



REFLECTION GROUP ON "EXPERT CULTURE"

Scientific Staff

GILBERT EGGERMONT,
FRANK DECONINCK,
PAUL GOVAERTS,
FRANS MOONS,
MATHIEU SNYKERS,
GUY COLLARD,
MARK LOOS,
PASCAL DEBOODT,
KLAAS VAN DER MEER,
SARAH BAATOUT,
GASTON MESKENS,
BERNARD NEERDAEL,
LUDO VEUCHELEN,
FRANK HARDEMAN,
BARTEL VAN DE WALLE,
JÉRÉMIE FAYS,
ERIK LAES,
GUSTAAF C. CORNELIS,
STEVEN LIERMAN,
GUNTHER BOMBAERTS

External Partners

PATRICK SMEESTERS
(*DBIS/SPRI and UCL*),
PIERRE DE SAINT GEORGES
(*UCL*),
BERNARD FELTZ (*UCL*),
JOHAN BRAECKMAN
(*RUG*),
MARC MORMONT (*FUL*),
EDWIN ZACCAI (*ULB*),
RAOUL WEILER
(*KULeuven*),
JEAN-PAUL
VAN BENDEGEM (*VUB*),
ILSE LOOTS (*UIA*),
MICHEL BOVY (*FUL*)

Supporting Staff

DOMINIQUE
GLINNE-TRÉPAGNE

Background

There was once the myth of the expert. In the nuclear energy field in particular the role of the expert has been questioned in public debate. Nuclear scientists are confronted with a (mis)use of their expertise and opinions. Clients are specifying constraining conditions. Is objectivity to a certain extent an illusion? Is there only one truth? How clear and accessible should the message be for the public? What is the limitation in mandate for the expert and in own value judgements? Society is challenging their responsibility. To give a critical view on the use of nuclear technology is no longer evident when media and green action groups question your future. Divergence in expert opinion is amplified by media, creating communication dilemmas between clarity and nuance.

In complex interactions with laymen, society and the environment, experts are needing a broader than disciplinary insight in their role. New skills are required to be effective in communication and public participation. Ethical guidance is sometimes requested.

Objectives

- ☒ Clarify the role of SCK•CEN expert.
- ☒ Clarify the new role of expertise in the evolving context of risk society
- ☒ Confront external views and internal SCK•CEN experiences on expert culture.
- ☒ Improve trustbuilding of experts and credibility of SCK•CEN as nuclear actor in society.
- ☒ Develop a draft for a deontological code.
- ☒ Integrate the approach in training on assertivity and communication.
- ☒ Creation of an output for a topical day on the subject of expert culture for February 2001, by editing a Cahier of contributed articles and discussion reports.

Programme

A reflection group was created with a selection of external experiences from universities following a call for interest and preliminary discussions. Researchers of different age and coming from different SCK•CEN divisions were associated in order to consider different aspects.

The reflection group started at the end of the year with an analytical contribution from dr. Patrick Smeesters (UCL-FANC) highlighting the role of the expert in complex radiological situations involving

decision making on societal aspects. Who is an expert, how broad can his mandate be in the increasing complexity and fragmentation of knowledge? Who is certifying him, why and what is his freedom of expression?

His message should be clearly understandable and his jargon accessible, implicit value judgements and uncertainties should be specified and elucidated.

Prof. E. Zaccai, ULB, was analysing the requirements of the expert in environmental issues and in the context of sustainable development. The relation science-society and knowledge-power has changed. Interests and ethics have to be clarified. The mission of the expert, the scope of his expertise should be specified.

Finally Prof. J. Braeckman, RUG, Department of Philosophy introduced the discussion of dilemmas in relation to attitudes and worldviews with particular attention for cognitive dissonance theory, explaining the loss of criticism of an expert when his field is offended.

Achievements

The reflection group as such is part of a learning process, an attempt in transdisciplinary dialogue. Discussion reports were prepared by the authors and by collective efforts of the social scientists recruited in the SCK•CEN projects on social science integration. A working document giving a summary of the contributions made by the various speakers, but also of the subsequent discussions, has been prepared. It serves as an "aide-mémoire" in order to keep track of the important aspects dealt with during the meeting, and it will in future be the basis of reports aimed for scientific output, but also of the deontological code for the experts of SCK•CEN. A first overview, structuring the expert culture was made in the planning for 2000.

Perspectives

The dilemma issues will be focussed and cognitive dissonance studied in nuclear expertise, particularly in relation to nuclear waste. A deontological code and communication approach will be developed by analysing different aspects of expert culture, such as:

- ☒ The experts role in evolving environmental policies.
- ☒ Implication of the risk society on public and expert attitudes

- ▣ Analysis of communication in an actual case, the Tokaimura accident.
- ▣ Risk perception factors and communication
- ▣ Experiments in participation and particularly the consensus conference experiences
- ▣ Ethical choices made.