Between professional autonomy and public responsibility: accountability and responsiveness in Dutch media and journalism

de Haan, Y.M.

Citation for published version (APA):
de Haan, Y. M. (2012). Between professional autonomy and public responsibility: accountability and responsiveness in Dutch media and journalism
Chapter 6

Opening the gate of the closed fortress:

A case study of NOS Nieuws
Chapter 6

Opening the gate of the closed fortress:

A case study of NOS Nieuws

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter evaluated how the newspaper de Volkskrant has coped with criticism of its performance and with demands for accountability and responsiveness. Public service broadcasting in the Netherlands, as in many other Western European countries, has also come in for a great deal of criticism recently and has increasingly been pressured to be more accountable to its public. Often public broadcasters are criticized for acting as a fortress and not being open to outsiders, as an executive of Dutch public service broadcasting stated (Van Liempt, 2005). When, in 2002, the populist politician Pim Fortuyn was murdered, Dutch public service broadcasters were accused of demonizing Fortuyn and creating a climate that led to his death. By siding with the socio-political elite, they were blamed for missing or ignoring society’s problems, particularly the issue of immigration. The Fortuyn incident was seen more or less as the apotheosis of a longer process of erosion of coherence and consensus within society that had created a general discontent towards the established elite, including the media. The public broadcasters did not ignore these accusations: a few months after Fortuyn was murdered, the editor-in-chief of the Netherlands Public Broadcasting new organisation (NOS [Nederlandse Omroep Stichting]) published a memorandum —In Attack [Ten Aanval] in which he urged journalists to rethink their public role in terms of openness, responsiveness and accountability (NOS, 2002). In an historical overview of 50 years of the NOS the historian Van Liempt summarizes this period for the NOS as the “New Openness that the editor-in-chief is preaching” (Van Liempt, 2005: 314).

Public broadcasting in the Netherlands was originally created in the 1920s out of citizens’ initiatives. It resulted in a decentralized system with numerous broadcasting associations with distinctive religious and ideological profiles and financed by voluntary member support. Since the Second World War a license fee was introduced, which lasted until 2000 when this was replaced by indirect taxation (Bardoel, 2008). Following the depillarization process in the 1960s the self-evident loyalty of the members waned, obliging broadcasting organisations to rethink their relationship with the public. The Broadcasting Act of 1969 allowed new entrants into the system that did not specifically represent an ideological or religious pillar (Brants & Slaa, 1994: 11). This created internal competition and a consumerist struggle for listeners and viewers (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004b). The introduction of commercial broadcasting in 1989 reinforced competition. Growing criticism of public broadcasting and the changing relationship with its audience has intensified the debate on and demand for media accountability and responsiveness.

This chapter will describe and analyse how public service broadcasting is responding to this debate, focusing on NOS Nieuws, which is part of the NOS and acts as the independent news organisation of Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep). As in the previous chapter, the aim is both to describe the organisation’s instruments of accountability and responsiveness and to analyse to how (and to what extent) they are adopted and used in the organisational structure and journalistic culture. For a better understanding of the context in which this study took place, I will first give a brief insight in the daily journalistic process.

6.2 The daily journalistic routine

Dutch public broadcasting’s news broadcast, NOS Journaal, started its first bulletin in 1956 with three a week at 8:00 pm (Van Liempt, 2005). Over the years it has expanded its activities with hourly news casts on television and radio and up-to-date news on the website and teletext. Since the reorganisation in 2006, the organisation has converged, providing news on radio, television, the Internet, teletext and mobile applications. The news service now operates under the name NOS Nieuws.

The news organisation is located at the Mediapark in Hilversum in a large concrete building that is often described as a closed fortress (Van Liempt,
2005). Since the reorganisation, the newsroom of NOS Nieuws has been changed to an open working space with the ‘central desk’ at its heart. Here, all incoming news is discussed and coordinated with unit heads of the national, foreign, economic and political news desks, and with coordinators or program editors of the different platforms. At the first meeting at 9:15 am initial ideas for news items are pitched and, as a deputy editor-in-chief put it on his blog, “The NOS machine starts off, reporters and correspondents are sent out, camera teams and satellite feeds are on the way” (Overdiek, 4 March 2009).

Throughout the day there are numerous fixed moments when representatives of the different editorial units and media platforms come together to discuss the potential news items for the different news broadcasts. These meetings are led by the deputy editor-in-chief and the program editor of the 8 pm prime news broadcast. Ideas and news angles are discussed and exchanged. A continuous process takes place of discussing, considering, changing and adapting news items, with representatives of the different editorial units trying to “sell their items to the program editor”. Nearing a deadline, the activities shift from the central desk to the “islands” of the different news broadcasts of radio and television. The program editor, together with the news anchor, is responsible for verifying and adapting the texts. The Internet and teletext unit operate differently as their news presentation is ongoing.

The different editorial units have a number of journalists working on possible future news items: the so-called ‘planners’. They too get together at fixed times to discuss the range of possibilities and news items for the coming days. In all, there are a large number of meetings to discuss, plan and coordinate the news broadcasts. To break the hectic intensity and time pressure, at 1:15 pm everyone in the newsroom is invited to evaluate the news broadcasts of the past 24 hours, led by a deputy editor-in-chief or the editor-in-chief. Other evaluation moments usually take place right after the broadcast, but with a more informal character. The deputy editor-in-chief on duty is responsible for guarding the overall processes. Other deputy editors-in-chief and the editor-in-chief have a more distant role, being more involved with overall policy issues.

The current editor-in-chief has been in charge since 2002 and has resigned in July 2011. During my research period (August—October 2010) there...
were three, rather new, deputy editors-in-chief. One came in 2003 from the commercial news organisation RTL Nieuws and has replaced the current editor-in-chief in July 2011. The second was a former NOS correspondent, who was appointed in 2008 for his multimedia skills (and resigned in 2010). The third, also appointed in 2008, came from a financial newspaper.

6.3 Accountability instruments

In the following sections I will describe the different accountability instruments that have either been implemented within NOS Nieuws or to which it adheres. These are divided into three types: political, public and professional. Market accountability is not applicable to a public organisation.

6.3.1 Political accountability

Traditionally, political accountability had been part and parcel of public broadcasting’s philosophy (McQuail, 2003; Wessberg, 2005). It is the only media institution that, by law, is assigned a number of tasks for society to meet the needs that may be neglected by the private media market. Public broadcasting’s television programmes are expected to offer a balanced range of information, culture, education and entertainment, and in that represent the diversity of opinions in society. Moreover, due to a scarcity of frequencies in the early days of radio and television transmission and the assumed social impact of the medium, regulation was already in place in the Netherlands in the 1930s (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003). It is generally felt, however, that the government should keep its distance from editorial policies.

Media Act

The responsibilities and tasks of the NPO are clearly stipulated in the 1988 Media Act (which followed the Broadcasting Act of 1969). With the development of new transmission technologies and the opportunities this created for private broadcasters to enter the market the government introduced the Media Act to secure the current public broadcasting system in a changing market (Bardoel & Brants, 2003). When the dual broadcasting system was introduced in the following year, the government had to restructure and in a way to ‘reinvent’ its broadcasting policy. They did not automatically guarantee a secure position for public broadcasting anymore. The general move towards liberalization and deregulation, spurred by the European Union since the end of the 1980s, meant less government interference (Bardoel, 2008).
This increasing laissez-faire attitude forced public broadcasting to redefine its public role and find ways to address Dutch society as a whole. In 1998, NOS (which at that time served as the umbrella organisation, now known as NPO) published a memorandum about the future of public service broadcasting, *Publiek in de Toekomst* [Public in the future]. It suggested that public broadcasting should become more responsive and accountable through mechanisms like public debates and an independent ombudsman. NOS/NPO made clear that in the current competitive media environment it was paramount that public broadcasting explicitly demonstrated its public functions. Whereas in the past the legitimacy of its public service was mainly manifested through the different member-based broadcasting corporations, now it is increasingly measured by performance criteria and more public accountability (Bardoel 2008; Bardoel & Brants, 2003; Van der Haak 2001).

**Visitation Commission**

The most far-reaching proposal in the 1998 NOS report was an external independent assessment commission to periodically evaluate the performance of public broadcasting. Even though the public broadcaster itself suggested it, the revised Media Act of 2000 used a more regulatory discourse (see also De Haan & Bardoel, 2009). It obliged public service broadcasting to organise an evaluation of its performance every five years. To this end, it was required to install an external assessment ‘visitation’ commission [Visitatie Commissie] consisting of at least five independent experts, “inasmuch as possible representative” of the viewing and listening audience (Visitatie Landelijke Publieke Omroep, 2004: 343).

**Policy plans and performance agreements**

Other instruments that NOS is obliged to adhere to are policy plans and performance agreements. Since 2000, NOS has been obliged to be accountable for its performance and finances and to that end provide a policy plan [Tussentijds concessiebeleidsplan] every five years and an annual budget proposal [Meerjarenbegroting]. Also, since 2007, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has demanded from NPO (as successor to NOS) annual performance agreements, which indicate what the NPO and the specific broadcasters promise to do in a variety of genres. NPO is responsible for being accountable to government and does this via formal political accountability instruments. NOS Nieuws is only indirectly responsible for this...
as it is accountable to the Board of NOS, which in turn is accountable to the umbrella organisation NPO. Although not politically accountable, NOS Nieuws is very much pre-occupied with being accountable to the public.

6.3.2 Public accountability

Public accountability had always been more or less self-evident, as it was arranged through the member-based pillar organisations (Brants & Slaa, 1994). Due to the depillarization process, the rapid rise of television and later the entrance of private broadcasters, public broadcasters gradually began to realize they had to invest in their public by being more transparent, open and accountable. NOS Nieuws did this through the following instruments.

Council for Journalism

One of the oldest ways for the public to file complaints is through the Council for Journalism [Raad voor de Journalistiek], which we have already come across in de Volkskrant case study. The Council has a self-regulatory character with no enforceable power and penalties. NOS Nieuws recognizes the Council, but it did not sign the covenant in which it is stated that the media should broadcast/publish all the verdicts and mention the existence of the Council in the credit titles of the news broadcasts. NOS Nieuws does, however, publish all the verdicts on its website and it overtly collaborates with the Council in that it goes to hearings when summoned and publishes a rectification when the judgement is grounded.

Public information services

Public service broadcasters in the Netherlands have always received letters from viewers and listeners, but did not generally deal with them in a systematic way (Brants & Slaa, 1994). In 1997, NOS introduced a ‘public information service’ [publieksvoorlichting] for external contacts, which gradually began to handle public complaints. During an internal reorganisation in 2006 the managing director of NOS proposed a more formalized system for dealing with public complaints as a result of the increasing number they had received since the introduction of email. At the moment, on average, about 100 complaints or reactions arrive each day. They vary from complaints about mistakes in spelling and language to bias in a news story. According to the employees of the complaints desk the tone is often quite rude. As one of them said, “The reactions can be very harsh, racist, sexist and discriminating. The
staff should not be bothered with these emails”. Not all emails are forwarded to the editorial staff, yet all correspondents receive at least a standard reply. By centralizing the complaints the workload of the journalists is reduced and no further direct contact with the journalists is stimulated. In practice, however, email addresses are often known to a wide range of sources due to past contacts. This type of accountability is covert, as it responds to individual complaints, but it can also take the form of responsiveness. Since mid-2009, the complaints desk has sent a daily overview of complaints and comments they received that day under the title ‘what was noticeable today’. In this way the editorial staff are informed of the opinion of the audience which it can use to take the public’s concerns and desires into account.

Mediadebat
A suggested accountability measure is Mediadebat. After concluding that over the years the media had gained too much power, in 2003 two independent government advisory commissions, the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling]) and the Council for Public Administration (ROB [Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur], proposed specific measures for accountability to the public (RMO, 2003; ROB, 2003). One of the suggestions was the creation of a media debate organisation. Two years later in 2005, NOS was one of the initiators of Mediadebat, together with the journalists’ union NVJ and the publishers’ organisation NDP. This organisation functioned both as an instrument of public and professional accountability, as it aimed to stimulate debate on the performance of journalism. Since 2010, however, Mediadebat has ceased to exist (see Chapter 5).

Nieuwsmonitor
The Nieuwsmonitor was another RMO suggestion. While it is not an instrument of accountability, the idea was to provide empirical data on news coverage that could potentially form the basis for debate on media performance and news coverage. This independent institute specifically monitors press coverage on political issues and other specific incidents through quantitative content analysis. Since March 2010 the television news coverage of NOS Nieuws has been evaluated by the Nieuwsmonitor on a project basis. As it was totally new during my research period, it is not clear how this instrument is evaluated within the organisation.
Ombudsman
Recently, NOS Nieuws has initiated a number of new measures for public accountability. After years of discussion on how to implement this innovation (for public broadcasting as a whole or for individual organisations), in 2007 an ombudsman was introduced. The editor-in-chief and the managing director of the NOS had decided not to wait and see what NPO would do (NOS, 2006). It appointed its own ombudsman with the objective of making NOS Nieuws accountable to the public, improving the quality of the media coverage and enhancing the internal awareness of the opinion climate of the Netherlands (Van Brussel, 2008a). This shows that formally the ombudsman serves both a public and a professional accountability function. An internal memo stated that it is a mechanism to come to terms with criticisms from the public and at the same time a means to be more accessible to the public than the Council for Journalism and the court (Van Brussel, 2008a). It was felt to be a necessity for an independent public organisation financed by public money (NOS, 2007a). The independence of the ombudsman is guaranteed and safeguarded by a specially appointed commission. The ombudsman reports directly to the director of NOS and not to the editor-in-chief of NOS Nieuws (NOS, 2007a).

The first ombudsman published a weekly column on a specific issue on the website and had a weekly column on the radio. The second ombudsman, who started in 2009, wanted to put more effort in stimulating debate with the public and more formal external actors. Instead of the weekly columns, she introduced an extensive weblog to create more dialogue with the public. The ombudsman now aims at a more overt form of public accountability, showing accountability to the public at large. There are also indications of covert public accountability as the ombudsman also responds individually to personal complaints. Nevertheless, the ombudsman’s responses are often also published on the weblog and then have an overt purpose.

After less than a year the second ombudsman resigned, following a “difference in perception concerning the character and fulfilment of the position” according to NOS (Villamedia, 19 July 2010). With the resignation of two advocates of accountability - the managing director of NOS in May 2010 and the editor-in-chief of NOS Nieuws in July 2011 – it is an open question whether the position will be filled again.
Journalistic code
In 2007, following suggestions from the first ombudsman, NOS Nieuws launched an official journalistic code which was publicly available on the website and thus served as overt public accountability. It also had the purpose of professional accountability to set performance criteria and ethical standards. The code is based on the mission of NPO, the journalistic guidelines of the International Federation of Journalists (1954/1986), the journalistic guideline of the Netherlands Association of Editors-in-Chief (NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren] (1995) and the Guideline of the Council for Journalism (2007). Besides the primary responsibility to provide reliable, precise and unbiased information, the code states that NOS’s accountability extends to “rectifying frankly when necessary” and demonstrating transparency in its journalism (NOS, 2007b). However, since the departure of the ombudsman the journalistic code is not available on the website anymore and it is not clear whether it functions internally as a professional accountability mechanism.

Chat on Friday
Another mechanism of overt accountability is the so-called Chat on Friday. Since 2007, every Friday after the 5:00 pm television news broadcast, the presenter interviews a studio guest who has some connection to an issue that has been widely discussed in society. Viewers are invited to ask questions through the chat function on the NOS website. This instrument started as a form of accountability to guests of the management, answering questions about the organisation and performance of NOS Nieuws. More recently, it has become more a mechanism of responsiveness meant to allow interaction with the public about a “hot” topic. However, as of end 2010 NOS Nieuws ceased applying this weekly instrument since the return on investment was negligible. The time and effort put into organizing the weekly discussion did not yield the desired public dialogue and related input. As stated by an editor, “[those participating] are often the ‘usual suspects’ and are by no means representative of the different sectors of society”. The instrument can now be used when felt necessary.
Weblogs

Many accountability measures could not have been introduced without new technological opportunities. The Internet has created more possibilities for interaction with the public and for the latter to voice its opinion on the NOS, "Lots of people look over our shoulders and can correct us directly after the broadcast. We don’t mind, it keeps us on our toes" (NOS, 2006: 17). In 2008, weblogs were introduced to enhance the dialogue with the public. Already in 2003 the NOS had introduced a forerunner of blogs by opening up a forum for discussion. In fact, it was the editor-in-chief himself who spent hours replying and explaining editorial decisions. After two years he closed the forum due to the increasingly harsh tone of contributions. In 2008, a new deputy with considerable multimedia experience was appointed with the primary task of enhancing and professionalizing the online interactive instruments, including weblogs. The blogs fulfil several objectives, offering "extra information, transparency and interaction" (Internal guideline on weblogs; Laroes, 18 Feb. 2008). It is mainly the management that uses it to show transparency, to give explanation and admit mistakes. For example, when NOS Nieuws wrongly announced the death of a well-known Dutch economist, a deputy apologised in a weblog (see also Chapter 5):

(Original: Overdiek, 25 May 2009)

Your report may be factually correct 99 times, it’s also about the 100th time, when we’re wrong. As a closely scrutinized public organisation, we are aware that what goes well is irrelevant. You are more often judged by that single fault. And then we don’t attempt to cover it up. We recognize the slip-up and make our humble apologies. (Overdiek, 25 May 2009).

The management also uses it to explain the choices they make. In August 2009, for example, there was a court case against Associated Press which had published pictures of the Dutch Royal Family while on a private holiday. On the day of the court case, NOS Nieuws published the pictures, even after an urgent request of the Government Information Service not to do so. In the weblog one of the deputy editors-in-chief explained the reason why: NOS Nieuws believed it is their journalistic responsibility to publish the pictures as only then can the public judge whether the Associated Press was wrong. Increasingly, weblogs are also being used as a mechanism for interaction, not only creating possibilities for the public to comment on editors, but also explicitly asking them about their experience with or their opinion of a specific issue. This takes the form of responsiveness.
Online correction box

The most recent accountability instrument is the online correction box [Herstelrubriek], which was introduced in August 2009. It is comparable to the correction box in newspapers. The aim is “to correct factual or journalistic mistakes” (Overdiek, 14 Sept 2009). The instrument was initiated by the management of \textit{NOS Nieuws} as a result of dissatisfaction among heads, deputies and the editor-in-chief with not being able to correct mistakes. A rectification within the news broadcast is often felt to be too ponderous (Van Brussel, 2008b). On the home page of the NOS website, a link can be found to this correction page. Mistakes published there come either from the public or the editorial staff. The deputy editors-in-chief and editor-in-chief are in charge and make the final decision on what mistakes will be included. When mistakes are substantial, the NOS also has the possibility of airing corrections in a radio or television news broadcast or including a written rectification on the website or teletext.

6.3.3 Professional accountability

Public accountability has a strong focus on responding to the public’s complaints, but remains voluntary. Professional accountability too has a self-regulatory and voluntary character, but it has the primary objective of showing accountability to the professional world of journalism with the ultimate objective of enhancing the quality of the performance. At \textit{NOS Nieuws} many meetings are held daily to brainstorm, plan and coordinate the different news items and platforms. Professional standards are formalized in a journalistic code. But, setting standards and organizing meetings only creates the aimed effect if the performance is evaluated. At \textit{NOS Nieuws} there are several moments of self-reflection and evaluation.

Evaluation and reflection meetings

Such meetings address the internal responsibilities and are also used to identify failings alleged by external parties. At \textit{NOS Nieuws} there are several moments of evaluation. Every day at 1:15 pm, the complete editorial staff is invited to come together to discuss and evaluate the news broadcasts of the past 24 hours, in a discussion led by the deputy on duty. Approximately 25 to 30 people of the 400 join daily, with usually people from the central desk, including the deputy editor-in-chief, the program editor of the 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm television broadcasts and the heads of the different departments.
The editor-in-chief also joins regularly. Others taking part are occasionally editors and reporters, who usually stand passively around the table. The issues discussed generally have to do with a specific item, technical problems and the order or relevancy of items in the broadcast. The meeting has intentionally no organised structure, stimulating an informal talk where everyone can join in. Yet, it appears that only the people sitting around the central desk have a say. However, after my research period, this meeting has become more structurized discussing one theme of concern.

Other evaluation moments have an even more informal character. After the 8:00 pm television news broadcast, the crew and editors still present at that time discuss the broadcast. In the last couple of years, the coordinator of the national news department organises monthly evaluation sessions, where a specific theme or item is discussed or, as insiders say, 'dissected'. Since the beginning of 2009, the program editors also meet once a month for a whole day to discuss certain issues, ethical dilemmas and evaluate specific news stories.

### 6.3.4 Accountability policy

*NOS Nieuws* has seen a major shift in its accountability policy. Historically, public broadcasting complied with political accountability instruments, which are still actively used today. At the institutional level NPO is more preoccupied with political accountability.

More recently, self-regulatory measures of public accountability have been launched and progressed in subsequent years from suggested to self-initiated measures. This is mainly the task of the professional news organisation, *NOS Nieuws*.

*NOS Nieuws* is mainly accountable to the public in an overt manner. Direct contact with the public by responding to individual complaints is formally dealt with by the ombudsman or the desk ‘public information services’ and less frequently by individual journalists. Particularly, the editor-in-chief makes extensive use of weblogs and Twitter to engage with the public as he is a strong proponent of providing transparency to the public. Professional accountability is primarily organised informally through different evaluation moments. These are mostly covert as they are not visible to the public or the journalism profession at large, but only to the employees of the media organisation.
6.4 Instruments of responsiveness

Besides showing accountability to the public, different measures have been initiated to come to terms with the public by understanding their issues of concern: by being responsive. When in 2002 the editor-in-chief published his memorandum In Attack, NOS clearly indicated it wanted to invest in the public’s concerns, go ‘from the state to the street’ and be responsive to what preoccupied ordinary citizens. The editor-in-chief clearly wanted to shift from institutional to public-oriented journalism (NOS, 2002). As a public broadcasting organisation, the need to be responsive is usually prompted by civic, not strategic reasons. However, in a competitive media environment the greater importance put on audience research also indicates a more strategic logic.

In the following discussion of the instruments of responsiveness I have tried to make an initial division between two different forms of responsiveness: civic and strategic (see Chapter 3). Empathic responsiveness or taking the victim of bureaucracy into account by siding with them and their worries was less visible, if at all. In the following, we will see that NOS Nieuws is making substantial attempts to let the ordinary man speak and trying to connect the ‘state with the street’. This might also involve highlighting the plight of victims of bureaucracy and trying to understand their problems. Yet, as a news organisation the NOS Nieuws takes a neutral position and does not side with individual citizens and their problems. The evaluation of the instruments in section 6.6 based on the interviews and observations will give a more thorough clarification of the reasoning behind the instruments and public-oriented policy.

6.4.1 Civic responsiveness

Public-oriented journalism

In his memorandum In Attack (NOS, 2002) the editor-in-chief admits that the media failed to see the discontent in society, the main point of criticism towards the media after the death of Fortuyn. The interviewees at different levels and units of the organisation also mentioned the Fortuyn period as a crucial period for NOS history. The common perception is that the incident led the public to question their faith in political parties, politicians and the media. The editor-in-chief wanted to increase the knowledge and awareness
of feelings in society beyond merely asking for comments on the street and vox pop interviews. Moreover, he urged for the news to be accessible to all citizens, creating a closer bond with the public and an understanding of their perception of society—a measure that has the potential to link the news “of the state with the street” (NOS, 2002). In his memorandum he made a number of practical suggestions including sending more city correspondents across the country, giving specific city problems higher priority, and using fewer institutional spokespeople and more people who are part of the story, from the learned expert to the experience expert (NOS, 2002). Moreover, in 2006, NOS Nieuws appointed six specialists and two researchers to the national news unit to specialize in or follow specific issues that needed special attention. The specialists are responsible for issues like education, health, mobility, integration and justice. The researchers are journalists who work on large research projects and are exempted from the daily journalistic routine.

The editor-in-chief acknowledged the difficulty of covering issues from within society and of connecting with the public. Nevertheless, he believed improvement was visible in terms of “understanding the world of the viewer”, as opposed to adhering to the “will of the viewer” (NOS, 2006: 21). This issue has been a focal point in the organisation policy with new memorandums written in 2006 [Hooggeererd Publiek] and 2009 [Publiek in de Toekomst].

**Guests**

NOS Nieuws also tries to interact with the public and engage with relevant experts by regularly inviting guests to the newsroom. In the past, journalists of NOS Nieuws were more reserved to accepting or inviting outsiders. When, in 2003, a journalist from a national newspaper spent time at the newsroom trying to understand the processes behind the news, he was not always received with open arms (Van Westerloo, 2003). However, this attitude has changed and guests are now invited on a regular basis. The national news department aims to invite a guest every month to obtain a better understanding of how the public debate on a certain issue unfolds, to learn how NOS Nieuws is perceived and to give explanations on their news choices. The last objective refers more to public accountability. Groups of students are also regularly invited for guided tours of the newsroom and debates are organised at school. In this way NOS Nieuws can obtain a better understanding of the wishes and concerns among young people, learn more on how they use media and receive feedback on
their performance. At the same time, they can be publicly accountable.

**Online interaction**

The online opportunities for interaction have created more possibilities for NOS Nieuws to be responsive to its public. We have already seen that weblogs and the Chat on Friday are instruments that aim to interact with the public or at least give the public the opportunity to have a voice. A recently implemented tool for interaction is the social networking and micro-blogging service Twitter. For journalists and reporters Twitter is a good, quick way to get in contact with sources. A few journalists, in particular reporters, actively use Twitter as a way to get in contact with relevant people, to hear what goes on in society and to notify the public in an informal way about the processes of news gathering prior to the actual broadcast.

In March 2010, after my research period, a further digital interactive mechanism was introduced, NOS Net. Based on the idea of the aggregated weblog The Huffington Post in the US, specific people within society, such as local politicians, policemen and tenants, are asked to inform the news organisation on issues and concerns within their working and living environment. Particularly, social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and the Dutch equivalent Hyves are used to contact the public. According to the editor-in-chief this is a way to “find out what people know, and not so much what people think”. Six months after the start, NOS Net consisted of a network of 1000 people across the country, which provided NOS Nieuws with new insights from within society. At the same time, the head of NOS Net acknowledges that even though online participatory instruments are an asset to the organisation, this should not prevent journalists from finding their information in the street. This is especially the case when trying to contact specific groups that are not active online.

**6.4.2 Strategic responsiveness**

Besides these instruments that aim to get a better understanding of the public’s agenda, NOS Nieuws also wants to understand the audience’s behaviour. The Dutch public broadcasting service already conducts audience research since 1965 through the Viewing and Listening Survey (KLO [Kijk- en Luisteronderzoek]). For a long time little attention was paid to such statistics as it was seen as interfering with their public task (Brants & Slaa, 1994). With
the advent of the commercial broadcasters and subsequent competition, the awareness of audience reach and share has grown, as part of strategic reasoning. Currently, NOS Nieuws conducts regular audience research to find out what interests viewers and listeners. When ideas are set for format changes, qualitative panel research is conducted to see if the pilot version attracts the audience and to make adaptations, if necessary.

6.4.3 Policy of responsiveness

Over the last decade the issue of responsiveness has gained much more attention, initially prompted by the editor-in-chief in his memorandum of 2002 (NOS, 2002). More recently, the interactive online possibilities have created the opportunity for NOS Nieuws to introduce new instruments to interact and engage with public. This shows NOS's efforts to take ordinary life issues into consideration and to connect governmental policy issues with the daily concerns of ordinary citizens. However, in an increasingly competitive environment where the position of public service broadcasting is not secure, viewing figures and understanding the audience's viewing behaviour have grown in importance.

6.5 Practicing accountability: a management issue

Looking at the number of recently introduced instruments of accountability and responsiveness one can observe a near explosion. However, initiated and often formally introduced primarily by the editor-in-chief and his deputies, the question remains to what extent the instruments are acknowledged, supported and used at all levels of the organisation.

In practice, the introduction of ‘accountability’ often meets with ambivalence. This begins with how it is defined. The majority of the interviewees consider accountability to refer to accounting for one’s mistakes and responding to external complaints or questions. In this context many associate it with something negative. As an editor said, “It feels as if you are called to account for a mistake you made”. Several higher-ranking interviewees, including unit heads, program editors and deputy editors-in-chief added that accountability is not merely reactive (to complaints), but also has a pro-active component of explaining and showing transparency. In this context, many mentioned the weblogs. Moreover, for several, accountability means being responsible and acting responsibly or just doing journalistic work properly.”It is about
doing your work well, working precisely, using more than one source and realizing that our work can have a high impact”. Not many, except for the management, referred to politics when discussing the issue of accountability, but associated it with the public. This is probably due to the fact that political accountability is mainly an issue at the institutional level (NPO) and not the journalistic level (NOS Nieuws).

The different views of accountability, whether reactive or pro-active or part of their social responsibility, also relate to how professionals perceive and actually use the different accountability instruments. In the following section, based primarily on the interviews, informal talks and observations, I will evaluate whether the instruments of accountability and responsiveness have merely been implemented or have also been incorporated and internalised within the organisation, using the stages of introduction of innovations as detailed in Chapter 4. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the accountability instruments and the level of adoption.

6.5.1 Reactive public accountability implemented

The interviewees at different levels of the organisation believe that being accountable by responding to complaints and providing explanation is a must for a public organisation, and that this has increased in importance today, coinciding with current trends in which transparency and accountability have gained prominence. This attitude has clearly developed over the years. As a unit head said, “In the past we would push those things aside and we were also inaccessible, so the public’s concerns didn’t reach us”. Box 6.1 offers an illustration of this changing attitude to responding to public complaints. Particularly, journalists relatively new to the organisation or with previous experience in regional media emphasise the importance of openness and relating to the public. Public accountability instruments such as the ombudsman, the online correction box, weblogs and the renewed public complaints desk are felt to be a way for “the NOS to come out of the ivory tower”.

6
### Table 6.1: Instruments of accountability at NOS Nieuws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Type of accountability</th>
<th>Suggested/ Self-initiated</th>
<th>Overt/ Covert (O /C)</th>
<th>Level of adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Media Act</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Adhering to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Visitation Commission</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Adhering to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Policy plans &amp; performance agreements</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Adhering to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Council for Journalism</td>
<td>Public Professional</td>
<td>Suggested</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Collaborating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Public information services</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Mediadebat</td>
<td>Public Professional</td>
<td>Suggested</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Collaborating (until 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Nieuwsmonitor</td>
<td>Basis for public and professional</td>
<td>Suggested</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Ombudsman</td>
<td>Public Professional</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>O &amp; C</td>
<td>Implemented (until 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Journalistic code</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Chat on Friday</td>
<td>Public Civic &amp; strategic resp.</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Incorporated (until end 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Weblogs</td>
<td>Public Civic &amp; strategic resp.</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Online correction box</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Evaluation &amp; self-reflection moments</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Self-initiated</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the majority of the editorial staff are proponents of accountability, the actual use of the instruments seems to be a different matter. Journalists are not eager to respond to public complaints due to the sort of criticisms they receive. According to a unit head, “there are a number of people who always complain about language use. We don’t really take them seriously.” Moreover, a recurring complaint is left-wing bias in news coverage. To many this is felt to be a never-ending debate and one in which it is impossible to give a satisfactory response. While there is no empirical justification for a possible leftward leaning slant, this overall perception might be a remnant of the public logic period in the 1970s in which Dutch journalism tried to detach itself from the political parties they were linked with in a partisan logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). The increasing autonomous and critical journalistic attitude was by many critised as having a left-wing bias. Many unit heads, deputy editors-in-chief and the employees of the public information services also mentioned the harsh and impolite tone of complaints, to which they would rather not respond. Paradoxically, many journalists do not have the chance to respond directly to complainants as the ombudsman and public complaints desk serve an intermediary role.

A second reason that the public accountability instruments are not used much is their visibility for the editorial staff. To many employees at a professional level (editors and reporters) instruments such as the online correction box, the ombudsman and the complaints desk are not very visible in the newsroom. Many did not know where the complaints desk is located, had little awareness of the ombudsman and were not clear about the tasks and procedures of the ombudsman, the complaints desk or the online correction box.

Box 6.1: Responding to criticism

A unit head clarifies:

Generally we take criticisms very seriously. Although it’s often very repetitive. There are of course certain issues which always provoke more reactions than others: criticisms that we do not cover the Middle East conflict properly, but also environmental issues and the debate about integration. But regarding the Middle East, on this subject we are approached by the most radical interest groups. We try to focus on certain points and provide counter arguments in defence of the manner we choose to cover the story. In any case, we always seek dialogue and discussion. This is certainly a new development; in the past we didn’t pay attention to such allegations or they simply didn’t reach us. This is because we used to be very inaccessible. I am of course referring to the pre-Internet era: the time when people would need to call a phone number of the broadcasting station and be put in an endless queue or were never put through at all. This would of course lead to additional complaints by people saying they did not have a platform where they could convey their objections about the news or NOS.
A third reason is that many instruments are introduced top-down without much involvement of the editorial staff, which consequently does not create a basis for editorial support. At the professional level many made similar remarks to this editor: “The ombudsman merely introduced herself to the management and unit heads. She was only once officially announced during a plenary meeting, at which I was not present. I do not know much about this function.” Similarly with regard to the online correction box one editor said, “It was a management idea and announced during a plenary meeting. However, I was not present. I quickly scanned through the email announcement before deleting it. We just get so many emails and we have so little time for these kinds of things.”

Lastly, many interviewees doubt the public effect of these instruments, since they are not only barely visible or known to them but also not to the public at large. Many wonder if the general public is acquainted with the ombudsman and how he or she can be used and reached. This also goes for the complaints desk.

Therefore, most of these accountability instruments are introduced by the editor-in-chief, but merely implemented and not incorporated in the organisation.

6.5.2 Pro-active public accountability incorporated

There are two public accountability instruments—weblogs and Chat on Friday—that appear to be incorporated in the organisation. These instruments have a permanent place in the organisation and the staff are familiar with them and use them on a regular basis.

All the interviewees are satisfied with the comprehensive weblogs, serving multiple purposes. Many heads and program editors believe it to be a good instrument to elaborate on discussions and news items, showing a more open and accessible NOS. Even though this instrument is rather new, many make use of it and have incorporated it in their daily tasks. Journalists from the national and international news departments, including editors, reporters and correspondents, write weblogs in order to offer a backstage glimpse into how they operate. A department head said, “This way we can provide the public with more insight into how we work and what we experience as a reporter..."
or correspondent. It is a place where one can give background information. In the past we would never do that. We were a closed fortress.” The deputy editor-in-chief responsible for ‘multimedia’ has put a lot of effort to convince both management and professionals to make use of weblogs.

The same goes for the Chat on Friday, in which journalists cooperate as a matter of fact using. Providing more information or transparency is recognized as useful, but should be done cautiously. A program editor explained, “You shouldn’t go overboard in justifying every move you make and accounting for your actions in a weblog. We do not have to be accountable for every decision we make at the newsroom. That would be absurd”.

The fact that these two instruments are incorporated might come from their pro-active character. Journalists are the ones initiating a discussion on a weblog or Chat on Friday. Instruments such as the ombudsman, correction box and public information services are reactive, based on responses from the public. While the pro-active instruments are incorporated, they are not internalised into journalistic culture and attitude. These instruments are introduced for accountability purposes, but in practice the journalists prefer to use them as a platform for public engagement or for additional information and less so for the objective of accountability. Moreover, there is a general hesitance to use them due to their time-consuming character and the doubt about the aimed effect. This is also one of the main reasons they stopped with the Chat on Friday end 2010.

6.5.3 Professional accountability implemented

Throughout the day journalists meet many times a day to discuss the progress of news bulletins. Some even believe the amount of meetings is overdone, taking time away from working on journalistic productions.”There is just too much talking going on”. Nevertheless, the respondents value the professional accountability measures—the formal and informal evaluation meetings—as moments of self-reflection and quality control. Particularly the plenary 1:15 pm meeting is seen as important because it is the only moment of the day where the entire editorial staff can get together to evaluate. A deputy said: “It’s very important to give certain issues a moment of thought and ask ourselves why we do these things.”
In practice, however, this evaluation session and other evaluation moments have pitfalls. The final result of a news broadcast is based not only on journalistic choices, but also on technical and logistic considerations. Journalists, coordinators and technical people work together in shifts with a specific news bulletin as the end result. Evaluating a news broadcast seems to often boil down to discussing technical or logistical errors.

There are practical problems too. Not all editorial units send delegates to the 1:15 pm plenary meeting. The meeting is dominated by people who work in television and/or are of higher rank. A radio program editor admitted, “It is a dilemma. We are so busy and focused on preparing the next broadcast that we hardly take time to reflect and evaluate our work among the radio editorial staff. Radio items are hardly discussed at the plenary meeting so we do not have the urge to be present. But we should also initiate a more active role”. Practical drawbacks such as time constraints and questions of scheduling hinder the incorporation of organised moments of evaluation. Moreover, in the newsroom, at both the formal meetings and informal gathering, there is a focus on planning and organizing the next programme instead of looking back and taking the time to evaluate. Box 6.2 offers an illustration of this dilemma.

There also appears to be a cultural motive underlying this hesitance to internal self-reflection and evaluation. At the professional level, many editors and coordinators find it difficult to voice their opinion during plenary meetings. A coordinator admitted, “One must be confident and secure to express oneself”. Several heads and program editors, working for many years at NOS described what they call the ‘soft’ culture at NOS Nieuws: everyone is friendly to each other, and they do not dare to be critical or give feedback. I also experienced that there is a pleasant and forthcoming atmosphere, where everyone is polite to each other —maybe even too polite as also observed by a press journalist (Van Westerloo, 2003). However, this seems to be an outer layer. When people are unhappy with an item this is often not discussed in a formal setting, but informally and often without the person involved present. It seems to be difficult to provide constructive feedback. Particularly the reporters and correspondents feel unhappy from the minimal responses of the editorial staff.
While the journalistic culture at NOS does not provide much room for feedback and evaluation, the younger generation in particular mentioned the importance of constructive feedback, which they would have liked to have seen more of in their work. This seems to refer to a changing journalistic culture in a continuously dynamic media landscape, with new journalistic demands making journalists less secure about their work and strengthening their need to reflect. At the same time, they do not see this as a solution in a time-pressured environment. There appears, therefore, to be a discrepancy between the stated aspiration for increased self-reflection and evaluation, and its actual practice. These professional accountability instruments are recognized and valued, but rarely used as such, which restrains them from being incorporated in the organisation.

### 6.6 Responsiveness: a continuous struggle

Being responsive or taking the public’s concerns into consideration has gained priority at NOS Nieuws since 2002. These changes were initially prompted by civic motives, but increasingly strategic considerations have become important. Yet, adoption seems to be a struggle. Table 6.2 provides an overview of the instruments of responsiveness and the level of adoption.

**Box 6.2: A focus on looking ahead**

An editor explains:

There are not many moments we look back. Part of the job is to plan and look forward. Moments of retrospection are mainly informal, like in the broadcasting reports. The editor-in-chief writes broadcasting reports to let us know what he thought. We do have the plenary meetings at 1:15 pm, but that’s more focused on television broadcasts. Further evaluations take place informally between colleagues or with reporters over the phone. But our tendency to look back is definitely small. Hindsight is less developed than looking forward. This is because what’s been done is in the past and tomorrow offers new ideas and opportunities. The future is something that needs to be made and our organisation is naturally inclined to focus on what is to come.
Table 6.2: Instruments of responsiveness at NOS Nieuws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Type of responsiveness</th>
<th>Level of adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Audience research</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Collaborating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Public-oriented journalism</td>
<td>Civic &amp; strategic</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guests</td>
<td>Civic accountability</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Chat on Friday</td>
<td>Civic &amp; strategic</td>
<td>Incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Weblogs</td>
<td>Civic &amp; strategic</td>
<td>Incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Civic &amp; strategic</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>NOS Net</td>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6.1 A combination of civic and strategic motives

Like the idea of accountability there is a general consensus that public-oriented journalism is of great importance. Many said, “It is old-fashioned to present institutional news”. The unit heads and program editors all felt that public-oriented journalism had been introduced to the organisation in response to the Fortuyn period, in answer to the accusations that the media had failed to see the problems of a large part of society. “We have come out of our ivory tower. In the past NOS was not accessible. Now we are much more open”. Besides a response to the Fortuyn period that the editor-in-chief addressed in his memorandum (NOS, 2002), a majority of the interviewees attributed the increasing interaction with the public to a rise in technological opportunities and the subsequent possibilities for the public to give its opinion.

The interviews revealed that in all measures of civic responsiveness there is also a strategic element to relate to the public. Even though public service broadcasting is publicly funded, strategies to increase viewing figures are becoming more salient as a result of increasing competition and government budget cuts. The interactive instruments and the provision of more public-oriented news are attempts to attract a large viewing audience, especially the young who are difficult to bond with.
6.6.2 Responsiveness implemented

Being responsive is embraced and many see a shift to more openness and connecting with the public. A program editor said, “We used to make news items for our colleagues and not for the people who needed to be informed”. Several interviewees explicitly stated, “we are now thinking more in their terms or ‘what’s in it for me?’”. However, even though the instruments have been implemented and are used frequently by the journalists, there is still a struggle to incorporate responsiveness in the daily production process. This relates to the fact that NOS journalists have difficulties connecting with ‘the public’ as by law they have the task of addressing all citizens. Those who work for specific news programmes such as *Journal op 3*, which is aimed at viewers aged 30 years and under, and *Jeugdjournaal*, for children, have an easier task as they can focus on specific target groups, cater to their needs and connect with them.

Practical reasons such as time constraints and scheduling can hinder the journalists from having time to really take into account the opinion climate in society, collect personal accounts and search beyond statements of institutional speakers. A radio editor admitted, “There is a permanent discussion about making news less institutional, but in practice this is very difficult to do. There are just so many broadcasts we need to prepare, so there is a tendency to take the easy way out and approach an institutional speaker”. Moreover, many journalists agree that it is not always possible to make the item less institutionalized and more personal since it is usually the institutions that have the facts first. The majority of the interviewees acknowledged that this issue of coming closer to the public, or in NOS’s terms ‘connecting the state with the street’ is still a daily struggle and remains a continuous debate.

Neither is there any agreement on the actual effectiveness of trying to reach the public. Many interviewees at different levels of the organisation are sometimes unhappy with the input they receive from the public and reported an imbalance between the energy they invest and the response they receive. An economy editor told me, “We put a call out on a weblog asking people what they think of the financial and economic crisis. But we did not receive any responses that would be suitable as material for a radio or television item”. With the new experiment NOS Net, they hope to overcome this problem by focusing on the knowledge of people and not so much on their opinion: what they know, not what they think.
Finally, at all levels of the organisation there was also some resistance to being responsive to the public, since this can conflict with their professional autonomy and journalistic responsibility of providing factual and trustworthy news items. A program editor for the radio said, “I do not think people should decide what the news should be. We also have a mission to inform people about items they are not immediately aware of and we should not only bring
stories that people are already informed about”. Many thus agreed with the statement ‘it is the world of the viewer not the will of the viewer’ we aim for (NOS, 2006: 21). Box 6.3 illustrates this continuous struggle to relate to the public.

Overall, while there is acknowledgment for public-oriented journalism and willingness to adopt this in the journalistic process, bringing news from an institutional perspective appears still to be rooted within the structure and culture of the news organisation. As a unit head put it, “Apparently it’s difficult for us to change patterns of behaviour, to deviate from the way we are used to doing things”.

6.7 Conclusion

This case study of the Dutch public news organisation NOS Nieuws illustrates a predominantly pro-active attempt in terms of self-regulatory public accountability and increasing transparency and interaction with the public. This is in line with the conclusions of Baldi & Hasebrink (2007), who, in a comparative study, classify the Netherlands as one of the ‘most advanced countries’ with regard to the accountability policy of public service broadcasting. Traditionally, public broadcasters have been reluctant to be open to outsiders and embrace participatory possibilities (Born, 2003; Enli, 2008; Hermida, 2010). Instigated by a changing society, pressured by public opinion and apparent waning trust of both politics and the public in them, NOS Nieuws only recently introduced a plethora of instruments of responsiveness and accountability. Attempts have been made to come closer to the public and to open the gates of the ‘closed fortress’. Whereas in the past accountability was predominantly political, nowadays there is a distinction between the institutional umbrella organisation NPO and the professional news organisation NOS Nieuws. NPO is responsible for the accountability processes and instruments that are directed towards government, and, as a journalistic organisation, NOS Nieuws is more preoccupied with showing accountability and being responsive to the public.

NOS Nieuws focuses on trying to bridge the gap with the public by being responsive and accountable. This has not only been prompted by external factors. Internal organisational factors have also played a crucial role in moving towards a more public-oriented organisation in very recent years.
The appointment of a new and more public-oriented editor-in-chief of NOS Nieuws in 2002 and a deputy editor-in-chief with extensive multimedia experience in 2006 prompted the organisation to introduce new instruments to be transparent and to engage with the public. The fact that one of the other deputies was recruited in 2003 from commercial RTL Nieuws, known for being less institutionalized than NOS news organisation, will also have boosted the increasing focus on public-oriented journalism.

Among the editorial staff and management, being responsive has increasingly become an issue of priority and is discussed on a daily basis. Yet, over the years this has not only been an answer to performance challenges, but also to structural problems such as increasing competition, a decreasing (and ageing) audience and changing media consumption. Whereas in the past public service broadcasting had a monopoly and its public was quite stable, the dual broadcasting system and the subsequent competition and fragmented audience has obliged broadcasting in general and NOS in particular to seek survival strategies in a highly competitive market. In this sense, even though market accountability does not fit the public system, market considerations are becoming more salient, with NOS Nieuws using responsive strategies for strategic reasons.

This focus on the public is also visible in the attention for public, often overt, accountability instruments. Yet, it is primarily the editor-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief who advocate being accountable and transparent. Most instruments have been implemented top-down without much investment at the professional level, which may explain limited support and lack of internalization. While there is a growing acknowledgment that NOS should be more accountable to the public, the majority of the journalists do not see the need to formalize or explicate it. Journalists are first and foremost preoccupied with their work and not with responding to comments. Moreover, connecting with the public — whether responding, justifying or bridging — is difficult when they are not a clearly defined group. Regional media, news programmes targeting a specific group or newspapers with subscribers have a better idea of their end user and how to relate to them.
Journalists are quite defensive, or at least reserved towards the actual use of the instruments. This can be explained by their linking of responsibility with autonomy. Accountability does not live easily with media freedom (Brants & Bardoel, 2008; McQuail, 2003). Similarly, responsiveness creates a tension with the journalistic authority: the journalist has the task of informing the public and not the other way around. The instruments are not incorporated in the organisational structure and culture which explains the relative success of this policy. At the moment it seems more a symbolic policy aimed at the outside world.

Throughout the day meetings at NOS Nieuws take place to brainstorm, plan, coordinate and make news items. However, looking back and being accountable to one’s peers for the work done with the final aim of improving journalistic performance seems to be less of a priority. While there are formal moments of evaluation, in practice journalists are working faster than ever in this competitive climate, which allows them little time to reflect on their work. Nevertheless, the new and younger journalists long for more moments of reflection on their performance. This is not surprising as they might still be involved in a learning process in which evaluation offers insights in improving journalistic skills and performance. The management acknowledges the practical and cultural dilemmas of evaluation and is looking into ways to improve it. Yet, in this current competitive and time-pressured environment coming together to discuss the items for the following broadcast is given more priority than looking back.

In line with the conceptual analysis (Chapter 3) this case study research has shown that Dutch public broadcasting has moved forward in terms of accountability and responsiveness. NOS Nieuws has attempted to improve trust by “coming out of the ivory tower” and relating to the public. Nevertheless, while there is agreement on the importance of legitimacy vis-à-vis the public, the autonomy of journalists is the recurrent theme. This need for autonomy within journalism, the top-down approach and the difficulties of connecting with the public prevents the instruments from being adopted in the organisation’s structure and culture.