

Innovation in accountability

Content, form and symbolism of new accountability arrangements

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1 Introduction

The obligation to give account for its actions is one of the basic principles of a democratic government (Behn, 2001; Bovens & Schillemans, 2009, p. 19). The public has the right to know what government and governmental organizations plan to do, what they hope to achieve and how much this will cost; and afterwards, in how far goals were reached and whether this was done within budget. After all, it is all our tax money that fills the public purse, and through accountability information citizens can make sure no public money is wasted. Accountability also provides citizens with the information needed to assess whether the actions of government are based on the core values of good governance such as effectiveness, integrity, democracy and transparency. Accountability information gives citizens the ability to preserve the equilibrium of power between them on one side and government on the other, and thus to prevent abuses of power (Behn, 2001, pp. 8-10).

Accountability is not just for the benefit of citizens, but also advantageous for organizations themselves. By giving account for their actions, governmental institutions can demonstrate their legitimacy. Accountability can hold up a mirror to the organization: by reflecting on their past actions; public organizations can learn from their mistakes and successes, and thus improve their future performance, which again will increase their support with the public.

As a cornerstone of good governance and a basic democratic principle, public accountability is a phenomenon that, on the surface at least, enjoys wide support. But below the shiny surface often lives an atmosphere of resentment against the practical implications of this lofty ideal (Power, 2007). In this undercurrent, accountability is seen as a burden rather than a benefit (van Rijn & van Twist, 2009). The critique focuses mainly on the unintended side effects of the enthusiastic uptake of many accountability measures. Whereas much of the discussion on accountability is conducted in poetry, reality tends to be more prosaic. In theory, giving account serves an important democratic purpose but in practice it often costs a lot of money, time and energy, and, the critics claim, often results into little more than a periodic ritual dance. In the eyes of many professionals forced to be accountable, it tends to become a goal in and of itself, and diverts attention from their real work; professional aptitude giving way to (more or less) slavishly following rules and schedules. The burden of accountability creates more bureaucracy and focussing on a number of fixed, measurable outcomes can lead to perverse effects (Behn, 2001; de Bruijn, 2002). This dissatisfaction with the negative side effects of traditional forms of accountability threatens to erode this cornerstone of good governance. Doubts about the effectiveness of accountability can seriously undermine the public's trust in governmental institutions.

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This critical undercurrent of the debate on public accountability, spurred on by changes in society, has resulted in the creation of an abundance of new, alternative, forms of giving account. These changes include a weakening of the government's self-evident authority, increased media scrutiny (especially when it comes to alleged government 'blunders') and technological developments, including the internet which allows governments to communicate directly to citizens, bypassing the traditional media's filter. At the same time, global trends in public management (or indeed, the global management revolution, see Kettl, 2000), including New Public Management, have meant that accountability has become even more important.

The critical voices in the undercurrent of the debate do not dismiss accountability, but rather treasure it as key principle of democratic government and --precisely because they treasure it-- have developed new and innovative accountability arrangements to counteract the negative side effects that often come with the more traditional accountability instruments. These new arrangements supplement rather than substitute more traditional forms of accountability: they exist alongside the classical accountability instruments which lie at the core of the rule of law, rather than replace them. These new forms take all sorts of shapes, thus offering a lot of choices, and with choice, there is also the additional burden of making the right decision. The possibility of bespoke arrangements also means that one size will not fit all; different situations call for different accountability arrangements. With all these additional choices, it is not only the content—the information that is shared—that is relevant, but also the form in which this process takes place. Each form comes with its own symbolism, and the symbolic value of giving account is thus increasingly important. Public organizations can send different messages to citizens, as well as their own staff, by using different accountability instruments.

Governmental institutions not only have to choose the right accountability arrangement because each situation necessitates a different approach. Choice is also necessary to prevent an overkill of accountability, as there is now an abundance of instruments that can be used. The unrestrained use of new forms of accountability can lead to accountability pressure, as professionals' attention has to shift from doing their job to producing accountability information, resulting in the same perverse and detrimental effects as a too heavy-handed use of the more traditional instruments.

1.1 Note on Methodology

In this paper we will describe and analyze new and innovative accountability arrangements that were developed over the few years. We base this overview on an extensive document and literature study. We studied relevant academic literature on new forms of accountability. We then gathered data on how they were brought into practice by studying websites, policy documents, press clippings and academic and journalistic case studies.

Based on our description and analysis, we developed a list of the choices public organizations have to account for their actions. This overview can be seen as a first step towards the development of an analytical framework that can both be used to ex post describe accountability instruments but that can also be used ex ante by policy makers to decide which instruments best fit their accountability needs.

1.2 Outline

In the following sections of this paper we will sketch a trend connecting some of the new and innovative forms of accountability, and illustrate them with a number of examples. We describe how accountability has moved from the classic interpretation as an intrinsic part of any government, via New Public Management's need to do more with less, combined with the technical innovations that enable performance to be constantly be monitored, to a situation which we refer to as dynamic accountability (Cels, van Twist, de Jong, & Karré, 2010)

Governments now use the possibilities of the internet to account for their actions directly to citizens, without having to rely on traditional media to relay their message. Also, accountability is less and less a one way stream: the internet gives citizens the opportunity to actively hold government to account by scrutinizing public records or gathering their own data.

From these descriptions we will distil the characteristics of each accountability arrangement on several dimensions concerning content, form and symbolism. In section 3 we will describe the choices governmental and other public organizations now face when it comes to their accountability. We conclude this paper with a section in which we discuss what the emergence of the new arrangements we described means for accountability as a corner stone of good governance.

2 Innovations in accountability

2.1 Innovation in classic accountability

As we already brought forward in the introduction of this paper, accounting for its actions, including the way public money is spent, is an intrinsic part of any democratic government. Giving account is seen as a great good, that deserves systematic, orderly and diligent execution. Accountability is not only seen as a government's duty, but also as the public's right.

In this mainstream view, accountability is understood to be a cyclical process that is an integral part of the government's operations. Transparency and comparability are highly valued. This generally results in a standardized supply of information, following set, tried and tested methods which often have not changed much over the centuries.

This type of accountability is vertically oriented: it follows hierarchical lines of control. A subordinate layer or organization gives account to the governing body on regular intervals. Vertical accountability is based in law, often even the constitution, requiring the organization to give account on a cyclical basis on whether the rules set out by the principals have been met.

Classic accountability focuses primarily on financial data and on the legitimacy of spending. Even if the formal goal is giving account on aspects of policy, it often amounts to little more than an accountant's statement of income and expenditure. Therefore the government's budget, together with an ex-post financial report, form a key part of most classic accountability arrangements. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this classic way of giving account is not subject to change.

Behn (2001, pp. 6-11) distinguishes between three types of (or reasons for) accountability: accountability for finance, accountability for fairness and accountability for performance. The world wide trend of New Public Management (NPM) has boosted the relative importance of the latter. NPM prompted many governments to implement some type of performance budgeting, in an effort to increase the effectiveness of government organizations and save money, or, as the Clinton administration put it, '*a government that works better and costs less*' (Gore, 1993). Traditionally, budgets focussed on distributing funds rather than performance: government departments receive a set amount of money rather than that they have to provide a set volume of goods or services. In contrast, performance budgeting sets output targets, and thus requires accountability on more than spending alone: also performance will have to be accounted for (Hilton & Joyce, 2007, p. 247; Wildavsky, 1986, p. 320).

For example, a performance budgeting programme was introduced in The Netherlands in 1999 under the name '*Van Beleidsbegroting Tot Beleidsverantwoording*' ('From Policy Budget to Accounting for Policy'), commonly referred to by the acronym VBTB (Ministerie van Financiën, 1999), which saw its first fully fledged run in 2001 (see box below).

VBTB (Performance Budgeting in The Netherlands)

In The Netherlands, a performance budgeting programme was introduced in 1999 under the name '*Van Beleidsbegroting Tot Beleidsverantwoording*' ('From Policy Budget to Accounting for Policy'), commonly referred to by the acronym VBTB (Ministerie van Financiën, 1999). VBTB saw its first fully fledged run in 2001.

In 1999, a document entitled 'From Policy Budget to Accounting for Policy' was published by the Dutch government (Ministerie van Financiën, 1999), introducing a policy of performance budgeting and accounting which has become known by the Dutch acronym of the document's title: VBTB ('*Van Beleidsbegroting tot Beleidsverantwoording*'). This programme thoroughly restructured the budget: appropriations are now made for policy lines (an average of 10 per department), defined by outcomes the departments aims to achieve (Sterck, 2007, p. 195). This dramatically reduced the number of articles on the central government budget: from more than 800 to around 140 (Inter-ministerial Consultations for Financial and Economic Affairs (IOFEZ), 2004; cited in: Sterck, 2007, p. 195). Its aim was to be both comprehensive and transparent (Zalm, Veerman, Ministerie van Financiën, & Ministerie van Landbouw, 2004, p. 2).

Each article is accompanied by the answers to three questions (which in Dutch, all start with a 'W'): 'What do we want to achieve?', 'What will we do to achieve it?' and 'How much would it cost?'. Especially this third question links VBTB with the accrual accounting programme introduced around the same time, by focusing on costs rather than cash expenditure, especially in cases where expenditure yields benefits over a number of years (van der Hoek, 2005, p. 40).

Three more questions are to be answered (this time all 'H's) in the Financial Report: 'What did we achieve?', 'Did we do what we thought we would do?', and 'Did it cost what we thought it would cost?'

To create more emphasis on the Financial Report, a new date was added to the budgetary calendar. The Financial Report is now issued separately from the new budget proposals: four months earlier, in May instead of September of the following year (Ministerie van Financiën, 1999, p. 32), giving parliament the opportunity to debate results from the past year separately from the plans for the upcoming year.

To stress the importance of this new Financial Report introduced by the adoption of VBTB style performance budgeting, some of the age-old symbols and rituals attached to the presentation of the budget were mirrored for its presentation. On the third Tuesday in September, the parliamentary year is opened with the Queen's Speech from the Throne. Later that day, the finance minister presents the budget proposals to parliament, for which he uses a special briefcase imprinted with the text 'Third Tuesday in September'².

For the presentation of the Financial Report, a similar date was chosen: while the budget proposals are presented to parliament on the third Tuesday in September, the third Wednesday in May was to become 'Accountability Day' (Ministerie van Financiën, 2009b). Also a new briefcase was created for this occasion, similar to the one used to present the budget, but bearing the text 'Third Wednesday in May' (Ministerie van Financiën, 2009a). In this manner government tried to lay a link between the new phenomenon of 'Accountability Day' and the traditional event of the opening of parliament. The message that is sent is clear: accounting for government's actions is as important as presenting its plans.

In The Netherlands, the New Public Management trend has resulted in new but still quite classic forms of public accountability: the new is explicitly linked to the old. By embedding the new accountability instrument of performance budgeting in the existing accountability arrangements, adopting old symbols and placing it within the existing calendar, the resulting form possesses many of the characteristics of classic accountability (see also section 3), in that it is an annually recurring

² The tradition on presenting the budget in its own special briefcase was in turn borrowed from British traditions, where the opening of parliament is accompanied with considerably more pomp and circumstance than in the Netherlands. In the Dutch context, the tradition only dates back to the first budget after World War II in 1947, when then Minister of Finance Liefinck introduced to custom (Ministerie van Financiën, 2009a).

process, following well-defined, fixed routines which are based in law. In other countries more innovative forms were chosen as part of a wider trend of focussing on performance measurement and management (de Bruijn, 2002; Talbot, 2007, 2010).

2.2 Accountability as an interactive process

In the Dutch context, the focus on the performance of government in the delivery of public services we described in the previous section has taken a form where goals are set for the upcoming year, followed by an accountability moment at the end of that year where the outcomes of each programme are held up to the set targets. However, this form of accountability still adheres to many of the classic characteristics: it is based in law, vertical, cyclical (annual) and there is a prescribed format that applies to all programmes.

In several other countries, especially those in the Anglo-Saxon world, the same trend of a focus on performance³ through innovative forms of accountability has inspired schemes where one does not wait until the end of the year to look back to see if the goals that were set, have been reached. Advances in technology have made it possible to monitor performance almost in real time, and thus make changes along the way to ensure that the delivery of public services stays on track.

Examples include the plethora of Stats, including CompStat, CitiStat, and Rotterdam's own MaasStat (collectively known as PerformanceStat; see Behn, 2008). These arrangements rely on frequent hearings in order to collectively identify problems and decide on target areas through interactive discourse.

Many of these programmes are not public accountability in the strict sense of the term (cf Bovens & Schillemans, 2009, p. 24), as these arrangements often are not open to the public (while much of the statistics are released, in most places the meetings are held behind closed doors), and are primarily meant as an internal management tool. However, they are meant not only to improve performance, but also to hold public organizations to account by their political principals, so that they in turn can account for government's performance to the citizens that elected them.

CompStat, CitiStat

CompStat (short for COMPuter STATistics or COMParative STATistics) is the New York City Police Department's accountability process, which has since been replicated in many other departments. Started in 1994, CompStat comprises computerized statistics in the form of weekly, monthly and annual reports, plus electronic pin maps to show how crimes and police activities cluster geographically (the so-called 'crime maps'). In addition to the statistics, CompStat encompasses a system of weekly meetings on multiple levels where the latest statistical reports are scrutinized. These form the basis for the strategy for the upcoming period, and assign target areas: thanks to the detailed statistics, it is possible to determine where the problem areas lie.

CompStat's key elements are mission clarification, internal accountability, geographic organization of command, organizational flexibility, data-driven problem identification and assessment, and innovative problem solving (Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, & Willis, 2003, p. 427)

Baltimore's **CitiStat**, started in 2001, takes this concept one step further, and includes not only crime statistics, but performance data from a wide range of government services. Instead of police chiefs meeting with local precinct commanders to strategize over the latest crime figures, in CitiStat it is the mayor who hears from the top officials of all city government departments

³ The OECD refers to performance management as "a key factor in public sector reforms in many OECD countries; an increased focus on results is the key objective of reforms. Performance management encompasses both the measurement of performance and how it is used by management for decision making and by external parties for *accountability purposes*" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 1997)

The basic characteristics of CitiStat are holding 'a series of regular, periodic meetings during which the mayor and/or the mayor's top aides use data to discuss, examine, and analyze, with the individual director (and the top staff) of different city agencies, past performance, future performance objectives, and overall performance strategies' (Behn, 2006, p. 332).

In the United States, many police departments have followed New York's example, and are now using some form of CompStat. These include major cities such as Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Austin, San Francisco and New Orleans (Weisburd et al., 2003). Followers of CitiStat include Atlanta, Georgia, which has ALTStat; Chattanooga, Tennessee, has Chattanooga Results; Providence, Rhode Island, has ProvStat; St. Louis, Missouri, has CitiView; San Francisco, California, has SFStat; Somerville, Massachusetts, has SomerStat; and Syracuse, New York, has SyraStat. King County, Washington, is creating KingStat, and Palm Bay, Florida, is creating PalmStat (Behn, 2006, p. 332).

The management principle these PerformanceStats draw on can be described as 'management by inquiry' (deHaven-Smith & Jenne, 2006), which relies on structured discourse rather than material rewards and penalties to motivate staff. According to deHaven-Smith and Jenne, the PerformanceStat meetings are designed to take advantage of universal communicative norms, such as described by Habermas (1975) in his theory of communicative action, specifically *'the peculiar but universally recognized tendency for people to feel bound by their promises, to give reasons for their beliefs and actions, and to accede to the better arguments and more justifiable claims of others'* (deHaven-Smith & Jenne, 2006, p. 67).

CompStat meetings are generally conducted by a board of top executives who sit at a U-shaped table. The unit or district commander giving evidence stands behind a podium facing this board and the audience, which is usually made up of 20-odd fellow police commanders, although some police departments have recently started inviting members of the public to these meetings (NOLA.com, 2010; Tulsa Police Department, 2009). The room is dark, except for a light directed at the commander at the podium, and small desk lamps on the board's table. The setting creates an atmosphere of interrogation, similar to what law enforcement officers use to interrogate suspects. Also the line of questioning follows that of an interrogation, including *'probing for details, looking for inconsistencies, and checking out claims.'* (deHaven-Smith & Jenne, 2006, pp. 74-5). This format is designed *'to intensify the normal sense of obligation that human beings feel about keeping their word'* (deHaven-Smith & Jenne, 2006, p. 66).

The combination of the drama, imagery and rhetoric of these meetings, with *'the display of sophisticated maps, an audience of top-ranking police officials in full regalia, and a focus on crime-fighting strategies'* (Willis, Mastrofski, & Weisburd, 2004, p. 23), and the possibility of a 'roasting' by the police chief in front of what is effectively a jury of their peers has proven an successful, if not somewhat abrasive, motivational and accountability mechanism for the district commanders.

In CompStat and other such arrangements, it is these commanders who bear the brunt of the accountability process, while providing top management with an ideal opportunity to display its authority and in effect push the accountability down into the organization and onto their district commanders (Willis et al., 2004, p. 30). Willis, Mastrofski, and Weisburd point out that especially amongst the lower ranks, Compstat is seen as *'a forum that punishes rather than rewards command staff for its performance'* (2004, p. 23). They cite officers describing CompStat *'as a forum where officers had "their balls ripped off"', 'nerve-racking' and potentially 'used "to humiliate or embarrass people."*' And although CompStat *'provides a mechanism for making "people do the job they do"',*

they observe that *'some are discouraged by the confrontational atmosphere that can characterize meetings'* (Willis et al., 2004, p. 23).

The Dutch city of Rotterdam has developed a programme similar to those in the US, named MaasStat. There are however some key differences: instead of regularly scheduled CitiStat meetings, MaasStat meetings are incidental. And rather than relying on weekly statistical reports, a small group of civil servants, in conjunction with all relevant delivery partners, researches the progress on the city council's priorities. The subsequent MaasStat meetings give the mayor and city aldermen a chance to discuss policy outcomes with the director of the relevant service (van Rijn & van Twist, 2009, pp. 266-7). In this, MaasStat can be seen as incorporating characteristics from Baltimore's CitiStat.

The way in which the various forms of Stats are used for public accountability purposes, although much copied, has also met with criticism. For one, this type of accountability is costly: *'For example, most of the resources and the personnel available to the NYPD are not available for other small agencies. Further, they felt that many of the Compstat elements are financially costly, involve a lot of personnel, and are therefore very difficult to implement in a small police department.'* (Vito, Walsh, & Kunselman, 2005, p. 194)

Halachmi (2002) raises the point that while these type of arrangements are meant to both improve performance and establish accountability, there is a chance of creating a 'dysfunctional trade-off'. The resources used to create organizational report cards could have been used for its main operations instead. Similarly, Behn (2001, pp. 10-1) writes, *'Holding people accountable for performance while also holding them accountable for finances and fairness creates a dilemma. The accountability rules for finances and fairness can hinder performance. Indeed the rules may actually thwart performance.'*

A related criticism against these new accountability arrangements concerns the underlying vision of professionals not being interested in improving their performance: *'The current emphasis on accountability is based on a questionable assumption that without outside review and scrutiny public employees may become derelict in their efforts to attain prescribed objectives.'* (Halachmi, 2002, p. 235) On the other hand, Vito, Walsh and Kunselman report 'Establishing Accountability' as one of their top three best elements of CompStat, as reported by practitioners. They cite one of their respondents as commenting, *'The weekly NYPD Compstat meetings are instrumental in entrenching the fundamental change in operational practices that the Department wants to bring about. Sustaining any process requires constant monitoring. When observation and scrutiny are non-existent, the natural tendency is toward inactivity.'* (Vito et al., 2005, p. 192)

2.3 Dynamic accountability

The same innovations in technology that made this focus on performance possible can also be used for empowering citizens so they can hold government directly to account. Moreover, by involving the public and making them not merely a consumer of information but also an active participant, it is possible to tap into previously unused potential of *crowdsourcing* (Noveck, 2009, p. 19).

This type of accountability instruments is not static and fixed in the shape they were initially designed; by releasing accountability data to the public, it can then be taken up and rereleased in different shapes, and thus become *dynamic* (Cels et al., 2010). Prime examples are the Open Government Initiative and Recovery.gov, both from the United States federal government.

Recovery.gov

According to Recovery.gov, the three main goals of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA or 'stimulus act') are to: (1) create new jobs as well as save existing ones; (2) spur economic activity and invest in long-term economic growth; and (3) foster unprecedented levels of accountability

and transparency in government spending (“The Recovery Act,” 2009; Helbig, Styrin, Canestraro, & Pardo, 2010).

To monitor spending under the stimulus bill, the Recovery Accountability and Transparency (RAT) Board was created as part of the same 2009 legislation (Coglianese, 2009, p. 534). Recovery.gov is the website of this Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, which tracks where the US government's stimulus money goes, to ensure that, as President Obama promised in his first presidential press conference *'every American will be able to go online and see where and how we're spending every dime'*, thus creating *"an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability"* (The White House, 2009).

The introduction of recovery.gov has not gone without criticism. There were many errors on the site at first, such as *'a Texas housing authority misreporting 450 jobs created by a \$26,000 roofing project that employed six people'* and *'a mix-up over so-called phantom congressional districts, in which recipients of legitimate stimulus awards sometimes attributed them to incorrect — and sometimes non-existent — congressional districts'* (Korte, 2010).

Also in this case, the trade-off between being accountable and performance (see previous section) has led to debate. The cost of building and maintaining the website, at some \$ 18 million, was met with condemnation. But according to Earl Devaney, chair of the RAT board, this was money well spent: *'Money spent on transparency is a smart investment that could pay for itself by reducing fraud in federal contracting. You have millions of people who go on this website and look at things. If I were going to steal money, I'm not going to steal this money'* (Korte, 2010).

There now are several spin-offs of recovery.gov, like private websites that use the data provided by government for their own purposes. Examples include StimulusWatch.org, which was set up as an addition to the official government website, according to one of its founders, Jerry Brito, speaking in front of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform: *'The formal mechanisms of oversight require informal oversight. And we are moving into a networked media environment where direct access to data will allow a wide variety of actors and entities in the public to do essentially direct oversight of [...] the government and of programs like the recent economic stimulus bill. We in the transparency community want access to data so that we can do this public oversight'* (Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2008; cited in: Cels et al., 2010)

Also CompStat and its various adaptations have inspired similar online spin-offs. Several American police departments have started offering information to the public through their own websites or those of the local media; the Los Angeles Police Department for example publishes its crime maps via the Los Angeles Times (“L.A. Crime Maps - Mapping L.A.,” 2010; Los Angeles Police Department, 2010). But also private initiatives such as CrimeReports.com use data from police departments to construct a map on which citizens can not only check what kinds of crimes are committed and find the sex offenders living in their neighbourhood, but also get involved by registering their webcam (bought from Logitech, one of the site's sponsors) (“CrimeReports.com,” 2010).

Other examples of dynamic accountability include the recent initiatives by various police forces to use social media such as Twitter as a means to communicate with citizens and keep them informed about their work, in particular to demonstrate *just how much* they do. Several regional Dutch police forces have a Twitter-channel, and so does the national police. Other forces with twitter accounts are Boston and New York police in the US and Victoria Police in Australia (“Twitter,” 2010). In the United Kingdom, Greater Manchester Police even staged what it called a 'Twitter day' in October 2010 (see the box below).

Greater Manchester Police Twitter Day (October, 14th, 2010)

On its 'Twitter Day', Greater Manchester Police has published every incident it dealt with on Twitter in order to allow the public to see the varying sorts of issues which are addressed by police on a daily basis. Another aim was to show British politicians, who were at the moment contemplating severe budget cuts at the police, the benefits of police work, especially concerning those issues that were not covered by the league tables of performance management, as Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable Peter Fahy described in the following statement:

'Policing is often seen in very simple terms, with cops chasing robbers and locking them up. However the reality is that this accounts for only part of the work they have to deal with. A lot of what we do is dealing with social problems such as missing children, people with mental health problems and domestic abuse. Often these incidents can be incredibly complex and need a lot of time, resource and expertise. I am not saying that we shouldn't deal with these types of incidents, far from it, but what I am saying is that this work is not recognised in league tables and measurements – yet is a huge part of what we do. I think that it's time to start measuring performance in a different way...' (“Greater Manchester Police - crime prevention, safety, police jobs,” 2010; “Police in 24-hour Twitter project,” 2010)

Similarly, the municipality of Rotterdam uses the internet to collect citizens' issues in their neighbourhoods such as litter, broken streetlights and the likes, and keeps them up-to-date on how these issues are resolved (“cityportal rotterdam,” 2010). Like the crime maps produced in the various PerformanceStat schemes, these issues are plotted on a map, so citizens can see exactly what action the municipality has undertaken in their immediate surroundings.

The data collected by websites like the one of the municipality of Rotterdam are collected on the website *VerbeterDeBuurt.nl* ('improve the neighbourhood'), where citizens not only find out how government fares with fixing the reported broken street lights, but can also make proposals for ways to improve their neighbourhood. Like *CrimeReports.com*, *VerbeterDeBuurt.nl* is a private initiative, based on the British example of *FixMyStreet.com* (“FixMyStreet,” 2010; “Verbeter de Buurt,” 2010).

2.4 Bottom-up (citizen initiated) accountability

VerbeterDeBuurt.nl and *FixMyStreet.com* are examples of innovative forms of accountability in which the tables have turned: they are not exclusively about government giving account for its actions, but also about citizens who actively call public organizations to account. These innovative forms are based on the idea that citizens are critical followers of government. They no longer see themselves as governments' subjects but demand value for money and a government that is firmly based on the core values of good governance.

Several of these forms of accountability are based on the possibilities brought on by mass collaboration (crowd sourcing) and open-source technology, which Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams coined as '*Wikinomics*' (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Economist columnist Schumpeter (2010) describes the tools that can be found on the website *Ushahidi.com*, which was set up by Kenian lawyer and blogger Ory Okolloh. Her website allowed anyone with a mobile phone or an internet connection to report outbreaks of violence which occurred after Kenya's disputed elections in 2007. The site posted eyewitness accounts online and even maps that showed where the killings and beatings were taking place. *Ushahidi.com* now is a platform from where those that live in other crisis centres can keep track on anything from vote-tampering to food shortages, and inform the world about what is going on, without depending on media organizations (who may be reluctant to report on government failure, or simply do not have the means to reach remote areas). The *Ushahidi* platform is currently used to reports on incidents relating to situations ranging from the floods in Pakistan, earthquakes in

Haiti and Chile, elections in India and the Sudan, and even to track crime in the Atlanta metro area (“Ushahidi :: Open Source Crowdsourcing Tools (FOSS),” 2010).

But citizens not only hold government to account, they also play a major role in dealing with social problems, as Schumpeter describes in the Economist: *‘Wikinomics is even rejuvenating the fusty old state. The Estonian government approved a remarkable attempt to rid the country of unsightly junk: volunteers used GPS devices to locate over 10,000 illegal dumps and then unleashed an army of 50,000 people to clean them up.’* (Schumpeter, 2010)

Citizens holding officials and public servants to account is not limited the internet. There also are examples in which the providers of public services have to account in person, in the setting of an official hearing, on why mistakes have been made and to discuss how they could be fixed. A Dutch example of such hearings, which has already taken on in other countries as well, is the work of the so-called Kafka-Brigade:

Kafka Brigade

The Kafka Brigade describes itself as *‘an independent, non-profit action research team, comprising a network of action researchers from Amsterdam and the Hague (NL), Boston (USA), Northern Ireland and Wales (UK). Its mission is to tackle the bureaucratic dysfunction and red tape which prevents people from accessing the services they need, and which constrains and frustrates public service staff’* (“Kafka Brigade UK,” 2010).

The Kafka Brigade deals with individual cases. Its researchers first conduct a case study in which they try to understand why and how the current situation has arisen. This information is used as input for what is described as a ‘collective performance review’, which is a carefully planned and facilitated workshop bringing together everyone necessary to address the issues identified in the same place, at the same time – members of the public, front line staff, managers, policy professionals, politicians and other concerned parties. The meeting is moderated to ensure that all participants are engaged, focused and committed to solving the problem. Not by talking about grand (re)designs, or simply pointing fingers or blaming the system, but by formulating small first steps. The three outcomes of this meeting are, respectively, to (i) arrive at a shared definition of the problem, (ii) identify and explore possible solutions, and (iii) agree on an initial set of corrective actions which will lay the foundation for a broader, more systemic remedy. These actions are owned and commitment is reaffirmed.

The Kafka Brigade also incorporates characteristics similar to those of the PerformanceStats. Through interactive discourse in the shape of hearings, a shared definition of the problem at hand is reached, and the different actors collectively agree on steps for action. However, part of the strength of PerformanceStat is that the actors involved are pushed to improve their performance because they know they will have to account for their actions in the upcoming meetings; as a citizen initiated rather than a cyclical occurring arrangement, the Kafka Brigade’s meetings only take place *after* something has gone wrong.

3 Choices for accountability

In the preceding paragraphs we described that governments and other public organizations now employ many different tools to account for their actions and spending. Especially the new focus on performance, brought about by the New Public Management revolution as well as the possibilities new technologies and especially the internet pose for keeping track of government’s performance in real time, have led to the emergence of new forms of accountability, each with its own characteristics.

With these innovative forms of accountability, practitioners have real choices to make in terms of process, design and content. This gives them the opportunity to develop bespoke accountability arrangements. One size fit all solutions that either focus on too broad a spectrum or narrow it down to only one aspect are a thing of the past. But having options also implies that not all tools are equally useful in all contexts. Analyzing each context and deciding which accountability instrument to employ best, takes (and deserves!) time and effort.

The first set of choices innovative means of accountability generate revolve around the *recurrence* in the accountability process: should giving account be a cyclical, or rather an incidental occurrence? Incidental processes are more focussed on demand, depending on the priorities of the moment, whereas cyclical accountability processes generate continuous data and insights. The classic answer to this question of recurrence is to structure accountability into formal arrangements with set routines and procedures, resulting in fixed events at regular intervals. We see this type of process in VBTB, CompStat and CitiStat, varying from weekly to annual events. Alternatively, an a-cyclical or incidental process can be chosen. This type of process can be seen in MaasStat. Recovery.gov goes one step further still. Due to the possibilities of the internet, it this an a-cyclical arrangement that makes continuous, 24/7 accountability not only possible but also accessible to all.

Choices of *design* centre around process and symbolism of accountability arrangements. Classic accountability uses fixed formats that have been committed to writing or even put into law, resulting in formidable documents that aim to be recognisable, comparable and consistent. VBTB is a good example of this type of design. However, this often results in the form overshadowing the content, with an impressive, almost theatrical display of beautifully designed full colour reports, in an attempt to prevent giving account in standardized form from becoming dull and drab. The alternative is to shy away from fixed formats, and in the case of PerformanceStat, including MaasStat, write down as little as possible and instead rely on oral accounts in the form of hearings. This makes it possible to focus only on that information that is currently relevant.

Third and last, choices on *content* shape the character of accountability arrangements. Classic accountability focuses primarily on financial data and on the legitimacy of spending. Even if the formal goal is giving account on aspects of policy, it often amounts to little more than an accountant's statement of income and expenditure. Innovative accountability instead tries to focus on policy and its quality and effectiveness, with accountability for finances and fairness taking a secondary role (Behn, 2001, pp. 6-10). This spotlight on quality is especially found in PerformanceStat and the bottom-up initiatives where citizens check up on their government's actions.

Each choice comes with its own symbolism attached: it is possible to choose for theatrics, making accountability into an event, or rather 24/7 online crowd sourcing. These three are not the only choices: the table below shows an overview of the possible considerations.

Classic	Innovative
Wide	Deep
Generic	Specific
Fundamental	Pragmatic
Comprehensive	Selective
Cyclical	Incidental
Financial	Policy
Ex-post	Ex-ante

Focussed on information provision	Focussed on debate
Judgement	Learning
Vertical	Horizontal
Standard structures	Made-to-measure
Fixed form	Freestyle
External	Internal
Written	Oral
Control	Facts, evidence and convictions
Rules	Experience
Permanent	Temporary

None of these choices are dichotomies: it is always possible to choose a middle-of-the-road solution. Neither is it a matter of choosing either column A or column B, on the contrary, most arrangements are combinations of the two. Consider for example PerformanceStats, which are focussed on debate and learning, but also (designed to be) very cyclical. The categories presented above as well as the choices that can be made on recurrence, design, content and symbolism can be used as building blocks in the development of accountability arrangements with a perfect fit.

4 Summary and conclusions

In this paper we described innovative ways in which governments can account for their actions. Accountability is one of the basic principles of a democratic government, as well as one of the corner stones of good governance and as such enjoys wide support. But today several trends challenge this rosy picture of accountability as a democratic ideal. Accountability is also often seen as a burden and nothing more than an annual ritual dance. Spurred on by several trends in society, especially the drop in citizens' trust suffered by many a government, the media's focus on governmental blunders and the possibilities technology offers, new, alternative, forms of giving account are developed. These supplement rather than substitute more traditional ways of giving account, which has led to a situation in which governments can chose from a wide array of instruments, which do not only differ from each other in regard to the content they cover, but also the form in which the process takes place. Each form comes with its own symbolism, and the symbolic value of giving account is thus increasingly important. Public organizations can send different messages to citizens, as well as their own staff, by using different accountability instruments.

In this paper we described several of these new forms by describing how accountability has moved from the classic interpretation as an intrinsic part of any government, via New Public Management's need to do more with less (performance budgeting), combined with the technical innovations that enable performance to be constantly be monitored (PerformanceStat), to a situation which we coin as dynamic accountability. Governments now use the possibilities of the internet to account for their actions directly to citizens (see for example recovery.gov). Other examples go one step further still, like in the organization of hearings in which government officials have to account for why public service provision to individual citizens have stalled (Kafka-Brigade). The same example also demonstrates that accountability is less and less a one way stream, and especially the internet (through the possibilities offered by 'Wikinomics' and crowdsourcing) has given citizens more opportunity to actively hold government to account.

We conclude from our description of these new and innovative instruments that practitioners now have real choices to make. We identified several of the possible ingredients they can use in three categories (process, design and content) to develop bespoke accountability regimes.

Our analysis of several new accountability arrangements, sketchy as it may have been, also showed that there is another important ingredient to accountability: symbolism. Each of the instruments we described, comes with its own symbolism attached. It is possible to choose for theatrics, making accountability into an event, or rather 24/7 online crowd sourcing. But so far the symbolism of accountability seems to be an underestimated or at least not yet very well researched category. Our paper was an attempt to shed a first light on its importance and on the various ways in which symbols are used to ensure that accountability instruments really come to life. The challenge for the future lies, in our opinion, in elaborating this notion and to discuss the possibilities of symbolism as well as the challenges it poses to those that are held to account and to those that have to assess the accountability information they provide. This paper is meant to be the beginning of such a discussion.

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