

The trader and the preacher : HRM dilemmas in the Netherlands

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RESUME

After an introduction on the country's historical, socio-economic and business characteristics, the authors elaborate shortly on the Dutch emphasis on organised consensus. Executive and supervisory boards of joint-stock companies represent shareholders, employees and the public interest, without differentiating clearly between these groups. The emphasis on the firm as a nexus of stakeholders occurs nowhere else. Besides, Dutch management is less flamboyant, career-minded, personally ambitious or eccentric than in other West European countries. The management ethos is one of sobriety, correctness and aversion against demonstrative display of power or hierarchical differences.

However, if one looks at the generation of human resources, it is striking that the Dutch system of public education is, in comparison with others, very stratified. The basic architecture of education and training looks rather French, with its hierarchical differentiation. In addition, the practice of mixing normal work experience with further education and training is not widespread; education is concentrated on the period before sustained work activity. But, contrary to France, breeding intellectual high-flyers or technocratic elites, and setting yourself apart from less talented people, are culturally and institutionally resented, like a sin against Dutch social responsibility, modesty and sobriety.

Turning the spotlights to the work-floor, one sees that the conflict which emerges for the Netherlands is that between traditional peer control, with its egalitarian lateral elements, and integration of separate functions in richer work roles on the one hand, and hierarchical, bureaucratic and professional specialist control on the other.

Dutch firms and governmental organisations are increasingly hiring human resource officers and organisation specialists. This has created a new, commercial rather than purely ideological, "market" for innovative socio-technics and human resource management. It has become one of the key ingredients in transforming the Dutch economy from a cost sensitive bulk producer into a value-added sensitive specialty producer.

Also, consultancy in human resources is booming. These new consultants are the preachers of the kind of social hygiene which is in better accord with traditional structures and Christian values. Most of Dutch social thinking is imbued with modern, laicistic spin-offs of Calvinist social thought, which has penetrated Roman Catholic, socialist, liberal and agnostic world views.

Accordingly, one can notice that a recent standard textbook offers a very complete and detailed conceptualisation of human resource management in the more ambitious sense: an important management specialty which is much larger than personnel management in the conventional form, and essential to turn an enterprise into a competitive and successful concern. It would be difficult to find a country which surpasses the Netherlands in this programmatic drive. However, it is not quite clear, yet, to what extent advanced concepts of human resource management have in actual practice gained ground, although one can recognize a growing trend. The more developmental activities are given high priority by managements. Still, actual practice is surely at a distance from the ideal models of active human resource management.

In our decade, Dutch human resource management shows the impact of various drives to make the enterprise a more flexible unit. On the one hand, with regard to the concentration on core activities and quantitative flexibilisation, we see more "commercial" employment relations and contracts with flexible time arrangements emerge. On the other hand, to achieve qualitative flexibility (customisation and innovation of products/services), we see the step-wise progression of human resource management, through organisation development, restructuring, education and training. Typically Dutch, in this respect, is the rather smooth blending of the "commercial" and the "humanitarian" elements inherent to the quantitative and qualitative flexibilisation drives.

RESUME (Suite)

A final section of the paper is devoted to industrial relations and social security. There is no country in Europe where ideological segmentation of unions and employers' associations is higher than in the Netherlands. But despite these splits, ideological segmentation is not felt to be a major issue. The strategies of unions have not been very different in practice or in their degree of combativeness. Furthermore, joint consultation and negotiation, and collective bargaining, have become well institutionalised.

Despite a more conservative government since the 1980s, the Netherlands have continued to provide an impressive array of social security measures and levels of benefits. In return, social security deductions are similar in height to direct income taxation, and more than half the gross domestic product is redistributed through government and social security activity.

That unions as well as works councils are reckoned with in matters of HRM, shows the fact that large scale rationalization and labour-shedding manoeuvres, such as in the recent Philips crisis, in ship-building and port operations, have been achieved in a way that avoided massive confrontations, which, again, is in line with the country's humanitarian concerns, which also can be noticed in the concept of the welfare state. This "manufacturing of consensus and social equity", it is concluded, has produced slack and problems, but it will also continue to remain one of the productive assets of the country.

The social and economic background of Dutch HRM

The history of the Netherlands can be summarized in three words: water, trade and Calvinism (VON DER DUNK, 1980: 132; also: ZAHN, 1984). Water defined the country's economic position in the maritime sector and associated services (banking, insurance, finance). The overseas carrying and transshipment trade brought the Netherlands its unprecedented prosperity in the Golden Age. Even when this pre-eminent position was taken over by neighbouring countries in the 18th century, trade remained the cornerstone of national wealth.

The industrial era in the Netherlands developed relatively late: about 1880. This retardation does appear to have been compounded by a lack of entrepreneurial zest combined with a marked risk-aversion and the fact that the Dutch bourgeoisie viewed their nation primarily as a commercial nation with no future in industry (MOKYR, 1976: 262). As long as trade and the transshipment of goods, combined with a highly productive agricultural sector¹, sustained the prosperity of the nation, the incentive for industrialization remained low. Prosperity made the Dutch rest on their laurels: while the upperclass lived off of their investments, the lower classes were greatly assisted by charity (KOSSMANN, 1976; MOKYR, *ibid.*: 194). Although the industrial gap was closing by 1914, the characteristics of the pre-industrial nation are still felt in many ways. The Netherlands retained its initial strengths in distributive services and agriculture. Likewise, the position of the welfare state is, despite contemporary criticism, still strong. From this tradition - trade on the one hand; strong social concern on the other - a value pattern evolved, which in Hofstede's terms is individualistic and feminine at the same time. Dutchmen know how to combine the attitudes of the trader and the preacher (HOFSTEDE, 1987: 4).

The third main feature in Dutch history is Calvinism. The Netherlands found national unity in the combat against the Spanish court (1568-1648). Calvinism was the ideology which fitted in with this struggle for freedom. At the same time, this ideology facilitated trade: commerce requires tolerance and sobriety (VON DER DUNK, *ibid.*). In Calvinism, these attitudes found a religious legitimization. The calvinistic tradition emphasizes thrift and a realistic attitude; showiness is to be avoided. Making money is not wrong in itself, as long as it does not imply decadence (Cf. SCHAMA, 1987). The Dutch national character - secularized as it may be - still is impregnated by the calvinist ethic. The Dutch understanding of individuality, for instance, is not self-glorification and eccentricity, but moral accountability - in particular the individual responsibility to conform to one's peer group.²

Consequently, Dutch management is less personally ambitious or glamorous than in other West European countries. Inter-firm mobility is low. The management ethos is one of sobriety, correctness and aversion against demonstrative display of hierarchical differences (LAWRENCE, 1991:128-135). Tolerance was furthermore reinforced by the proliferation of religious denominations. This fragmentation led to the development of separate life spheres for different groups, the *Verzuiling* (ZAHN, *ibid.*). This "pillarization" can be defined as the formal and informal patterning of schools, political parties, labour unions, broadcasting, etc., along confessional (roman-catholic, several protestant denominations) and later also political (socialist, communist) lines. This institutional pluralism has reinforced a tradition of compromise and consensus. Since neither of these different religious and ideological groups has gained absolute power, coalition building involving compromise seeking was to become another characteristic of Dutch society.

¹ Capital intensity and technology level in agriculture have been traditionally high. The backbone of this extraordinary productive agriculture is formed by the fertile marsh lands around river estuaries and low-lying water-rich grounds near the coasts. The surface of the country is cultivated to an extent which is singular in the world. Furthermore, the land surface has been substantially extended, by winning lands from the sea.

² The collective effort to control the ubiquitous water in the maritime provinces is the work of peer groups: partly voluntary organisations, founded on the cooperative principles of quasi-government through peer control. The still operative **waterschappen** (polder-boards) must be seen in this tradition. The 'battle against the sea' was neither fought by absolutist rulers nor by bureaucratic elites.

This spirit is also found in business life. In the prevailing conception of the firm as a nexus of stakeholders, where neither of parties dominates, coalition building is necessary to achieve goals.

It is assumed that the two boards in a Dutch company - the executive and the supervisory board - pursue the public interest of the company, which surpasses the partial interests of suppliers of capital, management, work force and other stakeholders (SCHREUDER, 1981).

If we now cast a glance at the size of contemporary Dutch firms, we observe the shape of an hour-glass (VAN ITERSON & OLIE, *ibid.*: 2). On the one hand, we see a large number of small-sized companies - again, often agro-related or trade companies. On the other, we see 16 enterprises employing more than 20,000 people, including the "big five" multinationals: Shell, Unilever, Akzo, Philips and DSM. Striking is the small number of medium-sized firms.

The larger enterprises are mainly capital intensive, highly productive¹ companies in process industries, like the chemical and the food and drinks industry. Now, the cooperative and corporatist principle which is strong in the agro-related (dairies, marketing of food) sector (as well as in social and political life), is rather weakly developed in the manufacturing industry (as well as in trade). The larger enterprises prefer to operate independently, or have subcontracting relations with smaller companies, which is also different from the cooperative principle. This tension between national values and business preferences has also major implications for the Dutch HRM, as we will see.

Generation of human resources

The educational system - one of the main "producers" of human resources - is very stratified in the Netherlands. There are four types of secondary schools: from the "lower vocational school" (Lager beroepsonderwijs, LBO), to the middle and higher secondary education (Middelbaar algemeen voorbereidend onderwijs, MAVO, and Hoger algemeen voorbereidend onderwijs, HAVO) and the grammar school (Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs, VWO) - the latter three offering general education. LBO often sets the scene for formalised apprenticeship training accompanied by day-release education. MAVO and HAVO prepare for middle vocational education (Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs, MBO) and higher vocational education (Hoger beroepsonderwijs, HBO), respectively. VWO gives access to universities, requiring four or five years of study.²

This system looks rather French, with its hierarchical differentiation. In addition, the practice of mixing normal work experience with further education and training is not widespread. Dutch vocational education is quite different from that in Germany, where the "Dual System" guarantees early and intensive work experience. Apprenticeship in the Netherlands is a similarly residual training category as in France. It is seen by young people as a "poor man's" route to the world of work.

However, it would be wrong to describe the Dutch education and training system as overly academicised. Curricula strike a reasonable balance between more academic and more practical orientations. Practical stages are obligatory both in MBO and HBO. End-of-study stages in companies or administration are also frequent in university studies, often leading to a practice-oriented exam thesis. In fact, university education is becoming somewhat more like HBO. To that extent, education in the Netherlands is radically different from that in France. Breeding intellectual high-flyers or technocratic elites, and setting yourself apart from less talented people, are, not surprisingly, resented. The educational "output" in the Netherlands does excel in the solid assurance of sound standards on a larger scale. For any employer, both the university engineer and the technician from the MBO are a reliable and competent educational "product".

Thus, although the educational system is very stratified, it is not elitist. Nor is it marked by great social differences between the rich and the poor, the excellent and the average. This smoothenes the contrast between intellectual and manual work, planning and execution.

Work organisation and personnel management

The "hour-glass" structure of Dutch business sits uncomfortably with the Dutch preference for smoothening differences and installing a negotiated order in which opposites find a legitimate place. The smaller firms are not much of a problem: HRM occurs here in a more cooperatively and corporatist context that is in keeping with the Dutch values. HRM at this level is less contentious; it is also less professionalised. Let us therefore look at the larger firms, which operate more on their own and therefore do form a problem. What can we expect about their work organisation? There will be a tendency to formalise regulations and expectations. Production and services will be more rationalised, so that segmentation of sub-units and specialisation of work roles prevail. Indirect functions like management, development and planning, will be more concentrated into specific departments or at specific levels. In sum, larger organisations will be bureaucratic. Let us now look at the industries prevailing in the Netherlands, and what this entails with regard to organisation structures. As there is a concentration of process industries,³ we find that most multinationals are located between large batch production and continuous process production in terms of Woodward's technology scale (WOODWARD, 1965).

Accordingly, most of their products are, either, composite (consisting of many separate parts) and made in large numbers, or "integral", i.e. homogeneous fluid, gaseous, viscous or solid substances. All along the Woodward scale, there is a tendency for the detachment of indirect functions from direct work to increase, reaching the top value in continuous process production. The elaborated technological basis of such processes is not easily transparent to direct workers, either for organisational reasons or because the chemistry and physics of product and process cannot be apprehended by direct human sensing, perception and understanding. Such processes are therefore subject to a high degree of specialists' coordination and control

¹ If you deduct the effect due to a favourable industrial structure, the Netherlands still come out as the second most labour-productive country, behind Germany.

² At all levels there are possibilities of transfer between these streams which temper their selectiveness.

³ Although Philips is an engineering concern, it is traditionally strong in mass-produced consumer goods, notably consumer electronics.

(MINTZBERG's "technostructure", 1979). So, the larger Dutch firms are to a very high degree "bureaucratic" and this clashes the more severely with the traditional peer control.

But in a way it does fit a highly stratified education and training system in which apprenticeship has come to have a Cinderella function. The emphasis on the technician and engineer in mass production and process industries, is paralleled by the emphasis on "bureaucratic professionalism" in MBO, HBO and universities. Apprenticeship and further education are the stronghold of building companies and mechanical engineering firms producing customised products in smaller batches, which are typically found in Germany but not the Netherlands. Here again we see the affinity which organisation patterns have with human resources generation in a country (SORGE, 1991). But there are also conflicts inherent to any kind of affinity.

The conflict which emerges for the Netherlands is that between egalitarian peer control, with its integration of separate functions in richer work roles, and bureaucratic specialist control.

This conflict is known in most industrialised countries. But where peer control is more strongly rooted, the conflict is experienced more severely. This applies, in particular, to Norway, which was hardly industrialised at the moment that it spawned a highly visible and productive socio-technical movement to overcome the conflict, by bringing back peer control through job enrichment, autonomous work groups, shortening of hierarchical distances and participation in decision-making.

A similar phenomenon has occurred in the Netherlands. Before publications appeared on the Norwegian experiments, the pioneer of Dutch socio-technical approaches put out a book on changes in work systems in the national postal giro service (VAN BEINUM, 1963). Later, a series of experiments was sponsored by the tripartite top body of the national corporatist system of industrial relations (Sociaal-Economische Raad, SER). These envisaged a more pervasive change of enterprise and work organisation. The experiments originated at a time when high expectations of employers and trade unions built up and clashed, involving a complex set of targets from shop and office floor work organisation to institutionalised industrial relation and enterprise structure and strategy. All in all, these experiments proved to be a mixed success (DE MAN, 1988). However, industrial relations and work organisation changes became more decoupled from each other, and events shifted from politically sponsored and highly visible experiments to a continuous series of piecemeal experimentation with more restricted ambitions - notably on work organisation. Philips also became involved. Consultancies were established to design and monitor experiments. The largest of these consultancies was KOERS, with the leading proponent of the Dutch socio-technical approach, Ulbo de Sitter, whose programme is at the top of the international state-of-the-art (DE SITTER, ed., 1986).

This kind of work has expanded from job redesign to more comprehensive human resource research and development. Currently, there is a high concentration of organisation and human resource consultancies in the Netherlands - possibly the highest in Europe. Very clearly, consultancy in organisation development, training, personnel policy, enterprise structuring and strategy-making activities has become a spectacular "growth industry". Apparently, firms have a

preference for contracting out this kind of work to advisers independent of internal interests. At the same time, firms and governmental organisations are increasingly hiring human resource officers and organisation specialists. How can this "double" tendency be explained? An important reason is that customisation of output and services, customer orientation, application of new technology, innovation of products and processes have taken place in many European countries. This has rendered socio-technical thinking and human resource development more acute, and it has become intertwined with more technically, commercially and administratively oriented design of new computer hardware, software and firmware, as well as organisational structures and routines. In view of the country's sectoral structure, the emphasis on productivity, economies of scale, division of labour and automation was even larger in the post-war Netherlands than in many other countries. Therefore, the recent changes towards more differentiated output produced in a more flexible way required a ever so more drastic change of thinking and practice. The new targets of flexibility and economies of scope, to promote profit margin and value-added, rather than quantity of output and low selling prices, required a far-reaching reorientation of organisation and human resource concepts. This has created a new, commercial rather than ideological, "market" for innovative socio-technics and HRM. To some extent, this has meant that consultancy in these matters has become more sober and technocratic. At the same time, it has given reformist thinking an impetus which is much greater than in the 1960s and 70s. As mentioned, the human resource and organisation conditions of the post-war industrial regime had been in conflict with Dutch social thinking. It can be imagined to have produced a kind of guilt feeling. The Dutch love to typify social thinking in their country as beset by both conflicts and synergy, between the archetypal postures of the trader and the preacher. More recently, renovated HRM and organisation practice offer the chance to alleviate such feelings of guilt, resulting from the conflicting postures of the money-conscious bulk producer and the socially conscious vicar. In a regime of value-added intensive customised production and services, both postures are more in harmony.

Division of labour and hierarchical management control, which have always struck an uncomfortable peace with traditional patterns of peer control and social equality, can now be changed in the direction of the latter. The recent emergence of organisation and human resource consulting therefore responds to the perceived conflict, and it feeds on a drive to bring back, and turn into a productive asset, features of Dutch social organisation which had been subdued.

The new consultants are the preachers of the social hygiene which is in better accord with traditional structures and Christian values. That a great deal of them do not believe in God, is no matter. Most of Dutch social thinking is imbued with modern, laicistic spin-offs of calvinist social thought, which has penetrated roman catholic, socialist and liberal world views

(LAWRENCE, *ibid*: 114-119; HOFSTEDE, *ibid*.).

Accordingly, a recent Dutch textbook (KLUYTMANS & HANCKE, 1990) offers a detailed conceptualisation of HRM in the more ambitious sense: an important management specialty which is much larger than conventional personnel management, and essential to turn an enterprise into a competitive, successful concern. HRM is seen to facilitate

development of sound enterprise policies in functional domains, as well as generic strategy-making.

This is a break with more restricted concepts which had locked the personnel management function into coping with the problems created by top commercial, technical and production management. The new view sees HRM as a creative producer of business options, rather than as an absorber of decisions made at higher levels.

This picture is propagated by university teachers and consultants - the preachers of the business world. It is difficult to find a country which surpasses the Netherlands in this programmatic drive. But we are not simply dealing with the victory of Christian or humanistic values over the tight-fisted trader. The rise of HRM is linked with increased self-assurance of Dutch businessmen, with a positive evaluation of the motive to make money, whereas management and profit had almost become dirty words in the 1970s (LAWRENCE, *ibid.*: 146-148).

Whereas then, the conflict between the trader and the preacher was very acute in society and politics, and the preacher gained importance in the unbridled prosperous welfare state, now the trader is much more accepted because he has internalised some of the preacher elements after prosperity and welfare had entered a crisis. Hence, the status of business has been elevated rather than that of preaching. But the new lease of life for business depends on infusion with preacher elements along with, of course, the labour market situation and industrial relations factors.

Furthermore, it is not quite clear, yet, to what extent advanced concepts of HRM have in practice gained ground. Kluytmans and Hancke (*ibid.*: 288) observed a growing trend. BUITENDAM (1979) reported findings from a period when the tendency had just started, and distinguished functions of i) personnel administration; ii) adaptation of human resources; iii) development of human resources and iv) collective participation. Buitendam suggested that the first two functions, the "classic domains" of personnel work, were still predominant, but there was a shifting of emphasis to the other ones which are more active. More recent research has shown that the trend has continued (HOOGENDOORN, 1987). Developmental activities are given priority by managements, though actual practice is surely at a distance from the ideal models of active HRM. Even classic personnel management in the Netherlands is comparatively extensive. It has brought about systems of fringe benefits, pension funds, employment guarantees and internal labour markets. A model example often held up, is Philips, which covered the employees' work and social needs "from the cradle to the grave". Recently, employment security and social benefits have been partly dismantled, being identified with organisational conservatism and entrepreneurial stagnation.

Many companies are eliminating "noncore activities". This may also affect the extent to which social benefits are provided, as employees in subcontracted firms usually are less protected. Similarly, there has been a pervasive tendency to hire in casual labour, on contracts with the company itself or via a manpower agency. Employers have further increased the flexibility of labour use through new types of working time. All this has led to a multiplication of employment relationships and contractual forms. Casual or unregulated forms of labour are very much in evidence in,

for instance, agriculture and small textile and clothing workshops. They involve a great deal of migrant foreign workers. This is a far cry indeed from "regular" work in the Dutch welfare state.

Such a phenomenon is, of course, different from the advance of demanding HRM. The latter applies to a core set of business activities, whereas quantitative flexibilisation of labour use has a more early capitalist appearance. But the practice of contracting-out has also extended to qualified work (repair, overhaul, transport, training, automation, research, development, consultancy). This phenomenon, which is surely international in character, constitutes for the Netherlands a clear break with the post-war past, in the shift away from coordination by management decision, back to coordination by markets.

To that extent, employees have become more frequently exposed to market relationships, even if they supply services to a larger enterprise on a fairly regular basis. This phenomenon - which on the one hand resembles job enrichment and other experiments - is also another move back to traditional Dutch trade practice: The principle that the producer of a commodity should look after its commercial exploitation.

In sum, Dutch HRM shows the impact of various drives to make the enterprise a more flexible unit. On the one hand, with regard to the concentration on core activities and quantitative flexibilisation, we see more "commercial" employment relations and contracts with flexible time arrangements emerge. On the other hand, to achieve qualitative flexibility (customisation and innovation of products/services), we see the step-wise progression of HRM, through organisation development, restructuring, education and training. Both moves are also international phenomena. But they also respond to typically Dutch predicaments and offer typically Dutch solutions. Most Dutch of all is the smooth blending of the "commercial" and "humanitarian" elements inherent to the quantitative and qualitative flexibilisation drives.

Industrial relations

Many European countries have ideologically segmented trade union movements, and this is usually deplored as a problem in negotiation between employers, unions and governments. Although there is at present in the Netherlands a general union movement and a Protestant one, a general employers' association and a christian one¹, these splits are not felt to be a major ideological issue.

In the first place, there has not been a major communist-oriented union movement, and the strategies of unions have not been very different in combativeness. Second, joint consultation and negotiation, and collective bargaining, have become well institutionalised. Post-war relations were mainly governed by a corporatist system of tri-partite top-level regulatory bodies (Sociaal-Economische Raad, SER, and Stichting van de Arbeid) and industry boards. These have enforced standardised wage policies, leaving almost no bargaining autonomy to individual industries and enterprises (ALBEDA & DERCKSEN, 1989: 57-60).

¹ The roman catholic union movement had joined the general union confederation, whereas the roman catholic employers had teamed up with the protestant ones.

Union and employer federations of different world views have cooperated in this regime.

In the mid-1960s, however, the institutionalised consensus broke up, giving way to bargaining in line with industry - and enterprise-specific productivity developments. This increased industrial conflict and inflation. Apart from the agricultural sector, where corporatism managed to hold its own, elsewhere, a mixed structure of collective agreements both by industry and by specific enterprises, resulted, with company agreements mostly in large enterprises. This is half-way between industry bargaining German style and enterprise or plant bargaining British style.

Collective agreements according to industry are usually declared generally applicable to all workers concerned, by ministerial decree. In addition, there is governmental regulation on minimum wages and minima do assure a very acceptable level of welfare. Other governmental regulation of social security, health hazards and pensions is similarly geared to assure protection against work inability and unemployment, to an extent which again stands out.

Despite a more conservative government since the 1980s, the Netherlands have continued to provide an impressive array of social security measures and levels of benefits. In return, social security deductions are similar in height to direct income taxation, and more than half the GDP is redistributed through government and social security activity.

It would be wrong to blame a supposedly decadent welfare state, lazy employees and feather-bedding trade unions for problems of growing transfer payments. In fact, management has used such schemes to get rid of the medical and human wastage of a highly productive economy, including demotivated workers. Those who did not meet expectations were nudged out of employment, with the, then, silent consent of unions, employers and government.

Industrial relations at the national and industry levels are articulated with company and plant level relations in a way which is similar to the German system, except that company collective agreements are frequent in the Netherlands and very rare in Germany. Dutch Works Councils are independent consultation and bargaining agents, elected by the whole work force, which also enjoy co-determination rights roughly similar to those in Germany. All considered, they have a comparatively strong position in the manufacturing of consensus in the enterprise, Dutch style. There are no strong independent union representatives on their own right, in the company, but where unions are well represented, works councillors have come to take over this role.

Union membership figures have declined from 41% in 1977 to 29% in 1987. (These figures includes union members who are not in the labour force any more.) (ALBEDA & DERCKSEN, *ibid.*: 47). But this decline does not reflect a proportional decline of the importance of unions in the overall regulatory apparatus and in HRM. The government does reckon with unions, and human resource management does have to reckon with works councils which have co-determination rights particularly in this field. That works councils and unions are reckoned with, shows in the fact that large scale labour-shedding manoeuvres, such as in ship-building, have been achieved without massive confrontations.

CONCLUSION

Going stereotypes about the Netherlands stress the country's humanitarian concerns, tolerant and democratic civic spirit, openness and good cheer. This is certainly not untrue. But the Netherlands are also a well organised society with a social control that is effective through consensus-building in a dense network of peer groups. In human resources generation and management, the country is good at assuring decent standards of security, well-being and performance. The institutional apparatus has in the past promoted a high degree of efficiency, and it is being adapted to promote greater effectiveness. There is also an endeavour to increase effectiveness structurally, by promoting growth of the higher value-added sector, notably in investment goods engineering.

Reorganisation, technical and strategic change have an important role to play in this endeavour which is backed by the development of professionalism, both in management within firms and in burgeoning organisation and human resources consultancy. The development of this professionalism, which is orientated by international recipes, is bolstered by reliance on domestic traditions of commercialism, peer control, and the intertwining of the public interest with voluntary and quasi-governmental associations. The manufacturing of consensus and social equity has produced slack and problems, but it will also continue to remain one of the productive assets of the country.

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