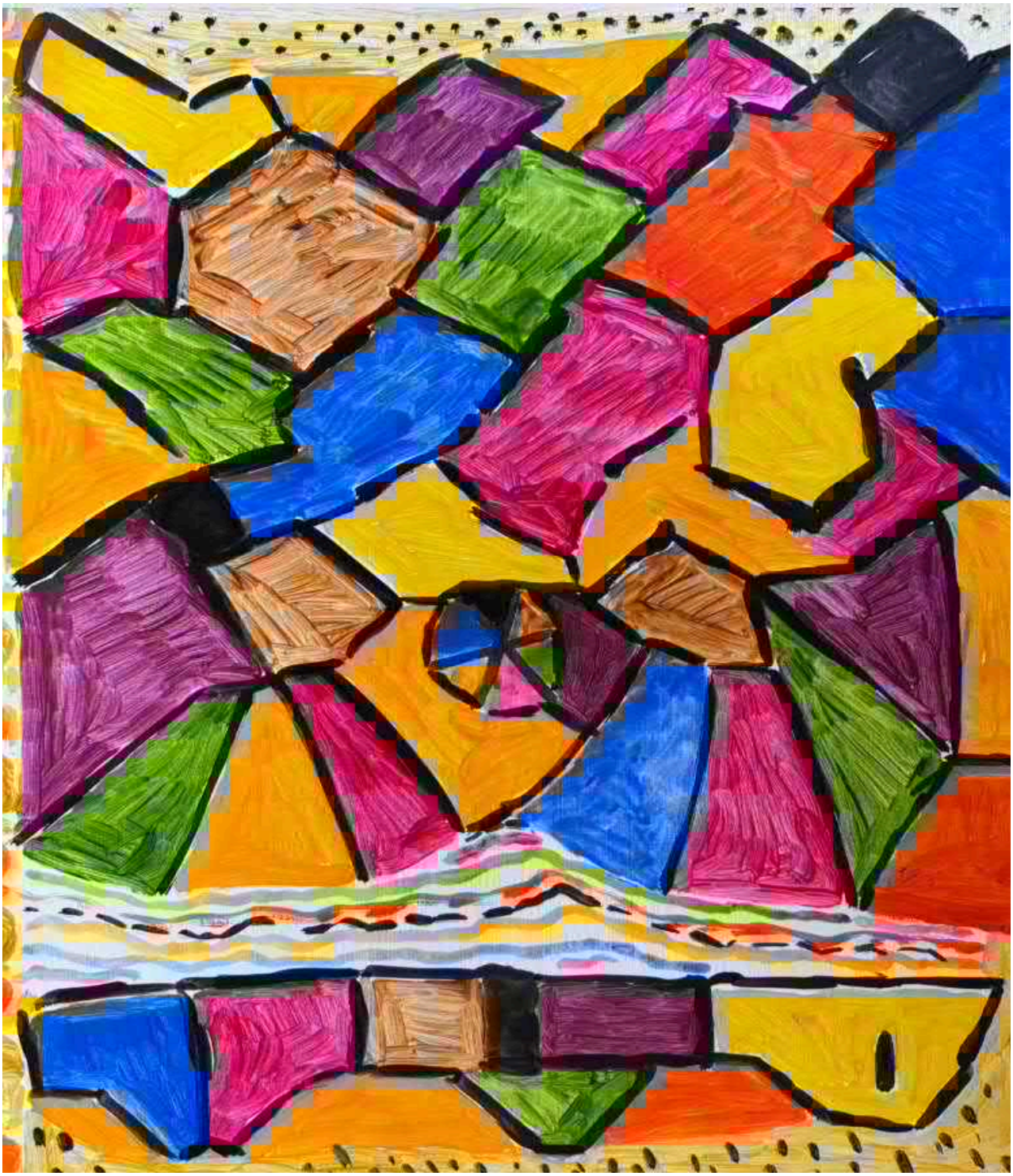


Organisational Development and Leadership

Key ideas and experiences

Adriaan Bekman

1 Introduction

Looking back on 55 years of consultancy work, I have compiled a series of articles that I have published over the years on the management website. In these articles, I explore themes that have preoccupied me and continue to do so. They are a mix of perspectives and examples and are intended to inspire readers who are engaged with development and change issues.

In my approach, personal and organisational development are inextricably linked. This perspective is connected to what I have termed ‘horizontal leadership’; after all, leadership is about guiding people and oneself within an organised context. We do this within the framework of work and change processes; we do so through dialogue with one another and link this to the purpose of our efforts and the personal steps we take.

In addition to this selection from my published articles, I have written many books. Their themes are identical to those of the articles posted here. They form a concise compilation of the most important insights and experiences gained over a long career as a business consultant. I have had the privilege of tackling challenging issues with my clients within the context of long-term relationships and have thus developed both as a person and as a professional.

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Bibliography

1. Professional Biographical Self-Management

Reflecting on one's own professional history and life journey is a source of self-assessment and self-knowledge. In our work with clients, too, we pay attention to the company's history. In an article in the academic journal 'MenO', I described the underlying methodology in which process, dialogue and biography were key concepts for ensuring a smooth social progression of events. The editors were familiar with process and dialogue, but it was the element of biography in particular that was significant, as little attention is paid to this in academia and perhaps also in business practice.

In my next article, 'Interactive Self-Management', I write: *'Together with my clients, I create a reflective space in which improvements emerge through meaningful dialogue.*
At a school, we spend a Saturday developing a vision for the future and launching several improvement processes. This gives the community a fresh burst of energy and paves the way for the school's continued success."
In such a process, I focus on how the organisation has developed over time and what self-awareness can be derived from this.

I'll take my own professional history as an example.

Up to and including secondary school, everything went by the book. After that, it didn't.

My sociology degree in Rotterdam was a surprising choice; I enrolled on the spot at the age of seventeen, even though I'd intended to apply for economics. With 80 students, we formed the second cohort of this programme, which meant we were able to shape the course personally alongside the professors. That personal

approach brought out the best in me. I progressed from average to excellent and graduated at the age of 21.

On my own initiative, I spent eight years working for Shell International, where I was given the opportunity to introduce and oversee organisational development in two Shell companies. It was something I gradually got the hang of as I went along. At that time, organisational development was unusual, and Shell chose me to shape it from within its own organisations. Many were not exactly keen on the idea, whilst a few welcomed it with enthusiasm: “I’ve been waiting for this for a long time”. We pioneered social skills, leadership skills, project work and teamwork. Dealing with resistance and persevering at NAM in the Netherlands and Shell Curaçao gave me the necessary resilience to tackle new challenges in the years that followed.

At Shell, my encounter with Bernard Lievegoed’s NPI (Netherlands Pedagogical Institute) felt like ‘coming home’, and I subsequently spent 28 years there providing consultancy services across multiple countries to a wide variety of organisations, as part of a community of NPI consultants. At the NPI, I met 22 colleagues who supported organisations not only in the Netherlands but also far beyond its borders in their people and organisational development. Initially, I found myself in the training rooms of De Baak and SIOO, but soon I was able to identify and implement the appropriate approach to difficult issues within organisations, working with the entire community. In this way, as NPI colleagues, we formed a community of client organisations worldwide, whose staff described our collaborative work as an adventure led by an NPI guide, usually featuring surprising approaches and results. Every Saturday morning, we would meet to exchange experiences and discuss new requests, alongside an inspiring

introduction from a colleague. In this way, I was able to internalise the discipline of systematic collaboration.

At their request, I began working with students at Erasmus University, Stenden University of Applied Sciences and Hanze University of Applied Sciences on organisational development and leadership. For 14 years, I worked with students from various degree programmes as part of a minor in leadership. I divided the 25 students from different degree programmes into groups of three and sent them to organisations I worked with, where they were given a specific issue to address and spent 10 weeks for three days holding discussions with staff members about that issue. The key question was “How does this issue relate to you?”, which then led to very personal conversations. In this way, the students brought the issue to life within the organisation. They had little interest in becoming managers, but “if this is what leadership is, then I’m all for it” was their typical reflection during the final presentations. New generations are clearly waiting for a different way of working and collaborating within organisations. They are looking for meaningful experiences.

Following the NPI, the IMO Institute for Human and Organisational Development was established in 2005. Now operating in 11 countries with 60 colleagues, inspired by the ‘evidence-based’ methodology, we support people and organisations in their development. The core of the methodology is that, for change issues, process owners are sought who have the talent and the will to bring this issue to a successful conclusion, with the community acting, and as a horizontal leader. No committees or project groups, but employees with their own role in the process who seek to collaborate with one another and involve other employees in the process of change.

In my article, ‘Meaningful change through horizontal leadership’, I describe how changes were implemented in a hospital. *“We supported the department heads in strengthening their leadership and the doctors in their collaboration with the professionals. They learnt to ask themselves questions such as: what do we want to achieve, how does our management principel work, what is our guiding vision, how do the work processes run, why are we spending money on these areas and not on others, who is in which role, how do we work together? Asking these questions sharpened the leaders’ observation skills and better enabled them, as horizontal leaders, to guide their staff through the work process.”*

It was, and remains, a joyful experience when change processes succeed in collaboration with people, and when experiences and insights are gained that last a lifetime.

Over the years, I have written many books and articles in which I have documented the learning outcomes of all this pioneering work; I have given lectures on the subject worldwide, coached people, and set up and facilitated learning programmes. (See www.het-imo.net, or search for ‘Adriaan Bekman’ on Google.) In 1998, I obtained my PhD from the Humanistic University in the Netherlands with a thesis entitled ‘Dynamic Organisations’.

I discovered that one’s professional journey reflects how one gives meaning to one’s own life, connected to people in the process, sometimes for a lifetime. Looking back, you can recognise a common thread, a recurring motif or impulse, something that keeps cropping up. For me, that is personal and organisational development. I know no such thing as a day not lived. One’s professional journey is shaped by the often-unexpected choices one makes. With my growing confidence in my own professional journey, I can balance my fear of life. It is precisely within organisations that employees can flourish when they are

involved in solving difficult problems using their own ideas. Time and again, I've seen that employees, acting as process owners, undergo personal development in their leadership. This experience encouraged them to take responsibility in difficult situations and to forge a path forward together with those involved. For me, as a consultant, this also provided special experiences and learning moments.

I remember how the chairman of the board of a large German Sparkasse asked me: "I feel as though my staff are sitting in the stands watching to see how I fare in the arena. I'd like to turn that around, but how?" After three years of organisational development, he told me: "I never thought we'd get this far. The staff are solving many issues themselves and are driving the necessary changes forward with enthusiasm as process owners."

The organisational biography

Every organisation goes through biographical phases. Bernard Lievegoed described these phases.

Firstly, the pioneering phase, in which an organisation gets to work, improvising as it goes along. The pioneer(s) are the linchpin around which everything revolves. They create a functioning community in which the customer is served through collaboration and direct communication. Growth ensues. Then a crisis arises: improvisation no longer works; we must start organising. Bernard Lievegoed referred to this as the differentiation phase. Standardisation, systematisation, organisation, coordination, mechanisation. The organisation becomes a functional, hierarchical body with roles and tasks, procedures and management. Growth continues and a new crisis loom. Staff lose their connection with the organisation, and the sense of purpose is no longer strongly felt. Lievegoed argues that in this phase – which he termed the integration phase

– people must be placed at the centre of managerial attention and involved in development, whether they are customers, staff, suppliers, leaders or managers. Attention also shifts from the inside out: what do we contribute to the social well-being of the community: leadership with a focus on process, dialogue and purpose.

Whereas I used to be very hands-on as a committed consultant with the client—who, as a result, tended to watch somewhat cautiously to see how things would turn out—I gradually changed my approach and attitude by putting the client in the lead and supporting them in how the process was carried out. I became 'a laid-back consultant' offering the client 'tips' on how things might be approached differently. You then become part of the organisation, having to demonstrate your own leadership and show staying power. 'Turn a project into a process' was my motto for client work.

Conclusion: because my life has been multifaceted and complicated, I was challenged in various community contexts to practise professional self-management to find my way through all that institutionalised, organised existence. In these communities, as a participant, I was challenged to take responsibility myself, to take the initiative, and in doing so I learnt that we are dependent on one another. The formation of judgement is particularly important.

In my article 'Judgement-forming in consultancy', I wrote:

"Looking back on more than 50 years of consultancy, I can see how development and change issues within an organised community of people require a form of leadership that is first and foremost driven by horizontal, dialogical processes, before the vertical structure, as the shaper, establishes the new order. The most powerful and effective interventions take place in the transformation and

improvement of work processes and collaborative relationships. Adapting the structure, as well as revitalising the entrepreneurial drive, shape the institutional framework of an organisation."

Fifty years of consultancy experience have provided me with the foundation for my own leadership development and self-knowledge. A combination of action and reflection was important not only at work but also at home. To avoid getting caught up in complications, the interplay between thoughts and feelings is crucial for arriving at appropriate actions that are meaningful. It is wonderful when this succeeds.

Finally, an example from my own practice

Four gentlemen are working together to explore how society can manage money more effectively.

After years of study, they found themselves face to face with Bernard Lievegoed, who asked them: "When are you going to actually do something?" They decided to take the initiative by creating a credit facility for new, alternative entrepreneurs who struggle to gain a foothold with the established banks. Following the announcement, the first customers came forward. The scheme operates on the principle of collateral: the young entrepreneur must provide security which, in the event of failure, will cover the debts. The credit initiative grows into a small bank where savers make their money available to specific young businesses. The Dutch Central Bank grants a banking licence. The small bank is successful and decides to invest more in wind energy, in the organic supply chain from farmer to trader to shop to consumer, and in innovative cultural initiatives. It finances projects in these areas. Gradually, an organisation takes shape, a new building is constructed, and its profile grows. Credit initiatives from abroad come forward and become part of this bank. Growth continues, and

the bank develops into a comprehensive European institution with funds, certificate holders and current accounts for individuals and businesses. Sustainability, cultural development and the social aspect are promoted in tandem with one another for the benefit of the customer. The Dutch Central Bank views this initiative favourably, but following substantial growth, it imposes new requirements. A crisis ensues, which is resolved by central specialists who review and monitor banking operations in the various countries. The bank, which operates on a decentralised basis, comes under greater central control. Staff feel a strong sense of purpose in their work for this bank. Within a short time, they can embody the drive and ideals of this bank. The customers, too, are strongly committed. The growth in the number of private and corporate certificate holders, as part of an internal certificate market, eventually leads – due to restricted trading – to a breakdown in the relationship between the bank and the certificate holders. The bank's certificates/shares are listed on the stock exchange, where they can be traded.

Triodos Bank has been in existence since 1980; it now operates in five countries with 750,000 customers and has successfully navigated several fundamental upheavals. To me, it is an example of how personal biographies find their way into an organisation's collective biography, with powerful interactive and biographical self-governance serving as the guiding principle across all areas. As a supervisory board member for 14 years, I was part of this impressive process. My focus as a board member was primarily on the following two points. I regularly asked Triodos' management about its customers, savers and borrowers as a counterbalance to the management's distinctly idealistic initiatives. It took some time before a decision was made to investigate who the customers were and what characterised them. This revealed that the customers form a very specific social group of people and organisations who share the bank's ideals and

wish to be part of them. Secondly, I asked the management how they organised the bank's processes and whether those processes flowed smoothly for managers, staff and customers. It turned out that things were often rather cumbersome. Attention to work processes was stepped up and bottlenecks were tackled by the management.

2. Interactive self-management

Institutions such as churches, politics, the business world, social organisations and families are losing their grip on people. To echo the words of the philosopher Arnold Cornelis: the natural connections and social infrastructures are losing their strength and the trust of the people who depend on them.
One example is the response of the tax authorities and politicians to the benefits scandal, which has caused problems for many people. The same applies to youth care, or the ground subsidence and damage to homes in Groningen resulting from gas extraction. The current government appears unable to deal with social issues in a meaningful and effective way. Voters are losing interest.

So, what is the solution?

A small example is how the residents of my street help one another navigate the bureaucratic maze of government organisations. It is increasingly down to our capacity for interactive self-governance.

Interactive self-governance

In a world of growing polarisation, we are challenged to take the wheel ourselves. *How do we shape and give meaning to our own lives in dialogue with others?* Following the philosopher Arnold Cornelis, I call this interactive self-governance
Three qualities are essential for interactive self-management.

Firstly, the ability to establish meaningful processes for the issues that concern us. This applies equally at home, at work and in our personal lives

Secondly, learning to live in dialogue. We do not shy away from others, nor do we exclude them; rather, in dialogue with others, we seek answers together.

Thirdly, meaningful reflection. In a life full of action, reflection becomes increasingly important to maintain the meaningful balance between the extremes that beset us.

Together with my clients, I create a space for reflection in which improvements emerge through meaningful dialogue.

At a school, we spend a Saturday developing a vision for the future and launching several improvement processes. This gives the community a fresh burst of energy and paves the way for the school's continued success.

How does this work?

I ask the participants to consider three perspectives ahead of the meeting. How do our clients, parents and children see us? How do the community and the leadership function? What is the financial situation?

In groups, the participants share their findings and vision and based on the dialogue, write down meaningful sentences. The groups present these sentences to one another. During the coffee break, a few colleagues set to work and return with an initial draft. This is then discussed in the groups, and anything that has been overlooked can be added. Ultimately, this guiding vision is put into practice for a few months to see how it supports collaboration and decision-making.

It is surprising how, in just half a day, this community can develop a guiding vision that springs from the hearts and minds of the participants. This guiding vision can be shared with stakeholders such as parents, regulators and other those involved. It also gives them an idea of what the school community, management and teachers have in mind and wish to achieve.

Such a vision also provides a basis for formulating questions about what needs to be done to turn this vision into reality. Issues at this school include how to foster a constructive dialogue with parents, how to get the finances in better order, and how to raise the standard of education for the pupils.
For each development process, a process owner is appointed – specifically, the process owner who is trusted and has the capacity to ensure this process runs smoothly and is brought to a successful conclusion in collaboration with the community.

Progress is monitored through regular exchanges between process owners and the community. Suggestions can help the process owners find the right path. A key advantage of this approach is that it avoids endless debate and ensures concrete steps are taken.

A guide

The challenge is to probe the other person's issue in a way that encourages them to reflectively explore their own issue and then identify their own next step.

The other person formulates their issue. I ask questions, not to understand it myself, but to help the other person articulate it. 'Could you give an example?', 'How did that go the other day?', 'What did you experience in that situation?'.

As they speak, the issue begins to shift; it changes, takes on new meaning, and I also see new ways of dealing with the issue. This is not theory, but an experience shared by myself and my colleagues of just how powerful and meaningful this dialogue is for people with questions.

One discovery in this regard was that within the operational organisation, where we are all busy at work, there is no time or space for development. Development

requires a different process to the one we practise in operations. Alongside daily routines and solving problems using our expertise, a third level is needed: the implementation of change and innovation processes within the organisation. I have published extensively on this subject.

An example of interactive self-management.

For years, I trained consultants at SIOO Context on how to facilitate change processes. To begin with, I set them an exercise. Two participants played the role of the client and two played the role of consultants. The client has an issue – for example, the management team not functioning effectively. The client meets with the consultants and begins to present the issue to them. The consultants listen and ask questions so that they can better understand the issue. The client then looks on expectantly to see what the consultants have to offer. They propose a training programme for the management team. 'Please draw up a quotation for your proposal, including the cost to us.' That's as far as it goes.

I ask the client and the consultants whether they are satisfied with the meeting. Usually, they feel it went quite well. I suggest a second meeting that will take a different course.

The consultants aren't focused on understanding the issue but are interested in how the client has approached the issue so far.

The client explains their issue, and the consultants ask the client how they have been tackling it so far. The client describes what they have undertaken so far to make progress on the issue. Together with the consultants, the issue comes to life again for the client. The client emerges. The consultants share some of their own experiences and insights and suggest how this issue might be tackled. A

conversation ensues, and the client begins to visualise a process for dealing with the issue. They discuss a first step and arrange a follow-up meeting.

When it comes to change, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ are of essential importance. It is not just about what the issue is, but also how we deal with it and why we do so in that way. This reinforces the meaning of the process and reveals new avenues.

Are you capable of doing this – not only guiding the change process with the other person, but also guiding yourself through that process of change?

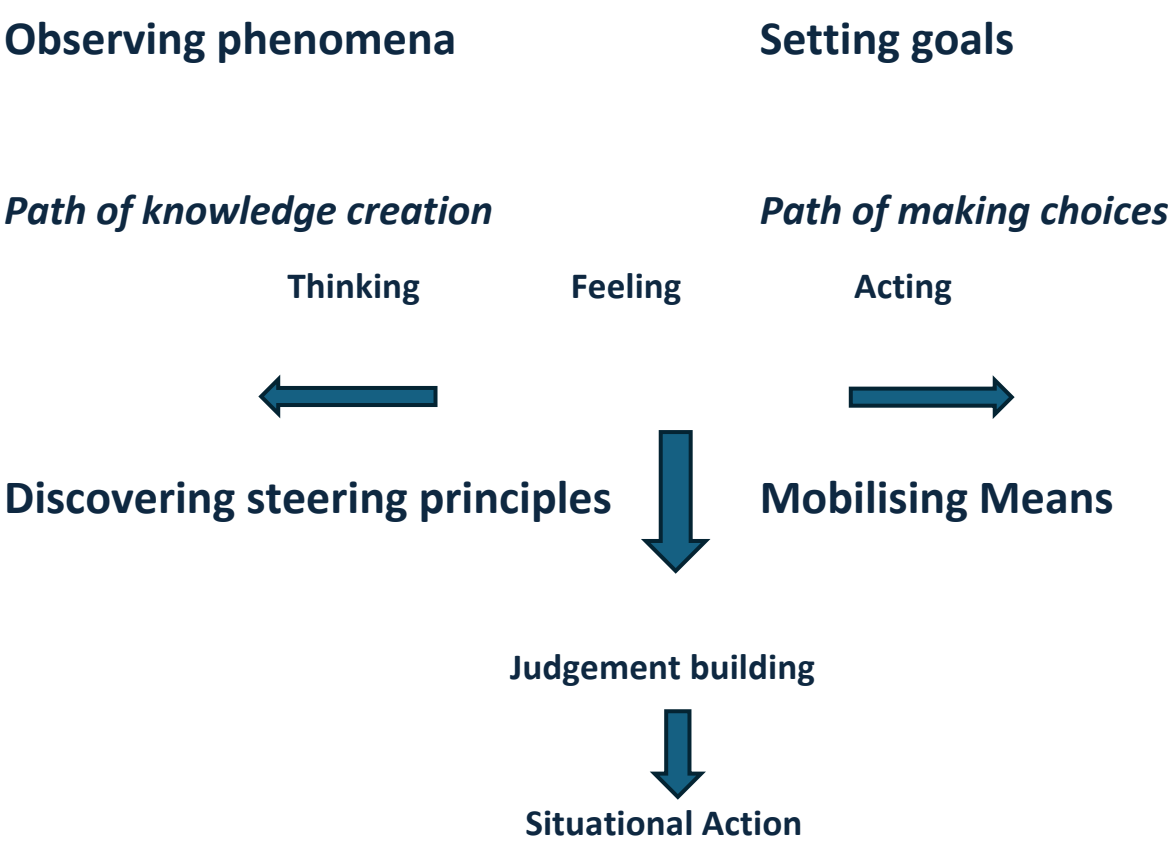
In conclusion

Dealing with questions in an inspiring way together with others through interactive self-management helps us to cope with the pressures of institutionalised life and to give meaning to our own actions. Wisdom in our conduct emerges.

3. Sound Judgement in Change Processes

Change in organisations requires creating one's own space for change and demands attention to careful judgement-building within the change process. Horizontal leadership makes this possible.

It has been years since my NPI colleague, consultant Lex Bos, completed his PhD on the topic of judgement-forming in groups. His brilliant insight was that judgement-forming requires a dialogical, cyclical process between the people involved. Polarities operate within that process; these are areas of tension between poles and a middle ground. Past – future, inner world – outer world, idea – practice are for example, ubiquitous polarities. His view of humanity – that humans are thinking, feeling and willing beings who ask questions, conduct research and make choices, often in interaction with others – led him to develop the alternating progression between a 'path of knowledge building' and a 'path of making choice'. Guiding principles on the one hand and situational action on the other are bridged by the fact that a person's 'I' consciously arrives at a judgement, in dialogue with others, a judgement that provides direction. Intuition and empathy play an important role here.



The formation of judgement is also of exceptional importance in the process that a consultant and client go through together when it comes to change. Here too, there is a tendency to translate research findings directly into proposals for action, whilst the formation of judgement through dialogue between those involved is overlooked.

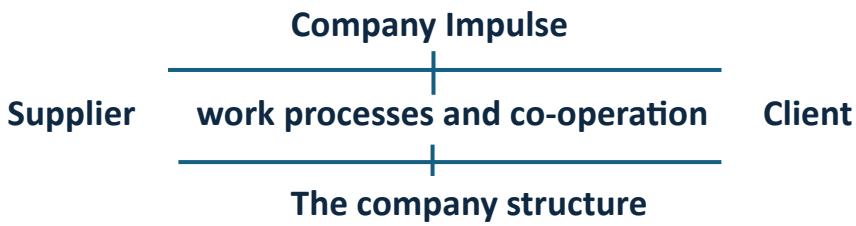
Our many years of research into what makes a change process successful indicate that thorough judgement building and the development of a sense of purpose help the people involved in the organised community to find their way.

4. The consultancy profession is about designing and implementing

As a rule, the consultancy profession is understood to mean one person advising another. The adviser possesses ‘something’ that the other person needs, and this ‘something’ is usually knowledge and expertise. This may take the form of technical knowledge and tools, financial knowledge and tools, social knowledge and tools, or psychological knowledge and tools. This knowledge and these tools are applied to issues relating to purchasing and sales, production, logistics, administration, human resources and management. When we examine how consultancy works with clients, it becomes clear that this only works when the client and the consultant enter a collaborative relationship – a dialogical process. It is therefore a two-way exchange in which supply and demand interact with one another. Both the client and the adviser have a demand and an offer. For example, the client wants a solution to a problem from the adviser, whilst the adviser, in addition to remuneration, seeks a new experience, ongoing collaboration and improved insight.

50 years of consultancy

Looking back on more than 50 years of consultancy, I can see how development and change issues within an organised community of people require a form of leadership that is first and foremost driven by horizontal, dialogical dynamics, before the vertical dimension, as the shaper, defines the new direction. The most powerful and effective interventions take place in the transformation and improvement of work processes and collaborative relationships. Adapting the structure and revitalising the entrepreneurial drive shape the institutional framework of an organisation.



As a consultant, I pay close attention to aligning the horizontal and the vertical. This requires careful judgement.

The key is to identify *the process owner* who leads the horizontal process and *the decisionmaker* with ultimate responsibility who takes the vertical decisions.

During the process of development and change, it becomes clear who these people are and how these two roles align. Throughout the development process, the collaborative decision-making between process owners and line managers is crucial to the smooth progress of the change process.

Leadership

In the change process, attention must be paid to both:

- Vision development,
- Developing and, where necessary, changing the team structure to ensure effective collaboration,
- Improving and, where necessary, redesigning work processes with the customer in mind.

If any one of these three elements is missing, the result will be disappointing.

This requires sensitive intervention. Throughout the change process, the driving force is the enthusiasm of those involved, combined with a sense of purpose –

the ‘why’ behind what we want to achieve. This stems from inspired leadership on the part of the decisionmaker, the process owner and the professionals involved in the change process.

Over time, leadership has evolved from a leader who controlled everything, through leadership elites, to successful entrepreneurs and then to management.

Today, leadership is placed in the hands of many. In complex global organisations, leadership is expected of everyone who participates.

Powerful hierarchical vertical structures and the institutional bodies in our society still exist, but life functions through the efforts of everyone who demonstrates leadership and knows how to navigate these complex contexts of existence.

Here we see an evolution from a strictly vertical structure towards an increasingly horizontal one. This means from fixed patterns to variable patterns, from one-sidedness to diversity, from ‘we stay our own’ to ‘dealing with differences’. This requires rhythmic processes, lively dialogue and the continuous creation of meaning by those involved, working together. Careful judgement, based on intuitive, step-by-step exploration and the development of an understanding of alternatives, forms the meaningful basis for this.

Example

In a banking organisation with 2,000 employees, the senior management team realises that, despite various interventions in organisational structure and banking products, things are not improving. They ask me, as an organisational consultant, what they might be overlooking. After several discussions, it becomes clear that employees are not being involved in the change processes and that

there is a lack of leadership at the various hierarchical levels. In this sense, there is awareness at the level of identity and structure, but less awareness of processes and relationships/collaboration. In a specially designed process, managers reflect on their leadership, whilst teams of staff are given the opportunity to independently develop and improve their work processes and collaboration. Within a few months, this leads to greater focus on processes – particularly those involving the customer – as well as improved collaboration between back-office and front-line teams.

Together with one of the three directors, the consultant shapes and leads this specialised development and change process. A notable effect is that staff interact with one another in a less functional and more personal manner, as do managers with one another and with their staff. Customers are also served in a more personalised way and are willing to do more business with the bank.

Three spaces

Change requires its own space, its own infrastructure. I outline three spaces within organisations in which we operate.

The first space *is for day-to-day operations. There is a lot of work to be done, and existing processes must be managed.*

The second space *is for problem-solving, for which specialists are called in and work is carried out on a project basis.*

The third space *is for devising and implementing changes and innovations.*

Issues that are not easily resolved but which nevertheless need to be tackled urgently are given a place and time within a special change infrastructure. This might look as follows.

The issue is linked to a decisionmaker and one or two process owners. They take personal responsibility for ensuring the change process runs smoothly.

The decisionmaker and process owners design their process using the guiding principles of ‘who, what, how and why’ and seek out a consultant from within or outside the organisation to participate in an agreed-upon specific role.

The process owner begins to explore the issue by seeking out staff members who are affected by it. During these discussions, the issue is addressed and experiences with, as well as ideas regarding, the issue come to the fore. The process owner asks them to conduct further research into the issue themselves and to experiment with promising ideas. What was not possible in the day-to-day operational environment can happen in this context.

The decisionmaker and process owners meet regularly (once a month, for example) to share experiences, offer each other advice and determine the next steps in the process.

This creates a cycle of meetings, investigations and initiatives that set the issue in motion: the issue evolves and the process is adjusted in line with the benchmarks. Ultimately, the decisionmaker, in collaboration with the managers involved, can make decisions and ensure that change and innovation take place in a systematic manner. This leads to changes in work processes, changes in the constellations of people and the way they collaborate, the introduction of a new vision, and changes in the way staff and managers operate.

During this process, ‘bottlenecks and constraints’ become apparent, allowing for targeted intervention and the addressing of issues that have long remained hidden. In such processes, much unresolved history can be confronted and resolved. This requires courage and the will to stop avoiding issues. It also

demands a great deal of attention to careful and inspired judgement, in which the ‘path of knowledge’ and the ‘path of choice’ are alternately followed, and where the right intuitions, based on gut feeling, lead to effective next steps.

If this third level can be established as a continuous infrastructure within this third space of work, it creates the opportunity to address difficult issues. It is our experience that change-related issues cannot be effectively addressed at levels/spaces 1 and 2. The operational, functional and hierarchical mode is unsuitable for allowing changes to take place. This is primarily because little scope is given to forming judgements within a personal dialogue.

In the following example, I will demonstrate how the consultant can engage with their decisionmaker in the third space within the context of change processes.

Example

For many years, I had the opportunity to contribute to an SIOO training programme for consultants. I did so use a specific, current client case study from a larger Sparkasse in Germany. Over two days, we examined key moments from this long-term consultancy process concerning organisational development and change – the creation of the third space.

I’ll describe two moments here:

- The intake, the first meeting.
- The first meeting with the management team

The intake, the first meeting

At some point, I was approached by a large Sparkasse in Germany and invited for a meeting.

The meeting took place in a restaurant in the city centre. A director and the head of marketing gave me a warm welcome and we soon struck up a conversation. The Stadt Sparkasse and the Regionale Sparkasse had merged two years earlier. He had been chairman of the board of the regional Sparkasse and was now second in command in a seven-member board. In a few months' time, the number one would be leaving and he would become chairman of the board. For two years now, they had been working hard on the technical merger. What they had not managed to achieve, however, was to merge the two entirely different cultures of the city bank and the regional bank. The city bank operated vertically, top-down, whilst the regional bank operated horizontally with a flat hierarchy. Their question to me was: how do we create a shared working culture?

I described to them some practical examples from my work and the methodology on which my advice is based. I could see that both were trying to imagine how this might work for them. What appealed to them about my approach was, first and foremost, the focus on identifying organisational issues with a view to developing organisational culture and entrusting these issues to process owners selected by the management team, who lead the process in collaboration with a member of the management team acting as the decisionmaker. This provides a good guarantee that the processes will ultimately lead to the desired results. At the end of the meeting, they propose organising a two-day session with the entire executive board, during which they can familiarise themselves further with this approach; if the response is positive, we can take an initial step towards identifying the issues and pinpointing potential process owners.

In the SIOO training for consultants, we begin with this initial meeting with the potential client. After providing some background information, I ask two

participants to play the role of the Sparkasse duo and two other participants to play the consultants.

The other participants watch.

As a rule, the following takes place.

The consultants are given a warm welcome by the client. The Sparkasse directors explain to the consultants what they are seeking a solution for and whether the consultants can help. The consultants ask questions to gain a clear understanding of the issue. A substantive discussion follows, and at some point, the two directors ask what the consultants would like to propose. Usually, the consultants offer a training course and outline what it might involve.

The directors ask the consultants to provide a written quotation. They say a friendly goodbye.

We ask the participants about their experience and they appear reasonably satisfied. As we continue the discussion, we get to the point of whether a rapport has been established between the client and the consultant. Well, not really; it remained somewhat distant on a professional level.

I suggest repeating the initial meeting but doing it differently.

The directors welcome the consultants. They tell the consultants about Sparkasse and the issue at hand. The consultants ask the two Sparkasse representatives to explain how they have tackled the issue so far and what they have noticed in the process. Immediately, the Sparkasse representatives' account becomes much more personal and concrete. They have invested heavily in training and discussions, but this has achieved little; even within the management team, there are differing views on how to tackle this issue. The consultants propose a meeting with the management team to work together on

an approach that all seven board members can support. The two Sparkasse directors consider this a good first step and will put it forward to their colleagues.

The course participants are surprised at how differently things work when, as an adviser, you do not try to understand the issue and offer solutions but instead focus on how the client has been dealing with this issue so far. It becomes more direct, more personal, motivates the client to act and offers the prospect of a constructive process in which the issue can evolve and change. If, during the initial meeting, the client can already envisage a process and see how a slightly different approach might work, there is a good chance that the client will want to take the plunge with this adviser or these advisers.

The first meeting with the management team

I meet the seven-member management team at a pleasant country estate. After a brief introduction and getting to know one another, I outline the programme. First, an exploration of the vision; then, identifying which development issues will be addressed, who the process owners might be, and finally, the next steps.

I propose approaching the vision for the future as follows. I refer to St Benedict's Rule, which states that when it comes to matters concerning the future, the youngest monk speaks first, for God speaks through the youngest soul. I added that the youngest monk is the one who will experience the consequences for the longest. This surprises the chairman of the board, as the eldest, but he agrees to speak last. Each board member answers my question about what he (there is no 'she') would like to achieve for the bank as an individual in the coming years.

Inspiring contributions follow, and the members are surprised by what they hear from their colleagues.

Four issues are identified:

- How do we ensure that we actively reach out to our customers and do more business with them?
- How do we systematically cut costs and improve work processes?
- How do we generate a higher return on our Sparkasse assets?
- How do we encourage our staff not only to do a good job but also to take the initiative?

Two process owners are selected for each issue.

I'll explain what I call 'the apostle principle'. Each of the seven board members writes down two names of staff members for each issue whom they would like to entrust with leading this process, based on their personality and leadership skills. My advice is: do not select based on functional role or hierarchical level – for example, the head of HR taking on issue 4, 'encouraging staff'. That person can, however, support the process owners later as an expert.

For each issue, we go round the table, hearing the names and the reasons for choosing each person. One or two names will stand out as having been mentioned by several people. This results in four pairs. They then discuss amongst themselves which of them will act as the decisionmaker for which issue or process. The four decisionmakers will approach their own process owners to ask whether they would like to lead this process alongside their operational role. The expectation is that they will be pleasantly surprised to have been 'chosen', and this is indeed what happens afterwards.

We discuss how we can create an infrastructure within which these processes will run. The decisionmaker and process owners can coordinate with one another at any time. Once every four weeks, the decisionmakers and process owners meet to discuss progress and offer each other advice. The process owners can involve other staff members in their process and ask them to

contribute. This is not an obligation but an invitation that may be accepted. The process owners are supported by the consultant, as are the decisionmakers. Furthermore, the consultant can be called upon to help find effective solutions in difficult situations.

To experience this stage of the process with the client, I ask the SIOO participants to draw up a vision of leadership. They present this vision to their colleagues in five minutes. Some listen to the content, some listen to the nature of the commitment, and some listen to the direction of intent. The listeners share their impressions and offer tips on how the vision can be expressed in a different, stronger and more expressive way.

These initial steps are followed by further steps. Over the years, the consultant moves with the process and forms part of the leadership driving the development of this bank.

In conclusion

Advising on change has, over all these years, placed me in a position of freedom and flexibility, allowing me to embark on a journey with the client and my colleagues in an adventurous and passionate manner. In doing so, I was continually inspired by my musical training: advising is an artistic, musical profession with a spiritual and philosophical dimension, grounded in a social-scientific approach. Consultancy is inspired composition and musical realisation. Between composition and realisation lies the ongoing process of judgement that yields deeper insight and effective choices.

5. Good leadership makes all the difference

Managing complexity by pooling leadership.

Everyone is a leader, and the leaders coordinate with one another.

In our research into leadership over the last 14 years, as a university lecturer and within our connected knowledge network, we have come to the conclusion that leadership is a process that takes place between people and is primarily concerned with the leadership capabilities and qualities that the individual has developed for themselves. Leadership is about people, operates between people and is based on what people have achieved in their own lives. There is no single, all-encompassing concept of leadership that everyone can apply.

Leadership is also about community. Every community – be it a family, a team, an organisation or a region – requires leadership to get things done.

Leadership is an issue for as long as we, as people with some degree of awareness, build and govern our communities, and it is therefore fascinating to look at the history of leadership. But also, at how that history of leadership continues to influence organisations today.
Here, I outline three models of leadership that have successively prevailed over the centuries, how these three models manifest as leadership forces within organisations, and I conclude with a possible model of leadership for the future.

Model 1: The Leader

Leadership is about the leader. The leader is the initiated individual who connects the visible and invisible worlds. The leader determines the fate of the members of the community. The leader does this by virtue of being initiated into the secrets of what determines the community's destiny. The leader is followed

and revered by the community. Important decisions concerning life and communal living are entrusted to the leader, who, after all, possesses the higher wisdom.

The chieftain, the pharaoh and the priest functioned as initiated figures in ancient cultures, linking the visible and invisible worlds and determining the fate of the people in the community.

The CEO or person with ultimate responsibility – who is well supported by others and who takes the key decisions that determine the fate of the organisation and the people within it – is a prime example of this. Monitoring and nurturing the entrepreneurial drive, allocating resources, and defining the mission and vision from a top-level position are manifestations of this. Supervisory bodies monitor the quality of this leader.

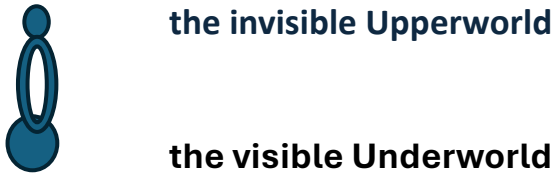
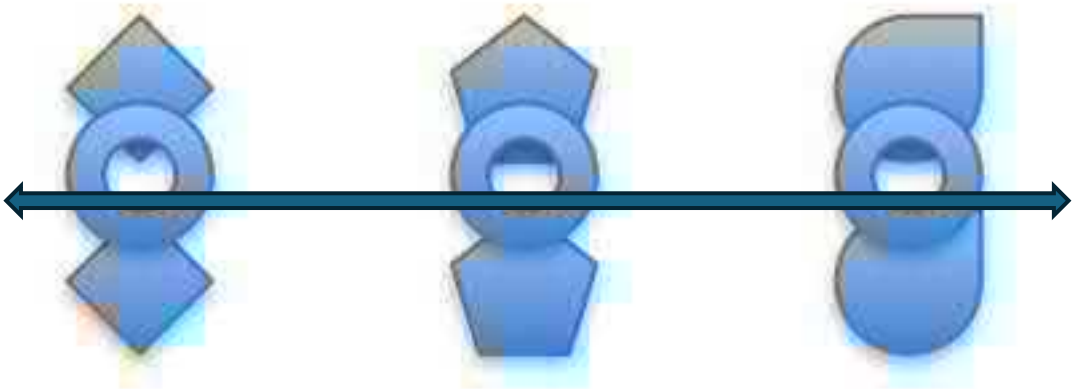


Image 2: Unit leaders

Within the community, various ways of living and working emerge, led by different people representing different parts of the community. The captain of the ship, the philosopher, the healer, the tailor, the farmer, the entrepreneur, the politician, the mayor and so on oversee various processes in which others work and live, and which are led by the leader of that process. These leaders have absolute power over what others in the process do and have to say. They

determine the fate of those involved and can intervene if people wish to go their own way. If that fails, people are ‘killed’ or ‘expelled’.

The leaders of organisational units reflect these socially powerful figures. They set the objectives, assess performance, manage the systems, and influence strategy and policy.

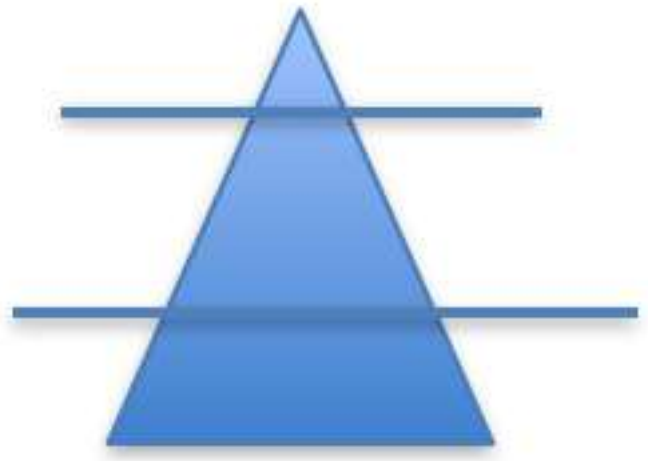


There are several leaders who stand side by side and together form a leadership community. They link their own visions to their own realities

Figure 3: Functional management

The community becomes organised. All societal processes are carried out by organisations. Leadership is linked to a role within the organised community. Hierarchy and functionality emerge. Structures and systems are introduced to maintain control over the process. Entrepreneurs, bosses and deputy bosses emerge who organise and manage the work. Specialisation and differentiation require greater co- ordination. Organisations evolve from pioneering entities into a differentiated whole comprising teams and units.

Managers reflect these bosses and under-bosses. They organise the work, establish the framework, exercise control and arrange meetings.



Leadership has become a system that governs the organisation. At the top, the vision is formulated; at the bottom, the tasks are carried out; and in the middle, the threads are tied together.

Organisations and leadership

These three leadership forces – the leader as the person with ultimate responsibility, specialised unit leaders and functional managers – together form the leadership system within organisations.

Distributed and shared power call the shots.

- The person with ultimate responsibility holds power over the mission, strategy and resources. He/she determines the organisation's fate and influences the fate of the people within the organisation.
- Unit leaders have authority over the processes and create the framework within which others must work. They can form the backbone of an organisation. Without them, nothing can be achieved.

- Functional management organises activities and overlooks operations by determining what professionals can and cannot do, as well as how they work together.

If these three are linked, leadership is highly effective within the organised community. In practice, they may be disconnected, and leadership within the organised community becomes a problem.

Figure 4: The professional as a leader

As professionals, staff collaborate independently with others within their work processes. They usually work autonomously and must resolve their issues in collaboration with colleagues. Managers and leaders are too preoccupied with one another and their own issues to be able to devote much attention to the professionals. Professionals who do not develop leadership within themselves struggle to cope in today's environment.

It is the professionals who have so far been excluded from leadership but who, in day-to-day practice, can no longer function effectively without personal leadership. They collaborate with others and can primarily influence this themselves. They take responsibility for their work and their way of working.



The professional leads the client process in collaboration with other professionals and independently integrates the various functional dimensions into a workable whole.

Today, we operate within organisations characterised by these four leadership forces, each with its own dynamics, all striving to maintain control over the complexities of organised life. A key question regarding leadership is how these four forces can be combined so that an organisation does not lose its strength through not - shared, disconnected and fragmented leadership.

Example

In a large pharmacy group in Germany with over 1,000 shops, three large warehouses and distribution centres operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to receive goods from suppliers and deliver them to the shops at the right times. Staff from 60 different nationalities work in a three-shift system. Each centre has a director, department heads, team leaders and staff. Work is carried out at a rapid pace, and the necessary changes are implemented with vigour. However, the centres' management has noticed that problems and delays are becoming increasingly frequent and that resolving them is proving ever more difficult. In discussions with department heads, team leaders and staff, it becomes clear that there is a distinct lack of coordination between the different levels, as well as within each level. How can this be bridged?
They find the answer in a change in the relationship between the different levels. Instead of managers and staff who do not understand one another, it is recognised that everyone can demonstrate leadership, albeit in different areas.

- The staff/professionals manage the customer process. They ensure that the workflow runs smoothly and that goods reach the right place.

- The team leaders lead the teams and facilitate teamwork.
- The department heads coordinate the processes and balance the various interests.
- The person with ultimate responsibility oversees the interplay within the wider context of the organisation.

How does this work? At the heart of the matter is a regular, reflective leadership dialogue. From their different leadership roles, those involved discuss current issues with one another, and in doing so, it becomes clear to everyone what steps they need to take. In this way, necessary changes are elegantly integrated into everyone's daily practice. Whereas in the past people often pointed fingers at one another and the question of blame was on the table, now, through direct dialogue, the issue is addressed head-on and the necessary steps are initiated. All of this is always done with the customer and the supplier we work with in mind. What is striking is that these reflective discussions are not conducted in a purely functional manner; rather, each person emerges as an individual, and the meaning of what we are doing can be rebuilt together time and again. This enables everyone to work more from the perspective of the whole, rather than focusing solely on the interests of the individual part.

Achieving such a relationship with one another does not happen automatically. It requires constant practice on the part of those involved and tight, consistent leadership of this process. It demands that those involved overcome an inner barrier; it is a process of trial and error. But eventually, people become accustomed to it and those involved come to regard it as effective and meaningful.

(In the article entitled 'The manager as an employee, the professional as a leader', I explored this theme and provided an example.)

Vertical and horizontal leadership

Alongside traditional vertical leadership – where 'those higher up manage those lower down' – horizontal leadership is being introduced. Everyone is a leader, and these leaders coordinate with one another. We address one another as leaders and ensure that, both in reflective discussions and in operational meetings, the consequences of our own actions within our own areas of responsibility are made clear and acted upon.

Ultimately, we cannot view the organisation solely as a vertical structure with vertically operating systems and functional management; rather, we can also view it as a map on which locations and routes are marked, and where everyone can act as a personal leader within the spaces and times that suit their responsibilities.

To achieve a good balance between vertical and horizontal leadership, it is important that everyone can develop their leadership skills and has the appropriate tools to work with and steer their own process. This means that the tools used by senior management must also be made available to others – middle managers and professionals – in a format that is appropriate for them.

This involves implementing change, developing one's own skills, being able to manage based on figures and cash flows, knowing the roadmap and being able to follow it, collaborating with others, schooling yourself and others, and being able to use systems.

Rather than building even more complex systems or overhauling existing ones that are designed to be controlled from the top down, it seems to me better to equip people with the tools they need to steer and manage the work process

and collaboration themselves, as leaders, together with others. Regular cross-functional dialogue then serves to bring everyone together.

6. Circular leadership

Leadership dialogue as the essence of organisational development

I have been exploring this together with my colleague Bernd Kloke and a group of German entrepreneurs who are willing to take part in a pilot project on organisational development for their companies. Over the course of nearly a year, through three two-day sessions and interim meetings at their companies, we worked with them on the key change issues facing their organisations, particularly the question*: 'How can they lead their company in such a way that the people within it are fully and wholeheartedly committed to participating in this development process*?' We discovered that the common desire they all shared was: *"What can I do to ensure that the people in the company take the right initiatives to improve their work and perform well, driven by their own sense of responsibility?"*

I clearly remember the case of one of these entrepreneurs, the owner of a textile company, who was very sales-oriented and, during the process, discovered that he had no real insight into how the procurement department in his company operated, even though they spent more than 40 per cent of the company's operating costs on raw materials.

When he began to look more closely at the procurement department's processes, he saw that the older, experienced lady and the young man running the department were doing their best to manage things as a matter of routine, and he discovered that many opportunities to negotiate quality and prices with suppliers were being missed. He became more actively involved in the procurement process himself, and within a short space of time they were able to achieve substantial cost savings by negotiating more effectively with suppliers.

The company's profits improved, enabling the owner to make investments that had been on hold for several years.

Good leaders make the difference

I set out to examine how leadership can make a difference to the effective functioning of development processes within the company. If leaders could find a way to involve the whole community in the development process, and if everyone's involvement were based on their personal motivation to contribute, then I believe everyone could connect their own drive in life with the drive of this company and form part of a co-creation approach.

I have had to learn time and again that this is not self-evident or easy to achieve.

Spinoza: People find that they achieve what they need more easily when they help one another and join forces.

Management – staff

It is an urgent question whether the top-down, hierarchical and functional approach to leadership and management through systems by senior management – and, as a result, the almost independent work of individual professionals within the company's existing structures – will provide a sufficient basis in the future for us to deal with the complexities we face today across all dimensions of an organisation. I do not believe that this will be sufficiently successful in the way it is generally practised.

As Peter Drucker has already demonstrated, something else is required: *"An organisation that knows it practises a high degree of integrity and is socially responsible, all other things being equal, usually performs better than an organisation that practises neither. More importantly, if things go wrong, people will support an organisation and a leader they trust and believe in and ultimately leave an organisation that does not."*

Leadership Change

Let us first share some professional perspectives on leadership that have influenced our way of looking at leadership and organisations. During the last century, following the Second World War, there were two highly influential figures who focused on management and leadership: Peter Drucker and Bernard Lievegoed. Peter Drucker, who was born in Europe, moved to the US, whilst Bernard Lievegoed put forward his ideas in European countries. Later, the work of both men spread across the globe and had a major influence on how we view the development of management and leadership within an organisational context.

Peter F. Drucker developed a unique leadership concept that focused on developing the capabilities of people working in organisations to achieve exceptional results. What was remarkable about this concept was that it differed significantly from the mainstream, predominantly Anglo-American concepts that sought to link leadership with the achievement of results.
Drucker wrote: *"Leadership is the vision to lift a person to a higher level, to raise a person's performance to a higher level, to build a person's character so that it extends beyond remaining within their normal limitations."*

Rather than viewing people as a kind of instrument or tool in the hands of management to achieve the desired results, he ultimately sees the aim of organisational leadership as enabling people to do things they had not thought possible.
Peter Drucker once linked this to a saying by Shakespeare: *"This above all: be true to your own self. And what follows, as night follows day, is that you cannot then be untrue to yourself..."*. Peter Drucker also stated: *"You do not have to*

sacrifice the organisation's efficiency or profitability. You simply need to be ethical and socially responsible as part of good leadership".

Bernard Lievegoed was, and remains, a great source of inspiration for leaders and entrepreneurs working worldwide. After the Second World War, Dutch and German entrepreneurs asked him how they could change the leadership style of directors and managers so that the new generation of young employees could be better integrated into their companies. That question set organisational development in motion, and Bernard Lievegoed can be regarded as a pioneer in this field. He introduced the concept of developmental stages of organisations, in which he described how organisations begin as pioneering initiatives supported by close-knit circles of people. When the organisation reaches a target group in need of this initiative, growth ensues. At certain points, it becomes apparent that the improvisational style of working and leading is no longer sufficient. The organisation needs structure to overcome the crisis of declining performance. We then see differentiation, specialisation, functionalisation, coordination and management. Management begins to take the lead, and the organisation becomes a system. Further growth occurs, but this turns people into mere functionaries; the result is a loss of commitment on their part, and the new crisis that arises from this, calls for a fresh approach. People must be placed at the centre, and the company must integrate into wider society.

Instead of focusing inwards, one must look outwards and connect with the broader development of society and with people, including new generations. People working in organisations must gain an understanding of the bigger picture and, as a result, be able to act as leaders themselves within the leadership process in which everyone is involved. In this way, Bernard Lievegoed

observed organisations evolving from groundbreaking pioneers to differentiated systems and, ultimately, to integrated institutions.

Lievegoed's vision of leadership can be summarised as follows: *"Leadership must balance customer focus and the process with the customer against what the organisation produces as a process and the value it adds, whilst steering the process using the correct information on which decisions are based and the resources and capabilities used to make it happen".*

This new way of viewing an organisation as a constellation of processes was a further step towards understanding how an organisation might develop and change. This perspective inspired people such as Daniel Jones and others to develop such concepts further, giving rise to new ideas such as the *'lean organisation*'. Later, people such as Otto Scharmer based their work on the ideas that Bernard Lievegoed and his colleagues at the NPI Institute introduced to the world.

I believe that management is essential for ensuring that operations run smoothly (we are in control) and that leadership is essential for bringing about the necessary changes (we are in a state of development). In practice, it depends heavily on the internal and external orientation of the manager/leader – where their personality places the emphasis. If we open the door to leadership and the door to management – for top, middle and front-line staff alike – thereby enabling us to see, through ' ', how everyone fits into this vertical/horizontal framework, then we have a chance that organisations can develop a way of being that Lievegoed described as: *'people at the heart of our organisations*'.

What now?

It is astonishing how much management literature has been produced in recent decades, offering impetus for change in management and leadership. Ideas such

as the ‘lean organisation’ (Womack and Jones), ‘the learning organisation’ (Peter Senge) and ‘the living organisation’ (Arie de Geus) – these promising catalysts for change in the way we work and lead within companies have, unfortunately, all too often been transformed in business practice into traditional efficiency measures, cost-cutting and profit maximisation, as this has remained the dominant shareholder-oriented vision of the majority of senior managers in larger companies.

To me, this means that new ideas can only find their way into organisational life if we practise a different kind of leadership from that demonstrated by mainstream management practice today. It is:

- Visionary leadership in conjunction with
- the further development of the community of people and
- The way in which customers are served and
- The integration of new generations over time,

which can form the foundation for the company’s continued existence.

These are:

- The company’s customers, who, as the most important people, must be at the centre of our attention,
- The work processes in which people are engaged, which must run smoothly to foster a positive attitude amongst those carrying them out,
- Good collaboration between us,

  which, together, make all the difference.

In my view, these are the most important principles and objectives for inspiring leadership within the organised community and should not be seen merely as means to achieve the objective of a stakeholder, namely the shareholder.

What conclusion do I draw?

I have worked with hundreds of leaders at all levels in companies across many different countries around the world. We have gone through intense processes of change and innovation, and in doing so I discovered a fundamental dimension of leadership:

Leadership is not a person who issues orders, but a process in which something new can emerge and in which different people contribute to creating change and development within a vibrant corporate community.

We called this type of leadership *'horizontal leadership'.*

When implementing this horizontal leadership process within the organisation, the leadership dialogue is essential for the development, change and innovation that the company requires. Top leaders, managers and professionals need to exercise their own personal leadership within the leadership process to ensure things are done properly and to engage in dialogue with one another, so that we can all act in the interests of the whole and take the right steps to move things forward. The key characteristic of this horizontal leadership dialogue is that we regularly speak to one another in a personal manner about the real change issues – that is, the issues that top, middle and front-line staff collectively identify within their different realities – so that, from there, everyone can identify and take the right steps. This then becomes circular leadership.

7. Horizontal leadership and self-managing teams

Towards the healthy development of the organisation.

How do we connect top, middle and front-line staff so that, despite the significant differences that exist, everyone can still create something in common? A practical example, representative of many more cases, illustrates the approach.

Vertical and horizontal

Organisations are structured vertically. Hierarchy and functionality dominate. The power of the role and the creation of enabling conditions for staff are the key management forces deployed to ensure successful organisation.

However, as soon as something fails to function and needs to be changed, these management tools prove insufficient to achieve the desired results effectively. Leadership is then required, and it is by no means a given that managers are also leaders in practice.

I reserve the term ‘leadership’ for leading people and, above all, for leading oneself. I call this ‘horizontal leadership’ because leadership operates within the community of people, even when they operate at different hierarchical levels.

The trend towards more self-managing teams reflects this leadership problem amongst management and staff. What is demanded at the top is often not implemented at the bottom, and what is needed and desired at the bottom is not always heard at the top.

How do we connect those at the top, in the middle and at the bottom so that, despite the significant differences that exist, everyone can still create something in common? Horizontal leadership and self-managing teams can help with this. But how do you get there?

My practice

In my long-standing international organisational development consultancy, I support organisations of various types in developing horizontal leadership and self-managing teams. I would like to illustrate this using a practical example, which is representative of many more cases.

Case study

The management team of a German Sparkasse with 1,200 employees has been modernising the operational organisation for several years now. New systems, new technology, new roles and new 'products' are being designed and introduced. This is placing increasing pressure on managers and professionals. The management team is keen for its efforts to yield results, under the motto: 'we provide our customers with comprehensive service'. After several years, the three-member management team must conclude that their expectations have only been partially met. It appears that managers and staff are struggling to translate the changes imposed from above into genuinely successful practices.

The management team concludes that, in addition to improvements in the operating conditions, something else may also need to be done. They decide to experiment with the idea of developing self-managing teams and, in doing so, supporting the managers in their horizontal leadership. To this end, a dedicated process is set up, which I am tasked with designing and leading, together with one of the three directors as the decisionmaker.

The experiment is being carried out across six sales offices and one internal department, and it works as follows.

Steps that can be taken

Firstly, the manager carries out a 360-degree analysis of his or her horizontal leadership qualities. Using a 16-question questionnaire, they involve four colleagues – two peers, their line manager and themselves – in this assessment. Four core qualities are examined: steering processes, coaching learning, inspiring others with a vision, and intervening when something isn't working. The 16-question questionnaires are distributed and completed. The manager analyses the results themselves and observes how differently the employees, colleagues, line manager and themselves have answered the questions. This leads to the identification of key issues, which are then discussed in a group discussion with all participants. The focus is not on 'right or wrong' but on 'more or less' and 'continuing as before or doing things differently'.

I facilitate these group discussions – 25 in total. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the way in which people communicate. Do they revert to speaking to one another in a functional manner and beat about the bush as usual, or does the conversation become more personal and do they discuss the real issues? When we sit round the table, the manager opens the discussion. He or she has identified a few themes from the scores and would like to discuss them: for example, the manager may consider themselves a good coach, but the staff do not see it that way at all 'because ultimately they still end up directing and deciding', or the manager may say they struggle to intervene, whilst the staff and colleagues feel that they intervene constantly. At first, things are a bit stiff and awkward but soon the conversation becomes more intense, with good examples and experiences coming to the fore, and you see the manager – at first cautiously and later more openly – taking stock and expressing their intentions towards the people they deal with on a daily basis in their role as a manager. Everyone is now aware of this, and in the period that follows, it becomes clearly

visible and tangible what has crystallised and changed because of this research and discussion, not only amongst the managers but also amongst the others.

The second step involves looking at the teams within the units. What are the teams, who is part of what team and who leads each team? The idea is that everyone is part of a team and that teams are linked to their own work process, each with its own distinctive characteristics.

Once the teams have been identified and it is clear who the team leader is, the team members are given a questionnaire: To what extent are we an autonomous team, and to what extent are we a top-performing team?

When it comes to an **autonomous team** – a self-managing team – the following qualities are important: the team has its own mission and objective; team members can take the initiative; we learn and improve together; we work with targets and indicators; we collaborate with one another and with other teams; we understand and use the systems; and we hold effective consultations with one another.

When it comes to a **top team**, the following qualities are important: staff take responsibility; we are connected and respect one another as colleagues; the team is innovative and devises new ways of working; the team achieves its goals; we give one another feedback and encourage one another's professional development; and new colleagues are welcomed and integrated.

Each team member answers the questions by assigning a score. During a team meeting, the scores are compared and issues are identified that the team wishes to tackle independently.

These issues are translated into specific projects and documented using a management tool.

The management tool is drawn on a whiteboard and displayed in the team room. The tool looks as follows:

The steering instrument for teams

	Projects	Owner	Timespan
Our mission			
Our Goals			
Our Indicators			
Our main activities			

The teams set to work on their projects after they have independently formulated and set out the mission, the objectives, the indicators for measuring results and the key activities. Each project has an owner and the timeframe for the project is set.

Progress is discussed at regular meetings. If there are any issues relating to preconditions or obstacles, the manager can be approached in a coaching capacity.
This process was implemented across seven units comprising a total of 25 teams.

I am guiding the self-managing teams through their initial steps. There are significant differences in how the teams currently work and how team members relate to one another. Some teams are thriving and keen to take the next steps, whilst others are stuck in a rut and anxious about what is now expected of them. Following an initial meeting to identify the key themes and a second meeting in which the management tool is put into action and the team's projects are

discussed, the teams are left to their own devices and have three months to make their own progress. After three months, I visit the teams together with one of the directors and am surprised by the enormous impact of this process. After what was at times a difficult start, practically all the teams have gained momentum and proudly recount what they have achieved over those three months. Despite the pandemic and a great deal of additional operational work, almost all the teams have worked energetically on their projects, and concrete results have been achieved. The managers have taken a positive stance and express their enthusiasm for the progress their teams have made.

Some teams however haven't really made much progress. "There was so much going on that this got a bit lost in the shuffle. The manager wasn't really involved either and was too busy with other matters." In one team, there were threats from customers towards staff and a fear of violence. That was the main concern for the group and the manager: how do you deal with that?

I see a clear link between how a manager performs and the way the teams function. If the manager is willing to engage personally and is interested in how the teams and team members are developing, then there is a good chance that the team members will also engage personally and be willing to take responsibility. If the manager and team remain in a hierarchical, functional relationship with one another, then this process of exploration and development proceeds with difficulty or not at all. In cases where this occurred, it turned out that there was a long-standing underlying issue, usually the fact that the manager was acting incompetently and everyone had been struggling with this for much longer. This then requires courage on the part of senior management to finally tackle this issue. It also happens that the organisation is

poorly structured and that, for example, its structure, systems and products are outdated. That, too, calls for intervention.

Examples of what happened

A team of experienced advisers serving high-net-worth clients, who work somewhat in isolation from others, get in touch with a group of young client advisers at a nearby 'Geschäftsstelle'. They agree that, where necessary, they will come and help during busy periods, whilst, conversely, specific clients will be referred to these specialist advisers. This proves to work well for everyone; the clients, too, are positive and willing to do more business.

At a *'Geschäftsstelle'*, clients regularly find themselves queuing. This irritates not only the clients but also the staff. The front-office staff discuss this with their back-office colleagues. Together, they find a way to work together much more flexibly. At busy times, everyone is at the counter; at quieter times, client enquiries are dealt with. Waiting times are largely eliminated and clients receive their products more quickly.

A team wants to improve its results and decides to approach customers about a few specific products. These are mostly customers with demanding jobs and children. They arrange targeted meetings with these customers to discuss their pension provision and the future funding of their children's education. The customers react positively and are pleasantly surprised. Many are keen to do business this way.

A team of in-house IT and organisational specialists are hard at work on the information systems. The users are dissatisfied and are putting pressure on the

team. As a team, they investigate what can be done differently and better. They conclude that users need to be involved much earlier in the process. They set out to visit users and work with them to identify the real issues and how to improve them. Many good ideas from the users are taken on board and implemented. This results in a smoother workflow and a significant increase in the satisfaction of their internal customers.

Webinar

In consultation with the management team, I organise a web seminar for 25 managers, including senior management, in which we briefly explain the various aspects of horizontal leadership and self-managing teams over six two-hour sessions (one session each week at a fixed time) and then practise these in groups of three. After a 15-minute introduction, I explain the 'exercise' for the following hour. Working in groups of three, these managers practise several key elements of horizontal leadership – for example, asking a good question, articulating their vision, improving a work process or developing future scenarios. They carry out the exercise independently. Afterwards, each person shares what the exercise has brought them.

Here, too, it is striking how the personal conversation between colleagues opens issues and themes relating to leadership and self-management, which can then be effectively integrated into and tested in their own practice. Everything rests on the personal initiatives of those involved.

How does the approach work?

It is surprising to see what happens when a team and its manager make this a priority. Changes occur on several fronts.

1. The team and the manager are confronted with their own strengths and weaknesses, and they can then choose to put effort into improving and developing themselves.
2. The team works in a more focused way, collaborates better with others and asks the manager the right questions.
3. Relationships within the team change as team members' behaviour changes – in many cases for the better. Teams and managers interact with one another on a more personal level.
4. Complaints decrease and motivation increases.
5. Results improve and the customer is placed at the centre.
6. It turns out there is much more scope for teams than they initially realised.
7. Teams are more customer-focused rather than preoccupied with themselves. Better results are achieved, and this reinforces the team members' determination to continue in this way.

Five levels of team existence

A clear distinction is emerging regarding where teams stand and how they operate.

At level 0: The team consists of individuals who do their own thing and aren't really interested in how this affects others. *"We're not a team,"* say the team members.

At level 1: The team members treat each other politely and everyone does their own thing: *"We respect each other*".

At level 2: We bring each other into the picture, work together, celebrate the results and give each other feedback. *"We strive together for a good result as a team."*

At level 3: We improve our processes when they aren't working properly and do this in collaboration with other teams we work with. *"We learn together and keep improving*."

At Level 4: We are enterprising and innovative. We engage in dialogue with our customers and clients and make the most of our opportunities. *"We work together creatively and enterprisingly*".

Teams and managers go through a development process. Once they have reached a higher level, they can continually take the next step. With every step in their development, the leadership quality of everyone involved improves.

Five levels of leadership

In parallel with team development, leadership changes. From being initially strongly vertical and operationally embedded – and sometimes constrained – there is an increasing tendency to seek out horizontal space and time and to create one's own scope for action. Managers can focus much more on horizontal collaboration with colleagues, using their own initiative to tackle improvements to the operating conditions and any structural bottlenecks.

I also observe different levels of performance amongst managers.

Level 0: We don't have the time or inclination to lead

Level 1: We are friendly and treat our staff with respect

Level 2: We encourage the team to tackle its own issues independently and make progress

Level 3: We make decisions on improved working conditions that support the team in its processes

Level 4: We take an active, entrepreneurial approach and encourage the team in its own entrepreneurial spirit.

Step by step, not ‘push’ but ‘pull’

At this Sparkasse, following a series of meaningful experiments, this development is being implemented step by step. Here, the ‘pull’ principle is applied rather than the ‘push’ principle. It is left to the managers and the teams to decide whether they wish to embark on such a process. It is the people themselves who choose whether to join one another in this development. Sometimes, through trial and error, progress is made, and people decide for themselves whether and how they wish to proceed.

In this way, alongside an operational management culture, a leadership culture is built up, and we learn together when it is time for one (operations) and when for the other (development and change).

Conclusions

Horizontal leadership and self-managing teams do not come about automatically; they require a specific development process which, just like operations, is shaped consistently and continuously.

Horizontal leadership and self-managing teams go hand in hand.

Leadership and the team go through a cyclical development process: step by step.

Those with final responsibility, managers and professionals/staff can be invited to engage in such a process. Vertical pressure does not work here; horizontal dialogue does. A ‘push’ approach is counterproductive here; the work is based on a ‘pull’ approach, and this is applied consistently. If something isn’t working in one area, it will be addressed here or there, and any issues causing friction (usually a historical legacy) can be discussed.

Guiding principles for horizontal leadership and team development help everyone to go through a conscious process together.

People and organisations benefit, and the sense of purpose in the work becomes very tangible

8. Horizontal Organisation

How to achieve this: 4 qualities.

Over the past twelve years, I have been conducting practical research, together with others, into the issue of effective organisation and leadership. This research was prompted by my own observation that, in the field of effective organisation and leadership over the past forty years, I have rarely encountered innovative ideas and practices within organisations that have provided us with a genuinely different, newer and fresher dynamic of organisation and leadership. Everything still tends to be – and largely remains – top-down and hierarchical-functional, driven by the power and authority associated with such structures. The tremendous efforts we all must make to achieve this, lead to fatigue and exhaustion amongst managers and professionals.

These experiences confronted me with the following questions:

- Can we carry on like this? No. And do we need to organise differently? Yes.
- I see an urgent need for more 'horizontal organisation'. Does this require a different kind of leadership?

  Yes, it requires each of us to participate in leadership.
- How does that work?

Key principles for horizontal organisation

In my view, horizontal organisation and horizontal leadership focus on four fundamental qualities of good organisation and good leadership, which must

constantly be kept in a healthy balance with one another. This applies to a CEO, a manager and a professional alike. These four qualities, which we all must deal with, constitute, as it were, the soul of an organisation:

- Working systematically with clients
- Systematically reducing costs and improving work processes
- Systematically promoting the development of people and professional skills
- Systematically promoting the development of teams and units.

Put simply: we focus on the customer, do so effectively, learn from one another and work well together. Not an easy feat!

What's great is that new energy is flowing into the organisation. This balances out the energy-sapping operational efforts demanded of us by the daily routines in our vertical organisation.
For example, I've personally noticed for quite some time now that when I'm working with a client, it gives me energy and new ideas, whereas after internal meetings where organisational matters are discussed, I usually feel tired afterwards. When the team I work in is on a roll, I'm doing well. If there's hassle, it comes at the expense of my happiness in life. If I'm developing, I can cope better with setbacks. If the processes are running smoothly and there's a sense of flow, I'm happy. If the process stagnates, I get grumpy.

Working systematically with clients

A key quality of good horizontal organisation and leadership is working systematically with clients.

Focusing on the client is by no means a given in our vertically organised organisations. As managers and professionals, we are heavily focused on our own work processes due to functional pressures, and it is not uncommon for us to lose sight of our clients. We are positioned vertically, whilst the client requires a horizontal connection.

A manager with final responsibility for a company decides to take over the business from the owner. The company is no longer part of the group's core business. The new entrepreneur decides to visit all the company's customers and, through discussions, find out where the customer perceives the company's strengths and weaknesses to lie. During these discussions, it becomes clear to him that some customers are genuinely interested in this company and keen to continue doing business, but there are also customers for whom only the product and the price – in comparison with other suppliers – determine whether they do business. The entrepreneur decides to set up two different processes. With the business customers, he will continue to develop and invest; for the consumer customers, he will supply a good standard product at an attractive price. The entire organisation is structured accordingly. Clients are offered a process tailored to their specific orders, whilst consumers order standard products that are supplied as standard. The company and its staff thrive, work processes run much more smoothly and profits increase significantly.

What is also important is: is the process with the customer aligned with the organisation's internal processes?
Internal processes have an impact on customer interfaces. This means that internal work processes must be streamlined and coordinated. If the processes are well integrated, new energy flows into the organisation.

A bank customer wants a mortgage. After having to provide all sorts of information on various forms, it takes weeks before a decision is made. There is only one procedure for all loan applications, whether complex or not. The bank manager decides to differentiate the procedure for standard applications and complex, specific loans. More than 80 per cent of applications are standard. A decision is made at the start of the process, and the loan is granted within a few days, followed by the administrative formalities. For complex loans, the best options are first analysed together with the customer before a joint decision is taken by both parties.

The leadership of customer-facing staff can be significantly strengthened if a well-structured, horizontal process is put in place for them.

A bank has decided to shift from a strong product-sales approach towards customers to a comprehensive advisory approach in which staff and customers analyse the best option together. This is proving challenging for staff. How do you conduct such an analytical discussion, and how do you ensure that the customer can make an informed decision themselves? After some time, it becomes apparent that those staff members who practise this new approach are more successful in securing favourable contracts with customers. This is because the analysis reveals several opportunities for building a customer relationship, given that customers usually have several needs which they are unaware the bank can also meet.

Systematically cutting costs and improving work processes

A second benefit of horizontal organisation and leadership is the avoidance of unnecessary costs and the improvement of inefficient work processes. This is essential to ensure that energy is not wasted on pointless matters. It requires staff to regularly reflect on how work is carried out, what is working and what is

not, and what contributes value and what does not. In this context, staff can put their own ideas into practice, which is an important source of motivation and inspiration. If a work process is carried out routinely, it quickly loses momentum and becomes bogged down in a great deal of unnecessary effort.

In a bank, cash is delivered to and collected from branches on a weekly basis. Staff analyse the cash flows from the various branches and identify certain patterns. Deliveries and collections can be carried out with far less effort. The schedule is drastically changed, resulting in significant cost savings.

When managers and professionals gain insight into both the budget and the actual financial performance, and every employee or team has their own 'contribution margin account' showing the costs they incur and the revenue they generate, there is a greater sense of responsibility for achieving a healthy balance between income and expenditure.

In a consultancy firm, every employee is given their own contribution margin account. The basic principle here is: 'how much money would be lost if this employee were to leave'. Employees can view their own contribution margin account and those of their colleagues and can manage it themselves. Some employees make a larger contribution, whilst others make a smaller one. This is discussed amongst the team. Everyone is asked to strike a balance between their own interests and the collective interest. This makes all sorts of discussions about differences much more effective.

Regularly reviewing work processes by asking questions such as: is there a smooth flow, is there good collaboration, are decisions being made, or is there stagnation, conflict or indecision? This helps identify areas for improvement. Bottlenecks are identified and the 'red spots' are addressed, preferably using good ideas from the employees themselves who carry out the process.

Within an organisation, extensive thought is given to what services might be offered to the customer. Plans are drawn up, but often they cannot be implemented. The process is analysed. There are many pointless steps in this process, and the process is radically overhauled. The process begins with a dialogue with the customer based on a specific customer enquiry. This saves a great deal of unnecessary preparation.

Horizontal organisation is not about the usual vertical cost-cutting and efficiency measures, which are often isolated, marked in red and imposed from the top down. Rather, it involves a permanent and active contribution from all staff members who, as horizontal leaders, take responsibility for ensuring that the work process and the interplay between work processes run effectively and inspire others. This generates energy and brings a sense of fulfilment.

Systematic development of employees and their professional skills

The personal development of staff forms a third key pillar underpinning the strength of horizontal organisation. First and foremost, improving the work process through one's own initiative, in collaboration with others, by means of an independent development project, has a strong learning effect.

Within the organisation, young staff are given the opportunity to undertake their own improvement project over a six-month period. In groups of 12 to 14 staff members, each person is given the chance to lead a project. There is a kick-off session during which they present their project to senior management and their line managers. Halfway through, the group reviews what is helping the projects succeed or, conversely, what is making them difficult. Advice is provided. After six months, the young people present their results. They demonstrate the benefits for the customer, the colleagues and what they themselves have learnt. Hundreds of young people have gone through this process. This unique

experience gives them the confidence to take their own initiatives and shoulder responsibility as they progress in their careers.

As an extension of this, they encourage one another to act entrepreneurially and take the right initiatives.

Within an organisation, the issue of recalibrating its driving force is being addressed. The organisation has grown rapidly, and many new staff members have joined. From its very inception, the organisation has been driven by a strong commitment to providing sustainable care for young people with disabilities and for older people. A process is set up in which two process owners are tasked with initiating discussions amongst and with staff about how each individual experiences and perceives the organisation's driving force. This leads to surprising stories, and the decisionmaker is amazed at how quickly the new staff members have embraced key aspects of the organisation. Step by step, everyone is involved in this process and can contribute to it.

The ability of managers and professionals to move freely and purposefully throughout the organisation enhances learning.

It has been observed within an organisation that staff members have no idea what work in the field involves, and vice versa. Employees are given the opportunity to spend a week working in a different unit. This has proved to be a huge success. Employees change their perspective on colleagues from unfamiliar departments and feel more connected to them.

In short: learning together in the workplace.

A new working method is introduced for customer-facing staff within an organisation. For one week, an hour is set aside each day to explore and experiment together with one another on how a customer conversation might unfold differently from what they are used to. Through practice, a bridge is built

to real-world application. The background to this change is explained by experts. After a week, the staff feel capable of implementing this new way of working.

Systematic team development

A team that works well together, as well as teams that collaborate effectively with one another, forms the basis for effective horizontal organisation and good leadership, as explained above.

- Team members respond to one another and act.
- Team members are willing to learn from and with one another. Mistakes are discussed, and successes are celebrated.
- A good team seeks new ways to answer customer enquiries. They regard the customer as their most important adviser.
- Team members are not afraid of confrontation. They are focused on the task at hand and give each other feedback.
- There is a determination to achieve good results and to strive for them continuously.
- The results achieved are made visible.
- New colleagues join the team. They are welcomed and shown the ropes. They immediately feel part of the team and at home.

Within an organisation, people work in teams. These include client teams, expert teams, support teams and management teams. Every year, each team works specifically on its own performance. As team members, they work together to identify ways to improve. There is also dialogue between teams that work together. Over the years, teams develop towards strong performance.

Employees are selected from across the organisation to act as coaches for a team other than their own. This creates an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues. Team leaders grow in their leadership roles.

Working holistically towards horizontal organisation

When managers and professionals jointly focus closely on these four qualities of horizontal organisation and leadership, the vertical organisation can then be kept lean and simple. The organisation is then better 'in control', with far less energy wasted than in the ever-more-complicated contexts and increasingly complex systems within which we operate.

This is not 'wishful thinking' but 'practical experience'.

A large healthcare organisation in southern Germany is facing mounting losses, customer dissatisfaction, frustrated staff and poor collaboration. The managers and professionals are losing motivation; morale is close to rock bottom. Even more pressure from above, even more projects – and thus even more resistance – and the situation is deteriorating. The top manager leaves; his successor wants to take a different approach. "I set the staff and myself three tasks: look after your clients, cut costs and learn from one another. We did the same within the management team, and it was astonishing how quickly we reached a personal consensus on what we wanted to do differently". Within three months, managers and professionals were putting this into practice, and through regular dialogues between senior management, managers and professionals, the bottlenecks were identified and addressed. Within a year, a loss running into millions had been turned around to break even. Customer and employee feedback were monitored regularly, and one saw clear improvements. "It's amazing how quickly change can happen when you tackle it horizontally rather than vertically."

9. The Mystery of Leadership

Leadership as an organisational process with a moral character

Leadership is a fascinating subject full of secrets. There are countless publications on this subject, offering just as many interesting approaches, and yet, in my opinion, it remains a secret, a mystery. In a research project on leadership spanning several years, during which I interviewed many leaders about their leadership, a theory was rarely, if ever, discussed; instead, every leader had a very personal answer to this question.

Leadership is personal

I also noticed that well-known leadership authors such as Covey, Quinn and Kotter, as well as lesser-known authors, base their leadership theory or model on a personally chosen starting point. They choose a starting point such as trust and reliability, or communication between leader and follower, or creating added value and achieving results, or initiating and implementing change and innovation, or the difference between a manager and a leader.

Leadership, I concluded, is based on personally acquired capital. *You can only lead yourself and others based on what you have acquired yourself, and you can only describe it on the basis of a self-chosen starting point.* This ultimately leads to your own leadership practice with your own concept or model.

The essence of positive leadership

Looking back, however, it struck me that leadership is always linked to the fortunes of the community and that when we discuss leadership together, important issues immediately come to the fore – issues that people grapple with in their daily lives and work. *A common essence of positive leadership is how one*

person can help another to take the initiative and assume responsibility. In practice, however, we also see countless examples of how leaders cause problems for the community, hinder well-meaning staff, frustrate cooperation and exercise their authority inappropriately.

Leadership in healthcare

I have been advising organisations in the healthcare sector for many years, and over the past 40 years I have also held positions on supervisory boards. The healthcare sector, which previously relied heavily on the compassionate care provided by its staff to patients, has now become a commercial industry. Many specialists dominate healthcare organisations, where the primary focus is on a culture of specialist treatment. Basic care suffers as a result; it is falling short.

The leadership of these institutions has evolved into a management system that attempts to keep everything under control. This is also enforced by funders such as the government and insurers. Everything must be accounted for and demonstrated through statistics, and this demands a constant administrative effort from managers and, in turn, from professionals, which in turn comes at the expense of patient care. This does not foster their leadership.

Example.

In one hospital, the chief executive was concerned about the issue of patient care. He had the idea of investigating exactly how long patients stayed in hospital and why this duration was the case rather than another. To his dismay, a series of cases came to light where nobody knew the exact answer to this question. Not the patients themselves, not the doctors or nurses, not the GPs, and not the managers. He decided that every Monday morning, he and his

management team would address the specific cases that arose and obtain decisions on the spot from those responsible.

This had a shock effect throughout the hospital. Everyone was so busy with all sorts of things that the patient had been lost sight of. The director then launched an investigation into the various work processes, how different departments collaborated within each other, and how managers and professionals demonstrated leadership in this regard. A surgeon, who had to undergo an operation at his own hospital, provided shocking accounts of how, even as someone familiar with the organisation, he experienced a complete lack of a shared vision on how to deal with patients; there was no collaboration; he mainly had to manage his own process as a patient, make his own decisions, and stand his ground.

It became very clear that there was a leadership problem here. There was no clear direction regarding patient care from the top; managers were doing their own thing, as were the doctors; and the nursing staff were busy with all their specialised tasks, meaning that the patient repeatedly found different people at his bedside who knew nothing about his case. In this hospital, this became a key issue for managers and professionals, and leadership discussions were held between those involved to identify where the patient fitted into the picture and how to improve the situation.

It turned out that huge strides could suddenly be made in this area. It proved possible to guide a patient who presented for an urgent examination – and who would normally have had to spend a whole day waiting – through the process within an hour, resulting in a final assessment by the doctor in charge. Appointments were planned more effectively, and doctors and other specialists were able to carry out their work on time. In wards where, in the past, one person would dispense medication, another would care for the patient, and yet another

would be at the bedside the next day for a different task – – the workflow was changed so that patients saw familiar faces at their bedside carrying out the various tasks. These staff members were also able to answer all the patients' questions and listen to their concerns.

When a shift in mindset takes place, initiated by the person with ultimate responsibility, and people begin to take pleasure in coordinating their collaboration around the patient once more, and managers and doctors communicate with one another in clear, understandable language, then suddenly a noticeable difference becomes apparent for the patient, for the manager and for the healthcare professional.

More examples

In a care home for elderly people with dementia, there has been talk of 'client-centred care' for years. In a horizontal discussion between the director, department heads, team leaders and carers, it emerged that, although there is much talk about it, little of it is put into practice. The pressure on carers has increased enormously in recent years, and the protocols governing all procedures have been tightened up, resulting in carers being required to shower a patient within a set number of minutes and to carry out this showering protocol on a precise number of residents on any given day. This turns out to be an impossible demand, leading to some very strange situations. During this conversation, it becomes clear that many of the measures are counterproductive to residents' needs. The director reflects on the policy being implemented and acknowledges that he would prefer to do things differently, but that different requirements are being imposed from above. Nevertheless, processes are set in motion to give managers and professionals the freedom to try out different practices and demonstrate their own leadership. This leads, for

example, to a move away from a single, uniform mealtime for the whole care home, and various wards being able to run their own programmes in consultation with the kitchen. This results in variety and much more tailored care for residents.

The elderly person with dementia who gets up early is not forcibly kept in bed, but can get straight to work, whilst the lady in the ward who sleeps late can do so at her leisure. It leads to a noticeable sense of relaxation amongst residents and staff, better cooperation, a personalised focus on each resident, and a surprising and delightful outcome for everyone. And it is also more effective and efficient.

It is precisely in the care sector that we can see good leadership at work. When those with ultimate responsibility, managers and professionals share a genuine common focus, wonderful things can be achieved with limited resources.

I've read a wonderful example of a care home in India with eighty residents, which was set up by the residents themselves and where everyone has a role and a task, people look after one another, all processes are carried out in-house, and a thriving community has emerged that functions excellently with minimal resources.

Horizontal leadership

It is precisely in the care sector that horizontal leadership could bring about a real improvement, rendering many of the measures dictated from above by politicians and insurers – and imposed by senior management – largely superfluous, whilst strengthening the link between leadership and the organisation's core process: serving clients well.

An inspired person in charge who cares deeply for the patient and their immediate family; a collaborative management team that guides all those

involved in finding the right path; and motivated carers and practitioners who support the patient' , but do not take over responsibility entirely. Together, this can lead to a different way of living and working – a liveable, well-organised reality for everyone involved.

Leadership as an organisational process

For more than forty years, I have noticed that there is a clear correlation between the effective functioning of an organisation as a community and good leadership. However, there is no single formula that automatically leads to a good outcome. Good leadership is exercised in entirely different ways, and organisations can succeed or fail.

I have come to view leadership increasingly as a process within the organisation – as a specific working process and, at the same time, a process of development for the entire organised community – rather than as a model focused on the leader's performance.

It has also gradually become clear to me *that* leadership is all about the moral questions we must ask ourselves today. Moral questions are questions of meaning, and these can primarily be posed as 'why' questions. Why are we doing this, and why are we doing it this way? Day-to-day practice divides people; everyone just does their own thing. Asking the 'why' question brings people together. In doing so, moral criteria can be applied. For example, the impact of our actions on the customer, on the supplier, on the collaborative community, but also on the environment, and on the freedom and safety of those involved. Leadership has a guiding power; it is a moral force at work within the community. Leadership is about questions that give meaning – 'why' questions – and we can no longer leave these questions to the single leader who determines our fate.

All around us, we see countless far-reaching events that affect our society and its organisations. In these situations, good or bad leadership stands out immediately, as does the tendency to point the finger at the leader who determines our fate*. However, such leaders can only exist today if the members of the community also demonstrate leadership themselves. None of us can pass on the responsibility entirely to the leaders who determine our fate.*

We all become part of the leadership process and bear moral responsibility within it. This is a dimension of life that is by no means automatically addressed in organisations and in our society. It is time we began to do so on a broad scale.

This idea – whereby leadership is seen as *a community-based process of a moral nature* – has led me to observe more closely which dimensions of the leadership process and of the moral character of leadership emerge in organisations of entirely different natures, with different missions and locations in the world, and in organisations with different cultures and positions in society.

Natural and organised leadership

First, I have noticed that leadership has traditionally been demonstrated within traditional natural communities such as a family, a people or a religion, and that leadership is also demonstrated within the organised contexts in which we work – and often live – today.

In the natural community, leadership is bound by the fixed laws of nature, such as the natural succession from father to son or from mother to daughter, and this leadership strives to perpetuate the natural community with its traditions and customs. There lies, as it were, an implicit moral dimension. For example, you do not abuse or mistreat your children, and when it does happen, we are shocked. In the organised community, by contrast, this leadership is more

closely linked to management and functional tasks, and in principle anyone can assume this leadership role. Moreover, change is a constant feature there, even more so than the pursuit of preserving the status quo. In such a context, it is not self-evident to raise the moral question.

We do things that we cannot and do not wish to justify, but under the pressure to perform, we permit or impose them on one another. The well-being of people and nature is constantly put at risk in the organised community.

Leadership as an organisational process with a moral character

Leadership in organisations can function effectively and ethically as a process when three conditions are met.

1. The first condition is that those with ultimate responsibility have an inspired vision of the organisation's fortunes, a vision linked to the organisation's core mission. This vision is linked to values that are largely shared within the community and that correspond to what is morally pursued in its wider environment. Consequently, there are certain things we do not do, such as defrauding customers, putting managers under unreasonable pressure, exploiting staff or abusing the natural environment.
2. The second condition is that the organisation's managers and leaders can fulfil their functional, specialised responsibilities, and that they are both willing and able to work together when it comes to change and innovation, and to commit themselves personally to these efforts. This is not just about the 'what' and the 'how', but also about the 'why'. That question should always be asked.

3. The third condition is that the organisation's professionals are customer-focused and serve their customers in their own way with specific products and services, and that they continually improve their own work processes to this end, whilst maintaining a constant willingness to learn.

When these three conditions come together – that is, when the inspiring vision from the top is aligned with the horizontal management practices of the managers, and these are aligned with the professionals who form the core of the customer process, and all are prepared to ask (or allow others to ask) the 'why' question – then these organisations flourish. If they fail to do so, the organisation will face serious difficulties in identifying the right next steps in its development.

Organisations and their leaders are all challenged today to fulfil their social responsibility, and they can only master this responsibility if each of us is willing to contribute our own leadership.

The gap between theory and practice

In my view, a significant gap has emerged between how we think leadership works – as illustrated in all those fine functional management theories – and everyday practice, where moral leadership is required for the community process and where it may or may not work and be demonstrated. A multitude of intractable, identical practical situations that I have experienced over more than fifty years, set against the continuous expanding body of management literature—which offered no answers to these—have made this clear to me. Within the broader social context, we urgently need to reassess and renew our views on leadership, moving beyond the often simplistic 'strongman' models or,

conversely, complex functional constructs such as matrix structures within which leadership is expected to operate.

Two starting points

With this exploration, I wish to offer two starting points for a more fundamental vision of leadership in organisations. These starting points focus on leadership as a communal process within the organisation and on leadership as a moral responsibility for every person who is part of it. In my view, these starting points offer a new and extremely important perspective on leadership for anyone who wishes to participate in this process through their own leadership.

10. Do you choose for your ego or for collaboration?

Three key factors and three examples of behaviour that works

The quality of collaboration determines the quality of the organisation. Good communication and collaboration are key factors for success. It is no coincidence that the successful company VDL has the motto 'Strength through collaboration'. One could even argue that there is hardly a company left that does not regard 'good collaboration and communication' as a top priority. But putting this into practice is another matter entirely! It places demands on people.

As soon as horizontal and vertical relationships become blocked, an organisation suffers. When interdependencies are disrupted by complications that can no longer be discussed, people find it increasingly difficult to function effectively.

Complications are an everyday occurrence and inevitable. What's more, the increasing interdependencies within and between organisations are making relationships increasingly fragile. People must continually develop their ability to deal with these issues with a degree of wisdom and self-awareness. Otherwise, every complication becomes a trap!

Here are three examples of how people try to do this.

Three examples

These examples illustrate the essence of the skills we increasingly need to possess.

The first example

Two colleagues work closely together in a consultancy practice. They regularly travel to clients together and share an office. They have been doing this for several years. One colleague is older and more senior, the other is younger and

still finding their feet in the profession. The younger colleague is ambitious and wants to play an increasingly important role, particularly when working with the client. The older colleague, who is far from ready to step back, finds this difficult to accept. Gradually, the relationship cools. The younger colleague strives to be able to act independently with the client, whilst the older colleague does everything in their power to remain the primary point of contact with the client.

This leads to a tense relationship. Both find it difficult to broach the subject with the other; at first, they still think things will sort themselves out in time. But they do not. On the contrary, further complications arise. When they bump into each other or travel to a client together, they make small talk or remain silent. Gradually, both withdraw into themselves and let habit take over.

Unexpectedly, a confrontation arises. The younger colleague has received a query from a manager in the client organisation where the older colleague is project leader. He does not report this to his colleague, fearing that he might be sidelined by him. A week later, the older colleague finds out and, at their next meeting – after holding back for a moment – explodes, showering the younger colleague with personal accusations and accusations of unprofessional behaviour. The younger colleague retorts and withdraws. Both lose sleep over it.

The younger colleague decides to speak to the older colleague and try to put their relationship on a different track. One evening, they go out for dinner and, over the course of the meal, they talk things through. They look back on the past period and see what sort of behaviour this has led to. In a sense, it comes as a shock to the older colleague to realise that his behaviour is completely at odds with his belief in mentoring young colleagues and giving them opportunities. That hurts. The younger colleague emphasises once again how much he continues to learn from the older colleague, but that the time is right to take on

greater responsibility. The older colleague suggests that the younger colleague take over project leadership for this client and, in that role, also manage his older colleague. They're going to give it a go.

That's how it can go. From entanglements to a deadlock from which they manage to extricate themselves. The entanglements cause the inner world to become preoccupied with all sorts of feelings and considerations that are no longer directly connected to the other person. The 'I' withdraws, fantasises and goes round in circles within itself. Only when two personalities look each other in the eye again and together gain a clear picture of how the process is unfolding does the situation become clearer and the relationship healthier. Complications can go so far that intense conflicts arise and those involved perceive each other merely as ghosts. Then access for the 'I' is cut off and the forces of conflict take over the soul.

A second situation

The manager of a department comprising several teams would like to take his staff out into the countryside. It is time to discuss a few matters and make clear the direction he wishes to take. This stems from the realisation that, over the course of the past year, he has become somewhat distanced from the teams and the team leaders. Senior management has taken up a great deal of his time and attention. He no longer feels comfortable with this.

He discusses this idea with his four team leaders. They are very reserved in their response. Will it achieve anything, they ask; after all, they're all doing well, and the is that it's not unpleasant to be able to work independently. Do they fear further interventions from the boss? Even after an hour of talking and trying to

persuade them, there is still no enthusiasm among the team leaders. He decides to put this idea on hold for a while. Nevertheless, he notices that the teams are increasingly going their own way. They're all busy, working hard, but there's no collaboration between them. Much more could be achieved, and to a higher standard, if they'd just pay a bit more attention to one another and work together. The manager raises this point, but now the team leaders are putting up fiercer opposition. They seem to have found common ground and seem to enjoy the distance from the manager. The head of department is losing sleep over it. How can we bring everyone back together?

At the next meeting, the manager raises this issue. What next? He has no idea. There's a moment's silence. Then he starts questioning the team leaders individually. After some hesitation, they go along with it. They've become somewhat estranged from their boss, have no idea what he wants, and see no added value in his approach. That's a bit of a pill to swallow. But the boss takes it in his stride. It then turns out that the team leaders also have differing views and judge the situation differently. 'Let's not argue about it, but work it out,' the manager suggests. The team leaders agree.

The head of department organises an off-site meeting where they look back on the past two years and look ahead to the next two years in a completely personal way. Everyone has a personal resolution, and they also have a shared resolution for the future. It has become clear to the manager that paying constant attention to his team leaders is vital for achieving effective collaboration, mutual bonds and trust.

Situations within organisations can become stagnant and potentially grind to a halt if leadership does not keep them alive through active attention. This can happen quickly. It is not enough simply to harbour good intentions; it is

necessary to mobilise one's own sense of self and bring it to bear in collaboration with others. You can easily get sucked into important matters and then forget what needs attending to, and to do so with care. It is not about quantity but about the quality of being, being present.

The third situation

During the performance review, the manager addresses the employee's conduct. The manager explains once again to the employee what their actual duties are and that the employee's work only very partially meets these requirements. The employee puts forward all sorts of arguments as to why things have turned out this way, but the manager sticks to the job description and what it requires of the employee. It turns into something of a 'back-and-forth conversation'. Both are, in other words, repeating the same thing. The conversation is cut short with an agreement to revisit the matter soon. Both return to work feeling frustrated.

A few hours later, the manager and the employee bump into each other by the coffee machine. The employee asks how the manager's wife is doing, as she had been seriously ill. 'Very well, thank goodness,' says the manager, and briefly explains how things turned out. The employee expresses his delight and mentions in passing that he has just had a new baby. 'Really?' exclaims the boss, congratulating the employee. Now they're both laughing. Just a moment ago they were caught up in a purely functional back-and-forth, and now they're facing each other as people and are genuinely interested in how the other is doing. 'Shall we try that at work too?' suggests the boss. The employee is happy to do so.

It makes a huge difference whether we interact with one another in a functional or personal way. In the functional approach, we hide behind our job titles and roles, addressing one another solely in terms of results and problems. We talk past one another, as it were, each focused on our own goal and our own reality and truth. In the personal approach, we look at one another and make contact. Then something in common can emerge. The 'I' is present and can connect with the other 'I'.

Good collaboration

Good cooperation is encouraged and pointless complications are avoided when people can embody the following qualities in their actions.

- Personal conduct: acting not in a functional way, based on a uniform, a role or a task, but from the person themselves. That person comes to the fore. This immediately appeals to the other person to become visible too. You address what needs to be addressed; you state what matters to you; you do not shy away from it or let it slide, but you take the bull by the horns.
- Taking a stand: You position yourself where you stand firm and remain there for a while. Taking a stand is not the same as expressing an opinion. Taking a stand means standing up for what matters, representing an important value; it is something that can be used to guide action.
- Being authentic: You stand on your own two feet and draw only on what you can genuinely represent yourself. You rely on the capital of insights, skills, impulses of will and judgements that you have acquired yourself. You do not allow yourself to be tempted to use what will not stick in the long run because it was not your own.

I would like to see these qualities more often in organised life and work. This requires us to continually overcome our selfishness and fear of life through the ongoing cultivation of our own inner world – our soul – in collaboration with 'the other'.

11. The manager as a colleague, the professional as a leader

A leadership crisis is also a crisis of meaning

Over the past 50 years, I have seen just about everything change within organisations. From manual labour to automation, from teams to professionals, from owner/entrepreneur to manager/CEO, from rules to systems. Everything has become a specialised endeavour. Professionals have established themselves in these fields, and more managers have emerged to organise the whole and its parts.

Everything has acquired its own language, its own discipline, its own work process.

Amidst all these changes, one thing has remained constant: our understanding and practice of leadership. There are bosses and there are employees. Bosses are meant to motivate employees, whilst employees are meant to achieve objectives within the specific work processes. In this complex, organised world, over the past few decades we have equipped managers with all manner of new knowledge, management skills, social skills, decision-making systems and so on. Institutions such as De Baak, Harvard and Fontainebleau have thrived on this. The consultancy sector has grown rich from it. Employees have developed into professionals who carry out their work processes entirely independently, whilst collaborating with many others. They manage to keep their heads above water amidst a multitude of tasks and projects. However, managers and staff are reaching their limits, and quite a few of them are tempted to push beyond those limits, resulting in them falling ill or dropping out. There is a growing divide

between managers and staff. Managers are preoccupied with other managers, whilst staff are focused on their colleagues and customers.
There may well be a creeping leadership crisis unfolding within our organised communities. On average, CEOs have a relatively short tenure. They fall ill, move on or switch to something else. Young staff are exhausted after just one year on the job. Managers are frustrated and are losing sight of the meaning of their work. A leadership crisis is therefore also a crisis of meaning, and this is true at all levels.

It is becoming clear to me that our complex organised communities can no longer be steered and managed exclusively in a vertical, hierarchical, top-down or bottom-up manner. Certainly, now that we have created a national culture of 'being in control', in which inspections today must monitor other inspections that monitor organisations run by managers who want to be in control.

In the practical reality of organised life, we may well be ready for a radical shift in our view of leadership. Let us, first and foremost, turn this image of reality on its head. The professionals are the leaders, and the managers are the staff.
The professionals carry out an organisation's core process – the process involving customers, suppliers or other stakeholders who provide or purchase services. Managers organise the framework conditions and act as the intelligent staff who relieve the professionals of all manner of organisational and monitoring tasks.

In this model, professionals suddenly become involved in leadership. They become discussion partners for the various management layers that create the framework conditions at different levels. This puts the excessive focus on all manner of management tasks and issues into perspective and shifts the emphasis back to where it should be namely, serving others within the core

process. This also means that professionals finally gain access to the key dimensions of work, such as cash flows, collaboration, strategy and objectives.

In my practice, across many organisations in many countries, this has been shown to lead to a highly workable vision of organisation and leadership. The senior executives step down from their pedestals and engage with clients and professionals to experience how they carry out the core processes together and demonstrate leadership in doing so.

Example

One of our institute's clients, of IMO, is dM Drogeriemarkt in Germany. A rapidly growing chemists' chain, particularly now that its competitor Schlecker has gone out of business. It has 1,500 shops and three large distribution centres. The company's founder instilled in it a fundamentally simple philosophy that is entirely based on the new vision of leadership I have outlined here. In the shops, branch managers work together with their staff to deliver optimal customer service. They know the figures, they know their role, and they are constantly involved in the next steps in the development of the corporate philosophy and the shop's processes.

Keep it simple and straightforward. Sell good products at fixed prices. Ensure the shop is well-organised and attractive. Sources of frustration and inefficiency in the work processes are tackled and resolved together as much as possible. If you have even a little affinity for this philosophy, working in a dM shop is a great experience. Any issues that arise are tackled and resolved immediately on the spot. Just as almost everything organised by people is imperfect and must be recreated time and again, so too here we continually strive to create an inspiring

experience. As a customer, you can experience this in the dM shop. As Goethe once said: “Everything is an experiment”.

Sixty different nationalities work in dM’s distribution centres and warehouses, and in recent years there has been a struggle to manage this enormous growth. The management of the distribution centres reflected on how to overcome these growing pains. They took a fresh look at leadership and asked themselves: in what ways does an employee demonstrate leadership, a team leader, a department head, and a director? Managers and staff alike took part in this process. What was surprising was that, in this leadership dialogue, the different levels understood one another much better than they had previously in the top-down discussions and were able to arrive at good solutions together.

A leadership dialogue of this kind requires a great deal of practice, particularly from the managers. They are not used to it. The managers at dM, too, prefer to solve problems themselves and tell staff what needs to be done differently. Their joint conclusion was that this approach is completely ineffective when truly difficult issues are on the table. The biggest change is evident in a different way of listening to one another, responding to what the other person is saying, sticking to the facts, and arriving at concrete steps.

If you adopt a hierarchical, top-down approach and must work your way down through several levels, the process grinds to a halt. Those at the bottom do not understand what those at the top mean. Those at the top interpret this lack of understanding as resistance. This is a structural problem in leadership within many organisations, which, in my view, has never been properly addressed. You could illustrate the situation as follows. The senior management stand on the table, overseeing the whole picture and free to intervene in anything they deem necessary. The department heads have a chair representing a specific area of

expertise and must work together with other chair-holders within certain parameters. The team leaders are on the shop floor and can see what is happening both above and below the table where the professionals sit; they must try to bring all this together into a coherent whole. The professionals, beneath the table, wonder what is going on up there and carry on, to the best of their ability, with the practical work assigned to them.

It is time for professionals to become part of the leadership. Their leadership is evident in the process with the client, their collaboration with colleagues, their professional judgement, and the initiatives they take to ensure everything runs smoothly. Team leaders guide team members and the team towards the objectives and ensure the immediate conditions are in place. Department heads connect the top and the bottom, left and right, and steer the units in the right direction. Senior management moves through the whole organisation and charts the course for the future in collaboration with all stakeholders who influence the organisation and may depend on it.

There are two key aspects in organisations that we share: customer service and the leadership we demonstrate. It is in these areas that we reveal ourselves as individuals and commit ourselves fully. That is where the difference is made. In this respect, we all stand together on an equal footing. We should recognise this and create the appropriate spaces for reflection in which this horizontal dynamic can unfold. At the same time, we can simplify the vertical structure and reduce the many burdens it places on our shoulders. This will enable everyone to find a better work-life balance and lead to a significant increase in a sense of purpose for all those involved in leadership.

12. The search for meaning

More reflection and less organisation

Why is it that 30 per cent of all managers are too stressed, dissatisfied and harbour doubts about the meaning of their work and contribution? Why is it that 55 per cent of working people are happy when they can leave work on time, and 20 per cent of people have mentally resigned from their jobs? Why is it that 1 in 10 young people are completely burnt out after a year of working in an organisation? Why is it that the workload in the Netherlands is among the highest in the world?

Are you ever busy?

Look at a typical working day. How does it unfold? Try, during such a day, to keep an eye on what's going on inside you whilst you're busy with work. How do you feel in that meeting, how does your colleague's project presentation strike you, what does it suggest that you're not communicating? Are there moments when you do say or show something of what's going on inside you?

In my research into these issues, something struck me. Whilst at home we do have a language for this and sometimes take the time to express what's going on inside us, such a language and such time are, in fact, scarcely available in organisations. You can tell your partner that you love her, and that can create an intimate and beautiful moment. If you were to say that to your boss, it would, first and foremost, cause consternation. What on earth does she mean?

We already struggle with our feelings and intimate thoughts at home. Just look at the rise in divorces, the growing problems with children and their development, domestic arguments and violence.

At work, feelings and secret thoughts are preferably kept separate from the rational, system-driven way we interact with one another. *'Don't worry, it'll be fine, there's no time for that now, you can do that outside work.'* In organisations, my observation is that the human experience is sacrificed to the pursuit of objectives. *'We're not married to one another here, are we?'*

The question of meaning

Is there perhaps an inner distress within organisations? Is that the cry and message conveyed by the statistics provided?
In my published book **In Search of Meaning*,* I approach the issue outlined here from a perspective of meaning. I ask myself why it is that we live in such a hectic society, in which it is not easy for the individual to take the time to ask themselves questions about the meaning of it all. In a fully organised society, are we still capable of engaging, both individually and collectively, with questions of moral meaning?

This is an issue that we cannot answer solely through an ever-better-organised infrastructure; it is a matter for the human soul. It concerns our own life values and how we wish to express them to one another, both individually and within the organised community; how we wish to protect and preserve them; and how we can allow them to exist as concrete experiences in our daily working lives.

A typical working day

An example of a typical working day for a busy manager.

In the car at 7.30 am after a quick breakfast on the go and a kiss for their partner and children.

Three quarters of an hour stuck in traffic.

At the office, 50 new emails and a hundred unread emails are waiting.

Two one-hour meetings, each with more than twenty items on the agenda.

Phone calls and a bit of a natter by the coffee machine.

Then a complicated conversation with a dissatisfied customer. We fail to reach a new agreement.

Two phone calls from bosses who are unhappy with the progress of my projects.

The secretary goes home sick.

Another hour spent tidying up the mess.

Stuck in a 40-minute traffic jam on the way home.

So how do you get home? What happened that day? What did you experience and how do you process those experiences? If you're lucky, your partner will have a moment to listen to those worries, that nice moment with that colleague, that little success you achieved, that nagging boss.

Whereas at work we've structured our actions and thinking using all sorts of systems and seek to keep them under control, we leave our inner lives to their own devices. Everyone is left to cope with that on their own. In my view, that is morally irresponsible. Our inner lives require a language of the soul within organisations too; they require space and attention; they require us to share with one another and to either enjoy or suffer from those experiences.

This is a matter of a moral nature. How can we give shape to this within organisations? That demands attention. It is even more necessary when we consider the context in which working life takes place today.

Organised life as a solution?

We have stepped out of our natural communal setting and established ourselves in organised society. The natural community, which in earlier times was expected to provide the answers to our 'slow questions' and to meet our inner needs, has been replaced by the organisation that, in return for payment, delivers the service or product directly.

Our lives have become organised, and this applies to all the aspects of life that may preoccupy us.

Ultimately, however, we cannot easily hand over our inner world to others.

The organised structure of our society and our organised lives within it cannot, in my view, provide a definitive answer to an age-old question: What is the meaning of our lives? What is the fruit of our existence? Who can answer my questions?

Now that, for many, God has left the natural community – where no answers can be found any longer – we may well ask ourselves where on earth we are to turn with our questions about meaning.

How can we introduce and address these questions within our organised lives?

If the Netherlands is working ever harder and continuing to develop its infrastructure, how can we still manage to address the question of meaning?

It should be clear that, in characterising the key question of our time in our organised lives as a question of meaning, I am taking the view that, in this shared existence, we must focus our attention first and foremost on the process of

finding meaning. That is the leadership challenge facing our community, our organisations and our society. I would like to explain here what that might entail.

Reflection and dialogue

Meaning is not achieved through more organisation but through more reflection. It should be clear that for a process of finding meaning, we need a different set of tools to those we usually employ when we want to solve problems or organise answers.

When organising, we focus first and foremost on creating the framework that can form the context for activities, which must then lead us to the goal that has been set. ‘We build the factory, install the machines, draw up the procedures and start production. We set up the desk, are given a computer and a job description, and get to work’.

When reflecting, we start first and foremost with the individual, who asks themselves questions and wants to explore. In doing so, they may encounter like-minded people grappling with the same questions. In this way, communities of question-driven constellations can form, which together wish to set up a process to gain insight and make sense of things. ‘It turns out this isn’t working very well, and we’re wondering how we could do things differently. We’re going to work that out together. Gosh, we hadn’t realised it worked like this. So, I need to do it a bit differently; then it’ll make more sense to you. Now I understand better what I’m doing.’

Examples from our own practice

Staff at a bank branch are frustrated by the increasingly complex systems they must use when serving customers. They realise that complaining doesn’t help. They seek a dialogue with the specialists at head office and share their

experiences together. The issue is brought to the table in a constructive way, and there is even a sense of relief on both sides. How can we make things a bit simpler?

That turns out not to be so straightforward, given the complex banking products and demanding procedures. Nevertheless, they manage to come up with sound proposals and convince management of their merits. They feel more warmth and inspiration when working with customers, but also in their ongoing communication with colleagues at head office.

You're organising a small birthday party at the restaurant in your village. The preliminary discussion with the restaurant owner is a real pleasure. We put together a lovely menu. That evening, you're warmly welcomed and congratulated by the staff. Your guests arrive right on time, and it turns out to be a lovely evening. The food tastes great, and the service is attentive. You have a quick chat afterwards with the restaurant owner, who clearly enjoyed it too. Back home, the excitement is still buzzing. You'd love to go back there again.

The management team agree to meet twice a year to reflect on how things are going, strategic issues and organisational development. Every autumn and every spring, they take some time out. They process experiences and develop the next steps. Sometimes there are guests from within the company or from outside with whom they discuss these issues. Time and again, they find that they learn, that they return to the company feeling refreshed and well prepared for the coming period. The staff notice this in the way they are treated.

After two years' service, every junior employee is asked to set up and carry out a project independently that can make a difference to customers, their colleagues and themselves. Everything is managed independently from start to finish. After nine months, they present the results to the management team:

what happened, what the outcomes were for the client and the company, and what they have learnt. They grow and gain self-confidence. You can see this in the years that follow. The managers are inspired.

In my experience, there are three aspects to this process of reflecting together that can help to arrive at meaningful insights and identify next steps.

Firstly: Start by looking at the impact on the client and examine how the process of working and collaborating either supports or hinders the client's process.

Furthermore: ensure there is a dialogue amongst yourselves, meaning that everyone involved in the process is engaged and able to contribute. Share not only the observable phenomena but also the inner experiences associated with them and what they reveal to you. Include, rather than exclude.

Bear in mind: ensure that what is said and done is closely linked to the personal stories of the people involved in relation to their organisation.

Attention – connection – trust

Meaning cannot be organised but can emerge between people who inspire one another. The process of finding meaning can develop its own dynamic when questions are allowed to be asked, dialogue is engaged in, and we are able to deal with the diversity of perspectives and aspirations held by those taking part in the process. *There you can see how paying attention to something that matters to us creates the space for us to connect with it, to meet one another in that space, and for that to foster mutual trust*. The examples outlined earlier illustrate this. We then take joy in all those people who approach others with respect, gentleness and a willingness to help. Without much deliberation, they have decided that the meaning of their existence is to be found above all in meaningful relationships with others, and they act accordingly. In this way, they inspire others.

Individual managers and staff should engage in joint discussions on ethical issues. I would welcome a little more courage, time and attention from leadership in relation to this responsibility.

13. Focus on professional autonomy in education

Less complaining, more inspiration! Is that possible?

In this contribution, I wish to focus on what I consider to be a neglected aspect of the educational process, namely the importance of a lively and ongoing dialogue between lecturers and students. From my role as a lecturer at a university of applied sciences, I see a link between this lack of dialogue and the current problems in educational institutions, such as maintaining motivation and vitality among teachers and students, as well as the scant attention paid to students' personal development compared to the overwhelming focus on knowledge-oriented curricula.

A question of meaning.

History

In his book **The Eye of the* Master* (De Bezige Bij, 2004), George Steiner describes how the only genuine learning process still takes place between masters and pupils. The pupil must find a way to move beyond the master. The master guides the pupil to the sources.

The classroom-based education that I (born in 1947) was part of, from primary school right through to a large part of my sociology studies, was a continuous dialogue between teacher and pupil. We can still recount amusing anecdotes about the secondary school (HBS) teachers who, in our eyes, sometimes behaved rather strangely in class, or about university lecturers who called on us to help them gain clarity on a particular topic. Looking back, learning was very

much shaped by how students and lecturers related to and interacted with one another.

This lecture-style method of teaching came to be regarded as incorrect and outdated following the wave of democratisation in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Children and students were expected to learn to work independently, based on assignments set by the teacher. Teachers focused on their own teaching material, their professional development, professional development days and so on. Both students and teachers adopted a different way of working. Teachers devised learning programmes for students, setting intelligent assignments with outcome criteria and quality assessments. Students became proficient at citing sources from the internet and library books in a well-structured manner, and at presenting their work coherently, both orally and in writing. Students and teachers – like so many people in the workforce today, for that matter – found themselves caught up in their own processes, in which they had to perform, either individually or sometimes in collaboration with others, whilst meeting detailed requirements.

What I have noticed, because of this, amongst university and higher professional education students and lecturers is that they have three parallel yet distinct interests that strongly influence their lives.

- As pragmatic students and lecturers, they try to adapt to the education system in which the lecturer, as the system's operator, devises the curriculum that the student must follow.
- They view their role as a lecturer or student as a job from which, respectively, an income and credits can be earned.

- They enjoy socialising in the context of family, friends, sport, the arts and pubs.

When I was teaching at Erasmus University, I once asked a group of economics students how they saw the connection between the concepts they were studying and the part-time jobs they were doing. There was silence. “What do you mean?” was the response. They couldn’t relate economic models to practical work. Nor to their personal social lives. “You’re so abstract,” they said. I thought I was being very concrete. “You’ll only be concrete if you give us a model,” they said. I found that rather abstract.

Meaning

What is the point, for students and lecturers alike, of an education system which, in my view, primarily trains students to act in a programmed manner and discourages them from seeking out the freedom to take risks? This issue is reflected in how lecturers and students assess their own existence in these roles. When, over several years, I have regularly asked students and lecturers how they assess their current situation, I have noticed that complaints about what is wrong outweigh the inspiration with which the subject is taught. You must dig a little deeper to get to the source from which lecturers and students draw in this process. It is much more directly about the stressful and demanding situations, the organisation that isn’t working, the lack of clarity regarding timetables and the requirements set, and the burdensome extra workload involved in all that quality assessment.

In my view, the way this system operates becomes even more apparent once students start work after completing their studies. They then find themselves in a world where, suddenly, there is no longer any interest in concepts and models. They enter a world of concrete hierarchical power relations between people,

within which concrete performance is required. They are on their own. They are encouraged to integrate into the wider organisation, into the specific organisational culture of the company and team, whilst at the same time being expected to show initiative and act entrepreneurially. Today, they join organisations without a long-term perspective and without a long-term development plan. They take on contract roles and must find their own way to the next interesting opportunity.

I read some time ago in an NRC article that, after one year of work, one in ten young employees is burnt out and temporarily unfit for work. They experience great disappointment at the fact that no one is really interested in them as individuals; you must be lucky to come across a willing older colleague who'll lend a hand or a boss who takes the trouble to coach you. The need for connection and collaboration is only increasing.

Personal leadership

A teacher was grappling with the question of how he could discipline his students so that they would be willing to follow the history lessons according to the required system, thereby meeting the programme's requirements. He was unable to make any real progress in this regard. Through a process of self-reflection, he came to realise that he needed to turn the approach on its head. How can I teach history to my students in such a way that they learn discipline? That turned out to work much better. The focus was no longer on 'filling vessels' – which quickly leads to boredom and hassle – but on 'kindling a fire'.

This teacher was very focused on the subject matter and content and paid little attention to the process taking place between teacher and student. His inspiration lay in the subject matter itself, rather than in the students' learning. Thanks to the shift he made, he was able to focus much more on the process

unfolding, observing the students in how they engaged with the subject matter, with one another and with him.

What can a teacher do to encourage students to be moved from within and set out on a path of exploration? How do they create a professional space together?

First and foremost, this requires teachers to engage with their students. Who are you, what drives you, what is your question, what is your next step? And vice versa.

Next, the teacher is called upon to design an original process for their students in which they explore the subject matter together and make it their own.
An essential skill for this is engaging in dialogue with the students. The essence of dialogue is listening to the other person. What are they saying or doing, what feelings are associated with this, and what is their intention? By asking questions that prompt reflection, and by taking initiatives that create unexpected situations, the students are set in motion. Because students become aware of the experiences and insights they have gained in their own way, document them and report on them, they internalise what they have learnt, and this becomes their own intellectual capital with which to navigate life. It is the teacher's personal leadership that sparks the student's personal leadership.

An example from my own practice:
In the 'People and Organisation' minor at Stenden University of Applied Sciences, in which 25 students spend 10 weeks conducting supervised research into leadership within various organisations, the students are taken aback when they hear how the minor is structured. They must set out in small groups to an unfamiliar organisation where an unknown client sets them a research question. They must hold meaningful discussions on this with staff members of that

organisation who are involved with this issue, in such a way that the issue comes to life within the organisational community. They must report on their research, detailing what they have experienced, what they have discovered and learnt, what they consider essential when it comes to personal leadership, and finally share this with their client, fellow students and the lecturers involved.

Where are the concepts, where are the models, what approach should we follow, what should our PowerPoint presentation look like? Only the courageous students who are keen to do and experience something different take the plunge. They go through a collaborative process with the supervising lecturer. Once they've got the hang of the process and developed a taste for it, their reactions are:

The people we speak take us seriously,

We've noticed things we didn't see before,

I've got to know myself and others better,

I now know how to shape a process myself,

It's fascinating to ask people about their life stories.

A different approach to the management of educational institutions

If we are to be able to give this attention to the teacher–student relationship and dialogue, then the governance and management of educational institutions will need to shift their focus.

At present, governance is primarily focused on demonstrating to the outside world how well the institution meets all the quality requirements set by various bodies. Are the student records in order? Are the prescribed procedures being

followed? Is the programme accredited? Do the teachers undertake all the required professional development, and so on?

What is needed now is a greater focus on the unique quality of the teacher–student dialogue and interaction, on their shared process and outcome, and on their joint development of professional space. This requires the courage to engage with the specific individuals and the specific process that is taking place. To provide a solid foundation for this, renewed attention is needed for the following issues:

- How do we design an inspiring, adventurous learning process for this subject, for this theme? The search for and creation of a process suited to this content.
- How do teachers and students engage in dialogue, challenge one another, listen to one another and take the initiative? Reaching out to one another and inspiring each other to act.
- How do we link everything to the personal stories of the teacher and the student so that they are able to create meaning together based on their shared experiences?

How wonderful it would be if teachers and students were to do this together. To explore and experiment together, to design learning projects together, to learn a subject together, to engage in scholarship together.

It is the teacher who guides the pupil through a process of learning, exploring, practising, experimenting, discovering, reflecting and engaging in dialogue together. It is the pupil who poses surprising questions to the teacher and offers unusual interpretations. That is learning together, based on a genuine teacher–pupil encounter. That is occupying professional space in a horizontal manner.

A few examples from my own experience:

A lecturer takes their students out on a field trip to visit people who are practising their profession in a unique way. They engage in conversation with these people, see how they work, and this inspires the students and provides direction.

A teacher puts their students in touch with clients who are grappling with a particular issue. Students discuss this issue with the people involved, not to come up with solutions but to bring the issue to life within the organisation. Through these conversations, they discover a great deal about themselves.

A lecturer role-plays real-life situations with her students and reflects with them on what is happening and what they can learn from it.

Students help a lecturer write an article.

Finally

The Minister for Education has expressed a desire for universities of applied sciences to address the issue of professional autonomy. Initially, he wanted to draft a Charter on this matter. This met with resistance from the Council for Higher Education. Let the universities of applied sciences sort this out for themselves and then report back on it. At various universities of applied sciences, a dialogical approach is being adopted. As administrators, let us engage in dialogue with deans, team leaders and lecturers about how they (can) shape that professional autonomy, how they can learn from one another, how they involve students in this process, how they conduct research, how they reflect on methodological questions, and how they carry out experiments.

I am keen to be involved in this, and, at their request, I am supporting a number of universities of applied sciences in this regard. This also nicely feeds into the ongoing research being carried out by our own knowledge circle at Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden into questions of leadership and purpose in organisations.

14. Horizontal leadership

Three dimensions and four key points

"Our department is in a state of constant flux. A great deal is happening, and the pace at which developments follow one another is very fast. I find this enjoyable, exciting and stimulating. It gives me energy. At the same time, I'm also concerned. With all the changes taking place, we sometimes make decisions at regional level that I don't find logical, and as a result I lose sight of the common thread in our work within the region. My main concerns are that we are no longer organising our work processes in a way that makes sense (to me) and that responsibilities are becoming increasingly unclear meaning we are becoming more dependent on one another whilst paying insufficient attention to this.Because of these developments, I find myself dealing with incident management more often than I'd like. I don't like the feeling of not being in control, of constantly playing catch-up and of having too little direct influence. In fact, I really hate this and it can make me restless and impatient; I start to get annoyed, I start to judge, and I have little understanding left for the considerations made by, for example, fellow managers.

A manager must deal with:

- A constant stream of change
- An unsuitable way of working
- Three dimensions to care for
- Deal with key aspects of horizontal leadership

A constant stream of change

Organisations, and particularly large organisations in the private and public sectors, are in a state of constant change. The multitude of regulations – such as those imposed on organisations by society, and regulations concerning the environment, taxation, working conditions and safety – constantly necessitate the internal restructuring of systems and procedures. New technology, new management concepts and new generations are transforming work processes, and people are required to process a multitude of instructions on how things must be done differently.

It is managers in particular who must deal with this constant flow of change. They are faced with a multitude of projects in which they are expected to participate or contribute. A ceaseless stream of meetings and consultations fills the manager's diary. With a flood of additional tasks, the manager is put under pressure. It is no wonder that many managers – estimated to be between 30 and 50 per cent – are somewhat fed up with the complex and demanding work and long for a simple and well-organised working life.

This constant effort might well be worthwhile if it were accompanied by satisfying results. If results are achieved, changes are successfully implemented and things improve as a result, then the energy expended can be perceived as meaningful. Unfortunately, however, most change processes fail partly or fully and, in day-to-day operations, complex work processes become increasingly difficult. Managers lose sight of the meaning of their work when they become bogged down in tasks and processes that lack flow and purpose.

An unsuitable way of working

In my view, the main cause of this trend is that operational work and change management are carried out within the same structure and in the same way. This tends to be primarily top-down and bottom-up, involving steering groups, project groups and management teams, with written plans setting out targets, steps and deadlines. Whilst this may occasionally be helpful in operations – although it can create a great deal of unnecessary complexity – it is an unsuitable way of working when it comes to change management.

Whilst operations must be sound and are therefore embedded within a vertically structured system, there is no room for change within it.
In my view, change takes place much more in the horizontal space. The horizontal space is not predetermined; it still offers scope for creativity. It is there that change processes can be carried out by leadership in collaboration with the working community, through dialogue with one another. This is not primarily about action, plans and steps, but is mainly about exploring together what is going on, jointly getting to the bottom of what is not working or running smoothly, and it also involves personal experimentation – for example, with a different way of working within one's own work process – by the people affected by the change.

Three dimensions to care for

In my view, there are three fundamental dimensions that must be addressed in change processes if leadership is to embark on a process that is meaningful for both them and the community.

The first is that a specific process must be designed for the change, in which all those affected by it are involved from the outset. Time is taken to reflect on and examine what is going on. The second dimension is that change is a dialogical process in which people co-create together. It involves finding a way forward, testing what is and isn't possible, and learning from and with one another. The third dimension is that people can connect personally with the change and the process, participate in it, and take their own steps.

These three dimensions can be realised when there is inspiring leadership at work within the organisation. This leadership is not necessarily provided by functional management but is taken on by decisionmakers and process owners, who personally initiate and champion the change processes. It is specific constellations of leaders who drive the change forward with the community and put it into practice. I call this 'horizontal leadership'.

Example

A German Sparkasse, Sparkasse Aachen, with 2,500 staff, has been at the forefront of the Sparkassen sector for many years because it implements its changes in a process-driven and horizontal manner. In recent years, changes to market organisation, customer approach, staff services, the role of young employees, flexible remuneration, the reduction of hierarchy and cost savings have been achieved by process owners in a horizontal manner.

Recently, the Executive Board came up with the idea of paying special attention to staff aged 45 and over. This number is set to grow in the coming years, yet no special attention is actually allocated to this group of staff.
The HR department proposed a comprehensive package of training opportunities, motivational programmes and special offers. The Executive

Board saw no merit in this and decided to take a different approach. It selected four process owners and 40 employees aged 45 and spread over all corners of the bank and across all levels of the organisation. Divided into two groups of 20 staff members, each group mentored by two 45+ process owners, the following questions were addressed: as a staff member aged 45 or over, how do I want to work on my development the coming years, what is my next step and how am I going to take it?

Over a period of six months, the process took shape, beginning with a 'kick-off event' and culminating in a final presentation. Progress was discussed monthly in peer review groups of five people. In a surprisingly straightforward way, 40 staff members got involved, developed ideas, experimented with them and presented their next steps. Staff from HR and training provided support. In future, all staff aged 45 and over will have the opportunity to take a step forward that they have created themselves.

It was striking that these staff members naturally kept the Sparkasse's interests in mind, that managers contributed in their own way, and that the steps taken had a positive impact on those involved and on the bank.

For this form of horizontal leadership, we can identify a number of key points of horizontal leadership we will describe in the next chapter that can ensure the change process does not reach a 'dead end' and that the leadership and the people involved do not become stuck in the rigidity of the vertical organisational system, but that it becomes and remains a meaningful process.

15. Key points of horizontal leadership

Leadership is about setting the direction

“Those who do not know the destination cannot know the way”
Morgenstern

Inspiring goals for the change process must be chosen, and a direction must be set. This process of setting goals and providing direction requires leadership to have a vision, a sense of direction, and an acute intuition as to where things might be heading. To this end, leadership conducts research.

Leadership can develop visions of the future in dialogue with the community; it can explore possible future scenarios and make predictions about what will happen in the future. Real life, however, will subsequently surprise us; it is, after all, different from what was thought and expected.

Without having chosen a goal and a direction, it becomes difficult to shape the process of change that follows. When those involved do not share a common vision, travelling the path together becomes a difficult task. These – goal and path – are iterative elements. They are continually defined in relation to one another through a constant interplay.

Leadership is engaging in dialogue

“What is more invigorating than light? It is conversation”
Goethe

In a change process, leadership can operate within a non-hierarchical relationship and engage in a horizontal dialogue. This concerns customer service, the professionalism and quality of the work process, the next step in an employee’s career, collaboration with colleagues, learning from one another,

and finding meaning in the work done. A horizontal dialogue is all about interaction. Through dialogue, we gain insight, we learn from one another, it creates a sense of purpose, things take on meaning; we also get to know one another, gain an understanding of the other person's values, and become more aware of our own standpoint and vision.

Leadership is about setting things in motion

"Each of us is an artist"

Joseph Beuys

"Art is what brings joy"

Anne-marie Ehrlich

Leadership is not the same as doing a lot. Leadership is not hard work. Leadership is, rather, 'doing nothing'. It is more about 'facilitating a process in which others can act'.

Leading people means setting them in motion and supporting the community of people in their next stage of development. Setting the community in motion through leadership means inviting others to step into a process of organisational development and change and to contribute to it. When employees are not invited to participate in this process but are nonetheless affected and impacted by the change, they are deprived of the opportunity to take the next step.

Leadership involves inviting staff to take this step, giving them a specific task within it, and bringing them into a new process and new group dynamics.

Leadership is about creating meaning

"Everything we create as organised human beings has no meaning other than the meaning we ourselves ascribe to it"

Adriaan Bekman

Participating in organised processes takes a great deal of energy. There is no natural, self-evident flow to these processes, nor is there a shared sense of collaboration. *We will have to consciously give shape and meaning to the process and the collaboration ourselves. We may all be very busy, but that does not mean it makes 'sense' to us.* Together with others, we will have to add our own meaning to our own creations. A policy devised by someone else only acquires meaning when I work with it. Then I create value from the outcome of someone else's work.

As leaders, we will need to draw on our own strengths to engage with meaningful ideas and thoughts, which we can then incorporate into what we do.

16. Advising = not trying to be smarter than your client

Vertical or horizontal advising

The consultant is delighted and excited by the enquiry from that large and well-known international company. Feeling somewhat nervous, he steps into the boardroom where a few well-dressed gentlemen welcome him with detached interest. The chairman of the board soon expresses the wish that the consultant should get to work in earnest with the first tier of management. A few issues are laid out on the table; the consultant asks follow-up questions from time to time and occasionally makes some pertinent comments. The meeting ends with the question of whether the consultant has sufficient information, and a request is made to receive a detailed quotation, preferably next week. There are still a few other candidates.

This is not an unusual situation between client and consultant. The client is the commissioning party, and the consultant is the service provider. The consultant tackles the problem on behalf of the client and attempts to arrive at an effective solution. The client can then put this into practice. I call this a vertical approach. Personally, I favour a horizontal approach.

The consultant is delighted and excited by the enquiry from this large and well-known international company. Feeling somewhat nervous, he steps into the boardroom, where a few well-dressed gentlemen welcome him with reserved interest. After the chairman of the board has welcomed the consultant, the latter proposes a procedure for the meeting to the board. Each board member, starting with the youngest, briefly outlines what they would like to achieve with this assignment. They then discuss this. The consultant asks the chair how he would like to formulate his brief. Inspired by what has gone before, the consultant explains how such a change process might unfold and suggests that, should the

organisation opt for his approach, he would be happy to formulate the joint mandate together with the chairman of the board. The chairman agrees to this.

An unusual situation between client and consultant. The client and consultant are joint decisionmakers, and the consultant takes responsibility and shares in the leadership required to bring about this change.
I call this a horizontal approach.

- The question
- Vertical and horizontal consultancy
- A look at the consultancy profession
- Smarter than the client?
- What does this mean for the adviser's approach?
- Advisory roles

The question

Alongside manufacturing and service provision, consultancy has become a third major sector of society. This involves high-value knowledge which is sold to the client at a high market price. Organisational managers also rely on this knowledge, as they are now barely able to keep track of all the complex specialisms required. In organisations of any size, there are therefore numerous advisory specialists who apply their expertise in various fields. This, in turn, creates its own complexities.

The relationship between commissioning management and the implementing consultant has become a sensitive issue. A problematic relationship between commissioning management and the implementing consultant can particularly arise during change processes within organisations. The consultant who is brought in contributes their expertise; they investigate and propose possible

solutions. However, it is precisely in change processes that the consultant is required to possess a range of skills that enables not only the design but, above all, the implementation of changes.

It is possible that the frequent failure of change processes in organisations has something to do with the way in which clients and consultants approach the matter together. Implementing change may therefore require a different advisory approach to that used in the usual resolution of specific problems or the introduction of new systems.

Vertical and horizontal consultancy

Considering this question, I draw a distinction between ***vertical and horizontal consultancy***. In *vertical consultancy*, the consultant is generally linked, as an expert, to a decisionmaker or manager who, from a hierarchical position, wishes to bring about change.

That is where the power and decision-making authority lie. The manager primarily wants to bring about change in others: in the teams, among subordinates, and amongst colleagues. Because of this link, the consultant adopts a vertical approach. They conduct research amongst the target groups, report to their client, convince others of the value of their advice, and coach staff in achieving what the boss wants. The system is implemented within the organisation; staff must make the best of it, whilst the bosses reap the rewards. There is nothing wrong with this, but it has its limitations.

The consultant can also *provide horizontal advice*. In this case, the focus is primarily on something the organisation wants to achieve, change or improve for its clients. This might involve, for example, changing work processes, collaborating differently, or steering desired changes. The consultant is

dedicated to this development task. They occupy a neutral position amongst many stakeholders; they are aligned with the mission of the organisation's leadership, which is to promote the organisation's success and well-being. They work for all those who wish to achieve this. They bridge worlds, helping to facilitate interaction and collaboration. This is primarily about putting words into action, about those involved tackling issues and problems intelligently themselves, about how they create 'flow' and a sense of purpose, and about how they clarify issues. It is about their learning and growth; it is about re-establishing the creative connection between the individual and the organisation.

A look at the consultancy profession

Initially, as a consultant, I saw myself as an *'expert'* who could help organisations and their staff to carry out their work processes smoothly. Intelligent systems, sound concepts and useful tools are my assets as a consultant. When my client makes use of them, they make progress with their process and I, as a consultant, am satisfied.

Later, I came to see the consultancy profession primarily as *a 'reflective' one.* Clients are up to their ears in work, and so am I, of course, as a consultant. There's no time to pause and see how things work, to reflect on how they could be done differently – perhaps better – and then to put that into practice. I reflect on the client's organisation and its challenges, and if the client wants to take a step forward and I see an opportunity there, I lend my clients a helping hand. I draw on everything I have at my disposal as a change consultant. That works for a while, and then the magic fades.

I see the consultant as a *'socially creative artist*'. Together with the community of people, they create creative processes that tackle the organisation's

development challenges. This generates new, vibrant substance, inspiration and the drive to take initiative. This counterbalances the draining, energy-sapping side of day-to-day operations. So, the consultancy profession is a risky one, but when it goes well, the work takes on meaning. Then we grow and, as authentic individuals, become visible to one another.

The client rings me and asks if I can pop round. There are problems. The staff in a department and their manager aren't coping. 'Would you be willing to train them?' is the question.

First option

I roll out my well-structured two-day management and team skills programme. Satisfied and in good spirits, the manager and the staff set about trying again. *The expert at work.*

Second option

I sit down with the manager and the team, and we carry out a 'group problem-analysing exercise'. That helps, and we're able to have a more in-depth discussion. Everyone formulates their next step, and we agree to review in a month's time whether those steps have been taken and what results they've yielded.

The practitioner at work.

Third option

I speak to the manager first. How has she engaged with the issue, and how does she view it? We prepare a one-day session in which we work with the team to examine how the work processes are running, where the bottlenecks lie, and why the team members are running into difficulties. The manager sets out her vision during this session. A few team members are appointed as process owners

for a specific issue that they agreed upon that they must tackle together with their colleagues. We agree on a four-weekly cycle for the next six months, during which we'll evaluate progress and agree on the next steps. At the end of the cycle, the manager and the consultant look back and look ahead.

The social artist at work.

Smarter than the client?

As my own career in consultancy progressed, it became clear to me that, when it comes to change, the notion that a consultant must go to great lengths to be 'smarter than the client' and find answers the client hasn't been able to find themselves is an illusion. Let's just assume that the client is more familiar with their own issue than the consultant ever will be. The consultant does not need to understand the issue better than the client. As a consultant, they do not need to go to great lengths to milk the client dry and grill them with questions, forcing them to reveal everything. It is far more important for the consultant to explore how the client relates to their own issue.

How does the client view their issue, what do they focus on, what did they undertake till now, where do their desires and fascination lie, and where might their fixation lie?

A radical consequence of this advisory approach is that the client does not need to explain the issue to the adviser in detail. They do not need to provide the adviser with all sorts of background information, nor present possible explanations and interpretations. The adviser engages in dialogue with the client to explore how the client views their issue and whether it might be useful to learn to look at the issue in a different way.

What does this mean for the adviser's approach?

First and foremost, it means that everything the client says is significant. Not necessarily in terms of content – the client may be speculating – but the client's statements do reveal something about how they talk about their issue.
A powerful investigative technique used by the consultant in this approach is to guide the client as quickly as possible towards their specific experiences of the issue and to encourage them to describe these experiences vividly and concretely. *'Could you give me a specific example?'* is a question that helps the client to speak from their lived reality. As consultants, we therefore begin with the client's perception and their reality.

When the client describes specific examples and experiences relating to the issue to the consultant, something happens within the client. They then draw upon their own past and the experience they have gained, and they re-engage with the associated concerns, feelings and interpretations. The client also describes themselves in relation to the issue. In my view, this is the only provisional point of reference for the counsellor in their process with the client. After all, in this way, the counsellor sets out on a discovering journey with the client, rather than only proposing a journey for the client.

Let me give an example:

A client tells me that his department heads are unable to motivate staff to actively approach clients. They are passive and are quick to assume that things are fine as they are. After all, clients have so far come of their own accord. '*Could you give me an example?*' I ask my client. *'Could you describe a manager and how they deal with this issue in practice?*' My client chooses a

situation from a few days ago in which he was visiting an important client with one of his department heads. That visit had been his initiative. The department head was supposed to lead the discussion during the meeting with the client. He didn't get much further than telling the client a few generalities. He asked the client hardly any questions and didn't pick up on the client's hints. Later in the conversation, the client expressed his disappointment to the manager about how the organisation had dealt with his enquiries in the past, and the department head simply remained silent.

As a consultant, I noticed that my client radiated impatience and showed irritation whilst telling his story, but also that he expressed some self-pity and concern about his own competence as a divisional director. We discussed this together. We came across a strongly held belief on my client's part, which went something like this: 'If I don't take them by the hand, they won't do it'. I asked him whether this was an appropriate approach to managing his department heads. We also discussed what the underlying beliefs are that are reflected in the behaviour of his department heads.

The art of consultancy lies in engaging with clients in such a way that they are willing to take a reflective look at their reality, identify the effects of their own actions within it, and begin to see how others act within the process and in relation to the issue at hand. This ultimately leads to the search for an intervention that breaks through existing frameworks. In the case of the divisional director, I worked with my client to identify case studies from his senior department heads regarding successful client visits and client initiatives undertaken by managers and staff within his division. The stories we found from managers and staff encouraged the director to launch an organisational development process for his unit, with a particular focus on boosting his own

and his team's capacity to take the initiative in relation to clients. This strengthened the foundation for his policy of actively taking the next steps together with clients.

Clarifying the issue is a consultancy activity that is repeated time and again throughout the entire consultancy process. This consistently leads to new insights and continually opens new opportunities for effective interventions that lead to a healthier situation and set the issue in motion. In this activity of clarifying the issue, the consultant's guiding principle is: *'I do not need to understand the client's issue; I focus on how the client relates to their issue'.* The consultant does this by conducting reflective conversations with their client about the issue and how it manifests in the client's reality, and by carrying out creative interventions that challenge the guiding beliefs through which the client approaches the issue.

Consultancy roles

The consultant can apply these key considerations within the change process. The consultant helps the client to visualise a sound process and to see it through to completion. The consultant acts as *a discussion partner for* an organisation's *senior* management, with whom the guiding principles, key concepts, approaches and findings from the process are shared and translated into decisions.

The consultant is also *a partner to the process owners*, who are responsible for ensuring that the change process progresses over a certain period. The consultant helps the process owners to take innovative steps, create unexpected scenarios, and document and communicate results. The consultant supports the process owners in mobilising the network of stakeholders, who are then engaged in a productive and effective role within the process.

The consultant is also *the one who introduces techniques and tools* that can be used by those involved. They provide training, conduct research and set up experiments. The consultant plays an active role in the development process of the client organisation.

The consultant provides *support during the internal* transition *process* that those involved undergo as part of the change process. It is not the role of a 'guardian' here, but rather that of a partner who can pay attention to the internal steps people take and the fears and concerns that this entails.

It is through these four qualitative roles that the consultant manifests their presence within the client organisation. In this way, they form part of the leadership.

17. Lean, learning and living organisations need new leadership

A vision of the future of leadership

It was only after the Second World War that Peter Drucker, the late giant of management theory, introduced the term ‘management’. Previously, there were owners and bosses who acted as leaders of family businesses. They were surrounded by a circle of trusted individuals who helped organise the staff carrying out the work. Since the 1950s, we have seen a global growth in organised communities led by managers.

They represent the owners, who these days are also largely anonymous figures. Over the past fifty years, we have witnessed an explosive growth in new management theories and models, which have guided us through this period of extreme growth in the field of management and organisation. We are all familiar with the famous names Taylor and Fayol as pioneering thinkers in the field of organisational efficiency. Many other thinkers who focused on organisational practices followed in their footsteps. My favourites are Peter Drucker and Henry Mintzberg.

One of the most interesting concepts in the field of organisational management/leadership and organisational development is the concept introduced by Bernard Lievegoed around 1964. He described three phases in the development of an organisation. He called the first phase the pioneering phase. This is the traditional start of organisations as we have seen them emerge for centuries. Someone has an idea that responds to peoples perceived needs. This idea is put into practice by forming an initial small community of like-minded people with different talents and qualities who help to realise the idea. The

necessary technical skills, financial skills, personnel skills and so on are mobilised on an informal basis. The organisation expands if it survives the first few years. Over time, a crisis arises regarding the organisation's survival, manifested in the fact that, following continuous growth, the pioneering phase now leads to chaos, a loss of energy and a loss of money. This crisis is addressed with a more scientific approach to organisation. New ideas are adopted and introduced, and it is the introduction of managers into the organisation that ensures the whole becomes more structured and systematic. This is accompanied by further specialisation and standardisation. As a result, the organisation can grow further. Subsequently, new systems are introduced that make the organisation more effective and efficient and help management to maintain control. Lievegoed referred to this phase as the differentiation phase.

We see this development taking place continuously all over the world. Pioneers set up organisations that survive their first few years and begin to grow. They then need to be organised in a structured manner. As a result, society in most countries around the world has now become an organised society. All manner of organisations with all sorts of specialisms are now active and performing well. Most organisations have a short lifespan, but some can last for hundreds of years. This short life cycle of organisations as an organised community, which is managed by systems, ultimately also ends up in a crisis. This is the crisis of people becoming disconnected from their organisation. In my view, this is now also happening worldwide. Lievegoed has made predictions on this subject and proposed the third phase of organisations as a perspective for further development. He called this the integration phase. This means that people are once again placed at the centre. This begins with a focus on customers, employees, owners and suppliers as a horizontally collaborative community of

people. Next, the focus shifts to work processes rather than structure. How are things done, and why are they done in this way?

The manifestation of this quest to create an integrated business organisation is most clearly reflected in the emergence of three organisational development movements worldwide. These are the lean, learning and living organisational movements. In this article, I will describe these three movements and then add a fourth 'L' to the three, namely that of 'Leadership'.

The basic idea here is that the positive developmental impact of the three 'L's' (the lean, learning and living organisations) – as ways of opening ourselves up to a new approach to organisation that responds to the current crisis of people's increasing lack of engagement with their organisations at work – depends on a new perspective on leadership. To date, no truly new vision of leadership has been introduced to enable the three 'L's' to function in an innovative way. They are usually applied within the traditional management approach seen in the differentiated organisation; that is to say, they exist to enhance efficiency and effectiveness to generate better – and, above all, better financial – results for the privileged elite who lead the companies.

In this article, we introduce a vision of leadership that can ensure the other three L's begin to function in a new and innovative way, as intended by the originators of these ideas and the associated movements that have emerged from them.

A brief introduction to the concept of a lean, learning and vibrant living organisation.

These three movements of new ideas on organisational development, as we might call them, manifest the slow, almost imperceptible transformation of

organisations from a vertical, hierarchical, functional structure towards an organisation as a horizontal, networked, co-creative process.

The concept of the lean organisation arose from a growing interest on the part of its originators, Womack (US) and Jones (UK), in further exploring the idea that Bernard Lievegoed had investigated when creating the concept of the process organisation.

Lievegoed introduced the concept of the Cloverleaf organisation with its horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension is the process of generating responses to customer needs. The vertical dimension involves channelling information and resources to make this possible. At the intersection of the horizontal and vertical dimensions lies the leadership that provides direction to the organisational community. Womack and Jones described the case of Toyota, where these ideas were, in a sense, put into practice. All attention is focused on the customer's needs, the process flow, the avoidance of waste and the integration of suppliers into the process. People at work not only carry out their work processes but are also part of the process of continuous improvement. This leads to astonishing results. Later, Womack and Jones described these ideas in greater detail in the book *Lean Thinking*. Unfortunately, these ideas were mainly taken up by traditional managers and applied in the old-fashioned way, namely: using experts and lean techniques to make work processes more efficient without truly involving the people on the shop floor. This has a short-term effect on the company but does not lead to a long-term improvement in the performance of all those involved. To achieve this, a different way of thinking about management and leadership is required on the part of the company's management, and that seems to be the main obstacle to realising these brilliant ideas.

The concept of the learning organisation originated from the work of Peter Senge. He was fascinated by the skills people demonstrate and the process through which they can achieve mastery in their profession. His book *The Fifth Discipline* was published worldwide. It laid the foundations for a much greater focus on 'lifelong learning' and the ongoing processes of knowledge creation. It became clear that it is people who make the difference and that investing in people's development is the best way to ensure the sustained high performance of the organised community and of all those involved. The knowledge-creation process was seen as a dialogical process in which people share their experiences and insights and help one another to find new ideas and new ways of working. It is this knowledge creation that safeguards the organisation's survival, as it ensures that the organisation remains connected to the spirit of the times and is able to integrate new insights into its practices. Unfortunately, traditional management has transformed this idea into the notion of training people in the classroom and sending them to seminars where they are instructed in new concepts, which they then go on to put into practice. However, this does not work at all. There is little transfer from classroom learning to practice unless a specific reflective learning process is created within the organisation to facilitate this. There is no time or space for this because we are all too busy to set aside time for it and give it the necessary attention.

Aria de Geus introduced the concept of the 'living organisation' to the world. As a planner at Shell, he discovered that it was not really accurate to predict what might happen in the future by analysing all sorts of trends and conducting scientific research, but that it was far better to engage in dialogue with all sorts of people both within and outside the organisation to find out what they saw and thought about the future. It is the community of people who, collectively, possess the reliable wisdom to help this organisation discover what its next steps

might be. De Geus discovered that long-lasting organisations were those capable of transforming their community in the right way, identifying the right next steps for product development, and integrating new generations, particularly into the organisation's core and leadership communities.

Unfortunately, traditional management saw fit to set up special programmes for cultural development, draw up mission statements and communicate these to staff, and honour all the top-performing heroes. Over time, however, more and more people – managers and employees alike – have become stressed and frustrated by the increasing pressure to meet targets, the growing number of procedures and systems designed to improve efficiency, and the extreme level of control promoted by top management in the pursuit of ever-greater profitability.

In my view, these three very important drivers to find new ways of organising life have not really taken us any further, because they were not accompanied by the development of new ideas and practices in the field of organisational leadership.

Old and new leadership

It is our view that new developments in organisations – such as lean, learning and living organisational development – cannot truly take root unless a fourth development occurs at the same time, namely the development of a new approach to leadership. This is a key issue in contemporary organisational development. Over the past 70 years, organisations have undergone a transformation at almost every level, but there is one dimension that has remained unchanged to this day: our ideas and practices regarding leadership. Of course, there have been many new management concepts of various kinds, but they were all based on two enduring assumptions: hierarchy and functionality. Ultimately, it was all focused on making things work and achieving

success. In my doctoral thesis *Bewogen Organisaties* (Dynamic Organisations), which I published in 1998, I highlight this one-sided view of leadership. I could not find a single model or theory of management that focused on creating failures and on non-hierarchical approaches to responding to them, even though failures may ultimately be more central to the practice of management than sustained success. Nevertheless, something fundamental has changed in the way organisations operate over the past seventy years, mainly because of the rapid development of technological systems. Step by step, production processes, administrative processes, information processes and management processes have been influenced by the development of new technological systems through which we carry out these processes. The result is that all employees nowadays carry out their work largely independently with the aid of technology and systems, whilst being embedded in a broad network of contacts and relationships with other professionals, with whom they collaborate quite independently. It is now almost unheard of for people to spend years doing the same work in a fixed team with the same people, as was the case for most people 50 to 70 years ago.

Another trend I have observed is that people at different management levels collaborate much more with colleagues at the same level than with colleagues at other hierarchical levels. CEOs do so with CEOs, directors with directors, team leaders with team leaders, and professionals with professionals.

There are fewer opportunities for the various management levels and employees to collaborate horizontally. What makes it even more complicated and difficult is that the different levels place high demands on the other levels, yet they have little real contact with one another. I concluded that there is hardly any effective communication between management levels or with employees,

because the vertical way of working does not allow for it. People at work behave like functionaries and view others as means to achieve their own goals. Top management, in particular, regard other people as human resources who can be steered in certain directions. This steering takes place with the aid of numerous systems.

We have investigated why this has become increasingly complex and difficult over recent decades. The main reason we have identified is that the people involved have no sense of what needs to be done. The 'why' question is rarely asked, and when it is, those in charge say it will be addressed at a later stage. However, when people do not understand the purpose of what they are doing, they go in whatever direction best suits their own reality. This creates a disconnect and the processes grind to a halt.

These phenomena demonstrate that there is a great need for a different kind of leadership. For this reason, over the years we have researched and developed a new leadership practice within organisations where we ourselves have acted as horizontal leaders in an advisory capacity. We have also supported this research through a knowledge group comprising researchers and practitioners as part of our work as professors of leadership at universities in the north of the Netherlands.

We have termed this new leadership method 'horizontal leadership'. This 'horizontal leadership' is linked to a 'horizontal organisational structure'.

Horizontal leadership

We have discovered that there is a fundamental difference between management and leadership. Management is a role, whilst leadership is a communal process.

Nowadays, we have all sorts of managers who carry out specialised work.

Management is the function of organising matters. The manager uses various resources to achieve objectives. He or she organises the conditions in which other people can carry out a particular task and do so. This management function is difficult because it is often disconnected from specific customers and suppliers and from the actual work processes. It requires a keen sense of quality. Managers sit in meetings where they try to understand what is going on and attempt to make the right decisions.

Leadership, however, is a process within the organisation that ensures things run smoothly. It could be said that everyone active within an organisation is part of the leadership process. A professional would not be able to do their job properly if they did not act with leadership in mind. A team leader exercises leadership over their team in relation to other team leaders and the higher echelons. A head of department exercises leadership over their own department in relation to other departments. The director and the CEO all possess specific leadership qualities that they must put into practice. Only when people within organisations come together and engage in dialogue with one another from a leadership perspective are they able to understand one another and work together.

It is therefore very important that we come to realise that leadership is not just a matter for management, but also for professionals.

Leadership is then primarily about creating meaning together. It is primarily linked to processes of change and innovation. It is at the heart of what enables a community to function, collaborate and learn, and to move together in a shared direction. This means that the traditional top-down style of leadership based on power will be less effective in today's organised economies, and that

we need a different approach to leadership that helps us deal with the complexity of modern organisations.

We can therefore link leadership to three qualities of organisation by managers and professionals working together, namely:

• Creating effective processes that work and serve the customer

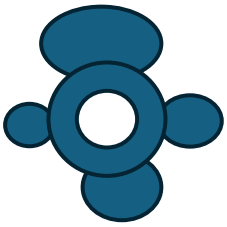
• Engaging in dialogue and collaboration as a mutually meaningful activity between people

• Connecting people's personal stories with the organisation's narrative.

To achieve this, we need reflective spaces and moments within organisations where we can think together about the meaning of what we do, the issues we need to address, what isn't working and can be stopped, and finding direction in goals and strategies that we can realise together. To achieve this, senior management must move towards the middle, towards the heart of what is happening. Middle management must work together to tackle the problems and help professionals to change and develop their working methods, particularly in relation to the needs and requirements of the customer.

Instead of viewing organisations through a structural lens, we are beginning to see the organisation as a series of interconnected circles.

OLD 

NEW 

Leadership dialogue

Instead of a top-down approach to leadership, we are now challenged to learn a horizontal approach to leadership dialogue. The first prerequisite for this is that we learn to talk to and listen to one another as leaders, rather than as people in specific roles. Although we have different roles and responsibilities, we meet as individuals in the leadership dialogue. At its core, leadership depends entirely on the person and the way in which that person exercises leadership. In our research into leadership over the past ten years, during which we have spoken to hundreds of leaders, it is striking that they all base their leadership on the skills and insights they have gained from personal experience. Leadership theories can help us to understand better, but they cannot help us to act as leaders. Our leadership is based on our own personal capital and operates in dialogue with the leadership capital that another person has built up in their life. What really stimulates this development of leadership is that we begin to see one another as leaders and engage in dialogue with one another as leaders. This is a level of interaction in which we can understand one another. This can bring us together, whilst almost everything else in life divides us.

Leadership community

Organisations are communities of people who share a common challenge and task. They exist to serve their customers and other stakeholders, to create a meaningful life and to support other organisations in doing so. It is possible for all of us to be part of leadership communities within organisations. We can do this by opening the horizontal space between us and tackling together the real

problems that concern us. We can become initiators who take steps to tackle the problems ourselves. We can learn together how to do this. We can improve our work processes and help one another by collaborating in a creative and meaningful way.

By being part of the leadership community, we enable ourselves to be part of the lean, learning and living processes that help us to lead meaningful lives together.

To do this, we need to change our guiding beliefs about leadership within our society, as well as some of the leadership practices of organisations as they operate today.

Five fundamental changes

To create a new form of leadership and a more horizontally organised society, I see five fundamental social principles and associated practices that we should radically change; that we should let go of as the framework defining the leadership dimensions of socio-economic life in our society.

The first thing we must let go of is the automatic link between being a manager and leading people. We expect managers to lead people. However, they are too busy organising resources to be able to act as inspiring partners to professionals. There is a vertical, hierarchical power dynamic that prevents them from connecting on a personal level. Functionally, they must collaborate with subordinates and superiors. This renders, for example, the entire performance appraisal process between manager and professional meaningless. It creates unhealthy dependencies and blocks creative collaboration. It certainly does not foster leadership in everyone. We can view management as the fulfilment of a role, just as all professionals do. When it comes to leadership, we can initiate a

horizontal leadership dialogue amongst all members to help one another do the right things in the right way. Top managers and selected process owners are the ones who initiate and facilitate these leadership dialogues.

The second thing we need to let go of is the automatic link between educational attainment, job level and remuneration. We still consider it normal that if you have a higher level of education, you can aspire to a higher position within the organisation and that this comes with a higher salary. This reflects the vertical dimension of organisation. We see top managers with very high salaries, bonuses and all manner of privileges, who are looked after by secretaries and staff who merely carry out routine tasks, and who can then blame everyone else if anything goes wrong. On the other hand, I see professionals with complex jobs and high levels of responsibility who earn only a modest salary, even though they are the ones delivering the real results that matter. There is an urgent need to reassess the challenges posed by different roles and positions within the organisation and to establish new links between jobs, skills and rewards.

The third thing we must let go of is the hierarchical, functional top-down and bottom-up approach when it comes to designing and implementing meaningful change. It has been demonstrated in various ways that change processes usually fail. This is because they are carried out in the same way as our operational processes. However, change is a different process from operational work. Whereas operational work is output-oriented, change is more input-oriented. It is about incorporating new perspectives, new ideas and new skills. Change is also primarily linked to people's inner world – their thoughts, feelings and actions. Change takes place in the inner world and subsequently manifests itself in the external world. With operational activities, it is the other way round. Through

our activities, we create a new external world, and over time this influences people's inner world.

The fourth aspect we must let go of is the automatic distinction between employer and employee, which encompasses groups on both sides. In many countries, there is a sharp rise in the number of self-employed workers operating as sole traders. They work on a contract basis and have more than one client. They must carry out all processes themselves, from marketing and sales to tax returns and travel arrangements. Even within organisations, employees no longer wish to commit themselves entirely to the company they work for. They want to safeguard the boundaries of their involvement and, above all, look after their own interests. Managers are now employees too and, just like other professionals, can easily be dismissed if they do not perform well. There is no longer any visible owner. Representatives of owners and employees negotiate with one another but do so as employees of their own organisations. In the future, it will be better to see ourselves as individual entrepreneurs collaborating with other entrepreneurs. We all work for clients and enter into contracts. Society will then need a general framework to support people who, due to their disability, are unable to participate in this development. Above all, we look after people who are making the transition to a new status in society – from student to entrepreneur, from worker to pensioner, from practising one profession to practising another.

The fifth thing we must let go of is the unethical behaviour of top leaders, managers and professionals when it comes to serving customers and suppliers. In this new era, people at all levels are confronted with the moral implications of their work. We have developed a sense of what is acceptable and support sustainable practices, rather than the abuse of resources that destroys not only

the Earth but also people's inner worlds. A moral conscience is what we all need today. It is now up to the individual to become aware of their own views regarding moral conduct within an organised context. The ethical question is on the table, and we can no longer ignore it. We can help one another to address this moral question and respond to human values that support the Earth and human development in a healthy way.

In conclusion

If we could evolve together towards a more horizontally organised and led society, in which people work and live within an organised context, we could find new ways of dealing with critical issues together. We would all can demonstrate leadership and contribute. This would take a great deal of pressure off people at work, as we could put an end to many pointless activities. We could connect more deeply with the essential elements of working life: serving the customer, collaborating with one another, taking the initiative and reflecting together on the meaning of it all. For many of us, this would lead to a more fulfilling life. It would free up energy that we could direct towards those who are unable to contribute, but who play an important role in shaping a community that looks after one another.

18. From a vertical structure to a horizontal map

The word 'organisation' is rarely directly linked to terms such as 'customer' or 'process', even though customers and processes define the life of an organisation. The organisational structure is formally organised vertically, whilst customers and processes constitute the horizontal and dynamic essence of organisation. Let's focus all our attention on the process towards the customer or target group, using a 'map' as a tool. How does that work? Experiences and examples.

Hierarchical management or management based on the map

The organisational structure consists of hierarchy and functionality. There are hierarchical layers, and within these there are various functional units. Everyone is pigeonholed, has a role and a place in the organisational chart. We may well be accustomed to this from time immemorial, given that for centuries the invisible world was depicted as hierarchical and functional.

However, if we take the customer and the process that shapes the organisation as our starting point, we can better depict the organisation as a map. Showing the Netherlands as a map with towns, villages, waterways, streets and squares gives you an impression of where everything fits into the bigger picture.

The map illustrates the quality of the connections

How do we draw the map of an organisation? Sketch and name the units, teams, individuals and routes that are passable and connect. In this way, we discover how the various parts are arranged in the right or wrong proportions.

Sometimes there are little-used main roads alongside busy sandy paths or ‘elephant trails’ that have emerged without official status.
On the map, we can indicate which units focus on customers and suppliers, which units work internally – such as HR and finance – and which teams provide internal services. How far apart are these units? Some are close together, whilst others are on the periphery and far removed from the central hub of activity. The map of the here and now shows us where there are bottlenecks, where the traffic jams are, but also where the process flows smoothly and delivers good results. The map represents the organisation. Within it are units, and within those units we see teams at work, comprising individuals.
We can see that certain units are too large and unwieldy, that there are teams which do not operate as a team and fail to liaise with other teams.

Example 1

A similar situation exists in a certification service organisation where several large units, each with many specialists, form a structure that is difficult to manage. Client assignments are allocated to the professionals in a rather haphazard manner. Furthermore, a focus on results and financial health is poorly represented. Management decides to work with small teams, each serving its own market segment and given responsibility for the results and the smooth running of the work process. Each team has a team leader whose task is to manage the team process with their colleagues. Management, too, consists of a small team that acts as a coach for the operational teams, client teams and internal teams. Very quickly, a greater dynamism becomes noticeable; the professionals are pleased with this change, as it gives them

more scope to operate. Teams can concentrate on client requirements as well as on their professional working methods.

The map shows us the ‘red spots’ in the social interactions taking place within the infrastructure. Rather than undertaking sweeping functional reorganisations, we can achieve a better-functioning whole through small adjustments. It is primarily the work processes that suffer because of an imperfect map in which the relationships are disrupted.

Example 2

In a hospital, various processes are not running smoothly; there are disputes between some departments; and the dual management of units is functioning poorly or inadequately.

Various attempts have been made to bring about improvement; training courses were attended, but the results were insufficient and the same issues soon resurfaced. In a meeting with the director, we examined several specific problems, such as the lack of cooperation among certain specialists and two departments failing to work together, to the detriment of patients. The A&E department was permanently understaffed and was becoming increasingly stagnant, much to the frustration of GPs and patients.

I suggested he lay the organisational chart on the floor of his spacious office. Using a traditional structural diagram, sheets bearing the names of departments were arranged in constantly shifting configurations. It soon became apparent that the grouping of departments had become historically entangled and that many ‘bottlenecks’ had arisen. Once the red spots had been identified, a new map was creatively drawn up, significantly improving the relationships between the departments.

In this hospital, dual leadership had been established for each unit. A doctor and a manager jointly formed the leadership team. Whilst this could function well, in many cases this collaboration proved not to work effectively. Time and again, conflicting interests between doctors and managers came to the fore, requiring constant intervention from higher up. Through a process involving doctors and managers, the organisational map was redrawn and the issues requiring improvement were identified.
Each management duo had formulated its own improvement target, and decisive action was then taken to address weaknesses within the organisation. Support departments such as human resources and finance were also scrutinised, and there too there was considerable potential for improvement in how processes were structured and decisions were made.

During these improvement processes, carried out within the context of the new roadmap, the issue of patient care also came to the fore. It transpired that quite a few patients were staying in hospital for reasons that were unclear. The person with final responsibility set up an early Monday morning meeting to discuss patient cases with an unclear status and to make decisions which were then implemented in consultation with those involved, including GPs.

The map and the work processes

Instead of a vertical structure that says nothing about how things work, it is better for management to draw up a horizontal map within which the processes that matter take place. Processes that are poorly designed and which cause stagnation cause headaches, frustration and dissatisfaction for the people working within such a process.

Rather than lecturing people on how to perform better, it makes more sense to examine the workflow itself.

In doing so, we identify the bottlenecks that hinder the work. With ideas for improvement – and sometimes a radical redesign of the work process – many unpleasant situations can be prevented.
A work process must have flow, cause no waste, prevent time wastage, facilitate good collaboration and, finally, give the people involved a sense of fulfilment because the process is meaningful and serves others well.

Example 3

A somewhat unusual situation arose at the hospital mentioned earlier. One of the surgeons had to be admitted himself for surgical treatment. From the very first moment of the process right through to the very last, there were countless irritating shortcomings in the way the surgeon was treated as a patient. His conclusion was that, as a patient, he had to take control of the process himself if it was to proceed to any degree of satisfaction. Afterwards, this surgeon wrote a friendly note to the management regarding everything that had not worked well for him as a client of his own hospital. This provided a great deal of useful material for improvements in every possible way. In particular, the admission process, diagnosis and administrative processing of patients resulted in a great deal of uncertainty and waiting time for the patient.

As a result of this situation, a trial was conducted to ensure a direct and rapid flow of diagnosis, administrative processing, treatment and aftercare for a patient/client – all within the space of an hour. This led to the fragmentation across roles, departments and areas of expertise being bridged by a clear

process that was designed and implemented across units. This proved feasible in 80 per cent of cases. For the remaining 20 per cent of complex cases, a separate pathway was established. First aid in the event of accidents was also strengthened, and working methods were successfully improved. Clients and GPs were surprised and amazed that this had suddenly become possible. Within the hospital, it was observed that this brought a great deal more peace of mind to the clinicians and their support staff.

Service organisations

Service organisations, especially those with an extensive infrastructure covering a wide area, benefit from this approach. Mapping out the process and reviewing the journey the customer goes through provides a deeper insight into where things are working well and where the balance is disrupted. Mapping out the process, identifying problem areas, reviewing and improving processes is, in essence, a regular necessity for a well-run organisation in which the client is at the centre and the organisational community can carry out its tasks in a meaningful way.

In conclusion

To conclude, here are a few more aspects of mapping out the organisation and improving processes. The ‘top’ is not at the very top but is situated in the centre of the map. Around the ‘top’, units have a clear place within the whole.

Within the units, there are teams: customer teams, specialist teams and service teams. In an appropriate manner, teams and units can undergo a development that is meaningful for both the customer and the community.

Vision and policy can be communicated in a targeted manner because the routes are clear and the paths are accessible. Staff are part of teams where individual and collective tasks can be carried out consciously.

Every unit and every team have a leader who guides the functioning of the team and unit, creates favourable conditions and, with aligned objectives and policy principles, can guide the team in its development.

Units and teams are provided with the tools and data they need to steer their own course and to implement improvements independently.

A vibrant, customer-focused community, working together within well-functioning processes and with the desired outcomes in mind, is possible. By keeping the bigger picture in mind, small changes can have a major impact on the smooth running of processes and collaboration. This also prevents the need for complex reorganisations along hierarchical lines.

19. The decline of institutional social frameworks as a meaningful context.

What now?

A personal note

It is now 2025. I was born in 1947. I have lived for 77 years in constantly changing circumstances. My father and mother both married at the age of 33 and soon had five children. I was the third. My father, born in The Hague, worked as a journalist, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *De Zuid-Limburger*, PR manager for the Dutch State mines, PR manager for the municipality of The Hague and PR director for the Holland-America Line. He died at the age of 60. My mother (88) was a primary school teacher until her marriage and looked after the family. The family lived according to Catholic traditions; the children received an education suited to them and they have all gone on to do well in life. The roles at home were crystal clear. Father was the head of the household, mother looked after the children, and the children fitted perfectly into this family life. At the age of 17, I went to study sociology in Rotterdam, first at the NEH and later at Erasmus University. There, a social world opened that you could step into as a student. I was involved in student politics, but as a member of the parish council in The Hague, I also conducted research into how Sundays and Mondays relate to the lives of working people. Two separate worlds: religious life and working life. After graduating at the age of 21 and completing a year's military service as a midshipman, I applied for a job at Shell International, whose head office was located close to my parents' home. I was hired with the task of initiating organisational development at Shell companies. This was something new at the time and would grow into an intensive drive to raise working practices – particularly leadership and collaboration – to a higher level. After eight years of intensive work at Shell, I decided to move to the NPI Institute for Organisational

Development, founded by Prof. Dr Bernard Lievegoed. The NPI offered me the opportunity to carry out consultancy work worldwide. I was able to guide organisations and communities in their development, particularly by introducing a methodology for change. This development work was based on a view of human nature that we, as colleagues, explored and developed together with our clients. Human beings as 'I'-beings, living in body, soul and spirit, capable of developing and taking responsibility. Developing leadership skills, professional skills, social skills and conceptual skills made it possible to 'turn a ten-cent coin into a twenty-five-cent coin' – something my mother had considered impossible ('A ten-cent coin will never become a twenty-five-cent coin,' she often said). Writing and publishing books on the insights, experiences and concepts that emerged from my work, teaching leadership to students as a lecturer and professor, and illustrating my own books, brought me into contact with many facets of society. From the age of 28, I played the saxophone, performed in jazz bands, composed jazz pieces and, for several years now, have been composing pieces for piano and string quartet. Looking back on my life, I am grateful for how I have been able to chart my own course and seize many opportunities in society to lead a meaningful and creative life. At the same time, I observed how all the institutional bodies of society were expanded a

nd managed, resulting in a massive increase in regulations, laws, rules, protocols and data recording, which led to the comprehensive bureaucratisation of society. It also became clear how every community was influenced not only locally but also internationally, leading to increasing complexity and, consequently, a desire for control amongst those in charge. Over the course of my life, I saw how essential social institutions began to lose their power. First, the churches, which in a short space of time lost their complete hold on people's moral lives and their social interactions. Next came political degeneration,

whereby the unifying force of the established ideals and convictions of political parties was lost. This was followed by the collapse of key institutions, including the tax system, transport, schools, hospitals and universities. Next came the business world, which, under pressure from legislation, regulatory scrutiny and technological innovations, began to lose its cohesive power over the people who worked there. Only 20 per cent of people still have a lasting connection with their organisation, some research says it is only 5 % of the people at work. When I started out, that figure was certainly 80 per cent. I must conclude that what had been painstakingly built up over centuries – based on a sense of purpose, solidarity and community spirit – right up until the two world wars, was subsequently rapidly dismantled. Moreover, since the Industrial Revolution and the far-reaching automation that followed in all areas, we have increasingly paid the price in successive crises: financial crisis, climate crisis, mental health issues affecting people of all ages. These crises can no longer be resolved by our weakened social institutions, and it seems that these crises are here to stay and that everyone will have to bear the consequences.

The social development of society over the past 70 years

Seventy years ago, society was structured along fixed institutional lines. These lines were primarily shaped by religious beliefs.

Each religion had its own church, its own school, its own infrastructure, its own businesses and its own political frameworks. In Dutch society, one principle prevailed: the ‘polder principle’. One had to bridge differences in views and customs. This required a pragmatic attitude.

In the 1960s, a social youth movement emerged that called many of the customs of daily life into question. The Netherlands had become a country with a stuffy atmosphere and needed a breath of fresh air. It was not only the Provo

movement that represented this desire to break with the established order; almost all sections of society were seeking renewal and creative initiatives.

Previously, these innovations had been termed ‘alternatives’, but they later proved to be the seeds of new social customs. Pop music, total football, religious renewal, new political parties, organisational development in the business world, open colleges and universities, the emancipation of family life and many other driving forces set society and the people within it in motion.

The Netherlands gained a global reputation for innovation, social solidarity and prosperity. Schoolmasterly and development practices were pushed into the background. They were replaced by management thinking. Models and concepts gained popularity, and control became an increasingly important aspect of a comprehensively organised existence.

The parallel technological revolution, which culminated in the internet, email, algorithms and now artificial intelligence, has transformed us into screen-gazing individuals, with social interaction with family and friends becoming increasingly limited in our lives.

International developments such as migration, a rise in senseless violence, and feelings of uncertainty and insecurity began to dominate people’s minds and hearts. This led to the questioning of long-held democratic principles and the reinforcement of an increasingly authoritarian stance amongst world leaders, which was emulated by others. The result: institutional bodies are losing their binding effect

Democracy in a country depends on the proper functioning of social institutions such as the tax authorities, the police, the armed forces, the health service, education and infrastructure such as roads, trains and aeroplanes. These

institutions function under good leadership. People who work in these institutions feel that they are making a meaningful contribution to the well-being of others. Customer awareness is important, as is involving stakeholders within the organisational context. This creates a solid network that enables the country's political and democratic governance. However, these social institutions lose their solid foundation when they are burdened with excessive demands from citizens and politicians.

A few examples.

The global reputation of the Dutch tax authorities was jeopardised when they were forced to adopt processes that were unfamiliar to them. Not only the collection of taxes, but now also the payment of subsidies and benefits. These are two completely different processes that require a completely different approach from all those involved.

Educational institutions are burdened with administrative record-keeping and critical inspection visits, which divert attention away from the core process: the interaction between teacher and student.

Insurance companies determine the availability of medicines.

The government-imposed coronavirus measures are paralysing society, which is hitting young people and the elderly particularly hard.

Migration and the influx of people from other countries, where their lives and survival are at stake, are leading to a radical closure of borders.

Wars over blood and land, trade wars, racist domination and oppression are taking place worldwide.

Crises large and small

All these developments are leading to crises, both major and minor. Everything we take for granted is being swept away by violence.

Wars on different continents.

Conflicts within national communities, for example politics between the left and the right.

Disagreements on boards of directors.

Conflicts between married partners.

Neighbourhood disputes.

Internal conflicts within people's own soul.

In the past, we were able to keep many things outside our own home, but nowadays everyone is confronted with conflicts and crises at various levels. I see this as a sign that every individual is confronted with the question of meaning: what is the meaning of all this, and what meaning can I create for myself to be empowered to transform these crises and conflicts into a meaningful next step in my life and in the lives of people and communities?

A local and a global order

Everyone lives in different contexts, ranging from the private sphere to work, from the local to the regional, from the national to the continental, from the global to humanity. We cannot escape this reality because of the global economy and global politics. The various media bring this to our attention daily.

The old boundaries are blurring, and the world's population is left to its own devices. This raises the question for all of us: how do I, together with others, give shape and meaning to my life and to community life?

What can we expect in the coming years?

After the Second World War, a social undercurrent emerged that we might characterise as ‘we help one another with our own resources’. Instead of being fully embedded in and able to rely on a strong social infrastructure, we are now increasingly dependent on our own initiative and sense of purpose.

In the Netherlands, more than 4 million people are actively involved in informal care. This applies not only to physical support, but above all to mental support. It is the encounter with the other person, the conversation with them, that counts. In addition, there are an increasing number of self-employed people who must shape the entire process of work and private life themselves. To this end, they form networks of colleagues who help and support one another, particularly in difficult times. On a small as well as a larger scale, ‘Islands of Humanity’ are emerging, as Bernard Lievegoed described them. On these islands of humanity, we learn not to belittle one another, but rather to see each other as a little greater.

This means that personal leadership will play an important role in our coexistence. Not vertical, hierarchical leadership, but horizontal, dialogical personal leadership.

Living and acting from the ‘I’-spirit within the soul is an art that we can practise together in our collaboration and co-existence. It bridges all cultural differences and is based on a universal truth. This truth has been passed down to us over generations by philosophers and other leaders of humanity, all inspired by spiritual beings such as Christ and Michael. It is about love, freedom and respect.

Let us rid these forces of all historical abuse, of the desire to use them for our own convictions and liberate ourselves as free people to realise our ideals

together. These are forces available to every human being if they show consideration for others and put this into practice and focus on the (unknown) other as a way of living in society. This can be supported by good horizontal leadership in all institutions at all levels, less bureaucracy and hierarchical management, and greater involvement of people on the shop floor in the development of the organisation and of themselves.

20. The search for meaning = the search for the soul

The question of the meaning of life

For over three thousand years, people have been wondering what the meaning of their lives is. Over that long period, this question has yielded incredibly beautiful and valuable contributions. Philosophers and many others have reflected on this question, and they did so through a curious dialogue with others. The common thread running through all these reflections is the idea that the question of the meaning of life is the central question for our coexistence and collaboration.

For centuries, the church and the state were expected to answer people's quest for meaning. People felt connected to the community to which they belonged. Even within organisations and companies, there was a natural bond between people and the organisation right up until the last century. It seems that this sense of natural connection is disappearing on all fronts. Some time ago, I read in a study that in the Netherlands only 5 to 20 per cent of people feel a connection to the organisation they work for, whilst 80 per cent do not. In Spain and Italy, that figure stands at 5 per cent or less. When I started working in the 1960s (at Shell), that figure was still at least 80 per cent of people. You may well wonder why this question of meaning is not asked frequently and regularly within organisations, and why we do not discuss it with one another, even though it is essential for a healthy society and effective collaboration to always ask this question of meaning.

In *Trouw*, a Dutch newspaper, I read the following: "Meaning is not something theoretical. It is simply a lens through which to look more closely at your own work and life," says Peter Henk Steenhuis. What exactly is meaning? According to the philosopher Gudde, giving meaning used to be primarily the preserve of

religion, which, strictly speaking, should be referred to as the ‘giver of meaning’. In the past, the meaning of our existence was bestowed upon us from above. In our secularised society, meaning has, for many of us, become something we must find for ourselves. It has shifted from ‘receiving meaning’ to ‘giving meaning ourselves’, and the act of ‘giving meaning’ thus becomes ‘shaping meaning’. Meaning is something you can shape; it is a calling. But what, then, is meaning? To answer this question, Gudde has examined the word ‘meaning’ closely. Meaning refers, first and foremost, to the corporeal, the physical. Gudde called this the sensory or the delightful, the pleasant. Giving meaning is also the aesthetic, the beautiful. But giving meaning also stands for the reasonable, the rational – that which can be put into words, that which one does or ought to do. And finally, meaning also signifies the meaningful – that you stand behind the goals of your life or your work. Gudde: “Memorise this and make sure that all four are reflected in your life. It may take a few years, it may take your whole life, but you know what you must do.”

How and why

It therefore makes sense within organisations for managers and staff to engage with the concept of meaning at these four levels. This has a significant impact. How does this work? Starting from our sensory perception of the problem we encounter in practice – for example, ‘something or someone is not functioning properly’ – we ask the questions ‘what is the problem and what is the solution?’ or ‘what change is needed to ensure things continue to run smoothly?’. Attention can then possibly turn to the questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’. The ‘how’ question might be: ‘How can something like this arise and come to light, and how do we

deal with it?', and the 'why' question might be: 'Why is this problem arising now, but also why should we tackle it now?'

By asking the 'how' and 'why' questions, we move from the visible world of content to the invisible world of process, and the question becomes 'how and why this invisible world speaks to us as a process, and how we can articulate this perception'. Here, ultimately, we encounter a constant theme in the centuries-long reflections on human meaning, namely that we live in two different worlds: the 'world of being' and the 'world of becoming' (Nietzsche). The world of being, to which we belong, is given to us and possesses a certain predictability, because meaning is present by nature. The world of becoming, with its appearances and disappearances, is a world beyond our control and, unlike the world of being, is in a sense unpredictable, to which we ourselves must add meaning. According to Nietzsche, the world of being is relatively clear and predictable, whilst the world of becoming is complex and difficult. According to Kant, we must accept the world of being, but we can explore and shape the world of becoming. In short, the world of our organised lives is a world of becoming and requires constant attention to give it meaning.

New urgency

In my view, the question of human meaning has taken on a new urgency considering the growing tension between the world of being and the world of becoming in our organised lives. As human beings, we live in our own organised world, which is engulfing the substance of the cosmic-natural world with increasing force. The earth, plants, animals and people are the victims of this. Even what we take for granted in our relationships with one another seems to be disappearing, and we sometimes ask ourselves, in desperation, how we should interact with one another. For many people, institutional frameworks

such as the church, politics and the economy no longer provide obvious answers to the questions we have. Crises such as the financial crisis, the coronavirus crisis and the crisis of meaning in our spiritual lives reveal this to us and make it tangible; they permeate all our lives.

In my books *Bezieling* and, more recently, *De ziel*, I have sought to connect the complex world of our self-organised existence with the fundamental questions of meaning that we have long been asking ourselves – questions about the origin, the soul and the freedom of the individual and of humanity. My aim was to discover how, drawing on inspiration and a sense of meaning, we can become more aware of our organised existence. It became clear to me that the question of the soul, as a question of meaning, was originally central to practical human existence, but that over the course of the past four centuries, the scientific approach to our practical existence has, in a sense, relegated this question exclusively to the religious sphere of human life and thus to the periphery – to what has become a 'Sunday question'. In our 24/7 economy, there is no clear place for the question of meaning and the soul. It is time that we take up the question of the soul and the meaning of our organised existence once more and bring these into a continuous dialogue with one another in our work and private lives. We are bringing Sunday into Monday.

The soul has lost its significance for us

Whereas the soul used to be central to human existence and the meaning of life was focused on preserving the soul, today, for many, the soul is a marginal phenomenon that sometimes still lingers on the fringes of our existence. Because we have surrendered to a material existence, an organised existence, a self-created existence, a self-fulfilling existence, and have lost the certainty that we are part of an eternal divine creation, from which we originate and to which

we return, we are condemned to lead a hectic and busy life, in which everything we create and make must also be dealt with by us. The price we pay for this is the constant search for what gives meaning to life and what can fulfil us: a clear call to open ourselves up to the soul.

3,000 years of research into the soul: an unsolvable problem

In his new book *Die Seele* (*The Soul*), Ole Martin Hoystad summarises his research into the history of the soul as 3,000 years of cultural history as follows: “Just as love was ‘invented’ in the High Middle Ages and defined by images and stories, of which the heart was the symbol, so too was love in practice. It was the same with the soul, which was ‘invented’ in ancient Greece. Once ‘invented’ and constructed through images and stories, it becomes part of our conception of humanity and, in turn, influences it. We can scarcely imagine a human being without a soul. It was not God, but humankind, who ‘invented’ the soul. The soul is an individual and personal entity. We ourselves are responsible for developing the soul, but we can also lose it if we fail to do so.”

Plato saw the soul as a divine creation bestowed upon humankind; Aristotle saw the soul as that which moves the body. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Arendt are enthusiastic about the soul as that which can make a person truly human – namely, freely expressing one’s own being and that of the other – yet they note how we, as human beings, seem to fail at this time and again.

The study of the soul

How can we explore the question of meaning and the soul in organised contexts today?

The soul finds one of its most striking expressions in the word, the Dutch concept, ‘bezieling’. A word that does not exist in many other languages.

The Dutch philosopher Haring once put it as follows in a newspaper interview: ‘I do not believe that a soul exists, but I am fascinated by “bezieling”’. In my view, ‘bezieling’ expresses a force that fills us at a particular moment, a force of consciousness that springs from the human ‘I’, the individual human spirit in its encounter with the other.

You could see it this way: over time, the soul has evolved from an autonomous force originating in the spiritual world and manifesting itself in human beings within an earthly context – an earthly institutional body – into an interpersonal process in which the other who appears in the situation represents my responsibility; this is also the reasoning of the philosopher Levinas. From a vertical descent of the soul to a horizontal, dialogical creation of the soul.

The soul is connected to the mystery of our lives

The question of the soul is deeply connected to the mystery of our lives. To achieve a more conscious connection with this mystery of life, we can turn our attention to what is going on within us. We observe the thoughts that flow through us, the feelings with which we live. We reflect on the actions we take and the impulses underlying them, as well as on the effects they bring about. We discover that there is an autonomous entity within us, our own autonomous ‘self’. In this way, we notice that we encounter certain situations time and again, that we face certain challenges time and again, that there are enduring fascinations, recurring challenges and recurring feelings, that judgements arise and decisions are made. We can delve deeper into ourselves and set out to explore. We discover the immense richness of our lives, our experiences, our insights, our encounters, our confrontations. In this way, we can savour the fruits of our lives; we begin to ‘see’ the meaning of our lives, to ‘listen’ to the value of our lives.

The soul manifests itself in our movement and in our sense of wonder

What is the challenge for the soul in the process of finding meaning? A living soul comes into being through movement and wonder. Movement of our body, but also openness to what moves us. Movement is linked to wonder. We are not closed off; rather, we are an open soul in motion. As soon as we move, all our senses are activated. We feel, see, hear, smell and taste. But our sense of balance also becomes active, as do our sense of life, our sense of language and our sense of the 'self'. In our body, everything revolves around movement: breathing, blood flow, the movement of fluids, the movement of the skin and the movement of organs. As soon as something stops moving, life withdraws from the body – our body of movement – in which our energy and life force, as well as our basic memory – that which has always driven us – are at work. Connected to this body of movement is the body of experience. We gain experiences, particularly through encounters that stimulate and awaken us. We radiate a certain mood, experience what is happening around us and build up a body of experience that transforms these experiences into insights. Linked to this is the process of internalising and learning, which in turn is a task of our 'I'.

This process of movement and experience is fostered by an attitude of wonder. Living with questions, opening yourself up, letting something in, wanting to explore and integrate, ensures that the world, as it wishes to reveal itself, appears and speaks to you.

Frederic Gros allows us to experience this in his wonderful book *Wandern, ein philosophischer Führer* (Walking, a Philosophical Guide): "It is one of the secrets of walking: a slow approach to the landscapes gradually makes them familiar. Like a friendship that grows through regular encounters. The same is

true of the outline of a mountain, which you carry with you all day and which you can see ever more clearly and sharply as the light changes. When you're travelling on foot, nothing moves quickly; you notice how the hills draw nearer and the landscape changes. When you walk, the present becomes tangible. The world permeates the body. The landscape is a tapestry of flavours, colours and scents that permeates the body" (p. 23).

The soul is expressed in our language, our memory and our conscience

Over the centuries, through movement and experience, three qualities of the soul have become increasingly evident: the soul as our language, the soul as our memory, the soul as our conscience.

As philosophers have shown us: the soul is expressed through language. We express everything through language; we communicate, understand, share and work through language. A multitude of languages has emerged, and new languages are still being developed. There are not only national languages and dialects, but also working languages, professional languages, management languages, organisational languages and secret languages, which emerge and persist at any given moment. Language enables us to express our thoughts, feelings and impulses of will, and to share them with others. Those who master a language can play a leading role in the community where that language is spoken. At school, we learn to read, write and do arithmetic, and later also other languages in all the subjects we encounter. Can I understand and master this language – for example, the language of mathematics, chemistry, English, history or computing? If you do not master the language, you fall behind; if you do not understand the language, you fall behind. The same applies to organisational languages.

A second manifestation of the developing human soul is memory. We can store what happens in our memory. What was originally a primitive form of memory has developed over the centuries into a comprehensive memory. First and foremost, we have a biographical memory and can recall many things from our lives in the here and now. We have a short-term memory that stores current events. We have a factual memory, and through this we can store a great deal of knowledge in factual records. If our memory fails us, we are deprived. With modern technology, we can store, build up and fill a vast number of memories. We can record and store everything: texts, images, figures. Moreover, this memory becomes accessible to anyone who knows the access code.

A third manifestation of the soul's development is our conscience. Gradually, we have learnt to realise that it is not desirable to kill, abuse, dominate or manipulate one another. A moral consciousness is developing in people, albeit not in everyone. Freedom, equality and fraternity form the basis of conscience. A democratic system gives conscience a chance; there is power and a countervailing force, there is a government and a parliament. Conscience plays an important role in faith, art and philosophy. Do we allow ourselves to be guided by moral principles, or do we, for example, follow selfish motives at the expense of others? The poverty of others appeals to our conscience; injustice and discrimination appeal to our conscience; dictatorship and tyranny appeal to our conscience; abuse and manipulation appeal to our conscience.

If we become aware of how our daily lives are organised through language,

memory and conscience, we can gain a sense of just how strongly the soul shapes our organised lives, and how the development of our soul is itself a development within organised language, memory and conscience.

The soul is our actions and our thoughts

When we are in action, the soul is results oriented. We want to achieve something. We want to cook well and enjoy our food, carry out and complete a fun project, do the housework, and ensure that discussions run smoothly. We want to see the effect of our actions and be able to assess whether they are good. The soul is therefore the sum of our abilities and what comes from our hands. Our drive, our character, our energy, our knowledge, our skills and our attitude all come into play and become effective. It is wonderful when our actions are 'in the flow' – flowing, moving forward, helping us progress. It is the processes through which we act that either enable or hinder this. At some point, things may also stagnate; we lose the joy in what we do, and frustrations may arise. That is when it is time to pause for a moment and reflect. We reflect on how things have gone and what may have hindered our progress. We can engage in this reflection together with those involved in the process. This includes the people with whom we have collaborated during this process. The soul needs reflection to recharge and to see and experience the meaning of what we do once more. Whilst the time for action often arises from what is asked of us, the time for reflection is something we must create ourselves. This is an art of living, an art of the soul. In that sense, our own 'self' is the agent that must ask this of our soul, and sometimes even demand it.

By linking our own leadership and the leadership dialogue with others to our organised lives through purpose and community-building, by doing justice to the fourfold purpose and focusing our attention on it, we will be better able to deal meaningfully with the problems we face together and thus lead fulfilled and meaningful lives and develop more consciously as human beings, as souls.

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