in a constant crisis of identity. It is going forward, but as what? Some observations, based on what is written here and more extensively on the case itself:

- Is it an association? Together the public libraries form one of the biggest membership associations of any country<sup>36</sup>. Who has not been a member at one time in his or her life? The fee for membership is low, and though it is easy to quit, many people will hold on to membership because it is easy to do so. Its digital activities and the way it is opening up for meetings, events, and educational purposes creates new members, with little or no barrier to entry. There are problems—membership is not as necessary or even as inevitable as it used to be—and the question is whether membership still feels like membership, with services you cannot find elsewhere, but that problem is being tackled as well.

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36. Given the uncertainties when counting associations and their members (par. 1.3–4), no exact numbers can or will be given here.

The real challenge lies with the library itself, and the people working for it, and not with its member clients:

- Is it a trade association? In a way, yes. Its members are organizations, libraries. They are organizations that provide services on a transactional basis, though obviously not cost effective. Yet the association has no real power over the entry and exit of its members, as is evident from the totally open way membership is defined, nor does it seem very able to formulate standards. Its main supportive functions are not in their own hands, so what can they do?
- Is it an association of professionals? Of the librarians, the directors of the public libraries? In formal terms, no. In terms of actual behavior, probably yes. Not only because the directors hold the roles of employers, and as such have organized themselves, but also because of how most of them show vision and commitment in the way they define the role of the library and the knowledge and skills that takes. In both roles, they try to put their stamps on the policies of the association and of the sector as a whole. However, it appears more like a kind of veto power than anything else. They cannot build the way they want, also because the purse strings are held by others, but also because most of them are not entrepreneurs.
- Is it a branch, an association that holds or represents an economic or social activity within its bounds? Not really, although outsiders could be forgiven for thinking so. And as far as the association is concerned: it could have been, but it did not happen. At each moment in time, those who controlled the flow of books on the public side did not take up that role.
- Is it a sector, a whole of economic and social activities that could be recognized from the outside? Certainly. Not just as part of the cultural sector, or that of education, or as one of the biggest parts of the budget of a local government.
- Is it a network, a cooperation between equals, between peers? Looking at the history of the libraries and librarians, it is the history of one missed opportunity after another. The ethics of civil servants are there, but where are the moments of creativity, commitment, and consensus-seeking that the original big-city librarians shared?

There is one question that comes up in the mind of this researcher again and again: Why bother? Why bother with an association that seems unable to deliver? The short, but important answer is: there seems to be no alternative—yet. By the time this case played out, a first commercial library project was put in the market, but as an alternative, it was yet unproven and would probably be rejected on policy or ideological grounds.

So, this is the situation from which we start in the next chapter, as placed within the Association matrix.

The first realization is, that the assignment to build a new quality approach did not spring from the association of libraries as such—and this is something the reader should understand. It came to the expert, this researcher, only later in the process, after a crisis. If and when it does spring from an association itself it should have started with a wish to improve entry or exit conditions or raise standards in the lower left-hand corner of the matrix. But when all is said and done, the certification scheme was never something the members of the library sector had ever wished for as a collective effort. Most of them felt capable enough to do so themselves, or the scheme came as something forced on them as a matter of politics. No, the certification scheme came about as the result of a contract between (local) government on the one hand and the association on the other. At the time of asking, there was nothing phony about the wish to lessen the burden of the scheme. The wish to make the standard shorter and less a matter of compliance suggested that the approach of the committee could be more open and more based on cooperation. This, in turn, suggested that there was room for innovation in the direction of the lower quadrant right-hand side, which has exactly that character, and less within the lower left-hand-side, the domain of (classic) associations<sup>37</sup>. It did not exactly go that way.

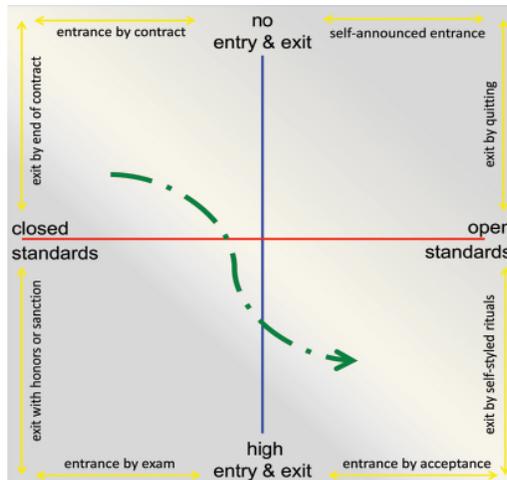


Figure 16 Matrix Ideal Movement Public Libraries

37. The fact that the color of this matrix is of a darker blue than the others, has no special significance. They come from a range of earlier versions of the association matrix.

## 14. Development of Associations: Case Study Notaries (Part One)<sup>38</sup>

In an old former chapel, close to the Vondelpark in the heart of Amsterdam, you can find the treasures of the notariat. It is the home of the “foundation for the promotion of the science of notariat” (Stichting ter Bevordering van de Wetenschap van het Notariaat (SBWN)). There you can find some examples of the material notaries used to use—from waxen seals to a fax—but most of all, old deeds and registers and all the books on the notariat and its history you could wish for, and an example for many other associations. This researcher went there a number of times, and within its walls, he found something quite remarkable.

### Parallels with the Library Case Study

When the library sector decided to review its audit system, this researcher had already gained much insight from what happened in other sectors, notably the notariat. Triggered on reflections about the relatively weak position of librarians as professionals—who must once have been the custodians of all knowledge in the world—it was logical to see how this compared to the position of the notaries. Superficially, the differences are great; an outside front of wealth, an image of slow reliability, part of every local elite, and masters of the deed. But this researcher knew there was another side to this, running remarkably parallel in these crisis years (2012–2015) to the challenges the library sector was facing. Both were said to face a shrinking of the budget or market of roughly 40%. Both were bound, with often big, expensive buildings, to their local market. Both were facing the effects of digitization: the e-books, e-deeds and other e-words were challenging their model in a fundamental way. Both faced a very real transformation.

The question then is how similarly or differently they deal with the crisis, and what role their way of associating plays. To this researcher a very practical question, as it has direct influence on the way your quality effort is supposed to work, including the question of how peer review would work given the dynamics.

To make it more to the point: the library sector has the sympathy of everyone. It can do no harm in the public mind. There is no inspectorate or other oversight body controlling the work of the libraries. Would this lack of oversight or governance structure make it easier or not for the library directors to visit each other? Does the association have the authority to make it mandatory?

The notariat, on the other hand, came out of the period, or was still in the middle of it, with serious upheavals. The notary has a public function, with its prices, for a long time, set by law. These were good prices. Those prices were no longer set.

38. For notes and literature: see the full case in attachment two.

Under the influence of privatization, the fees were to be set by the market and in the ensuing years, those prices would tumble and tumble, with sometimes less than 30% of the old price for a simple deed. At the same time, the profession was hit with many serious incidents, leading to measures against individual notaries and even arrests. Many a headline in the newspaper undercut their image of reliability. It went so far that the notaries were put under the authority of a new oversight body, the Bureau Financieel Toezicht (BFT or Bureau of Financial Oversight) (in the second part in the case descriptions, chapters nineteen and twenty, we will see what this difference between the library sector, with no oversight body, and the notariat, with one, means for the ability to change). To the association, this meant that they had to get their members working at a higher level. Coming from inside the bureau of the association, the proposal was to have a system of peer review in place.

This researcher was asked to help with the development of the system and to help select and train the auditors. More on that in the next chapter on quality but, first, the idea is to go back in time. Given the diversity in associations, there is no “one size fits all,” and in order to really understand, it is important to go back in time. As far as one can.

## The Roots of an Association

This is not proven to be the origins of the notariat (for all footnotes and literature, see A2), but it makes too good a story not to tell. At the same time as the first libraries were founded, and books (or rather: rolls of papyrus and tablets of clay) were laid carefully in the hands of librarians, any slave who had some reading and writing skills, was told by their owners to take “note” of the inventory of the harvest, of the elements of a heritage or of anything else that needed to be put in writing. These “notarii” performed in a way the tasks that “notaries” perform to this day. So, notaries as descendants of slaves? And librarians as the kings of books? It is almost too good to be true, but this supposed role reversal does illustrate how professional roles can change and it probably has a big impact on the way professionals start associating themselves.

It is in this respect that in another time period, and clearly proven, something happened that explains something about the position of the notariat that is still relevant today. Some of the first evidence of professional associations in the way we know them now, dates from the Italian city-states in the early Middle Ages; cities like Bologna, Modena, and Padua. In these cities, the magistrates wanted to have all legal professions together in one association. However, the lawyers and the judges protested against giving membership to the people, the notaries, who wrote documents against payment for citizens who could not do so themselves; documents of a legal nature. These “notaries” also wanted to join the association of lawyers but were refused. Their status was not high enough; they were not learned enough.

The magistrates did not agree and decided that the notaries would be part of the association. Without attaching too much meaning to it, this illustrates something that can be seen time and again. Lawyers, especially trial lawyers, sometimes need to oppose government, while judges want to have room for independent judgment, but on the whole, notaries remain close to the powers that be and help them with their documents. In the centuries after these first professional associations, you see notaries, or notary-like posts, most of all as clerical assistants to bishops, kings, and emperors. Sometimes they would have time to spare, and then they would make some money on the side helping “burgers,” citizens, with their writings. And so, slowly but surely, the notariat expanded its field of activities. Of course, some notaries were more equal than others, at least in the Netherlands. The notaries who worked at the court of the monarch would enjoy privileges that those outside would not, which of course gave rise to resentment and different ways of associating but did not matter much in the larger scheme of things. That is, until Napoleon. Soon, the first of two long periods of rise and decline of the notariat was to begin.

### The First Forty Years of Growth and Decline

Napoleon conquered all of continental Europe and parts of the Middle East and Africa. It only went wrong after trying to conquer Russia. But long before that, he put his own people in place as kings in the countries he had conquered. In the Netherlands, this was his brother, Louis Napoleon. This brother was anything but a conqueror. He believed in cooperation and really tried to help his new country as an “enlightened” monarch. He did this partly by introducing new legislation on the French (“Latin”) model, a model that is more centralized and public than that of the former republic of seven Dutch provinces. For this central model, you need good administration, and to be well organized. Like in France, he was in need of a functioning notariat in order to have trustworthy documents. So, Louis Napoleon and his main civil servant, Van Maanen, started writing the new law, which eventually would be called “the law of the wind,” *La loi Ventôse*. An important task in writing everything down, accordingly, is up to the notaries. They were to be elevated in status and become true “public notaries,” servants of the empire. But as with other aspects of the law, this met with resistance because of existing privileges. Instead of being happy with the new status and protection of that status, the existing notaries were afraid that they would lose their present practices. As public servants, they were not supposed to have property of their own but would receive a salary. As it was, their practice was something they could sell and with it, they could enjoy a pension. Because of this, the notaries started lobbying against Van Maanen and his new bill, trying to change it or to get it off the table. As with many subsequent lobby efforts, this would fail, but eventually, they would get what they wanted, a law that respected existing privileges.

It is out of this resistance against a law that would give them a public position, that the professional association of notaries came about, or as the name would become, the Royal Brotherhood of Notaries (two centuries later: the Koninklijke Notariële Beroepsvereniging, KNB). So, this association sprang from defensive motives.

It took a while before the law was there. Louis Napoleon had been too lenient in the eyes of his brother and was sent home. The emperor himself wrote the final law and, in 1812, the notaries did get public status.

It turned out to be the beginning of a forty-year period in which the notaries did really well. Their practice grew and grew, as did their status. However, the period ended on a sour note. The Brotherhood did have an internal court of discipline, but it failed to sanction notaries who broke the rules. In the end, it was the ministry of justice that took over in 1852. For almost half a century discipline was meted out by public prosecutors, until after 1903 the government sort of decided it had other priorities than to keep watch over the notaries.

### ‘Caretakers’

In the forty years after that moment, there was a sort of mild anarchy, semi-under control by the association and its board of discipline. But the sector did not always behave in a disciplined fashion. It was the time of “caretakers” (zaakwaarnemers), by which notaries could delegate tasks to others, for instance, real estate agents, and so expand business. This also went the other way around, and many notaries complained about false competition from incompetent caretakers. During the first part of the twentieth century, one committee after another tried to do something about it, but most reports ended up somewhere in a drawer. The association (associations, in fact; there was a strong regional and non-professional aspect to the association) was not very effective as a central actor, but neither were there great upheavals or scandals. The notaries were doing their business. They enjoy their public status most of all because the number of places to do notarial work was strictly limited, so once able to get an appointment, usually, after many years of waiting, your income was assured. And then the war happened.

### War and a New Gift

The story of the notariat in the Second World War is one the profession was silent about for too long. Fortunately, the present association has not, and, in 2017, it had the facts published as they were (Schütz, 2017). The central fact is that by far the majority of the notaries cooperated fully with the German occupier, without any real effort from the side of the association at the time to do something about it or give effective guidance. After the war, most notaries could go about their business as if there had been no war. With one difference. Like the French occupier, the Germans needed the notaries. Among other things, for dealing with the properties of the Jews.

However, they did not like the way the notariat was organized and wrote a new law on the notariat. Other than Louis Napoleon, they did not go along with local sensitivities and scraped the caretaker out of the new law on the notariat they made (it is not really funny, but histories like these make one realize how dependent we are on an occupation now and then). Morris would nod; the former hippy who wrote a book on war and its use would nod (Morris, 2014).

## The Second Forty Years of Growth and Decline

But it is too easy to be cynical, as we are all representatives of a generation that never had to go through war. The fact is that the notariat came out of the war ready to help rebuild the country. And there was something else they had going for them; a person, Professor Mr. Pitlo. Not a practicing notary, he became very important in the whole education effort of the profession (and beyond). Almost singlehandedly—but not quite, there were others—he lifted the profession up to academic level. In fact, that was his dream; turning the study of notarial law into something that was part of the curriculum of universities. And, in 1956, he would succeed. He would continue to be very important and a true example to the profession, but by then a new period of bloom and boom had started. The war had caused an enormous shortage of houses and it took a while before that was reasonably under control, and by that time, the “economic miracle” of the 1950s had transformed the economy with more and more business for the notaries as well. With security about their place in the world and with set prices, there was no way but up.

When opportunities are there, there will always be people or parties misusing them. It was the same (again) with a number of notaries. Especially in the 90s, there were headlines about notaries being arrested by the public prosecutor on suspicion of whitewashing drugs money through suspicious real-estate transactions. A famous parliamentary committee, Van Traa, brought the shady role of the profession to light: more than thirteen cases of notaries who had failed in their professional duties were published. Once more, the law had to intervene after a forty-year period of privilege and bloom. An indictment of the whole of the profession and its association, you could say.

Others thought so too, but the reaction to the problems with the notariat was twofold, one of which can be considered logical due to the condition of the profession and the other one—certainly in hindsight—not at all.

## A logical reaction and an illogical one

First, the logical reaction (a long story is here presented in a much-condensed form). As is usual in these circumstances in the Netherlands, a committee (chaired by Mr. Hammerstein, and including representatives from the association, but not dominated by it) was put to work to assess the situation and also to come up with the elements for a new law. It would take until 2013 before the law was there, but then it would also contain elements already set in motion much earlier, like the coming of an external oversight body, strengthen the internal oversight functions, and to work on the express demand to pay more attention to improvement of internal quality. This last point will be set in motion in 2003 and becomes the focus of this case further on.

Then the absolutely not-so-logical perspective, at least looking at it from the quality perspective of the association; because, what do you do when members take too much liberty? You restore order and calm things down until all the lessons have been learned. Instead, the opposite happened. Partly because of the anger at the misdeeds in the notariat, but more importantly, because of the times, it was decided that the notaries were to lose their fixed fees. This happened in 1999, at the height of “new public management” and the movement toward more privatization. The government had a point. Not even the notaries themselves could credibly explain why clients had to pay thousands of guilders (this is just before the euro arrived) for the reading of standard documents that often did not require extra work. Making money had become too easy. And so, the decision was made, and suddenly all prices were—what the individual notary decided they should be. Immediately price competitions began, and the entrepreneurial side of the notary had to get to work. The result was a sort of controlled panic. Fortunately, the housing market was better than ever, so making money was until 2008 not too hard. But looking back, it is easy to see that the freeing of the prices blew air into a market that was already overheated and out of balance. When the crisis broke, there was nowhere to go but down.

## Going forward in uncertainty

The reaction of the notaries showed both the strength and the weakness of a closed professional association. There is a life time appointment as notary, no one can become a notary who is not a member of the association. There will always be some stability. In contrast to the library case, here no doubt about the right terms: the notariat is an association of professionals, pure and simple, with high entry and an impossible exit and very much closed standards.

But in a way, that makes the members more nervous when real change happens. And as the members are all educated, opinioned people, the debates about where the association should go to can go anywhere. Which it did. As the reader can see in the matrix, there were many who wanted back to the public nature of the professions, to reconnect with the original mission. There were others who chose to be better entrepreneurs. Some started economizing, seeking more margin by increasing the routine element in processes: less time for each client, etcetera. Others believed more in a digital future, with for instance deeds delivered by internet, secured by blockchain technology. And there were even notaries trying out scenarios where the notarial function would be little more than an algorithm in a virtual world. The all too futuristic members would be checked by reminding them of the obligation to do 'Belehrung' (explaining) in person, but it is most of all an illustration of the differences of opinion within the association. It is not too much to say that this was hard on everybody, but certainly on the board and the people working at the bureau of the association. It is in this arena that an external oversight body landed and that people within the bureau started thinking about a quality effort through peer review. But that is to be described at the end of part III.

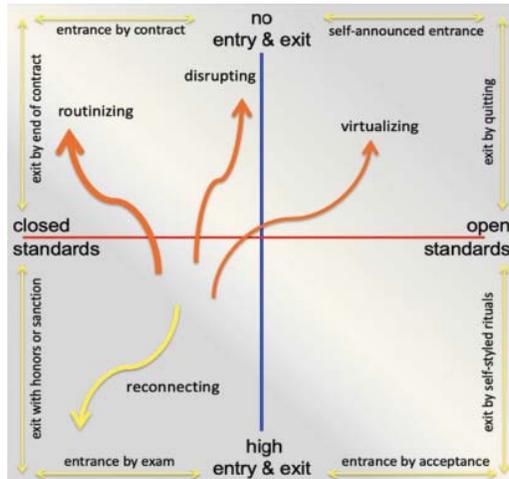


Figure 17 Matrix Vectors within Notariat

## 15. Challenges in Associations: Case study Real Estate Agents (Part One)

### A Stick of a Story

The buying and selling of houses, including its taxation for value, has been around for ages, and we can know this because it may well be the best-documented transaction in history, together with marriages and deaths. There is no library without documents on houses bought and sold, and no notarial practice without the same. Much more difficult, however, is the matter when it became a separate profession. It is safe to say that it did not become a profession like that of a judge or a lawyer, a notary or an accountant. Yet there is little doubt that it became a specialization, someone people went to because they knew the market and what price to set. How soon that was, probably depended a lot on how big or complicated the market was, so it is logical to see the first “agent” (makelaar: a better translation is probably a “broker,” meaning a middleman who makes a deal between others who want to trade) active in an urban setting, that of cities, and does not necessarily involve real estate, but can be about a lot of other things that need an active middleman. The first proof of the existence of professional brokers dates from 1284, when count Floris V gave the right to the city of Dordrecht to install agents (it is interesting that where we assume that the upmarket houses where the noble people lived were more often conquered than paid for, the count provides here a clear example of market regulation). Seven years later, that right was laid down in so-called keur, a document still in the archive of that city. So, agents brought traders together. As stated, the trade could be about anything, including the spices brought in to Amsterdam and other cities by ships sailing all over the world. The more trade there was, the more agents would be appointed. Around the sixteenth century, the agents formed a separate guild, so they could guarantee the quality of their work and protect themselves from competition from people who acted like agents but were not appointed by the city council. The word beunhaas, meaning interloper, someone who has a nice story but a crappy product, probably comes from this time. In 1636, it was determined at the national level that, when making a deal, the agents would have to show a “stick” on which the weapon of the city was inscribed. These sticks stayed in use until far into the eighteenth century and are still used when celebrating a jubilee of members of the NVM. In terms of “exit and entry,” a very clear example indeed.

An important moment came in the seventeenth century when agents were obliged by government to add to the title of broker or agent the kind of trade the broker was in, for instance, that of “agent in real estate.” In that way, there was a realization that the buying and selling of real estate, including setting a proper price, was something that required specialized knowledge. Within the guild, the profession seemed to grow and flourish.

Until Napoleon, that is. The contrast with the notariat is stark. Where the notaries got a public status and were so fierce in opposition to the loss of privilege this implied that it gave rise to the association of notaries, Napoleon forbade the guilds, including that of the agents for real estate. His motive has to do with the question of control over the economy. His Latin model puts all the power in the hands of central government. Separate entities with a say over the economy are then, of course, frowned upon. Only a select number of professionals, under control of the empire or with civil servant status, can do so.

## From Local Professionals to Regional Associations

Not diving as deep into the history of this profession as of that of the libraries and notaries, we will move this short history forward to the nineteenth century. In the case study description of the notaries, there was a period referred to as the “caretaker” period, where notaries delegated tasks to others and vice versa. It can be assumed that this period was the period when the profession of the real-estate agent came back after the disbandment of the guilds, as on the one hand, the notaries needed to stay closer to their legal assignment, and on the other hand, the nineteenth century and its industrial revolution brought the kind of wealth and urbanization that required specialized knowledge also in the field of real estate (and you can wonder whether notaries had or have the right temperament for helping to make deals). The real-estate agents truly came into their own.

Typical for the profession as it began, was that it depended very much on knowledge of the local conditions and prices. It really was a local profession, with an appointment by the local council, after which an oath had to be sworn to a local judge, so a heavy but local condition of entry. No wonder the first association-like attempts at professionalization as a group, was very much a matter for cities and regions. It would take until 1877 before real-estate agents in Amsterdam created the first association. They did so because the real-estate agents of this big town wanted to lobby the city council to appoint more agents, while at the same time they wanted to have less competition from notaries and insurance brokers. Theirs would become a very strong local association. An association that, now as a chapter of the NVM, to this very day has its own rules and traditions.

## The Problem of How to Be Relevant

There are other associations to come, but it is clear that the history of this profession is very much a history of regional associations slowly overlapping each other and getting to know each other. The latter was not easy.

There was always an element of competition and of “not invented here” that would keep the associations apart (the same would apply to the Chambers of Commerce, with which there is a strong parallel here) and as with most associations of professionals in that century, it was something you did as an extra, in your spare time. Even though there was a constant debate about whether agents should be more protected by the law, it never amounted to a strong lobby toward the government of the country and it would take a long time before the law became clearer about the position of the agents, including the aspect of who could work as middleman in real estate, as this was a source of contention too.

In the meantime, associations did attempt to improve the quality of their members. A great example is that of one of the larger, though still very small, associations, the NBA, which was the main predecessor of the NVM. The NBA stated as its goal to be very selective in recruiting members and would only accept “honest men.” The selection was done by the first chairman of the association. At one time, this chairman refused the admission of a certain agent. Asked at the members meeting why this person was barred, the chairman refused to give his motives. The members then rose up against the chairman and asked for a committee to research the matter. The committee found that the chairman had not formed an honest opinion. Not only was the candidate installed as a new member, but the chairman lost both his function and his membership. He was obviously not an “honest man” (Schreurs, 1998, p. 20).

In any case, finding time in order to maintain and create a larger association was hard, without much incentive to put all the effort in. Nevertheless, the written history of the NVM is very much a history of attempts to create a larger whole, and there are quite a few examples of people who really wanted a better profession. But until and after the German occupation, it was not easy.

In regard to what happened to the notariat during the Second World War, there is a remarkable echo here, as with the time of Napoleon. The Germans organized, in the early years of the occupation, all professions into different Fachgruppe (trade groups), obliging every professional to enter one or lose their job. The associations were to be transferred into these Fachgruppe. In an effort to counter the policies of the occupier, there was an attempt to form a national association. It failed. During the war, there was far less trade than usual, but still, the number of real-estate agents went up rapidly within the new Fachgruppe. This was because having a job as a trade could exclude you from forced labor in Germany. A rare reason for a career in real estate.

## Working Toward One National Association

The war proved to be both a stimulus for the profession, as the building and selling of houses became a priority of the post-war period, and also a continuation of one failed attempt at forming a national association after another, with, in the background, a constant struggle about the position of the real estate agent in the law. How much protection should the profession have? It would never get as far as that of the notariat, but then this also helped to protect the real-estate agents from the scandals within the notariat (helped, it must be said, by the fact that the actual money of a real-estate transaction does not come to rest with an agent). Not that the profession was without problems with its image, far from it. After the almost limitless growth in the fifties and sixties, many a shady deal ended up in the newspapers in the seventies and eighties, often connected to the kind of activities you get with a booming economy. Some were of a criminal nature, whereas in other cases economic realities ran counter to a new social “counterculture.” In Amsterdam, a sort of civil war would break out because of the way project developers would hold on to real estate in the city, prompting so-called “squatters” to “repossess” properties. Their evictions would come with much violence, at one time even putting tanks on the street of the nation’s capital and prompting battles during the coronation of a new queen. All this reflected badly on the image of the real estate profession as well, justified or not, and the associations were hard pressed to do something against it. Perhaps it helps the parties involved realize that it was better to have one national association. Still, it would take until 1984 before the whole process was completed, but by then the NVM was formed as a national association.

## The Challenge of an Association

One? Not exactly; not even then. At present, the NVM has about 4000 members from a total of 6000–7000 real-estate agents and their offices, including the largest real-estate offices. Other associations have established themselves in the field of real estate and it quite often happens that agents are members of several associations. The real-estate market is seen as a free market and this has consequences for its status too. A small, but significant example is that, under the influence of the more market-driven times of the nineties, there came a new law in which the obligation for new real-estate agents to take the oath for the magistrate of a court was scrapped (just like the fixed fee was scrapped for the notaries; there was no fixed fee to scrap in the case of the real-estate agents). The NVM, understanding the symbolic nature of an oath better than the government, reinstated the oath as something that took place at the NVM office, after the finish of a member’s first training and receiving a “Code of honor” outlining the main obligations of a professional real estate agent (to which we will come back later on).

For a long time, the NVM had one big advantage over other associations, and in terms of the digital transition a truly wonderful one. Quite soon after the internet became available and popular, people started using it to look for available housing. One Dutch company saw the opportunity and started a website called Funda, where real-estate agents could promote the houses they had on the market. This website was bought by the NVM. Very soon Funda became the dominant website in the housing market—and only members of the NVM could use it. In effect, this made becoming a member of the NVM a condition for doing any business in the market. Other parties tried to compete but failed, also because more and more options were added to Funda. As a case study of digital transformation, the way the NVM used Funda is an excellent example. Partly because of its success, the accusation of market dominance could not be avoided. From 2016, use of Funda is no longer linked to membership of the NVM. Did this lead to loss of membership? It did not, or not yet, also because the financial crisis was finally past, and the booming house market led to many become agents. Even so, it certainly made both members and the board of the NVM anxious. What else could they do to make membership of the NVM, the thing to do?

### Between Coaching and Control

To make a much longer story short, the board of the NVM started a project called “NVM 2020.” It would have to lead to a new strategy for the NVM, reviewing all aspects, including that of the digital promotion through channels like Funda and of its permanent education efforts. Part of NVM 2020 could also be the coming of a quality effort through “peer review.” For this, the peer-review approach of the notariat served as a model. As an external expert, this researcher was recommended and a number of rather thorough talks about the context and conditions of the assignment followed. One of the bigger topics in these talks was about the nature of the peer review: should it be only a visit to “coach the colleague” or could it have hard consequences, even going as far as the outcome being subject to the internal oversight bodies? The outside consultant active for NVM 2020 and some staff came down hard on the side of coaching, also because they were worried that otherwise, the members would not accept the scheme. Others came down on the other side because this was finally a chance to give the association “some teeth,” and many members were waiting for the association to get serious about its “bad apples.” In other words; classic tensions. Using the experience from earlier assignments, the expert came up with an approach that not only combined both elements but also provided a method that could help in choosing the right approach. The hoped-for result would have to be conversations between peers that would really touch upon basic questions. Questions like in which direction the real-estate office is going and where it wants or needs to go, including specific recommendations and a level below which the office can’t go, without having to take extra measures or go through another audit.

Based on the recommendations of the expert, in a very short time, an audit office was set up. Auditors were selected and trained, and a pilot was started. Within three months, twenty-two audits were held. The pilots were all evaluated and then brought together in a review by the expert, and together with many recommendations. From the first draft to review it took less than six months, all with a view toward a decision by the NVM's board of members on the NVM 2020 program, including the peer review. In the experience of the expert, the result was beyond expectations, both in general and specific terms. Most of the audits went well and all of them came up with points for improvement that were both specific and doable. Partly this was simply due to the fact that officers had never been reviewed in this way before, and partly because many real-estate agents do not really have a background in office management. There was a lot to win, little to lose, and it was obvious that most liked to be visited by someone who knew their business.

## The Board Decides

So it was with some confidence that the review was sent to the meeting of the board, in spite of signals that many members were critical of the whole idea of colleagues visiting the offices of other colleagues. The board would meet in the morning. No outside experts were welcome so, it was a matter of waiting until the result came in. But the waiting took a long time. In the end, it would take all day and most of the evening. From what was later heard, the board only barely survived the debate about NVM 2020, but no decision was taken. Except for one point on the agenda, the peer review. Asked at the last minute by the chairman for an opinion, the result was that it was too early for a decision, but that the pilot was to be extended. One member said this was fine, but that "the pilots should clearly show the added value to the members of the association." With that, the meeting adjourned.

## What Is of Added Value?

In the next chapter, the whole approach to the audits will be described because it could well be a benchmark for quality issues within associations, but also because extending the pilots also provided this researcher with a unique opportunity to test the added value of what he had already put forth in cases like that of the library sector and the notariat. Another sixty-six audits became part of a second review; a review with results that are both representative for the whole of the association and validated by evaluations done by people other than this researcher. It also provided an opportunity to test the association matrix for its value. After the first pilots were held and this researcher wrote his review, it was logical to assume that the result would convince all of the added value of the peer-review scheme. It was quite comprehensive already. Yet this did not happen.

For at least a month after the meeting of the board, there was this question of “What more do they want?” Then it dawned that “added value” is always a matter of perspective. What is of added value to, for instance, to the one who wants a general insight into the quality of the members of the association, is of a different perspective to someone who wants to use the audits to adhere more to privacy laws, or who looks at the audits to remove the bad apples. There are, in fact, a great number of perspectives to the question of added value, including questions that touch upon the relevance of associations for government policy. So, what to do?

The image below shows fifty-eight direct and indirect points of perspective on a possible added value, clustered into four different perspectives. They will be explained in Part III, chapter twenty, in the second installment of what became a true thriller.

And will this be enough to convince the members of the NVM? Yes. In December 2017 the members decided with a 70% majority in favor of peer review. What looked like a lost and very controversial cause in September, turned into a clear and quiet decision in December: an example of a surge, an unexpected surge of support. Peer review started for real. At this moment of writing, December 2018, almost 400 audits have been held. Looking back, it is surprising in a way how fast the mood changed from against peer review to a majority in favor. It can be called “a surge” in support. Essential must have been the fact that the board organized a roadshow across the country with the chairman himself leading the effort. Still, this also shows that it takes more than one victory to win in what can become a war. No crisis comes alone, though the agenda may shift. By the spring of 2018 part of the members effectively said not to trust either the chairman or the director of the association. It became the bitter end of their tenure – and soon also the end of that of the leaders of those who withdrew their trust. Hopefully that in the vacuum that this created, a new start can be made. It looks like that.

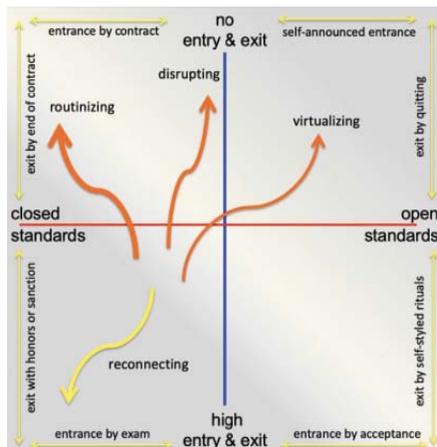


Figure 18 Matrix Added Value for Real Estate Agents

## PART II

### On the Nature of Associations



Image 1 Teun Hocks: No Title



## 16. Entering a Group, Becoming an Association

*“Man cannot become attached to higher aims and submit to a rule  
if he sees nothing above him to which he belongs”*

*- Émile Durkheim*

*(Durkheim, 1897, pp. Book 3, Ch. 3)*

Having looked at the cases, or at least their beginnings, it is time to reflect more on the nature of an association. What are their characteristics, why are they so hard to define beyond their basic characteristics? It seems logical to assume that associations are both a very fundamental and basic way for people to organize themselves in a group with a group just being ... a group. A group that sometimes can be called an association, especially when it looks like people will behave like a group for a longer time. In that latter sense, an association seems like the default shape of a group that stays together for a longer time period. It also seems that when you do not know what to call a group of people that can be observed over that longer time period, it can be called an association. But if we are to understand why, for instance, modern youth chooses tribes and gangs above associations and working people choose being part of a network or civic initiative above associations, then entering a group is by no means the same as becoming (part of) an association.

For this reason, this chapter is dedicated to looking into the way associations can be distinguished from other “constructs” for the way we humans interact with each other. Already a definition of an association has been given in chapter 3, including an outline of the history of writing about associations and the way associations have been looked upon by different disciplines like that of the sociologists, economists, politicians and lawyers. Each may see its own part of the Elephant clearly, but does the whole of the animal come into view?

### From Groups to Associations

When we are talking about associations, it all starts with the assumption of a “group.” Defining what a group is, beyond just following a dictionary, brings you back to the bedrock of the social sciences—and finding that this bedrock is rockier<sup>39</sup> and less stable as thought.

As described in the case of the public libraries, there was an unexpected negative reaction to the proposal for a new quality initiative for the sector (Chapter two, Att. A1, esp. 8.4).

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39. Probably the busiest collector of knowledge about associations in the Netherlands is Jolles. He collected these terms to describe different groups: “aktiegroep, associatie, bond, broederschap, club, collegie, comite, commissie, congregatie, cooperatie, corps, gemeenschap, genootschap, gezelschap, gilde, kamer, krans, kring, liga, loge, maatschappij, orde, organisatie, platform, praatgroep, raad, societeit, stuurgroep, unie, verband, verbond, verbroedering, werkgroep, enz. (Jolles, 1959).

Fully in line with the assignment, a committee had written a proposal that was less instrumental and less detailed than the certification-based quality system that was then operational. Unexpectedly, the general assembly turned against the proposal. What happened? What did we miss? It was clear that the negative reaction was not directly caused by the proposal itself. Clearly there was internal politics at work. But how did the one relate to the other? In urgent need of a conceptual framework to explain a situation that brought the library project to the brink Expanding the thinking on that framework, it became obvious that very different concepts of what an association is came into play.

In the next chapter, this conceptual Werdegang can be followed closely. Here we start with an impression of the writing of Emile Durkheim, then we go back and forth and confront this with what we are now seeing in the real world. Of course, since Durkheim, a lot has happened in social sciences<sup>40</sup>, but when it comes to associations this researcher finds his thinking in its strength and weakness still a touchstone for further thinking, if only for a quote like the following:

*“A nation can be maintained only if, between the state and the individual, there is interposed a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life Occupational groups are suited to fill this role, and that is their destiny.”*  
(Durkheim, 1902)

Durkheim had an outspoken “hard” scientific ambition with his work (Velthoven, 2017). An ambition he fulfilled brilliantly, making him the eyes of many the first modern social scientist, though from the perspective of associations he probably comes in somewhere between De Tocqueville and Tönnis. In his drive he was, like all pioneers, fighting for his own view of society. This can also be found in his two most seminal work, on suicides—La suicide (Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, 1897) (Smollenaars, 1997). Stating that each society has its own characteristics, he showed how society influences individual decisions by looking at the rate of suicides. Sometimes counting, always observing, he saw that even though each person may think it makes a highly individual decision to take his or her life, the rate of suicide in a society is in fact quite constant. This led him to ask questions along the lines of “What makes people act?” or “What binds people?” The answers to the latter he formulated in terms of a contrast between “mechanical” and “organic” solidarity and the concept of anomie.

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40. Or even before him. Unfortunately, this researcher learned too late of the fundamental work done in Germany by Otto von Gierke, who wrote extensively on the subject of associations and its categorization. He also said: “Society grows up because people form groups and groups of groups, from families to the State”. (Gierke, 1868–1913).

Mechanical—probably best translated as “automatic” or “unthinking”—solidarity you can find in smaller and more traditional societies, where religion and rituals play an important role by supporting the “collective conscience.”

Modern societies, with their industrial base, have far more complicated structures. When there are organic connections, they are based on a division of labor and functions (Durkheim, 1902). In complex societies, there is no direct link between individual and collective conscience. Social cohesion is not based on a shared consensus. It takes ingenious research techniques to discover what binds people in societies like these, Durkheim states challengingly.

### Durkheim’s Distinctions

From this dichotomy, between “mechanic” and “organic,” a great many adaptations and interpretations will arise, also creating differences in opinion that last to this day. This is as it should be with great thinkers. For this study on associations and the possibilities for change, extra attention is paid to the way Durkheim makes distinctions between the two groups. However, it does pay to look a bit further at what Durkheim has set in motion.

First of all, Durkheim is the initiator of social science as a “categorical” science. He tries to describe the social order from a non-normative point of view (Bierstedt, 1957), aiming to describe its several characteristics. For instance, the later and very relevant distinction by Merton between “group,” “collective,” and “social category” builds on this foundation (Merton, 1957). By the end of the nineteenth century, he saw a huge wave of division of functions within the labor force taking place (Doorn & Lammers, 1979, p. 197) (Gunsteren & Lock, 1977). In his mind, this just had to lead to a society that would find its main base for integration in the cooperation between a big number of functionally specialized groups, where one group cannot do without the other. This is also interesting from the perspective of associations, though debated and fought by others. Abbott, for instance, says that the social world “does not consist of grand social entities that shape and determine the lives of little individuals (Abbott, 2016).”

Secondly, in his attempt to start the social sciences, Durkheim was not consistent in his non-normative approach, if only for the fact that he tried to replace a religious view on society with another, more humanistic belief in the blessings of rational thinking. In the end, his distinction between a mechanistic and organic way of organizing society is as normative as it is descriptive. He mistrusted the idea of shared values as an organizing concept. This foreshadows the debate between liberal and communitaristic ways of organizing society to this day (Popper, 1962) (Etzioni, 2005) (Siedentop, 2014) (Vries, 2004) (Beer & Schuyt, 2004).

This tension between different ways of influencing individual behavior in a collective context, is as relevant as ever, including the question if this can be influenced at all (Kohlmeier Jr., 1969) (Wilson, 1980) (Noll & Owen, 1983) (Breyer, 1983) (Evers, 2002) (Eijlander & Voermans, 1999), or if there is a sequence in moral imperatives before social constructs or not (Gunsteren & Lock, 1977) (Berger & Berger, 1980) (Etzioni, 2005) (Muuses, 1953). Much of this is also about the distinction between open and closed societies. More about this later, especially because Franklin (Franklin, 2018) has modern and very relevant insights into this distinction, also by putting Popper and Durkheim against each other. Durkheim is a precursor of the permanent tension between those who approach the social sciences more like a philosophy and those who see sociology as a hard science. This study starts from the premise that you can make a distinction between the two, but that in the end, they are just different nodes around which people can associate themselves.

Thirdly, and notwithstanding the second point, Durkheim had a clear view of when neither a mechanistic nor an organic way of looking at socializing offers enough perspective, so he was aware of the danger of change or not enough change. His concept of “anomie” (Durkheim, 1897) (Doorn & Lammers, 1979, p. 166) is directly applicable to the debate about whether or not associations are in decline; not just in terms of membership but also in more general terms of contribution to the necessary socialization within society. This argument will be picked up again later, also in the context of standards, as especially Franklin (Franklin, 2018) is critical about the bias for “open” standards when “closed” standards perform a function that can be just as useful. He favors Durkheim over Popper (Popper, 1962), as Durkheim shows how vital social groups are, where Popper seems to deny their relevance or value.

Franklin also draws a direct line from Durkheim to the social capital movement of Putnam and others and the relevance of that for the debate on “class”.

Fourthly, in terms of methodology, he brings a lot to the table. Not that he was a perfect sociologist in the modern sense. This researcher could not get away with some aspects of his research into suicides (Smollenaars, 1997), but he set something in motion that still helps to define the way people go from a group to a collective; from just a gathering of people to something with a purpose. This, not least because of his recommendation to make a clear distinction between the cause of a phenomenon and the functions a phenomenon fulfills in social life (Doorn & Lammers, 1979, p. 146). In more practical terms, his writing on “attributing” characteristics to groups is of more direct relevance. These characteristics, most of all those categorizing a collective by the symbols that are attributed to its members, are the starting point for looking at the definition of associations here.

In the view of the author, it is not justified to talk about an “attribution theory” in this context. That theory is overwhelmingly, in terms of available literature (Heider, 1958) and many others, reserved for the term in the context of (individual) social psychology and the causal nature of individual behavior and not for that of collectives. Still, the idea of using attributions is, in all its original roughness, still inspiring.

## Dynamic Categorization

The four reasons to regard Emile Durkheim as still relevant when it comes to the question of how to look at associations and their change. The main point is that with Durkheim important distinctions started to be made between groups. Durkheim turned sociology into a “categorical” science, aimed at describing different phenomena of the social order (Bierstedt, 1957). One of them is the still relevant distinction between “Gemeinschaft” and “Gesellschaft” by Tönnies (also founder of the German Association of Sociologists) (Tönnies, 1887) has been used often to make a distinction between association that have a goal aimed at themselves (“self-expressive” ones like hobby clubs) or are aimed at society (“social action” ones like union). It is one of the reasons for this researcher to make a distinction between “social” and “occupational” associations. But there are constantly new distinctions made in the social sciences, often leading to debate. It is in this tradition that this study probably finds itself. Exactly because we know that distinctions are hard to make, and categorization is often futile or worse. It is too easy to say this has to be done in a way that is much more dynamic than in his time, as each time probably thinks itself exceptionally dynamic in its own way. It is applicable because much of the change in the world of associations appears to be a mix of stable, less stable, and truly transformative factors. Many questions surround the actual number of associations around the world, but even where there is a decline in membership, the actual number of associations is not diminishing but just fragmenting—and when the numbers of groups on social media are added, you talk of an explosion in associations. So, there is every reason to talk about a new categorization (and characterization) of associations. The goal, then, should be to imagine not just the steady state of new categories, but also the way their parts move and interact. This requires in the mind of this researcher a multidimensional, 3D approach, theoretically sound and applicable in practice. Way further than where Durkheim started. Maybe it should not be about the characteristics of the member, but about the conditions in which a member fulfills his or her role and how this can be influenced.

But where to start? As described later in this chapter and the first case study on libraries, this researcher has worked toward a life-cycle approach for members of associations. Again, this starts with basic definitions of an association and members.

## 17. Entering an Association

### Members of an Association

One thing that distinguishes associations from an enterprise, a foundation, or other private or public bodies, is that it has members. Never just one, and always at least two. The American Association of Retirees and Pensioners (AARP) has more than 40 million members (ASAE, Membership, 2016), but most are much, much smaller. The smallest association has only two members, which happen to be the same person. In the case of a political party in the Netherlands, Mr. Wilders' PVV, and one in Switzerland, the Lega dei Ticinesi, you get a strange double role. You have Mr. Wilders, the chairman, and Mr. Wilders, the member. Together, the two form the association called the "Party for Freedom" (*Partij Voor de Vrijheid*, PVV), a very right-wing, political party, of which its only chairman and member leads a delegation in the parliament of the Netherlands, with at the time of writing about thirty representatives in national and local politics. In other words, Mr. Wilders uses a legal trick in order to use the legal form of an association to legitimize his party. It is a legal obligation in most European countries for a politician to represent a political party with the legal status of an association. It is not about money, either profit or nonprofit. It is about what is probably the first defining term from the days of the Roman law: the "natural person." Member Mr. Wilders wants to be the sole ruler of his party, so this was the solution.

He is a very extreme exception to a very general rule, rooted in history, that politics should be about people and not about institutions debating the course of society<sup>41</sup>. This principle is still upheld in many of the laws that deal with associations, but it should not obscure the fact that there are many associations that have businesses or institutions as members or are considered to be institutions themselves. So, in itself being a "member" is not enough as a defining characteristic. What is then? First, let us go back to some sources with authority.

### Seeking Definitions of an Association

There is more to the nature of an association, but the regular definitions of an association do not seem to do more than to describe outward characteristics. In chapter 3 competencies are mentioned that together can make an association from a group.

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41. A debate is going on that it would be better for democracy to have political associations without members, as these members are not a good representation of the voters and because political associations become too small to be representative at all. This debate has as yet not led to any successful alternative (Ridder, 2017) (Mazzolini & Voerman, 2016) (Scarrow, 2015) (Ridder, 2014) (Ridder, 2014).

These have a good base in the work of Fassaert (Fasseart, 1987) and Abbott (Abbott, 2016) but in the context of this research more can be done to seek for sources of confirmation or denial.

Different terms for associations have been written down for a long time, but much of that is hardly recognizable nowadays (Schmalz, 1995). Here we start after the second war in the first wave of a more empirical use of the social sciences. Factors mentioned in a book by Robert Bierstedt of an association are: *1) a specific function or purpose, 2) associational norms, 3) associational statuses, 4) authority, 5) test of membership, 6) property, and 7) a name and other identifying symbols.* (Bierstedt, 1957).

The most recent American “handbook” on association management is from 2007 (sic) and starts with a dry summing up of common elements: *1) statement of purpose(s), 2) forms, types, and qualifications of membership, 3) dues structure (but not due amounts), 4) list of elected offices, including terms, powers, duties, and rules for filling vacancies, 5) the role of the chief executive officer, 6) voting qualifications, including procedures, proxies, and quorum provisions, 7) general assembly and special meeting criteria, 8) description of standing committees, 9) accounting, fiscal and reporting procedures, 10) designation of corporate seal, 11) procedures for amending bylaws and dissolution, 12) location of association, and 13) tax-exempt purpose.* (Cox, 2007)

Especially the last point is worth tasting. A real regret comes up for having chosen associations as a topic for a dissertation. Even so, there is a need for a precise formulation of responsibilities, just as long as it is clear that the legalese does not stand in the way of understanding what an association is about—which is far more than applying the law.

Finally, from Wikipedia:

Wikipedia Netherlands: an association (vereniging) is *“a collection of people organized with a view toward a specific goal,”* or *“a legal entity.”* The long text is very much of a legal nature, with a summing up of liabilities, aspects, and different names and shapes of associations.

Wikipedia America: *“an association is first of all a voluntary organization as defined by the tax law: a 501 (c) non-profit organization. Secondly, it can be an alumni association, professional, sports or trade association. Most interesting is the description of the professional association or body. It is a “nonprofit organization seeking to further a particular profession, the interest of individuals engaged in that profession and the public interest.”* More interesting are the quotes that Wikipedia connects to this description: *“A group of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted with maintaining control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation.”* (Harvey, 2004) This description is so interesting because it is an active definition; giving the association a task and putting this in a public context. This is necessary because, as another description makes clear, the association can *“act to maintain their own privileged and powerful position as controlling body.”* (Fletcher, 1983)

## Life-cycle Approach: Member

This researcher is of the opinion that all these definitions remain too much on the surface of a very fundamental social phenomenon. Legal definitions, especially, are inadequate, as the law is something that is always a codification *after the fact*. It does not capture what went on before, so it can never really change what comes after.

More than a summing up of all outward aspects, it is probably better to bring a life-cycle approach to the issue of what should be most telling about an association. How else can you come to the social facts Durkheim went looking for? How else can you understand Gierke's dictum about the growing up of a state? (Gierke, 1868-1913) By life-cycle approach, what is meant is that each member and the association itself, has a start and end at some point in time, with the activities and markers along that cycle from welcome to growth and finally goodbye. In all cases, you have the two markers of the border of an association: an entry and an exit. A life cycle made possible and limited by the surroundings and context of members and association. Influencing those is at the heart of the "story" of each member, and direct or indirectly at the front of the mind of the few writers on association "management" (Jacobs S. , *Membership Essentials: Recruitment, Retention, Roles, Responsibilities, and Resources.*, 2016) (Ernstthal, 2001) (Courver & Byers, 2011) (Dalton & Dignam, 2007). This includes an author like Sarah Sladek (Sladek, 2017) (Sladek, 2011) (Sladek, 2007). She writes from a generational point of view and the "disengagement" she sees happening in younger generations, resulting in an estimated 62% of associations experiencing flat or declining membership. This research will get back to this later, in the context of the digital transformation. Still, as discussed in the context of Franklins' discourse on open or closed society, it is doubtful whether this generational disappointment is the only or even the most important cause for a decline in membership. It could very well be that the lack of social group skills – the 'anomie' in terms of Durkheim' - may be the deeper cause for the decline. It would be helpful when more research is done, to add to the life-cycle approach also indications of for instance income and social status.

Like in many other things in life, the choice of membership in an association is determined by the example of the parents. Especially with choices in the field of religion and job, the will or example of the parents will count heavily in the choice of association. Later in life, school and other institutions will provide other examples and opportunities to join associations. The more regulated and structured a society is, the more this holds—with the guild system in the Middle Ages as historic examples and the caste system in India as a present-day example—with membership traditionally for life; once in, never out.

However, puberty and opportunity may provide more than enough reason in modern societies to assemble a different collection of membership.

From a scientific perspective, it would be interesting to see which “path of associations” people follow as they go through life and especially through early youth. From the very start, associations are an incubator for the “processes of socialization,” which may be precisely the reason they are there at all. However, it seems like the emotional aspects of associations have been phased out for more businesslike transactions and the truly emotional barriers to entry and exit have shifted to the arenas of media and professional sports: there, cheering and going wild is allowed. Even so, it is important, even now, not to underestimate the strength of the socialization processes in associations, also when not talking about formal associations.

[Observation: Look, for instance, at the way “gamers” start playing on the internet in multiplayer games. Even though they know they may never meet in real life, players take their co-gamers seriously. They think about their nicknames and develop a certain slang in chat conversations. Rules of fair play are often visible in the way participants treat each other.

Even though there seems no sport more individualistic than long-distance running and less geared toward competition, runners treat each other differently from others. Runners together very soon create a subculture. When there is a run, suddenly there seems no problem with running all in the same clothes, medals are appreciated, and the exchange of running times comes naturally.

When members of a trade organization meet each other, the meetings can be all business. Yet everybody seems to know that the real business is done at the fringe of the meetings, or at the bar. It is one of the important reasons why there are still physical meetings at all.

With political associations, it can be strange. In most parties, it seems like nobody is required to pass a test in any ideological way. The quality of the meeting and the speeches seem to be the defining characteristics. This will change, however, when members apply for a political post. Then the barriers of entry can become daunting indeed.]

Here, an overview is presented of such a life cycle from the perspective of a member.

Association member life cycle		
stage	elements	factors
Life before		
	Youth, informal education	parents' preferences and examples, peer pressure, early career choices, first taste of association life, preferred role in group, love life
	Education and career choices	school and career path, with the membership opportunities they provide. Role of educator and first employers
Start of membership		
Selection	Self, by others	from personal choices, to selection by others (peer selection), from formal selection methods to informal tests
Entry	From formal, symbolical to informal transaction	from rituals with the attribution of visible symbols, including clothes, to a small membership fee or a simple handshake ('the coffee is there')
association 'career'		
Introduction	First meetings and activities	Formal and informal education are important, including some form of mentorship
Full membership	Rights and obligations, status growth	value, involvement and belonging, the latter also concerning partner and social environment
Continued membership	Roles and responsibilities	Retention and belonging, including conflicts and their resolution
Final phase	From fade-out to honors	appreciation of seniority, need for examples, social needs, charity
Exit		
Exit	From fade-out to death, from honors to dismembership	some memberships last until death, most have fixed terms with exit rituals
Still around	From forgotten to honored former members	closeness of group, strength of association, short social distance

Table 8 Association Member Life Cycle

In these processes of socialization, there is one aspect that most distinguishes an association from just another group with a purpose, apart from the fact that most memberships last longer. These are the recognizable barriers and rules of entry and exit. Here, these will be called the most “classic” aspect of an association, fitting the characterization of Durkheim. In how far this still applies to associations in our digital age, will be described later on, because there it can be truly problematic. For now, we still see a role for rituals and other symbols.

From being baptized in a church to having to serve dinner as the youngest member of the club. In the latter example, you also see how organization creates authority; the older members put themselves above the younger ones (Bierstedt, 1957). But the most outward sign of membership—the “material culture items”—lies not in rituals, as they cannot be seen from the outside, in daily life. For this, you most of all have to look at professional associations with, in principle, a career-long membership. Think of the doctor in his white coat, the soldier and policeman in his or her uniform, the lawyer in the toga, the priest with his collar, the gavel for the chairman. In short: through its attributes, the group clearly distinguishes itself. As yet, there is still no better way of distinguishing a group than with the outward attributes of clothes and symbolic instruments. Alongside this—and especially at the moments of entry and exit—there are added elements; from soft-spoken words to hard razing; from a simple handshake to the shaving of a head.

[Observation: There is a picture of this researcher’s father as a young man with a shaven head. He is at that moment a freshman in one of the student fraternities in Leyden in the 1940s. He looks like he is having fun. Nothing special about that, you might say. It is only now, after reading Ian Buruma’s story (Buruma, 2013) about his own father, that I truly wonder what he was smiling about. Only a few years before, from the age of fourteen until sixteen, he was in a prison camp in Indonesia during the war. I now know how hard his time there was and how much humiliation and abuse he had to endure. And here he is, as a freshman, seemingly happily enduring the harassment by some students hardly older than him. How can this be? Unfortunately, I can no longer ask him. Buruma writes something similar about his own father. He survived, as a forced laborer the bombings of Berlin, and much more, but gladly endured his pretty tough introduction into student life. What did it mean to him? Buruma thinks that for his father above all it meant a return to normal, to the certainties of student life, and being accepted into their midst.

This “hazing” of new students by older ones is no longer the accepted thing to do. Partly this is because of serious incidents in which freshmen got hurt or even died. But it is also possible to speak of a clash between on the one hand student clubs’ freedom to exclude and on the other hand demands for more inclusion and transparency. For instance, very traditional student “final clubs” at Harvard University, like the Porcellian, the Fly, and others, will probably be forced to close, as they are all male and bastions of “patriarchal privilege” and other faults that are now being considered unethical by (parts of) Harvard (Sedgwick, 2017).

Though it is true that they are certainly not in line with the values of “diversity” and “inclusion,” this is still a surprising thing for the board to do. The clubs say they have amended their practices, but this will not be good enough for the many who want to put an end to these clubs. This seems not only a fight about ethical standards but also about the power of association. No matter what you think of it, it is evidence of the suspicion with which many associations are regarded. These clubs are no longer “normal.”]

So, in the modern world, many of these attributes, symbols, and rituals are mistrusted. They go against the values of transparency and equality, or simply against cultural ideas of private space and what is “normal” among people. Yet with all the critique on bad practices by the “elite” or other privileged people (and membership of an association can still be seen as a privilege), there also seems to be a movement of restoration of old value morals, bringing with them a renewal of rituals.

[Observation: A case in point is the oath or declaration that members are asked to take or sign when entering an association. There is a ritual aspect to this—for instance, the reading of the four principles of Rotary clubs—but its significance seems to lie more and more in aspects that have to do with preventing critique from outside the association. In some associations—in the Netherlands in associations in the field of banking and accountancy, where membership is obligatory—the oath is enforced by law. Without it, there can be no membership<sup>42</sup>.

So, for instance, in accountancy, almost all accountants take the oath, except for a small group that refuses on grounds of principle: the oath is taken in order “to guard the general interest” and when you are an accounting working for a corporation it is the interest of the company you should guard, not the general interest (Knoop, 35 accountants voor de tuchtrechter na niet afleggen beroepseed, 2017) (Lange & Wolde, 2014). It must be said that this oath is relatively new and is not being administered before new members have a good discussion about ethics. Still, the oath would not have been there if outside pressure was not so high (See also 1.7 and case A3).]

The example of the oath shows that it is not always up to the members to create their own rituals. Public bodies look with different intensity at associations as intermediaries to a sector or slice of society. This is why it is not enough to look only at the life cycle for members and we should also construe some lifecycle for associations as well and its consequences.

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42. One of the strongest oaths that can be taken is the Hippocratic Oath by new doctors. It could be questioned, however, if this is part of the domain of doctors and universities or that of an association of its peers. In the end, both support it.

Without assuming there is a straight correlation between an association and its (collective of) members, in all likelihood, this does determine how much room there is for change.

### Life-cycle Approach: Association

All the individual life cycles together make up the history of the way people associate with each other. Looking at available literature in this respect, there is (again) a wealth of histories available at the level of individual associations (often including a museum of historical society within the association), but no history of associations as such. What you can get, is a summing up of what kind of associations there are, leading up to the classification of associations as discussed before as discussed in the context of the number of associations.

Many books have been written about the development of the human race. Depending on your definition, forms of association can be found everywhere and anytime. You can go all the way back to our biological roots to know that we are naturally communal and far from purely individualistic creatures. Through kin selection and “reciprocal altruism,” we creatures—from monkeys to homo sapiens, and even wider—have learned that we survive better through communal behavior. Becoming part of a group happens as much because of our social instincts as through rational decisions. This does not mean that we do it always the same way. During our evolution, we humanoids have not only found ways to live with each other but have also forever been looking for more effective ways of cooperation. It is, for instance, interesting to read next to each other, the books of De Waal (Waal F. d., 1982) (Waal F. d., 2013) on chimpanzees and Bonobos on the one hand and Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1999), Landes (Landes, 1998) or books from Morris (Morris, 2014) and Dennett (Dennett, 2003) on early political order on the other hand. The parallels are inescapable. In both, the nucleus is formed by the families working together, with always the need to open up the gene pool by letting new members of families into the group. It is easy to see the origins of associations already there. But there is absolutely a danger to read too much into it. The development of language (Pinker, 1994) (Ayer, 1936), of morals (Greene, 2013) (Bovens & Hemerijck, 1996) (Ellemers, 2018) and of religion (Armstrong K., 2006) are all projected onto it, even the development of the brain is considered to be as much the fruit of associative interaction as of genes. But science, thinking slow (Kahneman, 2011), is still working on firm conclusions. And when everything can be read into it, nothing is read into it. If an association is no more than “a group with a purpose,” where then to draw the line? It is too meager as a category. Indeed, Mexican drug gangs can then also be classified as an association (Voeten, 2018), and though in a formal way that might not matter, in moral and other ways it does (Ellemers, 2018). But just using the categories as are given by Wikipedia, dictionaries, and several authors also does not help in the definition, as we have seen. Where is the cause?

Where the effect? We are talking here about an evolutionary life cycle from which the associations of today arise. There will probably never be a moment in time where we can say: look, the first association. It will all be gradual (Moor, 2008).

Yet at some point in time, the nature of the group changes or gets an extra dimension; an evolutionary trajectory becomes a revolution for a moment, turning a group into a collective actor with a certain structure determined by standards. Staying within the sphere of families, it seems that the moment that leadership and property ownership became hereditary was such an important moment, creating the “association” of noble families; always competing with each other, but also creating their own gene pool and doing their best to keep outsiders from coming in. Probably, you will see other “social families” as well; tribe-like combinations of families choosing some form of specialization. Through this way, people gather “social capital,” giving access to important contacts, support, and opportunities. (Putnam R. D., 2000) (Putnam R. , *Democracies in flux. The evolution of social capital in contemporary society.*, 2002) (Fukuyama, 2011) (Edwards, Foley, Diani, & Eds., 2001) (Harari, 2011), all showing that “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) can bind as effectively as others.

The family aspect will always be there in a society. But, historically, and in terms of status, they have moved to the background with the advent of what this researcher calls “occupational associations” and “social associations.” The two distinguish themselves in the sense that within the first, the members share a goal that is clearly profit and/or status-related and, in the second group, this is not immediately obvious, and the members do not want to be treated as such. In each of the main cases, clear and detailed examples will be given of the kind of moments that can demarcate a collection of professionals from that of an association, but, here, one word will suffice to conjure up an image and it is that of the “guild” of the Middle Ages (Moor, 2008) (Landes, 1998), (Huizinga J. , 1963) (Harman, 1999). Guilds were one of the few ways in which people without noble birth or religious position could gain a position on personal merit also: the skill through which you could produce your “masterpiece.” Guilds were, in fact, a complicated form of organization, where merit played only a limited part. Both rulers and church people were wary of the guilds; they always suspected the potential of someday being overtaken by the craftsmen. Ultimately, this would happen. The members of the guilds would, together with the tradesmen, lay the foundation for the modern citizenry. There is an important aspect to this. The Middle Ages were characterized by their literally vertical structures. The model for everything was the castle and the church (Huizinga J. , 1963). Guilds broke through this mold. After the first strict selection, they created a group of, in principle, equal craftsmen. There is no underestimating this aspect, rightly described by Tiny de Moor as a “silent revolution” (Moor, 2008), also creating one of the reasons why guilds are often treated with suspicion by rulers and church people alike.

It is still one of the defining characteristics of associations that it is a horizontal and not a vertical way of organizing people.

Of course, some people are always more equal than others, but equality remains to this day, one of the characteristics of an association, inviting democratic forms of decision making. It seems no accident that where the silent revolution did not take place, mostly toward the east of the European continent, neither associations nor democracy took deep root (Harman, 1999). Still, this is a development that cannot be read in a one-dimensional way. It is interesting to read in the literature how each form of organization that grew out of the Middle Ages also created its counterpart, and so on, meanwhile slowly using rituals and gathering symbols, an indication of Abbotts' fractal-like self-similarity (Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines*, 2001).

[Observation: the most market driven and individualistic of all associations here is probably that of the real estate agents. As described in A3, the members of the leading association, the NVM, are mostly small entrepreneurs, all the time asking questions about the "added value" of the association. There was a time when all members had to swear an oath before a judge before being installed as member, but that was abolished in the 1990's, together with the introduction of privatization and deregulation. However, there is one thing the association kept: the "brokers staff". Brokers can get it after many years of membership, as part of a small ritual. The "brokers staff" is a true relic of the guild era. When a procession was held, the guild of traders carried in front of it a short wooden pole: the present staff. With the introduction of peer review, we find that auditors and auditee alike will never fail to make a small mention the staff if it has been given.]

The guilds would eventually become victims of their own success (except perhaps the British medical ones. At least, they still exist in name (Lemaire, 2003)). Especially when they attained the position of a monopoly, as was often the case, criticism became fierce and probably justified. There have been other interesting moments in the development of associations, where especially the role of the Italian city-states is remarkable. This study will pay much attention to the historical development of a number of associations. In the end, it is the guild that has captured the people's imagination. More attainable than becoming a ruler, or more attractive than becoming a man or woman of the church, the guild would become in the Middle Ages the model for a membership that was both attractive and profitable. Many times people and nations have tried to copy the concept, most ignobly the Germans in the Second World War, but it never really worked, possibly because guilds require a form of social discipline that becomes too closed, but more likely because, in its pure form, a guild will often be too closed and too powerful for the powers that be, to get a hold on.

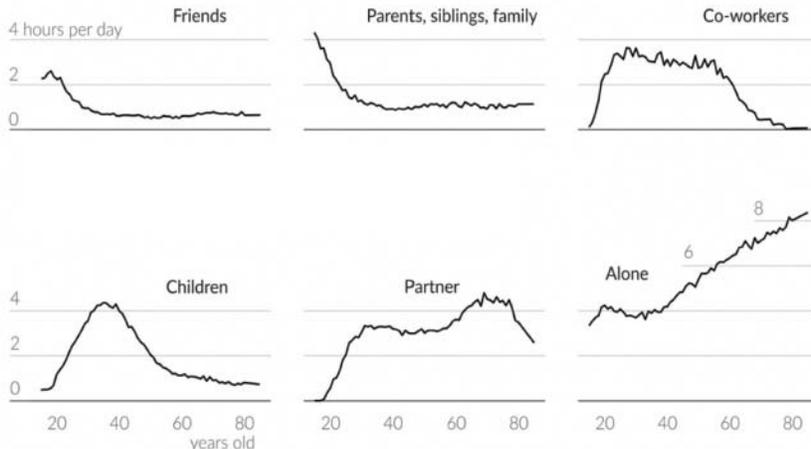
Still, if the guild is a signature example for an association, it is an interesting fact that the first entity that is been called a modern international “business” is the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003).

This was a collection of Dutch cities that sent ships all over the world dealing in spices like tea, and becoming very rich in the process, as can be seen when looking at the houses on the canals of Amsterdam. However, it should be noted that the VOC actually has the character of an association, as the name—*vereeniging*—also gives away<sup>43</sup>. Remarkable, but it is not a game or competition between different ways for groups to organize themselves. Form follows function. There is a need and a context, and it is this that eventually shows the way to a future. In this sense, we could also speak of a life cycle for associations as a whole. If so, then in the Western world the association seems to be at the end of its life cycle. However, in other parts of the world, it is still being discovered and it seems somehow unlikely that an organizational form as potentially versatile as that of the association will come to an end.

There is some extra support for this categorization based on a life-cycle approach. Based on the American Time Use Survey, Henrik Lindberg (Lindberg, 2017), as quoted by Franklin (Franklin, 2018) has produced six graphs on how Americans spend their time with at different stages in life. The outcomes are so stereotypical, that it should not come as a surprise. Still, there are some lessons to draw from this in the context of associations, even though there is no actual correlation identified between time spend on activities and association membership.

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43. De Moor speaks of “Corporate Collective Action” when it comes to commons or guilds (Moor, 2008). This does not seem correct as, historically speaking, the guild comes before the company. A debate is possible, also within the framework of this study, about whether we should not speak of “co-operatives” or even “mutuals.”



@hnrkndbrg | Source: American Time Use Survey

Figure 19 Time Spend with Others

*[With the figure goes a quote by Lindberg, the author, referring specifically to the steep curve of time spend “alone”: “Spend time with those you love. One of these days you will say either “I wish I had” or “I’m glad I did”.]*

It can be assumed that the question on who spends time with whom, also means something for the question what kind of association of membership(s) people have. The time spend with co-workers will be spend at least for some part in the context of occupational associations. The time spend with family and siblings is likely to be spend in nucleus (pre-) associations. Friends, children and often the partner find each other in social associations. Perhaps only children as yet find their association in the shape of a transsociation, but this could be changing fast.

## An Attempt at Categorization

From this beginning, a whole forest of different associations has come about, bringing us back to the theme of categorization as introduced by Durkheim and proven almost impossible to handle by the average statistical office. For conceptual reasons, and not because this is a complete alternative to the present categorization by the UN, here follows a more modern categorization of associations.

### Nucleus pre-associations

The group of nucleus associations are a sort of pre-associations; the word association has, in that context, limited actual meaning; social, biological and cultural imperatives take precedence. In Durkheim’s thinking, these are the primary groups (Durkheim, 1902).

The primary groups of occupational and social categories of course link back to Tönnies distinction between “*gemeinschaft*” and “*Gesellschaft*” (Tönnies, 1887). In other literature, the category of “intimate association” is used to extend the issue of “personal liberty” to the sphere of the family. Exactly, for this reason, it is less logical to use it here.

### Classic associations

The two groups of associations that follow are, together, the “classic associations”. Lawyers in private law will immediately recognize their shape and applicable books of law<sup>44</sup>, but here it is better to stick to historical meanings, as described in the case studies, and know that these meanings can shift. Later in this main study, it will again become more complicated, but there is nothing wrong with a recognizable categorizing whenever possible. The line between occupational and social associations is, of course, a thin one; occupational associations are by definition also social associations.

The main difference is that the members have ultimately themselves (or itself, in the case of a business) as their goal and social associations do not, so there will be a much larger base of volunteers in the latter. There is a need to remain careful in the wording, though. In some countries, there is a separate category for “idealistic associations.” In the United States, the category of “expressive association” is used, meaning all associations whose activities are covered by the First Amendment of the US Constitution: speech, assembly, press, petitioning, etc. (McBride, 2005) (Wikipedia, 2017) (Susskind & Susskind, 2015) This researcher finds that separate category less useful, as it is not used elsewhere and, more importantly, all associations may be assumed to be able to deal with fundamental rights. As such, they should either be protected or have to deal with the limitations (see also 1.7).

It should be noted here, that efforts at categorization are functional, in as much as it helps to get a grip on society and the many complex institutions within it that are or can be useful to us. At the same time, it is also true that any attempt at describing a group means creating both an in- and an out-group. Each time a group of people gets included in a category, others are excluded. In that sense there is no in-group without an out-group. This again has social psychological consequences that can be detrimental to specific people and society at large (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003) (Boehm, 2014) (Brewer M. , 1999) (Tajfel H. (., 1978). This can hardly be helped. Associations are there and they will always have this effect. A better understanding of what an association is and how they function, given the many obvious misunderstandings about this in forinstance the leadership of many associations, could perhaps help tackle this effect.

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44. In the Netherlands: “Book 2 Nieuw BW”.

Categories of associations		
Group	Category	Description
<b>Nucleus (pre-)associations</b>		
	Biological families	Extended families as a close group
	Tribe	A group of people, often related, sharing core values, woven into daily life
	Noble families	Hereditary peers living and working together in a 'order'
	Social families	Families working to better themselves together with other families
	Fraternalities	Tight-knit social groups based on co-optation
	Political families	Groups working together to reach a political goal
	Families of nations	Groups of nations that feel connected and share a common interest
<b>Occupational associations</b>		
	Guild associations	Associations with members recognized on the base of proven craft, skill or trade experience ('guild like')
	Professional associations	Associations with members recognized as professional on the base of proven higher education
	Public professional associations	Association of which either the association or its member, professional or public institutions) provide a function by law
	Conditional associations	Associations for professionals without a direct market function
	Business associations	Associations with (international) businesses or organizations and their representatives as members
	Vocational associations	Associations of professionals with a stated public goal (service clubs, etc.)
<b>Social associations</b>		
	Religious associations	People become part of congregations based on religious affiliation
	Sport and educational associations	Voluntary associations with a goal of sporting or fraternizing with each other
	Civic associations	Voluntary associations to further a common goal for het (local) community
	Care and consolation associations	Voluntary associations around health care and wellbeing
	Culture, heritage and honors ass.	Voluntary associations aimed at promoting culture, heritage and heroes
	Charitative associations	Voluntary associations (including NGO's) with a charitative aim
	Civil and political associations	Association of members with an active will to participate in debate and politics
	Other voluntary associations	For instance NGO's with an international mission
<b>Transsociations</b>		
	Digital networks	Intranet and other semi-closed digital groups with a common purpose
	Gamers	Shared competitive role play
	Social media networks and chats	Direct communication and connectedness with single-sided chosen contacts

Table 9. Categories of Associations

## Transsociations

Transsociations, finally, will be the “associations” that have come about as a consequence of the internet and the ongoing digital revolution. We are talking about groups of people that are similar to an association in that they share a common purpose and share the same activities. Their purpose can be earning money but, if so, indirectly, by sharing experiences or a common outlook. Most of the groups are almost purely social, with an implicit pay-off in the possibility to communicate with like-minded people. At the same time, there are big differences. From the standpoint of the social sciences, directly undercutting Durkheim’s idea of distinguishing groups through the way its attributes and symbols, is the almost invisibly low threshold for entry and exit. One click and you are a “member.” When you cease being active, you are effectively no longer that. The model of “free” membership, especially, has lowered the threshold to an invisible level—“Here comes everybody” is the apt title of a book (Shirky, 2008)—and especially undercutting the element of “professionalism” as it is generally known (Susskind & Susskind, 2015).

Often there is no transaction or other formal exchange of commitment. It is interesting though, to see that there seems a shift in membership of transsociations like LinkedIn and Facebook as a consequence of their respective goal (Differencebetween.net, 2018). The 'membership' of both is drifting apart, already mirroring the distinction between occupational and social categories of classic associations. Perhaps this holds the promise of a merger between classic associations and transsociations in the future.

### From Symbol to Size

The criteria of entry and exit, with the visible elements of membership in the classic associations, provide no clear evidence of membership for transsociations because of a host of problems that probably at best can only be solved through big data analysis: the speed with which (dis)membership can happen, the question of central registration, the chance of dealing with someone with a false or fake identity, and privacy issues all conspire against using the traditional Durkheimian way of looking at outward signs of membership. The only thing one can really know at a given moment is the number of likes or followers. Only at the moment that central data registration takes place (SEO driven, probably) can it turn into an association in more or less the same way that a classic association can be measured. So here we have to turn it around: with a transsociation, a group is not defined by its borders, but by its size.

This is a vital distinction. Size in terms of the number of people taking part in its activities seems to be easier to measure but it often is not. Take, for instance, the size of a Facebook group, as many will think of this when talking about a transsociation. Are we counting the number of people that founded a page, the number of its likes or the number of people that visit the page? Researchers more raised in classical thinking will stay closer to the classical definition; researchers more inspired by the potential of modern technology might even take into account the number of people Facebook uses in its algorithm to lure others to this group.

To solve this problem, it is necessary to use in the definition, one more element: sense.

### From status to sense

The key question here is whether we should speak of an association or a market? This is a difficult question, as each association, including classic ones, clearly has moments of a transactional nature, and none more than with entry and exit: the moment after you are congratulated with your membership, you get the bill for your contribution.

Associations can have a very good business model. In social media, you usually do not have to pay an entrance fee, but you have to accept advertisements, and there are silent codes that ask you to accept, for instance, that when you are active by posting a message, others can respond, from giving a like to that wonderful funny picture of a kitten to venting your anger when someone mentions President Trump. But interaction is not always the same as a transaction. It does not start as a market. Reciprocity is not a given or needed. Membership alone is already appreciated. The fact that any person can literally “buy” followers on twitter only proves the fact that the number of followers gives status and access. This only then can perhaps be converted to a value in monetary terms. Giving this question a full answer, later on, it does seem that a transsociation is more transactional than institutional: if you show me a picture of a kitten, I give you a Like. but please, make no yearly report of my kitten pictures (Facebook will take care of that for me). This does not mean that there is not an institutional side to groups of a transsociational nature and that this side is increasing. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and the likes have now been here for over ten years. You could say (this is not a validated number) that a member of a Facebook group who has been a member for longer than five years a member of that group, posts himself something over five times a year and likes, comments, or retweets something five times a year, is more of an institutionalized member than the member of a classic association who pays his or her contribution once a year, goes to a single meeting and reads only the front page of his magazine. Still, institutionalization has never been the point of associations, and should not count as such. The question is: why join? It must make sense to the member.

As the outer layers of the concept of association are scrapped, something else needs to come in its place, because in the end associations are not about symbols or status, but about size and sense: being able to feel what cannot be fully felt alone. The question, of course, is how this will come about. This is a fundamental question, if we look at it, for example, from the perspective of Max Weber’s view that societies will crumble once the moral order beneath it disappears (as cited by (Etzioni, 2005, p. 83)). A new society may rise from the ruins of the old one, but once its foundations are broken, a renewal is not possible. Transsociation suggests renewal or at least a second chance for associations, yet there are many who see the wave of digitization as the end of the old moral order. It as Schumpeter suggests, at its most destructive. This study works from the assumption that transsociation is just another stage in an ongoing, continuous process of change.

## Consequences for Social Sciences

The existence of transassociations prove in a paradoxical way that associations exist, or at the very least are more than a fading way of people organizing themselves. The classic way through which Durkheim made it possible to define associations started to hide them from plain sight. Maybe, if Durkheim were alive today, he would come back on the Kantian way he distinguished organic and mechanistic ways of organizations and would state that they really are just two sides of the same coin. Meanwhile, the social sciences would have moved way beyond Durkheim. Well, they did when it came to other social phenomena, but not enough when it came to associations. For too long the field has been neglected. To this researcher, this seems like a rather fundamental point for the social sciences. For the purpose of this study, it means something about the way associations are categorized and how their dynamics need to be discussed.

## Coming to a New Definition

This study ended the first part with this answer to the question about what an association is:

*an association is a group of people and entities bonded by trust and recognizable by its barriers for entry and exit, and standards, applying equally to all its members.*

All that has been described in this second part leads to a new, but still preliminary definition of an association as a group or collective actor that:

- a. Has membership; usually one with natural persons, but not always;
- b. With members that go through a cycle of membership starting with an entry to the association and ending with an exit;
- c. Expecting an experience that makes sense to them in the way not joining does not;
- d. A cycle during which value is added through presence, activities, and representation;
- e. In which members share a common interest and goal(s) in a manner based on equality; and,
- f. In some measure, uses symbols of significance in order to distinguish itself internally and externally.

Every association represents a balance between distinction and equality. Distinction (“quality”): in order to reward status and merit during the long cycle of membership. Equality: to stress the fundamental truth that you, as a member, are part of a whole and that no member is bigger than the association. The lesser the power distance, being a source of inequality, the stronger the fundamentals of an association are met. In this sense, an association is fundamentally different from businesses, governments, and even cooptive networks.

It also touches on the issue of “sense-making” through common goals and the bonding by trust that may come from this.

Entry and exit are the major defining moments for this in classic associations, helped by symbols that have both an external and internal function. This is not an absolute given. Here the choice is made to use a vertical scale that goes from high barriers to entry and exit to no barriers of exit. Halfway, this scale changes from one where outside barriers define entry and exit to one where size defines the group as an association. More on this was addressed in chapter eight. This matrix is turned into the most relevant one for this study in order to prevent this research becoming too static in its approach of associations and to explain where the biggest chances for change lie. Or when that change simply happens.

### Association Drift

Much has happened since the eminent Bierstedt wrote in his introduction of sociology, *The Social Order*, “In general, all of these status symbols are perfectly clear in our complex society and confusion arising from misinterpretation are relatively rare. Material culture items, in short, serve as status symbols in all societies, and a rich collection of material culture makes possible a very high degree of precision in status identification.” (Bierstedt, 1957, p. 230)

Ah, those were the days! —or not really, because even at the time of Bierstedt there was much more of what this researcher would like to call “association drift” than supposed. It was, for instance, the time when the Salvation Army, after, one, having started as a movement and then went on to become a church-like association, developed charity-like activities that eventually would turn it into something more resembling a civic association. This change in identity is hardly unique. This study, as its main case shows, often tells the story about *association drift* as a form of unconscious change. The more interesting question is: what happens when a conscious decision is made to raise standards or quality for the development of an association?

## 18. Defining Standards

### *Article 20 Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

*(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*

*(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

*United Nations, December 10, 1945*

### The Social Dilemma of Standards

In the last paragraph, a way was presented to get to grips with the nature of an association. Out of many characteristics, the life cycle of an association member was chosen, starting with a sliding scale of very high barriers to entry and exit, to almost none. But does this say enough? Can it explain enough of the actual behavior of the members? Does it say enough about the chances for change when needed? The simple answer is that it does not. Context is needed; an engine to explain the dynamics of members and their associations.

Between the entry and the exit of a member of an association, there is a time—often many, many years—where the member has to comply to standards, both internal, of the association itself, and external, as influenced by law. As the member goes through the cycle of membership, rights can be exerted, obligations must be fulfilled, and transactions must be made. A whole body of knowledge has been established around these legal conditions (In the Netherlands for instance: (Dijk & Ploeg, 2013) (Kollen, 2007) (Rensen, 2012) (Schwarz & Zaman, Handboek Stichting en vereniging. Stichting, vereniging, coöperatie en onderlinge waarborgmaatschappij, civielrechtelijk en fiscaalrechtelijk beschouwd, 2015)). There has been one attempt to bring all internal regulations together in a publication dedicated to “chapters of process law on self-regulation” but this got no follow up and in fact limited itself to aspect of complaint regulation and mediation (Bemmelen van Gent, Groot, Nijgh, & Slabbers, 2006) (Noordhoek P. , 2008). In legal terms, associations are dominated by private contract law, although it could be argued that so many of their activities interact with the public domain that this should be better reflected in their legal position and structure. There is a missing link, at least in European Continental law, between the elements of private law and the thinking about modern governance. The elements of private law, as discussed in part I, are both few and formulated in what appears to be a very open way. It looks like Governance Codes have to make up for what is lacking in the specifics of the law and the question modern organization dynamics asks of institutions (Strikwerda, 2012) (Swinkels, 2012). The question is though, whether Governance Codes developed for the private or semi-public sector are fully applicable to associations.

There is a difference when it comes to the checks and balances. Though it is often said that the general assembly of an association is ‘the highest authority’ within in association and not the board, in legal terms (and jurisprudence) there is a collective responsibility for any action (Olfers, 2008). There is no higher and lower. Both in the private and (semi) public sector there is a clear hierarchy, which gives room for a system of checks and balances that can be governed by a code. It will be interesting to see how the relation between the legal framework of an association and the different codes will develop.

Back to the issue of what standards do with the members. In all but a few cases, membership will not have been entered into in order to deal with all kinds of standards, rules, and regulations. They are what often is called, a “dissatisfier,” and rightly so if you are a member of, for instance, a sport association and all you want is to do your sport, or when you are a dermatologist and you want to talk with your colleagues within the association about new methods of treatment and are bothered by new conditions by the insurance, as brought up in that same meeting. But there is another side to it. The standards, laws, and regulations not only give the necessary safety to do whatever you as a member want to do, but the association often gives a member a unique way to influence said regulation. It is even stronger: when analyzing why so many attempts fail to lessen the regulatory burden of a society, it is usually the politicians who get the blame and it is the businesses that complain the loudest. But, starting for this researcher with his own studies into deregulation (Noordhoek P. , 1985), it is quite clear that in a great many cases it is the businesses themselves that ask for the (upholding of) regulations—and they do so mostly through their associations and their lobby efforts. And the examples of this double standard toward standards and regulations abound. Nijssen (Nijssen, 2003) called his dissertation on regulatory reform “Dancing with the octopus,” and this also applies to the tentacles of business and their associations.

So, it is exactly these conflicting intentions—no, stronger: implicit double standards—that members have when it comes to standardization and regulation that makes it an interesting indication for the dynamics of an association. This not only applies to external standards and regulations but most of all to the internal rules that govern the members. There is a “social dilemma” here, capturing relevant issues for individual members and a “collective actors”-like associations. A dilemma that centers on dilemmas like: how much certainty can we give our members in a changing society? How much freedom do we give our members to find their own way in the market? How much free-riding behavior can we accept before our members complain? Etc. And though people to different degrees all take the law seriously, in fact, we are dealing with too much of it. In the legal sphere, there is this legal principle that “we are all supposed to know the law” (Schuijt, 1991) or that we are “all assumed to be mentally competent in the eyes of the law” (Dulk, 2016).

But this sounds empty when the number of rules and regulations literally run into the millions (very rough estimate: 1.7 million rules and regulations for the government of the Netherlands alone, derived from some 2.000+ general laws. Add to this the number of internal regulations. But nobody really knows.). There are so many associations that, in fact, there is no reasonable way of looking at an association without taking into account both the framework of standards, rules, and regulations in which they work and how all, in and outside an association, react to them.

All this makes the lawyer, politician, and philosopher Willem Witteveen (Witteveen, 2014) speak of the law as “a work of art,” a social and cultural construct always open to multiple interpretations, all the more as with our present overflow of governance and regulation, “a recognizable rule of law has become a dream that fades in daylight” (Witteveen, 2014, p. 319). In his systematic critique of the way laws are formulated, he eschews instrumentalism and pleads for regulatory frameworks that are more transparent and communicative<sup>45</sup>. This is reasonable, but when you as a member of the board have to deal with a law or an internal standard, there seems to be little choice but to take it seriously. A precondition for any functioning association seems to be to keep as many members happy as possible and friction as low as possible. Standards, rules, and regulations help with this, and fortunately, there is much in already-existing laws on associations that makes the structure of an association obvious. Still, laws change with times, standards can become obsolete. Pressure from outside, incidents and technology seem to conspire to deal with them differently or come up with new ones. The bigger the need, the more it becomes logical to formulate open standards and flexible rules for the way rules are made. Yet, there is always a price to pay, an exchange to be made: stability for flexibility, certainty for exposure, and control for transparency. It almost goes without saying that associations deal with this differently. There are differences depending on the culture of associations and their different sources of standards and regulations; in the following paragraphs, we will discuss some of the most important ones. There are also differences in terms of where the life cycle of an association is at a given time. In fact, you could write the history of an association just by following the dynamics of how it deals with the balance between closed and open standards—which is exactly what is being done here.

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45. This researcher has done extensive work researching the quality aspects of airline regulations and knows no (combination of) associations with standards that are more closed. Willem Witteveen died in 2014 with his family on board of the MH17 airplane heading for a holiday destination, shot out of the air by a Russian-made rocket, fired by Ukraine separatists. A bitter confirmation on the relativity of closed standards.

[Observation: Just to illustrate this axis a little more, let us look at another great thinker of the social sciences, Max Weber (Weber, 1911). He started his career with a study of British and German stock exchanges. As Hosking describes (Hosking, 2014): “The British one, Weber noted, were private associations, rather like gentleman’s clubs, which guaranteed a tight, mutually trusting membership by charging a high subscription fee, requiring financial guarantees for new applicants as well as approval from existing members. German exchanges, by contrast, were run by chambers of commerce and membership was open to anyone with sufficient capital, whatever his social standing. The Hamburg exchange, where merchant guilds had venerable traditions, was relatively orderly, but the Berlin one, which lacked such traditions, tended to tolerate irresponsible speculative deals.”]

What you see is a high level of entry in the case of the British stock exchange and a low one in the case of the German one. All exchanges had relatively open standards (certainly in the sense that they were not written down), but you get a clear sense that the one in Berlin was too open and that it would just be a matter of time before standards became more closed. All three exchanges have a business purpose, but all the businesspeople try to behave as if they formed an association. There is even the whiff of a cooperative around the London exchange. It seems as if Weber saw three business arenas where all the participants wanted the best of both the world of business and the world of association. A sense of history will teach that this cannot last. Breaches of trust were the logical outcome. Interventions are around the bend, aiming to improve the quality of the exchange.

So, these are the kinds of dynamics this study is about. But first, let’s get some order in the way we define these terms and look at the sources of these standards, rules, and regulations.

### First Order: Use of Terms

In the world of associations, legal realities are seldom far away and need words, also because they are the benchmark of “trust.” More about this later in this text. So far, three terms have been used intermittently: standards, rules, and regulations. The problem is that all three can have a different meaning in a different context. There aren’t even any standard ways to talk about standards: “standards” are often considered to be the norms as part of an external standard for a product, often as part of a standard of a product norm as written according to the “standards” and “guidelines” of the International Standard Organization (ISO). Not all standards are rules and regulations, but rules and (self)-regulations always contain standards. Rules and regulations can be defined differently, in which rules are the elements of the regulations as given by “law,” which is another important term.

But it is also quite possible that we talk about “rules and regulations” because of the simple fact that the alliteration makes clear that we are talking about a lot of them.

[Observation: The problem goes even deeper. Researching the term “deregulation,” this researcher sought a comparison between the term in both the United States and the Netherlands. After a while, it became clear that the actual use of the term in the 1400 books and articles he collected, very much depended on the educational background of the author. In the United States, deregulation was a term used by economists, supported by public choice theory and a libertarian ideology. In the Netherlands, the term was used by lawyers within a legalistic tradition. It did make a difference in the actual politics (Noordhoek P. , 1985) (Nijssen, 2003).]

Trying to keep it simple, it starts out with the most generic term; this is “standards,” as these easily cover both external and internal codes of conduct. It will be exchanged for laws or regulations only when it is clear the subject is about external standards. When in doubt, go to par. 1.8 for an overview of the different legal interventions an association has at its disposal or has to deal with. Look also a little further on, for a not unimportant reflection on the way standards are formulated as a resource for an association.

Immediately after answering the question about standards, an answer needs to be given to the key question about how closed or open standards are being formalized. Closed standards can be recognized by the way their meaning can be deduced in a straight manner from standards as expressed in strictly defined terms or numbers. Open standards are the reverse and will always require further interpretation. It seems logical to expect classic associations to have closed rules of, for instance, entrance to an association: the applicant has to pass exam X before date Y, or the applicant has to pay Z contribution in order to obtain one, two, or three privileges, etc. More open standards can be expected with new professions or when the nature of the association has to do with creative processes. In a philosophical sense, no standard is ever totally closed or open. It is a gradual scale, asking you at some time to stop asking further questions, as there will always be a definition behind the definition. The real matter is how members, and those outside an association, treat a standard. What is the mindset? There are two extremes.

The first is what can be called a “Kantian” yes or no conformity: something can be either this or that, but not both. In extremis: there is only one truth when confronted with a breach in a standard, and that truth is self-evident to the (leading) members.

Professional standards within professional associations are and can be leading, and have a universal strength based on a “categoric imperative”: acting ethically if acting rationally as based on universal binding and reasonable standards, applicable to all (Heesen-Laclé Z. v., 2008), with reference to (Nieuwenburg, 2001) , see also A2, p. 27).

The second is when you speak of standards as “Aristotelian” windows of opportunity: context dictates interpretations and out of many truths, members pick the one best suited to their needs. The Aristotelian approach is more open; less dictated by rules and more by “virtues.” Character counts the most.

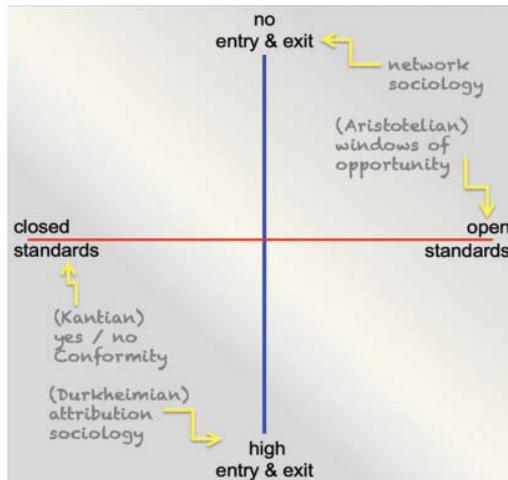


Figure 20 Matrix Counterpoint Descriptions

## A Universal Right: Freedom of Association

There is an aspect of association that no other legal shape of organization has, or at least not that explicit: the status of a constitutional nature. In the Germanic languages, people speak of a grund (Gierke, 1868-1913) or grond right (Gerbenzon & Algra, 1974). This word refers to that of the ground beneath our feet: it is what you stand on in order to walk through life. Like other fundamental rights, the right to associate has to do with our ability to withstand dictatorship and tyranny. Labor unions, especially, have often been forbidden by law in closed societies, and many other forms of associations have traditionally shared the suspicion of governments against groups of people uncontrolled by their masters. In countries like the United Kingdom and Germany, this has meant that only in the latter part of the nineteenth-century associations, and especially unions, got recognized. It is a reason why unions get an explicit mention in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 23.4) (U.N., 2017), but the fundamental right to association has then already been stated in article 20.1.

These fundamental human rights were formulated in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, which may also explain article 20.2, the right not to be forced against your will into an association. In the war, the Germans attempted to put every representative of an art or trade in guild-like Kulturkammers, while at the same time excluding all of the people, mostly Jews, who did not belong in the eyes of the occupier. Together with other founding documents of new nations (Amendments eight and twelve of the Constitution of the United States or institutions) or international organizations (European Convention on Human Rights) they are born out of centuries of struggle but are fundamentally optimistic documents, with a great belief in the power of law and civilization to overcome our former faults. The right of association is a logical part of this often both optimistic and activist vision of life (Poletta, 2002) (Gutman, 1998) (Paxton, 2002).

And just like many other fundamental rights, until recently they seemed more of an issue for developing countries suffering under an autocratic regime than for the modern democracies. The question is whether it is true or, if true, whether it will stay that way. Globalization and digitization bring a new dynamic, which also brings new pressures to bear on the issue of human rights. The Universal Declaration for Human Rights—like their national constitutional counterparts (eighth and twelfth amendment in the USA, article eight in the Netherlands, etc., or as part of treaties and international institutions (Schermers, 1980)—are above all rights for the individual, not for a group or community, or even of a nation. This has always been a source of tension for policymakers and governments as even the most well-intentioned of them have to work with some concept of “general interest” in which individuals have to adapt themselves, but tensions are increasing together with the numbers. Take for instance article thirteen. The right to move from one country to the next is at the heart of the debate about migration as the number of people fleeing or leaving their countries increases. Or take article twelve, the right to privacy. How to square that with demands for safety from terrorists? Or article eighteen, the right to, among other items, the right of religion, which gives the church a *sui generis* (“stand-alone”) position in respect to public authority. As yet there is hardly a debate like that around article twenty, the right of association. Do they have the same *sui generis* position as churches? The authors of the Declaration certainly made no exception, but why then are associations in many instances part of the “long arm of the law?” Mind you, there can be little doubt that with the right to association, the writers of the declaration meant what here is called the “classic” form of association and not just the more general term of “assembly,” the getting together of people. It just seems that as the existence of unions has been accepted in most countries, the good fight has been fought. Meanwhile, the very concept of association has been diffused by its many forms, so what remains the object of this article? And do the pathologies of associations not point toward something that limits the essential freedoms of individuals?

If there is still a battle around associations about their right to exist, it is about the way they exist. In this respect, the fundamental debate seems to be about the exclusionary aspect of associations. Can it be accepted in a modern world that associations refuse membership? Even as it becomes normal that women are present in former masculine associations, many groups still feel excluded and demand access or the abolishment of an association. See for instance the example of the Harvard Clubs (Sedgwick, 2017). Associations have become the focus of a battle between “political correctness” and “libertarianism” or even “populism”. They are what needs to change, not what needs protecting. Quite a social dilemma. How this will balance out in the near future, is very much part of this study about “trusting associations” (see also chapter six).

### Sources of Standards: Internal and External Rules as Powers of Communication

As what is evident from everything written before, the sources of standards can be both inside and outside of associations. It illustrates that in associations, both the best and worst of standards, rules, and regulations (and their oversight) come to bear, and many will say: especially the worst. But rather than reviewing all the problems (they will come back, in a way, in the pathologies as described in par. 1.8), or suggesting that this study has the answers (it does not, but there will be some interesting interventions described in part III), it is better to pay attention to the way closed or open regulations and closed and open standards interact and work like “heart valves” of the social system of which associations are such a vital part. It can be seen as a way of turning water into ice.

[Observation: It would be a good thing for the reader to be skeptical about research into the concept of “change,” and that includes this one. In the end, it can feel like you have stuck your hand into water and started circling and waving about in that water. The water does move and may even flow in a different direction, but the moment you lift your hand out of the water, and your hand may still be wet, the water is already settling down and becoming calm again, like nothing ever moved, like there never was a hand in the water. There is one remedy for that. You freeze the ice. Once it is frozen you can not only touch it, but you can also hold it and even move it. Of course, it is cold to the touch and not very pleasant to handle. And the ice will start melting soon enough. But if you want to change the water, freeze it.]

This can be a useful metaphor, up to a point, the melting point. There is this image of associations as slow distributors of internal standards and external regulations. When a (classic) association is too slow to impose the measures a government wants, it will impose regulations.

If not, it will be satisfied to wait for the internal standards to hit their members and/or clients, but sooner or later the association will give in. It could be that way, ice moves slowly.

But it could also be the other way around. If an association is active in society, which it often is, as its members are usually not the worst part of the population, it might well be that most of the insights and experiences that members express within an association will sooner or later be translated into internal standards or external regulations. If it is to be “later,” then it might well be that a member of the broader audience will not experience it as an answer to the problems of the day, and be very critical, but chances are there that without the new regulations the members would have missed an opportunity to adapt their work to (earlier) realities.

[Observation: Take, for instance, the resistance of many in the legal profession (see also case A1-2) against a new privacy regulation. The regulation will bring nuisance to the office of the lawyer, notary, or real-estate agent and they will call their association to complain about the nuisance and ask why the association has done nothing to prevent it from bothering them. But in the end, they should realize that it is not the association that “invented” the problem of privacy, but that it is just another aspect of modern society. And it might well be that dealing with privacy will become another source of income for both professionals and associations. Perhaps that they will then also remember that it was at one of the meetings organized by the association that they first heard about the “problem” with privacy.]

So, it could well be that associations are at the forefront of dealing with standards, whether external or internal. If that is true, then it must have been the case for a very long time. And this is probably true. You can probably trace the development from natural law to the modern codes of law (Algra & Janssen, 1978) (Gerbenzon & Algra, 1974) right back to the meetings of scholars in their associations. On the other hand, the division between Anglo-Saxon and European attitudes toward the law, from “common law” to “continental law” has probably grown worse because of too little interaction between the different law societies (Xanthaki, 2013) (Zijlstra, S.E., 2014): Brexit was partly as a consequence of not enough interaction between associations.

One of the main tasks of associations has always been to represent the interest of their members. Members are not always aware of this, but an association’s cumulative power can be both great and limited. Associations are therefore often involved in some meeting of “private power versus public purpose” (Wilson (Ed.), 1980). It seems as if in the past few decades this has led to a lively “governance” debate on the relationship between horizontal self-regulation and vertical public regulation.

It is important to notice that “regulatory theory” clearly states that before public regulation is attempted there should be an attempt at self-regulation. Some countries have codes for the writing of regulation in which this is clearly indicated and civil servants can get training in how best to write the laws, as it is really a craft (Aanwijzingen voor de regelgeving, 2011) (Eijlander & Voermans, 1999) (Integraal Afwegingskader IAK, 2016). Still, the quality of regulations leaves much to be desired and its level of intrusion is growing steadily, as one can follow from the newsletters from your association, especially at the beginning of the new year. As stated there are many drawbacks to regulations (Sparrow, 2000), (Wilson, 1980), (Breyer, 1982), (Kohlmeier, 1969). However, there is no modern society that has succeeded in actually bringing down the number of regulations. Deregulations is usually followed by (re)regulation in the same way somebody who tries a diet after some time ends up weighing more. Partly this is due to the ever-growing complexity of a globalized world, but there are also other forces at work. It can never be a matter of blind trust to choose for instance that certification is an alternative for regulation or the way to deregulation. As such, it is not (Evers, 2002). It is more or less proven that attempts at deregulation lead to reregulation or more regulation, often through the backchannel of trade associations. There are several mechanisms behind this, which should be understood by people within associations too, as it may explain why many, including members, are often not happy with new standards. From public choice theory to modern insights in bio-psychology, researches are learning about the motives behind formal policy motives for regulations, from the obvious of risk aversion to wanting to score for superiors to more intricate motivations. Of course, this does not only happen at the level of public regulators but also within associations. At the moment, what is striking is how similar and basically people work with internal and external regulations, just as it is striking how similar the structures of most associations are at first glance throughout the world. A matter for more research.

When it comes to standards as written by the policymakers for or within an association, we are usually talking about 1) internal disciplinary regulations, and 2) certification and its learned brother, accreditation.

Internal disciplinary regulation is gaining in complexity (Boer M. d., 2017) (Heseman & Huls, 2017) and getting intertwined with governance dimensions. It is not the focus of this study, but important.

In chapter two, we will see that there are alternatives to certification, depending on what “school of quality” is considered to be the most effective. However, standardization by certification is in most countries and certainly on an international basis the absolute, uh, standard. It is different with many services, but trade associations of which the members are involved in the making of products, can hardly do without certification (Jacobs & Glassic, 2004). In fact, there is an (illusion of) exactness to certification that there often is not around public regulation.

This could be because it seems like there is less politics about it.

In particular, standards formulated in the context of the International Standard Organization seem the result of hard but transparent negotiations by partners who have lots of knowledge about the products (this is not entirely true: there can be pure industrial power play, but it seems to be the exception to the rule). When looking for “hard” standards, there seems no alternative to ISO-accepted standards. In a sense, if there are problems, it is not with the standards themselves, but the way they are interpreted (too much aimed at the paperwork) and without enough attention to compliance and the risk of groupthink. An endless number of serious incidents have underlined this vulnerability, driving (the associations of) regulators, inspectorates and certification bodies together. As yet, these problems have not been addressed in a sufficient manner, no matter that new generations of general ISO standards have been codified. It could very well be that the same problems that bedevil public regulation also plague private certification efforts. But what is the alternative? Maybe it should start by getting off of our islands and connecting, as governments and associations, what we know. It is logical that (big) data efforts are made in order to measure the cumulative effect of regulation and standards on members and their customers and clients.

One of the almost permanent—though hidden—debates in both public regulation and private standardization is the shift from closed to open standards.

First, it must be clear that in the context of this research, it is at least as much about internal standards regarding the members, from entering the association to codes of conduct, as it is about standards regarding products and services as produced by the members. But the idea at heart is always the same: it is not by writing more or fewer regulations, but by using fewer and fewer defined words in these laws and standards that it is possible to create more space for flexible solutions. Instead of saying “A and B should be done before year C,” you, for instance, say that “The result in year X should be Y,” leaving it up to the executives to determine how it is to be done. There is nothing wrong with this principle, except for the same mechanism of uncertainty reduction that takes place whenever some party is confronted with something not quite clear: creating sub-standards in order to give more grip. In that case, it might have been wiser to formulate a closed rule to begin with.

There is only one way in which the choice for open standards is the most rational: when confronted with too many “unknown unknowns.” The speed of technological change is inducing this now all the time. Keeping standards closed when everything is speeding up is a like locking the knees of person when he or she should run; it will cause a fall. Somewhere, a balance between closed and open should be struck and there is no standard answer to the question where.

One of the more interesting contributions to this debate about open or closed standards comes from Peter Franklin (Franklin, 2018).

He starts by looking into the “left” versus “right” debate in politics, concluding that there is a slight but logical bias in favor of right-wing thinking. The question is then if “open” versus “closed” standards is a better dichotomy. He thinks not, because there also might be a bias in favor of “open” standards. He states that most of the opinion pieces that have appeared since 2016, have almost all been written from an “open” perspective, and he rethorically asks “Who would want to identify themselves as being “closed”? It is a question that can and should be debated in the context of liberal versus illiberal societies, but there a side to it that is more relevant to the issue of standards in and around associations and the many measures that have been taken to deregulate barriers for entry and exit. Franklin observes “that the costs and befits of dismantling barriers has had a hugely unequal impact on different parts of the population – and that the advocates of open are insensitive to this reality.” Franklin quotes Adrian Wooldridge (Wooldridge, 2018) when he says about the post-1979 deregulation of the British economy that it was “One sided. Working-class closed shops, such as that of the printworkers, were broken, while professional closed shops, notably for barristers, were left to thrive.” It seems that in countries like the Netherlands it is less one-sided (see case notariat, A2), but on the whole it is hard to argue against it. Franklin takes the argument to deeper waters when going back to Karl Popper. It is worth quoting him here, as this touches not only upon the important distinction between open and closed standards in defining associations, but also because it touches too upon the distinction between trust and rationality.

Popper’s seminal work was ‘the Open Society and its Enemies’ (Popper, 1962) Popper determined closed society as “determined by taboos, by magical tribal institutions which can never be objects of critical consideration”, whereas an open society is “one in which taboos remain, but with an “ever-widening field of personal decisions ... on which there is the possibility of rational reflection” (Popper, Ch. 10). Daring to think Popper is wrong in his assumption that we can all become like “philosophy professors” in struggling with the realities of life, he states “To live a good life (or, failing that, one that isn’t catastrophically dysfunctional) we need so much more than our own rational faculties. We also – indeed, mainly – depend on the incentives, expectations and encouragement we’re exposed to through our participation in collective human endeavor.” He notices Popper has little need for human connections and suggests “real social groups” are an irrelevance. Observations like these are the bridge he needs to go to Émile Durkheim, of whom Popper had a low opinion. Durkheim understood about social groups and people’s need for it. His concept of anomie defined the situation in which people find themselves as in a lawless or normless position due to the decay or absence of social strictures or when they are too strictive – trapping the individual in situations where they cannot thrive. Societies with “organic solidarity” are the real opposite to this because relations are neither fixed nor chaotic, but self-regulating.

Community-based norms and institutions help with aligning autonomous individual actions to the common good. Franklin then gives Durkheim new meaning by explaining how anomie in its effects looks much like that of globalization, with social capital destroyed (Putnam R. , 2015), especially for the new lower class (Murray, 2012) (Silva, 2013). The “new upper class”, in terms of Murray maintains or increases the self-regulatory structures that fit organic solidarity.

With this, Franklin both demonstrates a need for more closed social groups, including associations, though he does not mention them, and defines a new agenda for change in society. Interestingly, he draws attention to the fact that members of the new upper class do not know what they miss: “It’s difficult to be sensitive to what you have always had. But what open voters can take for granted, closed voters are having to fight for – or have already lost. They have not turned against the open society, they are struggling to feel part of it. Having suffered so much damage to their economic and social cohesion, what remains is cultural identity. But when even that comes under sustained attack from those ill-equipped to understand its value, it would be surprising if the disposed did not rebel.” With this, Franklin does two things in the context of this study. First, he provides an important ratio for taking social groups way more important than is happening now. Open standards are not automatically better than closed. On the contrary, more closed standards might be necessary. Second, he goes way beyond the simple observation that many associations are simply suffering a decline because young people think associations are not exiting enough to join. His analysis puts associations squarely in the debate about divisions in society and the problem of people being left behind.

Back to the case of associations, it could be helpful to show what happens when a standard is made more open or closed. Different scenarios could inspire different solutions<sup>46</sup>. As will be shown, an association is a quadrant within a matrix where ways or social organization come together one by one. On the one hand, you have more informal, cooperative ways of coming together, and on the other hand, you have more business, market-driven ways of meeting each other based on contracts. On the other side of the barrier, you have the more digital ways of meeting and interacting with each other. As with any model, it is a (gross) simplification of reality. The question that is relevant here, is how best the “jump” can be made from one part of the matrix to another.

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46. What is described here, is at a meta-level, as is necessary in the case of associations. In reality, the setting of standards can grow more complex. There are different modes of standardization, depending on the goal and function a standard needs to perform. For instance, depending on the kind of market standards have to do their work, and the complexity involved, there is a different role for ‘Committee-based’, “Market-based” and Government-based” ways of standardization. With some difficulty, this issue of “multi mode standardization” is put aside here (Wiegmann, Vries, & Blind, 2017). In more general sense it will come back in part III, ch 18, as part of the “objective” and “system” mindset.

It could be that private contracts, public regulations, and association standards are the “hard” part of the mechanism through which one domain can meet the other without losing “language,” the ability to understand and work together within your own domain. Information is pumped from one domain to the other and these hard elements are the “valves” through which they are pumped.

### Sources of standards: Fair Play in War and Sports

Are any of the people reading this study “gamers?” Do you, like them, spend hours on end behind a computer console immersed in a beeping, zooming game full of enemies and dangers? Killing them and destroying them. Not likely. If you did try it, you might understand that for many it is the safest way to vent their energy and that the same player who does not say “boo” or “bah” at the dinner table has a very active social life with his multiplayer friends, and where the most competitive are also the ones most keen on maintaining (their) rules of fair play. In fact, they may be heading soon to a “boot camp” where together they can play each other and hack the systems of outsiders. The organizers of the boot camp? Association people would recognize them immediately as someone who would be an association leader in other times.

In other words, perhaps the most transsociational of groups may have much in common with one of the main sources of standards in the world of associations: war and sports.

“Make peace, not war.” Most people would agree to this sentiment, and in fact, we have done away with much of it, as indexes for conflicts in the world show (IISS, 2017). The question is whether or not we have become more peaceful or if our tendencies for striving, competition, and conflict have sublimated into other, less violent activities. The latter may be assumed. Associations have both arisen from war and could be said to have played a vital role in this sublimation, with sporting associations as the most obvious example.

Yet war still has its role to play. An author like Morris (Morris, 2014) makes plausible that war both shaped and tamed society: “War creates the states, and the state creates peace.” At the same time, the state is the product of other forces pointing toward civilization (Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 1933) (Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, 2011) (Cleary (Tr.), 2000): the beast is tamed by many forces. One of those forces may be through associations. Especially (young) officers are known to form associations. They come together for the initiation and ritualization of the practice of war. These can be the meeting places where the blood runs hot, preparing for battle. They can also be the places where the ones most familiar with the horrors of war thought about ways of appointing winners without having to kill all opponents.

From the more pre-association world of Middle Ages where knights would start jousting in tournaments to the ritualized “exercises” along the borders of Russia and North Korea; each show of arms is made as predictable as possible in order to give the other party a chance to back off. When parties do not adhere to this, like Al Qaida or IS terrorists don’t, reverting to old ways of war, no group is more offended than the military. The more formal the practices of war, the more standard they are, the better. When enemy forces like IS organize themselves in something resembling a state, they can be beaten and battered, but the guerilla warfare of the loners and small groups survives and kills.

Quite a lot of attention has been paid to the way the military has organized itself. It has become far more professional along the way (Teitler, 1974) (Doorn, 1973). The role of associations has become more something for one’s spare time, to socialize among each other. Associations have also become places to go for celebration and comfort. The question is how this will develop? As something of a shift is going on from regular armies to commercial ones, there is also a shift in standards. Public standards will in part be replaced by trade standards, it is said even including ISO:9000:2015 standards, though that would violate international law. All this will take the military further away from associations and their standards.

The jump from rules of engagement to rules of fair play is not high, and, in a way, war, especially colonial war, has helped to make them universal. It seems like sports they lend themselves to closed standards: exact to the point of ridiculousness, balanced as they apply to all. It is still not completely clear if there were many rules at the time of the first real Olympics in Greece or at the gladiator games in Rome, but from the moment sport as a leisure activity for the well-to-do spread from the elites to the general people, it was very much helped by the fact that this happened in the heyday of the British Empire. Even the curious rules for counting scores at tennis (15–30–luv–game) survived to this day the export of the sport across the world. Tennis used to be a game for the elite, as you need from the start a net, court, and rackets (plus white clothes). On every street or anywhere you can play a bit of cricket, or even easier, kick a ball with your feet. Soccer became a sport that served as a great emancipator, not only in England but on every continent, except for one former colony of Britain that preferred head banging. Many of the sports that were (re-)introduced by the British, including the Olympics (together with the French), had a strong “gentleman amateur” aspect about them. You did the sport for fun and for free, in associations that were run by volunteers. Ultimately this did not hold. Everywhere sport has been professionalized, sponsored, and monetized. Though a large layer of voluntary sport still exists and is well thought of, this seems under pressure, with declining numbers of members for associations (though organizing more social responsibility seems capable of changing that trend (Misener, Shier, Babiak, & Rogalsky, 2018).

One thing though has stayed the same: rules are formulated as closed as they can be. Whether you play the game of soccer in Edinburgh or Beijing, the rules of the game are everywhere the same, from the size of the goal to the number of players. Rules concerning being “outside” or wrongly attacked have remained problematic, but not without many having tried to formulate rules as exact as possible for player and referee. And it is probably there, where the rules are formulated as closed as can be, that emotions can run wild about the “stupid referee” and give an extra thrill or anger to the game. With this, an interesting paradox can arise: the effort to close the rules raises expectations. When they are not met, fair play comes truly into question. And fairness matters to people, much more than for example efficiency (Tiber, 2017) (Turgodden, cited by Wilte Zijlstra, also on correlations of trust). The social dilemma here is that of on the one hand giving certainty through closed standards, versus on the other hand providing a sense of justice through fair play. They can go together but may often fail to do so.

### Sources of Standards: Rules and Risings in religion

Shared values are a true source of association. Where can this be found better than in a religious community? Every main stream of religion has its books with stories and commandments about how to live or to behave. For instance, it is remarkable how every major religion has at its core a variation on the Golden Rule “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” or “Do not do to others what you would not have done to yourself” and a number of rules that are on the whole remarkably similar. This works in many ways. Moses’ Ten Commandments can be found in the Torah, Bible, and Quran. They are not only very specific guidelines for behavior but can also be considered the bedrock of natural law within the Judeo and Christian domain and all legal systems that came after. From Augustine onwards, through both the Byzantine and Catholic Church something was built that influences the way European societies function to this day. Look at how the rules of Benedictus can (or should be) applied to this day, certainly when it comes to associations:

*“Before the abbot takes a decision, he calls all monks together and explains what it is about.”*

*“When important decisions are to be taken, the abbot listens especially to the younger monks, as they carry the voice of God.”*

*“When taking unimportant decisions, getting counsel from the older monks is sufficient.”*

*(Maas, 1996)*

But this translation of clerical rules into more general rules has never gone in a straight line, nor did they always lead to association-like forms of self-organization.

Renaissance, reformation, and revolution have gone against and through these churches, creating new churches as the tide of history rose and ebbed, each with their own rules, customs and traditions (Chidester, 2000) (Ryrie, 2017). As history is rewritten constantly, it is interesting to see how the thinking of secularists and ‘liberals’ come in fact from a background that is highly community minded and, in terms of Durkheim, ‘organic’ in their thinking. Adam Smith and the Dutch Statesman Thorbecke are prime examples of this (Norman, 2018) (Aerts, 2018) (Noordhoek P. , Zomer 2018) In this maelstrom, it can be hard to distinguish the characteristics of what is sometimes a powerful and centrally led semi-public institution and sometimes a classic association with a very egalitarian mission. Though in the background there would always be the debate about the separation of church and state<sup>47</sup>, it is safe to say that churches as “associations” had or have privileges that other associations do not have or not in this measure: tax exemptions, access to information and networks, a moral authority, and all signs of a special trust of people and the state in church and religion<sup>48</sup>. Sometimes the people representing the churches would abuse that trust. There are libraries full of books showing how much churches and their representatives have abused that trust, but there is also another side to it. Even in the country that is supposed to be the most secular of all, the United Kingdom, there is still great social strength in churches.

*“According to the 2016 Cinnamon Network Faith Action Audit which collected evidence from 3,007 faith groups in the UK, each of those groups provided on average eight social action projects, managed 66 volunteers and had 1,696 interactions with people who needed help. Debt advice centers, parenting classes, lunch clubs for elderly people, youth work, job finding schemes, and business start-up opportunities are offered in thousands of religious buildings around the UK. Cinnamon Network say their data suggests that this could equate to £3 billion worth of support for some of this country’s vulnerable people.” (Harrison, 2017)*

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47. Is it right to talk about churches and associations in one breath? The first, one could say, is governed by “freedom of religion,” the other by “freedom of association.” This tension seems to be resolved in many countries by declaring a church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, to have a “sui generis” position; its world-wide presence in effect superseding private national law, and in this way taking it out of the domain of “ordinary” associations. This may be right in legal terms, but as in all other ways churches behave like associations, they can be treated as associations. The behavior of (parts of) the church undoubtedly has an impact on the trust in associations

48. And in the case of religion there is something extra: places to gather, central places of their own. In the definition of an association (see ch. 4) the ‘goal’ of the group takes first place. It could be argued that within religion ‘place’ holds equal importance. Look at the meaning of words like “church” (“kyriakon” is “Huis des Heren”) or “synagog” (Greek for “house for gathering”; they are nothing more or less than “places where people gather”).

This complicated but rich mixture of principle and practice seems to belong to religious associations, though there are a few things that are remarkably clear, not only when it comes to its governance or “ecclesial polity,” but also in its civic nature. Most people active in associations will recognize the basic structure of, for instance, a parish. Recognizable too will be its culture of volunteers led by professionals (the minister or priest). Yet above and behind it there is even in minor churches a complicated structure of roles, rules, and procedures (except for the few churches run as a business). You could say that no association is more an institution than a religious congregation and no institution is more an association than a church. The associational and the institutional (Napel, 2017) (Burleigh, 2006) (Sap, Soeteman, & Veen, 1997) (Armstrong K. , 2004) constantly interact, sometimes making them stronger, and influencing all partners around them, and sometimes leaving them stuck or in dark places (Armstrong K. , 2014).

Looking into the relationship between state and church, here the proposition is made that when both look upon themselves as institutions, they will try to interfere with each other and sooner or later get into a mutually destructive partnership. But when the church sees itself as (a collection of) associations, or when the state is made up of representatives of minorities, both seek to isolate themselves and both stay at some distance from each other. An illustration of this comes from the Netherlands when around 1900, on the one hand, a Dr. Kuyper, both a Protestant minister and a media man (we would now say a populist) started to write about groups of people—from family to groups of working people—as being “sovereign in their own circle,” and on the other hand a Catholic priest-politician like Schaepman started to talk about “subsidiarity,” the principle that decisions should be taken as low as possible. Both did so in order to “emancipate” their followers; small Protestant landowners (*kleine luyden*) and Catholic workers. Associations became their true source of strength, with everything from family to work being organized through associations. In both cases it was a sign of “seeking strength in isolation” (also called “Internal Sphere Sovereignty” (Vyver, 2001) (Vyver, 2012), yet at the same time these were people and groups so big and influential that for better or worse they could not be ignored or kept in full isolation by representatives of the classic state. In the end, this height of association formation through the churches resulted in a state and society where it became hard for outsiders and those not in the know, to see the defining lines between the state and segments of society, including the churches. Starting from the 1960s, the tide turned against this. What remains and could be relevant in a time where people are looking for new ways to create a civic society, might be the memory of a time where strong leaders of such movements sought the power of isolation.

Despite all the efforts to separate church and state, history shows that they are like brother and sister. The one cannot do without the other, secularization or not. From the point of association studies, religious associations are of vital importance, especially at the beginning and end of the life cycle of members, and certainly at its beginning when looking at it from the perspective of the historic life cycle of associations. The latter point must be answered from this perspective: has the decline of membership of churches to do with that of membership in associations in general, or is it primarily related to the religious conviction of individuals? Probably both.

This is not only about the issue of legitimacy, but also about the day-to-day interaction between the church and the outside world. Religious associations are held to a somewhat different standard when it comes to issuing or using standards. The social dilemma behind this paradox could be formulated as a tension between the need to formulate standards as clear and as close as possible in the line of its dominant interpretation of the Gospel, or the wish to leave standards open to “the mercy of the Lord.” It seems that, in the end, religion is all about the human condition.

### Sources of Standards: When Civic becomes Civil

It is a necessary evil to start with the distinction between the civic and the civil. With civic associations, it is about what citizens do with and for other citizens. In the USA for instance, in 2011 15% of the population participates in School groups or Neighborhood and 7,5% is member of a service organization. An impressive 26,8% of the population participated in voluntary activities in 2009 (USA Facts, 2018). Think of people organizing a festival or neighbors helping each other out. One act of civic initiative is not enough, but when it becomes a habit and some standing organization is recognizable with a form a communication on behalf of the initiative, a civic association can be a reality. With civil society, it is about how citizens take part in and interact with the government and sometimes take over its role. In the next part, the latter will be discussed in the context of political associations, but here this researcher would look at those parts of the “participative society” that give rise to civic associations. There are many, as everywhere in the world—and certainly not just the Western world—civic initiatives abound. But when do you count them as associations? The data from statistics are not conclusive, as we have seen. And there often is a complication: most of the time civic groups become associations when they have to deal with governments or want to keep problems of liability at bay (sometimes it happens because groups want to escape paternalistic arrangements (Schudson, 1999, p. 99). Can they then still be counted as civic associations? It is likely this will depend on how much a society is used to make clear distinctions between different activities; in other words, how open or closed they formulate standards for the existence and purpose of an association (Henriksen & Stromsnes, 2018).

The social dilemma here is probably between internal and external effectiveness, including the ease of informal versus formal associations and their trade-offs.

Purely neighborly initiatives, civic in nature, will (hopefully?) never get to the level of an association, but where will the turning point come when considerations, risks, opportunities, and liabilities, driven by private and public law, will lead to a situation when there is suddenly a chairman, secretary, and a treasurer? And when and where will this turn into something that addresses the government for a need or complaint? Probably quite soon, and in the process turning the civic into a civil association. But how soon is only an assumption, to be tested by serious research, although it seems logical that there is a parallel between the social and cultural distance people feel toward each other in a society and the speed in which a nucleus-like initiative will turn into a civic and then a civil association? Studies in power distance like those by Mulder (Mulder, 1977) and Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001), and in some measure Gladwell (Gladwell M. , 2013), show a quite consistent image where cultures with a low power distance create, for example, more autonomy, less paternalism, more democracy, etc. In short: more likely to have initiatives that will take longer to transform into associations or institutions and from civic to civil orientations. In more detailed research, interesting correlations abound. For instance, when it comes to giving donations from both a communal and an exchange perspective. The research shows there is a positive correlation with both: “In both relationships perceptions influence attitudes toward donating and this through a mix of intrinsic, extrinsic, and social motivations” (Wiggins Johnson & Grimm, 2010). In other words, cultural factors, including power distance, are probably more important than economic ones. The same goes for how people deal with events and what their regulatory focus becomes (Brockner, Paruchuri, Idson, & Higgins, 2002), or when people show empathy (Betancourt, 1990). Different aspects of human behavior can be put more or less along the same Power Distance Index. Which is not to say this is good or bad (it is interesting to see how, for instance, the whole appreciation of empathy or mindfulness is rapidly changing (Bloom, 2016), the main proposition here is that there is a trend and an appreciation in the Western world for short power-distances, including open standards, and a rejection of closed standards, coming from places with a high power distance. Of course, this will also influence the relationship to the state and for instance the use of free speech, letting, for instance, a liberal thinker state unequivocally “an association is not a state.” (Levy, 2014). There can be a debate about whether this is more than a bias and in effect a precondition for a “true” association, but then we are probably entering the domain of values instead of standards.

Going through the literature, there is no escaping the wish by many, including all parties in the political center, and those with socialistic and liberal roots, to have a stronger role for more civic initiatives—the “small connections” (Grappnerhaus, 2017)—and a stronger role for associations and institutes that show civil initiative. The question is, how should this come about when society has grown used to government intervention and more market initiatives (it seems that both have risen with the coming of the welfare state). Is it feasible to have a strong civil society without a decreased public and private role? The financial crisis 2007–2013 shows many examples where budget cuts took the guise of increased responsibility for civic initiatives. It is not surprising, this increased distrust on the part of the public. On the other hand, do enough people within that public know enough about how a civic or civil initiative works and do enough people share the goal and spirit to turn an initiative into a success? Asking the question is not the same as answering it. The political parties (associations in their own rights) should spend more time researching and answering this question, as is discussed in the next paragraph. At a time when many are asking for a roadmap for democratic renewal, the association road is the one less traveled by.

### Sources of Standards: when Civil becomes Political

The barrier between civic and civil association is much more a matter of gradual shift than that between civil and political. First, some notes on the historical perspective, then the shift to more modern times, and research; research that once more touches upon the issue of trust.

Nowhere has this shift from civil to political probably been made more visible than in the United States. When the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution and thought about the balance of power, there was quite a consensus on one thing: no political parties. The battle against political parties or associations—they were the same, but we will get back to this—was a source of such contention that the present struggle for the shape of the European Union pales in comparison. The American federation came about because there was a common enemy; Great Britain and its king, George III. Especially in cases where most of the people in the new country come from the old country, a process of decolonization is much like a civil war. It is full of self-doubt, divisions and the need to explain oneself. It feels like a rise of the children against the father and cuts deep in a way that territorial conflict does not. Otherwise, it is not very likely that on the huge American continent very different regional powers would have formed a confederation. Even less likely is that they would form a nation in the shape of a federation with a strong constitution. When that constitution was signed, in 1776, northern states like New York and Massachusetts still felt very different from Virginia or South Carolina, in which the matter of slavery already played some part. When representatives of the States came together, they did not come together on some kind of party lines.

The debate was really on how much the British institutions, including a monarch, should be copied or not. The Dutch and French republics provided an alternative, but not a very democratic one in the way we would understand now (McCullough, 2001) (Schulte Nordholt, 1976). The leading men of ideas in the days the Constitution was written—Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, and others—were very much occupied with finding ways of common ground, with unity, especially among themselves, as the main consideration. Political “factions” were considered divisive and corroding (Meacham, 2013) (Ferling, 2000) (Chernov, 2004) (Wilentz, 2005). The wondrous thing is, that a person of whom we think now as a populist or rebel rouser, Thomas Paine, did perhaps the most to bring them together with his words. In his pamphlet “Common Sense” he taught the people in the different states to think of themselves as part of the same continent (Kaye, 2005) (Ferling, 2000)<sup>49</sup>.

It was only after the War of Independence, in the 1790s, that, as it were, the debate on how to debate could no longer be delayed. And this was not a happy debate, as the spirit of unity waned and the economic cost of the revolution became more visible. The divisiveness that reared its head then pitted the minds of Jefferson and Adams and of Hamilton and Madison against each other (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1961) (Meacham, 2013). The American revolution was, in the best sense of the words, a revolution of writers, printers, and readers. These written words were the means to cross the enormous distances on the continent, and none of the main players were without their own means of publication and getting their message across. It is the reason why we have now such a clear view of what was happening then: through the writings of now-famous names we know not only what they did, but also what they thought. Yet it remains important to read beyond the famous names of the day to understand what was really happening in the former colonies if we are to know why aristocratic minds like that of Jefferson’s could totally embrace the idea of democracy but not that of political association.

it was of course De Tocqueville who saw it first and clearest (Tocqueville, 1839) (Tocqueville, June/July 1996). He saw beyond the big events of the day and noticed how much America was an example of civil life. Of course, there was civil life in Europe too, but it was always in the shadow of either the wealth of the nobility or the squalor of the poor. A much more egalitarian society arose in the United States, without the extremes of class societies on the old continent. A form of “popular sovereignty” arose out of the way local communities helped each other (as citizen’s collectives (Moor, 2008)) and dealt with daily life in the shadow of bigger events, communicated by a torrent of words. The American revolution may be one the few in which war did not dumb down a nation but lifted it. Associations were at the heart of this.

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49. Europe is still waiting for its Paine, it does not seem to have anti-Paines.

[Observation: De Tocqueville mentioned in a chapter titled “On the use which the Americans make of associations in civil life” the existence of political associations, but he hastened to add that they “are only a small part of the intense number of different types of associations found there. Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all dispositions are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute.” In this way he goes on, to end with: “Finally, if they want to proclaim a truth or propagate some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association. In every case, at the head of a new undertaking, where in France you would find the government or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find an association.” (Tocqueville, 1839, p. 513)]

In these words, you see the full power of associations as an engine for the emancipation of the average citizen (admittedly: white, male, and Protestant). His words were echoed by Madison in the Federalist Papers No. 10 (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1961). Nevertheless, there was a long way to go before modern party democracy was established. Typically, it would happen through the establishment and publications of citizen journalists (of whom De Tocqueville writes, with disapproval, “that writers take the same place as party leaders,” cited in Burleigh (Burleigh, 2006, p. 60)). Freedom of speech and freedom of association, also when it comes to politics, very much went hand in hand in the early days of the American republic. A more modern writer, Michael Schudson, describes in *The Good Citizen*, a history of American civic life (Schudson, 1999) how party formation was considered anathema to a “public spirit” for many, not only to Jefferson. Civic association was fine, as long as it was not about politics. Politics should be on principles, and elections should go along geographic lines. That was the social dilemma of the day. But it was just a matter of time before this line of public spirit would break enough to allow differences of opinion to be aired through newspapers, reflecting the divisions heard through association assemblies.

In the view of Schudson, civil society started with a newspaperman, and should also be considered as the birth of the media in the United States (Schudson, 1999) (Wilentz, 2005) (Starr, 2004). Schudson has a background in media studies, but his take is broader and interesting, imbedding journalism and the rise of the media as sort of peaks in the civil association landscape. In its “blur of politics and society” (Schudson, 1999, p. 30) private associations are “self-created bodies under the shade of night.” In his view, the first danger does not come from political associations but from other private associations like churches and workers, who from the 1830s onwards start rallying against government when in the view of their members they make the wrong decisions.

Public affairs and lobbying were also there from that time onwards in connection with associations.

Schudson makes an interesting historical distinction between the different models into which civil life started to merge and intertwine with politics and media in society. His first model is that of the “politics of assent,” when in the colonial phase associations aligned themselves with the goals of the British and then with the new nation. This turned into the second model of the “politics of affiliation” in the nineteenth century when associations grew and at the same time aligned themselves with political goals and the new parties. So-called progressive reforms reduced the power of parties and increased the role of education. This again made way for the “informed citizen.” Schudson believes this is still the ideal in American civic life (observe how the terms civic and civil are used, PN). Writing his book in 1999, he indicates there is a fourth model coming instead of the third, which he calls “the rights-bearing citizen.” Informed by the civil-rights movement, he sees a right-consciousness that has brought politics into everyday American life. If he were writing now, in 2017, he would probably see this model back in our politically correct times of “identity politics,” but he would also see that the Trump era has brought a sharp backlash against it. In social and political sciences, there is still a large body of literature dedicated to studying the link between civil society and democracy in the light of De Tocqueville (Edwards, Foley, Diani, & Eds., 2001), partly translated into debates about Putnam’s “social capital,” (Putnam R. D., 2000) (Farr, 2004) (Franklin, 2018) and social enterprises (Euricse, 2017). Echoes can be found in titles like “Beyond Tocqueville” (Edwards, Foley, Diani, & Eds., 2001) and interestingly enough in a title like “Tocqueville did not write about soccer clubs: participation in voluntary associations and political involvement” (Dekker P. ) (Freise & Hallman, 2014). It is here that the link with (voluntary) associations appear, most of all through a lens firmly aimed at democratization and civil society challenges. Fung (Fung, 2003) argues there are at least six ways in which associations enhance democracy:

1. Through the intrinsic value of associative life
2. Through fostering civic virtues and teaching political skills
3. Offering resistance to power and checking government
4. Improving the quality and equality of representation
5. Facilitating public deliberation
6. Creating opportunities for citizens and groups to participate directly in governance.

Fung states that “the democratic priority or associative contributions depends crucially on context features of particular societies”. This is in line with other authors (Cohen & Rogers, 1995; Kateb, 1998) (Hirst, 1994) (Rossteutscher, 2005).

But how to make this harder in terms of evidence? Interestingly enough, research by Baggetta and Madsen shows that, in line with on data of the American Citizen Participation Study, typologies based on structure can produce more straightforwardly interpretable results than content-based typologies. They conclude that there is a need for more organization or association level data on civic structures (Baggetta & Madsen, 2018). In other words; the content of political participation is also influenced by its structure. A classic association structure produces different content from that of, say, modern network type kinds of participation. This means something for the many political parties that want to get rid of their classic structure. Do they realize it might also mean a change in messaging?

Translating these developments into something that first the (Western) European model or that of other continents can be done, but not outright. The distinctions can be as interesting as the similarities. First off, civil society in Europe did not start with a newspaper or expression of journalism, unless Martin Luther hammering his words to the door of a Roman Catholic Church counts as such. The sources of civic and civil life lie elsewhere, or never emerged at all from under the reigns of tyrants. An example of where it did happen, and that at a very early stage, were the (precursors to) the waterschappen in the Netherlands. Here the counts and dukes of Holland did not keep their bargain in the early Middle Ages of upholding the dykes high enough to keep the people safe. Tired of waiting, farmers and others wanted to do the upkeeping of the dykes themselves, but it did not make sense to do it on your own—one farmer who did not take care of his own piece of dyke would drown them all. So, they had to cooperate, and they had to decide collectively on how to do it and how much each should pay for it. Prevention is the goal here, which takes a longer and greater effort at cooperation than when you just had to accept the floods from time to time and then let everybody rebuild what they can. What started out as a pragmatic solution in Holland, the Western part of the Netherlands, the closest to the sea, became a way of life, with the waterschappen as, in fact, the first democratic bodies in what was still to become a nation. The waterschappen are still around, ever further democratized, for instance also giving inhabitants of cities a vote (becoming “Water Authorities” (DWA, 2017)). In this respect, they are also working within the “rights-bearing citizens” model, but their main goal has to do with one absolute goal: safety from water.

In this way, each country that went through renaissance and revolution has its story. Much of the world of association and party politics in Britain can be explained when starting with the Magna Charter and the centuries-lasting tug of war between King and Parliament, later transferred into a tug of war between the two main parties of Conservatives and Labour, with a king or queen serving as a mystic Bagehotian umbrella (Bagehot, 1867).

It seems a society where custom and conformity is prized and commerce mistrusted—until it is useful. Associations, including the political kind, flourish in this climate as long as they conform to the standard of the day—and this is where it gets complicated. With a culture that is often been described as both pragmatic and innovative on the one hand and full of historical precedent and arcane rituals, on the other hand, it is hard to assess how closed or open the standards of an association really are. This makes it fascinating, but hardly a workable example. Even so, from a historical perspective, there are two developments worth mentioning. The first is the “One nation” concept. This Tory (Conservative) concept, started by Prime Minister Disraeli in the nineteenth century, aimed at overcoming differences of class (Ridley, 1995). Associations, including the political association of the Tories themselves, became very important in that movement. The One Nation concept raises its head regularly within the Conservative party and was in effect copied by Tony Blair as head of the Labor party (Blair, 2010). Recently it became most visible in the Big Society movement, which was very much aimed at voluntary associations and seen as a revival of the collective approach to politics (Franklin & Noordhoek, *The past, present and future of the Big Society. Een ideëengeschiedenis met betekenis voor Nederland.*, 2013) (Moor, 2013). It is not considered a great success by either the media or the party itself, but it has some staying power. There is an image that can still be of relevance to the social dilemmas surrounding associations and their standards. Conservative strategist Oliver Letwin MP explained it best in a book called *There is such a thing as society* (a dig at Prime Minister Thatcher, who denied such a thing existed), as he described the way the government tried to encourage social initiatives. In a hearing on the issue: “A strong theme emerges that links these particular findings. And that theme is the incredible clumsiness of the state, however well-intentioned when it comes to tackling the sheer intricacy of social problems. The state can seem so thick-fingered and ignorant to the poverty fighters on the frontline. It’s like a man trying to repair a cobweb with his own bare hands. By far the most effective schemes are local, discretionary, and flexible.” (Streeter, 2002, p. 55)

In the struggle to let civic initiatives and associations do the work of governments or vice versa, often both lose. Recent experiences with “participative society” in the Netherlands, for example, suggest that most of the effort depends on higher-educated, white people and that their numbers are significantly less than they should be in order to have a society-wide impact. For instance, 81% of the population was never involved in a civil society initiative (VNG, 2016) (period 2011–2013) even though 94% of all local governments state they have or are running civil initiatives (BZK, 2014).

And though 70% of all aldermen and city council members think that citizens love to participate in civil activities, only 33% indicate that they themselves would want to participate (Reichling & Jonker, 2013) (Verschoor & Bruijn, 2017).

Rotmans (Rotmans, 2015) states that there is a core of 250,000 people running civil initiatives, while he estimates that at least 20% of the population (3.4 million citizens) should be active to make his ideal civil society come true. It will not happen then. Somewhere in these—rather soft—numbers, there is also a role for associations. A role coming up short. Meanwhile, the fact remains that there is a strong correlation between voluntary work and the percentage of the population that comes out to vote in an election, as this example from the Netherlands shows (including the fact that data on volunteers and associations are lagging, as discussed in Chapter 1.3). It is interesting to see a sort of “civic belt” running through the country (Voogd, 2017).

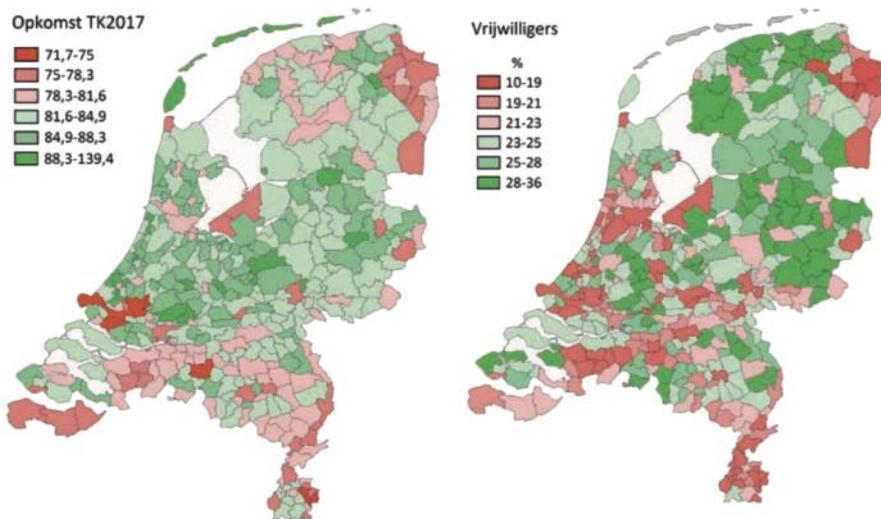


Figure 21 Comparing Percentage of Voters in Dutch Elections 2017 and Percentage Volunteers 2009

Glancing for a moment at other examples and starting with the German example (from Gierke on down), there seems to be much more predictability. The legal and actual positions appear more in line with each other. And in this way, each country will have its own characteristics. It is tempting here to repeat all the clichés of comparative politics; the French obsession with leading from the center, the eastern and central Europeans wrestling with the legacy of the communist parties, the Italians and Spaniards running everything like the Catholic church, and the smaller countries compensating with better language skills for their smaller size. From the European continent, we can go to others, but chances are that the bigger point will get lost. In the end, the comparison will lead to a culture-dependent answer on what makes associations differ from each other.

In reality, there are also strong forces that make associations develop in parallel ways, including those of governance and digitization.

Perhaps this is more applicable to political associations than to other forms of associations, as they are part and parcel of a world that had grown politically very interdependent. Developments in the Gulf region and Asia in that respect are exciting when it comes to trade associations (see chapter five). Most interesting of all may be the development of political associations in the European Union as a whole (remarks based on extensive experience of this researcher).

[Observation: The European People’s Party (EPP) is the largest of the different political parties in the European Parliament. It represents the Christian democratic and center-right parties from the twenty-seven EU members and has, like the other parties, basically two functions: the first is to support the delegations from the different member parties within the European Parliament and the second is that of a policy-coordination platform for the member parties, organizing its conferences (here it resembles US political parties, or their National Committees, which are also mainly organizers of their party conferences and leave most to the parties at state level). Surrounding the EPP are a number of other platform functions, but the whole does not add up to an association: there are hardly any entry or exit conditions applying to citizens wanting to become active, and standards are much more closed than open. In the other European “parties,” conditions are equal or less. This is not the fault of the parties; this is a consequence of the present European model. Of course, there is a parallel here with the way the United States became a federation, but the pressures are quite different. Expecting a similar outcome is too optimistic or pessimistic, depending on where one stands.]

A note on methodology: it is hard to distinguish the growth and functioning of political associations from that of political institutions in general (the same goes for associations operating in the international arena, see the next paragraph). It could be asked if political associations are not part and parcel of the public domain. And often in the worst possible way: research by Transparency International in 107 countries cited fifty-one countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2016 (Transparency International, 2017) in which political parties were seen as the most corrupt institution. In other words; they are the least trusted form of associations. Yet in terms of governance and in the way they, for instance, depend on volunteers and initiate civic activities, they are very much classic associations in most (Western) countries and behave according to a different, much more horizontal, rationality from that of political officials and civil servants. Within a political party, even the prime minister has only one vote.

They are also a place where members can experiment in new ways of democracy in a way they cannot in the actual political arena and can exert an influence they cannot have as average citizens<sup>50</sup>.

It is a debate that is not reflected that much in the political sciences. The contents of journals like *Acta Politica* (1988–2008) and *Res Publica* (2008–2012) did not reflect a single title in which a political party is approached as an association. (The same goes for public administration publications like the *Journal for Public Sector Management and Bestuurskunde*, but this is more to be expected).

Political associations are definitely studied as part of ongoing political history, including its deeper ideological roots, but little as civic or phenomenon. Research into the function of a political party is limited, but there is literature from both Anglo-Saxon (Katz & Mair, 1994) (Sartori, 1976) (Mughan, 2009) and Dutch sources (Posthumus, Ridder, & Hart, 2014) (Ridder J. d., 2014) (Ridder J. d., 2015) (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011) and further more through the documentation centre of the University of Groningen. One of the more interesting debates from the view of the case studies presented here concerns the question how majorities in party conferences are obtained. Under which conditions can the leadership of a party turn an expected loss in to a consent? Is it true that party conferences turn everything “grey”? (Sinke, 2013)

Political sciences evolved from roots in philosophy, history, and law into a small but important part of the social sciences. Its closest scientific links seem to be with public administration and constitutional law. Developments in the field of, for instance, citizens’ participation and grassroots activities are often viewed through a lens of public policy. This is understandable, but it would be balanced if research was done more from the perspective of group formation as such, and the way socialization turns into association or vice versa in the theory and practice of politics<sup>51</sup>. The social sciences have fragmented into so many disciplines and subdisciplines, that their common roots are forgotten. More knowledge of groups and associations can probably be found close to these roots.

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50. There is an important notion that members of a political party, especially at the mid-level functions, are more radical than the voters on that party. Addressing this issue of “May’s laws of General and Special curvilinear disparity,” evidence does not support this law (Holsteyn, Ridder, & Koole, 2015). Looking at non-political associations, this researcher does recognize tendencies of members in a circle around and just below the board that is more activist radical than the average member.

51. This researcher has never considered himself a political scientist, though he did follow many colloquies at Leiden university. Even so he became a founding member of the NKWP, the Dutch Association for the Science of Politics, including helping to create a division of the association for “people working in the practice of politics.” This division never fared well. The activities were always dominated by the political scientists and their publications. The interesting thing is, that this was far less the case within the association for public administration or the legal associations of which he is also a member. In the case of the association of quality professionals, it is the scientists who are a sort of afterthought in the association. In the case of the Dutch National Association for association professionals (DNA), there are no full-time academics. For further reflections on differences in position within the sciences, see Abbott’s ‘A Chaos of Disciplines’ (Abbott, 2011).

We still have to go further where De Tocqueville started, and use the “social capital” (Edwards, Foley, Diani, & Eds., 2001) that political party associations generate.

## Sources of Standards: When Politics Becomes Diplomacy

Many standards are not the result of national developments; it is the international arena that counts. More than most realize, associations play an important part in the formulation of standards at the international level. They do this as platforms in which standards are discussed and decided upon, as in the (in)famous ISO standards, they do so as a means in which to influence (inter)national standards from both businesses and governments alike, and they are players in the international arena themselves, as part of the very influential world of NGOs. In this sense, it is worth taking a short closer look. In an article and in a paper and chapter of a book on “business diplomacy, associations and a multi-actor approach” (Noordhoek, 2015) (Noordhoek P. , 2017), this researcher stated that there are three kinds of (classic) associations with an international dimension:

1. *Purely national associations.* Each may or may not have a link to an international platform of sister associations, but its international activities are limited, and so is its impact in that respect. Multinational enterprises usually leave it to their national affiliates to be members;
2. *International platform associations.* There is a strong effort at coordinating the policies of national associations. The international platform has a strong position in at least one continent. Multinational enterprises almost always play a role;
3. *Purely international associations,* with multinational enterprises as their dominant members; with headquarters on every continent, but no national representative function.

It almost goes without saying that the third category is the one most relevant to the setting of standards, but the other ones are also important in terms of “business diplomacy.” However, associations of true multinationals are still a tiny group indeed. An example is to be found in the oil industry, a branch of the energy sector where all relevant players are international by nature. In fact, all three categories can be relevant. The first because of its sheer volume of combined business interests, and because this is where most SMEs can be found. The second category is interesting because international platform associations are really flexing their muscles. Even in Western Europe, those platforms are gaining clout, even though true integration seems harder here because of the relative strength of national associations. In the chapter of the book about business diplomacy, several groups of associations are tested in terms of the association matrix and their possible impact on business diplomacy.

It must be said that associations are both a part of globalization and an instrument for fighting this.

The internationalizations as described in this three-step build-up are the inevitable result of globalization, yet it is not hard to see that even associations working at an international level carry the characteristics of the dominant nationality of its members, and just like there can be no doubt that international associations can function as a vessel for national interests. It is therefore important to make sharp cultural assessments of an association before declaring it a multinational platform fit for business diplomacy. For instance, a special mention needs to be made of national employers' associations. They show particular strength, being both strong in their national arenas and in the international (EU) one, also in comparison with their union association counterparts. It is interesting to see how durable strong employers' associations are on both the national and international stage.

All of this may seem to have only limited relevance for the issue of this thesis, but if associations are important to the conduct of diplomacy, these implications can be presumed:

- Businesses and their employees will organize themselves in order to profit from the exclusive and combined positions of associations. As the world gets both more fragmented and complex, some form of representation through association will become more and more logical;
- The truly large multinational enterprises (MNEs) have started to behave like "free agents"; sometimes profiting, but more often chasing their own interests at the possible expense of smaller ones and their associations;
- MNEs have also gained much clout in relation to nation states, yet at the same time have become more vulnerable to criticism. This can lead them to hide or seek legitimacy with or within their chosen associations;
- Meanwhile, associations are becoming more professional, more interconnected and more outward looking. The best of them manage to renew their sectors;
- Even so, these associations will remain the subjects of high tensions, connected to changes in the way people and their businesses rearrange themselves outside of classic associations;
- Scandals, incidents, and true disasters will keep on following in the paths of businesses misbehaving. There are always members who misbehave, and associations can or will no longer hide these members. This turns associations into awkward partners for (multinational) governments to ensure better oversight and governance;

- The average association has always been highly attuned to political agendas, but through better knowledge and more professionalism, their association managers have become significant figures in their own right: representatives of the better associations could be the economic diplomats of the future.

All of these implications make it clear that we need a better understanding of the role of associations in public or economic diplomacy, including its impact on public affairs and communication aspects because most of this has implications for both occupational and social associations.

### Sources of Standards: When Occupation Leads to Association

Finally, we will pay attention to the way trade associations deal with standards. For professional associations, the examples of three main cases should serve abundantly.

First, the usual matter of definitions, but this time aiming for some extra clarity. They are called “trade” associations. This is a misnomer, born out of history, and going back all the way to the guilds of the Middle Ages (see 1.2/A3), and therefore hard to change. But look at what can be put under this misnomer of “trade”: producers, farmers, service providers, transporters, collectors, consultants, and cleaners; they can all be counted as trade organizations. Yes, they trade, but they also build, grow, refine, or exploit and so many other things. This seems a bit too much of a good thing, also because, like the guild, it suggests that trade associations sort of grow like a tree from a single plant. There is this one trade, this one guild, and from each grow specializations like branches, getting leaves in the shape of committees or sections and grow on and on. In the end, you have a great forest of densely grown associations, grouped together within their economic sector. As an analogy, it is too neat.

This forest alone does no longer do justice to the term “trade,” but it also disregards how thoroughly globalization and digitization and all those other development play havoc with the trees and the forest (Rijkes, Schmidt, Rijken, & Toren, 2015). If there is an architecture to associations, as Huizinga and Tack so aptly describe (Huizinga & Tack, 2005), the buildings are shaky indeed.

Perhaps the most fundamental of them all, at least in terms of impact on associations, is the movement toward individualization in society, translated into more independent professionalism in the economic domain. This happens both at the level of the skilled worker and at the level of the higher-educated office worker. Regular hours, regular salaries, and regular pensions as a spin-off of well-regulated and ordered economic life are disappearing, and with them classic ways of representation of common interests.

It is not that individuals do not take part in associations, but that they expect something else from them compared to what they expect from classic trade associations. In the latter, everyone was not just an individual but also the representative of their company. Neither does this mean that the companies or (small and medium) businesses disappear, but they start to diverge more in function than used to be the case. The result is much uncertainty, not least when it comes to legalities: who is the employer here, who the employee. What is the status of someone with a steady contract, what of someone who is “just” a contractor, but behaves with the assurance of a true entrepreneur?

As vexing as all these problems are, they detract from what lies at the heart of most associations: a common goal, a sense of sense, a belonging. And this is what should be rediscovered within associations, along with all the other things that should be dealt with at a time when transsociations lie on the other side of business as usual.

Here lies a new distinction between categories of associations that is at first glance not that different from what was, but it is not without consequences.

All associations are, in the view of this researcher, part of “occupational associations.” They are a source of income. They are much more, but this is where the distinction lies with social associations. The next main difference is a harder line between associations for individual members and associations where businesses or corporations are members. Individuals can certainly be active in these associations, but only as representatives of the legal entity recognized as a business in a market or as a public partner of these businesses. And yes, governments and their agencies can be members too. Perhaps even more important is that to this category also belong the “umbrella associations” representing groups of associations, which are very important as partners in policy making, together with the government (In the Netherlands, they are called “the polder”).

Then there is an important differentiation between four categories of associations for individual members or small businesses (or actually three, there is one “hors category”). It seems to this researcher that it is not tenable to have a sort of “catch-all” category of associations of individual members. First of all, it misses the point that many people do not regard themselves as professionals but as entrepreneurs, craftsmen, skilled workers, or whatever. Their business is their identity, not their education. Fine—and a great opportunity to go back to the model of the guilds where training and education are done on the job and by peers.

Then there is the other end of the spectrum; the professional association with a strong public character. They want to be recognized as such, which is understandable as their public role brings with it special privileges and obligations.

More or less in the same line, there is a category with special demands. This category of “conditional associations” will be discussed below. Disregarding the other categories for a moment, what remains is as important a category as you can find: the associations with members who have higher-education backgrounds. Can an association have two identities? Within the confines of occupational associations, this should not be a problem. The categorization is there to help, not hinder. For this reason, there is also an extra category called vocational associations. Clubs like the Round Table, Rotary and many others start as a gathering of people with an occupational background, but their goal lies often outside the profit motive; it goes from occupation to vocation. Still, indirectly it is likely that membership will help their education and standing in their occupation as well, so it is logical to categorize them within the occupational associations as “vocational associations.”

Occupational associations	
Guild associations	Associations with members recognized on the base of proven craft, skill or trade experience ('guild like')
Professional associations	Associations with members recognized as professional on the base of proven higher education
Public professional associations	Association of which either the association or its member, professional or public institutions) provide a function by law
Conditional associations	Associations for professionals without a direct market function
Business associations	Associations with (international) businesses or organizations and their representatives as members
Vocational associations	Associations of professionals with a stated public goal (service clubs, etc.)

Table 9a Occupational Associations

Occupational associations can be seen as the most complete of all associations in terms of the functions they fulfill. There are many ways in which associations can “add value” for their members. The association does so through the different functions it can have. Though it can be said that the literature on associations is limited, the one big exception is on the way associations develop their tasks and functions and how members interact with them, including many surveys about member satisfaction with the different functions. This author too has paid quite some attention to the different ways that tasks interact (Noordhoek P. , 2011). In the Netherlands, we have helpful drawings of a helicopter-like division of tasks (Dedan, Schulz, & Kastelein, 2004) (Tack & Huizenga, F.D., 2008) and a sort of subway system to tell us cleverly how you let the tasks develop and interact (Wesselink, 2010). Others have shown how you can increase revenue or strengthen the business model of your association when you work the different angles (Niesink, 2014-2016). Yet because this aspect of associational life has been covered so well, it should not get too much attention here. This researcher only wants to bring the elements that bring the most added value to the members together in this matrix, expecting that every occupational association that is run by professionals is able to do well on all four elements. As always, too much of it can have downsides and can add to the pathologies.

Here four values are brought together:

- Standard value: the value of standardizing the products or services members buy or sell and maintaining its quality.
- Service value: the services an association provides to the members or their customers, including services like insurance, legal advice, billing, etc.
- Position value: strengthening the position of the association and its members through representation, public affairs, and lobbying.
- Trust value: everything the association does to strengthen the way members make or deliver their products and services, from training and education to instilling pride in the profession.

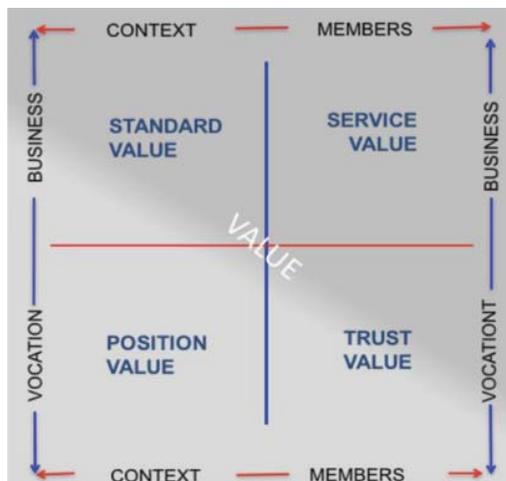


Figure 23 Value Matrix

Each element is also a big source of standards, either open or closed. Some of that (the darker gray area) is increasingly getting digital, but much is still about humans interacting with other humans and then abiding by the rules or not. Of course, this touches on the element of trust, with repercussions to the other elements when it is not dealt with in the proper way.

This touches also on the way standards are developed and maintained, including the compliance side of standards. More than service issues, this seems to bedevil many associations and their members. Here is a scheme with all kind of sources of standards, both coming from the association itself and from (public) authorities. See how these standards can come from very different sources at different moments: preventive, ongoing, and afterward (more interventions in Part III). All of them have a more or less open or closed character.

In chapter seven, the example of an oath was given. As one of many post-crisis measures, it is coming back into the world of professional associations after having been upheld or de-ritualized in the preceding decades (an example of the latter is the oath as one of two peaks in civil associations, the other being political associations or parties, administered for members of the association for real estate and taxation (NVM, see A3). It used to be administered in front of a magistrate and now it is “just” an intern ritual after graduation.

The same goes for many internal “rules of behavior,” “honor codes,” or internal protocols. Almost all bigger associations have them, but as all members also have to uphold the laws of the land, somehow the distinction between internal and external rules got lost. In many associations, you see an attempt to give them back their separate places.

When it comes to the interaction between standards coming from associations and those from public authorities, it is also worth mentioning meta-evaluation as a source of standards. Meta-evaluation cannot only be used to see whether standards are upheld, but also to see whether the association is capable of self-regulation through standards. Should the association fail, it is clear that there will be an intervention from the public side.

Sources of standards occupational associations (not exclusive)			
	Association	Public	International
Preventive	Monitoring	Monitoring	International Survey
	Self-assessment	Formal and material law	
	Codes and oaths	Recognition	
	Checklists	Checklists	
	Governance	Market authority	
	Risk assessment	Ex-ante evaluation	Visitation
Ongoing	Self-regulation	Meta-evaluation	
	Internal audit	Risk based inspection	
	External audit	Oversight	
	Certification	Accreditation	
	Risk management	Crisis intervention	
	Afterwards	Crisis management	Crisis communication
Evaluation		Ex-post evaluation	
Reparation		Reparation	
Award scheme		Award promotion	

Table 10 Sources of Standards Occupational Associations

With occupational associations, there is always an extra dimension to the activities of its members. What happens when standards are not upheld? In a way, this is more a matter of trust than of standardization. Especially when “incidents” reach the media, the fallout usually can and will hit the association as well. When this goes on for too long, the feeling within society can get so grim that there is no belief left in the ability of an association to correct itself or its members and that the government needs to step in.

Closing your standards, and increasing your vigilance is seldom enough. All these incidents can bring about a breach of trust between association and members, as members who feel that they are not to blame, feel the measures as well. But the association has often little choice and should stay ahead of the curve when it comes to sanctions and increased oversight by the government. It is the same with setting higher standards for the members when the association can know that those outside of the association can never meet them. In that case, what helps the trading associations and their members does not necessarily help the workings of the market.

So, there are more than enough social dilemmas within occupational associations. Pathologies threaten, and decisions can be hard to make. But can we do without them?

### Sources of Standards: When Conditions Make Them Irrelevant

In the categorization of occupational associations, there is one category that is rather opaque at first glance: it is that of the conditional association. These are, for instance, the associations to which professional soldiers and sportsmen belong, because for them, in a sense, it is not really about making a living; it is about survival or achieving the top spot in the world. This could also apply to journalists or some parts of the clergy. These professionals deserve a special category because some professions will always tend to be more equal than others.

Seriously, however, a conditional association is the kind of association in which professional people participate but in which the transaction of a salary or fee is but a condition for an occupation that demands unusual sacrifice in such a measure that there is no normal, direct market function. Characteristic of these occupational associations is that their members are often extremely individualistic and are hard pressed to give an account of their work. Nevertheless, they share enough to form associations but can be hard pressed to follow the cue of their board. Membership is never equivocal, always conditional, and as a rule conditional on reasons of principle rather than practical ones. Perhaps the most complicated of these conditional associations is the one for journalists. On the one hand, many are truly driven by bringing the news as best as they can, no matter their salary and are rightly protected by the freedom of the press, but on the other hand, they represent a force that has very real power and is often part of or connected to extremely commercial ventures. Time after time, efforts at self-regulation have failed for this group. There are no closed standards, except that one universal standard of the freedom of the press. There are not even many open standards, and when applied by boards or judges are only followed conditionally. This may be as it should be, as many scholars and judges have concluded that any alternative is probably worse, but it does have an effect on the issue of trust in associations, as the profession is never judged very trustworthy and makes their associations rather irrelevant.

# PART III

## On the Quality of Associations



Image 2 Google Images



### III On the Quality of Associations

#### 19. The Concept of Quality

The challenge, for the operational part of this study, is to get the members to agree to an approach for peer review. Not in an informal way, but formally. The assumption is, and as we will see rightly so, that this decision is something that touches the emotions of the members. Some are strongly for it, others against. So, no matter how the outside world thinks of the association, a positive decision is not a foregone conclusion.

[Observation: The statement made in the last sentence is not fully scientific. It expresses something that is inherent to Anglo-Saxon or north-western European culture.

At the celebration “50 years of Quality Management in the Netherlands,” the organizers asked a very good writer with no other qualification other than knowing a lot about history, and especially the Middle Ages, to write an essay on “quality” (Haasse, 2003). What she wrote was intriguing.

She places the term quality squarely in the realm of values, especially personal values. It is about being shown the virtue of a knight, about being “noble”—about being “a man of *qualité*,” especially in the French courts. There, a man should show he is able to play the game and enliven the lives of all with frivolities. It is not about being so sordid as to have to do work. On the contrary, it is about just being, not doing anything. Of course, this put the whole concept of quality straight into the debate about ... inequality.

Later, the French revolution would sort of decapitate that debate, but it is interesting to reflect upon. Not least because nowadays we think that more equal societies produce more quality than those that are unequal. But also, because in the debate about quality management, a counter-movement has come up (see the paragraphs about schools) that, in essence, places personal quality above organizational quality.

Around the same time, the courts of France were full of “man of *qualité*,” while in countries like the “Republic of the Netherlands” the debate was also about values, but with a connotation that had less to do with personal honor and more with material possessions. It was about beautiful paintings, as realistic as possible, houses that were beautiful but practical too, furniture that looked like what it was, “honest” and above all about cleanliness, or better: making things clean, so that distinctions come out best. It was a quality you could literally make, something outside yourself, but reflecting values nonetheless.]

This way our look at quality has swung from one side to the other. One of the interesting aspects of Hella Haases' line of argument, is that she sees the concept of quality first connected to an individual, the "man of qualité." The situation is the civic tradition in the Netherlands, where it is the collective of cleaners that, so to speak, brush off the concept of quality. Maybe it is no surprise that associations seem to have more of an independent impact than in France. Still, she points out that quality can come under pressure when it becomes something "of the masses." There remains something about quality that seems to need the image of exclusiveness. But even if this is true, and in the "Age of the Masses" (Biddiss, 1977) of the twentieth century that seemed to hold true, then it must also be stated that modern society, including its much-maligned managers, have created a wealth that brings exclusive quality to a great many people.

As much as this researcher would like to speak about quality in a concrete, non-abstract way, the reality is that this would harm the goal of writing at the level of all associations everywhere. Given the diversity that this brings along, a more abstract way of approaching it is inevitable; the specific reality of one quality effort in one association must illustrate and may not obscure the general picture of quality in associations. As will be shown, the way quality approaches are looked at now is gaining in scope but is still highly unbalanced and incomplete. It is a poor comfort, but in terms of attention paid to a field of inquiry, it is considerably larger than the attention paid to the field of associations.

In the sentences above, the term "approaches" is being used. This is partly because key thinkers in the field like Vinkenburg, do not consider "quality" a science or think the term itself can be defined. In the following chapters, this point will get much attention. Partly this is because the concept of quality as such is important, but ultimately not the focus of this research. The way quality will be defined here, means that implicit definitions are to be made explicit and that an effort will be made to get a consensus on quality. The logic is that this requires action and leads to the use of interventions. It is a process that requires interventions; interventions that may lead to change and ultimately to trust. "May lead," not "will lead." Study and experience show that the conditions under which interventions are used, do matter. Elements will be described and brought into relation with each other.

Also, the interventions themselves change their nature while being used. Do they really change the "quality," whatever that is? It is questions like these that ultimately lead to a complex chapter, chapter seventeen. On the one hand, this touches upon the way different views on quality can lead to different interventions. Different "schools" or "paradigms" lead to different interpretations and possible actions.

Part of the chapter is a test and critical review of these approaches. Another important part is to get to an “action perspective” on the way quality can be improved in associations. Inspired by the (critique on) the earlier approaches and by a more basic view by the researcher on how concepts like trust and rationality can interact with each other, a model is developed that works as a counterpoint to the model as developed in Part II.

After so many abstractions, it may come as a relief to the reader to read more about the three main cases of this study. The description of the main cases of the public libraries, notaries, and real-estate brokers will be continued. This time the description will not be of the nature of the associations and their separate histories, but the way each of them has tried a single intervention to change the way stakeholders around the association look at them, with the goal, very much present, of increasing trust in the association and its members. They tried to do so. In each case, the members of the association had serious misgivings and it became a matter of doubt, strategizing, and changing the intervention to see if and when the intervention would be accepted. It is not without reason that in the introduction the question of whether the members would say “yes” to the intervention has been described as the central test for the acceptance of any approach toward more quality within an association. Along the way, other relevant aspects will be shown, among them the question of whether the presence or absence of a vertical oversight mechanism helps or hinders the acceptance of a quality intervention in an association and the general question of trust.

## Defining Quality

As we have seen, associations create standards and are the object of standards. Even the very small ones do so, if only to bind their members to a common goal. Large associations are so busy with the writing and dealing with standards, that they have it written into their “business models.” Often more than half the staff are busy with standards in one way or another. So far, this is useful but nothing special. Where it gets different and complicated is when members and others start adding qualifications to the standards; literally defining the quality of a standard or act based on that standard, as positive or negative, good or bad. When done so in a strong manner, the qualification becomes (a call to) an intervention, a way to raise the standard of defining the lack of quality in the standard. In real life, general discussions about the quality of standards are rare. Perhaps they happen when statutes need to be revised, or when large chunks of legislation touch an association in a big way. Much more common is a situation where “incidents” happen and raise more general debates about quality. The challenge is then to draw a line between what is specific or particular in an incident and what is the general lesson that needs to be learned—and how to do this in a setting that is often emotionally charged and where every member can have his or her opinion on the matter.

Each “incident” is a moment where an association and its board can show signs of its pathologies or prove they are the remedy. Sooner or later, however, the board is challenged to do more than fend off incidents. A longer-term strategy is necessary. The word “quality” will most likely already appear in the report that sets out this strategy and reappear in the measures taken—what we here call “interventions,” as they have the double aim of getting to some higher level and action taken in order to break through the status quo.

So all these abstractions must lead to something specific, something that will be noticed. Other than in the private or public sphere where there can be a strong mandate, or measures can be piled upon each other in such a way that one more won’t be noticed, it is in general harder to get something by the members of an association. The number of members is that of a neighborhood, a (small) village, or town. Changes have a habit of getting noticed, and of inviting debate. How to “survive” this? Ah, now that is really the question, is it not? One of the most logical tactics is to phrase the goal of the change in such a way that no sensible person can be against it. It is not cynical; it does this in a way to delay the inevitable: a debate on the meaning of the word quality. The reader will find that in the mind of this researcher of associations, the term “quality” not only carries the connotation of quality “as a certain state,” but also of “a certain way.” The “certain state” connotation is the passive element in each definition of quality, and the time or process dimension of the (potential) active element.

So, forget all the definitions of quality as “The one best way” (Taylor as quoted by (Kanigel, 1997), “product demands that conform to customer demand” (Juran, 1989), “free of failure” (Juran, 1989), “number of non-conformities divided by the number of chances for non-conformances” (Juran, 1989), “meeting expectations,” “exceeding expectations,” “love” (Pirsig, 1974), “the ability to deal with undefined problems” (Klein, 1998), “perception minus expectations” (Zeithalm, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985), “gradual, unending improvement” (Imai, 1986), “shared value creation” (Jonker & Reichling, 2013), “making sense” (Verlinde & Luijten, 2002) “appreciation” (Ahaus, 2006), “completeness” (Cosby, 1992), and “about right” (Lemmens, 2003), etc. There are many more definitions (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017), some very perceptive, not all of them serious. The kindest of them is “You know it when you see it,” confirming, in fact, the totally open character of the concept. Or as Vinkenbug calls it in a publication summarizing and ordering all definitions of quality: it is an “undetermined concept, its meaning depending on the context” (Vinkenbug, 2017). If it has to have significance (which it is often forced to have), the lesson is that the definition should paradoxically have something in it that shows a way out of that open character, to funnel it toward some content that activates, even energizes. Therefore, the researcher proposes this definition:

## *Quality Is the Consensus Achieved After Making Implicit Definitions Explicit*

We all look in a different way at the things we see, hold, or hear, even though we might think we mean the same thing. Insights into how people make decisions or learn a language show us how we “align” our thoughts when we are close together, but it does not have to mean we define what we see in the same way or appreciate it. Even within our own minds, we may change the meaning of what we see depending on mood and memory. This researcher is no neuro-biologist or social psychologist but does work on the assumption that no person thinks or observes alike and that group dynamics influence much of what we remember to have seen, heard, or done when meeting. This also goes specifically for the moments we talk about quality, as this is always a moment when we load this essentially open or empty concept. In principle, it can be loaded any which way, independent from context or even history. Even in the case that we talk about, say, the “quality” of a car, we may see or touch the car in the same light or circumstances, but still think differently about its quality based on cost, style, engine under the hood, brand sympathy, or sheer sentimentality. When it comes to the quality of social phenomena like organizations, markets, or how a meeting went, it is, even more, the case. This is not necessarily good or bad but should make us aware that our definition of quality will not hold unless it is shared and checked for meaning. And when the definitions diverge too much, they will be amended, expanded, or scrapped. It is the supposition of the author that this, in principle, needs to be done at all times when people talk or write about quality. In Kantian terms: the concept of quality is either shared or it is not. Only definitions of quality made explicit and made explicit in such a way that its aims at a consensus between people and parties involved, can be relevant in the real world.

[Observation: In the ongoing debate about the definition of quality, different paradigms can be followed, about which there will be more a little further on, especially the fourth paradigm. Here it should be clear that this definition has an “emergent” (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017) or latent character. However, to make it emergent, there needs to be an active component or actor. It is in this aspect that this researcher wants to stress the dynamic nature of the theory on the quality of associations and is not fully satisfied to call it emergent. Here and at the end of this chapter, the term “surgent” is used. In most cases it will take an effort to get to a consensus on quality; it must be made to “rise.” In the end, definitions of quality need an action perspective to become relevant, even if it is only the simple utterance of the word that indicates “quality” in the context of food: “Wow, that tastes good!” Then the debate on what is good, can begin. The consequences of the emergent/surgent character of quality have to be better understood (see chapter seventeen).]

## The Challenge of Making Definitions of Quality Explicit

Is this not to expecting too much? It is never that simple. But is the working assumption here that an open term needs an ambition to close it in order to gain meaning? With the term quality, this ambition is ingrained: the opposite of quality is non-quality, and though you can talk about “more or less” quality, the assumption is that people everywhere assume there is in the end only one definition of “the” quality for each object that exists and is pointed out by someone or something to be defined. In other words, just using the word “quality” will make people assume (or suspend thinking about it) that there can be a quality that is defined in one way only. It is also assumed that using the word “quality” loads that ambition with the idea that the closed definition of quality is also loaded with an ambition to change its nature in a positive direction.

When all these assumptions come together, we have a quality plan that with some quality management can turn into a new and more positive definition of something of which people say, “this is quality”.

Let us try that again, and now with some addition of reality.

The assumption is that when confronted with a definition of quality (Q), what in fact is an open definition of quality (OC) is treated as a closed one (CQ) at that moment in time ( $OC = CQ1$ ). In fact, there is a double assumption: the idea that the definition of quality will change in a positive direction ( $OC = CQ1 - CQ2 \sim CQn$ ). All this, when no aspect of quality is made explicit, that is: stated in verbal or written form by the person or organization using the term “quality.”

What would be the reality of this when an attempt is made to make the definition explicit in a group of, for example, ten people, including the person or representative of an organization who used the word quality, the “owner” of the term?

First of all, we would start out with ten open definitions of the term assumed to be closed, and this includes the owner’s definition. If someone then asks, not necessarily the owner, “What do you mean by quality?” the first thing that happens is that people realize their closed definition is perhaps not so closed. Then it immediately becomes complex in term of group process. Is each individual then starting to make his or her own definition of the term, or are they going to guess what the others want to hear? Do they welcome the question or will they, for example, wait until the owner gives the definition?

Assuming at least five people give an answer to the question, chances are that most of them overlap, but not exactly. What if this is not good enough and the owner gives an answer that does not fully satisfy? In that case, it is likely that the ten people need to memorize the elements of each of the five earlier definitions in order just to be able to follow the debate.

What follows will probably be a process in which definitions of the quality will start to diverge and hopefully converge again, leaving probably dozens of different definitions in the heads of the ten participants in the debate, all differently memorized, given the way the mind works.

Assuming some consensus on the definition of the quality is found, gathering as many of the elements as possible, then the participants still have to deal with the ambition that is ingrained in every definition of quality; that it should become more positive in the future. Again, there can be a marked increase in the number of (elements of) definitions of the quality. Even so, it is still possible that the participants will go away with a closed definition of quality on present and future quality, but chances are that the process of making the definition of quality more explicit will have made it more open.

Of course, the reader already knows that different words have different meanings, but by spelling it out like this, it is hoped that there comes an extra appreciation for the dynamics that can surround the term “quality.” If this researcher would really want a Kantian approach to the term, he would have no life, nor would the people around him. At every given moment, there are objects and events that are crying out for a new version of the question “What do you mean by quality?” Most of the time we simply do not have the time to make definitions (fully) explicit and this is quite alright. But should there not be moments when you do make the term “quality” explicit? It is when you do that you enter the commonly understood terrain of “quality management” and also when you immediately have to deal with the expectation of “change.” It poses the challenge to the “owner(s)” of the term quality to make in some form explicit what is until then implicit in the term.

## Defining Quality in Associations

This is especially true when it comes to associations. Associations are the one place to debate issues of quality. Members, each of them often an expert in his or own right, come together to discuss their activity or vocation and will have an almost permanent—yet usually implicit—debate on different aspects of quality.

On the one hand, this is very effective and one of the main reasons associations are still popular: it is the place where you can have that debate in the most effective way because “you are among equals” and “you don’t have to explain everything.” A member may assume that other members have gone through similar experiences or have for instance had the same training so that there are always points of reference. It is also the role of many occupational associations to set the quality standards for that occupation, with stakeholders, including public bodies, relying on the association for that. It is both relevant and professionally interesting for members to be involved in formulating explicit standards.

On the other hand, this is dangerous for a number of reasons. So, can it be, that members for too long have not felt any need to make definitions of quality explicit and suddenly it comes about that definitions have diverged so much that conflicts arise when made explicit. It can be seen as a form of groupthink with an innocent beginning but with serious consequences. A second point is the element of change. Change in quality can become harder, both because of the number of members involved and the egalitarian nature of most associations—and also because an implicit but assumed shared consensus of quality has to be broken first before there is room for change. Thirdly, having explicit definitions on, for instance, the products and services of the members, does not always—often: not—prepare them for dealing with the quality of an association as a whole. That usually requires a different way of making quality explicit, starting with good motivation for starting to work on quality in the first place.

Some motives for starting to work on quality:

- Because it tells everyone what we stand for;
- Because it helps to keep the focus of our association outwards;
- Because it shows what the association and its members can achieve together;
- Because it shows oversight politicians, journalists, and all on social media that we are OK;
- Because it keeps government-oversight bodies from coming too far onto the terrain of our members;
- Because good quality can be an alternative to government regulation;
- Because it pays itself back by reducing non-conformity;
- Because it can regenerate associations through the energy that comes with the introduction;
- Because it forces us to keep our policies and standards up-to-date;
- Because for those directly involved, it can be the learning experience of a lifetime;
- Because it can be fun and reason for a party;
- Because, because.

So, there are very good reasons to use the word quality and what it stands for. Used in the context of an association-wide effort to improve, there are clear motives for doing so. But again, a warning. This researcher started his career with the introduction of so-called “citizens” charters,” a British initiative by the government in the early 1990s, to publicly state what the level of service is, for example for getting your passport and for the maximum delay of a train, and then compensate the citizen when the performance did not conform to the standard. A brilliant idea, so this writer thought and translated it to the Netherlands. To some extent it worked. At some point in time, each local government body that provided services had one. But almost none of them dared to give (financial) compensation.

When asked to write a book about the charters, together with his colleague, (Noordhoek & Muntinga, 2006) it was decided to pay special attention to the motives behind the introduction of a charter. We later heard that this was the part of the book that was used the most. Yet most of the motives were internal, to help managers decide. Later we learned that we had needed an extra motivation: a clear-cut endorsement of the scheme by the government. We never got that. So, it is not just important to have a good motivation as an association, other stakeholders should play their parts too. Fortunately, at least one of the main cases gives a clear example of that.

In many ways, associations are at the heart of the art of making quality definitions more explicit. This is their role, their challenge, their evidence of being “masterly,” or to say it in French, “*L’ excellence, ça se mérite*” (Corner, 2012). As will be clear from the three main case studies, this role is not an easy one and it has made this researcher rethink the way associations add value to society. It is important to understand the mechanism behind it. It is the personal belief that in the end, it is all about the “power of vulnerability,” of daring to make it explicit, but it is very understandable when this is not the chosen path of the board.

### From Fight to Flight

Why bother being explicit about quality? Quality in the sense described above, is a recipe for fights and arguments. All it gives you is argument upon argument. How is it ever possible to get a consensus on the definition of quality?

These are legitimate questions, and this researcher likes them better than any automatic assumptions of “quality” as a base for policy. The argument is here, that when an association proposes a program aimed at improving quality without making explicit what this means, sooner or later the members will force the board to make its meaning implicit, causing at the very least delay and sometimes the abandonment of the program. This danger is visible in the three main cases, but not just there. It is one of the reasons that around quality projects we see a lot of what this researcher calls the “swallowing of delay” (Dutch: *inslikvertraging*), or: going from “fight to flight.” In all cases, the things that should be said, are not said. Instead, we see in effect a use of quality interventions (certification and other programs) that are managed as much as a way to avoid confrontation as to help the program succeed. Some boards or staff members do this more consciously than others, but the speed at which interventions are done varies in practice according to the chances of it being accepted by the members. This is stated without saying this is right or wrong. It can very well be a sign of a board and staff that are very able in reading what the members can accept, but chances are that it is more the product of a tug and pull between different parties than a considered strategy.

The immediate question of this study is whether or not in the three cases, the intervention—a system of peer review—can get acceptance by the members. It is not strange that this is the question in an intervention that will lead to conflict. Who is really willing to be judged by a colleague? Who is willing to pay for the privilege? Peer review is, by its very nature, a very sensitive matter. It is very tempting to at the very least delay the confrontation, no matter what the arguments are. As such, it is a fine way of testing true resolve when it comes to making a quality effort by the association.

## Experiences with Peer Review

But, of course, it does not stop there. In most cases, it is wise to talk about incremental change, in which there will be moments where explicit and new standards are set. In other words, updating implicit changes into explicit standards.

There is more to be said here. This very study started in 2006 with an observation during another assignment for the researcher, that it seemed as if the time in which an audit system can prove itself is shortening, and that the same goes for other interventions. In the past, you could exploit an audit system for generation upon generation of new members. It is no longer so. The time after which an audit needs to be done is shortening as society is changing faster. The number of rounds is decreasing as it is clear that responses to an audit system, and the communication around it, go so fast, that after three rounds there is really a need to change or renew the approach. Yet, what does this researcher see: attempts by members or boards to lengthen the number of years after which a new round is done to sometimes five years and new audit rounds in which usually the process is changed, but the content of the standards is left alone. In the long run, this makes it harder to have an effective intervention and lessens its added value. There is no such thing as a perfect system or approach. Each intervention creates its own dynamic and sometimes you have to learn the hard way what works or not. It took this researcher, for instance, quite some time to learn how big an association must be to support an audit system based on peer review. There is a threshold below which the members know each other too well to get proper audit teams.

But this is all just about an intervention in the form of an audit. In fact, there are many, many more—in principle. The next paragraph will show a basic structure for choosing them, and in an attachment, the reader can find more than 200 interventions. The question is, what do they add to what you already have or do? The answer to that question also depends on the routines an association already has developed when it comes to quality interventions. And is there room to change that routine? When there is room to look for a new intervention to raise quality, there are good reasons to look further than the ones that are usually on the table.

## 20. Interventions for Quality

### Building an Intervention Pyramid

The issue of quality was born, in terms of concept, in the years after the second world war, not least brought about by some very smart people with large-scale army experience. Think of a fine line of men like Deming, Juran (Juran, 1989), Klein (Klein, 1998), and others. It took a while, but they finally hit the organization landscape very hard in the 1980s as part of a challenge from Japan, brought forward by other war veterans like Ishikawa (Ishikawa, 1985) and Imai (Imai, 1986), and its response in the United States and Europe. It was also the time when “management” was truly discovered and a wave of globalization efforts demanded more efficiency through standardization. It was great—and it was a disaster, as quality is so much more than management and its systems and standards. No wonder that after the hype of the 80s and 90s there came a reaction. Perhaps the standard methods of quality management just could not keep up with the speed of the new digital world. Innovation became the new buzzword; quality was for bureaucrats writing thick handbooks. And though the issue of quality will never go away, the people involved with it have as yet not found the answer to make the world focus on the issue of quality again. Maybe that is as well—having a world focusing on the issue of quality is also a world in trouble. Even so, this researcher states that because of the one-sided attention on managing closed standards, only a small part of possible interventions to raise quality are being used. The potential is so much bigger. It is no longer about “quality management,” with its suggestions of control and efficiency as central issues. Quality, in the end, is about growth, learning and improving whatever one is doing. Present literature constantly presents new ways of doing so. One of the logical developments is that of setting quality at the heart of sustainable development, as part of a “third generation” of quality approaches (Jonker & Reichling, *Derde generatie kwaliteitsmanagement. vertrekken, zoeken, verbreden*, 2013). There is also a sort of counterrevolution going on against the one-sided stress on procedures and measurement—the technical-rational approach—as the heart of quality management (Hardjono, Oosterhoorn, Vos, & Vaal, 2012), with at the same time another movement using big data and other forms of sharp measurement to make the measurement of quality more relevant for the high demands of manufacturing in the digital world. In terms of conceptual development, the developments are all over the place, which is interesting to observe but in itself no sign of “quality of the quality.” It is a debate without leadership, without a head; a search for the “sweet spot of conflict” (Fluit, 2015) that gets a desperate tone about it.

Associations can be at the forefront of the debate on quality. Individually and collectively, they have the most to gain and lose in the debate about the future of quality efforts.

What is the quality they demand of their members? What is the quality going to be of the products and services their members deliver? What is the quality of the role associations and their members play in society, from the sports club promoting fair play to the association of soft-drink producers promoting a healthier lifestyle? What alternative can associations provide as a credible and less bureaucratic form of self-regulation without unnecessary government intervention or market failure? In short, can associations show themselves to be the carriers of quality for their members?

Associations are the collectives where all questions of quality come together—and where they cannot be set aside as a matter for the market or “solved” by the writing of another law. The logic of the nature of associations says that for associations, working at improving quality, defined as positively as possible, is probably the best way to show their added value for both their members and the stakeholders around them. In order to take up that role, an association must at the very least know what its options are. Secondly, it must be up to it. Can we make a success of the intervention? As might be evident already from the case studies and the text of this study, there really is an art to placing the right intervention, including a lot of internal positioning and politics. Reading the internal and external dynamics of an association is the real litmus test, as we may see from the three cases at the end of this chapter.

Which brings this study to a question that was central to the 2011 book by this researcher. Can an intervention in the field of quality get the association moving or not?



Figure 24 Intervention Pyramid

First some order to the matter of interventions. In this “intervention pyramid,” many different expectations and aspects are brought together before they are weighted and placed in a logical order<sup>52</sup>.

The pyramid is built on four levels of expectations. In the world of quality, it is more or less traditional to start reasoning from the point of the “customer,” if only for the reason that most of the standard quality interventions do so. This might very well be fitting for a regular business in a perfect market, but in all other cases, it is risky. Certainly, in the world of associations, it is better to recognize that there are many more expectations raised. Here they are reduced to four connected levels of expectations:

### Expectations by Regulators

Regulators are, by definition, regulating yesterday’s needs, but this does not mean they can be ignored. The interplay between government regulations and internal quality standards is in most cases so tight, that compliance to government rules and regulations should be part of any quality approach by an association, certainly those of an occupational nature (see also chapter twelve). Officially, this is almost never a problem. Standards, including oaths and codes, are written in such a way that they encompass whatever government asks, but, in practice, conscious choices have to be made on what rule to apply and how. If it all adds up, and there are now obvious breaches or incidents, the association and its members can claim to meet the “basic” expectations of the regulators.

At the front of the pyramid, an association and/or its members deal with translating rules and regulations into action, providing basic quality: adhering to the law, including administering acts and activities in such a way that they can be checked for compliance. As such, registration is a big part of basic quality. In many cases, it will be hard to draw a line between complying with government regulations and just doing daily activities. This is fine. We are talking here about the stage in organization development before a conscious orientation on processes and customers (first stage INK/EFQM).

At the back of the pyramid, the actual compliance activities take place, from internal regulatory reviews to (external) accountant audits, and oversight activities by governmental bodies themselves.

More than anything, it is this basic quality that is the focus of stakeholders outside the association. Media and public players—from different governments to other associations and activists—put pressure on the front side of the pyramid, inspectorates, and other oversight bodies on the backside. All the pressure is sooner or later translated into new expectations in society, as articulated by stakeholders on the top of the pyramid. Meeting those expectations is, of course, connected in time.

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52. This is a summary, translation and update of texts found in the book on “sector-wide quality” (Noordhoek P., 2011), especially chapter seven. The pyramid images are based on images from presentations created in 2007.

## Expectations by “Customers”

### Customer focus in associations

Basic quality, abiding by the rules, is in the end never good enough, not even for maintaining the status quo. It is no accident that in the past decades an enormous amount of attention has been paid to “meeting customers’ expectations,” giving rise to whole new industries, including that of marketing. In a way, it is odd that this should be necessary. Is it not self-evident to be focused on the customer? On who else? But it is necessary, not in the least for associations. Are the members the “customers” or are we talking about the “customers of the members?” Both can be true, providing a source of many misunderstandings or creating a diffused focus. There are two reasons why a customer focus remains very important and is a necessary source for successful interventions:

- Inwardness—as already observed, there is a tendency of being preoccupied with matters and existing members within the association. This inwardness must be lifted or broken through if there is to be a chance or renewal, including the renewal of membership.
- Outside actor perspective—one of the interesting misconceptions about customer orientation is that we should all love and like our customers. Don’t we all know how demanding obnoxious customers can be? The point is that customers are outside our own system. In system theory, this is good. They are not tempted toward the kind of entropy that associations endure when they are too inward looking. They can give the kind of frank feedback you may not like but need. This feedback is the point, not customer satisfaction as such.

At the same time, there is at least one good reason to be careful of focusing on the expectations of the customer, and this has to do with misunderstandings about who or what a customer is. There is an interesting definition of a customer as “the person who holds in his or her hand the power to choose, pay and enjoy a product or service” (lecture J. Vis, 1993). This definition is important, but it only holds in situations of a perfect market, which may not be found in the context of an association. In normal situations, one should be aware that these three functions are split. Take, for instance, the young metal worker who is being made a member of the metalworker’s branch. Does he have a choice about his membership? Not really. Does he pay? Probably his employer does. Does he enjoy it? One hopes so. And so on: is a patient in a hospital a customer? In a formal sense, he or she is, but there will not be much joy. Does this make a difference to the doctor who is a member of a professional association? As a member who is to be disciplined by the association because of professional faults as a doctor? It is complicated.

And so is the role of the customer. Meeting his and her expectations can be an impossible assignment, and better not pursued to its end, as it may lead the association away from its original purpose. Nevertheless, there is no better source for feedback than the customer, split up or not.

### Tasks of the association

Customer feedback touches upon all the tasks of and within the association, adding value in the way the earlier “value matrix” showed. This matrix can be easily translated into a “task matrix” with activities on four fronts that should be recognizable to the authors of earlier publications on tasks for associations (Tack & Huizenga, F.D., 2008) (Wesselink, 2010) (Dedan, Schulz, & Kastelein, 2004), and can be varied upon with similar matrices, depending on the task.

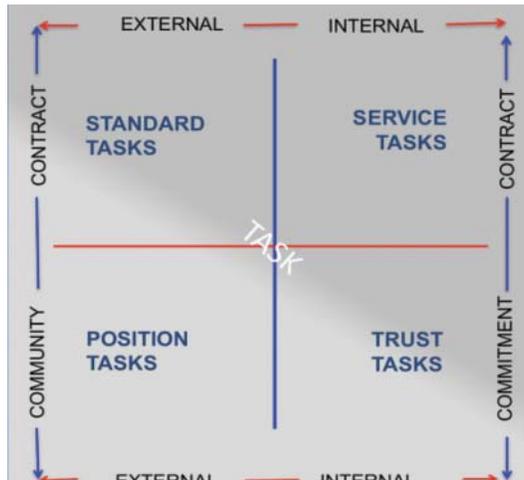


Figure 25 Task Matrix

The “standard tasks” are those tasks that are needed to make the association work for the members, the board, and staff of the association. This goes from the organization of meetings and conferences to the actual decision-making process and all that is needed for that. As a rule, activities for this task are paid out of the annual fee of the members, making the members not feel like customers in terms of the three elements of the definition given above. These are typically activities at the front of the pyramid, covered at the back by “trust tasks.”

As most associations have a relatively small board and staff, these standard tasks are limited. There are, as always, exceptions to the rule. It is quite common that an association stays dormant for most of the time but comes alive once or twice a year with a big event. Organizing that event or conference overshadows the standard tasks. It may happen that there is a general assembly at the event that will attract a few dozen members, but they will rush away when the true main event starts.

That does not mean the general assembly has not been important or taken away much time leading up to the event, but here we must speak of parallel processes of the standard task (the assembly) and the service task (the event).

There are also exceptions of scale. Though by far most associations are small, they can, and often will be, part of a bigger whole. Associations of associations (“umbrella associations,” in private law sometimes acting like a parent corporation) can be huge and very international, with the Catholic Church as the historical model for these big associations. It needs little argument that differences in scale will have an impact on the processes, but as the model of an association seems to be the same almost everywhere, there is no fundamental change—unless we enter the domain of the transassociation, where processes that can take months or weeks in classic associations, can become instantaneous.

The “service tasks” are, the reader may have guessed, all the activities related to providing services for the members, from giving information to providing insurance and pensions for the members. These have the clearest and most recognizable processes and because of this can be “priced” and budgeted, with the members in a recognizable role as customers<sup>53</sup>. The processes and professionalism required for this task are dealt with at the front of the pyramid and also, and most extensively, tested at the back through audits and many other means. The following paragraphs will have more to say on that. Here it is important to note that it matters whether the services are no more than an extra service or are the true “business model” of the association. When the income from service tasks gets more important than the other tasks (or when the service task and an aspect of trust task—certification paid for by members and others), there will be much more emphasis on processes than when this is not the case. It will require more professionalism from the staff, though, to keep it all together or to make a choice. Out of some associations have come businesses (publishers, event organizers, certification institutes, and insurance companies) that are far bigger than the associations from which they sprang.

The “*trust tasks*” are those tasks the association performs in order to show the outside world—also potential or real customers or members—that it can be “trusted.”

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53. Sometimes these services are also available for the general public and can become a source of income for the association and its members, but market activities like these will, in general, come about as an afterthought of services for the members. In many countries, there exists the legal entity of the “co-operative association” (Wikipedia, 2017). In this study, they are part of the definition of associations, as they can have the kind of group bonding that gives added value to so many associations. Yet its members operate clearly in the domain of the market, and its added value comes from the income this brings. As such they are not the focus of this part of the study.

How to grasp this concept of trust is very much part of this study<sup>54</sup>, but it certainly is about all these professional processes aimed at improving the image or status and to tell its “story,” real or less substantive. Its accounting, audit and other quality activities are very much part of these “passive” tasks (which require, in fact, a lot of action and the processes and professionalism to make them work for the association). It translates into a “governance matrix” that makes it possible for the association to take or keep control of its own integrity as an association. But—and this is a big “but”—this governance can nowadays only be viewed in the context of outside pressures. The governance is in that sense the outcome of both:

- Internal intervention, aimed at vertical control/discipline or horizontal review within the reach of the association, and
- External oversight, done by either private auditors or public controllers/inspectors and, in principle, outside the reach of the association.

These vertical and horizontal elements of governance will always start at the level of processes and/or professional behavior, but evidently impact the association as a whole, with consequences for position, liability, status, etc.

[Observation: One aspect of this deserves specific mention in the context of this study. Two of the main cases have also been selected because one (the library sector) has no formal oversight or inspectorate function, and the other does (the notariat). Has one more impact than the other? More later on when it comes to difference and how governance has an impact.]

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54. Here, unfortunately, a line has to be drawn between the analysis at association level and the analysis that can be made on the level of the interaction between individual and group, including its moral and (neurobiological) behavioral aspects. Of course, this has impact on issues of trust, but the knowledge and competencies are not there to weight the impact on of literature like that of Ellemers on issues like “trust tasks” here. But perhaps the reverse holds also true. In the very extensive literature list in Ellemers “Morality and the Regulation of Human Behavior” (Ellemers, 2018) there is not one title referring directly to the existence of associations.

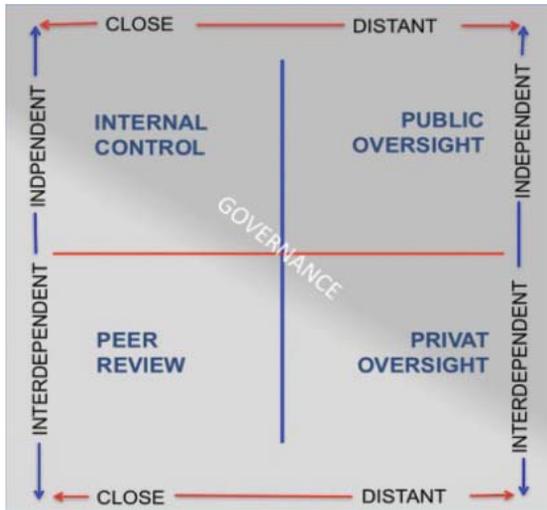


Figure 26 Governance matrix

The “*position tasks*” are the activities that relate to the goals the association wants to achieve in the public arena. Compared to the “*trust tasks*” they require an active kind of professionalism, entering the arena of politics. The tasks have to do with communicating the right image or frame with the outside world, with lobbying and public affairs and even with diplomacy, as much of it plays out in the international arena (Noordhoek P. , 2017) (Noordhoek & Hoogers, 2016) (Saner, Yiu, & Sondergaard, 2000), and with using legal means in order to strengthen the position of the association. All of the elements are part of the front of the pyramid. Some associations are so good at this that it raises questions. The National Rifle Association (NRA) in the United States of America is very controversial, but they are extremely professional in their positioning activities, including the mobilization of their members through clever data management. For most associations, lobbying the capital is an important activity, but outside the scope of their day-to-day activities, requiring special staff or external consultants to do the actual work. For many reasons though, it is well worth doing well. Research, like that of insurance company AON among business representatives and members of trade associations, shows consistently that the appreciation of these positioning activities is consistently higher than that for the service activities. (AON, 2012) This is not illogical; the activities seem (certainly at the time of the survey; it was a crisis) very necessary, the costs seem low and the effectiveness is harder to judge. Yet there is another side to this, and this one has most of all to do with integrity issues. It helps the association when it has a means of monitoring and disciplining its (board) members (Karssing E. , *Integriteit in de beroepspraktijk.*, 2006). Is it possible to intervene, to have an inquiry or whatever, to evaluate a process or come to a judgment about the position of the association, and whether it has been burnished or burned? It is a matter of professional responsibility to question your own morals.

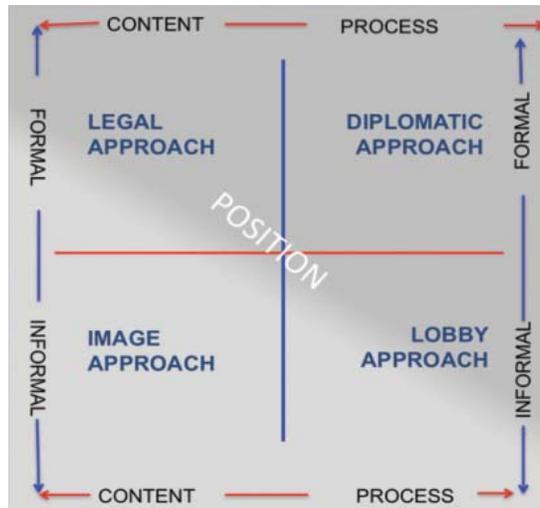


Figure 27 Position Matrix

### Process and profession for the members of the association

When looking at the pyramid, meeting the expectations of customers is the logical starting point of all interventions above the basic level of upholding the law. The signals from the customers translate themselves into processes and/or into standards of professional behavior. The distinction between process and professional standards has translated itself into a difference between trade and professional associations, but in fact, both the process and professional aspect of work are present in all categories of associations, and both for the internal organization of the association and for the processes and professional work of the members. How the two should relate is determined by the choice of paradigm and by answering the question of how rigid or flexible the association needs to be (see for both the following paragraphs). The relevance of processes can hardly but overstated, yet it appears that where many organizations of the members are “process driven,” the same cannot be said of their associations and what they do for their members. One indication is that associations and their secretariats are themselves seldom certified or accredited or recognized as process driven (Jacobs & Glassic, 2004) (Hardjono & Bakker, 2001). Many associations perform a limited set of tasks with a limited number of staff; staff that seem to depend mostly on administrative and organizational skills. When it gets more complicated, specialists get hired or members with specialized skills, and (the beginning of) a professional association (Maister, 1993) emerge, or at least that of a “knowledge-intensive” organization (Weggeman, 1997; Fisscher, 1994; Kemenade E. v., Het belang van de context, 2017), or that of a “professional services firm” (Otterlo (Ed.), 2010) (see also below). Of course, this is also what gives a membership base for associations of association professionals.

The one thing that seems to require specialized process skills most of all, is dealing with the board and keeping the key members of the association happy. Assessing how this interplay between the board, members, and staff plays out, is very much part of the main case studies and the leading research question as formulated earlier. But perhaps it helps to give a specific example.

[Observation: Having control over the processes is, without doubt, important, but it can have strange effects. From the main cases and from similar situations in five cases that this researcher has observed from up close, there is one example that shows this in extremis. It concerns the Dutch Bar Association, a professional association, but also a public body. In 1998, this researcher was asked to be the independent chairman of a committee to raise the quality of their pro bono advocacy. In the Netherlands, this is paid for by the state, through an executive agency. The government had asked me to come up with a plan that would be acceptable to the more than eight different parties involved in the process.

I was not only chairman but also wrote the report. In the draft report, I recommended a system of peer review (the first time I did so). The audits were to be done by members of the bar through an independent authority or audit office. After some tough negotiations, the report was accepted (Noordhoek P. , 1999). I went on to other assignments until a little over two years later I was asked to step in again, as the man who had been asked to execute and actually build the system had fallen very ill. What this researcher found was in crucial aspects the opposite of what this researcher had thought out (Noordhoek P. , 2002). There was an audit office, but it was positioned as an ordinary part of the organization of the Bar Association, with its staff consisting of staff salaried by the Bar Association. Very, very much under the control of the Bar Association, though still paid for by the government. The audits themselves were done by members of the bar, solicitors, who did their audit based on a direct private contract with the office of the solicitors they were to audit. The reason for all this? Partly to circumvent the law on cartels, but most of all to try and prevent the lawyers from suing the Bar Association. For this reason, they wanted to keep the audit office as close as possible and the actual audit as far as possible from them. And the government let them. As such it did not function badly, but the fault in the positioning meant that there was no defense against the members when they wanted to get rid of the system, even when three in-depth evaluations told them the effect was positive (Raden voor Rechtsbijstand, 2004-2008) (Vogels, 2005).]

The internal processes of an association may not be that special but knowing how to work them is very much part of the skillset of the association professional, for better or for worse.

### Process and professionalism working for the customers of the association

The processes of an association can have a significant impact on customers outside the circle of members, so on the “customers” in general. Sometimes the processes are very recognizable, but limited in their scope, like the sporting club that plays a champion match with millions of people watching, but still does so within very strict rules and procedures, as described by others. A completely different example is a union that declares a strike (unions being one of the oldest forms of association). The way the union organizes that strike can be a very structured process, but the result can play havoc with the processes of others. Part of the professional skill of the union leadership is to assess how much havoc other people can handle or accept. Their own history can often show what happens if they do not (Kloppenburger, 2018 Q4).

Again, there is more than one way in which the processes and professional attitudes of associations, their members, and their staff can touch the lives of those outside the association, but there are some products or processes of which, without further research, it can reasonably be said that they can often be found within an association and always play a role in discussions about quality.

One is often found within associations: taking care of the certification scheme(s) that regulates the quality of the products and services of the members. Probably this is not only a highly specialized, but also a highly regulated part of the activities of the association, with a level of governance and process control that may not be found elsewhere in the association or anywhere within the private sector<sup>55</sup>. Both the front and back of the pyramid will get a lot of attention. The paradigm of which certification can be a part of will be discussed a little later on, but it is normal to look at the whole of the processes of certification as a “construct” that has to be built from the ground up and is very much owned by those responsible for it. Usually, these are highly skilled and specialized people, including the board member(s) responsible for it. The same goes for those working on the back of the pyramid; those actively looking for compliance in audit and accreditation processes.

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55. There is an issue of terminology here. Jacobs and Glassic talk of “professional credentialing” (Jacobs & Glassic, 2004). In the United States, it is a broad activity done by both state and private actors. When done by the state it is called “licensing,” and “certification when done by private, nonprofit, voluntary organizations.” Educational or business “accreditation” is fully in the domain of private parties and concerns mostly educational efforts. Certainly in Europe, accreditation is often perceived as the credentialing of certification schemes, run by a (semi-)government institute, the Council of Accreditation. This can produce confusion when people in the domain of (higher) education use the word “accreditation.”

And no mistake: certification and standardization are not only for classic products and services. It is perhaps most of all modern technology that uses the most specific forms of certification (of protocols: the technology of organization and control operating in distributed networks (Lovink & Rossiter, 2015), also giving rise to new ways of looking at quality interventions like Lean and Six Sigma (Tennant, 2001) from a fresh statistical viewpoint<sup>56</sup>.

The interaction between the front and back of the pyramid can be intense and time and money consuming when it comes to certification. This is also true because certification is not only a construct of processes but also a legal construct. Both can get complicated, with the latter producing many liabilities if the association is not careful. In other words: this part of the pyramid can be full of interventions or attempts at them.

Another has to do with the distribution of knowledge and information to the members, from writing and distributing the newsletter to very specialized helpdesks. But with this, we immediately have to recognize that the function is so hard to define, that once again the question about the nature of association comes up. Just a few situations:

- The association has an official communications department, but as the person involved only works two days a week and also has to work out the minutes of many meetings, a newsletter every other month is all she manages.
- An association of small business owners has a legal desk where all questions of a legal nature can be asked by members. The people working there are so well versed in both the profession and legal questions, that, in fact, they set the policy for all of the members.
- A Rotary “committee” charged with communication consists out of just two volunteers without means, mandate, or time, but as these volunteers are all top of the bill when it comes to their communication skills in their daytime jobs, the way they communicate can be expected to be excellent.
- The association says it has a communication and information function, but, in fact, this has been delegated to an outside office of professionals. They are very professional in their job, but sometimes make mistakes, also because each of them works for several associations at the same time, which can get confusing at times.

There are different functions at work here: the inadequate service desk of a mediocre association, the superior professionals within a trade association, the voluntary association with professional people, and the professional services firm working for too many associations.

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56. This researcher suspects that, extrapolating from this development, it is the data engineer who will be the next quality manager.

It concerns activities that are often hard to measure in terms of effectiveness or efficiency but can be crucial nonetheless. Evaluations at the back of the pyramid are important, but do they bring enough change?

It is also interesting here to look at the difference between the (professional) association and the PSFs. From a distance, the “traits” can look the same, even when it comes to the profit motive, but as authors like Sonnevile and Zielstra (Sonneville & Zielstra, 2010) state in a handbook on PSFs (Otterlo (Ed.), 2010, p. 371), from the world of academics, the theories on professions, professionalization, and PSFs are getting stuck. These theories are often ahistoric, meaning not based on factual developments and the realities of the working place, lack an empirical basis and have not enough focus on the dynamic aspects. It is their advice to stop trying to use “traits” as a defining characteristic and to look at the world in all its complexity. Starting to look at the world or organizations in all their heterogeneity, gives a better starting point for reflections from an “interactionist” perspective. It is only after a long process of observation that categorizations can be temporarily useful in a world that is never stable: “It takes variety to control variety,” as Weick and Sutcliffe state in the context of the “high reliable organizing” approach (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999).

The perspective from Sonnevile, Zietstra, and others (Weggemans, 2007) (Eccles, R. & Nohria, 1992) (Weick K. , 1979) is interesting, but there are two aspects to this argument that should not be forgotten.

The first is that the attention on the PSFs is relatively new, starting with the impressive rise of legal and consultancy firms from the eighties. It is probably good to correct the tendency to categorize by trait. Associations, on the other hand, are a very old phenomenon and it looks like we have sort of forgotten to look at their traits while at the same time the nature of associations may be fundamentally changing.

The other aspect is that just observing does not seem enough for an interactionist approach. If there is to be observation, it should also be in reaction to changes and interventions. In other words, the perspective should be more active and aimed most of all at the level of customer expectations.

## Expectations by the Collective

Above the level of customer expectations in the intervention pyramid, there is the level of expectations by the organization as a whole. Here what is meant is either the association itself or the organizations of the members as a whole. The dynamic changes from one aimed at satisfying customers while obeying the law, to one more focused on the whole of the group, institution, or organization that delivers for the market or society.

At the front of the pyramid, it is well possible that the association has policy documents that are aimed at “improving quality.”

It is, however, too limited to take this as the only basis for quality interventions. The good thing about a quality policy is that it is (reasonably) explicit about what the association expects. However, implicit definitions in the different policy initiatives, the budget documents, etc., are at least as interesting, including the items that are not written down but are part of the effort the association and its members make to raise their level.

When looking at the quality function of the association, it can be important to take into account what the size is of the certification and accreditation activities, including the connected activities in the field of training and publication, compared to the other activities. The research on this is limited and seems to stay confidential most of the time. Even so, they cannot take the place of the integral front-side image of an association and its members. For that, all of the tasks and attempts at adding value should be part of the analysis. In its most advanced form, it should even include the analysis of the whole network—the “chain activities”—of the association and its members. Forgetting about the negative image of the insect, it should be like taking a (3D) picture of the whole cobweb of a spider and not just of the spider itself.

The same goes for the activities at the back of the pyramid, such as visitations, benchmarking, or those in the context of good governance codes and the audits that are part of this, including those accountancy activities that manage to rise above strict legal compliance<sup>57</sup>.

Here it is relevant to refer to an earlier attempt to systemize the experience of this researcher with the integral (self-)assessment of organizations and institutions in the (semi-)public sector. During his career, he has led or guided more than seventy-five of these through the process of an assessment according to the INK/EFQM approach, using a model that looks at nine aspects of creating an “excellent” organization, and then looking deeper through the use of the Deming circle (P-D-C-A) (INK, 2017) (INK, 2013) (Hardjono & Hes, 1993) (Hardjono, Have, & Have, 1995). As such, these assessments were, in themselves, a rich source of data on all kinds of quality interventions, touching almost every aspect of the development of the organization. The model makes a distinction between five areas that are called Renablers”; aspects that deal with how the organization organizes itself in such a way that it fits the strategic environment (five lots of four sub-elements makes for twenty aspects, and four so-called “result areas” divided over each of two orientations, basically what the results are and in which way they are measured. In total there are twenty-eight aspects).

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57. At the risk of sounding cynical, this is because much of the regulation since the crisis comes down to a form of strict compliance audit by accountants and other. There seems little room to recognize the many grey areas in accounting, or the legitimate need for professional advice or accounting, given without fear of legal consequences. Ultimately, this may prove to be an overreaction to the original mishaps in the crisis years; resulting in a dumbing down instead of a of further professionalization.

The outcomes of these assessments during the period 1997–2005 were put in a database and analyzed extensively. This is probably the largest collection of data in this field, to which later about thirty more assessments could be added as the outcome of assessments in the field of the Ministry of justice (the so-called Prisma audits (Fijn, 2006)). So, all in all over 100 assessments, of which a third through audit and the rest through self-assessments based on a quick scan that was updated every five years (Noordhoek P. , 2007) (Noordhoek P. , 2007) Research by others was added to this, for instance coming from the healthcare sector. (Schramade & Nabitz, 2005) (Nabitz, 2006), (Walburg, 1997) Parts of the results have been used in non-scientific articles by this researcher, but it has not become the then hoped-for basis for a Ph.D. study. The researcher concluded at that time that there were simply too many variables in play to trust that the results would be replicable when repeated. What can be said is that the band-width of the scores for the different aspects were all somewhat in the same range and that there seemed to be a barrier (between phase II and III) that was hard for the organization to overcome.

What is also relevant is that the model employed while doing a self-assessment uses a five-stage development scheme going from 1) activity oriented, to 2) process oriented, 3) system oriented, 4) “chain” oriented, to 5) “society” or “transformation” oriented. (For more explanation, see (INK, 2013).) When the model is employed in the context of an audit, it prescribes a 1000-points scheme with a scoring system that more or less equals the five phases, in blocks of 200 points.

Brought back to its most elementary findings, the assessments and audits show:

- For the so-called “enablers,” a structurally higher score than for the “result areas” (circa phase one, 150–250 points);
- On average, a phase one or two score in the first years of the assessments and audits for the enablers (the ’90s), with much variation (150–350), within later years (after ’00) a rise to phase two or three and less variation in the scores (240–380);
- On average, a lower score for the result areas, with less improvement over the years (100–250). Defining and measuring results is and remains a problem for the organization in the (semi-) public sector;
- The more complex the board structure, or closer to an arena with high political and media attention, the lower the phase of development. In a purely political environment, a phase one “activity” oriented attitude prevails.

More will be said on the inherently limited added value of assessments like these when different paradigms come into play (INK/EFQM is mostly part of the “referential” paradigm), but INK/EFQM remains the standard for an integral assessment of organizations. But associations are not standard organizations. And even though INK/EFQM has been adopted in many areas with the active support of associations in these fields, it is not the same as applying the model to the association itself. Based on this researcher’s twenty-five years of experience with the model and its instruments—all the while repeating remarks about the weakness of the methodology—this is to be expected:

- Depending on the nature (category), task, size, and context, associations are at heart stable phase one or two organizations: as active as they can be, but not working very pro-actively or process driven toward a goal;
- When it comes to the service task, an exception can sometimes be made, as associations sometimes are successful at holding key positions in their sector with well thought out processes;
- Measuring effectiveness and being transparent about it, is and remains a weakness, in spite of, in principle, strong governance structures. Predictably, this is mostly the case when it comes to the positioning and trust tasks.

These observations raise the question of whether it is possible for associations to grow further toward excellence. There has never been an association that went for an INK/EFQM excellence award<sup>58</sup>; only business or (semi-) public-sector organizations have done so. It is quite possible that the nature of an association is such that a “higher”<sup>59</sup> level of organization is not possible for an association, or that the service task will operate at a higher level than that of the associations as a whole (perhaps at some risk to that whole).

The danger of observations like these is that they are too simple: an association will not amount to much, so why bother improving them? You could say: forget associations, try turning it into a business or so. The reason that this probably will not happen, has to do with the nature of associations. A nature that probably both limits the scope of an association but helps enough to be of added value to the members of the association. Taking inspiration from an analogy of the adaptation of the INK to the public sector, here is the reasoning behind it.

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58. Or any other award that this researcher knows of. There are awards for associations within the world of associations itself.

59. It should be said that the goal of the INK/EFQM scheme is not a high level one as such. In many cases, it is about the “strategic fit” to the context of an organization. If, for instance, an organization is a start-up or other form of pioneering business, it might be better to have a phase-one structure, as too many process activities can make the organization slow or bureaucratic.

In scheme 16.5, it is shown how a business, through sustained management interventions could, in principle, grow from INK level one, activity oriented, to level five, transformation oriented (able to transform itself without losing itself). This is very much a stylized picture of a growth path like this, as the authors themselves acknowledge, but informative as a thought exercise. It is never a straight line, as the business has to make conceptual changes from the moment it tries to grow from process oriented to system oriented, and so on.

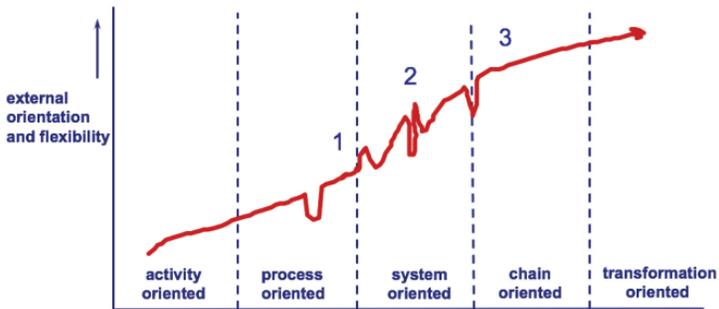


Figure 28 Stylized Development of a Business

In 16.6, something different is going on. Above the horizontal line, there is once again the line of development of a business activity. It assumes that the business is able and capable of making strategic choices and uses interventions as it sees fit: 1-2-3-4-5.

Below the horizontal line, there is a line that is a stylized picture of a public organization: it goes the other way. This is logical when you think about it: there is a big change going on in society (5), many parties say what they want to be changed and fight it out (4), this produces a law; a law which works like a new system for the sector involved (3). The new law asks the public sector to work out the processes through which the goal of the government can be achieved (2), leading to all kinds of activities (1). In effect, the public entity has no choice in the matter.

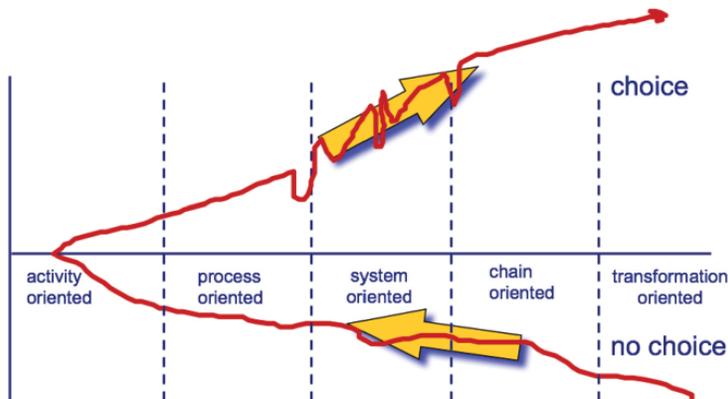


Figure 29 Stylized Development of a Public Sector Organization

When the two lines are combined, it becomes clear why public-sector organizations have a hard time developing themselves according to the dictates of New Public Management (Noordhoek & Saner, 2008) (Noordhoek & Saner, 2011). Even those organizations, or better: executive agencies, that need some freedom to deliver their products and services, will always be limited when they touch upon their legal mandate. If it comes down to it, no agency can expect to enjoy more than an extended phase two (200–350 points in an audit) freedom. Perhaps semi-public-sector organizations without a big public arena nearby can come further along the development stages, but at some time it then needs to choose between a private identity and functioning if it wants to develop itself further. This also may explain why politics and media are predominantly phase one; activity oriented. They feel the full brunt of all the signals coming from society. Responding cannot wait until everything has been thought through. The drama is that they do not see that there is a need for others to have that time, to work out how processes should run, and how to make the system grow in a stable manner.

Compared with businesses and public-sector organizations, two suppositions can be made for associations. Both are probably true to some extent:

1. The association acts like a public body toward its own members: its role is to act under the horizontal line, setting standards that in fact limit the choice of their members above that line.
2. Some tasks, especially the service task, can develop themselves more than another task, but at some point, the business activity of the association itself must be limited.

If an association is to change, the choice of intervention should be seen in the light of this double tension within each association.

Auditing, testing, evaluating, or reporting about the performance of the association should take this into account as well. An association is neither a private, nor a public organization, but has the marks, strengths, and drawbacks of both. Unfortunately, this may mean that an association is a complicated structure, too complicated for those members and stakeholders who are only interested in one function or value of an association and not the whole package. This may result in a loss of trust. In the storyline of some of the cases, there is clear evidence of this, requiring from the board and staff of the association an adequate response.

## Expectations by Society

Meeting the expectations of regulators is not the same as meeting the expectations of society. Not by a long stretch. Expectations from society are immediate and felt in the moment, brought by signals from many sides. Naming them “stakeholders” or “media” can obscure the immediacy of signals given by people in the street, in your home, or when talking in a bar about what is happening around your association. Yet at some time or another, the signals from society do translate themselves into noticeable effects, some of them to be felt for a long time and gaining a systemic nature. Each and every intervention discussed in the previous segments of the pyramid is supposed to contribute to quality, reliability, and trustworthiness in general for the association and its members, but it is at this level that it should all come together, or that the risks are addressed that are less predictable.

[Observation: A classic example is the Brent Sparr incident where oil company Shell wanted to demolish an oil rig with that name in 1995 but misjudged the fallout in the public eye caused by actions from Greenpeace “showing” that it would destroy the environment. In fact, this was an exaggeration, leaving Shell non-plussed about what they had done wrong. Had they not done everything according to the book? Yes, they had (Greenpeace had used faulty data), but it was not enough. In the end, Shell was the villain, with permanent reputation damage. (UK, 2008)]

The Brent Sparr incident started an awareness of societies’ impacts in systematic quality models like INK/EFQM, Baldrige, and many others. In time, it would lead to a merging of quality and risk approaches. In a way, it was also a catalyst for movements that wanted to go beyond systematic approaches. With content above process and passion above reason, it became an activist approach to improve environmental, safety approaches and aimed at social issues like “identity issues.” Activism in society often requires an activist approach from those who become the object of the activism, which in turn requires activism from the government, etc. Framing and counter-framing go faster than traditional means of communication can keep up with.

It is a ladder of escalation that can threaten and destroy companies, institutions, and whole sectors. And associations. Associations perhaps most of all. Further research could perhaps show what the role of the association is in dampening (most likely) or strengthening (less likely) of this escalation ladder. It could very well be that in a session of the association the first signs of a trend are spotted, and warnings are given. But because of the lack of speed in decision-making procedures and the need to guard the interest of all members, it can take a long time before warnings are heeded. In combination with, for example, an economic crisis, the escalation can take the shape of both internal and external damage. The book of the researcher (Noordhoek P. , 2011) is full of examples of this. The main cases of this study all show signs of this. But what can help to get beyond this? What is a good intervention to face the wrath of society?

There appear to be significant differences between the interventions of the front and back end of the pyramid by associations. At the front end, we see storytelling-like interventions using symbols, stories, and images. It is the worlds of communication and public affairs that dominate, on both the national and international front (Noordhoek P. , 2017), not that of quality of change management. Part of that is the use of oaths, codes, certificates and other evidence of being capable of self-governance. There are more systematic methods available, especially when it comes to risk-assessment of diagnoses of vulnerabilities. An example of the first had been the use of the field “impact on society” in the INK/EFQM model, with a myriad of other instruments brought by consultancy firms and others.

Sustainability efforts, including the Sustainability Development Goals, have provided an even stronger impulse to proceed, though more on a negotiation base than a systematic base. In summary, there is action on a very broad front, but there seems not a lot of method behind it.

This appears to be different when it comes to the back of the pyramid. The reason for this is, in the eyes of this researcher, a power struggle contained by different governance models, putting a kind of discipline on the way the impact of society is dealt with.

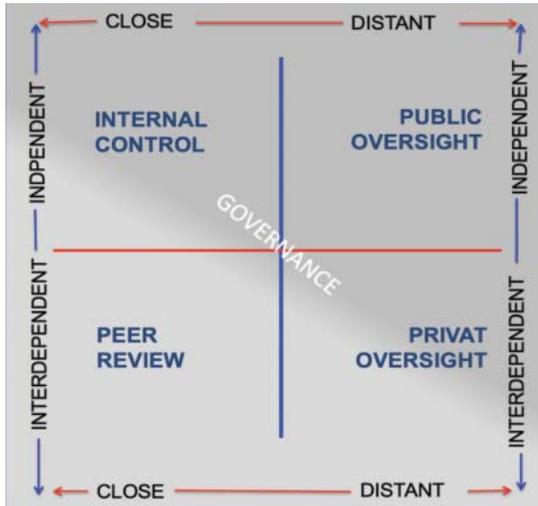


Figure 30 Governance Matrix

In the “governance matrix” above, there are two forces at work, one coming from the association, telling the world: we can deal with this, trust us to improve and discipline ourselves. The other is the government, acting on behalf of worried citizens (and journalists), and not accepting the promises of self-regulation by the association. Both face the same dilemma: what is the most (cost) effective way of decreasing the mistrust of the other party without losing the trust of their own audience. This comes down to the interplay between vertical control and horizontal coaching and between keeping a close watch or keeping your distance. The association can choose between internal control by independent disciplinary boards on the one hand and forms of peer review or other interdisciplinary incentives, on the other hand, all in order to get the members moving in the right direction. The government can choose between public inspectorate and oversight bodies or private forms of accreditation or certification (with probably some form of public check on the whole system).

In the main cases, all four means of governance come back in some shape or form. Unfortunately, there is not the opportunity to debate all angles and aspects of the interplay between public and private governance schemes in sufficient detail.

The point is, most of all, to watch how one sector (libraries) fare without external oversight, public or private, and how another sector (notariat) has both public and private oversight and a system of oversight. Compare also the historic dimension to these governance constructs, and how they came about as a result of the (lack of) tension between public and private role. This tension is in many respects far less in the third case, but this does not mean that the business of real estate is better trusted by the public. Not at all. Here we see a coming of public oversight for the purposes of taxation.

So, in a way, you can see how in the left of the pyramid there a struggle is going on to uphold the image of the association. While to the right of it, there is the struggle for real change. In both cases, one can wonder in how far it is possible to change the level of trust in an association and its members.

## Using Interventions

A pyramid has a solid base and tapers off toward a narrow top. As far as the intervention pyramid is concerned, this is correct, in the sense that there are far more rules and procedures to take care of than there are interventions for network activities or governance measures. But this also contains a warning; this is a pyramid that is too solid. It can hardly move or change, and movement and change are what most of the interventions are about, at least when it comes to their original intention. In this researcher's book on sector-wide quality (Noordhoek P. , 2011) there was a description of how many interventions immediately or soon after introduction were used to stabilize and solidify, resulting in standards that were set in stone. Variation reduction soon became more important than raising standards. In the book, all the interventions used to the knowledge and experience of the researcher were collected and divided into 1) interventions that were aimed at getting the quality image of a sector, its associations and members, under control, static, and 2) interventions to set that same quality in movement by change and exploration, moving. Or, as an equation:

$$\text{Sector-wide quality} = \text{static/moving}$$

In short:  $Sq = S/M$  (yes, you may joke). Sector-wide quality is seen here as determined by the whole of the business and professional activities brought together in associations or other forms of collective organization or action. Unless one association covers the whole of the sector, as in the case of the notaries, a single association will find it hard to raise its quality image when that of the sector as a whole is lagging, but without an association, it will certainly be hard to establish sector-wide quality.

Associations will be treated here as a condition sine qua non for trust, but only able to garner that trust by themselves when they are but a single actor.

Movement is a precondition before the sensation of quality can be shared and is about raising standards to a higher level, however defined. Controlling is a precondition in order to be able to guarantee others quality at least equal to the past. Both are usually not able to determine the quality itself directly—quality made explicit, subjective though it may be, is in the end about content, not process—but without them, the chances are slim that any message about sector-wide quality will be heard where it counts in order to increase trust.

Both movement and control are needed. How and how much they interact—positive or negative—determines the speed with which the sector-wide quality improves or goes downwards. Once more, it is about making implicit definitions of quality explicit. Quality—here, the subjective sensation raised within and outside the sector when people are forced to think about what associations really stand for—can be connected to all kinds of phenomenon, but certainly to matters of trust and distrust.

The next step. What does “static” / “moving” mean? Many elements play a role but let us start with two times two elements. Again, in a formula:

$$\text{Sector-wide quality} = \frac{\text{movement (low thresholds/open standards)} \times (\text{intervention/dynamic})}{\text{control (high thresholds/closed standards)} \times (\text{intervention/symbolic})}$$

On the one hand, this involves the previously introduced dimensions of a high or low threshold for entry and exit, plus that of closed or open standards. On the other hand, there is the element of what the intervention aims for. With “movement,” the goal is primarily the increase of dynamic in the sector. That way the chances of change improve. With “control,” the goal is to show that reliability of the sector and its participants, approached through content and legitimacy and expressed in a symbol like a logo or other proof of certification or registration. Change is only a goal, in as much proof of stability and reliability is an improvement over the present situation.

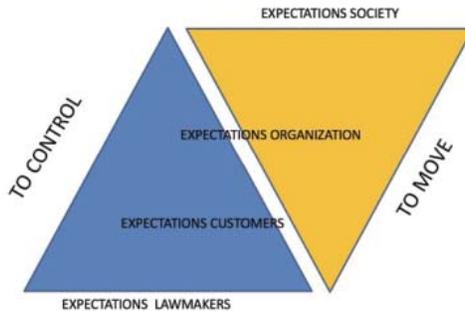


Figure 31 Intervention Pyramid: Static and Dynamic

Movement goes in many directions. It is, in this case, much more than a question of more or less quality. It can be toward “simplicity” (Bono, 1998) or “a simpler way” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996). Often it is both more complex and less exact than interventions aimed at control. Going back to the case studies: each consecutive intervention in the cases is less measurable or specific (compare, especially, the previous and present set up in library case study A1 with the “three-way approach” in the brokers’ case A4).

This proves to be a drawback in getting acceptance from the members or people working in the sector, even though evidence suggests it is a better way to gain trust.

Control seems to have a shorter road to acceptance and legitimacy. Reducing it to a cliché: do the checklist, get the certificate, done. This does not do right to the many and often smart incentives that are part of interventions aimed at controlling quality, but this danger of window dressing is always there. It suggests that in the longer term this can work against acceptance, mostly because of the rigidity and bureaucracy it can induce (Asif, Bruijn, Douglas, & Fisscher, 2009) (Dahlgaard, 1999) (Miller & Cangemi, 1993). But the power of interventions aimed at controlling should not be underestimated, nor the tenacity of the frame (Bruijne, 2014) (Dewulf, Craps, & Dercon, 2004) that quality should always be approached through management approaches. This also because it provides the easiest (and probably the most equal) access to the symbols that come with certification or registration.

And there is something else going on with all these interventions. For this, we need to have a closer look at attachment A4, the (second) oversight of interventions, as made by this researcher. The number of interventions has increased, and their nature has too.

## Looking at Different Interventions: To Attachment Four

In this chapter, it is described how interventions to promote quality in associations can be classified and used. But what are these interventions in practice?

In attachment A4, the reader will find more than 200 examples of possible interventions<sup>60</sup>. To be sure, these are generic interventions, applicable in the contexts of quality, innovation, change, and other dynamic initiatives. Apart from these interventions, there are many others, depending on the characteristics of members and context. An example is accountancy, where over the years many interventions have been discussed, but the most important ones of those are very specific to the sector, as summarized in this article (Knoop & Piersma, 2018) on “three reforms in accountancy that will never happen”: 1) only audit, no consultancy, 2) accountants with a public status, and 3) ending the “partner model.”

These are interventions too, but of a specific nature, and though they may indeed never happen, the fact that they are discussed already has had much influence.

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60. It is still in Dutch. For reasons of readability, there is no mention of sources. However, send an email to the researcher and he will gladly provide information. It should also be said that information about each of them should be readily available with a Google or Wikipedia search.

In the first part, an overview is given of all interventions feasible for associations that want to control their quality or comply to existing standards: see attachment A4/4a. In the second part, examples of interventions are given that can be used to promote more movement in the quality of an association: see attachment A4/4b.

Each intervention is placed within (a part of) the intervention pyramid as described in chapter fifteen (sometimes the same intervention comes back to other places in the pyramid). As much as possible, the interventions are placed in such a way that an indication is given whether it can best be used at the front (left) or back (right) side of the pyramid, or as a “check” on the result of earlier interventions.

Though it is true that most interventions can be applied in the context of quality improvement for the purpose of control and movement, there is often a significant difference. This overview shows significantly more interventions for the front side than for the back side and more for the control aspect than for the improvement aspect of quality interventions. In the end, it is hoped that all interventions come together in some balance, which includes an increase of interventions at bringing movement into the quality of associations. But there is a real question of if this will happen. This is a question that has big implications for the theme of this study, which is about “trusting associations.” First of all, it should be noted again that interventions aimed at control far outnumber the interventions aimed at movement. The wished-for balance is not there. Secondly, when going back in 2013–2014 to the overview over interventions, there were few interventions that could be added that were aimed at movement. The interventions aimed at controlling further outweighed the interventions aimed at movement. Thirdly, and more of an impression than hard evidence, it seemed that interventions aimed at movement had become more controlling over time. This was especially true for interventions in the INK/EFQM family. The way evaluations and audits were used became more and more bureaucratic, despite efforts to prevent this from happening. It could be said that the years 2013–2014 were true years of crisis. So, some signs of defense use of quality interventions were to be expected. Still, it is a reasonable assumption, supported by the experiences of this researcher, that interventions aimed at more movement in quality, can and will become more controlling over time. This certainly happened in the three case studies. Translated back to the matter of definitions of quality: once made explicit, the owners of the process of defining quality tend to hold on to that explicit definition and the underlying process. It needs little explanation that over time the explicit definition will no longer fit new (implicit) definitions.

This brings us to a final aspect of the quality of associations. If and when the goal is to be more able to “trust associations,” it is important that trust, like quality, is in the eye of the beholder. Working on quality is the process through which this can be influenced, but this should never be reduced to the simple rationality of using interventions.

No instrument is better than the one who wields it, and when, like in associations, many members try to get a grip on the handle of an intervention, it can get truly complicated. Therefore, without providing immediate solutions, a number of paradigms present themselves in the process of trying to turn implicit into explicit definitions. Describing and debating this will hopefully lift this study up to the necessary macro level.

## 21. Quality in the Eye of the Beholder

### A Note on Method

Much has been said about ways to improve quality in the last chapter and before that. This was done in the assumption that strengthening the quality image of an association and its members will help to build trust. There is no lack of intervention that can be used to achieve that goal, though in practice only a limited number will be used, mostly recognizable as a form of certification or registration. As has been indicated, these are also the kinds of intervention that are more of a controlling nature, while bringing more dynamics to an association is probably more necessary.

This brings us to the matter of preferences and positions that members and board of an association take. Recommending the right intervention can be tricky, but getting it accepted is a completely different story. Here the need for consensus between the members may also induce conformity in the decision making, reinforcing the pathologies as discussed in Parts I and II of this study. In the book by this author on sector-wide quality, this problem of acceptance was addressed by a long chapter on the issue of change.

This included, for instance, a number of schemes to assess how strong the need for change was felt, adhering to numerous theories that change will only happen under the right (learning) conditions (See for instance wiki on change management). While this still holds true, subsequent experiences taught this researcher that a general theory of change is not sufficient. It neither explains nor gives enough guidance to the question of how and when to create a consensus within an association to do more or introduce new interventions to improve quality. Something different is necessary. An important part of that answer can, for instance, be found in the association matrix, in the sense that it shows where the forces governing the association come from. Most association are at the heart of truly complex factors. They push and pull the members in different directions, creating contradictions and leading to difficult choices. Understanding those forces is a precondition before making any decision as to the direction of change and the best interventions to go with it. And then there is more to consider. There is a saying that, “in the hands of a carpenter every tool is a hammer.” Even if you make the right analysis and choose the right tool, chances are that the result will not be good. Probably because there is just too little understanding of what it takes to make the change and wield the tool—and old habits die hard. This is the reason why in this last chapter on “the quality of associations” a last deep dive is made into the preconceptions from which quality issues are approached, starting with the nature of these preconceptions. Are these to be seen as “schools of thought,” as “value orientations,” “paradigms,” or again something else?

In terms of methodology, it must be explained that this chapter arises from more than just the logic of what has gone before.

For a number of years, there has been a full-blown debate in the small world of quality management specialists in the Netherlands on the different ways of thinking about “quality.” Started by Vinkenburg, and followed up by specialists like Van Schijndel, Hardjono, Kemenade, Fisscher, De Vaal, and others (including this author), what started out as a rather playful article in 2006 is by 2018 leading toward a thorough rethinking at meta-level of approaches to the way quality can be defined and used. So far this has no echo or equivalent elsewhere, although there are many authors and professionals outside the Netherlands relevant to this debate.

The object of this rethinking is usually aimed at the level of products and services. Though the debate started in the journal of the association of quality professions in the Netherlands, (the Netherlands Network of Quality, or NNK), associations themselves were, quite typical, never the object or context of this debate. Here an effort is made to not only amend this but also to test different paradigms on the reality of associations<sup>61</sup> and to see if this makes a difference to any conclusions.

In this, the researcher has an ambition that does go further than starting or contributing to the study of associations, though he is of two minds about this. On the one hand, he finds it important to come to a consensus on the different schools or paradigms in this field of study. Wherever he can, he has the intention to concur the present consensus in the debate, especially as formulated in the study to be published by the “Goudse School” on “Thinking about quality. Four paradigms” (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017). On the other hand, there is something missing in the debate so far, and he feels the need to introduce this new perspective, if only because he otherwise cannot truly understand what he observed in his practice as a professional and as reflected in the different cases of this study.

At this point, it is also necessary to point out that what is written here, in many ways links into what has been written in Part III before this. Central—also when it comes to the point where the consensus and this researcher will diverge—is the definition of quality itself. To repeat: *quality is the consensus achieved after making implicit definitions explicit*. It requires two steps: 1) making implicit definitions of quality explicit, and 2) having an intention to maintain or reach consensus on this explicit definition. This definition does not require a fully settled consensus. In many ways, quality is, in the words of Vinkenburg, “an undetermined concept, impossible to define” (Vinkenburg, *Kwaliteitslexicon*, 2017). It is the effort to define it and to reach consensus, that can and will create new realities, and a possible vessel for change. It means that the focus shifts away from the question “What is quality?” as this is in too many ways a meaningless question, and shifts to the question of “How do we agree on quality?”

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61. This researcher has already done this after the publication of the new government agreement in the Netherlands (Noordhoek P. , 2017). The document that came out of the negotiations between four political parties was hailed as very specific, but a quick check, on the fifty times that the word quality was used in the text of fifty-eight pages, showed the text to be far from exact in traditional quality terms.

This is done from the observation—sustained by the cases in this study—that whenever people use the word quality, it is done from an active perspective: something needs to be done about the quality if only to applaud or condemn it. In other words, talking about quality prepares one for action, it mobilizes. Not just for yourself, who is doing the talking about quality, but others too: it creates a “surge,” a rise in activity.

## Waves of Defining What Quality Is: A Summary and Critique

In the process of defining quality, underlying assumptions about the world we live in become clear and then have to fit again into the world as it is or thought of to be. To make a longer story short, the thinking about quality has evolved from a dominant managerial and (semi-) exact concept to something that is much more diverse and complex. At several points in time, the divergence in methods (and their adherents) became so visible and strong, that organizations and associations willing to invest in “quality” became confused and basically asked for a common approach. This happened in the 1980s with the rise of Japanese quality methods, it happened again in the nineties with the rise of big award schemes and has been happening once more in the early 2000s, with a severe backlash against the bureaucratic nature of many quality approaches<sup>62</sup>. Each wave of uncertainty and discontent led to both breakthroughs in the thinking about quality and a loss of trust in older approaches. The situation in the crisis years (2007–2013) can be characterized as pure confusion. In the present post-crisis years there is certainly a new attempt at gaining clarity. Perhaps this will lead to a new wave of quality approaches, but this is not clear yet. Sustainability is often mentioned as the driver behind new quality approaches. Though it is a factor, it does not (yet) seem to be the defining one. A falling back on old methods is just as likely, also helped by the new (“high level”) structure of the renewed ISO:9000 standards. But somehow it does not seem likely that we will go back to where we came from, certainly not in the context of associations.

Of course, this study wants to show what the options are. There are many ways to draw distinctions: from hard to soft, from material to personal, and many more. Here, a summary of the debate is given, including an assessment of the term paradigm or alternatives, and then four chosen ways of looking at quality are given. The last one is, of course, the newest and most vital one.

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62. In a way, this researcher has made his career by helping clients deal with this confusion. In the early nineties he saw how quality management in general, and Japanese approaches like Kaizen, in particular, helped to change the world of business. With a background in public administration, it was easy to see that sooner or later the (semi-) public sector would also want to deal with quality approaches. ISO-approaches were an option for several public functions, but not for most. Many consultants came up with their own models, but it was better to have something that was recognized by governments, in order to have maximum legitimization. The Baldrige Awards and the EFQM scheme fitted that requirement, with the British government’s Citizens’ Charters providing a model for public service delivery. Putting these government-recognized options next to each other, and then recommending the best approach, became the start of years of work.

Starting around 2006, Vinkenburg came with a number of articles and an “open letter” that drew much attention. The first article—itsself again a reaction to an article by Hardjono; “stones on stones” drew a distinction between a “control” and “involvement” paradigm (Vinkenburg, 2006a) (Vinkenburg, 2006b), which then translated into three schools in the “art” (not: science) of quality (Vinkenburg, 2007) (Vinkenburg, 2008) (Vinkenburg, 2009) (Vinkenburg, 2012). These schools were the “empirical school,” the “normative school,” and the “reflective school.” The first name sort of explains itself; quality arises from quantity, the objective measurement of the capacity (Dutch: *hoedanigheid*) of a product. The second school observes how an organization tries to formulate a normative point of view on its development. Translating this into standards is part of that normative view. The third, and in his view last school, he has called the “reflective school” because, following Harthelow (Harthelow, 2000) in his dissertation on quality in health care (Harthelow, 2000), in his view quality does not exist but “arises” or “comes about” (depending on the translation of the Dutch) as a result of a reflexive process (plan, do, check, act). Hardjono (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017, p. 25) finds it a pity that Vinkenburg did not use the word “emergent” here, but this is understandable as Vinkenburg requires an action from someone to initiate the reflexive process. A process aimed at increasing trust in the outcomes of this reflection.

Somehow Vinkenburg’s article touched a snare, even though many articles had already been written about distinctions between different forms of quality. Or maybe it was just because the association journal of the Netherlands Network for Quality (NNK) has a small but very well-informed readership<sup>63</sup>, which also comes physically together in the yearly held so-called “Winter camp”<sup>64</sup>. Among the first to react were Van Schijndel and Van Kemenade who point out that Vinkenburg does not pay attention enough to the human factor in quality management (Schijndel & Berendsen, 2007). Van Schijndel also uses a threefold distinction, this one between “professional,” “organizational,” and “reflective” quality. Schijndel would go on to expand this argument in a number of publications (Schijndel, 2010) (Schijndel, 2015) (Schijndel, 2016) (Schijndel, 2017).

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63 Someone should do research on the relation between association journals and regular (commercial) journals. Are association journals different in terms of impact and independence? It must be said that in this case the relationship between the association journal and the two commercial magazines of quality management is rather symbiotic.

64 The importance of the physical meetings will not be lost on the readers of this thesis. In the case of this Winter camp it does not concern a formal association. It is a low entrance barrier, open standard get-together, of a rather co-optive nature. This researcher has not attended meetings.

Another to make a significant contribution to the debate was Van Kemenade. Not only through his comments to other authors on issues concerning the different schools or paradigms (Kemenade E. v., 2009) (Kemenade E. v., 2011) (Kemenade & Hardjono, 2011a), but also by drawing attention to the importance to the context within which different quality approaches are used (Kemenade E. v., 2012) (Kemenade E. v., 2014), and the values people associate with these, and also of those outside Western concepts of quality (Al-Salmani, 2017).

The debate went on, and many joined in. There was much of the association's magazine largely dedicated to the theme, including exchanges of open letters. At least one book shows the attention that members of the community of quality professionals pay to the fundamentals of their business (Hardjono, Oosterhoorn, Vos, & Vaal, 2012). It sometimes seemed too much (Noordhoek P. , 2005). The debate about the fundamentals sometimes seemed a way to hide that not enough was being built on any fundament. Yet, it is good that a professional sector looks at its basic question. The question here is whether it has been done in a way that is fundamental enough. In 2017, all the elements of the debate have been brought together in a book (Hardjono T. , 2017) and an article by Van Kemenade and Hardjono (Kemenade & Hardjono, 2018). Based on this study, and having read much of the literature that went before, there are some questions asking to be addressed:

- How does the way we define quality matter?
- Is it a school, a paradigm, or something else altogether?
- Is it about the method, or about the goal of quality definitions?

First question first, but quickly, because this has already been addressed:  
*How does the way we define quality matter?*

In the debate, the matter of definition gets a lot of attention, going from undefinable, to "fitness for use" and always ending with Pirsig's "love." Having looked at all of them and re-established their conditional nature in line with Feigenbaum (Feigenbaum, 1951), Hardjono shows how different definitions adhere to different principles or paradigms, but that there is not a single one that captures all possible ways of looking at quality (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017, p. 37). In the end, Hardjono settles on a definition that poses a true challenge the moment this researcher wants to translate it: "Kwaliteit is de hoedanigheid van een entiteit." The dictionary literally translates this as: "quality is the quality of an entity." Trying an etymological approach to the word hoedanigheid, you would get something like the "how?-iness" or "state-it-is." In essence, the definition is descriptive, not prescriptive. To this researcher, this is somewhat of a deception. It does not take sufficient account of the possibility that people will express themselves on quality issues as part of an attempt to change that quality. Defining quality and changing it, often go hand in hand.

Fortunately, Hardjono shows awareness of this in his last chapter. Looking back at the theme of his study, he first goes all the way back to the guilds, noting that quality control stood central to the craftsmanship of the makers. In line with Shewart, he recognizes that there is always both a more or less objective and a subjective aspect to quality, and then he does something important: in line with many, he states that it is not just about describing the quality as it is at that moment, but also about the future quality. And also, in line with Guaspari, going from “Quality? I know it when I see it!” to “Quality, I know it when they see it!” So, both an action perspective and a consensus perspective.

Unfortunately, Hardjono does not leave it at that. Without drawing the consequences from this, he moves on to the value orientation of Kemenade and others, even quoting Pirsig: “Quality. Quality was value. They were the same thing” (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017, p. ch 7.). They may be the same thing, but this introduces a different dimension, one that has no direct bearing on the time dimension he describes, moving from process to content, and from shape to how that shape is loaded. This researcher suggests taking more time to work at the process-side of quality before moving on to the value aspects.

The second question asks for clarification: *is it a school, a paradigm, or something else altogether?*

Vinkenburg starts out with three schools. He chose three, partly because the odd number forces

one to choose. A “school” is a group of people—and so: not a building or institute—who fulfill their main tasks each in their own ways with theories, models, and instruments. They distinguish themselves mostly in their objects, not in their paradigms (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017, p. ch. 8.1). For Hardjono this is not enough. He prefers the potential for symmetry in a matrix, with different paradigms confronting each other. This researcher agrees with him, if only for the fact that it gives a richer pallet to confront choices and dilemmas. But as every model is a simplification of the real world, the secret of a good model does not lie in the number of its dimensions, but in the names of its axes and how you want to read the resulting data spread.

The definition of a paradigm has grown in complexity over time. After more straightforward definitions by Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962), a shift can be seen toward the definition as formulated by Salter and Wolfe: “A specific collection of questions, viewpoints, and models that define how authors, publishers, and theorists who subscribe to that paradigm, view and approach the science.” (Salter & Wolfe, 1990) This is not a very inspiring definition, one written for want of a better. The definition gets more color when “the rule of incommensurability” is applied, meaning that in principle paradigms cannot overlap. This is also put as the MECE-criteria: mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive. This seems a logical addition, as a paradigm needs to be strong to be recognized as a paradigm.

It brings clarity. The question is whether it is rigorous logic that determines whether not it is a MECE paradigm or that, considering we talk about a group of people, there is a more sociological assumption to be made. Behind each “specific collection,” there can be a host of assumptions, histories, and interests that together build a sort of cultural container around a group of people sharing the same assumptions or beliefs. Here, a distinction used by Van Schijndel (Schijndel, 2017) may help. He introduces two versions of paradigms. One is the “scientific paradigm”: a whole of interconnected theories and models. The other is the “sociological/psychological paradigm”: the shared constellation of an interconnected whole of convictions, values, and activities shared by the members of a group. This researcher would suggest that only a scientific paradigm can pass a MECE-test. In all other cases, a paradigm would be “weakened” by the fact that any group of people is susceptible to changing perspectives and preferences, and sharp borders and enmities will not hold. In terms of the association matrix: a paradigm is something that occupies the bottom-left-hand corner of the matrix, combining closed standards with high entry barriers. In reality, this is not often to be found or has not been for a long time.

In that sense, the question should be asked of whether we should talk about paradigms here or not. Is what we see in this debate about approaches to quality a matter of paradigms, or simply of a scientific discourse among a very small group of scientists in which the arguments are still not debated enough and tested in practice? Much of what we see in terms of quality approaches is still far from a set of interconnected theories or models, let alone that they apply to MECE-criteria. What can be seen, is that there is, on the one hand, a collective set of theories and bodies among those who approach quality as a set of recognizable objects. Both those active in the world of ISO criteria or EFQM-like models use data and measurements and statistical approaches. Both represent a world in which everything can be explained through a “systemic” approach. Yet the literature shows there is not a lack of awareness that this systemic approach has its limits or drawbacks, and often does not make enough “sense” to the people that are supposed to work with the results. So many others are working on different approaches, but often with the aim to combine the best of both exact and less-exact sciences. Even those who oppose traditional theories and models, use scientific paradigms to explain this (Hart W. , 2012), while stating that “we should go back to the original intention.” This can be seen best when it comes to issues such as “responsible entrepreneurship” (Coymans & Hintzen, 2000) or “Corporate Social responsibility” or “sustainability” (Reichling & Jonker, 2013) (Jonker, 2014). Probably the real challenge is more one of complexity (Vermaak, 2009) or flexibility (Volberda, 2004) and not one of different paradigms excluding each other.

In terms of sociological paradigms, it is hard to see how they pass the META-criteria. Certainly, in the main cases as described in this study, there is no real evidence. Time and again, most of the members can and are being persuaded by the method that is brought with strength by a leader, committee, or expert.

Using the perspective of a sociological paradigm, again there is a problem of evidence. How high are the barriers around the different groups? How closed are the standards? Hardjono gives the example of the European Organization of Quality (EOQ) and that of European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) not coming together as expected, even though they share the goal of promoting quality management. This example does indeed show that there are serious barriers between the “ISO-adepts” and the “EFQM-adapts.” Like Hardjono, this researcher experienced the differences too (Noordhoek P. , 2005). The question remains about how relevant this still is in 2017. Some counterarguments: 1) the number of members or clients of both associations and foundation is limited compared to their potential, 2) in terms of content, certainly the ISO standards have moved toward the EFQM approach, and 3) research into the effectiveness of both approaches do not show significant differences when it comes to the result of assessments (Have, 2011). All in all, perhaps more a matter of Schumpeterian creative friction (or money matters) than of paradigms that exclude each other.

This does not mean it is not useful to identify different approaches as to the issue of quality. In fact, it is essential. It is just that the term paradigm is too heavy for use in this context. It can also be agreed that the term “school” does not cover all the ways one can talk about quality and that there is not yet enough history in the analysis of quality approaches to justify the word “school” in the context of quality approaches. Interesting is the way how Van Schijndel shows that the different “paradigms” suddenly come together in the way of the Deming circle<sup>65</sup> and that this cycle is, in a way, a sort of “algorithm” for many quality approaches. This researcher would suggest that a combination of P-D-C-As with the cycle as developed by Stassen from the Dutch Institute for Quality (INK) (Stassen, 2012), goes a long way in covering both the “What?” and the “Why?” of quality actions: the Deming cycle tries to tell the story of what should be moved, the I-M-V-R circle suggests why the cycle will move.

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65. Preferably used in the way Deming intended it; as a learning cycle, not as a to-do list (Kemenade E. , 2013).

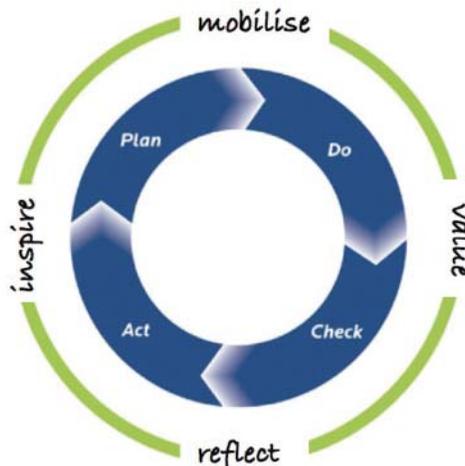


Figure 32 P-D-C-A and I-M-V-R Cycles

Both cycles are in no way a matter of hard science. Evidence suggests that in both cycles it is hard to go beyond the P-D or I-M. The circles often do not close, and a loop upwards through different stages is hard to prove when taking all factors into account (Noordhoek P. , 2008). Yet their practical significance and theoretical relevance should not be underestimated (certainly not by scientists, as the accreditation of many Dutch universities have had the P-D-C-A cycle running in the background for a long time now (Fossen, Hagemeyer, Koning, Logtestijn, & Lombarts, 2005)). Still, as an algorithm, it would not pass muster with a software developer.

The preference of this researcher would be to talk about different “orientations” brought together in a “matrix.” The reason for this preference has primarily to do with a wish to show how, in time, there is a distinct movement in the way different orientations are being used. The interventions move with it. In a more normative sense, this researcher finds it important to have a shift from a focus on the method to describe quality as it is, and to a focus on the goal of quality efforts. A matrix is preferred because it is best equipped to show movement through the quadrants, as has earlier been shown in Part II. This researcher does not agree with De Vries (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017, p. ch 8.3) that Hardjono tries to get too many things within his four quadrants, but it is important that the matrices should show more movement.

Reflecting on the literature that is being used, perhaps the problem started with the use of Wilbert’s quadrant, making the distinction between the objective (Wilber, 2000) (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017) and the (inter) subjective, the individual, and the collective.

Adding context as an extra element, as, for instance, Kemenade does (Kemenade E. v., 2012) (Kemenade E. v., 2017), adds to the point that you must do a lot of analysis at meta-level before something happens, and then still the question raises its head as to whether this is all not an exercise to evade the hard work that trying to be truly objective asks from any researcher (Brand, 1976).

The following is the third and last question: *is it about the method, or about the goal?*

As we have seen, any attempt at defining “quality” is hard and will not go further than a definition that talks about a process to define quality. This includes the definition as used in this research. Yet, it should not be forgotten that most professionals and organizations are not interested in process definitions. They want results: change, recognition, and more profit. In a word: action. Can they get results without action? Perhaps, but in all of the four main cases, the majority of the members may, in general, be in favor of change but are against it when it comes to their own preferences. There is much resistance to overcome and they better like that challenge (Rijnja, 2012). The danger with the different orientations Hardjono (and many others, including this researcher) has used, is that it puts the user at a distance from those who want action.

Here, the four paradigms are described and commented on in more detail. This is largely based on Hardjono and Van Kemenade in their book *Thinking about Quality*. Four paradigms (Hardjono & Kemenade, 2017), yet mostly done in the words of this researcher.

## Empirical Paradigm

Description:

The empirical paradigm has strong roots in (positive) science. Science that comes from measurement and observation and not from interpretation, certainly not the kind of interpretation that is metaphysical in its nature. In the world of quality, Shewart (Shewart, 1939) has laid the groundwork for this approach, with a strong emphasis on statistical methods of control. Quality here is conformity to standards. Standards that are the logical base for making decisions and taking actions. This issue of standardization and its empirical base has a vital place in both the science of economics and that of quality management. It is much criticized, but it also has an undeniable strong position in the world of business in many shapes and remains a strong base for research (Wiegmann, Vries, & Blind, 2017).

Problem:

“To measure is to know” (*meten is weten*), as the saying goes. In this approach, the act of measurement not only produces data but also produces a result. Statistical control over processes gives less variation in quality, which here can mean the same as getting better quality.

The first question then: is this true? Outside the world of academia, and even there, it seldom holds true. Customer preferences and measurement problems can have sources that are far from classic rational approaches.

The second question then is: can this approach stand on its own or does it need the legitimization through the way it connects with systems, models, and bodies of regulation? Especially the latter, that of regulation, can be contentious (Witteveen, 2014) (Gestel, 2018/6).

Conclusion:

There certainly is a scientific method, including statistical realities. The data that comes from it, is more relevant than ever. But from a goal-oriented perspective, the conclusion must be that the empirical orientation is one that does not stand on its own and in practice is a subset of the referential orientation.

## Referential Paradigm

Description:

In order to determine the quality of an object, be it a product or service, each statement must be able to find its place in a model, standard or otherwise. Here Vinkenburg and Hardjono have different approaches. Vinkenburg calls it the normative school, because “it is a way to do quality management.” Its prescriptive nature would make it normative. Hardjono describes this as more of a mentality or attitude, making all references not objective, but “inter-subjective,” connected to social-constructivism, which sees learning as an active process of knowledge acquirement.

Problem:

A way to refer to an observation or remark to a model, standard, or rule that makes life easier, or seemingly less complex. It is efficient. It is also limiting, confining. The quality of the reference can matter as much as the content of the reference itself. The very least that can be said is that there are different ways to refer something to something else and that this makes a difference. So, in the end, what have you got, other than a way to objectify or justify attempts to determine quality? Hardjono states that those who have an empirical background have problems with those who work on an inter-subjective base, but the reality is, that these methods are very often mixed into a hybrid approach with more or less objective or subjective criteria (once again: including attempts at accreditation of universities).

Conclusion:

Using a reference itself is a recognizable act and as such is useful for making distinctions. However, it is only an easy way to deal with quality issues on the surface. It matters very much how the reference is done.

It would, therefore, be better to use reference as a generic way of indicating that a quality judgment is not made on a purely subjective base. That there is a basic trust in some other standard than one's own judgment. It becomes interesting when you scale the way references are done from objective to inter-subjective, from a base of mutual trust or basic distrust.

## Reflective Paradigm

Description: "Quality is a subjective perception." This quote from Pirsig (Pirsig, 1991) is what lies at the heart of the reflective orientation. Quality is a process of change, which is done by bringing individual conceptions of truth. For this, you need conversations, storytelling, and listening. In Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983) a distinction is made between reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection on reflection-on-action. Hardjono makes a big step, by concluding it is about giving meaning and giving an answer to the "why" of the organization. This, again, is in line with Hart's going back to the original intent of an organization (Hart W. , 2012). The overall impression is one of self-propelled (spiritual) growth. The reflective approach is a much-needed corrective to traditional methods of defining quality. It also brings its own problems with it.

### Problem:

This researcher intuitively loves this orientation. Though it does not quite fit his own definition of quality, as it lacks the conscious effort to get consensus, it shares the hope of coming to an agreement through transparency on intent. The problem with this orientation is that, in practice, it requires a very honest and adult approach to everything, and we are not all there yet. The evidence from the use of the P-D-C-A and I-M-V-R cycle suggests that the last, reflective part of the cycle is the hardest. The reflective orientation gives probably too little guidance, support or even much orientation unless one falls back on some form of referential quality. Asking someone for the road is all very fine when you are close to your destination, but for a long journey, a map or other navigation tool is welcome. This also goes for the approach by Schön. There is no question more important than the question of "why." It is also probably the question that is the hardest or takes the longest time to answer. Sometimes you just have to act. Can you do this without the benefits of the reflective approach? Not easily.

### Conclusion:

A good reflection can work better than just using a reference to an outside standard or rule, but it is not for everyone or every situation. In practice, a mixture of referential and reflective approaches is likely, even though they require different temperaments.

## Emergent Paradigm

### Description:

Emergence is a concept that concerns the development of complex systems. These systems have certain characteristics that cannot be deduced from a reduction to all their separate parts. It is in the interaction that new characteristics, patterns, regularities, and/or new entities or “collective intelligence” arise. Its nature is chaotic, in which we collectively and constantly give new meaning to everything that is happening. The process of giving new meaning can result in forms of pragmatism or leading to improvisation, but at the heart of the emergent orientation lies the conviction that any method is good as long as it is not the only method applied: there is not one truth; there is no such thing as objectivity or the duality of right and wrong. This also means that it is not possible not to intervene in a situation and that this should be accepted.

### Problem:

The emergent orientation is a high, very high concept. In its looseness, perhaps the one true paradigm of the four. In terms of philosophy, it sorts of puts itself above all others, as it makes everything relative. In its practical application it is less pretentious, almost empty, but not quite. It is in a way more an attitude than a way of doing something. A skill to find patterns in complex realities, and a reluctance to go for solutions that are too simple, can be of priceless value, but it may also miss your moment. No matter how admirable this attitude may be, it is in its lack of aspiration and focus that its problem lies. It can hide a reality that is nihilistic and full of resistance to change or an unwillingness to engage. Especially when the context is highly partisan, it will maintain the intellectual distance an emergent orientation requires.

### Conclusion:

It is hard to draw a conclusion about something so hard to define. Looking at it from many sides, there is something about this orientation that is helpful for the individual in taking action, but in itself passive or empty in terms of what a collective must or must not do. Yet at the same time, there is a real need for a less structured and more “pragmatic,” however defined, approach, especially in a context with many political aspects, including those of complex decision making in associations. In that sense, a more active approach—“surgent”—is lacking here.

## Overall Reflection on the Four Paradigms

It is hard not to be fascinated by the different ways you can look at quality, but all in all, the conclusions must be that the four quadrants lack balance in the way they are presented now.

The referential orientation will probably outshine the other three in terms of daily relevance (with this researcher's article on the government's agreement as an indication of this (Noordhoek P. , 2017)). This is not good, as it may confirm the too dominant position of instrumental thinking.

Reading and commenting the description of the four paradigms, what "emerges" is less a matrix with four different aspects, and more an aspiration ladder with the empirical orientation at the lowest rung and the emergent as the top one. In a normative sense, this researcher felt himself concurring with each step on the ladder, as someone who has to deal with customers, he thought that something else was needed. As a journey through scientific thinking, it is truly valuable, as a tool for improvement of the quality function less useful, neither in the context of associations nor outside it. Hardjono, but also Van Schijndel (Schijndel, 2017) and others, are using this debate on "thinking about quality" to improve the way experts can look at the issue of quality; opening windows (vensters) to see more. The definition of quality this researcher uses requires a "dominant action principle"; increasing the chances for the one, the actor, making quality definitions explicit to get to a consensus, even one as complicated as getting an association to say "yes" to a new quality initiative. Considering the "hardness" or "distance" toward an observation or tool is important, but not the way to achieve this goal. As stated before, an action perspective is lacking. Yet, it is too easy to set aside the whole thinking of the authors without at least trying to set something in its place that is more than a call to action.

### An Alternative Approach

Instead of basing the approach on Wilber or a comparable author, this researcher, after some time of trying to stay within the consensus or Hardjono et al, went back to the matrix that underlies the whole of his theoretical and practical approach. This Trust matrix confronts two basic dualities: ratio and emotion, and trust and distrust. Going back to the quadrants above: each has its roots in trust: trust in the science of measurement, trust in the possibility of working models, trust in the strength of reflection, and trust in the ability to let patterns emerge. But what if the starting point is distrust? In the same way, it could be said there is a ratio behind every quadrant—even when dealing with emotions. There is room for emotion in all quadrants (yes, also in the empirical quadrant; emotion can be observed, for instance in an MRI, and measured). But what if emotion is the starting point?

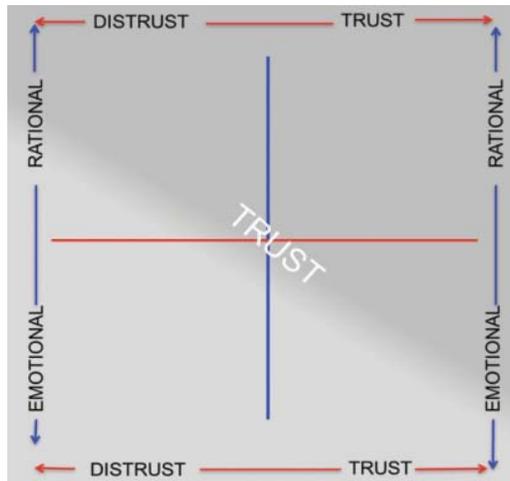


Figure 33 Trust Matrix, Elements

In different versions of this matrix, the names in the quadrant have changed. That is fine. In the only version this study had shown thus far, the quadrants were filled with, in the upper left-hand corner, the word “power” and in the upper-right hand corner the word “system.” In the lower right-hand corner was the word “social” and in the lower-left corner the word “moment,” meaning that in this corner of emotion and distrust, there is often nothing left but living in the moment. A prospect for growth is lacking. For most this may be true, but never for all. It is just an orientation.

In real life, trust and distrust, and ratio and emotion get mixed or can be used at the same time instead of excluding each other. It is the effect of the mix on the dominant action perspective that is what is truly interesting. When ratio and trust find each other, it is very well possible to build that integral quality system and to do it in such an inter-subjective way that there is no need for authority arguments. In situations where trust is not a given, you have to lean more on the quality of your measurements or the objectivity of your standards, though be aware that these can be discussed or circumvented. This will certainly be the case when distrust and emotion reign and there is a clash of “different rationalities” (Veld & Kruiter, 2015). Chaos is there, but chaos need not be random. Somewhere in the chaos, something or somebody can be working at a new story, a new solution, or just looking for the right opportunity to surge ahead with his ambition. And it could be that this somebody is trying to build on a relationship, making an emotional connection with those who have a professional trust in each other, becoming a professional him- or herself. Still not in authority but getting there. And so on. It is not a clean world, but then the world of quality never really is. And for that person in this ever-changing world, the question is: what helps me to order this world, so that I know which orientation helps me most, given where I am now?

Trying to keep the essence of what Hardjono et al have thought of, and also making the link to associations, this is what you can get when you apply it to different quality perspectives:

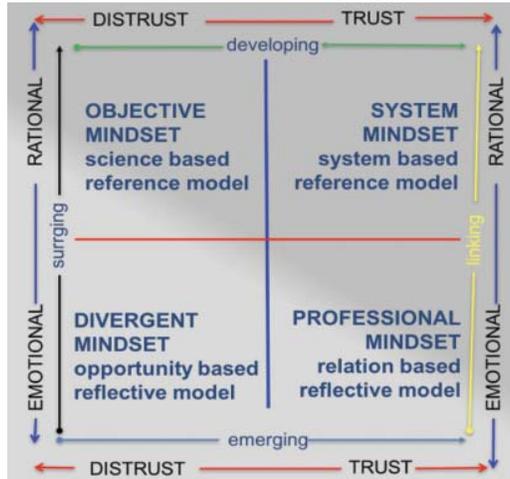


Figure 34 Trust and the Quality Mindset

The quadrant where distrust and emotion meet is the start of a tour around the different orientations. Each quadrant represents a different orientation. There are borders around the different orientations. Borders made barriers of culture and knowledge by belonging to the out- or the in-group, but even so, these borders can be crossed. Sometimes they are not a bother, but simply confusion. As someone said: “When you don’t know how it happens, you call it a process. When you don’t know what it is, you call it a system. When you don’t know how it all came about, you call it power.” (Li Vos, 2001)

In order to make the content of the matrices less abstract, this is described from two points of view.

The first is from the point of view of someone who in principle is talented, able and energetic. There is an ambition there, even though he (who, of course, can be a she) starts out in the most terrible combination of emotional mistrust in the downward left-hand corner.

The second starts out much closer to the center and plays in the present world of associations, taking inspiration from the three main cases.

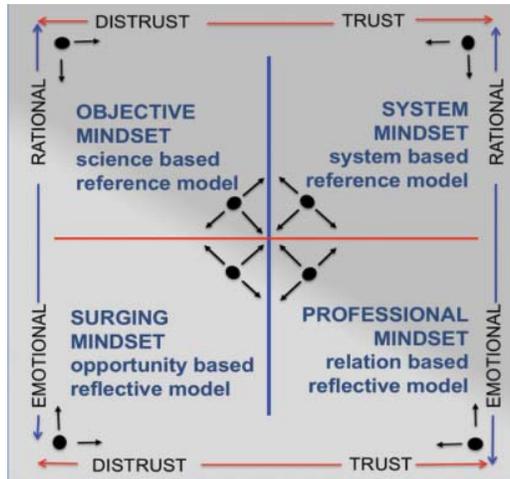


Figure 35 Trust and the Quality Mindset, with Positions

After this quadrant has played out for both points of view, the focus shifts to the next quadrant. Two routes are taken.

### Divergent Mindset

Out in the corner:

As stated, he starts out in the quadrant where there is in its most extreme corner no continuity, no trust, and no believing. There is emotion, much of it fear. There is surface, not content. Between humans, there is no cooperation. Leadership is all about power. Followers follow because they must. If given an opportunity, they may rise against anything and anyone; they are divergent. Going back to the definition of quality where the idea is to make definitions explicit and get consensus; this is true here as well. But the way to interpret this definition is much harsher than elsewhere. The likelihood that definitions are avoided (“fight or flight,” chapter fourteen) or lead to arguments is even bigger here than elsewhere and often requires a strong intervention to get an agreement.

A scene out of a grim novel or bad movie, no doubt. And fortunately, except perhaps for the worst cases, unrealistic. In most instances, it is more a matter of not knowing how to come together rather than not wanting to come together. We are social creatures, creating “patterns of aliveness” (Kuenkel, 2017). Even when mistrust rules, because everyone competes with everyone, there is a need to cooperate at some points and there are always institutions to keep a minimum of order.

It is in a situation like this that someone—out of anger or out of simple pragmatism—can see opportunity. This someone has basically two options. One is to ride the wave of what he or she sees coming up. Reading the movements of people, the most promising ones are selected and he or she tries to make a connection, through love, hate, or sheer cunning.

He looks at the opportunities as they emerge, making the connection with people whose emotion he can share, gaining trust. He takes the emergent route. The other one is to see the opportunity and start leading him- or herself by setting standards and by bringing people together. An association? Let's not call it that, it would not survive long. Possibly a tribe, a gang, a group of pals, the beginning of an enterprise of a kingdom. He makes himself the spokesperson of all those who feel wronged. Perhaps he will even start an emancipation movement by means of an insurgent action, creating something bigger than himself. But it starts with his own ambitions and the opportunities he sees. He pushes them. With urgency, he chooses the surgent route.

Closer to the Center:

Let us assume, that an association—associations can and very much do live here where a modicum of trust in institutions is there—is in trouble. The (business) association did well for a while, helped by the fact that the members share a common passion and do well when the market is right. However, not all is going well. The same monoculture that helped the members get strong, is now a problem, as everybody is showing the same negative behavior about each other. There are incidents in the press, nobody trusts the boards or agrees with their policy. In this situation, someone says the magic words: “Let's do a quality project.” Why? Because. Someone takes it seriously, gets the assignment, and starts to work. What to do? Which interventions to choose in such a negative environment? How can we ever get something accepted when everybody is so negative? Should we play it safe, or do something big and drastic?

It is these kinds of situations, along with their tensions, that are a big part of the three cases in this study. Doing the “quality project” requires much thinking and planning in the other quadrants, but from the perspective of this quadrant, the actual intervention is almost beside the point. It is the “politics” of the situation, including getting a majority of the members behind the project, that is what occupies the mind here. And though it may seem that it will be hard to get a majority behind it, perhaps there are mechanisms, or there is a secret pathway, to get members to go along with it. The surgent way works here too: board and staff may work hard and smart in order to force the members to go with it. The emergent way certainly has a role here: forging the kind of “coalitions of the willing” that make people go along with a proposal that at first makes them distrustful and angry.

[Observation: Which starts by the way, with listening: in each (pilot) audit time is reserved to let an auditee vent steam about the association and its board toward the auditor. This is so important to the whole process that for instance, the board of the association for real estate (NVM) proposed to turn this into a permanent fixture of each audit so that the board might learn most about their functioning.]

A remark must be made that this perspective is really more about “politics” than about “policy” or even about “change” in a managerial sense. But even the political literature on getting consensus on change programs within associations is rare and from a procedural or legal manner (Sienkewicz, CMP, CAE, 2007). The most important exception comes from the world of business ethics. Very important, though mostly limited to the dynamics of actual internal audits, is a study on “The Politics of Internal Auditing” by Miller and Rittenberg (Miller & Rittenberg, 2015), also quoted by Karssing and others (Karssing, Jeurissen, & Zaal, 2017). What is relevant is the historical literature of the branches themselves and the literature on governance, but certainly, the latter is often of a procedural nature, and hardly reflects the “lick me roll” of conflict, manipulation, and tricks that may go on while a decision has to be made. On the politics of quality programs, the literature is non-existent or of only indirect nature. This researcher has taken an anthropological approach to this whole divergent perspective on quality development within associations. From an action-research perspective (Clarke, 1972) (Vall, 1980) it is shown how all actors behave, given the context and given the elements of the quality intervention.

## Objective Mindset

Out in the Corner:

If it cannot be determined objectively, it is not just irrelevant, it should be opposed as dangerous. Power comes from setting the standards and the parameters for measuring them. This cannot be left to others. If done well, it will make you surge ahead toward your goal.

Standards come directly from the government or are chosen out of distrust toward the government. Rationality in the quality approach leads to setting only those standards that comply with statistical control standards and are rigorously applied by well-trained experts. Compliance is assured through outside experts, who have to prove themselves with the right kind of certification. Yet, not even the scientist working in laboratories like CERN in Switzerland will ever attain a completely objective mindset, and probably that is for the better. Rational thought based on distrust might in some world deliver perfect Popperian falsifications, but it will probably kill all creativity too. But this does not have to be a problem when your immediate goal is to solve a crisis at speed. The idea of objectivity can already be enough to gain legitimacy in any surgent approach. It is the fast lane to trust.

Closer to the Center:

Measurements and the subsequent setting of standards are a way to come out of blockades or power games between factions and parties. Objectivity is important, but it comes as the result of following rules and procedures the right way. Rather than following the authority of others, there is a will to be self-regulating.

Quality interventions support this, even when their nature is more horizontal than vertical. Improvisation, though, is not popular. It might hamper the wish to protect the members of the association from competition and government intervention through constant monitoring activities and the pushing of the results in lobbying efforts. This attitude can become very defensive: see how good we are, why don't you believe us; but it can also become a source of quiet power: we always know more than the others.

Looking at the main cases, there are quite a few examples of items or people that require an objective mindset.

Though it is not their image, (public) libraries can also be seen as logistical operations and as a collection of IT companies. They love numbers as much as letters and fight accordingly for the right standards. For other tasks, the checklists were more important than had been assumed at the start of the project. The request was to stop the bureaucracy, but not too much, please, and when it came to the transfer of the audit function to colleagues, many heads of libraries preferred the “objectivity” of an expert.

Within the notariat, the objectivity comes from the law. There is a legal culture, expressed in legal language, even when the issue does not need to be legal. Being able to speak this language and bring everything back to the meaning of the law, is a kind of semi-objectivity that can be as effective as anything in the world of natural sciences. It is not the method that determines objectivity; the suggestion of it is enough to serve its goal.

Within the world of real-estate brokers, there are those who say that the only thing that is objective is the price you pay for the building. The question of whether that is true from a scientific viewpoint is not irrelevant, but also beside the point as the value of a building is very hard to assess in objective terms. However, for many with an objective mindset—including a tendency to mistrust others—the attempt at objectivity matters. This is most noticeable when it comes to taxation. Complaints by customers lead to media incidents, which in turn lead to demands by the government to restore trust. Attempts to create digital registers to benchmark taxations lead to improvements, but also to new tensions, not to say, more distrust. The case shows a desire on the side of the NVM association to increase objectivity, but even more, it shows the desire to regain control of the issue.

## System Mindset

### Out in the Corner

The world is a system. Everything that does not fit into the system, does not exist. It is the place where both the surgent and emergent streams find a place to come home and feel complete—if they ever get there. And if they do get there, they would get there by constantly communicating with each other in an “inter-subjective way”; they are talking all the time in order to agree on definitions of quality.

Of course, they use P-D-C-A and I-M-W-R and all similar models, but they also see systems in the way nature and all living organisms work. They are transforming their systems all the time, and ever further integrating them. Surging and emerging are one and the same.

The problem is that this far out, it is probably more a place of dreaming about a world of systems than a space where you can actually find them. Unless you define it differently. When the world of digital systems and (social media) networks is your world, then your system mindset will be absolutely fulfilled. This, however, is an enormous and often fleeting world of links and algorithms, that do not easily come together in such a way that the requirements of living in a complex society are fulfilled. Systems crowd over systems, making beautiful patterns, but the insensitive kind in which you can get lost. Developing your own identity in this world can be a challenge.

### Closer to the Center

Closer to the center there is much evidence of (attempts at) systematic approaches. Though the height of integral and systematic working on the quality (including many aspects of trust) lies around the year 2000, it is still considered a worthwhile goal to many. However, the attempts to do this by a management approach have been overtaken by attempts to do so through digital technology. This is transforming people, organizations, and society with great speed. Such great speed that associations and their members are torn by the question of how to respond to that. In this sense, the systemic mindset is now not only seen as a condition for gaining trust but also as a cause of losing it.

The library case study, especially, shows examples of the systemic mindset. Here the so-called INK-model has often been applied (though never in the way intended by INK or EFQM), including the intention to grow toward a “chain orientation” making all public libraries work together within one national framework. In the case study, the longing for a working library system does not just reside in a quality system, but it also resides in the law. Much of what happens in the case study has to do with attempts from within the library sector to get a more stable (income) base to reach that goal either through the quality system or through the system of the Library Bill as it is being written and discussed. Other parties, mostly within (local) government, have different ideas. Sometimes you can almost feel the system getting closer, but it stays just out of reach.

The case study of the notaries only shows a system mindset in as much as the different laws governing the profession can be considered a system. Within that system, a lot happens. The world of the notaries itself can be considered a bit of a closed system, through which signals from outside can only get through with difficulty when there is really no alternative left. It is also the story of two systems straining and failing to meet each other: the vertical one of a government-oversight body and the horizontal one of inter-collegial review.

The horizontal one is more open and is most likely the more effective one, but could not have come about without the closed vertical one. In the case of the brokers, a system orientation seems far away. Consciously so. The members share a practical, no-nonsense orientation, often staying as far away from legal and other systems as the business allows. In a way, many are both scared and fascinated by the digital system world.

## Social Mindset

### Out in the Corner

The relationships that people have with each other are dominant within this orientation. In the extreme corner of this orientation, there is rational love or the recognition of how rational love is. Both the spiritual and material aspect of your world is in balance, also with the people around you. Within that rationality, there can also be a calculating aspect: whom do I love, with whom do I team up? The more you go to the center of this quadrant, the more it is about building your network and smart career choices. Trust comes from building relationships. It is not as fast as doing an exam and gaining a certificate but may, in the end, be the more reliable route to trust. Out in the far corner, it is quite possible to feel a rejection of all things instrumental and rule-based. Trust, whether professional or personal, should be the starting position, distrust is seen as an unwelcome rejection. The profession is all, the organization should only be supportive of the professionals and not get in the way. Interpersonal relations by definition take precedence above organizational goals. Within all four orientations, the idea of grouping together is important, but within this one, the group is really a goal in itself. Leadership is important but can lead to mistrust—unless you want to be close to the leader, of course.

### Closer to the Center

The role of social relations gets intertwined here with other ways to build trust. There will probably be a preference for systematic approaches like that of the Baldrige/EFQM/INK award schemes, as they pay much attention to the social aspect.

In the library case study, there are close relations at the personal level. It seems as if it has a “soft” culture. Yet, positions are guarded carefully, and it matters to which subgroup you belong. The group of people manning the different functions of the sector is clearly in a different category from that of the people actually running the libraries. Other groups from the municipalities have their own relations to guard. All in all, personal relations are important but do not get too close. And when it comes down to it, position is more important.

Looking at the case of the notaria, there can be little doubt that relations are important. The number of notaries (and the number of their staff) is smaller than for instance that of the members of the bar or the brokers of real estate, but the relationship is often a guarded one.

Visions on how the association should develop itself are often far apart, while at the same time few coalitions are formed and alliances with customers or other stakeholders are rare. There is, in the profession, a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand it is a relatively close community, but on the other hand, there is a lot of loneliness too and an inability to really share methods. In this situation, an intervention like peer review seems to work well.

Looking at the situation of the brokers in real estate, the situation is more complex. First of all, the mutual competitiveness at the local level is much more intense than for instance with the notaries. At the national level, there is quite a formal structure and relations that go with that. The association has an approach to challenges that seems slow but capable, even forceful. In this way, it is less dependent on personal relations than other associations.

### Ratio As Result of the Different Orientations?

Whether far out in the corner of an orientation or close to the center, there is no easy place where to rest and say the association is where it should stay and can be considered “trustworthy.” “Trust” is not better seen as a state, but more likely as a perception as a result of a movement in the past that is maintained in the present. What can be said is that when issues cause an immediate breach of trust, a surgent trajectory will show more result in the short term than following an emergent path.

It is important to notice that nothing was said about “continuous improvement,” one of the cornerstones of modern quality thinking (see part III). To the contrary, there is an orientation that is “divergent.” It goes against the grain. Seemingly, it goes against all rational and trusting concepts. This is both necessary and not true. Necessary in both the sense of recognizing daily reality and necessary in the sense that from this comes the “creative destruction” and emancipation of new groups (and decline of old) that is necessary for maintaining and raising quality. Important too is to notice that there is an active— “surgent”—route out of this quadrant and another, more passive and reactive—emergent—“route” out of the quadrant. In the first, politics and power play their parts; in the second, social relations.

Somewhere along these routes, we come to recognizable quality territory. Validated measurements, closed standards, and certificates will slowly make place for a more integrated approach, based on more open standards and a developmental approach, with awards for the best of them. However, in the end, these must be considered as ways of improvement that are too slow for society. Digitization takes them into a realm that ordinary humans have a hard time following, and organizations splinter and transform. It is to these less recognizable quality territories that this study wants to draw attention. Associations are perfect research objects for this, as they have less a goal orientation than businesses do and do not share the position governments do.

Maybe the way they try to increase trust says something about the future of all institutions and the human relations that go with it. It somehow connects that undefinable, context-dependent concept of trust with that of rationality. Hopefully, this will result in some kind of: TRATIO.

## 22. Tratio in Associations: Case study Public Libraries, Part Two

In this second part of the summary of the first of the main cases, that of the Dutch public libraries, there will first be a short description of the setting of the case. Already, in the first part, the historical context was described, but here it starts with the economic and policy environment at the moment the researcher, in his role of outside expert, has to get a grip on what is happening and should happen within the sector. He helped a committee develop an approach that reflects the kind of changes in mindset that are described in the previous chapter and is therefore described in some detail. Although it looked like all parties accepted this new approach, that misconception would turn in a single hour. In the end, it would result in more than two years of talking and redesigning the original approach. This will not be described as extensively, but long enough to touch upon important issues as described in the previous chapters.

As with the first part, and for reasons of readability, this summary is without references to sources. For this, the reader is referred to the extensive writing on the case in attachment A1. This writing is in Dutch. This researcher is glad to assist if any translation is needed.

### The Books That Were Lent Before

Together, the Dutch public libraries form an association. It is probably the association with the most members; over a million. The directors of the association also used to form an association. This had a practical (labor, technical) reason, but it led to a powerful position for the directors in the association. When the directors did not agree among each other, the board had a hard time. The board often had a hard time. The question became: When did was it not having a hard time? When could the necessary decisions be taken? Stakeholders—among them national, provincial, and local governments—wanted to know. And became impatient. As described in this first part, these stakeholders started making demands. Ultimately this led to a transfer of authority to a steering group in which only an advisory role was left for the library association. A little later, all the support services were to be split from the association. The organization with the support services was to be called the “sector institute,” making visible that the association of public association never really covered the whole of the sector. A sector that felt more and more the pressure of less reading on paper, less money, and fewer members. Libraries started to close, especially at the level of small places and hamlets. Libraries had to merge, and there was pressure also from local governments. In Dutch local government most of the money comes from central government and there is only limited freedom for the local council in spending the budget.

Within the budget that remain fully the authority of the council (about 10% of total budget), the library costs are by far the highest because of its high cost of the library personnel.

One of the assignments of the steering group was to come up with a quality approach. This resulted in a hybrid approach: partly a system approach (INK), and partly a checklist leading to a certificate. Partly written with an aim to stimulate improvement, partly an effort at control: the objective and system mindset were playing tug of war. One of the ways to see that was by the way the public libraries were reviewed. As stated, the system was based on the systematic INK-approach, which is at heart inter-subjective. However, the review of the libraries was done by a single expert from outside the library sector, in order to guarantee objectivity.

By the end of the second round of the certification scheme, complaints grew that the whole process of certification was becoming both too bureaucratic and too limited. More than a hundred items were checked, almost all about the internal organization. The audit did not help with strategic issues. And those strategic issues were getting urgent. The financial crisis hit and the speed with which libraries closed ran up. Some said that at least 40% of the libraries would not survive. The rise of the e-book was predicted to make matters even worse. It was not that libraries did not have the sympathy of the public and politics. In a way, they were asked to do more and more. With the slimming down of schools, the closing of community centers, and the discovery that many people, including the influx of refugees, had big language problems, the demand for the services that libraries could provide, only grew. It led to a big change in policy. For the first time since the nineteenth century, there would come a New Law for the Libraries. In this case, there was wide support from all members of the public library association; the VOB, very much supported this. They saw it as an opportunity to get clarity from policymakers about their tasks—and, of course, about their budgets. The more tasks, the more there is a basis for budgeting. The budget for a local library is mostly funded by a municipality on the base of a certain amount of money for each citizen. Local government is free to set the amount, but the law should set a minimum standard, or so the association members stated, providing a basis for their budgets.

The association for municipalities in the Netherlands, the VNG, not surprisingly, took a different perspective. When local governments are free to set the amount, they are and should be free to set the amount, given local conditions, and political preferences. So, they had no interest in a law to set that closed standard.

Not involved in this debate, this researcher was asked to play the role of independent expert for a committee that was to write the approach for the third round of the quality audit.

The letter with the assignment was clear: help the committee to develop an approach that would be less bureaucratic than the one before. Less explicit, but there was the expectation of giving the whole certification scheme a boost, given all the uncertainties surrounding the public libraries. The committee would consist of a small delegation from the public libraries and one from the municipalities, supported by secretaries from the municipalities, the public libraries, and the sector institute that supported the certification scheme—plus the independent expert. The chairman came from the delegation of the public libraries.

Perceived Need for Sector Wide Quality	Not Relevant	Little Necessity	Necessary	Urgent	Decreasing Need	Explanation
<b>Regulations, standards and contracts</b>						
sector specific regulation by own state / government is tight						
sector specific regulation (EU / internationaal) is tight						
regulation standards authorities is tight at product level						
regulation by NGO / (int.) standard authorities is tight at level association						
covenants with network partners are tight						
citizens and other stakeholders continuously ask for tightening of standards						
other factors ...						
<b>Oversight</b>						
much attention is paid to market disturbances						
national inspectorates and oversight bodies inspect on a regular bases and are critical						
local oversight bodies check regularly and are critical						
citizens and other stakeholders signal many breaks in standards and regulations						
other factors ...						
<b>In the picture</b>						
many governmental institutions are involved in what happens within the sector						
national media keep a sharp eye on the sector						
sector specific media write critically						
there are just a few media who write about the sector and they are critical						
politicians make sharp remarks about the sector						
other sectors, associations and network partners make sharp remarks about the sector						
opinion leaders' follow the sector in a critical way						
other factors ...						
<b>Nature of the sector</b>						
entry & exit to our sector is easy						
sector is focus of big upheavels in society						
sector is sensitive to technological development						
sector has no influence on the education of people working in the sector						
the sector has a very divers customer base, hard to know or influence						
it is easy for customers and suppliers to form a judgement on price and quality						
chances of a conflict with customers / suppliers is there						
other factors ...						

Table 11 Assessment of Context Factors

From the beginning, much time was invested in developing a common approach. As part of that, an assessment was made of the context in which the quality approach was to be developed and to see how the chances were for getting it adopted. The scheme underneath was used for that (Noordhoek P. , 2011).

The outcome was an indication that there was enough pressure to make it likely that a drastic change of the certification scheme would be accepted at the level of the library association. There were other reasons for this too, as brought in by the expert. The first point was that the “life cycle” of an audit system is getting shorter and shorter. The time that an audit goes through the same scheme round after round, year after year, is well behind us. The other point is, that there were already some indications of window dressing in the present way of auditing, and this also provided a reason, though not enough in itself, for change. Normally three audit rounds of three to four years seem optimal before changing the setup, but here there were too many other reasons to change the setup.

At the first meeting, different scenarios were laid down by the expert, going from certification schemes more governed by ISO-9000-like “objective” factors, to be tested by two independent experts, while at the other end of the scale there was a far more “inter-subjective” approach. Still based on the INK system orientation, a choice was provided for a drastic reduction of standards and making those remaining standards far more open. Finally, it offered the choice to turn the scheme into one audited by colleagues: peer review.

The consensus was very much to work according to the latter scenario for as much as we could. For a time this went well. However, the consensus broke down when, on the invitation of the expert, the group started talking about the content of the standards, and a possible list of minimum standards for a library. Apart from vague notions like “going from the management of means to the management of meaning,” the only consensus was that there was no consensus. Not wanting to ruin the positive atmosphere, that problem was left to the expert to deal with.

## New Stories for the Sector

After the first committee meeting, there was a lot of freedom in designing the new quality approach, decision-wise. Still, there is much to consider when going about it and not just specific standards. On the one hand, it is important to keep elements that are familiar. It is no use changing things for the sake of changing them. But the goal of having a much shorter standard had to be reached. The solution was to reduce the elements back to the INK-standard and then to adjust the names of the elements to something recognizable for the association members. It worked quite well, reducing the 100+ criteria to nine criteria of four elements each. The nine criteria were close to both the practice of the libraries and the elements of the INK-mode. Within each criterion, the elements together form the well-known P-D-C-A or Deming-cycle. From a more objective mindset, it clearly went to a more systemic one.

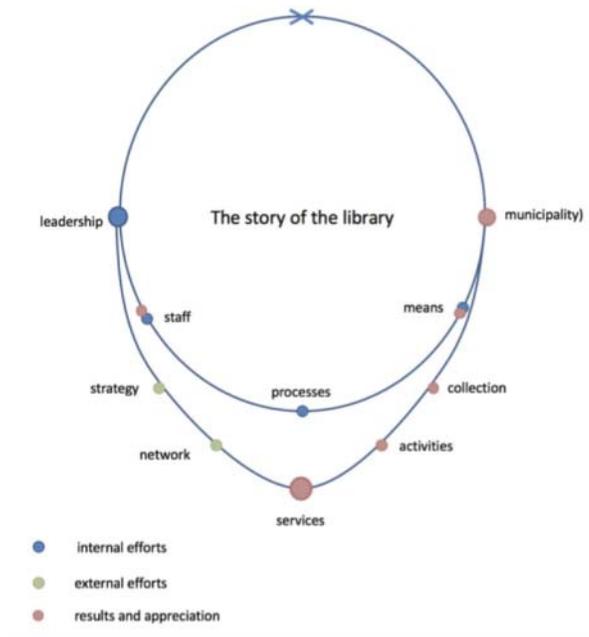


Figure 36 A Necklace of Indicators

Each audit is only a “snapshot” of a specific situation, made within a limited amount of time. The question is both of the effectiveness of the audit itself as of the impact of the audit. To tackle both aspects, a “butterfly approach” was used. As before, the libraries were asked to do a (short) self-assessment, gathering the most relevant information in advance of the audit. Secondly—and this was new and controversial—there was to be a meeting of about one hour in advance of the audit in which the leadership of the library could tell the auditors where they wanted the focus of the audit to be. The audit team, of course, would be free to see whatever it wanted but would always address the issues raised by the library itself. There is a danger to this method, but the (elsewhere proven<sup>66</sup>) assumption was that this would significantly raise the result of the audit for the library itself. It could also provide further input for the activities of the library after the audit. The idea was to write the audit report in such a way that it could not only be used for internal, but also for external purposes.

It is always tempting when trying to find a new approach for a sector, to use a new symbol or metaphor as a sort of “frame” (Bruine H. d., 2014) for the approach. The temptation to do so for the library sector proved to be irresistible.

66. This was for instance also done with audits in twenty-seven police regions in The Netherlands (Noordhoek P. , 2008).

Two were formulated, both would not last. The first one was to visualize and frame the whole approach as an attempt of “storytelling” ( Twist, 1995) and many others). For this, the list of indicators was transformed into a “necklace”-like image. Storytelling is a well-known tool in communication theory, but one usually not applied in a quality context. In hindsight, the libraries should have been tempted to use this, and not told. The “not-invented-here” syndrome struck.

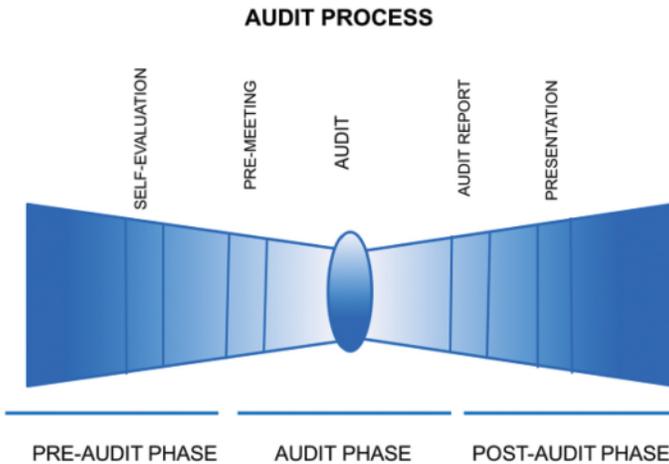


Figure 37 A Butterfly Approach to the Audit Process

The second idea of renewal that would not last, concerned the metal plate with a certificate on the outside wall of each library after a successful audit. The committee wanted to maintain this but wanted to be added to it elements from the report that could be used in different (digital) communications. Again, this would not last. A metal plate was good enough.

Both new elements in the plan would end up galvanizing parts of the opposition against the plan, even though we stressed they were only there to strengthen the effect of an audit. This was not believed or thought of as an arrogant way of meddling with the library. It cannot be said that either element was essential to the acceptance of the scheme. The directors themselves did not say that when asked to evaluate the scheme. Yet, in a situation where the resistance to change can be fierce, each element that provides ammunition to the opposition is one too many. Especially when the question “What to do with the minimum standards?” still hangs in the air.

## First Crisis: Getting to Grips with the Minimum Standard

Yet, in these first weeks, much progress was made. In a second meeting, the committee showed itself enthusiastic about the new approach. Part of the work of the expert was to come up with improved standards for the new approach. For this, he based himself on the old standards, results of earlier audits, and on available data. The result was unbalanced, with some indicators very precise and others vague. Until that moment, no financial indicators had been used. New indicators were hard to come by. There was little choice but to go back to the committee with the problem. There was a location problem, so the committee literally ended up in a “smoke-filled room,” but that did not help either. In the end, every possible minimum standard was blocked, also on the principle that every local government must be free to set its own standards. It is hard to argue with principles. What to do?

After some thought, the solution for the crisis, which came from not finding an answer to the question, came from two other questions. The first is to the library that is to be audited: “What are your standards?” The audit is then about what the library does to meet those standards, trusting the library to be ambitious enough (on paper). Most organizations, including libraries, are ambitious on paper.

The second question is the question that comes right after the question about minimum standards: “What are the consequences when a library does not conform to the new standards?” So far, the theory was that when a library does not comply, it would lose its status as a public library. In reality, this never happened and would never happen. Even public libraries that clearly showed obstructive behavior, like simply boycotting an audit, were reprimanded but never punished. This researcher knew of a number of organizations that could not get the award they wanted after having had an audit. Refusing such an award could be hard enough for the organizing committee. Never had this researcher seen or heard of a negative audit leading to the end of the activities of an organization or member of an association, outside the context of heavily accredited systems. Never. There is a logic to this, no matter how unfair or even unethical it might sound. It has to do with membership fees and precedents. Even in an association like that of the public libraries, where there is no alternative association, kicking members out of the group can lead to “more trouble than it is worth.” Instead of formulating strong statements that “this time will be different,” the researcher proposed another approach, based on three ideas:

- The association never leaves a member to its fate;
- Incidental shortcomings should be dealt with as such and not lead to a reaudit. The “homework” can be dealt with within three months and be checked by the original audit team;

- A reaudit<sup>67</sup> is logical when there are structural causes for failing to conform to standards. Structural shortcomings will take time to address. A reaudit (by another team) cannot be done before six months have gone by;
- When after a reaudit there are still structural shortcomings, or when grave shortcomings appear from the very first, the (re) audit is canceled and a special protocol is used for a tailor-made approach to help the member;
- In a situation of “will not” instead of “cannot,” it is time for internal or external disciplinary measures.

And there is another, positive side to this:

- When a member is very good at a certain aspect of their overall performance in the eyes of the auditors, the association will recognize this and communicate it in some form to the other members.

## To a More Existential Approach

There was another thought behind all this. Up to then, the audits were to a very large extent about the internal business of the library. Though the criteria made it possible to address every subject the library was dealing with, in reality, the focus was on issues that did not touch upon the wider question of trust; trust in the continuation of the library as it is, or trust in the performance of the library in the eyes of the stakeholders. The libraries were suffering under an existential threat and this had to be reflected better in the setup of the audit. One proposal for bringing this perspective in was to have a talk during the audit with a representative from the municipality, and preferably the one politically responsible for the library services. This would work out well. Another crucial proposal was to change from an expert-driven audit to an audit based on peer review.

In practical terms, this meant more time during the audit to speak with the library director on pressing issues. For this, the hour in advance of the audit was to be used, but in the day’s program, there would also be more time for talking with the director (and management team) on the (preliminary) findings of the audit and its implications for the future. This, by implication, also makes it necessary to have a conversation between an auditor and director who have confidence in each other’s professionalism, and also when it comes to existential questions. This is one of the main reasons for wanting to have a peer-review approach: equals able to speak both frankly and knowledgeable about the challenges of running a library. Another motive has to do with a side effect of each audit done by a peer. Most peers who are also functioning as auditors will learn as much as the auditee, and they also become part of a team of colleagues.

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67. A “re-audit” appears to be the correct translation of the Dutch word of “heraudit.” For reference see the CPA Auditing Dictionary of Terms and Glossary, 2017.

Especially when the pool of auditors is constantly refreshed, having peers do the audit will in all likelihood greatly strengthen knowledge and mutual understanding.

Still, the idea to go for peer review would run into trouble from the start. There was a doubt that library directors would be able to be good auditors. Do they have the necessary auditing skills and competencies?

For this reason, it was suggested that the experts who were at that time running the audits, would be added alongside the peer, resulting in an audit team of two. Later, doubts were voiced that there would be enough library directors able to be auditors. For this, the profile of a “peer auditor” was changed, so a wider group could be sought. Debating the pros and cons of a peer-based audit, errors were made, not least by the expert. The first was the assumption that we could just use the same team of experts that were used before, as experts in the new round. Though they were good auditors, they did not go along with the changes the committee made. In fact, they were the strongest proponents of the first scenario, in which more objectivity was sought through accreditation. As outside expert, a request was made to change the team, but this was not implemented, at least not right at the start. This would not have mattered that much if the outside expert had (in hindsight) not made a miscalculation in terms of the size of the pool of auditors. There are many factors going into creating a good pool of peers for an audit: size, distance toward each other, frequency of contact, etc. But with just a little over 300 public libraries, this number would prove to be on the very low side of realistic. Also based on the other main cases, the minimum for a working peer review approach seems to lie in a potential pool of at least a thousand members of an association. But in the end, it is not just about the numbers. In hindsight, one of the sources of resistance had to do with the fact that, as described in Part I, library directors were more civil servants than professional colleagues. How independent were they, really?

But all these drawbacks of the peer-review approach would only reveal themselves in the future. When the committee was making its plans, there was a broad consensus and approval to go toward a more “adult” approach. One that dared to put the very existence of a public library in focus. So, even though there were to be no minimum standards, there was trust that the process was hard enough to make it all feel challenging enough.

The new design by the committee was well-received. The association of municipalities had a few remarks, but nothing essential to the new approach. They liked that fact that there were no minimum standards. The director and staff of the association of public libraries made more critical remarks. Again, it was the point of minimum standards, but the director was satisfied with the quote that “the goal is to have maximum performance, not to have minimum standards.”

In essence, the new approach was welcomed as in line with the assignment of the committee. Though not an official party to the committee, the ministry of education and culture also gave enthusiastic backing to the plans.

At that, the chairman of the committee gave an interview and communication with the sector began. Two pilots were started and went fine. A wide and representative survey was done among all libraries and its outcome reflected support for the approach (IVA data, 2012) (Handelsblad, 2013) (IVA Data, 2012).

After this, the board of the institute responsible for the execution of the audits had a meeting with a critique by some of its members, but this was not considered very important by the secretary of the institute at the time. All in all, the committee had delivered a proposal that was in line with its mission and supported by both of the key institutions. The committee was annoyed that due to scheduling problems it was not possible to have the planned meetings with members to discuss the plans but assessed there was enough support to go ahead. In retrospect, the question the actor Alan Alda posed and answered himself comes to memory:

*“What is the greatest misunderstanding about communication?”  
“That it took place.”*

## The Second Crisis: A Cloaked Attack

So, there was confidence that the general assembly of the library association would say “yes” to the proposal. The general assembly lasts for a day. During the morning, the mood of the members was critical, as it always is within this association, but on the whole, the board had no problem getting its proposals accepted. At lunch, there seemed no untoward sounds about the audit proposal. After lunch, that audit was the first item of business. The chairman and the expert were asked to explain the essentials of the proposal and answer questions. The questions were critical, and showed, as is often the case, that members had not really read the proposals, or only took out the elements that had somehow struck them, but nothing unexpected was asked until there came an intervention by the director of the largest public library. He declared himself against the proposal, on the grounds that it did not contain standards that were specific enough, mentioning the role of the accountant. He stated that any standard should have a minimum to which a library should conform. That was unexpected, but very much on point. The mood in the room changed and became outright critical. One of the people who then declared himself against the proposition, for the reason that it was not enough like certification, was also a member of the board of the institute that organizes the audit. So, he was willing to go against his own board’s decision. There were some voices then that came out in favor of the proposal, but they were in a minority.

The two directors who had undergone the audit in a pilot and were enthusiastic about it wanted to talk about it but had not been able to make it to the assembly.

Faced with this opposition, it was hard to see how to proceed. Instead of strongly endorsing the new approach the chairman of the association—who had until then not been very actively involved in the issue, mostly leaving it to his director, adjourned the meeting. Outside, in the hallway, we had a short meeting, recommending at the very least postponing further debate, and so it happened.

A few days later, we met as a commission and decided to give back the assignment. There could have been quite some anger in and around that meeting, but here the nature of the people in the committee and all the investments in good relations all around paid off. There was no mistaking it; the representatives of the association of municipalities were aghast at the decision and were about to give a very strongly worded rebuke. The people representing the libraries, had strong language too, as they were suddenly faced with a division of the members, which they had not foreseen. Perhaps most unhappy was the representative of the institute organizing the audits, as he had to face opposition in his own ranks, without having been warned. From the assembly had come the question about the minimum standards. No matter who the source was, or what the motives behind the questions were, this was a serious question. (In retrospect, recognizing that this library director represented the old guard of big-city library directors, at the very least he should have been spoken with beforehand). In the first meeting of the committee, the members once again faced the fact there was a total lack of agreement on minimum standards. Still, led by the chairman, there was also a cold and quiet conviction that there was no real alternative for what the committee had presented. In that way, it was decided that the committee would give back its assignment.

## Missing Players

Before we move on with the case, three elements came up from reflection—and the experts did a lot of reflection in those moments of limbo.

So far, much attention has been paid in this case study to the position of play of all parties involved. There are two important parties in this case, the people involved are hardly ever mentioned. One was the ministry of education, culture, and science, with at its head a minister who showed herself very interested in the work of the libraries, as was, for instance, the case with members of the Royal family, most notably Princess Laurentien, who was more than just the Honorary Chairman. Even so, the civil servants—of whom there were very few with knowledge of the field—kept their distance.

To some degree, this “outside” expert felt he was their agent, the middleman developing the policy they could not make without weakening their position.

The second party missing was (and is?) the inspectorate. The libraries had their own inspectorate a long time before this case took place, but nobody seemed to miss them now.

This is in a way remarkable, as in the whole of the education sector the inspectorate is very much present and appears to be a true engine of change. It is always a question of whether or not an inspectorate has an accurate assessment of what an institute needs in terms of oversight and disciplining, but just its presence can be a factor.

By going the horizontal route of “the story of the library,” the library sector moved further away from a vertical approach. Through lack of an inspectorate, the library director who led the opposition against the program had a point when he mentioned the accountant. In many ways, the accountant is the one party still guarding the (financial) integrity of the system. However, as we will see, this director was not wholly honest or complete when only mentioning the accountant. It will also be shown how the lack of an inspectorate or other oversight body can influence the speed with which change can take place when the other main cases are discussed.

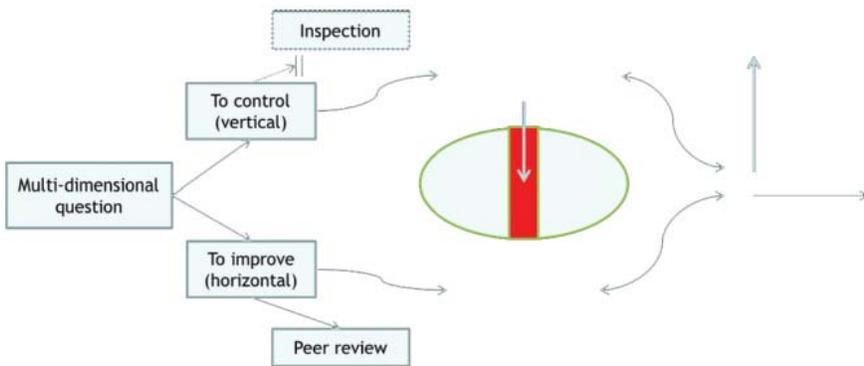


Figure 38 Vertical versus Horizontal: What if there is No Inspectorate

## From Pattern to Matrix

In the eyes of the expert, there was another thing missing. The debate about the minimum standards hid something else, something he as an outsider could not touch, but was probably not visible to the people in the sector either. And it had everything to do with the question of whether or not a public library could be part of the “system” (Dutch: stelsel) or not. Who or what was really decisive? Are the library people players in this, or do we see their frustration at not being true players? Do the local governments know what their libraries are worth?

Do they hold on because of the crisis, or close because of all the digital alternatives? In the year the committee came up with its plan, there was also an entrepreneur showing he was able to do a library service for a smaller price than the public libraries could. Was he a free rider or the future of the system? Could he get into the system? Would this be “allowed?” Who does the “allowing?”

It was developments like these, which made the expert return to his studies and all he had learned up to that point. In 2011, there was the publication of his book on sector-wide quality. This was always meant to be of practical value, but there was little doubt that parts of it went beyond practical value. Based on the first writing for a possible dissertation, he had become interested in the basic question of “What is a group?”, also using insights from Durkheim. Based on this a matrix was drawn.

Two lines were drawn. A vertical one for the question: when is a library no longer part of the system? A horizontal one for the question: how exact should the standards be?

The first line started where I knew Durkheim would be: at a place with high entry-and-exit barriers, recognizable at the attributes (clothes, instruments) that were used. At the other end of the vertical line was ... yes, what was there? At some point in time, librarians had stopped wearing recognizable uniforms, but still, it felt like they wanted those barriers as high as they could be.

The second line started at the wished-for minimum standards: preferably quantified and formulated as close as possible. On the other side of the line: qualitative and open standards.

It felt logical to place the libraries in the lower-left quadrant. That was the logical place for associations. However, much of what so far had been written in the context of the new audit system did not fit that quadrant. Some of the tasks required low barriers, some of the work they did meant using standards that were as open as they could be.

Instead of declaring the matrix invalid—which was, of course, possible—it felt like more attention needed to be given to the other quadrants. The result of thinking that started then can be found extensively in this thesis, especially Part II. For that moment of limbo, when thinking about where to go from there with the whole audit approach, it was important to realize that all of the decisions that truly concerned libraries, were not made within the context of an association, by members and/or board. They were made in the upper left-hand quadrant, ruled by contracts and under semi-market conditions. Decisions whether or not to have a (big) public library were literally about contracts that were made between local government and library. There was no way the existential decision about the continuity of the library could be made by the library management alone, within the context of their association.

Then there was something else to be considered. To say it with a bit of cynicism; the assignment of the committee was not to give new meaning to the association. The goal was to help adapt the libraries to their new challenges. Many of these challenges have to do with the new network society and the digitization that comes with it. So, the goal the committee was pursuing, though unaware of this, was to give the libraries more independence from all parties, and more able to survive on its own, seeking the alliances it wants. Neither the municipalities nor the local governments should stand in that way.

With hindsight, the error in this thinking was obvious. The senior directors within the library sector put the brakes on this idea, trying to force the whole system back into the fold of the association. If that would work remained to be seen, but suddenly there was much more insight into the context of the project than before. And there was also more insight into the challenges of the association. A realization struck the expert that Durkheim could no longer explain all that was happening in association land. In fact, the whole classic concept of a group no longer held, when looking at it sharply. In the next five years, the thinking behind the matrix and its aspects would grow and be applied in other associations and sectors.

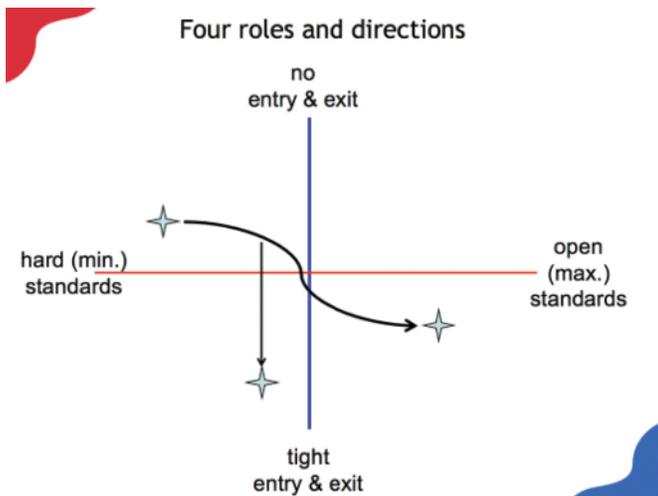


Figure 39 The Original Association Matrix

## A Successful Failure

The parties that got the problem back of designing a quality approach, handed it in turn back to the same committee. There was to be no change in the team, nor in the gist of the approach. However, there was to be more effort to communicate with the party members and there was to be a further attempt at the definition of minimum standards. There was also a request, supported by the ministry, to make the audit a better base for benchmarking: comparing libraries on a performance basis.

The idea of having all of the standards on no more than two A4s was not to be, that much was clear. But what should these standards be about? The committee gave birth to a smaller committee with the task of formulating standards with as many ways to get them specific and suitable for comparison as possible, with the expert in charge. As he saw it, there was only one way to go about it: if you want standards, you are going to get them. In the small committee, much knowledge and research capacity were brought together. Where necessary, outside expertise was brought in. The full Christmas period was used to produce an impressive list of indicators. We could go no further. And then what happened was both frustrating and wonderful; all parties agreed that based on this list it was not possible to have a working set of minimum standards for public libraries. Neither was there a set of indicators to be found that could work as a sensible base for benchmarking.

Were we back to square one? Not quite. It was one thing to hear the boards say it, and another to hear the members say it. We would wait for a definitive judgment until we had heard the members, which we were to do in four sessions throughout the country. The other thing was that the small committee had during its work come upon a different way of formulating the nine criteria. Until then, the criteria were basically descriptions of what a library does, in P-D-C-A form. Now, the texts became more like descriptions of actions the library had recently taken to ensure compliance. The text became such that they gave the auditors the right handle to see that the library worked actively to be ahead in the game, or at least in control. This was also done for specific items, like the way the libraries dealt with digital activities (of which most were done under a national umbrella). The text also reflected the tasks as they were mentioned in the concept of the new law on public libraries. In all, the standards remained basically open, but better to audit and with more a library feel to it. The text did become twice as thick.

On the whole, this was a small price to pay for a working audit methodology, just as it was to be expected that something had to give. There was one aspect that worried the expert. This was that it made the role of the expert more important, as using the texts required a more professional judgment, and this led away from an audit that was done on main lines, providing a basis for a deep conversation at the end of the audit. The control element in the audit did grow. Because the experts were also the ones who would write the reports, their influence had gained markedly. But again, that was a small price to pay.

## Going to the Country

There are always questions when a new way of auditing is introduced, whether anyone is interested. The default position is that it is a boring subject. This was no longer so for the public library sector.

The four hearing sessions that were held throughout the land were well attended; the last one, in the south, very well attended. There was a feeling that the libraries were struggling for survival and that the audit mattered. The chairman of the regional meeting was from the region. The chairman of the committee talked about the “why” of the chosen auditing system, the expert told the audience about the “what.” After that: questions. In the audience were people who had either been auditors or auditees in a pilot (these had gone on throughout the process described above). The meetings were lively, and the questions were sharp.

There was always the question on minimum standards, sometimes formulated the way a strike worker would do it: if the ministry does not go along, we will stop providing services. In that case, passion met passion, sometimes coming from the director of the library association, who had become a staunch supporter of the approach (the representative of the local government association wisely did not show up). The experts by now also defended the approach. All in all, the meetings were a hard-fought victory of the proponents of the audits, but with the realization that much would depend on the actual execution of the audits.

The actual decision to start with the audits was not even discussed at the general assembly in the autumn of 2014. It was a so-called “hammer-piece” on the agenda. But those who think it was no more than a storm in a teacup should have been there at the previous general assembly. At that meeting, the chairman of the association had been given a very hard time by the members. He barely survived. This was not (directly) about the audit system, but it showed how any proposal can become entangled in other topics when there is pressure on the association and its board. Handling that takes skill and time—and even then, it may not work.

## Public Audit and Public Law

Did it end with this? No, it did not; it was just the end of the beginning. At the same time that the audit got into calmer waters, all the attention went out to the new law on public libraries. The library association had already lost the debate on minimum standards to be written into law (much of the reason why they had wanted it in the standards of the audit) and now the debate was most of all on the number of tasks the libraries were to have besides taking care of a collection of (physical) books. In the end—we are talking about the seventeenth version of the law—there were to be five tasks for the library to do, from the classic collection function to becoming a center for debate and a place to fight illiteracy. All these tasks or “essential functions” were considered vital in the (very active) lobby of the library association in order to ensure survival for the members. The audit was in the legislation as a kind of safeguard for this. Yet, in this debate as in all the others, there was no real safeguard to find through law or audit for everything that was happening in the field.

This was made clear during the debate when the minister, in answer to a question by a member of parliament to formulate in a more specific way what those “essential functions” beheld, said “the heart of the matter is that I cannot say what is essential. For this, the situation in which the libraries are in is much too fluid.”

So, she too drew the line, and she did not say this because local governments told her to say it. With this, she in a way also kind of validated the line of the new audits. “Kind of?” In scientific terms, it is no real validation and in politics, there are no guarantees, but it has worked out that way<sup>68</sup>. It also consolidated that in fact, it is up to the audit team to give their interpretation of a situation and draw a line somewhere. This is difficult and very hard to calibrate. In that sense, this approach leaves too much to the responsibility of the auditor.

In many ways, the standard has become as relevant as the law for the public libraries. This is not what we had hoped for when designing the new system. We had hoped that the audit would operate in the shadow of the law. In as far as we had an eye on it at all, we had wanted it to be something to fall back on when looking for the right interpretation. It has not worked out that way. This opens the gate for situations where auditors—alone in the audit, together when in a calibration session— start interpreting both standards and law, making it harder. Of this, there are already signs. The surge with which the decision to adopt peer review came about, has ebbed away. What emerges is something more expert driven and more aimed at the internal workings of the library. The existential side of the audit seems to have been put to bed again.

## Looking Back at the Struggle for a More Horizontal Approach

What was just observed in the last sentence of the last paragraph, seems another sign of what Stevens observed in his doctoral thesis, that “it is doable to turn a soft standard into a harder one, but almost undoable to do the reverse.” (Stevens R. , 2012) Yet, at the same time, this whole case is evidence of a situation where a much more classic, checklist-like standard was turned into a more open one with a far more horizontal approach (from expert to peer, from control to conversation, and from compliance to improvement). This did happen. Those with an objective mindset tried again and again but could not win from those with a system or divergent mindset. At the same time, it can be said that those who worked from a position of trust, can show more results than those who chose to work from distrust. Those are interesting signs of what can happen with an intervention like this audit approach. It bears much relevance for the position of the association.

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68. This “coupling”, “de-coupling” and “re-coupling” of government regulation to the self-regulation of a sector is subject of relevant articles by De Bree and Stoopendaal (Bree & Stoopendaal, 2018). See also Van Gestel (Gestel, 2018/6)

## 23. Ratio in Quality: Case Study Notaries, Part Two

### The Deeds That Went Before<sup>69</sup>

In the first part of the description of the case study of the notaries, the historic perspective dominated. And what a history it is. The roots of the profession go back as far as the old Egyptians, where there almost immediately seems to be a position of authority. But “the taking of notes” was also a job for those slaves who, unlike their masters, could do some reading and writing in ancient times. The first evidence of an association of notaries can be traced back to the Italian city-states in the Middle Ages, immediately showing a distinction and rivalry with the lawyers, the “advocates.” Notaries were not allowed in as members of the law association. However, they must have been of great use to the prominent people of the cities, as they were allowed to have their own association. Later on, the notaries were often close to the purple gowns of the bishops or the royal blues of the crown. It shows how the notaries have always been close to church and state, though not always part of it. Much of the history of the profession is a description of how close the notaries are to either the crown or to the market, with the association as a sort of broker between the state and the profession on the one hand, and between the members of the association on the other hand. Describing it roughly: at any given moment, there is always a segment of the notaries that wants to have more freedom to do business and another segment that wants more public recognition, with the association profiting in professional status, but also suffering in terms of that same status when the misbehavior of members reflects back on the status of the profession as a whole. In fact, the history of the association, as first interpreted by this researcher, shows a truly remarkable forty-year development when it comes to the rise and fall of the profession. Looking at it from an “emergent mindset” (Chapter Seventeen), the pattern that presents itself says much about the balance between self-regulation and regulation for any given profession.

When at the very start of the nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte conquers most of Europe, he gives his brother, Louis Bonaparte, the Netherlands to rule as king. The new king shows himself to be both a progressive and a systematic man. He takes many initiatives and wants them to be well documented. For this, he needs notaries, and in his French eyes: public notaries. Are the notaries glad about this? No, they are not. It limits their freedom. Worse, it means they cannot sell their private practice when they are public servants, which is their pension.

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69. For this main case too, there will be few referrals to literature in this case summary. These referrals can be found extensively in attachment A2.

After the new law is announced in 1803, they start a lobby against the new law, which is also the start of the first nationwide association of notaries<sup>70</sup>. When Napoleon, tired of his lack of results, puts his brother aside, one of the things he does is to proclaim a new law in 1812, La loi Ventôse, in which he gives all notaries public status, without turning them into civil servants. It took some time, but the notaries started to profit from their new and more exclusive status. Business went well. But as business grew, the number of incidents increased. The association had a court of internal discipline (tuchtraad), but the evidence is that hardly ever was a member disciplined. Throughout history, and in all professions, notably that of medicine, it appears that courts of internal discipline are reluctant to discipline their own members or will only do so with many safeguards. At some point in time, the public no longer accepts the assurance of such courts as evidence of trustworthiness. This is an early example of this. Discontent rose, until by 1842, the government had to intervene. The job to discipline the notaries became a matter for the public prosecutors. Self-regulation had failed.

This would remain the situation till 1903 when the association of notaries once again became fully responsible for the disciplining of its own members. This was never done in such a way that it was adequate. Although there was only one association of notaries, in fact, there were many people who acted as “caretaker,” which was the same job a notary did, just as there were many notaries moonlighting as real-estate broker or otherwise. Even though a number of committees wrote reports about the situation, in fact, little about the situation changed, which was anything but transparent.

Change came with new occupiers, the Germans. In 1944, they brought an end to the situation with the “caretakers,” and limiting notarial functions to the notaries. With the end of the war, a time of rebuilding started. In hindsight, it was the start of a building boom that has no historical parallel, with the notaries profiting from each real-estate deal in the Netherlands. Business would grow exponentially. At the same time, the status of the profession would rise. In 1956, Professor Pitlo secured academic recognition for the training and education of notaries, supposedly ending the “notarial default” in status compared with other law professions. Things reached a climax for the profession and its association. However, around 1996, again some forty years after having acquired a better status, public and media discontent over the work of the notaries came to the fore.

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70. It is now called the Koninklijke Notariële Beroepsorganisatie, or KNB, a neutral and descriptive professional association also representing a sector or branch, with only the prefix of “Royal” referring to the public role of its members. Until quite recently, the abbreviation stood for “Royal Netherlands Brotherhood of Notaries.” This notion of “brotherhood” is intriguing. Though too pretentious and old fashioned to maintain, it does give a strong and emotional sense of what an association could stand for: it is more than just a group of members.

Many criminal activities were proven to be sanctioned or “whitewashed” by notaries. The profession came into disrepute. Action was needed. When the action came, it worked probably paradoxically. The 1980s and 1990s were also decades of deregulation and supply-side economics. At the same time, there appeared an increase in criminality (especially through the Committee van Traa, 1997), there was also much consumer criticism against the high and fixed prices notaries could command for a deed or other legal document. The public function of the notaries was seen as an abuse of power, of a cartel. The government intervened, and in spite of much lobbying by the associations of notaries, an end came to the fixed price as part of a new law on the notaries in 1999.

The new law was introduced at the height of the long post-war building boom. Lack of competition, lack of oversight, and a lack of insight into the effects of digitization had led to a downward spiral in terms of professional discipline. The introduction of “market forces” was to change all that, but in effect, setting the prices free probably fanned the flames of an already blazing fire. It was certainly a revolution in the world of the notaries. To this day, they have not fully adapted or accepted its reality (based on interviews from 2015). It also did not end the calls for discipline from the media and politics concerning the lack of ethics in the profession. If anything, the opposite was true.

When Pitlo closed the “notarial default” in 1956, he would have been very disappointed to know that (again) forty years later, the notariat suffered real blows to its reputation, becoming again the focus of attention of public prosecutors and others.

### Many Interventions

Yet, out of this dire situation, and the unforced error of introducing market forces at exactly the time when it would mean that “the fox was put in the henhouse,” something also grew there that in the end may prove more durable than a governmental intervention. The 1999 law on the notariat was after all not only written to set the prices free, but also to “make it possible for the professional association to put its house in order and promote the right execution of the public function and to promote everything needed for greater professionalism and bind the members to other things necessary for its future existence.” (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1999). In the period after the law was set in motion, a number of developments took place that fortunately were well analyzed in, among many other publications, two dissertations and an important evaluation report by a committee named after its chairman, Mr. Hammerstein. One of the dissertations, C.L.B. van Kocken’s, a notary himself, was about the independence and integrity of notaries. A rare sociological study in a very legal profession, it warned against a shift away from the public nature of the profession, showing worryingly how tempting it is to take sides for a client instead of a general principle (Kocken, 1997) (Kocken C. , 1997). At the very least in mood, contrasting with this thesis, is the one by Zayenne van Heesen-Laclé.

In surveys conducted in 2004 and 2006, she shows that more market not necessarily will lead to an “ethical depression.” In fact, the new market situation forces the profession to start a rethinking of the fundamentals of the profession. This is not to say that it is in her view easy to come to new “collective action.” She states:

- Competition between “moral communities.” Is it the professional association that sets the standards, or is it the new external oversight body, or the standardization as put in place by competing professions in one office?
- The invisible ones. The notaries that are neither active in the association nor elsewhere, stay invisible to the profession. A culture of non-intervention rules. Closed shops become more closed. It shows a lack of confidence in the ability to do the work in such a way that it builds public trust.
- A lack of “collective consciousness.” The realization, that collective challenges from outside need to be challenged collectively, is missing.

In her conclusions, she asks for a robust notarial ethical standard and interventions that break through the culture of non-intervention, including those that improve quality and integrity consciousness (Heesen-Laclé Z. v., 2008). However, what she misses, is the basic vulnerability of the profession in terms of economics and digital competency. The crisis will reveal this.

And then there came the committee that was asked to review the new law for the notariat, five years after its inception. This committee—named after its chairman, Hammerstein—was not only asked to look at the effect of the liberalization of the market but also to look at ways to increase quality and discipline within the profession. Apart from a number of measures to further strengthen disciplinary procedures and strengthen customer orientation, two elements stand out from the recommendations. The first has to do with the new public oversight body that had come about with the new law, the BFT. The other element has to do with the future of several quality interventions that had been taken by the association but were floundering. With the work of the committee, those two elements became linked in a controversial but fruitful manner.

The new oversight body—*Bureau Financieel Toezicht*, or BFT—is a somewhat odd construction, as it is a public oversight body overseeing publicly appointed functionaries (appointed by “the Crown”). As it starts out, its mission is specifically linked to a law aimed at whitewashing criminal money and money used to fund terrorist attacks. This Wwft<sup>71</sup> basically means a check on the proper handling of identity papers and the obligation to report when large or otherwise significant or unusual sums of money change hands. Almost all countries have such a law by now.

<sup>71</sup> In this case study, the Wwft is usually mentioned by the abbreviation WID-MOT, its predecessor.

The BFT can be seen as a successor to a small and well-appreciated collective accounting office working for the notariat. With the new law on the notariat, the unit got a significant upgrade as an oversight body, including its own legal basis. The notariat is not the only sector confronted with the demands of the new law, but here it probably creates the most nervousness. As unbelievable it sounds to many in the notariat in the years after, the coming of the BFT was actually welcomed by a majority of the members of the notariat association, reflected in a survey held at the annual meeting of the KNB in 2002. Its former identity may have helped with that. Very soon after that annual meeting, the mood turned and would turn critical toward the BFT. There was a specific reason for that, a principle one in the eyes of most notaries. This has to do with the *verschoningsrecht* of the notariat, the client's privilege. For its inquiries, BFT would have to look into the clients' files with confidential information. This would not do, for many in the profession. A fierce, though very civil, legal battle ensued against the work of the BFT. But as was often the case, without significant support from either politics or the public. However, it did prepare the mind for possible alternatives.

Due to differences of opinion within the membership—certainly in the case of the notaries with a sort of constant disconnect between the inside and outside world—most associations are late in adapting to new realities, and this certainly is the case with the notariat throughout its history. This was also true when it came to the issue of quality. For a long time, there was no coherent strategy on how to get from “institutional trust” to “peer trust” or vice versa. From 1999, some notarial offices started to experiment with ISO certification, but this mostly made the already good ones better, without others following them. A type of self-assessment based on the INK/EFQM Award Scheme was introduced by the Dutch Bar Association (NOvA), but this was no great success either. Conferences and a small body of literature (Bekkers, Hooijdonk, Kortmann, Suyver, & (Red.), 2007) (Peijj, S.C., Westerink, & Winter, 2003) did help to keep the theme of quality alive.

## Quality and Integrity as a Goal

The inspiration for the proposal to start with peer review comes from another and more enduring example within the Dutch Bar Association. Here, lawyers receiving a fee for their legal aid work, need to partake in a system of peer review, as part of an initiative to make visible what the taxpayer got for their money. This type of peer review followed the file of a client through its process in an office. However, the content of the file was not allowed to be audited, again because of client privilege. Anyhow, peer review was presented within the notariat as both an alternative and an addition to the coming of the vertical oversight by the BFT. A new version standard for quality was published, centered around the primary process of passing a deed. In 2004, ten auditors were trained. In the end, they did 160 voluntary audits.

But there were many signals of resistance among the members and the decision to make it obligatory was postponed time after time by the board. When it came to a decision in 2005, the members present at the general assembly rejected the system.

What now? Here the Hammerstein Committee shows itself, in that same year, critical of the peer review.

The committee went so far as to call the system of peer review a form of “window dressing.” On the one hand, it went too far in its focus on the internal processes of the notarial office: it can be useful, but the members have a public function and there is no basis for a peer review that is only focused on the internal working of an office. On the other hand, it did not go far enough to address the content and integrity of the work of the notary. What the committee wanted, was to have a system of peer review that would fundamentally make the notary personally responsible for the quality and integrity of his work. There would have to be stricter guarantees for that: stronger testing at the entry level of the profession, strengthening and concentration of the internal disciplinary court, with an oversight role by the association, an improved mandate for the BFT to review notarial offices, and the coming of improved quality standards and audits<sup>72</sup>. To achieve this, the committee had even looked at the Scottish system of peer review, in which the content of legal dossiers is reviewed in much the same way as academic articles are reviewed. However, as with many other approaches, this went too far.

A new approach for peer review was set up eventually by the association. Though it was an important aspect of the audit, the association was determined that it would be more than a check upon the Wwft items of identity and transfer of unusual funds. The audit auditor could do what the BFT could not do: look into the files (this was still being challenged legally, but the challengers would lose), and as such was important. However, the audit was also structured in such a way that it was possible for quality items, in a broad sense, to help an office in its function.

This was in the end accepted by the general assembly of the notaries; for many as the lesser of two evils, compared with the BFT checking the files. One aspect was not to be, however. Testing the integrity of a notary was one step too far. In fact, it was considered a sign of distrust: a presumption of non-integrity. The quality approach should be enough. The rules and procedures of the association were a given. The way the office dealt with those was important, but, in essence, it was up to the auditor to choose which aspects to check upon, especially when the research findings gave rise to questions.

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72. A factor here is that, once over the entry barrier, there is hardly any possibility to expel a notary from their function; there is no exit other than the expressed wish by the notary to “defunction.”

So finally, and after much effort and recrimination, the peer review got a start. It is important to state that all this would not have come about without the endurance of some key people in the committee, the board and staff of the association. It is safe to say that they pushed their vision on quality through against the wishes of the majority of the association. And not just against a majority: the association has some very senior and learned members and they came out against it as well. But in the end, the opponents did not formulate any strategy that was more than a defensive one and aimed at the status quo. The members of the association showed themselves prone to the pathologies of an association, including groupthink. Worse: there was evidence of the kind of “moral hazard” that is typical of monopolists, but they did not really want to fight it. As to the public character of the function, seeking an exaggeration to make things clear: did this give the members an added feeling of responsibility, or was it just a gift by an occupier, to do with as they pleased? The price war that started after the coming of the new law, had (and still has, even fifteen years later) deeply unsettled many notaries, who find it at odds with what every public function should stand for. They, and the ones who welcomed the new market situation, banded together when it came to the interference in their office privileges when it came to the audits: intolerably meddling. In the main case, there is a passage that states that “moral hazard” is a term that can be applied to individual cases<sup>73</sup>.

No matter what the members thought, wanted or wished away; there were greater forces from outside leaning against them. In fact, there was a consensus among politicians and civil servants that the association was not able to reform itself. The result, as can be seen in many other sectors with incidents and oversight issues, is a slow building of consensus toward a new regime. In this respect, much can be learned from Steven’s dissertation about “audit as stimulating intervention” (Stevens R. , 2012), including his use of the Cynafin Sensemaking Framework (Kurtz & Snowden, 2003). This result also helped to get a basic consensus among the board to move ahead when temporization no longer worked. And, in particular, there was a “change agent” in the person of a policy official, helped by others on the staff and at board level. She had a vision of what was necessary for the association and was not prepared to give up when things went the other way. Later she got much support from the new head of the new audit office.

She had been working for the Dutch Bar Association, had seen what happened there and became a very important bridge of knowledge and insight from one legal profession to the other.

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73. At the level of a collective with a strong professional identity like that of the notaries, a better term than “moral hazard” is “identity flatness”: the real danger is not knowing anymore what professionalism stands for, including the needed adherence to the law and internalized moral conduct. An association should therefore go from “identity confirmation” to “identity binding.” If not, “identity loss” is the danger.



Though the start of the peer review was a simple check of whether or not the conditions of the Wwft were met, the approach soon developed into something that better acknowledged the complexity of judging a notarial office. Inspired by (the title of) the same book—Gladwell’s *Blink* (Gladwell M. , 2005)—extra attention was paid to the moment that a peer/auditor enters the office of the colleague/auditee. Every professional should be aware of the power of first impressions by professionals. On the one hand, there is an immediate understanding and knowledge, on the other hand, there is at the same moment the danger of presumptions and prejudgment. In a single moment, say the handshake between peer and colleagues, the audit can be effectively done. What the auditor learns, is to listen to the signals he gets from the start, but also to suspend judgment and do the audit according to what he or she hears and learns in the first meeting that day.

This start, with an intuitive “Blink,” is in the actual audit combined with an orientation of the office before the audit and introductory meeting, followed by thorough research at the level of a file (dossier). Usually, these research activities at file level lead both to a check on de introductory talk and further conversations with all the staff at the office. This part of the audit is usually both of a technical-legal nature and of a more general nature, debating all aspects of the working of the office, including personnel issues.

After this, the auditor reflects and decides on his or her decision regarding the quality of the office. This decision will come as advice to the association, more particular to its audit office. This is by far the most vital part of the audit. Usually not because of the advice, but because of the conversation or the reasons behind the advice. During the development of the audit, this moment became more important, as this is the moment that the whole of the office can be discussed, sometimes far beyond the issue of compliance with standards. After this, there is the final meeting with the notary. Last, but not least, there is the report. One of the important aspects of the system is that every report is seen (and edited) by the audit office.

When it comes to the advice an auditor can give, the developers of the approach came out with a system in which there was a recognition (learned from other audit systems), that it does not really help improve an office when there is only one opinion in judgment: good or false. In practice, auditors will then ignore the smaller failings in an office because it is “overall” a good office. That can be justified, considering the consequences of negative advice, but meanwhile, the small signs of lesser quality are ignored. Because of this, the auditors could ask the office for “homework” in order to correct minor deficiencies, within a short period of time. If the deficiencies were of a more structural nature, there would be a reaudit. By that time, the audit office would already be involved, looking at the severity of the case and the right auditor for the reaudit.

Because of this method, in most cases, the problems were sufficiently addressed by the office, with hardly ever any offices that started a complaint procedure. In later years, two developments were added. One was that when an office was clearly failing, but out of a lack of capability and not out of culpability (unable, not unwilling), the association would set a “special protocol” in motion for a tailor-made solution for the office. Another development was to seek for signals that an office proved to have sufficiently “alertness” to signal problems in time and do something about it. This came from the “high reliable organizing” (HRO) approach from Weick and Sutcliffe (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, *Organizing for High Reliability: Processes of Collective Mindfulness*, 1999). Part of this approach was the willingness to discard a procedure when its results are clearly destructive or counterproductive. If this all sounds labor intensive, it is. But a solid base for the audits would prove to be very necessary.

Vital to this way of auditing is the “peer” who is doing the auditing. When the first auditors were selected, there was a preference for peers in the last phase of their career or just pensioned, with what was hoped was a natural authority toward their colleagues. They did have this, but the question could be asked if they had the natural skill to turn an audit into a conversation between equals. Better experiences were had with younger auditors, also because they were better in assessing and discussing the digital challenges offices faced (there is often a danger that the audit will turn into a basic lesson in digital skills, as they are often low). Important is the fact that every year a number of new auditors are selected (and an equal number deselected), which has the effect of forming a cadre of members within the association that have seen more than their own office; an auditor often learns at least as much as the auditee.

## The Loneliness of the Member

When the audit process was established, business was booming. As Van Heesen-Laclé wrote in her dissertation in 2008: freeing the prices for notarial services could also be a boon to the notariat as it brought the entrepreneur out. The building boom went on and on, and as one notary said, “It was hard not to make money.” In 2009, the crisis hit the notariat with full force. And not only that, it became obvious to many that with the new digital possibilities, the whole future of the notariat was in doubt. It was also decided in 2009 that both BFT and the peer review would not be limited anymore to the Wwft. Both the oversight activities and the quality audit became integral by nature, with Wwft just one of the activities to be reviewed. For the peer review, this did not really change much. For the BFT this did change a lot. What they would do was still rule-based, but they now had to put this rule-based perspective in effect for a multitude of rules.

In other words, they would have to think more like notaries themselves, while the background of most inspectors was more likely that of an accountant. The problems to which this would lead will be described a little further on.

For the audits themselves, this did not matter that much. But in the second round of the audits, there would come a change in the nature of the conversations held during the audits. It is the nature of any peer-review audit, that once a relationship is established, and possible barriers of resistance have been broken, the auditee and staff of an office, say a lot and become confidential with the auditor. This includes dreams and shattered dreams. Many dreams were shattered in the crisis years. Suddenly there were more debts than assets. Or, harder for most, staff had to be laid off and that decision was taken too late or did not go well, also because most of the staff were not young and had a permanent contract. So many of the staff also had their dreams shattered and became unemployed or could not make the promotion to full notary they had come to expect as automatic. As most of the notaries were closer to pension age than to their student days, many were faced with fundamental questions about the end of their career—and their social standing within their communities. Many others, including most younger notaries, started a host of new activities. In their brand-new websites, they could mention up to twelve specialisms their one-man operation could help the client with. Others sought the combination with law offices or other ventures. And of course, there were those who wanted to go completely digital, competing with very cheap rates and the brand name of commercial retailers (of which the so-called “HEMA-notary” would become the most famous and symbolic). And then there were the notaries who wanted to go back to the essence, the public core, of the profession, believing that there were still enough clients willing to pay a higher fee for sound legal advice. In short, the members of the professional association went everywhere their profession could take them. And many, if not most of the notaries, dealt with this alone. Yes, they went to regional or national meetings of the association. They also met each other in the context of obligatory education. But did they really, really talk with each other about issues like survival and identity? Probably less than ever: the freeing of the prices and the crisis more than ever made them see each other as competitors, with the board of the association as their failing champion. Fundamentally, they were lonely in their professions.

And then there comes an audit. “A colleague is coming to judge me,” the notaries may think before the beginning of the audit. “A colleague that understands me,” could be the reaction after the first conversation, “and not a direct competitor,” the next thought might be. And then far more gets discussed than was the initial intention. In what the audit office heard and could read from the individual reports and from what was reported (anonymously) in the half-yearly reports, a reader can get a clear sense of the impact of the audits.

More clearly (but still anonymously) this impact is felt during the so-called “calibration days” when auditors assemble. One meeting stands out, fortunately also attended by the chairman of the association, where almost all of the auditors reported about audits where the very existence of the auditees’ office was discussed. There was an almost uniform finding of those present, that very existential conversations took place during the audit. There was a sense of urgency, for many offices with problems. There was also a sense that the “mirroring” of findings during the audits had much impact. Not always an immediate impact, but more a sense of leaving the auditees with a lot to think about and a readiness to take action. This went clearly beyond findings in terms of small efficiencies or improvements. But what to do with these findings? Much of it went into continuous improvement of the audits. For a wider audience, publications were made in both Dutch and English (KNB, 2012). Slowly the audits positioned themselves as an asset to the association, but it was never fully outside contention. There were rumblings within the association that could derail it, the relationship with the BFT required much “diplomacy”.

### A Battle for the Soul of the Association

Quality initiatives profit from a consistent and stable approach. At the level of individual audits and the audit office, this turned out to be possible. Every half year the results were analyzed and reported, new auditors were trained, calibration took place, and new themes were added to the audits. Within the association, there was a growing number of (former) auditors and auditees who appreciated the audits and what they brought<sup>75</sup>. But context and environment were never that stable. Perhaps, most of all, this touched upon the position of the board of the association and their strategic direction. To better understand this, especially at the level of the members, this researcher applied the association matrix to the situation within the association of notaries. Partly on the base of a number of interviews, and internal news bulletins, the tensions within the association could be followed.

Most fundamental of all was the tension between those who wanted to go back to the public side of the notary function (“back to basics”) and those who would not. Within the latter group, different directions, vectors, were taken, all with an eye toward the further digitization of the market. Some looked for profits by routinizing procedures or compensating smaller margins with a higher turn-over (and less *belehrung*; the obligatory advisory function toward clients). Others would try to go more the route of business-to-business and get higher margins with more and more specialized advice.

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75. The number of auditors grew throughout the years, also because every year 20% of auditors are replaced by new ones. Unfortunately, very few members of the board have audit(or) experience themselves.

And then there were the ones who thought that the whole classic notarial function not only should be digitized but also replaced by, for instance seeking, a notarial role in issues like cybersecurity. In other words, representatives of the three latter groups did not really expect much from the association, other than a drawback in their attempts at finding new business. In the background to this played the usual tensions between associations of large and small members and of members with a local, national, or international perspective.

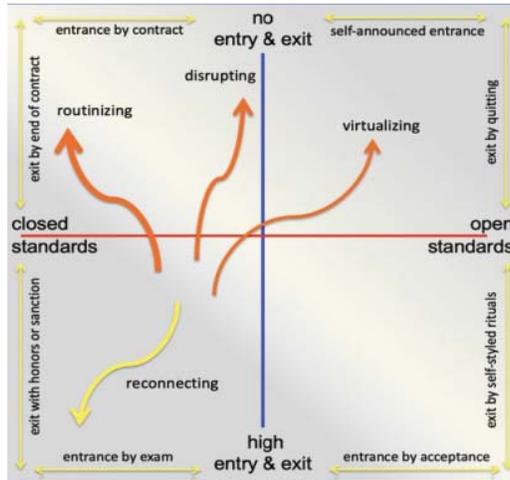


Figure 41 Vectors within the Notariat

The tensions between the different groups grew. In Cynefin terms: going from complex to chaotic. Partly this was anger at the failure to mitigate the consequences of the new law by the board, partly this was the result of a new vision on the future of the new profession—and failure of the board to “listen” to their vision. At a certain moment, around 2013, this resulted in the coming of two “activist groups” and later an interesting project group. They all wanted something; a surge in activity. One group, called “notariat for legal certainty” (*notariaat voor rechtszekerheid*) aimed, among other things, for a restoration of the original mission of the association: “giving assurances as to the legal position of clients.” And then there was the action group “notariat for quality.”

The group “notariat for legal certainty” was by far the strongest. They had a well-developed critique on the present state of the notariat, including the analysis that in the notariat a downward spiral was taking place, citing research by Baarsma and others (Baarsma, Mulder, & Teulings, 2004) that “adverse selection” would take place when clients could not choose on the base of transparent price-quality relations. In that case, tariff regulation would be in order. The group wanted to go back to the public function, with the general interest of the public at heart.

In that sense, the group was a restoration movement, much in the sense of the reaction from the notaries after the new law by Napoleon, which created the association in the first place. But like before, going back in time was not an option, not even when you try to digitize it with ideas the project group added to let the notaries play a strong role in the digital securitization of virtual contracts and deeds.

In March 2012, the first group proposed to replace the present board with an interim board. After that, a new board was to be formed, with a policy in line with the declaration of the first group. Two notaries formed their own activist group “Notaries for quality.” They went completely the other way. They wanted an end to the “political notariat.” The future was to be for entrepreneurs. There was not much added value to the professional association or any other “guild-like” system. It was better to merge with the Bar Association for essential functions and the notaries as a group of specialists. An auditing system? No need; the market would determine what quality is.

The proposals of the latter group would not even be discussed in the general assembly. The first group managed to mobilize the members, the latter did not. Within a month, the first group no longer existed; they were now the new board. The board did install a new project group, called “digitizing for legal certainty: how to keep our principles intact in the digital age?”

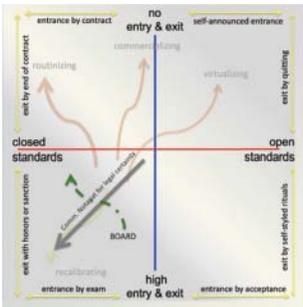


Figure 42 Movements by Committee Group “Notariat for Legal Certainty”

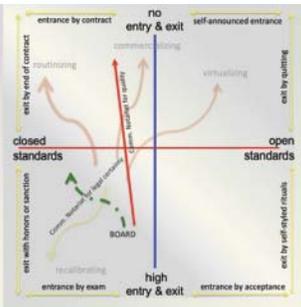


Figure 43 Action Group “Notariat for Quality”

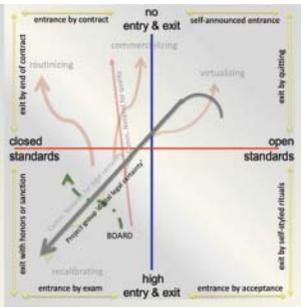


Figure 44 Project “Digital Legal Certainty”

Looking back, the crisis in the association resulted in a better and more focused board. The association in a way regained its feet, based on a clear vision. That vision could not hold in full. There was no going back to a more public position. Maintaining quality would also remain an issue, as would be seen from the developments in the task of the BFT, with the audits as a rare bit of good news. Yet, it is important to notice that under pressure, that association reasserted itself as an association.

## The Vertical and the Horizontal

In 2013, the audits go into a second round (not counting the earlier WID/MOT-audits and what went before that). The role of the audit as a check on the Wwft is now ended. There is to be no further public role for the audits; the goal is purely horizontal, inter-collegial. This does not mean that the relationship with the BFT is less important. It does mean, however, that in a legal way, the BFT is now a fully vertical oversight body, responsible for an integral review of the notariat. This is a clear political wish, supported by media and society. Just like for instance in accountancy, incidents have not stopped happening, and too many notaries appear in the papers with a role in whitewashing criminal money or another less savory role. There is no trust in the “butcher who checks his own meat,” as a Dutch saying goes.

The highly relevant question here is whether or not this vertical assurance of trust and quality holds true in practice. In this case of the notaries, big question marks must be raised.

First of all, there are no signals that more traditional disciplinary measures within the association do not function. New measures were added since the crisis, making both customer complaint procedures and the disciplinary court even more independent than before, with a heavy involvement of independent judges in the procedures. There is a steady stream of disciplinary measures. And as an aside: the pages with the outcomes of disciplinary procedures are the best read of the association’s magazine. Harder, but not impossible, is making the chairman of the different regions more responsible for the signaling and disciplining of members. In a way, the paradoxical situation occurs that more attention to wayward members produces an increase in convictions, which in its turn provides an image of more wrongdoings. This does not mean that there is not a real problem with a profession in (financial) crisis, but the association and its board and members are aware of it.

The same goes for the audits as part of the peer review. Usually initiated from the side of the notary association, the KNB, there has been a reasonable-to-good working relationship between KNB and BFT. BFT was invited to bring in case material for the training of the first WID/MOT-auditors and reports by the audit office were discussed with the BFT. The people from BFT and the audit office met on a regular base, with a feeling of mutual respect and an awareness that the vertical BFT and horizontal audit approach were additive and not competitive by nature. However, over time, the relationship became more lopsided. The BFT wants information from the audits but is not prepared to give information itself (a legal matter, is the excuse). They do not get information at the level of individual offices, but the pressure grows to do so. And if the review by the BFT is of an integral nature, then what is that of the peer review audit? Both parties appear to be doing their best to keep relations professional and constructive, but to the outsider the tension is obvious.

It raises this question: which of the two approaches is the more effective? Which has the most added value for the association, its members, and society at large?

It has proven hard for this researcher to give an answer to this question, as there was no willingness of the BFT to give insight into its workings and numbers in practice. In the main case, this is dealt with by using the spare data the BFT published under its obligation to publish an annual report. Looking at the data from 2007–2013 (see Table 5, main case), it is obvious that there is a clear peak in 2008 in the activities with the coming of the WID/MOT-audits, with, after this, a relatively constant level of activities, with a relatively constant number of visited notaria office (around 30% of the number of notaries and candidate notaries).

In terms of results, it was that the activities of the BFT led to 108 verdicts by the “chambers of oversight” (Kamers van Toezicht). In sixteen cases, this led to a suspension or expulsion, in all other cases, the sanction was light, or no sanction was given. Underneath, however, there was a problem with weighing the cases, as it seems that there was a change in methodology and counting almost every other year.

To this limited quantitative data, little can be added in qualitative terms, other than that attempts to include notaries (with an audit background) in the staff were short-lived.

With the audits in the context of peer reviews, the problem was reversed. Here the data was limited but complete and over a slightly longer time period: 2007–2014 (Table 4, main case). More qualitative insights are there in abundance, but they are harder to quantify, and many results of an audit will probably only become visible, if at all, sometime after the actual audit. When it comes to the data, there was a clear peak in activities from 2007–2009 when it comes to the WID/MOT-audits. It is clear to see how the WID/MOT-audits of the KNB precede those of the BFT. There is also consistency in the numbers of offices visited, 800 or 30%, though the numbers here are muddled because they also concern data from decentralized offices. From the numbers, you cannot deduce any change in method. It is all very consistent. Coming to the results, each year on average 78% of the office comes out well, 17% has to do extra “homework,” 1% gets a reaudit (twenty-eight offices). The rest concerns special cases, including tailor-made coaching (“special protocol”).

Comparing the two at this quantitative level, the only striking difference is in terms of consistency in the method. The number of offices or notaries that obviously fail the criteria is higher in the case of the BFT, but with both institutions, it is limited to just a few individual cases every year (which does not seem to deviate much from the numbers in which the court of discipline sanctions members).

If there is a difference in effectiveness, it must be found in more qualitative impressions. Here not much can be said about the BFT, except for the clear perception that members have turned against the BFT after the very initial support for the coming of the BFT in publications and in statements during meetings of the association.

When it comes to the appreciation of the peer review, there is the benefit of a consistent evaluation of each audit, both from the side of the auditor and of the auditee. The evaluations, certainly the early ones, sometimes reflect the resistance against audits as phenomena. At times the evaluations gave reason to rethink approaches, but on the whole, both auditors and auditees proved themselves satisfied with the audits. More valuable in terms of measuring the effects are the many quotes concerning the impact of the audits. Together with what comes back from repeat audits, there seems to be a significant impact from the audits.

To the association, the benefit of the audits also lies in the signaling function of that audits concerning practical issues the members get confronted with, or of problems with the implementation of new legal regimes.

In this way, it is not hard to conclude that the peer-review audits are, on balance, more effective than the work of BFT, though the reader is once again reminded of the lack of data and information from the side of this public oversight body.

Does this mean that the notaries could do without their oversight body, and save some public money? Not necessarily. Comparing the notaries with the public library system (main case A1, chapter nineteen), you can see that from the evaluation of the new law (Hammerstein Committee) in 2005 to the first audits by KNB and BFT in 2007 it takes a little over two years. In the case of the public libraries, it takes from 2012 to 2014 to develop a new audit system. In that sense, the difference is not that big. Yet looking into both cases, you see a far more complex situation within the public library sector when it comes to the external parties involved, with central government staying at far more distance from the sector than in the case of the notaries and local government lobbying hard for open standards. The thinking exercise should be this: would a public oversight body have made a difference in the case of the libraries. The assumption here is: yes, that would have made a difference. The presence of a vertical oversight body increases discipline within the sector and can work as an arbitrator and stimulator. The coming of the BFT, a heavy vertical intervention, created the surge that made the horizontal intervention of the peer review possible. For this reason, the notariat can be glad about the presence of the BFT. At the same time, it is a sign of poor decision making that the external intervention performs worse than the internal one, but still gets integral responsibility for the whole of the sector.

## Where To Go?

In 2017, members of the general assembly of the notaries signed a letter decrying the way the BFT functions. Whatever the merits (it is beyond the scope of this research), it has led to a change in the board. The signals from the association could no longer be ignored. Trust can be lost in vertical oversight bodies too. Perhaps a different way of working, with other competencies, is in order. A more limited scope, with lower expectations, might be better. For this study, the question that is more relevant is what could the future mean for peer reform, as a form of horizontal governance? Is the time ready to give more trust to the association and its different horizontal interventions?

This is not a question that can be answered without looking at the context. Even though—or especially because—economic indicators have vastly improved, it is necessary for the association to look at the whole of the developments as they emerge from the depths of the crisis.

Research at the European level shows that notaries have improved their business model enough, including digitization, that increasingly they are taking over tasks from government and the courts (Working group on the Evaluation of Judicial Systems (CEPEJ-GT-EVAL), 2017). With the improvement in the economic climate, the necessity of change might become less, and new lessons might once again be forgotten: the notariat has proven it allows history to repeat itself.

What was to be seen within the notariat is a lessening in position and status of internal control, even though enough is done to increase its independence. Public oversight has taken in a new and very significant position. Private oversight was never considered an option because of the status of the profession (though the Dutch association of Court Bailiffs (KBvG) does work efficiently with a private expert system for its member register (kbvg.nl, 2017)). What has come up in a stable and effective way is the peer review. There is (one-sided) information between peer review and public oversight, but not in terms of governance. Maybe that could change. It would be rational for it to do so. Whether it happens is a matter of trust in the profession. This again is something not only to be determined by the public oversight body itself. All in all, the notariat is the one case in this study that does not show a sudden surge in support for the measure of establishing peer review. As in the past, this decision was basically made for them, by the coming of BFT. Peer review emerges after that as both the most effective and most acceptable way of keeping control of its own quality.

The conditions outside and inside the association seem to improve, as described above. At the height of the crisis, centrifugal forces drove the members apart in the way they each see the future of their own profession and the association, as described in the matrix on the left.

A deep crisis within the association, resulting in a change of the board with people from a group aimed at “legal certainty” coming in. Looking back, this changed a lot. In essence, there was a redirecting of the members toward the characteristics of the association with a recognition of (high) standards and entry conditions. These were secured by the members themselves, also through peer review.

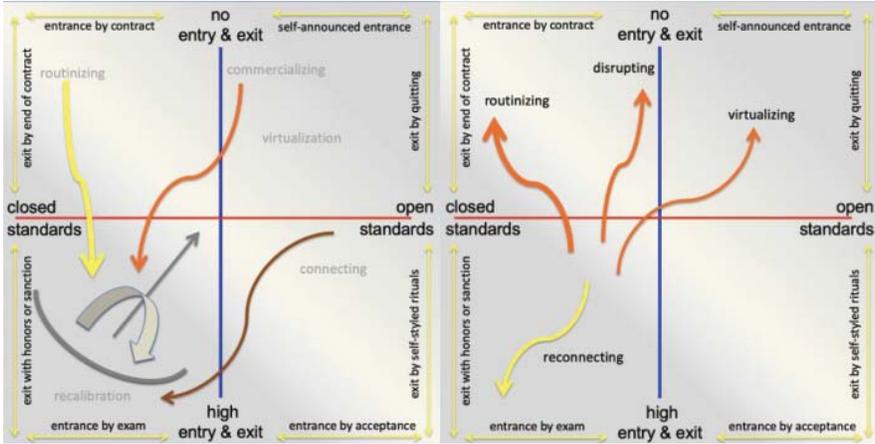


Figure 45 Matrix Vectors within the Notariat    Figure 46 Matrix Convergence within the Association

There was still a need for routinization and virtualization, but in a way these forces were now addressed within the context of the association, strengthening the “brand.” Elements that strengthen the trust in the association and its members are growing. A factor in this can be that the virtual world—with its hallmarks of open standards and lack of barriers for entry and exit—is itself becoming so insecure that a need grows there for exactly the kind of solid assurances society used to expect from notaries. People and groups within the virtual world reinvent the function of the notary, only to discover that the function already exists and functions better within a well-regulated environment. So, is trust coming back to the association? Looking at it through the lens of the association matrix, this looks likely. The question is how much the association has trust in this; in itself and its own vision and standards. This includes its own “deontology,” its moral philosophy & or normative ethical position (Melis & Waaijer, 2012).

How does she or he behave as a professional within the specific confines of the profession as a whole? For that, you have to look at the rules and standards that govern the members. In the case of the notaries, the remarkable thing is that these have not fundamentally changed since 1999 and the coming of the new law for the notariat. Nor have these rules been duly stressed during the intervention of the peer review. This researcher, in his role of advisor to the peer review, has repeatedly let it be known, that it was not fair to the auditors for them to be going into an audit with the whole of the regulation of the association as their standard.

Such regulation is, in a profession like the notariat, too large, complex, and multidimensional to test in one day. That it still works, is a tribute to the process of the audit and the professionalism of the peers. The audit bureau has always chosen a thematic approach in its audits, which can be seen as a form of risk-based audit, but always against the background of a broad application of the whole regulatory task of a notarial office.

As the confidence of the association grows back in force, it would be logical to look again at the conceptual base and content of its regulatory body. As this mostly concerns public law, it could be said that the association is too dependent on political decision making, which is outside its authority, to be able to engage in a debate on the content of the profession. It is doubtful whether this holds up, not only for the lobbying power of the association but also because other associations with a public character (including the Bar Association, the library sector and the association of real estate brokers) show that it can be done. More likely, here the careful, defensive and deliberative character of the profession reasserts itself, including a big role for the principle of non-intervention.

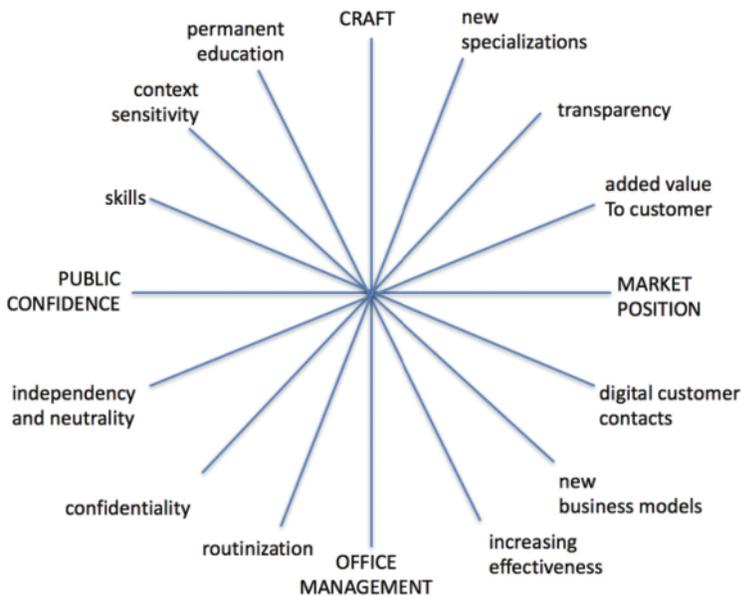


Figure 47 Deaing with All Dimensions

Yet, there is much to think about. The character of the notariat is very bipolar; both the public and the market character are integral to the profession. What can be seen from the peer reviews is that there is also an important balance between getting the “craft” side of the profession right (including the knowledge aspect) and keeping the office management effective and modern.

Rare is the office that has this balance in dimensions perfectly right—and then never for a very long time. So, while the association itself holds the key to further increasing trust in the association, it should never rest easy on either its public or its private side, its craft or its office skills. The key to working “on the notarial shortage” is to look for the shortage on the other side of the position in which it is dominant. The notariat can never be at rest.

## 24. Ratio in Quality: Case Study Real Estate Agents, Part Two

### What Went Before?

The summary in chapter eleven of the case study of the association of real-estate agents, the NVM, ended with a general assembly that showed significant internal tension, hurting the chances of the board getting its main “Program 2020” of quality initiatives accepted. The coming of “peer review” or “inter-collegial review” was on the agenda of the meeting, supported by a thirty-five-page report with specific details on the findings of twenty-two pilot audits. After a day-long meeting, with everybody very willing to end the session, the chairman did ask for a short discussion about peer review approach. A decision on the peer review did not come to the table, only an extension of the pilots. This was approved by the general assembly. In the short debate before that decision was made, a member asked to have the pilots reported in such a way that “the added value to the member was evident.”

The researcher, in his role as an expert, was again asked to do the research for the report. Believing that the first report already gave enough evidence of the added value of the approach, it was a struggle to come up with the right perspective. The idea for a new look at the question of added value came with the realization that what is “added value” in the eyes of one member, is not necessarily so for another member, or another, etc.

The “added value” of an audit might also be seen differently in the eyes of different members of the board and general assembly. The best option, therefore, was to try and identify all relevant points of added value as could be gathered from the first and later pilot audits, a hundred in total. This became the report “Added value in many eyes” (Meerwaarde in vele ogen) (Noordhoek D. , 2017) that is central to further decision making.

Here we have a summary of the audit method in some terms of the main thesis. After that follows a summary of the main findings, also in terms of the main thesis. The last part of this summary is a description of the final and often tense period, from the publication of the report to the final decision in December 2017, the end of a period that for this researcher started in March-April 2016 with the question: what would be a good approach for an audit?<sup>76</sup>

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76. In contrast to the other main cases, footnotes can be used here. When not, the text refers to the NVM-report of added value. This report (in Dutch) can be requested through the NVM or this researcher. The case has no literature list. Sources are immediately quoted and come from the research itself.

## A New Approach to Audits: Inductive Auditing

There were some very good starting points for an audit within the association of real-estate agents:

- A single sheet honor code to which all brokers had sworn an oath when becoming a member. The last item on the code was “adhering to the law.”
- Transparency on all key performance indicators of all real-estate objects<sup>77</sup> for all members (including the peers!). A perfect base for the preparation of an audit.
- Entry-and-exit criteria for a member are relatively clear. There is a relatively clear object of the audit: the enterprise and office of the member.

This last point was especially important. A broker does most of his work outside his or her office (showing houses) or brokering a price for the party he or she represents. Both activities are the “black box” of the profession and very hard to combine with an audit. Their results, however, can be audited. Together with the transparency in performance indicators, there is, in fact, a very rational basis for the audit, with relatively closed standards by the association or closed agreements with contracting partners and suppliers. The one technically difficult subject is the use of the internet, but as this is a challenge to all brokers, peers should be able to audit this too. Much more difficult in the development of the audit, proved to be the endless debate about the goal of the audit. Should it be a coaching audit or a controlling one? And if the latter, then what is the relationship with the internal disciplinary system? This conflict would at no time resolve itself truly, a big part of the reason why members have such different opinions about the added value of peer review. In many ways, this touches directly on the issue of “trust”; between the members, between members and the association, and between the association and society at large. Choosing one side of the argument means losing touch with the other side. The one way to deal with this dilemma is to realize that reactions to an audit will vary from one audit to the other too. To think more from the perspective of the auditee might mean something to the way an audit is done. Some will welcome the auditor, some will not. Some will have their office truly in order, and the best an auditor can do is to help the auditee with improving what is already good. The honor code of the NVM can be a source of inspiration, but will mostly stay in the background. The best practices an auditor sees may become “excellence points.” Some may think they are already doing well or not, but in the opinion of the auditor need to be checked more in order to see if there is enough compliance with the code.

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77. This concerns most of all brokers working in the housing market. Commercial and agricultural objects and their data gave more problems with categorization and availability.

The honor code is here an active presence. Both have an *inductive* approach in common: it starts with the reality of the office, and only after that do the code and regulations come into play.

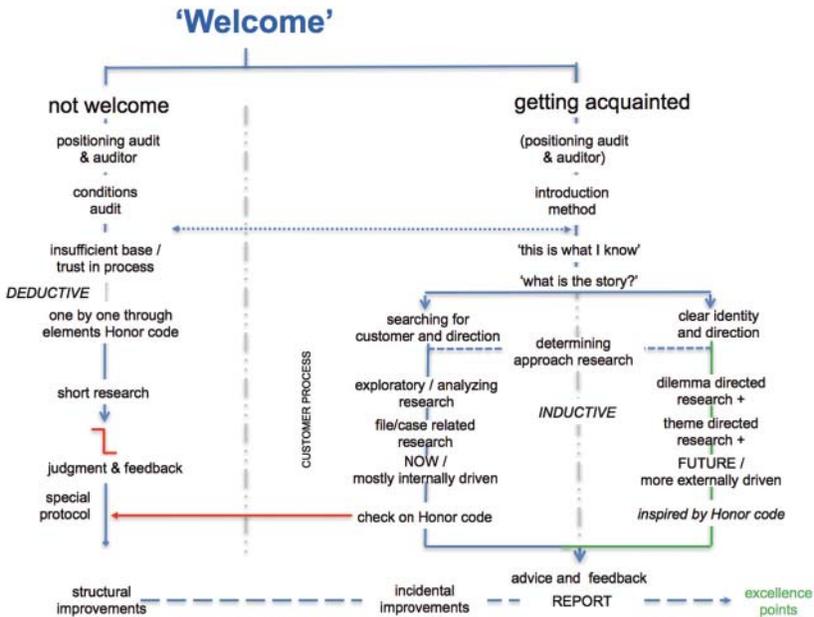


Figure 48 Three Ways of Welcome for a Peer

There can also be audits in which the auditee does not welcome the auditor or the auditor believes, based on his or her preparation or the first introduction, that the office may have several serious compliance issues. In that case, the approach is deductive: Honor code and connected regulation will be brought to the situation in the office. If the situation looks really serious, the auditor has the option to break off the audit, because a (re) audit may not turn into a reason for delay in tackling the problems. Here it is important if the auditee is “unable” or “unwilling” to deal with problems and non-compliances. Is the auditee willing but unable? Then there will be a “special protocol” with a tailor-made approach to the problems of the member, with a new audit afterward. If the auditee is unwilling to deal with his or her own failures to comply, a signal goes out to the internal disciplinary function of the association (a signal, not the report).

### Identifying Added Value

After the general assembly and the decision to extend the pilot period, a lot of work needed to be done in a short period of time. A second group of auditors had to be selected and trained and at the same time, the process had to be such that all pilot audits could be carefully followed according to the same approach.

Part of the process would be to involve the account managers of the association, one for each region, all with a position of trust, in the evaluation of the pilot audits on the side of the auditees. The evaluations of the auditors were done by the audit office. These evaluations were relatively straightforward; looking into each step of the process and with maximum space to make added remarks on the effectiveness and other possible items. In the background, these outcomes of the evaluations were input for the association matrix as developed in the context of the library case, the notarial case, and work done in the context of the main study of this thesis. Within the matrix, direct and indirect points of possible “added value” were placed by the expert, depending on both the origins of the point (first or second round of pilots, or insights of expert) and the characteristics of the association matrix itself. The direct points (1.1–43) were checked against the whole of the auditing process, from preparation to report. The indirect points (2.1–15) were the result of several conceptual exercises, done in dialog with the auditing office, especially on points like the future of taxation, which has a special context, including oversight dimensions.

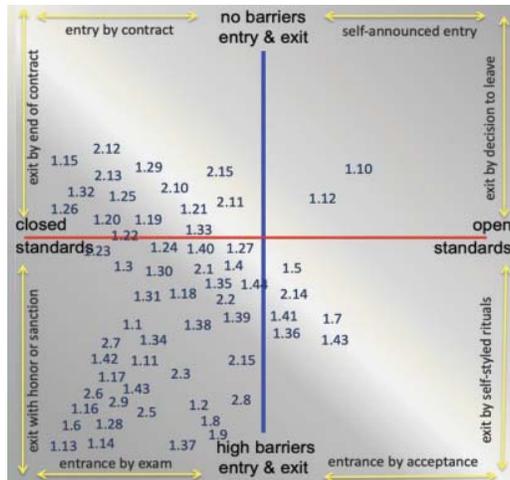


Figure 49 Points of Added Value 1

The cloud of points within the matrix are a broad mix, among them:  
**Direct points (43):**  
 Preparation (4): use of public and member information, presentation by the real estate office  
 Introduction (11): first impression of the office, ideas on the future of the office, craft and association, use of honor code, validation of registrations, possible earlier sanctions  
 File research (16): content and effectiveness files, effective digitization, identification and privacy, marketing, workload, archiving

- Conclusions and final conversation (4): method of bringing conclusions, reaching deeper layers and dilemmas, consequences for office
- Reports and follow-up (6): reporting skills, excellent offices, calibration, conditions
- Indirect points (15): Support for role policy function, disciplines, service provision; Role toward taxations, internal and external oversight, educators, suppliers, governments, pride in membership

By far the majority of these points are evaluated in a positive sense, in so far as this can be established. Whether something is seen as having added value depends, however, and cannot always be valued in a rational, objective way. Much depends on the way it contributes to a sense of trust. For this, it is important that an audit or association can influence a specific point. When something can be changed by a member, that member may feel inclined to be more assured of a point's intrinsic value. For this, the positioning of the point in the association matrix is important.

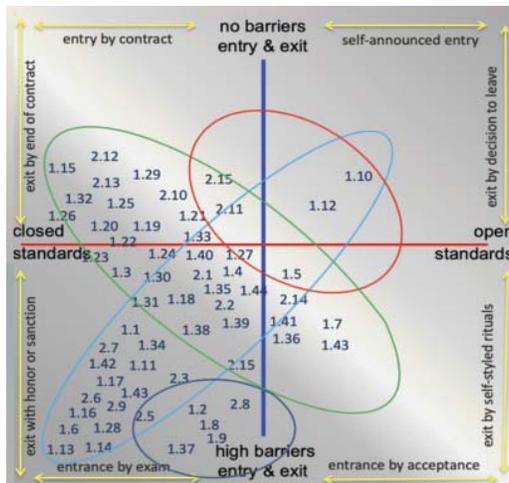


Figure 50 Points of Added Value 2, Clustered

The cloud of points of added value can be categorized within the association matrix, after which four clusters appear:

- Green cluster:** market points—influence determined by contracts and legal obligations, not all directly influenced by the association, especially when in the upper-left quadrant.
- Purple cluster:** Entry-and-exit points—points impacted by the way entry and exit to the NVM is regulated. Definitely to be influenced by the association.
- Blue cluster:** role points—points impacted by internal regulations of the association or maintained on behalf of public bodies. Up to a point to be influenced by the association.

**Red cluster:** transition points—points dealing with the transition from traditional offices to a more digital way of transferring houses and other objects. Up to a point, the association can condition and influence how this goes, and what can be accepted.

In this way, it becomes apparent that a great many points—most of all the “market points”—are in themselves hard to be influenced by the association or members. Especially these market points, which are in the upper left hand of the matrix, are not governed by association rules but by contracts as governed by (private) law. However, the pilots show that it is precisely the market points that produce most of the deficiencies during the audits. The worries about the extra bureaucracy (or too much control) that the audits may bring with them, have much to do with exactly those points. It could well be argued—an argument made in the first report—that if there are many deficiencies with these points, there is also much room for progress, something that would count in favor of the association or can be used in the lobby. This argument has been little heard in the later debates. The percentage of role points (blue cluster) that is hard to influence by the association is considerable too. Here, the indirect points carry much weight. For instance, there is much to do about new registration demands connected to the taxation function. This is done by registration and oversight bodies in a way that generates many complaints by auditees. As these complaints become part of the policy and lobby of the association, they increase their added value. If the association fails at this, the reverse is, of course, also true. The important point here is that the association has a significant role to play.

When it comes to the entry-and-exit points, this is all the more true. As such, these did not prove to be very controversial during the pilot audits, but it did lead to a debate about the relationship between the audit and permanent education. In the end, this resulted in a proposal to let the audit come in place of a number of permanent education points, as part of the association’s register.

The transition points have not led to much debate—yet. This is partly because all internet offices have not yet been audited, but also because the association itself is very active, if not leading in internet activities, and debates already take place at other times and in other forums.

## **Bridging the Distance Between Trust and Ratio**

These and other findings were shared in the second audit report, based at that time on eighty-two pilot audits. The audits would continue; in the end, there were almost 120 audits. Anyone who wanted the experience basically got a chance. The report was finished in time for the general assembly in June, but in the end, it was decided not to let the report go to the floor, but to debate it at the general assembly in September. Later, it would be clear that the final decision was to be expected in December.

Making the proper assessment of how long a decision-making process should take, is part of the high art of association politics. Should it surge, or should it emerge? The expert was afraid that momentum would get lost, but the other story was that the present speed in the process was already faster than earlier and similar processes.

In the back of our minds was the realization that two earlier attempts by the board to get a form of self-assessment or audits, had failed. But this time would be different.

The findings of the second report were communicated widely throughout the profession, including a modern digital magazine. The report was well-received and thoroughly read by those who were involved in the audits. Within the board and staff, the support for the audit was and would remain broad, perhaps helped by the fact that the audit office had realized many successful audits, all within the deadline. That was good, but not enough, of course, to guarantee enthusiasm within the sector. No matter what, it was clear that only a small minority of the members would read the thick report. So, much effort was spent in communicating its summary. The way it was communicated was also balanced: the bad with the good. Much was done to prevent the complaint that it was too one-sided and too much of a “good-news show.” In the meantime, the signals coming from the different regions were mostly negative about the audit. 100 pilots were not all that many compared with over 3000 real-estate offices, most of them very busy indeed.

When peer review was finally on the agenda in the General Assembly of September, it was like the report did not exist. The remarks were about audits the assembly members—41, from different groups and regions within the association, officially without burden or consultation—had gone through or heard about. Individual experiences, without references to the report. The negative stood out and those who were not totally negative, asked questions that could cripple the proposal just as easily: why not use outside experts instead of peers? Why not make it voluntary instead of obligatory? Etc.

Afterward, reflecting on it from different angles, it was clear that much of what was discussed had to do with other issues; with other points on the agenda and, in general, the relationship between members and board. In itself, nothing abnormal for an association, but it does show the political nature of the decision making in an association where the ratio of a report—again, made according to the exact specifications of the members—could not play a part in the trust issues between the members and between the members and the board. This was strengthened by another factor: the meeting was held in where normally the city council came together, and the meetings had at moments the same feel as those of a fractious council meeting in which mostly the opposition raised their voices. Location matters when organizing a meeting.

By the end of the debate, the mood of the members did turn. This was because of a passionate plea by representatives of the board to see the peer review in the context of the quality efforts in the context of the program 2020. The members had said yes to the program, aware that something needed to be done to improve quality. The status quo was not good enough and there was no alternative plan on the table. This quieted the debate. The members agreed that the pilots should continue. There was also the recognition by the board that more had to be done in terms of communication.

Looking back at the meeting, it was obvious that there was indeed still a lot to do in terms of communication. It was decided that there would be several two-hour “roadshows,” spread out over the regions in the Netherlands. All members interested in the peer reviews were welcome. There was to be no other subject on the agenda. There was a neutral chairman for the meeting, so all the voices would be heard. In a video, the main topics of the audits were shown. Then, first, the national chairman would talk for fifteen minutes about the reasons why the peer review was necessary from the 2020 view of the association and, second, the expert would talk for fifteen minutes on the reasons behind the choices made in the setup of the audits. After that, ninety minutes of questions and answers. All was recorded on video and made available to the members after the four meetings. Not all meetings were well attended, but enough members came to have real debates. Many would go away with the same opinion they’d had when coming in, but enough were interested enough to hear more. The fact that there were also auditors and auditees from the pilots’ present was important. Their arguments carried weight. But it could be said just as well that the chairman grew in his role in presenting the broader reasoning behind the peer review.

The meetings must have helped to change the minds. Toward the final general assembly in December 2017, the rumor was that the members were coming around to supporting the peer review. Even so, nobody took the result for granted. A general assembly of the association can easily last a whole day. In this case, the peer review was tabled to be discussed around twelve o’clock in the morning. Instead, it would be at the end of the day. After a long and hard debate, in many ways repeating the kind of debates that were held during the roadshows, the proposal would be supported by a clear majority and without fundamental changes. Peer review was accepted.

After the decision in December 2017 (and the closing of this case study), the decision was an established fact. Even though misgivings were still there (especially among the older brokers), the decision was no longer in doubt. Not even when a new board crisis happened late spring 2018. With the decision on peer review taken, the chairperson of NVM Housing, by far the largest section of the NVM, decided not to seek another term.

A new chairman sought a conflict with the chairman and director of the NVM, in fact attempting a coup. In the end this even made the national news and led to the ending of the term of the chairman and the resignation director – and in the end also the disappearance of the chairman of Housing.

The brave decision to confront the members on the issue of peer review was not enough to show the members that the chairman (for the first time an outside chairman) was the right person to lead the NVM through necessary changes.

## 25. Four Ways to Work on Quality: Comparing the Case Studies

In chapter 18 four mindsets were shown through which an association can work on “quality” and define it as such. Evidence of the “objective”, “system”, “social en “divergent” mindset can be found in all three cases. In terms of the “objective” and “system” mindset this is to be expected. Accreditation and certification systems can be found in almost every trade or professional association and many social associations. Experiences with systems like that of INK/EFQM and Baldrige can be found on a wide scale too. But what can be found in terms of a “social” (“or inspirational”) mindset or of a divergent one (either “emergent” or “surgent”) are less obvious, if only for the fact they are recent additions to the debate on quality. Here are the summaries.

Case	Mindset	Evidence
Main case 1: Public Libraries	objective mindset	Looking at the evidence, the members of the association of public libraries (VOB) had and have a strong preference for an objective mindset when it comes to quality approaches. One aspect of this was evident at the start of the redesign of the audit system: the presence of many checklike or ISO-inspired indicators and a preference for independent experts as auditors. The second partner in the project, the Association of Dutch Municipalities, very much wanted a system ready for benchmarking. The apparent drawbacks of the present system - too much bureaucracy, too much attention paid to what was not relevant enough - pointed to a different approach. When it really mattered, another aspect came up that could also be seen as evident of an objective mindset, but given in by political considerations: the wish to, for instance, couple the financing of a library to a (minimum) contribution per inhabitant. Because the role of the experts was not reduced in the new round of the audit system, this evidence of a more objective mindset may have helped to get more support, but might have undercut the elements from a social mindset.
	system mindset	Many libraries have done self-assessments through the INK-method, evidence of a systematic mindset. The old standard itself was also aimed at following the Deming P-D-C-A circle. However, its application was limited. When the proposal for a new system of peer review came into trouble, extra support was gained by writing the new standard as more an application of the P-D-C-A standard. A true systematic mindset is one that looks in a more integral and output way at the performance of a library, then clear steps have been made.
	social mindset	Though all members of the same association and working in the same sector, this does not mean that the members of the VOB are often in accord or follow the same strategy. The principle of non-intervention is strong, with the board of the association common advocate or scapegoat. The new system of peer review is partly meant to change that and also to talk about the continuity of the library and other existential problems at the peer level. As such it is an approach very much born out of the social mindset. It is an approach that has been accepted, but also one that has met a lot of resistance.
	divergent mindset	What was interpreted as a rather straightforward assignment to reduce the complexity of the audit system and make it more effective, almost became a total failure. A hidden agenda connected to the financing of the system of the public libraries, made many members reject the draft of the new approach. The demand was to have standards that were more closed. Parties outside the association did not want this. In order to break the impasse, the work continued on new approaches were developed, while keeping the essence the same. The board showed itself more committed to the new approach and the plan survived and new audit system got accepted against the original resistance.
	conclusion	Politically inspired resistance was met by a surgent approach. Without the divergent mindset, with its sharp eye for power aspects, the new audit approach would not have been accepted. All mindsets were present in the association, but could not make a breakthrough argument until the divergent mindset was applied and forces were combined.

Table 12. Case Public Libraries by Quality Mindset

Main case 2: Notaries	objective mindset	A few notary offices had experimented with ISO:9001-like standards to raise quality in an objective way. For most notaries, objectivity is interpreted as a correct application of the law. In the context of the audit checklists were used, but as something on the background. There is little use of data yet.
	system mindset	The system is the system of the law. Auditors test in principle all elements of the law regulating the profession. The P-D-C-A and the I-M-W-R cycle were trained by the auditors and is in the back of their minds when doing an audit. Within the present approach the audit system if more consistently monitored and adapted then the oversight bodies seems to do.
	social mindset	The essence of the notarial profession may be social and not legal. The concept of 'Belehrung' touches upon this point. The coming of intercollegial audits was a recognition of the social mindset, but it took several tries and a lot of outside pressure before it was accepted.
	divergent mindset	It took time to discover the logic of intercollegial audit, including looking at different methods in different countries. At some time, the effort to come to peer review had to be tried, but this failed twice. A semi-objective system for looking at wrong payments (WID-MOT) was used to start peer review, partly made possible because the external oversight body did not, at that time, have the position to look into files, as they were confidential. From this start emerged the audit system. During this process and after, there was lots of divergence between the members on the course of the association, but the system of peer review slowly but surely rose above the resistance among members.
	conclusion	This was not a fast surge, perhaps because there was never a a board that fully threw its weight behind the system of peer review. But under pressure of the outside oversight body, and by moving in a way that was both professional and done with perseverance, peer review got enough credit.

Table 13. Case Notaries by Quality Mindset

Main case 3: Real estate agents	objective mindset	The association for real estate agents is rare in the data it collects and shares. Not only all relevant real estate data are made available for consumer and agent alike, the agents that are member can see all of each others transaction in the database: almost complete transparency. The association publishes many detailed monitors on the housing market, available for many, not just members. Private customers can give feedback at the collective website (Funda), expressed in both rating and comments. At the same time not too many agents use these data for their businesses and they have for a long time not been connected to clear common quality strategy. The data are the base for individual quality efforts, not common efforts.
	system mindset	The association has regularly started projects to improve the standing of the association and its members, regularly with a quality dimension. However, in het recent history two efforts to raise quality in a systematic way did not come further than failed attempts at self-evaluation. Individual offices do (sometimes ISO or ITIL oriented) efforts at quality management, but they are the exception.
	social mindset	Brokers are proud of their profession and see it as a profession. Combined with often very liberal attitudes towards entrepreneurship, many of them do not react kindly to infringements on their autonomy, real or perceived. Within board and staff of the association there was a fundamental debate on what should be the focus of the peer review: coaching or disciplining? Making clear that it was neither, was key to get a majority for the approach of peer review.
	divergent mindset	The support for peer review emerged slowly. Having many pilots and multiple evaluations helped to gain confidence in the added value of the system. But resistance was often fierce. At first the support of the board for the approach was there, but not very clear, as they were preoccupied with many other issues and crisis. It was basically to the bureau to get support. Objective evidence on the

Table 14. Case Real Estate Agents by Quality Mindset

So, in each case, it can be established that major attempts have been made to raise quality through referential efforts (objective and system mindset). And though the professional mindset plays its role, including being a stimulant for peer review, neither of these classic approaches can convince the members enough. In fact, they may be used to delay consensus on a new course for the association, or data is used without a common strategy behind it to improve the standing of the association.

Tenaciousness, in combination with a forceful strategy, including both board and staff, are necessary to get the surge needed to swing the membership from against to positive. Accepting that this is about daring to fight for the vision of the board, including the internal political fights that then have to be fought, is part of the game. Groupthink needs to be challenged; non-intervention behavior has to be challenged. In other words, the usual pathologies of an association are no longer accepted. And then a breakthrough is possible. A consensus on quality emerges.



# **PART IV**

## **TRUSTING ASSOCIATIONS**

## 26. Getting to “Yes”: A Surgent Approach

In the proceeding chapters, three case studies were summarized and discussed one by one. In order to do so three themes were of vital importance: trust, association and quality.

We start these last chapters by trying to learn from all three case studies on the issue of quality, or better perhaps: ‘the politics of quality’. This is done by trying to assess what actually happened, based on the more general findings of this study. All three reported an assent by the members, as represented by their General Assembly, to the start of a system of inter-collegial audit or ‘peer review’. It is the assumption of this study that with this we come as close to an expression of ‘trust’ within the association, as can be expected, given the essentially subjective nature of the concept. This again may be seen as a necessary step toward trust outside the association. The most telling question of this study – *“Do a majority of the members say ‘yes’ to a proposal by the board of the association to have a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?”* - was each time clearly answered with more “yes” than “no”. The decision making in a general assembly was a central and telling event (Abbott, 2016) in two of the tree cases, with a less clear event in a third case.

In all case studies – though one more than the other – the members went from positive to critical and back to positive again when confronted with a specific measure to increase trust: a quality intervention requiring members to review each other. The move back to positive came in the shape of a sudden surge in support for the board in at least two of the cases. After sometimes years of small steps and a board crisis or other evidence of strong criticism by the members, within a relatively short time – 1 to 3 months – the mood would swing enough to let the members assent to a measure many seemed to refute. As this surge is one of the most unexpected outcomes of this study and a possible way forward for associations in a future crisis, it is worth diving deeper into the reasons for this surge in this final part of the study and go from there to the more general conclusions. One case seems to be not in line with this assumption that a surge is necessary but opens the eyes to other ways of accepting a quality initiative by an association. Or does it falsify the premise of the need for a surge? This question will be answered further on in this final part of the study.

It is repeated here, that three case studies in themselves cannot never be fully representative of all associations or even the associations this researcher is and has worked for, though given both the wide definition of (trade) associations and the self-similarity you can find in their nature, there is no reason to assume results are different in other associations, apart from context. In combination with everything else this study has brought up; the cases can serve as a base for further exploring public and internal issues of trust in both individual associations and the multidimensional collective of associations.

## When Is It a Surge?

The idea of a sudden support for a decision to have peer review within the association – a controversial idea at the best of times – is not one of those things the researcher expected to find or wondered about in advance. Looking back, it seemed that in each case an event happened at a pivotal moment in each case: a sudden support for a decision that until shortly before the general assembly could be considered (very) controversial. It must be said that in each association, and certainly in times of crisis and transformation, at each general assembly there are moments of tension: will the members adopt or reject a certain proposal that means change for the members? Proposals for change are in that sense “stressful but normal”. In all three cases it was about a proposal to increase collective quality by testing the individual quality as delivered by the members themselves instead of by outside experts: the introduction of so-called “peer review”. What piqued the interest of the researcher was the way in which the proposal to introduce peer review went from opposition to adaptation. Both in terms of speed and in terms of the dynamic of decision making, something seemed to have happened that on reflection was not to be expected, and contained at least these elements:

1. A relatively fast change (often a matter of weeks, not more than three months (Zuydam, 2018)) from a general position of the members of the General Assembly of an association from opposition to support for a decision by that assembly to have peer review as a quality initiative.
2. Without actually changing the general position of the members with regard to that initiative, a position held for already a longer time.
3. Involving a direct appeal by the leadership of the association to the individual members, showing “enacted credibility” (Zuydam, 2018).
4. Without changing the general position of the members (of the general assembly) toward the board.

This observation was made for the first time in the case of the real estate association. Thinking back, this also seemed to have happened in the other two cases and seems significant. But before questions can be asked and debated about the possible significance of a surge, there is another question to be answered first: did it really happen? These are the descriptions, case by case and based on the observations and literature as described in attachments A1, 2 and 3, and starting out with the one in which the first observation of a surge was done, that of the real estate agencies.

## Real Estate Agents Association: A Surge Against All Odds

In the case of the association of real estate agents, the NVM, the leadership of the association formulated a vision on improving quality throughout the association. Part of this was the introduction of peer review. This happened after a history of trying other quality interventions, failing at least twice in getting them accepted. In the end peer review was introduced, as part of an 'NVM 2020' vision program. Though it met all internal criteria for a quality initiative, it none the less was met with distrust by the members. To deal with that mistrust, a pilot was developed with at first just one small group of auditors and 37 pilot audits. An outright positive evaluation of the pilot went to the General Assembly meeting but was met with distrust and critical questions. It must be said that this was also due to the setting: a deeper clash between the board and the assembly members in a meeting in December 2016 that would take up a whole day and leave everybody critical and dissatisfied. At the last moment the peer review project was saved (the only point on the long agenda to do so that day), but a better answer had to be given to the question by a member: "What is the added value of this peer review to the members?" With this, the decision could be made to extend the pilot for another period, until the Assembly meeting late Spring the next year. In the end more than a hundred extra audits were held in the pilot with a strongly validated approach to the question of added value (it is at the heart of the case study A3 and its summary in part III of this study). However, when, after another delay because of its sensitive nature and ongoing tensions within the association, the report and peer review in general were to be discussed (and not decided upon!) in an extra general assembly of September 2017, the mood was negative and adverse to peer review. The report and its findings played only a marginal role in the debate. Nobody seriously debated its outcomes, but neither were the outcomes used. The members of the assembly used mostly incidental examples of the effect of the audit held during the pilot period, often their own experience or as brought in by members of their region. There were many expressions of doubts and few of support. There was some evidence of a game being played by some important members, but on the whole, it seemed mostly a reaction on the emotional level. Late in the meeting, an intervention was made by a senior member from the staff, reminding the members of the commitment the members had made toward the goals of the vision 2020. For the moment that ended the line of negative comments enough for the chairman to bring the debate to a close. The chairman of the association (appointed from outside the brokers community) took a procedural role during that meeting (the expert was not allowed to speak) and proposed that the assembly was to decide on the issue of peer review at the next general assembly in December. After this assembly there was a clear sense that more needed to be done to convince the members. A defeat for the board seemed likely. Although already much had been done in terms of communication to the members, it was obviously not enough.

Shortly after the general assembly a meeting was held in which it was decided that the chairman himself would go to the members in four regional meetings. Supported by the expert and led by a neutral chairman, all four meetings were to be a frank exchange between the members and the leadership of the association.

all in all about 300 of the 4000 members were to participate in these meetings. The meetings were summarized in a video for all members to see, but it is unlikely more than 20% of the members were truly informed by them. During the members the members expressed opinions that both were (very much) in favor and (very much) against peer review. At several times the debate got caught up in the general dissatisfaction with the way the NVM functioned in the eyes of the members, but on the whole, it was very much internally driven, with the focus on the audits of the peer review itself. This time, the chairman fully committed to a defense of the peer review. At times he showed he learned from the specific, but otherwise he fully confronted all arguments against peer review, placing in the context of regaining trust in the association.

In December 2017 the general assembly was held, and peer review was finally led to a vote. There were some tense moments and some members did not relent in their criticism, but in the end, it was a far less emotional debate than before. With a 70% majority the decision to start with peer review was adopted. 4000+ real estate offices will be audited by approximately 100 trained colleagues in the next three years.

A logical outcome after the effort of the four meetings or still a surprising one? It is worth noting that the meetings were not attended by more than 10% of the members, nor was there great consensus on the need for peer review at the meetings themselves. Nevertheless, the fire seemed to have gone out of the opposition to peer review. Opinion must have turned rapidly, and in what can be called a surge, the leadership was supported, also bringing a much-needed personal victory for the chairman.

It is worth noting that, the victory in the case of the adaptation of peer review in this case did not mean a more general turnaround for the leadership of the association. The structure of the NVM is made up of three groupings concerning the transactions of private houses, of businesses and of agriculture related business. Each one is structured as an association within the larger association (confirming Abbott's idea of self-similarity (Abbott, 2016)), though they differ very much in size. By far the largest is the housing group, composed mainly by small to individual real estate offices and a few larger ones). The chairman of the housing group was during her tenure also responsible within the board for the theme 'quality' and showed herself much in favor of the peer review approach. The meeting in which this approach was approved was also her last within the terms she was given. Hardly had she left, or her successor initiated a coup against the chairman and director of the NVM at the next general assembly, and as a result both had to leave. At the moment of writing it is unclear where the NVM is heading, but so far, the peer review is not subject of debate. A coming evaluation will no doubt be important.

Considering the evaluation of the pilot and audit and subsequent audits, peer review seems to keep its promise of added value for its members. Pride in the membership of the NVM is there. In order to truly change the trust all stakeholders have in the NVM and their board, it can safely be assumed that more needs to be done.

## Public Library Association: A Necessary Surge

The situation in the public library sector starts out differently from that of the association of real estate agents. As explained in A1 and in the summary of Part I, sector and association arrangements overlap each other, and whereas the real estate agent's association is strongly market driven, here it is the public sector that greatly influences its development, not least through the association of local governments (VNG). The association of public libraries (VOB) itself is dominated by (the association of) directors of the public libraries and has multiple working groups. Economic crisis resulted in large cutbacks in funds and the coming of the e-Book resulted in a strategic rearrangement of the whole sector and the coming of a wholly new law on public libraries.

For some time, the VOB has been working on a sizable quality effort, based on the idea of an integral quality approach (INK), but more and more evolved into a checklist that did not really touch on existential issues. No library ever lost money or status by failing an audit through the model. The responsibility for this 'certification' of the libraries, is an independent body, with a board composed of representatives of libraries and local government.

Because of formal reasons – but driven by a few persons with a change ambition - both the sector and the local government association asked for a new setup that was to be less bureaucratic and more effective. A committee from both VOB and VNG was set up and went to work. They came up with a much-reduced standard and the idea that it would evolve from an expert-led audit to a peer review setup, and more changes. In general, the first reaction was positive. Both VOB and VNG seemed happy with it and surveys held under the members and employees of the public libraries were also supportive. Yet, when a general assembly was held and the committee presented its recommendations, key members, directors of large public libraries, rose up in unity against it. They used different arguments, with opposition to peer review as one of them. Rebuffed, and with the board not able to respond effectively, the committee took back its assignment. A deep crisis beckoned, also opening up the divide between libraries and local government representatives within the committee. Yet, in the analysis, it was thought that the rebuttal by the members had in essence not really much to do with the new standard itself, but with the fact that in deregulating the standards would also cause the libraries to lose negotiation cloud with local government (number of cents per inhabitant).

As the upcoming new law was also expected to hold no specific standard for the financing of the libraries, the quality standard became the focus of contention – though not the only one; opposition to peer review was in part very real.

Seeing no alternative, the committee got its assignment back. In several rounds of consultation, the standard was revised though stayed essentially the same. Sensing that there would be another confrontation with members and a possible defeat in the next general assembly, the decision was made by the committee to do a regional tour where members could voice their opinions. These meetings were well attended, with many critical remarks made by the members. Critical remarks though, which often had more to do with a general dissatisfaction with the situation in the sector than with the quality intervention itself. Again, politics played a big part in this.

The meetings were generally well attended, with a last meeting overflowing with attendees. The committee and its expert did most of the work, but at key moments, the director of the library association let its voice be heard. The representative of the local government association kept a low profile but went through some trouble with his own members.

When shortly after these meetings the general assembly was held, the decision to go ahead with the quality intervention, including peer review, did not even merit a vote by the members. It was done.

But maybe a more explicit decision would still have been better. In the period leading up to the regional meetings there was a long period of negotiations on the details of the text of the standard. Slowly the text expanded, also influenced by the input of experts that had audited the libraries in the previous periods. Some of the original goals of reducing bureaucracy and making it less expert driven also got lost in the process. At the end of the formal period of four years, with none of the original people involved still active, the ‘certification scheme’ was abandoned and replaced by an outsourced system of certification. With the decrease of the budget cuts and the assumption that e-books are less a threat than originally sought, the public library sector and its association comes into calmer water, though not before having another internal crisis in which both chairman and director had to depart prematurely. It can also be clear that through the new law, audits and other measures the libraries have become less dependent on lending books as their base for survival. How this translates in more trust by the public remains unclear, but this trust was relatively high to begin with, certainly compared with the other two cases. Perhaps the greatest risk here lies in the fact that the sector knows no oversight body like proved decisive in the case of the notariat, nor seems the association of local governments, the VNG, to have the position to demand more of the sector. Based on the case study, the sector could need it when it comes to collective action.

## Notariat: An Emergent Approach

It is within the notariat that the quality process is most complicated, even though it seems there was a surge within the notariat right at the beginning of the process. When the combined impact of too many incidents and more freedom in the market for price-setting became clear to the members of the Royal Notarial Professional association (KNB) in the late nineteen nineties, the members seemed to realize their predicament and – in a non-formal situation – even voted in favor of the coming of an outside oversight body during a general assembly. But in hindsight this seems more a sign of panic or surrender than of a new consensus on which kind of quality to embrace. The resistance against interference with the notarial business on quality grounds remained substantial, even though an outside committee recommended quality initiatives next to the introduction of an oversight body. Several quality interventions were tried by members, mostly based on an ISO standard, but no approach became sector wide. Used to disciplinary boards and other repressive measures, there was little regard for preventive measures or interest for another course. Even so, and partly taken from the example of the Dutch Bar Association (NOvA), a start was made with pilots with audits based on peer review. Again this was met with opposition, partly based on framing the audits as a breach of the secrecy to which the notaries are obliged (later dismissed in court). In a tense general assembly, a green light for a continuation of the audits was refused. About two years later another attempt was made to introduce audits based on peer review. This was helped by the introduction of a new law to fight the money laundering and financing of terrorism (Wwft) and the role of a new oversight body to uphold this law. As with the Bar Association the KNB was asked to do part of the control activities by auditors who were also notaries. There was no denying this. As the audits became accepted, the goal of the audit expanded from control to coaching and turned into the kind of audit that was originally intended. This was supported by both the board and the BFT, as it became clear in those years of financial crisis, that the audits were one of the few means through which the KNB could actually help the notarial offices and keep an eye out for weak offices. It was the board itself that came into trouble as divisions about the course of the KNB resulted in a ‘coup’ against the sitting board. Several ‘committees’ of members had formulated a new course for the association, with at least two of them with the term ‘quality’ in its title (and meaning very different things in their use of the term). One of those committees basically took over as the new board. To the new board members, the peer review seemed an asset. Partly perhaps because they were part of a younger generation of notaries (in the recruitment and acceptance of audits, the younger generation in all cases seem more receptive to the idea of peer review) and partly because they understood the value of inter-collegial review in regard to oversight issues with both the oversight body, the ministry and parliament. In other words, peer review became one of the least controversial elements of the policy of the new board.

Over time it emerged as the logical quality intervention for the profession. But not without cause. It is the coming of the oversight body that provoked a response from the professional association. This again is consistent with the history (a double cycle of two periods of 40+ years) in which it is always an outside actor that brings change to the notariat. Which again can be explained from the fact that the notaries themselves never seem to be able to choose between the public and private part of their identity. In a way this *emergent* character of the quality initiative was a disadvantage when the end of the second rounds of audits came in sights. In the eyes of the expert it is important to energize an audit system from time to time and change it enough to prevent routinization or window dressing. The recommendation was done to shift from improvements in the process of the audits to improvements in the content of the standards. The need to do so was not felt. In that sense, too little tension can be as worrying as too much. Even so, the peer review system is constantly reviewed (and results at meta level shared with the oversight body) and in general seems a good base for a risk-based assessment of the quality as delivered by the association and its members. Within the notariat there were no more serious changes of leadership in the board.

### First Assessment: Delivering Quality

When these three storylines and outcomes get compared and analyzed, a number of observations can be made, with the focus on the ‘event’ of the final vote on peer review. Starting close to the operational question of *“Do a majority of the members say ‘yes’ to a proposal by the board of the association to have a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?”*, these conclusions can be drawn:

- in all three cases it got to a “yes”
- in all three cases this only happened after a number of serious crisis’s both outside and within the association, leading in all cases to at least one board crisis before the crisis was made
- in all three case there was an initial and strong resistance against the coming of peer review, always mixed up with more general concerns about the role of the association and its leadership.
- the general assembly proved to be the defining arena for the development and decision making within the association, in that sense proving the horizontal and fundamentally democratic nature of association
- in two cases the leadership of the association in the end felt compelled to go to the members through a number of regional meetings. It is likely this helped directly in turning the vote toward the proponents of peer review

- It must be noted that the meetings themselves were not unequivocal in support. As the number of people attending these meetings was limited, there must be more reasons for the surge in support
- in one case there was resistance against peer review and the leadership did not manage to come to a consensus. However, here there was outside pressure, specifically coming from the arrival of an outside oversight body and this helped both to start serious peer review and involve the members. When a leadership crisis came, peer review was already emerging as a fruitful intervention.

In summary, a quality initiative like peer review makes a chance to break through the resistance of the members of an association, even though it seems like a majority of those members is against the initiative. It does take something extra. Announcing an initiative and waiting for it to happen, will not work. In all cases the board did not survive the transition period or the period it took to get to “yes”.

Cause and effect are hard to distinguish because of all the context factors, about which underneath more, but the point here is that there are at least two promising routes toward consensus. Both seem to require more an alert and active preparedness than a great deal of planning. The first route is by going directly and in person to the members when the decision hangs in the balance. Both the library and the real estate agent’s association go this route. The second is (to organize) a party from outside to force a choice upon the association and to deal smartly with the consequences. The latter is the quieter route but requires from the board a rather reactive attitude. In the case of the notariat it is hard to stay reactive when many members at the same time seem to ask a very active attitude to solve the misery of the members.

It is a sobering thought that in all three cases, especially in those with a surge, the board in the end did not manage to benefit from the goodwill their victory provided. But to this observation must be added two other insights. The first is that in terms of “the politics of quality” the board did the right thing, but only very late into the game, depending for a long time on traditional decision-making methods for an association. The other is the insight that no quality initiative can stand on its own or is in itself enough to change perceptions of trust. In fact, selecting and improving or implementing several quality initiatives at the same time might be the secret to success. Peer review is attractive because it involves the members themselves but is also more difficult for precisely that reason. In all cases (see the cooperative analysis in both chapter 18 and 22) a divergent approach wins from the “objective” or “system” mindset and that of the “social” mindset in situations of maximum distrust.

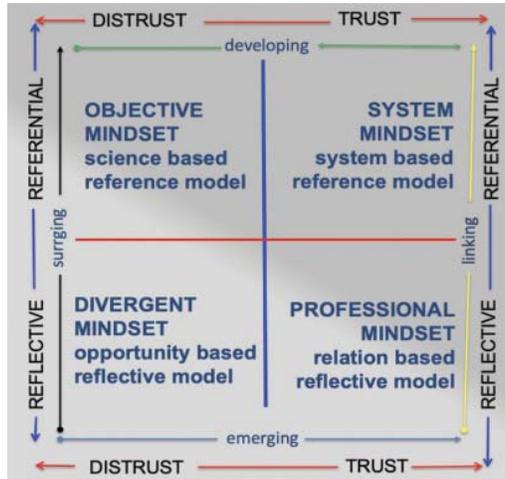


Figure 51 Different Mindsets and Different Positions

Apart from questions on the overall representativeness of the three cases for the very broad world of associations, the fact that it got to a “yes” on the question can be considered significant as a sign of trust in associations, though it still takes a number of conceptual jumps to get from a majority vote in a general assembly to a feeling of trust in society as a whole. In fact, that is too much bear for the operational question of this study, significant though it remains. From the descriptions of the cases it is clear that multiple factors play a role in the actual dynamics of each case and even the fact that a surge can occur. To name some of the most important context factors outside that of the quality intervention themselves:

- the nature and progress of the outside crisis and transformation
- the impact of “incidents” to the (self-) image of the association
- the history and nature of the association: size, goal, membership, etc.
- the nature and force of parties outside the association to determine the course of the association
- the nature of the leadership of the association

In the previous chapter much has been said about the nature of the quality initiative and the surge it took to get a breakthrough when it comes to accepting the initiative when that initiative is met by distrust. Looking at the situation in the association through the mindset of the “politics of quality” is then more helpful than the more traditional mindsets. But even so the true reason for the acceptance of the initiative and the reason for the surge cannot properly be assessed without taking into account much more of the specific context in which it all plays out: that of an association. To get to the heart of these questions, more of the point above are discussed. First of all, the question is in how much of a crisis the associations concerned have been and what role this crisis played.

## 27. Dealing with Crisis and Transformation

It all starts with the realization that the members of the associations in the three case studies—fully described in attachments A1-3 and summarized in the previous chapters—have been exposed to a combined threat, arising from the economic crisis and the digitization of work. These are threats in which both revenue and status loss became likely, eroding confidence and more, making public trust in each association and its members less likely. Closures of libraries and offices happened in all three cases, media incidents rocked the boat, especially, in the case of the notariat. In audits held after the end of the crisis (Ch. 20), the interviewed members of their associations would all have their own stories of “before” and “after” the crisis (Noordhoek D. , 2017, p. 611). There are many issues of perception and attribution here. For instance:

- Both the library sector and the notariat came at some point with estimates of 40% downturn for the sector. The library sector because of the cutbacks and the threat of e-books, the notariat and the brokers because of the crash in the real estate market and web-based initiatives that seemed to turn the market into a do-it-yourself place. In conceptual terms: in all cases, an effect became visible of the decreasing costs of information on the one hand and a possible disappearance of the middle man on the other hand. However, although the crisis hit deep, soon after the crisis, especially for those in the real estate business, most members did not feel the urge to change their business model (Noordhoek D. , 2017, p. 609).
- Who can you blame for something like an economic crisis or a digital revolution? Perhaps nobody, but in life, there are often signs of blame-mechanisms working or of attribution bias. Associations have a role in this (see Chapter 7 on pathologies and remedies). As a result, it must, for instance, be tempting or a member to blame the association for either not foreseeing the crisis or responding inadequately to it. However, the nature of the (classic) association is such that it is hard to influence that which is outside its direct control or its own closed standards. Take, for instance, what is shown in the association matrix as was made for the NVM. The matrix (Figure 21.2b) shows many points that are relevant from a quality of added value perspective to a member.

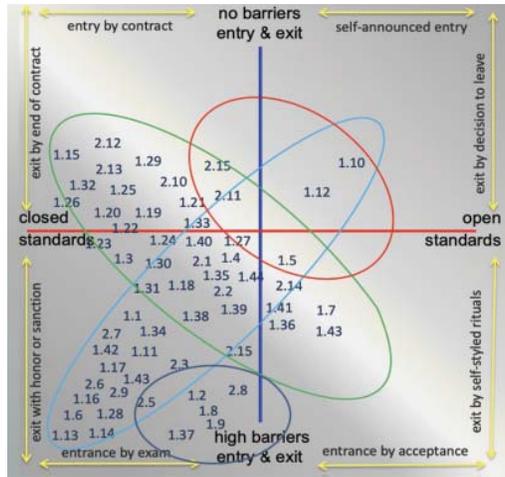


Figure 52 Points of Added Value, Clustered

Only those within the lower-left quadrant can be directly influenced by the association itself, though many will be probably be resistant to change and require, for instance, the assent of the general assembly. The points in all other quadrants are, by definition, outside the association’s exclusive control and are even harder to control. However, audit results show that it is especially in the upper-left quadrant (contract or outside regulation based) where most of the members’ dissatisfaction of the members with the association lies; the fact, especially, that associations have taken on the (delegated) role of implementers of (semi-) government regulation can hurt when an economy turns and risks in society increase. In other words, if the expectation of a member is that the association can control or influence many factors, he or she will be disappointed when the association seems to make matters worse. Much then will depend on the impact of the specific events or measures, but it also depends on how strong the members feel to do something about it. Some associations are dominated by members that are big or powerful enough to handle their own agenda, but in the three cases studies, the tone is set by the small members and they seem to be increasing in number and are most dependent on the association for their “trust position.”

The crisis of 2008-2015 caused both losses of revenue and of status for the members. The revenue loss in all three case studies was probably felt more deeply than in other associations because of extra vulnerabilities. The vulnerability to budget cuts by local government for the public libraries was relatively highest. The vulnerability of the notaries and brokers was high due to the fact that the real estate sector was hit at least as hard as the financial sector. For instance, in both the library sector and the notariat, there was a loss expected of up to 40% in revenues or income.

Though in hindsight, the actual loss would turn out to be milder than feared, or losses were recuperated when the economy went eventually upwards again, all members were hit severely enough to create a scare: will it be my turn too to have my budget cut or my office to fold? On top of that came an even more existential threat: will we not all lose our jobs with the coming of the e-book, the digital deed or the internet broker? This fear may have also lessened, as in all three cases this fear either did not materialize in the expected way—there are still books, still deeds, still house buyers needing a broker—but the fear of further digitization has not gone away. Meanwhile, members had to let go of many employees and old privileges. For example, in the public libraries, a third of the libraries (mostly subsidiaries) closed. In the period between 2009 and 2014, the number of notaries fell from 1500 to 1320, the number of employees (candidate notaries) from 2100 to 1600. Not as bad as sometimes feared, but still a big shock. The actual loss within the real estate sector is harder to read, as a member of an association can lose just about everything, and still retain its membership of the association. Yet, a definite and sizable shrinking of the market took place.

The crisis also translated into a loss of status, and this both in an absolute and relative sense. Digitization, and its accompanying effect of the greatly reduced cost of information, did become a force behind deep changes in society. Changes that destroyed the until then exclusive position of the sectors and the information workers in it. Loss of status too in relation to the secure position especially the notaries and the civil servants in the public libraries were used too. The real estate agents had become used to the material aspects of success too, though could never be that sure of their status.

This combined loss of revenue and status may have been a gradual experience for many members of the three case studies. Something not foreseen, but survivable. But it is not enough here to cite the number of closed libraries and offices or quote statistics about the loss of jobs. As is known from studies about fear and crisis, it is the anticipation of loss that may hurt at least as much as the actual loss<sup>78</sup>. And often this anticipation of loss is triggered, symbolized or accentuated by “incidents.” Incidents perhaps of a different nature than in the past, where public libraries were hardly ever the focus of news—remember the jokes about members not bringing back books?—and notaries and real estate agents suffered incidents mostly in the context of local things going wrong and where people could know by name who did what to whom. It seems different now.

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78. In a renowned study into eight independent variables suggested by theories of deviance/conformity, it is found the primary determinants of conformity are the fear of losing respect among those one knows personally, moral commitments, and differential association (Tittle, 1977).

With millions of members and thousands of buildings, the library sector is really not a dull place to work in, but it is true that headlines in the media are hardly ever made. There can be protests, even demonstrations when libraries close, but mostly they only make it to the regional news. The sector seems so quiet that the inspectorate that once was there, was abolished, leaving it to the sector, including its dominant group of directors, to influence policy. In the first case, this culminates in a fierce lobby for a new law on public libraries. The development of the system of peer review became a tool in a political play from the library directors to get an income guarantee, provoking a negative response from local government and so setting the scene for some true “politics of quality.”

The notaries and real estate agents present more complicated cases in terms of threats. Both are involved in real estate transactions. This can be very good for negative headlines in the media, but as professionals, they rarely make headlines. This was not always the case. Before, and certainly in the period from the end of the nineteenth century till the Second World War, there was in the Netherlands a period (*de zaakwaarnemerij*) in which the members of both professions were vying for position and often took over each other's markets. But that is long ago and forgotten. As described in the case study, the professional association of the notaries regained a strong status through both a reconfirmation of its public status by the German occupier in the Second World War, and through a strong effort by the charismatic Professor Pitlo to secure a better academic status, redeeming “the notarial shortage” and, in general, confirming the status of the its association, the KNB.

In the more diverse, more market-driven world of the real estate agents, there came a consolidation among the different circles within the profession, producing a dominant association, the NVM. By the start of the crisis, this association had managed to acquire a dominant position through exclusive ownership of a site (‘Funda’) where all house buyers can get their information. But the market for real estate is in all other respects, an open market and the consequences were felt everywhere. With a reputation never very high (see Ch. 3), it fell even further as whitewash scandals also seemed to involve the brokers. While NVM remained a strong “label”, the image of the association got hit, along with the members themselves.

It should be noted, though, that both in the case of the notaries and that of the real estate agents, the actual number of members that have been sanctioned for serious offenses by a disciplinary board and/or have been expelled, is and has been relatively trivial: less than 1 %. Often, the same names come up again and again. There has been an increase in the number of smaller infractions against regulations. This concerns mostly new regulations to prevent money laundering activities (Wwft regulation) or privacy regulations (GDPR), but this is more evidence of improved governance and serious compliance activities by both oversight bodies and internal audit activities than of actual infringements.

In other words, the idea of more serious incidents can also be considered an overreaction or the stepping into a “frame” by all concerned. Nevertheless, there might be more to it, given the fact that in audits a significant part of the auditees say they know of other infringements, but for different reasons do not report them. And it can also be said, that the perception of incidents has very real effects, also on the attitude of the members. Witness for instance the intensity with which the members followed the news on closures of libraries, the media messages concerning members and perhaps most evident, the vote of the members of the notariat for an external oversight body, the BFT. Real or perceived, logical or overblown, the members want something done about the incidents—and, in that way, possibly lessening their fears of crisis and transformation.

## 28. A Context of Incidents

A debate could be held on the question of “When do organizations or institutions start to work on quality?” No matter how much is written about the need for “continuous improvement”, the expectation here is that trust is most impacted by the discontinuity caused by “incidents”. “Incidents” are defined here as an individual events or occurrences that reflects in a negative way on the presumed perpetrator and those literally and symbolically associated with it, him or her) (definition by author).

Looking at it from the perspective of quality mindsets, and especially the response to the economic crisis of the seventies and the perceived threat of the Japanese industry, it seems that the interest in debating quality (in its many shapes) comes quite late in a crisis, but then picks up, especially when in the period just after the crisis more money becomes available to invest in it. The latter, even though the urgency diminishes. Looking at it from an association perspective, it can be said that the interest in quality, in some shape or form, is always there, as it involves the setting of standards for entry and exit. In other words, quality is a core business for each association. However, the shape it takes and the intensity of the effort, are often determined by outside factors and especially government related factors. These, in turn, are often incident and media driven. Though it is not a given for associations that they are better at dealing with incidents than other institutions, they can be natural “buffers” in that respect. Incidents started as single incidents and became waves of them, increasing in symbolic importance. Written in the middle of the economic crisis, the book that preceded this study (Noordhoek, 2011) provides ample examples of big and small incidents—and the readers of this study will probably be able to provide their own examples. Big incidents in the shape of failing or fraudulent banks or accounting firms captured the international headlines. Smaller but still significant incidents find their way into the news both at the (inter)national and local front. They have their impact on the three cases.

It is the notariat that suffers the most incidents of the three case studies, certainly in the media. The reason is simple, in the sense that public libraries use public money and have few opportunities for fraud and that real estate agents in the Netherlands are not involved in the transfer of money when a house or building is transferred. It is the notariat that handles the money side of transactions and here there is ample opportunity for things to go wrong and become part of “whitewash” operations. And things went wrong. There can be doubt as to how badly things went wrong. If compared, for instance, against the number of transactions notaries take care of daily, the number might still be considered small.

But few members argue that there was no reputational problem, and this also because the notariat was already vulnerable to negative publicity for some time; in any case, for a longer time than say, the accounting firms and perhaps even the banks. As described, the notaries twice went through a cycle going from a newfound public status and wealth to private misuse and loss of public confidence. The second time the cycle ended—in the 1990’s—a parliamentary inquiry (Committee Van Traa, 1993) showed that notaries played a key function in whitewashing criminal money. So, about ten years before the financial crisis the reputation of the notariat had already become shaky. In the years after that, while at the same time the government set new controls on the profession, something happened that made matters worse. Due to the policy of market liberalization by that same government, tariffs were set free. Suddenly the notariat became a competitive market and a race to the bottom started. Fifteen years later, as the economic crisis began, and new scandals broke out, the members of the notariat looked around and wondered what to do. Though probably with less urgency at first, the colleagues in the library and real estate sector did the same.

An economic crisis on top of a digital revolution should be enough to create conditions in which breaches of trust become logical. Incidents can be seen both as symptoms and evidence of these breaches in trust. The question here is to what kind of dynamic this leads within each association. With what kind of response will the associations come up? What actions will be demanded by board and members?

It should be said here that the governances in the three cases are not completely similar. Though all three have “members” and a board with a chairman and the usual governance characteristics, there are among the members many differences in position and influence.

As described, the public library association, the VOB, is a rather hybrid construct. Though the public libraries themselves have more than a million individual “members”, these members do not meet or decide as you would expect in an association. Enjoying a service is basically the extent of the membership. In the case study of the VOB, the public library association is a sector association with the libraries as members. These members are led by directors that behave like members of a professional association much like those of the notaries with their offices, but formally have taken on the role of an employer’s association, to be able to negotiate on salaries with their personnel. Added to these complications, there are stakeholders’ representatives, sector institutes and business activities woven in and out of the formal structure of the association, as the case study describes. All in all, this makes it hard to define the association at any given moment. This study looks a lot at the role of standard setting in associations. The VOB is an example of an association where the representatives of the members (the directors) have a lot at stake in setting in both internal and external/public standards.

It seems easier with the NVM, the leading association for real estate agents. It can be seen as a trade association with some of the characteristics of a professional association. The association is dominated by the “chapter” of private housing brokers. These represent mostly small to very small businesses and their owners, but there are also some big (internet) firms. The two smaller chapters represent brokers in the business and agricultural market. These two behave more like small associations of specialists. The picture is not complete without noting that the association is the owner of or has a stake in some serious internet (Funda) and data activities, good for serious tensions within the membership even without incidents. The NVM has its own honor code and internal regulations but is in many ways the subject of government regulation.

The KNB, the association of the notaries, is also an association with hybrid aspects, but falls in terms of the nature of its membership somewhere in between the other two. In many ways, it is a classic professional association, similar to the Bar Association or medical associations. The individual members are also private entrepreneurs, but, as in the real estate association, the number of larger offices is relatively small. The association used to be able to, more or less, set its own standards and price for its services, much like the public libraries, but in the past decades they have normalized and are even more than the real estate agents subject to external regulation and oversight.

With the stage set in this way, the question comes to the issue of individual behavior and collective action. Where will the balance lie when a combination of crisis, digitization and “incidents” undermines the image of the association? Part of the answer lies in how far individual members feel threatened by the behavior of miscreants within the collective of the association. Different answers are possible, but each case shows that there is a moment when the “rotten apples in the basket” move from a being a sideshow to something which the association can no longer ignore or deal with internally and reach center stage. To extend the metaphor: when the rotten apples seem to have spoiled the whole basket. This is also the moment that individual members ask for collective action. Looking through the cases, that moment is not as easily recognizable as one might think. There is no “smoking gun” or explosive headline that is recognizable for every member as the signal moment. The assessment of the incidents by the members diverges; not everyone is as equally preoccupied with outside opinion and it also matters how well members know the people involved in the incident. It is only after a while that specific people or incidents become the center of a story that stands for other things that have gone wrong. The Dutch accountants have their “Pinkeltjes Affair,” the Bar Association their infamous lawyer, Moskowitz. In the case of the notariat there is a name that comes up again and again and the same goes for the world of the real estate agents. But when looking closer, it is not a name of a colleague that dominates internal discussions, it is something else.

Within the public libraries it is all about the impact of e-Books. Within the notariat it is the so-called “HEMA-notary”. The HEMA is a supermarket, and a notary office has come up with the plan to sell their work in a digital form through this supermarket. What a shock to the profession. At least as interesting is what happens in the real estate market. It is not a “bad apple” as such, but the coming on the market of “Brokersland” (“Makelaarsland”), which sends shock waves through the Dutch association of real estate agents, NVM. This is an internet broker, and as such a threat to the business model of the traditional real estate agent. It is also an internet broker that uses aggressive marketing techniques, attacking the traditional agent. As such, Brokersland is a prime example of a transformative business, fiercely (and on the radio) attacking the business model of the traditional broker, very unusual in the staid world of the Dutch notariat. Yet Brokersland is also a member of the NVM and claims to fully comply with the honor code and internal laws of the association. Many members cannot understand that Brokersland is a member of the NVM, turning the coming of Brokersland into the symbolic incident that all members know about. Of course, when it comes to an audit, the same standard as for every member must be applied.

So, behind the “rotten apples”, the members who create incidents in the media, there are the “incidents” that are transformative, in the sense that they threaten the whole business model of the members of the association. Assuming both kinds of incidents will be connected both by the members and the general public as an indication of the failure of the association or sector as a whole, what should the response be? When incidents are signals of a lack of trust, how should the response be? The assumption here is that all involved will ask for a response in terms of more or better “quality”. And with this we are back again to the central issue of quality interventions and how to go about them to create more trust in associations. But before doing so, it is worth pointing out that the largest, transformative incidents are also called “black swans” and that they can both have their impact in the shape of a sudden downturn and in the shape of a sudden upswing. The author Nassim Taleb (Taleb, 2013), explained the occurrence of phenomena’s like these from a neglect of the causes of fragility in a system. His statement is that “Just as human bones get stronger when subjected to stress and tension, and rumors and riots intensify when someone tries to repress them, many things in life benefit from stress, disorder, volatility and turmoil.” When the disorder is organized away for too long, a black swan like the 2008-2015 crisis can hit, and the nature of such a black swan is by definition unpredictable. So, the best response is to have the widest range of options available to deal with any given incident. For this, localization, diversification, and decentralization of decision-making are vital (Franklin, 2018) With this, Taleb goes against the standard reaction of associations to meet incidents with plans and more communication, meanwhile diminishing the size and number of board members.

The more diverse, the better here and this includes a clear eye for the political aspects of dealing with incidents. In all this, Taleb is clearly focused on a major and unpredictable incident, which might hopefully lead to Schumpeter's "creative destruction" but for which he gives no indication. Other strategies to prevent or deal with incidents can be less radical, by which especially measures are meant to increase "resilience" (Zolli & Healy, 2012) (Weick & Sutcliffe, *Managing the Unexpected: Resilient Performance in an Age of Uncertainty.*, 2007) or "flexibility" (Volberda, 2004). These can improve the chances for survival and subsequent innovation after the incident but can, in practice, also be too narrow in scope to see the incident coming (Bruine H. d., 2018).

## 29. Being an Association: Construct, Context and Consequences

Starting out on this study, a number of rational questions were formulated in order to come closer to the question of trust in associations. These “Association questions” were:

1. What is an association?
2. What are its characteristics and categories?
3. What are the dynamics of an association?
4. How do associations deal with pressures?
5. How will associations develop, given these pressures?

### What we do not know

Part I became an illustration of how little we really know about associations and their dynamics. To give a short summary of what we do not know:

- We do not know how many associations there are, partly because they are simply not counted and partly because of their self-reflective nature: statistics do not show the difference between “umbrella” associations and their local or functional little brothers and sister associations.
- We do not know how many members associations have nor the changes in membership
- We do not know why people join associations or why they leave.
- We do not know what the average age of members is, their composition, functions, and vitality.
- We do not know how many memberships people hold as they go through life. In modern societies, it is likely people go through life with always at least one membership from birth to grave and probably several at the same time.
- We do not know what the direct economic impact is of associations in terms of salaries, events, activities and so on, and certainly not when it concerns the impact of their members, but this impact must be measured in billions and billions.
- We do not know what the direct social impact is of the work associations do, nor do we know the impact of the voluntary work the members do in the context of associations.
- We do not know what the impact of associations is on the writing of laws and regulations, nor do we know how much they are impacted themselves by laws and regulations.
- We do not know how our democracy would work if they would choose another shape than that of associations.
- We do not know how the international community would function without international associations and the international exchanges that happen in the context of associations.

- We do not know how to get the answers to questions like those above as hardly any academic research into associations is done above the level of individual associations.

Before this last point is misunderstood: research is done into aspects of associations. In fact, there is quite a lot of it, including the work of scientific associations dedicated to these aspects. This is especially the case when it comes to the voluntary aspect within social associations, or trust issues when it comes to professional associations. In the past few years, more attention has been paid to the role of “association professionals” (mostly the secretaries and other functionaries or employees doing paid work within the association) or the “leaders” in the profession (chairperson and some others). Another aspect getting more and more attention is that of the public affairs/lobbying/public diplomacy function of associations, but this research seems more pointed at the institutions being addressed by the associations than the associations themselves. All these aspects do not add up to an integral academic research agenda with associations as its subject. In terms of knowledge, we cannot truly answer any of the general questions on associations. It is good to know what we do not know, though. And one remarkable thing must be remarked on too: nobody seems too bothered by the not-knowing. Because of the outright easy legal structure of associations, with almost never changing demands, most people will have little trouble in starting or ending an association. In its basic “default” structure (from member to general assembly and from board, to chairman, secretary, treasurer and executive) it is both very recognizable and self-copying. The latter so much so, that it seems as if a permanent restructuring is going on, fractal-like (Abbott, 2001) and filling up all available space – that was, until the coming of the internet. It is this latest development that gives in many ways rise to a new way of group formation through social media and network activities. It is possible that at some point of time these virtual groups give rise to new constructs (perhaps called “transsociations”, as this study proposes). In the Western world, there is a tendency to see associations as a declining phenomenon, as membership of associations seems to decline and there is a visible aging going on. However, elsewhere in the world associations are on the rise (for instance in Asia, the Gulf Region, and Latin America) and there is no fundamental reason to think of why associations would become obsolete as long as people want to come together around a common goal. It is probably more relevant to have a better view of how associations shrink or grow in relation to other constructs. For this, the scheme of their dynamics is repeated from the end of Part I, including the remedies and pathologies attached to the different constructs. It is best to look at the scheme for a longer time, then first try to follow the dynamics in each quadrant and then picture the dynamics of the whole, using a clockwise orientation.

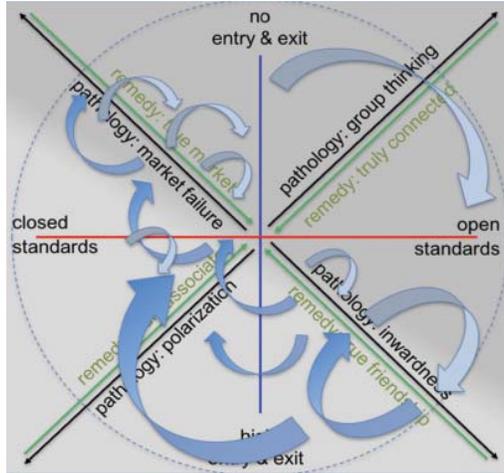


Figure 53 Association Dynamics

### The endurance of associations

In Part II an attempt is made at characterization and cataloging of the different shapes of associations. A social historical perspective is dominant in the description of the most important categories of associations, but, of course, trust dimensions, legal (universal right of association) and most of all, issues of standardization are there. It shows most of all the inherent complexity behind the seemingly simple structure of associations. In the way this study approached associations, much has been made of the ability of an association to set open or closed standards. But, as these (changes in) standards are an inherent aspect of associations, they can predict little in terms of behavior. Other aspects also have to play their part, like that of the tasks or functions associations have, the manner in which they play a role in the self-regulation or not. To put it all together, a three-dimensional model is not too much to ask for, though the reader has to cut and paste it him- or herself, as in real life.

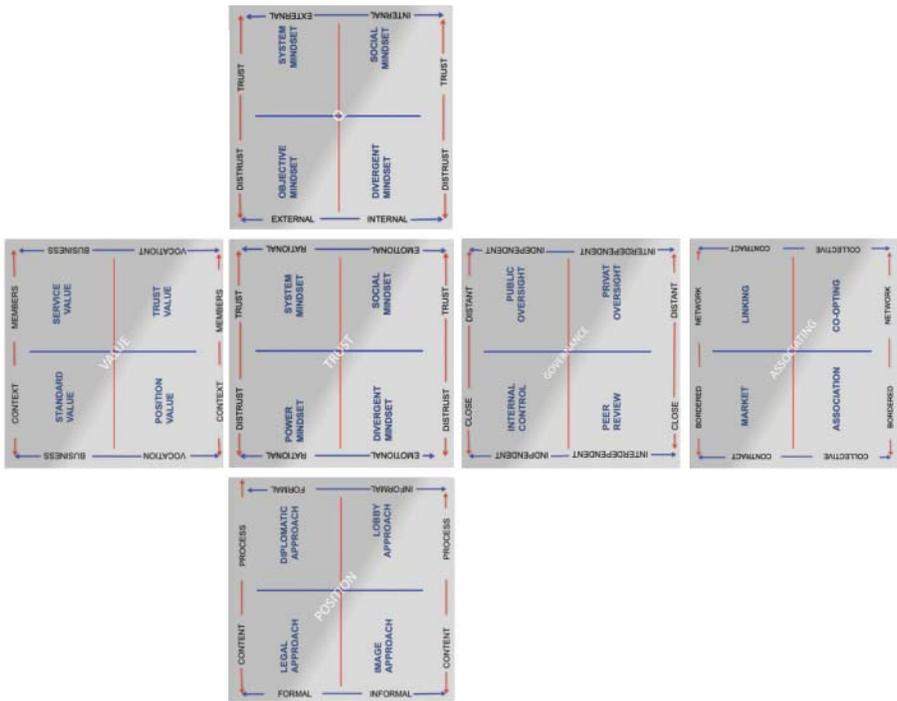


Figure 54 A 3-D-Model of Associations

The many dimensions of associations and the dynamic of all the ways you can categorize them, can take the eyes away from what might be the most fascinating aspect of all: how enduring associations are and how much they tell us about the way we want to lead our lives. Whatever the incentive—war, belief, exercise, civic and civil activities, politics, trade, profession, hobby—people construct associations in which to pursue common goals. As society gains in complexity, the different categories of associations will have to adapt. More importantly, their standards will have to adapt. These standards can be open or closed, are very pragmatic or come with a heavy moral load. De Tocqueville speaks of the “art” of associations when looking at the way American society managed to organize itself in a very natural way around the tasks at hand. Some of this art is still visible in the way many associations come into being and fulfill their role in society. In terms of Durkheim, it is “organic” and not “mechanistic,” a sign of a developing society and not of tribes stuck in inescapable behavior. Yet the danger of an “anomic” role of associations is there too, especially when not enough change takes place within or change is handled badly. Then the pathologies of associations – groupthink, polarization, market failure and too much inwardness (Ch. 7)—get a chance. Each of the three cases shows signs of this as they went into the crisis. As each of the three has deep historical roots, you can observe how “history becomes destiny” when nothing is done to wake people in time on the trust issues that arise.

But, and here comes a connected observation, in none of the cases was there much awareness of the specific history and characteristics of the association, or did members not seem to care much about it. And if the members do not care enough about it, who will?

In the case of the public library association with a few hundred members, there was little awareness of how the role of the association (the collective of library leaders) had become interconnected with the institutional role (the library) or their role as civil servants (again, the leaders of the library). In this “intra-institutional” setting for the association, formal hats were changed at will, in spite of a range of mergers, reorganization or collective watchdogs including the association of local municipalities. The chairperson of the association of the public library was in the period most written about always someone from outside and of whom the members expected little more than to lead the meetings. The history and culture of public libraries, especially of those in the larger cities, is one of civic engagement, including many political activities. In this they can be proud of what they have achieved, but the association became also one of the more politicized associations. Politicized, but not policed, as this association is the only one in the study without at the moment of writing an oversight body or other strong authority. This may be logical given the nature of the relatively risk-free tasks of the libraries, but less so from the internal dynamics of the association. Though there were good analyses available of the situation in the sector and the association and some hard changes had already been made, it was very difficult to deal with the effects of the crisis once it occurred and resulted mainly in requests for fewer cuts in the budgets and claims of a special position in society. Though the budget holders at the local, regional, and national levels were not insensitive to that, they also saw little reason to help, given that they all had their own challenges. In the end, the governments made a trade: you can get your extra budget or fewer cuts, but in exchange, you have to show your quality. A combination of an objective and systematic approach was chosen, and an independent certification board was installed to oversee it. But to the libraries it was just another instrument to be applied and, in its adaptation, it became more and more bureaucratic. No library was ever expelled or otherwise sanctioned because of bad results, though at the same time one library after another had to close. A new committee, part public libraries, part local government, was asked to improve the approach. This, they did. The proposal was met with enough enthusiasm to continue, but, in the end, the proposal got killed in the general assembly because it was seen as against the (financial) interests of multiple members. It could also be observed that members spoke out against exactly the kind of elements that were introduced as closer to the professional and the “storytelling” aspects: peer review and elements of the proposed standard. In other words, the members were against the associative aspects of the proposal.

However, the power to say “no” did not translate in more acceptable proposal for the parties involved. In the end, with some moderations and after a direct appeal to the members, the proposal was adopted (the surge). What a hard-won victory for a proposal! A proposal that in terms of both content and process was so close to the stated goals of the association. It seems to show that there is something self-defeating in the nature of the association, when internal politics can so dominate an association. And, in a way, it has led to a defeat. During this quality initiative there came a split between the association and its support organization for the libraries. By the time the bickering around the quality initiative had ended another decision was made to make the support organization part of the Royal Library, effectively turning it into a part of an executive agency. The role of the association is lessened now. There was not enough trust left with the different governments to let the public libraries take care of themselves so for “efficiency” reasons and in order to deal with the digitization of the library functions, the move was made.

At the beginning of the study, the question was asked why, when books are the original sources of knowledge in the world and “knowledge is power”, do librarians have such a relatively low status now? The answer has much to do with their failure to organize themselves effectively, basically making their role dependent on the state. In the end this will limit the role of the profession.

In the case of the notariat we see a “professional association” that managed to get into a unique position in between a purely public and private function. Their history is a history of writers and note-takers on behalf of more powerful people in church and state, slowly but surely creating more status for themselves and providing a specific “trust” function in society. In a way, the members of the association, on average some 1400 notaries and a similar number of “candidates”, who in the Dutch situation now have a monopoly on their function are in an ideal position: public authority, private earnings, professional status. Even the “notarial shortage” of not having an academic position or title has been amended. On the whole, the trust function of the notariat has been ably fulfilled. Yet that position has come at a price common to all monopolist positions; a decreased sensitivity to trust issues and change. The history of the profession shows that at every juncture in history, change had to come from outside, from the authorities. More to the point, at pivotal times, change twice had to come from foreign occupiers. In modern times, effective change could, in the end, only emerge under the threat of a new oversight body. Even so, this does not mean to say that the association and its members were ignorant of the pressures on the profession. Incidents and the financial squeeze had made many of them very much aware. However, there was no consensus on how to proceed as the opinions of the members diverged from each other in a fundamental way. In as far as this researcher has seen, the board did not mismanage the situation or stepped beyond its mandate.

Neither did the decision-making process of the association malfunction, but this only seemed to prolong the stalemate, until several groups (or “committees”) tried to upset the balance. The board was sent away, and a new group took over, in essence, stating that the public function of the notariat should be paramount.

By that time, peer review was already fully accepted by the association, so there was no need for another surge. In the combination of traditional disciplinary measures, peer review and the audits by the oversight body, the feeling was that when incidents happened, they could be controlled. Even so, the present shape of peer review still holds within it something of the peripheral tension of the association. When the full audits started (after a brief start with a smaller scope), the auditors were not given a specific standard to uphold. They were to assess all of the rules and regulations applicable to a notary. This is far too much to assess within a day. In effect, it was left up to the auditor to select applicable regulations, along with some guidelines from the audit office. This is still the case more than eight years after the start of the audits. Of course, it would be better if the association would state its priorities or would adapt its own standards, but this seems still too sensitive. It would perhaps be wise for the association to confront its own dilemma’s concerning its position and place in society if it wants to retain its position of trust.

In the third case, that of the association of real estate agents, the NVM, with 4000+ members, the situation is at first glance simpler. Its members are business people, used to the demands of the market. Historically the association can trace its roots back to the Guild of traders in the Middle Ages. The NVM is by far the largest association, but it has no monopoly like the notariat, or the public library association and its history shows a constant effort to merge often vital competitive interests between the members. Digitization is vital for its members and it is in this respect that the NVM in the past proved indispensable for its members. However, because of trust issues (the “market failure” kind), the NVM had to open up its dominant website to sell houses to all brokers. With that, the “added value” question, always a point for the many cost-conscious small entrepreneurs in the membership, came more and more to the fore. And even though after the crisis the membership of the NVM only increased, there was a general feeling that more had to be done for the members. It is in that context that a process for renewal started within the association. The vision behind it also involved a new and better start to earlier quality initiatives.

Two points of this vision are relevant, in terms of a strong base for an association. The first is that the association chose to base its initiative on its honor code and not the whole of the internal and external regulation it is responsible for.

The second point is that the association could base its efforts on a unique characteristic: the association has all the data of all real-estate transactions of (almost) all its members in a database that is accessible to all members: providing true transparency and a hard base to start each audit. Even so, much communication about the future course of the association, including the different measures, were marked by distrust. A chairman from outside could, in the end, not fundamentally change this. A proposal to diminish the size of the board and make the association function more flexible was received positively at first but became a source of contention when decisions had to be made. Reflecting on this pattern of positive and negative signals, what stands out most is the way everything is defined in immediate “added value” to the members. There is no sharp formulation of a public or more general interest role for the association. It seems that this makes it likely that every change can be blocked by a sizable part of the membership if this added value is not immediately felt. A situation that produces “small politics” and not enough significant politics both in and outside the association. Though in the case of peer review, with the chairman on the road to meet the members and referring to the larger vision of the association, it was shown that a decision could be made.

How do these three cases reflect on associations in general and in relation to the issue of trust in particular? Apart from the obvious fact of the limited representability, it is perhaps most striking how the “limited rationality” works. The definition of an association stands basically on two pillars. One pillar is the fact that it is a group of people that have something in common, creating a collective, recognizable by using common and relatively closed standards. The second pillar is its common goal, which again links back to the reason and content of those standards. Something is going on with both pillars, but the most important one in terms of trust is the latter.

### The pillar of the collective

First, the pillar of the collective. Numbers matter, as does their composition. The number of people working in the public libraries is more than in the real estate business and much more than in the notariat. Still, the library sector, especially after a wave of mergers between local governments and closure of smaller libraries, the actual association of public libraries has fewer members than either of them. The advantage is that all the members know each other very well and the lines of communication can be short. The disadvantage may be the same: the members know each other too well and balance each other out. The surge in the case of the public libraries only came about when the regional meetings were held, and the workers got a chance to voice their support or criticism. On the other extreme, there is the real estate agents’ association. The numbers are too high to know each individually and they are very much bound to their own place of business. As a result, they behave more like a collective.

They can also be influenced more like a collective, though at the individual level they may diverge a lot in their opinions. With a crowd, a surge seems more likely. And this point is not without strong meaning. There are roughly two options here. The first one connects to the observation that many in the field in Western countries make that the numbers of members in associations is declining. The data is not good enough to confirm or deny this, but if this is true associations will be harder pressed to find a way, or surge, to break out of internal deadlock when they have to decide on quality initiatives.

The second one takes the view that membership is not really declining but redistributing itself across new shapes of collectives and that even in the most classic of associations, there is a firm base for enough membership. This has 1) to do with the idea that there is a division going on between small and big organizations and that with the rise of globalization and individualization, the number of small and very small (individual) businesses and organizations is rising. They may enjoy the freedom this brings, but, in times of crisis, they know very well they cannot represent their own interests well enough. The example of the real estate agent association is illustrative: membership is rising because even in the wake of the crisis and when the real estate market is booming once more, few dare to expand in terms of employees. As membership is increasing due to the fragmentation of the labor market, so do associations gain in importance in terms of collective representation, perhaps partly filling the whole of declining union membership. It has perhaps also to do, 2) with the possibility that membership is not really declining but redistributing itself in a self-reflective way and that this is caused by shifts in the life cycle of people, with more or other memberships at the beginning and end of people's lives. This "redistribution thesis" would imply that there are still many associations where the nature of the membership is more susceptible to collective behavior than is generally expected.

Meanwhile, within the broad confines of an association, much is possible in terms of constructs, but in the end, we see the same kind of decision-making procedures being used that associations have been using for a very long time. This, notwithstanding many attempts at becoming more a "network association", decreasing the size of the board and being more aware of governance issues. Within the classic associations, this still seems in line with Abbott's self-reflective principle where associations like fractals split and merge, but still remain much of the same characteristics. Maybe there is some collective wisdom in that. Still, this does not do justice to everything that is happening or is necessary in order to adjust to modern times. Developments in the group formation around the association give rise to both inspiration and defensive reactions. Tempting though it is, to describe this for each corner of the association matrix, for brevity I will stop here, apart from noting that each corner in the matrix has its own different and distinctive way of dealing with governance issues.

## The Pillar of the Goal - Leadership Issues

The second pillar is at least as vital as the first. In terms of Durkheim, it is the difference between a mechanistic and organic construct, if not the difference between organic and anomic. All three cases came into trouble when they neglected this aspect, even though in a technical sense they fulfilled their roles as best as can be expected in legal and human terms. Going to the members, challenging them in terms of content and/or principles, does seem to be a necessity in order to survive or adapt to a crisis in confidence. The basic shape and structure of an association are more robust than they look, but looking at it from an historic, sociological angle, it has developed in order to get more stability in relations, resulting in more predictability in the way people collectively behave—and how the outside world deals with that. It is obvious that when an adaptation is necessary, it takes a ‘getting out of the comfort zone’. Dealing with resistance to change - “enjoying it”, in Rijnja’s terms (Rijnja, 2012)—is from all times. There is nothing new about that. In this respect, there is definitely literature available for the association leader. Some references in English are as follows: (Cox, 2007) (Jacobs S. , *Membership Essentials: Recruitment, Retention, Roles, Responsibilities, and Resources.*, 2016) (Jacobs S. , 2018) (Shirky, 2008) (Sladek, 2011; Tecker, Meyer, Crouch, & Wintz, CAE, 2010). Some references in Dutch: (Boer, Wesselink, & Harmelink, 2015) (Kuperus, Marike, Poorthuis, Loo, & Wijnperle, 2018; Pouwels & Bemmels, 2017) (Rijken, 2012) (Rijkes, Schmidt, Rijken, & Toren, 2015) (Tack & Huizinga, 2005).

But dealing with resistance is not new; what is new, perhaps, is the realization that the characteristics of the association are more helpful for the leadership in achieving that change than is usually realized. How else to explain the sudden consensus to a quality initiative that the members were against or afraid of. How else to explain that consensus when in actual fact most of the loudest voices during the regional meetings were critical, to very critical, about the proposal from the board?

It takes more controlled social-psychological research techniques than deployed in the context of this study to verify this, as for instance Ellemers does (Ellemers, 2018), but a reasoning like the following might be helpful in order to understand the psychological background of a surge:

Starting out from the simple fact that when an appeal to the goals of the associations is made by the board, this is not without meaning. Even the most skeptical member has to assess at some point what his or her reasons for joining are and is reminded of what the members have in common. This probably happens less often than is generally thought (“Have I told you lately that I love you?”) or has become too ritualized to carry meaning.

A timely and authentic reminder of the goal can still be a powerful signal. If then a connection by the leadership is made between the goals of the association and a specific measure, he or she—if he or she belongs to the skeptical or negative part of the membership—has to formulate a reason for not going along. When the leadership has a basically reasonable or logical position (including the routine of reports from committees), it might become hard for the skeptics to argue against the leadership, even though emotional or particular counterarguments can still be voiced. Even when still political arguments for gainsaying the leadership still remain, they will have to overcome the forces that plead for joining what the leadership of the association is saying. In a smaller organization or meeting, the clues for a counterargument may come from enough people around the skeptic voicing those arguments. In a bigger setting, with fewer opportunities to voice concerns or play with arguments, it is more of a gamble for the member to take a position. In that case, the temptation to go with the majority must be stronger. If enough members make that assessment, a surge might happen.

Somewhere in the description above is the moment where individual members become a collective. Processes of groupthink and other aspects of group behavior then come into play, partly involving the kind of moral stances that can play a role in the formation of groups (Ellemers, 2018). The parallels with flock behavior are also there. As Adler writes, “Just one bird can urge an entire flock to change directions” (Adler, 2014). The digital dimension, including the use of social media, can give another, and sometimes unpredictable, incentive for flock (or mob) behavior. There is a difference here between associations and public organizations, classic businesses and other institutions like NGO’s. In the latter, hierarchical elements are more likely to influence and mitigate behavior. Leadership has a different position.

This is often not understood enough. Especially, in circumstances of crisis and transformation, with incidents as visible reminders, it requires great skill to run a successful quality initiative. Much will depend on the quality of the board and staff in order to do well. There is reason to be skeptical about the smartness with which change programs are done, not least when it comes to quality issues. Part of this—but this may be speculation—may have to do with the fact that associations often depend for their ideas on insufficient self-awareness of the people within the association. The ideas that outside board members and consultants take with them on how to run businesses or large institutions may not always fit the specific governance, structure or culture of associations.

Management methods from the market may be too contractual for community action (upper left-hand corner of the association matrix), modern network solutions (lower right-hand corner) may be too open for the need to structure member behavior in the average association. Totally digital network methods may be great for communication but less so for decision making (upper right-hand corner). As is shown in Part III, this also echoes, to a degree, the four paradigms of quality, which are again based on the different ways trust (and its companion distrust) and rationality (and its companion emotion) combine.

Added to this, it should be realized that some arenas are more likely to behave like a true associations than others. The political arena is a prime example. Even though party discipline brings hierarchical behavior to the arena, in a more fundamental way, political parties in full democracies behave more like associations than governments or businesses. A surge is not an uncommon phenomenon in politics. This difference in dynamics is little understood by the people outside of politics, including civil servants, and even those active in politics can have different expectations. This is another source of the debate on the “rationality” of politics. But it is not about rationality, it is about different dynamics. Churches too can show mixed behavior, as can sporting clubs. And with this, we come back to the issues addressed in Part II and the different ways we can define and categorize associations. There is still a lot of work to be done. Further reflections on the what and how of associations, in combination with more observations on the way the goal of the associations works through for the members, are welcome on the agenda for the future.

## 30. Trusting Associations

One aspect had to stay hidden, too much so, while writing this final part on the theme of this study: that of “trust in associations” itself. Almost all effort has gone into describing the efforts within the association itself in order to get a quality initiative accepted. This is admittedly dangerous, even to the point of misleading. It is almost as if getting the trust of the members is equal to getting trust from society in general. Many leaders in associations would wish it is that simple. And their logical response to all the complexity is to keep their actions as simple as possible. In practice, associations usually stay close to what is accepted as a change “quality” program: certification, examination, disciplining, and awarding. Maybe this helps in the positioning of the association toward different partners, including government-oversight bodies, but does it get the members active? It seems a safe and explainable course, but is it effective enough? Given everything that has been discussed about the surge and the importance of stressing the goal of the association, the answer can be guessed. If there is a message in this study, it is to be careful in jumping to conclusions. It is easy to do so, because most of what we know or seek in associations is shaped by our experiences outside associations. It often does not do enough justice to the essential democratic and horizontal nature of associations. Members are neither shareholders or stakeholders. At best they are co-owners in a metaphorical sense.

### A Cycle of trust

Treating an association as just another organization or entity, also runs the danger of not doing enough justice to the situation in and around the association and how reactions are to an association as actor. This touches for instance on the question if and how much an association is responsible for the behavior of its members. In a legal sense the answer is: hardly ever. In a social sense: often, if not always.

So, it is important to look beyond the often misleadingly simple structure of the association. It is about reading the characteristics of the association and what this means in terms of interaction between board and members and between the members themselves. It has to do with trying to understand why people join or leave the association and what makes them active. It has to do with understanding what the association is about and what this means as the world around the association changes. Words “business model” or even “business opportunity” can and will be used, certainly within trade or professional associations, and in fact association can and are legally entitled to provide business. At heart it is not a business and members will resent it if being treated as such. Neither is an association a government. If the members so decide, an association can do almost all the things a government does, including wielding extensive regulatory powers or act like an oversight body. *But the question then becomes what still binds the members?*

If it is nothing but an “extended arm” for other forces, leaving the members no room for their own expressed wishes, it is better not to speak of an association and its legitimacy should be sought elsewhere. Neither is a group of people that is together on an ad hoc basis and does not choose or elect its leaders and association but a co-optation. The same goes for the network or community with a goal that is only temporary and requires no permanent structure. In all these cases, the question of “trusting associations” becomes a different one, to be answered through different means and initiatives<sup>79</sup>.

But then what does become the question of “trusting associations”, given what this study has to tell, or failed to tell? In this study a link was made between these concepts which can look like this:

As a line of words:

*trust – signals & incidents – distrust – quality – trust? -  
quality initiative –trust*

Or, as a cycle:

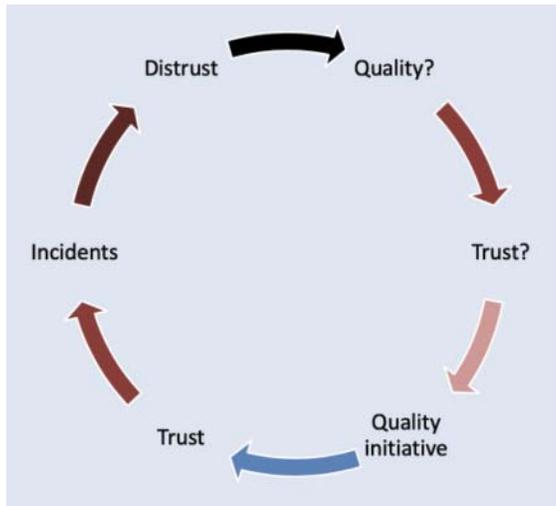


Figure 55 The Association Cycle of Trust

It should come as no surprise that it does not work in such a direct cause-and-effect manner. This is about humans interacting with each other with endless layers of motives, morals and means. But issues of trust matter and can grow at any time from perception to reality.

79. But do not bot business, governments and associations use the same kind of accreditation and certification activities? In fact, they do not. An association can provide those as service for its members, but the association itself does not need to be accredited or certified. They could do it, and probably should do it if they believe in it, but it is no accident that associations do not take the medicine they provide others.

In the case studies the story goes much further back than in the recent economic crisis and it can be truthfully said that transformative events like the coming of e-Books rocked the world of associations as much, and probably more, as the coming of eBooks does now. Each time, incidents, real and perceived, became the kind of historical events that brought about change. Each time, both issues of trust (or more to the point: distrust) brought out the need of a response. And it is at this point that the essentially democratic nature of an association – in contrast to authorities' leadership – that people were forced to align their different interest, helped by, or legitimized by, rational arguments. Though emotions and their connected interests were also there. It is tempting here, to go deep into rational choice theory and the different ways this has been discredited, as this author has been following and writing about this debate since the early 1980s (Noordhoek P. , 1985)<sup>80</sup>, but here it is important that questions of "tratio" (trust and ratio) in the context of associations very easily lead to questions of quality. The moment that happens (and accepting the nature of the definition of quality, asking for a consensus that might be hard to attain), we immediately have an issue of trust surrounding the choice of the quality intervention. To reduce it to a dichotomy: if and when an intervention is proposed by the board that is close to what the members are used to – disciplinary and control-based interventions like certification – it is not likely to lead to a trust issue with the members, but it will little do to meet the distrust outside the association. So, the other option would be to choose an intervention – movement-based like peer review – which would lead to more distrust by the members ("what are my colleagues doing on my premises?") and possibly leading to more trust outside the association. Now this dichotomy seems fundamentally correct and suggesting the latter course in especially times of crisis and after heavy incidents, but here it is important to point out the word "possibly". It cannot be assumed there is a direct link between the introduction of a quality initiative and a change in the level of trust the association in general can enjoy. Directly after the incident it is probably much more important to repair any damage, using all disciplinary force the association can muster. In the long run trust in the association can change, and the more confronting the quality initiative is to the members, the better, as it is in the end always, they who have to change, not society.

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80. One important deviation is perhaps allowed. Adam Smith, known as the proponent of the free market and the working of its "invisible hand", wrote his two main books partly as a reaction to the working of the guilds. He saw these guilds as a closed collection of entrepreneurs who conspired to prevent true competition. The question is if he would still write this if he were alive today. In a recent work by Norman (Norman, 2018), reviewed and commented upon by this researcher (Noordhoek P. , 2018), it becomes clear that Smith was far more a believer in the strength of communities than is generally assumed. Based on especially his first book, "the moral foundations of society" (mark its title), it can be said that he is a believer in the "sympathy" between people, believing like Durkheim in an organic approach to the growth of society. Nowhere was he as absolute in his prescription of liberty as he is nowadays portrayed. It is because of this that he would now probably plead for less free market, as they show the characteristics of the guilt he so strongly portrayed. Perhaps he would even see the invisible hand most at work within associations and not within businesses.

## A Conscious decision

The question for the leadership of the association (the board, often but not always the chairman, and the secretariat or bureau) then becomes: how far can and will we go with our intervention? It is one of the main lessons of this study, that this decision should be made much more consciously than is generally done and with more regard for the nature of the association. So many questions can come together in this one moment. And, while taking a too “planned” approach to what in reality will be more like a garbage can of considerations, it involves at least these **five** considerations.

First of all: how much is the idea shared that crisis and transformation is a true threat to the association. It might very well be, that the impact of both is felt much more different or keenly at the level of the members than of the board. As change is always very much about the need for change and its urgency, it should not be assumed there is a consensus on the manner in which the sense of crisis and transformation is shared. An assessment from the point of view of each stakeholder should be made (Noordhoek P. , 2011, p. ch. 8) or, perhaps better, an analysis should be made of where the association comes from and how that can explain the culture of the association. It is noticeable in the case study how little lessons were drawn from the past. Management perspectives from outside are not seldom preferred above perspectives from within the association itself.

Secondly: after incidents, what is done to limit the damage? A time of crisis should not become a time for permanent crisis management. At some point it is necessary to look beyond the incidents, or rather; look at its root causes and what can be done about them.

Thirdly: the capability of intervention, always in the context of the long-term strategy for the association and including a sharp assessment of the strength and weaknesses of board and bureau. Can we carry the weight?

Fourthly: choosing the kind of intervention that has most impact and least drawbacks. In the large overview of quality interventions that is part of this study (A4), many interventions are mentioned that in the end are about compliance more than about improvement. In practice it is also to be expected that many interventions aimed at more dynamics, can and will lose that aspect over time. Disregarding as much as possible the cry for more actions against the ‘rotten apples’ and the temptation to choose the kind of intervention other associations are choosing out of habit, it is much better to have a tailor-made intervention that ‘stretches the limits of what the association can take as much as possible.

Fifth and last: this requires a strategy that, with all the regard there should be for more objective and systematic considerations, is fundamentally more about the politics of quality: what should be done when and how and with regard to which outside considerations?

It is about making decisions that address both the trust and the rational aspects of human interaction. When that is done, it should also include a sharp look at interpersonal relations and positions. This includes considerations of influence and power. And for that, there is nothing better than to listen to for instance what the historian of the association has to say and/or the person upholding the traditions and/or the wise outsider and/or the ever critical know-it-all each association has or should have (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007) (Chan, Louis, & Jetten, 2010). In other words; association leadership in a situation like this requires both force and subtlety on top of thorough knowledge of the ins and outs of the association. Just like a good sense of timing, etc. As this not a study about change management in associations, it is left here at that, but it is worth reminding that trust apparently does not come from a single thing but is the sum of a host of big and small decisions and movements.

## Scenarios

During this study, a scenario was used in which the members went from an initial positive reaction to the idea of a quality initiative (indicating trust) to a negative one when the reality of how the initiative would work hit them. This happened in each of the case studies, but it must be said that it does not always have to go that way. Even so, the case studies often show a reaction that comes down to the saying that “it is the others that have to change, they themselves do not.” The chapter in this part of the study about surge or emerge, shows most of all that an assent by the members to an initiative the members are not used to, can never be taken for granted. It is hard to see how standard democratic decision-making can work in cases like those in this study. Yet, that is exactly what was tried in each case. And each time it failed. Perhaps here we see the assumption at work that democracy is a goal in itself. The idea that “as long as we do everything by the book, with full transparency and with all members having a say and a vote, everybody will see how much sense it makes and assent to the initiative”. It does not work that way. Association democracy is, probably more than political democracy, where debate is a goal in itself, above all a way of keeping groups in balance and prevent conflicts from escalating too early the wrong way. Actual votes should be taken as little as possible, in order to retain the idea of a community as much as possible. In situations as described here, a static approach clearly does not work. A vote is necessary in order to get closure on a debate that already ruptures the community of members. In the two cases of a surge, the association leadership brought not only the debate to the members, but also did not delay a vote longer than was absolutely necessary. Even where there remained disagreement, many members must have felt like they were listened to.

The decision to start a quality initiative will probably mean not that much in trust within the association at first. The outside world will probably not even hear about it. Once the quality initiative is some effect might be expected, including to the outside world. To some extent this can be measured. Looking at the three case studies, there is both direct and indirect evidence:

- In the case of the public libraries there are several evaluations. They involve each pilot of the audits and actual audits. Besides this they are also based on the outcome of interviews, questionnaires and outcomes from discussions at review meetings of the auditors. Added to that are surveys among the staff of the libraries. On the whole the results this researcher has seen (case A1) are good to very good, progress has been made. At the same time this had not prevented the library sector to choose another approach at the end of the four-year period, which can hardly be considered a sign of a big increase in effectiveness or trust;
- In the case of the notaries the results are more substantive (A2). Here too are evaluations and meetings, but the audits have been going on for a longer time (now 8+ years) and the audit bureau does an intense assessment of each audit rapport and write a thorough report each half year. It is enough to have a good impression of the impact of the audits. Especially in the wake of the crisis this impact has been substantial indeed on many individual offices and have also gained a wider reputation. Relevant too is. The comparison that can be made both with the internal disciplinary function and with the oversight body (BFT) that does its own bodies, partly overlapping with the internal audits of the notariat. It appears that the number of disfunctioning offices of breeches of regulations, are neither very high, nor do they diverge in a significant way. On the whole, the system of peer review works to satisfaction. Another aspect comes also to the fore. The fact that by now close to 200 auditors have visited the offices of the colleagues as auditors of the 12-1400 offices, while in the past notaries basically did not visit each other, must have a significant cultural effect. Especially the younger generation seems to consider peer review a normal part of the notarial practice. It is also true that the number of serious incidents seems to have been reduced. That might just be an effect of a better market, but if it leads to more trust in the profession, there will be little complaining in the notariat.
- In the case of the real estate agents, two extensive evaluations of the pilots were made and the present audits in the first round are also extensively and independently audited (A3). It is still early days, so the real impact cannot be measured as yet, but it will probably comparable to that of the notariat.

There is one extra bonus already: peer review drives up the use of already available data on housing. There is more uncertainty concerning one aspect of the audit and this concerns the taxation function of the real estate agents. This aspect has come under extra scrutiny and the question is whether the review of the taxation function in the peer review audit is of extra added value to the new registration bodies that have come about or vice versa.

On the whole it can be said that the outcomes of the quality initiative thus far are promising indeed, but there is still a way to go and it remains difficult to get a true appreciation for its impact. Has it increased trust in each association? It is probably best to say that peer review has created better conditions for trust in all three case studies and keep it at that.

Beyond the three case studies, a general picture does emerge on how the impact of a quality initiatives like peer review likely could translate into three scenarios for “trusting associations”:

1. Indirectly and not planned. The impact of a quality initiative must simply be considered too low to make a difference. In small part because of lasting resistance among the members, but most of all because hardly any association will ever have the capacity to impact expectations in such a way. The association goes up and down with the general mood in a country or the world, too dependent on other factors to make a difference.
2. The process can make a difference. Most association go up and down with the flow, but an active board and a small approach can make a difference. The difference however is not in the quality initiative, but in the way the decision-making process went. If that gives evidence of strong leadership skills, then one can expect to see other evidence elsewhere. In that situation some evidence of rising trust can be expected through satisfaction measurement.
3. Like in the second scenario, the leadership of the association makes a difference through the process, but here the quality initiative itself also makes a difference for two reasons. The first is that the approach and mindset has the effect of mobilizing the members and it's through the membership that the real difference can be made, mostly through their daily activities. The second is that the approach leads to a realization on the side of government and media that the association becomes less relevant from the point of view of oversight bodies, media attention and questions in parliament.

It is hard to tell which scenario is most likely to be true. In terms of finding hard evidence, certainly the first scenario sounds true but some sign of the second and third scenarios are there. It would be so good to do more and wider research.

## The Added Value of Associations

Last but not least, there is this question to be asked: what if there would be no associations and only businesses, governments and networks? What would this imply? The question comes from the analysis that if associations are so cumbersome, so hard to change, why are there then still so many people participating them and willing to contribute to their association? Is that just inertia, the inability to change of too many people, or is there more? The assumption here is that there is more, much more. So much so, that associations would be reinvented right away if an abolishment had somehow succeeded. In all likelihood, there is no other way of grouping people together that is so part of the resilience of society. These are some of the reasons why:

1. Associations are in a way the default shape of structured human interaction. There will always remain a need for that.
2. In this study we have seen many members who were more or less captured by the association, unwilling or unable to leave and, as they said, “only in it for the money”. Still it was there choice to remain, suggesting that there are wider benefits to membership.
3. This is in particular true for the large group of people who are both without the older shell of strong institutions and represent few people but themselves. This is particularly true in professional associations but is plays wider and on a larger scale.
4. Many people feel free from old structures but want to belong anyhow. They also want to be proud of their association, causing a latent support for any kind of quality initiative that connects to this sense of belonging. If done well, a surge of support can be expected.

With this, the trust cycle is closed, ready to turn again.

## 31. Questions of Cause and Effect

When in the 1980s, Japan surprised the world with streams of products that were not just cheaper, but better than what their American and European counterparts could make, it took quite a while before a response came. In Europe, the response would finally come after a nice dinner. The CEOs of many of the largest corporations got together. Shaken by the Japanese quality expertise and inspired by the American Baldrige Award Scheme, they decided to start their own Award Scheme, organized by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The rest is history: Europe recovered and started to match the Japanese in quality again. Trust in the European capability for industrial production was restored. Service delivery and the public sector would follow.

It is a nice story about a major surge, similar to for instance the surge that the people within Toyota managed; with a pretty large kernel of truth inside it. But things do not develop so linearly in real life. Or are repeatable. When the Chinese started coming, there was probably a nice dinner somewhere too. Or two. It did not lead to a similar wave of activities. And the question could be asked, in the early twenty-first century are businesses the logical parties to create such a surge, or is that up to old and new forms of association? So, it is reasonable to ask whether surges, as described in the three cases, are a good yardstick to determine if an association is setting a major step toward more trust. In each association, regular surveys are done into issues like reputation and image, but they cannot count as a good zero-measurement. Toward and after the acceptance of peer review by the members there are positive evaluations. Yet, they are mostly done among the members, and cannot (yet) be seen as a general measurement of trust by society.

In methodological terms, it is even the question of whether this cause-effect relationship is the right thing to measure. Maybe it is not about the quality intervention itself, but about the dynamics that have been generated by the effort to get a majority that will bring renewed trust. Before the surge, in each case, we see boards drifting and set aside. Peer review is a success story from the perspective of members daring to make the decision to go for it. In the two cases that have a longer history, the practice of peer review remains a relative success story, with no noticeable incidents and many positive reviews. In the two cases where the presence of an oversight body is felt (partly), the peer review has a higher acceptance rate among respondents (based on interviews and signals in at least one case, the notariat).

It is not that the methods used in this study have come up empty. All of the main concepts—trust, quality and above all: associations—have been touched by both quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence. All of the main questions have received an answer. Yet, these are answers that give rise to so many new questions, that it does not feel finished. Perhaps, in the end, there is satisfaction with two things.

First, the historical research done to see where associations come from, including the find of the double loop of rise and decline in the notarial profession. It is not only new but also relevant. Second, especially the way the added value of peer review in the real-estate case study has been brought to light in a consistent, complete, and insightful manner, building on the insights of the earlier cases and other experiences.

Yet, this researcher sees clearly that none of the traditional methods of research have brought enough fundamental things to light when compared to the immensity of the subject matter, other than to be able to state that there is a great neglect of associations. No, the greater value of this study is, as the researcher hopes, in the work on definitions and concepts, especially as brought together in several connected matrices. This again was born out of looking back with clear eyes at what happened in the heat of the moment, like for instance in the public library case. In the end, all methods and insights are connected.

In the end of this study, we leave the reader with more questions. The study of associations cannot be done by a few, let alone by a single researcher, nor are we finished with questions on quality or trust.



# **PART V**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

## Answering the Questions of this Study

This thesis deals with questions surrounding three terms: associations, trust and quality. Each term raises more questions than could ever be fully answered because of their subjective, shape-shifting and sometimes paradoxical nature. Whether approached from a more theoretical angle or from that of a reflective practitioner, new questions keep on rising faster than facts can be collected. Yet, both the theorist and the practitioner are not without skills or insights.

In hindsight this practitioner has, especially in the context of the three case studies, worked in line with Abbott, who wrote that it is probably best to follow “the making and unmaking of (...) individual, social entities, cultural structures, patterns of conflict – instant by instant as the social process unfolds in time.” It is “events” that then are the best markers of that social process.

To this historical approach is added the view of the theorist. Defining associations, it must be understood that two of the most distinguishing things about associations are its fundamentally democratic nature and its character as a collective. It then becomes logical to choose this one defining event in an association as the litmus test for all associations faced with a trust issues to be resolved by a quality initiative like peer review:

*Do a majority of the members say ‘yes’ to a proposal by the board of the association for a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?*

In all three cases the answer to this was ‘yes’ indeed. In each case it was a very hard won ‘yes’. And this is what makes it interesting and relevant, because resistance was fierce and coming from a situation where the general interest of the association could not be considered in line with the interest as many, if not most, members saw this.

In two case the speed with which the membership turned from against to in favor was fast enough to speak of a sudden “surge” in support. In one case it took more time before the support for it “emerged”, probably caused by an outside reason, that of the coming of a new oversight body. In the two cases of ‘yes’ the turn around was so drastic that it led to further research into its causes:

*Why does it take a surge to let the members decide ‘yes’ to a quality initiative across the whole of the membership of the association?*

There is a specific answer to be given to this second question. In both cases of ‘yes’ the leadership of the association literally went to the members in order to explain to them the reasons behind the quality initiative. In both cases the traditional wait and see role was broken, however, not before the board had come under heavy criticism or had folded.

In both study and case studies more detailed analyzes are made on why the board was right to pursue a 'politics of quality'. They have to do with this, much too stylized 'cycle of trust', in which a crisis leads to a context of signals and incidents that things are not going right, and action is necessary. Trust in the association grows less in the outside world. This action comes in the shape of a need for more "quality". As this study extensively but indirectly argues, the choice of the quality intervention matters a lot and should probably not be of the kind associations usually employ: certification and accreditation schemes. This study gives new answers about the nature of these initiatives and that of the debate on quality itself. Though in general terms, most members may agree to a quality initiative, they often show resistance when it comes to the actual introduction. This time an internal trust issue has to be addressed. As the answer to the first question shows, it is possible to break through this resistance.

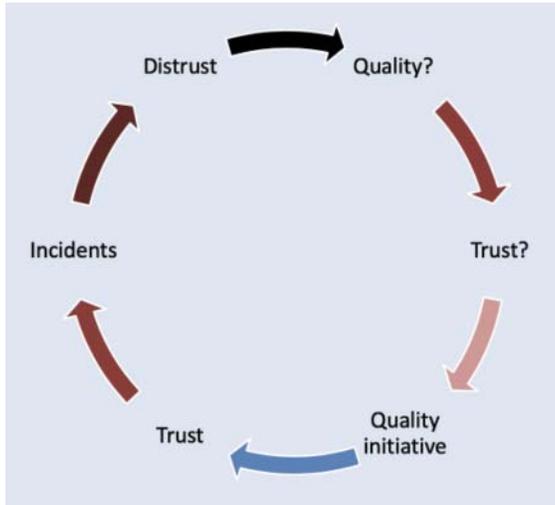


Figure 55 The Association Cycle of Trust

Still, the question why a surge will happen in one case, or an assent emerges in another case, or nothing happens in a third case, can be very dependent on the nature of the association itself and its members. This study is much concerned with questions exactly at this level. For a full answer it was inevitable to look at associations themselves, what they have in common and where they differ. Could it be that the surge happens earlier when the association has more and more smaller members (likely) and when their questions of members are truly met (certainly). But the real value of these questions may not lie in the answers, but in the picture that emerges of associations themselves and their character. From study itself and from the history of the writing about associations we can learn that, in spite of some attempts, the full picture of what associations there are, and how much impact they have on society, is not clear.

The full picture, not the fragmented and too often partial picture that comes from different specialists' views. It is right to speak about "the neglect of associations". But even so, though that might be the logical first conclusion of this study, it is important to move on to others that may be more concrete. In any case, here follows a number of statements and conclusions that may not be complete but should provide work enough to those who care for issues of trust, quality and especially associations, for a long time to come.

## Conclusions

The first conclusions from this study is this:

*The role of associations in society is neglected, certainly in comparison with public and private institutions. The reasons why science neglects the phenomenon of associations is a question in itself.*

There is a need for a quantitative research agenda that also touches upon standard counting and classification questions. This goes much beyond the scope of this study. However, there is also a more qualitative agenda to formulate, as there is a need to rethink the whole concept of associations in the light of new developments like the coming of digitization and the increased complexity of the modern network society. There are huge transitions going on. Do associations help or hinder? In this study, some of the most important pathologies of modern associations are mentioned. They could best be summarized by the idea that through the danger of collective groupthink, associations stand in the way of necessary change. But are there no benefits to associations then? Probably there are as many remedies as there are pathologies. The deeper question is this: is our understanding of associations still deep enough to assess their impact and chances for change? Though a first definition of associations is given at the end of Part I, on the neglect of associations, many further dimensions are touched upon in Part II, on the nature of associations.

To gain insight into the new dynamics of associations, different dimensions are named and translated into different matrices: associations themselves (A-matrix), their governance (G-matrix), the added value of their tasks to the members (V), their governance (G-matrix, including the issue of self-regulation versus public or private oversight), their way of working on quality (Q-matrix), the way they position themselves in society (P-matrix), and finally on the difficult convergence of trust and rational approaches (T-matrix). The Association matrix is extensively used in this study, including the main cases. The trust matrix underlies almost everything else and will lead to the concept of "tratio." All these matrices are, in the end, but a tool to describe a phenomenon that is never one-dimensional and always moving. A final ambition is to bring all this together in one three-dimensional image of movement.

What emerges first, is the need for a rethinking of the Durkheim notion of what a group is and when its nature changes from that of a classic association into something else. Present definitions of associations as “a group of people who have the same job, aim, or interest” are correct, but explain nothing. In that way, the association will only be identified by its standard structure of a board with members, etc. The point is that associations can reflect all the ways in which people can cooperate in a group, and this includes a social dynamic that makes it different from more the more hierarchical groups that form a business, government, or more cooptive network structure. But where does one draw the line? Durkheim sought the distinction in the symbols or other attributes a group can use when admitting or expelling a member: its entry-and-exit criteria. This works fine with donning a toga on a lawyer or a white coat on a doctor, but it fails to work when a single click on LinkedIn or another social media post makes you a member of a group. In Part II of this study, using the association matrix most of all, we look again at Durkheim and some other thinkers on the characteristics of associations—again, there are few compared to other group formations—and look especially at the dimension of entry and exit and at the perspective of standards and how they are used.

The second conclusion of this study is:

*The nature of associations is dynamic, and that nature changes depending on new definitions of what the nature of a group is.*

When it comes to the entry-and-exit conditions, we look, for instance, once again at the matter of categorization. It can does so first start with looking at the issue through the lens of a “life-cycle approach.” Looking at it from the perspective of a person as a member, you can see that the kind of membership, including its number and nature, much depends on the life phase one is in. Looking at it from the perspective of an association, you can read in the rise and decline of associations truly the whole history of modern mankind. There are many histories of individual associations, but except for a few phases, very few descriptions of world history through the lens of associations as a whole. Phases in which this does happen, are the period of the “guilds” in the Middle Ages and the formation of associations at the time of De Tocqueville’s description of the early United States; the latter, also a source of inspiration to Durkheim. For now, too many of the world historians who look at history as shaped by associations and networks do so through the lens of conspiracy theories. This does not help, except for stressing the issue of trust.

Looking at it through this life-cycle approach to entry and exit, a third conclusion is:

*We need a modernized categorization of associations, to be adopted by the collectors of statistics sources.*

This also leads to a new answer to the question “What is an association?” A fourth statement starts out by stating that an association is a group, though a special kind of group, with four special conditions:

- voluntary entry and exit are by achievement and not by ascription
- the group decides on issues in a fundamentally democratic nature
- there are autonomous standards through formalization and specialization
- it is recognized as a legal entity
- and associations as a whole have a strong “self-similarity”

It can be summarized as follows:

*An association is a group of people and entities, bonded by trust, and recognizable by its barriers for entry and exit and its standards, applying equally to all its members.*

Every association represents a balance between distinction and equality. Distinction (“quality”): in order to reward status and merit during the long cycle of membership. Equality: to stress the fundamental truth that you as a member are part of a whole and that no member is bigger than the association. The lesser the power distance, being a source of inequality that will also be there in the horizontal structure of associations, the stronger the fundamentals of an association are met. In this sense, an association is fundamentally different from businesses, governments, and even cooptive networks. It also touches on the issue of “sense-making” through common goals and the bonding by trust that may come from this. Elements of ratio and trust meet.

A fourth conclusion is that:

*A modern association distinguishes itself, one the one hand, by the existence of barriers for entry & exit, and relatively closed standards, and by a bond of trust on the other hand.*

On the aspect of quality, there is something else at work: the issue of standards and how they are formulated. To distinguish this axis on the association matrix from that of entry-and-exit criteria, the issue is debated mostly from the perspective of standards governing members during their membership (so after entry and before exit), and from the question of how closed or open the standards are formulated. It is possible to write the history of an association just by following the dynamics of how it deals with the balance between closed and open standards. The closer a standard is formulated, the more it probably applies to a classic association. In part, the latter has to do a lot with the technique of writing standards, which, in line with the lawyer-philosopher Witteveen, should always be seen as a social and cultural construct.

But then again, the way you write a law or regulation—or how many sub-rules it has—owes a lot to the history and context of the association, including the question of how present public authorities are in the work of the association.

In society, we tend to think of associations as subservient to public authorities. Horizontal “self-regulation” stands underneath vertical government regulation. However, article twenty of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights formulates “peaceful assembly and association” as an essential freedom, one that gives associations a place “sui generis” in much the same way churches have their sui generis status based on the same Declaration. But as with associations themselves, the consequences of the Declaration are hardly debated, outside of perhaps a few labor union associations. Much closer to home, and very relevant indeed, are the many attempts at certification and other forms of self-regulation, to which this study pays much attention in the third and last part of the study. In the second part, the issue of standards is used to demonstrate how different categories of associations have different rules and different relations to the regulations of governments.

A fifth conclusion is:

*Associations have in legal terms a universal sui generis status. They may be forced to be part of an effort by public or private authorities to be used for (self-) regulatory purposes.*

Looking at how closed or open standards are formulated gives an important historical perspective on the growth of different categories of associations. In the study, this gives, for instance, fresh insights into associations in the field of war and sports and other categories.

- Fair play in war and sports: War games became sporting games, but are the relatively open rules of fair play still maintained, or have they been replaced by regulations that determine a medal on the 1/100th of a second that one skater is faster than another?

A sixth conclusion is the following:

*Especially sporting associations should go back more to the relatively open concept of fair play, instead of relying upon closed standard rules for games.*

- Rules and risings in religion: Associations and churches are like brother and sister, growing up and from time to time loving and hating each other, just like the open standards of Protestant movements grew closed again and the Catholic Church grew more open to its members. But does declining membership in associations say something about declining membership of churches or is this something else?

A seventh conclusion is as follows:

*Church and associations share the same sui generis position and share similar developments but are approached differently. There is no rational ground for this.*

- From civic to civil: when De Tocqueville came to the United States, he was amazed to find so many associations and wrote, “The art of associations then becomes ... the mother of action, studied and applied by all”. What he saw was mostly “civic”: what citizens can do for and with other citizens.” And when there is little by way of government, like in the early States, associations can be used for anything and everything. At some point, there is the transformation of a (cooptive) informal network into a classic association, but there is little need for the role of public authority. Rediscovered from time to time—again in the twenty-first century, there is increased attention for civic initiatives, but this can now much more easily clash into the presence of public authorities or even classic associations. This is where civic initiatives need to become civil in their nature: they take part or interact with government and sometimes take over their role. There has always been a strong longing for a society with a stronger role for civic initiatives, but the question is whether society is capable of lessening its dependency on public and commercial hierarchical structures.

An eighth conclusion is the following:

*There is a positive sentiment toward civic and civil associations in general. If this is to lead to specific new initiatives both the public sector and people themselves will have to reassess their own roles.*

- When civic becomes political: as associations become stronger and transform from civic to civil, there also comes a point where they start to take up public positions. However, the transformation to a political association is something else altogether. Political associations can be frowned upon and forbidden in societies where associations themselves may flourish. Also, it is clear that political science does not pay enough attention to political parties as associations. Perhaps there lies a source for democratic renewal.

A ninth observation is:

*Political science should and could pay more attention to the role of political parties as associations.*

- When politics becomes diplomacy: globalization has as much effect on associations as anything else.

The impact is not understood, neither with the national associations or outside of it, except perhaps when it comes to the international role of employers' associations and unions. Research done is almost exclusively of a commercial nature. Among other things, it will lead to a form of diplomacy instead of lobbying and public affairs.

A tenth conclusion is:

*International activities of associations and their impact are underestimated.*

- When occupation leads to association: first of all, the term “trade” association is outdated for many reasons, among them digitization and individualization. More attention should be paid to the common goal, including the source of income. Still, not all occupational associations can be treated the same, though as a major category they can be distinguished from “social associations” like sporting and civic associations. Within this group, different tasks, or sources of added value to the members, play a role and ask for strategic choices. The different elements are also sources of standards, and the tensions surrounding them.

An eleventh conclusion is this:

*The term “trade” association should be replaced by “occupational” association: where individuals or entities find their common goal and source of income.*

In Part III of this study, the attention turned to the question formulated as the second overarching question: how far can associations be trusted? The answer to this question is in part to be answered by the question of the issue of trust. In the very beginning of this study, it was said that trust is “the result of an accumulation of signals and suggestions that in a very short time can raise the expectation that someone or something will behave according to expectations.” So, a behavioral approach within a process definition. Trust is too implicit to be considered rational or traced as rational. The two can be considered the same in stable conditions, just like distrust and irrationality can come together. Trust can only be influenced directly at the moment a signal or suggestion requires a direct action. Mostly, trust comes and goes in an indirect way. However, it can be influenced by interventions in the perceived quality of a product, service, or activity as provided by an association and its members. It is here that the question in how far associations can be trusted changes into a question of “quality.” What is this quality and which interventions can influence it?

There are a great many definitions of quality and most do not catch what is at the heart of each definition of quality: the potential for conflict or consensus. The following is the definition used in this study.

A twelfth conclusion is this:

*Quality is the consensus achieved after making implicit definitions explicit.*

It is the effort to define explicitly and reach consensus, that helps to create and maintain new realities. This is, as most quality definitions, nothing but a process definition, but a hard one to match and with consequences that are often not foreseen. The point is, that making definitions explicit, also highlights the differences in the perception of quality. In that crucial sense, the consensus is hard to achieve, and quality can become a source of conflicts. Conflicts that have to be managed, especially in the context of associations full of members with different interests and views of quality. It raises the question if certification schemes are there for the raising of quality or for pacifying the association and its stakeholders. Both the 2011 publication by Noordhoek on “sector-wide quality,” and the development in the list of quality interventions he followed, show the tendency of associations and their members to keep quality under control, mostly through certification schemes, instead of trying to raise the quality upwards.

A thirteenth observation is this:

*Certification can become a form of pacifying and evading the debate about quality. There is a tendency for quality instruments to become instruments of control instead of moving quality upwards. New approaches to increase trust in the association are needed.*

There are many ways with which to select means to improve quality. But there is no “one fits all,” though the certification efforts of many associations seem to suggest otherwise. In an intervention pyramid, the different players, perspective, and conditions are brought together. And in every case, there are at least the following two positions: the one of the associations and its members, choosing and implementing the right intervention on the one hand, and the ones who have to assess, review or testify that this has been done correctly on the other hand. How this is done is partly a governance matter (as can also be shown through the governance matrix). Relevant from the case studies is that three sectors are compared in which one has no vertical (public) oversight body, one has such an oversight body and another partly. Each association has adopted a horizontal intervention in the shape of peer review or inter-collegial review. In as much as this can be established, it appears that the horizontal approach is more effective for improving the quality in the sector than the vertical oversight methodology. However, the presence of vertical oversight is a clear incentive to adopt the horizontal approach and do so more speedily.

The fourteenth conclusion is as follows:

*In as much as this can be established, it appears that a horizontal quality approach is more effective for improving the quality in a sector than vertical (public or private) oversight. However, the presence of vertical oversight is a clear incentive to have or adopt a horizontal approach and do so more speedily. This is of high importance to the governance of associations and the debate of the chances for self-regulation.*

It is also and partly a matter of choosing the right quality intervention (as can also be shown through the quality matrix). Here, these two sides are usually called auditee and auditor. The intervention most discussed here, also in the context of the main cases, is that of peer review, or inter-collegial review, and not certification. But to look at the whole picture it is also important to look at the kind of tasks that need to be performed, the scale of the members of the association (tensions between large and small members are endemic. Then there is also the question of how the right quality intervention translates itself into an effective positioning of the association in both internal and external eyes. The language of those who are responsible for the quality intervention is not always the same as those who have to communicate, lobby, or influence its results.

The fifteenth conclusion is as follows:

*No lobbying or public affairs effort can replace the actual quality effort by an association or that of its members. This effort comes first. At the same time, no quality effort will have an impact without a clear communication strategy both internally and externally.*

When it comes to choosing the right quality intervention, there also raises the more fundamental question of which quality approach to use. In professional quality circles, there is a constant and subtle debate going on about the right approach, school, or paradigm. Hardjono and Kemenade come in their thinking to four paradigms that are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive: empirical, referential, reflective, and emergent. In lay terms: first, come the more (ISO-like) certification and registration activities, and later come the award schemes (INK, EFQM, Baldrige) that are more integral by nature. This creates a backlash against the bureaucratic nature of these interventions, resulting in two more reflective approaches. The first takes a more spiritual approach, asking for inspiration. The second is termed an 'emergent' approach, intervening when all patterns are understood. After commenting on these, this researcher comes to a different approach, also using elements from the trust matrix, in which trust-distrust and rational-emotional are crossed, creating four kinds of strategies for behavior, which are relevant to the use of quality approaches as well.

They translate into four “mindsets”: the objective mindset (science-based reference model), the system mindset (system-based reference model), the divergent mindset (opportunity-based reflective model) and the professional mindset (relation-based reflective model). For each mindset, different modes of behavior or strategies are described, from different points in the matrix.

The sixteenth conclusion is as follows:

*There are important distinctions to be made between different quality approaches. The debate among quality specialists is not yet decided, but here four mindsets are given that give clarity when the choice for a new quality approach must be made in order to increase trust.*

One important addition by Hardjono and Kemenade to the debate about the quality approach is to plead for an “emergent” paradigm. They plead for an inquiring and open mindset and look at a problem from many angles. This thesis has consciously tried to have an open eye for emergent issues and situations. Yet, as a mindset, it is too passive. Without a strong effort, the main cases show that trust will not increase through a quality intervention. For this, a surgent approach is needed; making the quality effort surge and touch the whole of the association.

The seventeenth conclusion is as follows:

*Looking at emergent issues is important in order to see what intervention is needed to increase quality, but it is not enough. In each of the main cases, it required multiple attempts to let the members agree with an intervention. The actual intervention requires a “surgent approach” throughout the association.*

In line with the wish to have a surgent approach, it is sensible to choose a quality intervention that involves the members as much as possible. Peer review or inter-collegial review fits this purpose well but is more sensitive than the classic interventions of associations like certification.

The decision to go ahead with the peer review is relevant from a number of perspectives—and maybe not relevant at all because in each case it could be argued that the decision could have gone the other way, and anyhow, what is a sample of three? Yet, all three decisions were no accident, neither from the side of the members nor, most particularly, from the side of the proponents within the board of the peer review. The following are some of the observations that can be made:

- For the longest time, the opposition against the peer review, among the members, was strong and influenced the majority of them. This was often in contrast with the outcome of surveys among members;

- In each case, the resistance of the members was overcome because there was a combination of strong groundwork and a fully committed leadership. This can and has changed the thinking of the members;
- This could mean a “surging” approach is needed to increase trust. It is not good enough to let it emerge;
- Looking beyond the main cases, and, for instance, to the cases as studied in the context of this researcher’s book on “Sector-wide quality,” much the same can be said from comparable cases.

The eighteenth conclusion is this:

*Opinions of members in advance of a quality intervention are hard to assess. In general, they want trust to improve and see the need for a quality effort, but do not apply this general insight more to other members and the board than themselves. Here an emergent approach is needed.*

Much of the resistance against quality interventions have to do with issues the association cannot do much about, as they have for instance to do with market regulations or digital transformations. Yet the moment the association tries to “help” the members improve, the association “owns” the problem even more than it probably did before. In this way, the association makes itself both relevant and impotent at the same time. Using the association matrix to identify points of added value, it will be clear that many points lie outside the domain of a classic association to influence directly.

The nineteenth conclusion is as follows:

*In most associations, members will use arguments concerning elements that come up in a quality intervention, which the association cannot directly influence. The association should not only be clear about this, but also use the surge to involve the whole of the association in the effort to address these elements as much as possible.*

In public or semi-public situations, the nature of the entity can be hard to define: it sometimes can be a sector, a professional association, and an employer’s association in one. Its identity can change, depending on defined interests by (parts) of the membership of associations. As public and private spheres collide, associations are hard pressed to maintain their own spheres or find the right balance. History shows this can be hard to do. In the case of an association with both public and private traits, it has failed to do so. In two (roughly) forty-year cycles, the notariat was provided with a public status while maintaining a commercial position. At first, this proved to be very fruitful for the professional association, but in both cases, it ended with structural damage to the association and its members. The last time, the government did not provide the right response, worsening the situation. In combination with the financial crisis, it took the association a long time to regain its confidence.

The twentieth conclusion is as follows:

*Associations need to learn the lessons of their history. In one case, there is a (forty-year) cycle to gaining and losing trust.*

In the end, in all the main cases, the members of the associations chose in the majority to support the quality intervention of peer review or inter-collegial audit. Lessons learned during the development of the audits made it more likely this would happen. The more deductive the approach, the closer to the everyday reality of a member, including its dilemmas, the better the audit system functions. This does require careful selection of auditors. From the many other aspects that determine the quality of a peer-review approach, these deserve a mention: a membership that is large enough to have an auditor pool, which gives a few issues of confidentiality; all members participate; a balance between control and audit and between process and content of the standards; repeated renewal of the approach; the position and quality of the audit office, and above all the quality of the auditor. If it all comes together, no member needs to be lonely.

The twenty-first, and last conclusion is this one:

*Peer review or inter-collegial review is an effective quality intervention to regain trust. The quality of the auditor and many other factors need to be taken into account.*

## Theses

1. The role of associations in society is neglected, certainly in comparison with public and private institutions.
2. A modernized categorization of associations is due, to be followed by the statistical sources.
3. An association is a group of people and entities, bonded by trust and recognizable by its barriers for entry and exit and its standards for membership.
4. With data-visualization more can be done to distinguish modern collectives in their shapes and dynamics, using the definitions and standards developed in this study
5. A modern association distinguishes itself on the one hand by the existence of barriers for entry and exit, and relatively closed standards on the one hand, and by a bond of trust on the other hand.
6. Associations have, in legal terms, a universal *sui generis* status. They may not be forced to be part of an effort by public or private authorities to be used for (self-) regulatory purposes.
7. Sporting associations especially should go back more to the relatively open concept of fair play, instead of relying upon closed, standard rules for games.
8. Church and associations share the same *sui generis* position, share similar developments, but are approached differently. The ratio for this, if any, is not convincing.
9. There is a positive sentiment toward civic and civil associations in general. If this is to lead to specific new initiatives, both the public sector and people themselves will have to reassess their own roles.
10. Political science should and could pay more attention to the role of political parties as associations.
11. International activities of associations, and their impact, are underestimated.
12. The term “trade” association should be replaced by “occupational” association: where individuals or entities find their common goal and source of income.
13. Quality is the consensus achieved after making implicit definitions explicit.
14. Certification can become a form of pacifying and evading the debate about quality. There is a tendency for quality instruments to become instruments of control instead of raising quality upwards. New approaches to increase trust in the association are needed.

15. In as much as this can be established, it appears that a horizontal quality approach is more effective for improving the quality in a sector than vertical (public or private) oversight. However, the presence of vertical oversight is a clear incentive to have or adopt a horizontal approach and to do so more speedily. This is of high importance to the governance of associations and the debate of the chances for self-regulation.
16. No lobbying or public affairs effort can replace the actual quality effort by an association or that of its members. This effort comes first. At the same time, no quality effort will have an impact without a clear communication strategy both internally and externally.
17. There are distinctions to be made between different quality approaches. The debate among quality specialists is not yet decided, but here, four mindsets are given that give clarity when the choice for a new quality approach must be made in order to increase trust.
18. Looking at emergent issues, it is important to see what intervention is needed to increase quality, but it is not enough. The actual intervention requires a surgent approach throughout the association.
19. Opinions of members in advance of quality interventions are hard to assess. In general, they want trust to improve and see the need for a quality effort, but do not apply this general insight more to other members and the board than themselves. Here an emergent approach is needed.
20. In most associations, members will use arguments concerning elements that come up in a quality intervention, which the association cannot directly influence. The association should not only be clear about this but also use the surge to involve the whole of the association in the effort to address these elements as much as possible.
21. Associations need to learn the lessons of their history. In one case, there is a (forty-year) cycle to gaining and losing trust.
22. Peer review or inter-collegial review is an effective quality intervention to regain trust. The quality of the auditor and many other factors need to be taken into account.
23. Nothing prepared me better for my career than what I learned as a volunteer in a social association, that of a political party.
24. Little gave me more courage to push on with this study than what Abbott said on being an eclectic person: you will lose all your battles from the specialists, but if you learn enough from your losses, you will get further anyway.

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Uitgeverij:



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