

## **Lasting Results through Leadership training?**

*Develop (project)managers through learning to lead based on imagination and abundance!*

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### **Category of the paper**

Experience-based article

## **Lasting results through leadership training?**

*Develop managers through learning to lead based on imagination and abundance!*

### **Summary**

In our view, effective consulting for leadership entails: training and coaching managers to lead their teams to valuable and concrete organizational results through instilling high levels of motivation and reducing the amount of spent energy, also in contexts with conflicting interests. This article describes this vision of leadership consulting, based on literature, and we show how a manager can master this approach through a unique, intense management-development programme entitled 'Providing Leadership.' The programme consists of three parts: 17 full days of plenary sessions, over a period of 6 months; carrying out an organizational project; and weekly telephone coaching sessions to review each managers' projects progress. In this paper we also report the results of a field study of the perceived programme outcomes: through twelve in-depth, individual interviews with a representative sample of trained managers. We posed the question: What are the 'working ingredients' of the leadership training programme, aiming to leave managers with the ability to act adequately in different situations? Through the interviews we identified four 'working ingredients:' the key concepts introduced in the plenary sessions; the immediate application of these ideas in a real-life project; developing an investigative approach in dialogues; and the disciplined coaching structure.

### **1 Introduction**

This experienced-based article is about our vision on leadership and its impact on those who take it on board through an intense leadership training programme offered in the Netherlands. The central question of this paper is: What are the 'working ingredients' of this leadership programme?

First we provide a definition of leadership that we use in the programme 'Providing leadership' (part 2). Next we look at how an individual can internalize this type of leadership and how it is that this particular leadership training programme sinks in and remains of lasting significance for participating leaders, even after a period of some years. The design and underlying concepts of the programme are described, and we examine the

erratic and strenuous path which a participant follows (part 3). We close with describing the 'working ingredients' that we identified and with the prospects that the programme offers: what becomes possible within an organisation when leaders work from possibility, imagination and abundance (part 4)?

## **2 Leadership: Creating innovative results through imagination and abundance**

Just what is effective leadership? In our view, effective leadership means producing innovative and creative organizational outcomes through imagination and abundance. In this section we will examine the fundamentals underlying this view.

### *2.1 The relationship between result and 'way of being' of a leader*

We make the assumption that there is a relationship between the results which someone produces and his 'way of being.' Results are concrete, visible and clear. By way of contrast, 'way of being' is an invisible, intangible and frequently ignored dimension. What is this 'way of being'? It is the source from which our actions flow, the place where our intentions and attention reside. 'Way of being' is about the quality of attention and concentration and expresses itself in the way we observe, listen, feel, speak and act. A painting for instance can be seen as a reflection of who the painter is.

In a broader perspective the world and the observer are inseparably related. Your 'way of being' determines the results which you produce, just as the way in which you perceive the world determines what you see. 'Mind' and 'matter' are closely related. *'...reality is not a given: it is perceiver-dependent, not because the perceiver "constructs" it as he or she pleases, but because what counts as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver'* (Varela, 1999, p. 13). Our vision has a philosophical tint and assumes a close relationship between individuals and the external world.

### *2.2 The individual as an inseparable part of the greater whole*

In addition we see a clear relationship between the individual and the group, between 'I' and 'we.' Ken Wilber describes how the inner and the outer world and at the same time the individual and the collective world can be seen as one (Wilber, 2004). We too base ourselves on the belief that each individual forms part of a greater whole: the group. An individual sees this whole, the objective world, through his subjective perspective. A person's 'way of being' determines how he collaborates and acts in a group and the results which are achieved.

### 2.3 Two 'ways of being'

A person's 'way of being' can take many different forms. We distinguish two. On the one hand there is a 'way of being' based on the judgments, opinions and convictions which each individual makes his or her own in the course of his/her life. The world is perceived as made up of dualities, as subject and object, as 'perceiver-independent' (Varela, 1999). In this 'way of being' the individual unconsciously assumes limitations and scarcity, and acts accordingly. This fixed 'way of being' leads to routine behaviour, to what Argyris calls 'skilled incompetence: *'The ability to get along with others is always an asset, right? Wrong ... And it's the very adeptness that's the problem. The explanation for this lies in what I call skilled incompetence, whereby managers use practiced routine behaviour to produce what they do not intend (incompetence)'* (Argyris, 1986, p. 74). In this 'way of being' everything is centred on the possession of power and on 'being right.' A manifestation of this is the 'yes-but' conversation: it costs a great deal of energy, generates irritation and is less than productive. People demonstrate practiced routine behaviour driven by deeply-rooted assumptions about the surrounding world. One programme participant in 2004 described it as follows: *"...only then the penny dropped for me, what the real purpose of the programme was. Actually every day is much the same, going around in your own circle and not taking the actions necessary to break out of that circle. Responding to situations in the same way, time after time, I realized that I was stuck in that circle and unable to get out of it."* Routine and defensive behaviour arises from a focus on one's own interests. The economists Jansen and Jägers describe this as a 'scarcity perspective': *'The assumption of scarcity assumes that one person will profit from another (weaker) person, unless he/she is restrained by a still stronger power in society'* (Jansen and Jägers, 2007, p.19).

On the other hand, we distinguish a 'way of being' based on the present, on imagination, abundance and trust. From this perspective the future is full of possibility instead of posing a potential threat. In Jansen and Jäger's terms we can call this an 'abundance perspective.' Working from such a perspective, all parties can come out as winners in the process of collaboration and exchange, and coalitions based on mutual trust can be built (Jansen and Jägers, 2007). We call the 'way of being,' 'being possibility.' This 'way of being' is far from self-evident as judgments, limitations and ideas of separateness are firmly rooted in our minds. The 'scarcity perspective' and the associated power games are addictive, and it can be frightening to let go of them.

#### *2.4 Gaining access to imagination, beauty and abundance*

We argue that you can access 'being possibility' by awakening your senses, by examining what you see, hear and feel in the present. It is important to grasp what is *really* happening: 'what is.' This entails that one learns to see the difference between 'what is' and the expectations and opinions which come from one's own mindset. Only when you see and experience this difference and the emotional tension which accompanies it as 'what is', instead of something which *must* be changed by struggling against it, it becomes possible to let go of apparently quite rational assumptions, opinions and expectations. Only then one can avoid letting one's behaviour be determined by unpleasant feelings. Seeing and experiencing the difference, instead of re-acting on it, creates space: for imagination, beauty and opportunity in the future.

A 2004 participant in 'Providing Leadership' described how he experienced the difference between patterned behaviour and acting from 'being possibility': *"...also more insight into the behaviour of my children, for example. I used to become angry much more quickly than has been the case since. It [the training] might well have been the turning point, that I react from anger much less frequently. That I look into, gosh, why do you do that? What is this child's behaviour, what drives it, so that he reacts the way he reacts. Then you think, why in the name of heaven did I react so angrily? ... That negative stuff doesn't solve anything."*

Kessels calls this unexpected leap to 'being possibility' the 'poetic argument' (Kessels, 2006). It is the argument of art: *'Only then when you have been touched, touched by something or someone, addressed at different level than that of routine thought, can you step away from the familiar and trusted images. It is the trigger which opens your eyes – the path towards insight leads through the heart'* (Kessels, 2005, p.13). The 'poetic argument' is the remarkable experience in which assumed truths concerning the environment and yourself suddenly show themselves to be illusions. Your fears are unfounded. In such a moment your ratio is overtaken by the beauty which presents itself. Everyone will have experienced such a moment while listening to beautiful music, watching a touching movie or feeling the sun and the wind during a walk. In such a moment ratio comes to a stop and you are totally absorbed by the present experience. By feeling, listening and looking anew, by opening all the senses, we remove the curtains from our eyes and we can experience a world full of beauty and opportunity. The portal is opened to a different 'way of being. A feeling of peace, freedom and clarity is created. Suddenly you are able to make clear choices, where previously you experienced confusion and doubt. This 'way of being' is accompanied by a new quality of unconditioned attention, whereby new possibilities can appear which can have an enormous impact on the way the current task will move forward.

### *2.5 Leadership: Creating innovative result through imagination and abundance*

In this paragraph what was discussed previously comes together. We offer a definition of effective leadership: in four parts.

*Leadership is about...*

- a. ... developing the ability of 'being possibility' by letting go the need of 'being right' and by being present.....*

Scharmer calls the process by which someone acquires access to 'being possibility' the 'U-process' (see Senge et al., 2004; Hassan, 2006 and Scharmer, 2007).

He discusses the possibilities which arise when someone examines his own assumptions in relation to 'what is.' The 'U-process' describes change from within which leads to a manifestation of that change in the external world. Characteristic of this process is the development of an 'open mind,' an 'open heart' and 'open will.' These dimensions make clear that, in order to realize a real change from within, rational intelligence alone is not enough, but it also requires the intelligence of the heart and will.

*b. ... creating opportunity for a group of people, setting them in action and creating new results together...*

Creating opportunity means allowing your imagination to speak and visualizing what might happen, might become possible, if you create certain results. By attaching yourself to such a visualization you can inspire your current activities (see also Appreciative Inquiry, e.g. Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). When as a leader you are 'being possibility,' think in terms of possibilities and translate this thinking into behaviour, then you invite your team members to let their talents speak. Innovative result can be created. You cannot predict the future but you can shape it. By looking at possibilities to which you can contribute together, you create a new reality (see Kahane, 2004). *'Learning from the future involves intuition. It involves embracing high levels of ambiguity, uncertainty and willingness to fail. It involves opening ourselves to the unthinkable and sometimes attempting to do the impossible. But the fears and risks are balanced by feeling ourselves part of something important that is emerging that will truly make a difference'* (Scharmer, 2007, p.xvi).

*c. ... creating leaders around you by offering guidance on four attitudinal aspects of leadership: commitment, responsibility, integrity and being in relationship ...*

These attitudinal aspects are practical notions which guide you as a leader when you provide direction to your employees while at the same time offering them the opportunity to develop themselves. What do you pay attention to, if you wish to direct and delegate effectively?

- The attitudinal aspect "commitment." Are your employees committed? Commitment means choosing for something and at the same time not being bound by a

predetermined outcome. By rigidly adhering to a predetermined outcome you create a 'way of being' which is limiting and unproductive.

This attitudinal aspect is paradoxical: by being committed without being bound to a predetermined result (an other 'way of being') the opportunity is created for quite a different or surprising outcome. This is the secret of top athletes. Think of the tennis player in the final at Wimbledon, who delivers his match point service as if it were a training session. It's about dealing with abundance and has a totally different quality than a rational decision (Hoebeke, 2004a). One's heart is involved.

- The attitudinal aspect "responsibility." Responsibility is about acknowledging what your contribution is to success and failure. It is about acknowledging reality and accepting the facts, also when these do not accord with your own expectations and your assumptions about yourself and others. Does someone take responsibility for what he does and does not say and do (see Hoebeke, 2004b)?
- The attitudinal aspect "integrity." By integrity we mean acting from a clear commitment within a time frame. Saying what you are doing, and doing what you say. Do you stick by your promises and get things done in time?
- The attitudinal aspect "being in relationship." This refers to maintaining the relationship and staying in contact with the people with whom you work. You make sure that things are cleared up when issues arise.

d. ... *developing flexible behaviour which is appropriate to the given situation.*

Behaviour gives shape to your 'way of being.' In contrast to a 'way of being,' behaviour is visible and can be learned. For a leader it is about being versatile in terms of behaviour. It means being able to switch between three types of behaviour: listening actively and asking open questions (1); being able to take another person along with you by painting a picture of a shared future (2) and being able to direct, negotiate and make proposals (3). Certain deeply ingrained assumptions about yourself can result in behaviour which is inflexible and lacking in versatility.

## *2.6 Training for effective leadership: Developing an enquiring approach*

To summarize our definition of effective leadership, leadership is about making choices, committing yourself, and inspiring your team with vitality in order to achieve desired results together. How can you go about making this approach to leadership your own?

In our view, being curious and searching and researching contributes to this type of leadership. It does not come easily. It is acquired through an arduous process in which sometimes you do, but also often do not experience what it is really about. You experience it in a flash, and then it is gone again. It is a process marked by on-off, on-off. We believe that gaining access to 'being possibility' requires daily training and exercise in enquiry.

This examination is done through the senses: what do I see, hear and feel, and how am I breathing? It requires slowing things down and letting go of views and opinions. It requires being able to look very carefully and without prejudice at something, without a frame of reference, without taking flight into explanation, emotion or activity. French calls this ability 'negative capability', a capacity for 'reflective inaction' (Simpson et al., 2002; French, 2001). "... *negative capability as 'precisely the ability to tolerate anxiety and fear, to stay in the place of uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of new thoughts or perceptions'*" (see: Simpson et al., 2002, p.1211). This is in this area of uncertainty, ambiguity and non-understanding of other modes of thought that someone can, slowly but surely, can gain insight into his own 'way of being.'

The emphasis in leadership, on the other hand, is usually on 'positive capability' or 'decisive action': the ability to make decisions, to organise etc. One of the points of tension between 'positive capability' and 'negative capability' lies in the fact that the latter requires a certain humility (Simpson et.al., 2002). It is about being able to admit that you do not have all the answers, being able to investigate. Fear and ego are set aside: it is not about you as an individual, but about how you can, with an open approach, driven by curiosity, discover how you can contribute to the organisation in which you work with your talents and experience.

### **3      *How to develop leadership through imagination and abundance?***

In the previous section we described how we perceive leadership and how this form of leadership can be made your own: by developing an enquiring approach. But how does

that work? In our experience it is an erratic and often difficult process. During the programme 'Providing Leadership' facilitative conditions are created within which participants can move through this process. They experience the process as essential, confronting, difficult and liberating. We will first provide a concrete description of the programme and describe a number of the key concepts which we use. Subsequently we will use quotations from a number of participants to show how the erratic process looks and feels.

### *3.1 Design of the programme 'Providing Leadership': Project, training and coaching*

The programme 'Providing Leadership' has been developed over the last ten years and has been delivered for both profit and non-profit organisations. In each programme 12 to 14 experienced managers or project leaders participate. In total, some 300 people have experienced the programme. The programme has three key objectives: producing a project result for the strategic agenda of the organisation or for a larger network (1), motivating a project team and inspiring them to realise that result (2) and providing the leaders with greater insight into the relationship between one's personal 'way of being' and the project result (3).

The programme consists of the following three parts: carrying out a project, monthly training sessions and weekly telephone coaching sessions to review project progress (see figure 1).

- 1) *Carrying out a project:* During the programme all participants lead a project which is important to the strategic agenda of the organisation or a greater network.
- 2) *Monthly multi-day training sessions:* The programme contains six monthly training sessions, totalling 17 full days. During these sessions concepts are presented, participants engage in concentration exercises and apply the concepts provided to the concrete situations in their project.
- 3) *Weekly coaching:* From the first training session on all participants receive a weekly 30-minute time slot for a coaching session by phone. During these sessions, attention is first paid to the facts: which results have been booked so far? The

coaching is a recurrent exercise in examining the facts (the result) and one's own contribution to these facts.

These three parts complement each other and are of equal importance. Characteristic of this design is also that the real workplace and the learning environment are closely connected (Van Staveren, 2007).

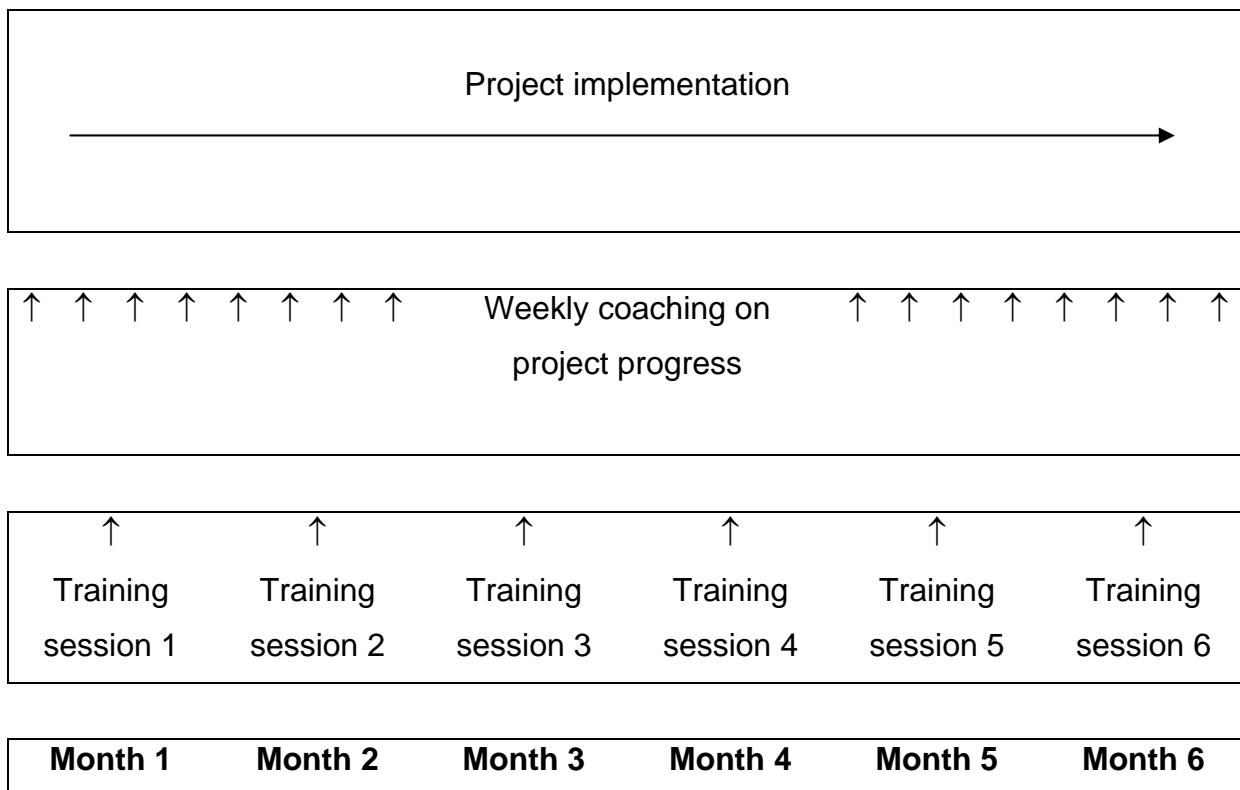


Figure 1 Overview of the three key processes in the programme 'Providing Leadership'

### 3.2 Investigation and discipline during the programme 'Providing Leadership'

*'Like any learning journey, it takes time and sustained discipline, with many semblances of progress and retrogress along the way. But practitioners report that they catch glimpses that encourage them to keep striving'* (Varela, 1999, p.70-71)

*'The process of self-actualization requires discipline... We can also see discipline as being a disciple, as learning.'* (Ganzevoort, 2007, p.39)

The coaching during the programme provides the essential and disciplined training in investigation, looking, listening and feeling. Because of the weekly structure participants can observe their behavioural patterns and their fixed 'way of being' in full clarity. Through this disciplined structure of perceiving and observing a surprising freedom is created in fixed behavioural patterns. Prior to a coaching session the participant completes a coaching form, which is read by the coach prior to the actual session. As a result the coachee is engaged with the material on a weekly and often indeed daily basis. Time and discipline are essential in this learning process (Varela, 1999; Ganzevoort, 2007).

### *3.3 Several concepts from the programme*

During the programme we offer concepts to enable making a distinction between when a result is achieved and when not, what caused this and how that relates to one's 'way of being.' The terms 'way of being,' 'being possibility' and 'creating possibility' are part of these concepts.

The most important concepts from the programme are represented in figure 2. It focuses on the relationship between a person's 'way of being,' the behaviour which he/she exhibits and the results which subsequently flow forth.

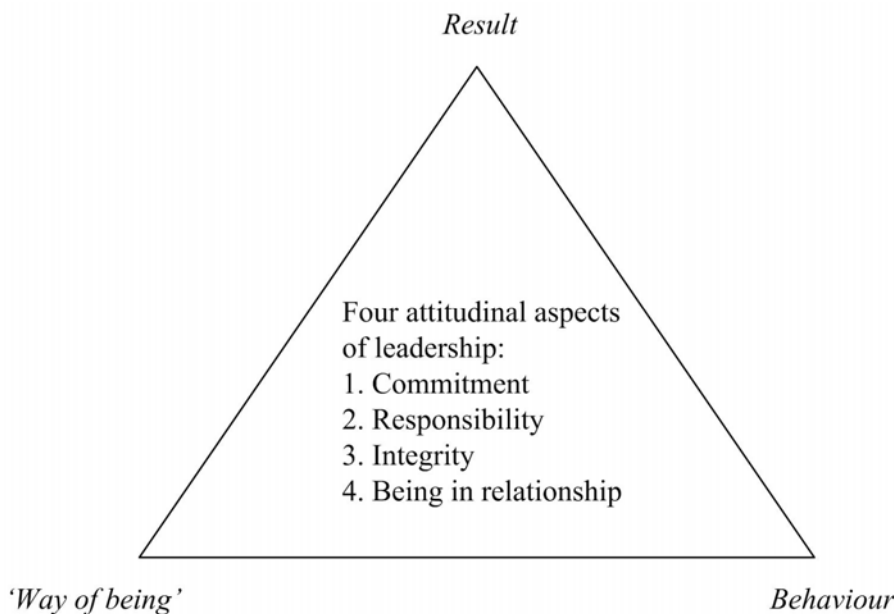


Figure 2 Relationship between 'way of being', behaviour and result in effective leadership

An individual's invisible 'way of being' manifests itself in visible behaviour and a result. In order to gain insight into the 'way of being' we examine the visible dimensions behaviour and result during the training. The outcome acts like a mirror; the result is a concrete manifestation of our 'way of being.' The four attitudinal aspects of leadership also determine the relationship between the three factors shown in figure 2. This triangle forms a conceptual thread throughout the programme. Participants examine concrete situations and investigate which 'way of being' they acted from in those situations, which behaviours they exhibited and to which result those behaviours led.

### *'Never-ending game'*

The notion of the 'never-ending game' is another key concept. This is a constantly recurring conversation which characterizes practiced routine behaviour. It is comparable to script behaviour as described in transactional analysis (e.g. Harris, 1975; Kouwenhoven, 1983). This behaviour stems from a 'way of being' originating in a firmly held conviction about the other, the environment or oneself. Because of these convictions only selective perception is possible. It is not possible to observe, listen and feel in an open, unprejudiced manner. The 'never-ending game' can be recognized by 'yes-but' discussions. The game consumes a great deal of energy and creates a sense of disconnection. It is marked by power (of being powerless) and a loss of relationship and self-expression. Essentially it is a power game which begins with a negative judgment. The 'never-ending game' is often part of the everyday reality in which we work. It is important to start to recognize this type of exchange and eventually to step out of it. By recognizing the 'never-ending game' for what it is space is created. Of course this does not mean that deeply-rooted convictions and behavioural patterns will disappear entirely; they last a lifetime. Nevertheless, participants do develop a degree of flexibility: they are quicker to recognize the 'never-ending game.' They develop the skills required to step out of it, they apply newly-acquired behaviours, specifically in the sense of listening and asking open questions.

During the programme participants explore these concepts during (coaching) discussions and training exercises. The concepts create a framework within which they can place their experiences.

### *3.4 Providing something that lasts*

The previously described concepts and programme design offer participants something they can internalise and use also after the programme has come to an end. We think this way of working can be very valuable for individuals and organisations, because participants are offered concepts they can immediately use in the daily execution of their (project) work.

Of essential importance is that programme participants can only gain real cognitive understanding of the concepts by experiencing them and incorporating them into their own way of being and working (embodied experience). These concepts are not technical skills or tricks. Varela calls the development of cognition by embodied experience 'enaction': *'Thus cognition consists not of representations but of embodied action. Thus we can say that the world is not pre-given; it is, rather, enacted through our history of structural coupling... Behavioural repertoires vary throughout the animal kingdom, but what all living cognitive beings seem to have in common is know-how constituted on the basis of the concrete. Thus what we call general and abstract are aggregates of readiness-for-action'* (Varela, 1999, p.15-16).

In our opinion the way of learning used in 'Providing leadership' and described by Varela as 'enaction' is of great importance. Today's business and government worlds are full of rational, verbal learning. In order to stimulate real and ongoing development, learning in action and experience, 'enaction' is necessary. It is like learning to ride a bicycle by practicing it instead of reading the instructions and memorizing them. Once you've learned to ride a bicycle by practicing, the written instructions become more understandable (cognition). The programme offers this way of learning in the form of carrying out a project and providing relevant concepts at the same time.

The kind of learning and leadership we describe requires the programme facilitators/trainers to work with compassion and rigor. The facilitators need to have compassion for the participants, their 'way of being' and their behavioural patterns. This compassion provides an opening through which the participants can examine themselves. At the same time, it is important that the facilitators be rigorous, particularly when a participant loses sight of the difference between present facts and personal value judgments from the past. Is what a participant thinks, when he really examines the facts, the truth? Facilitators also need to be rigorous when it comes to integrity and discipline. To be able to transfer the concepts of the programme, the trainers/facilitators have to keep the concepts alive (refresh them for themselves) and apply them to their own lives. Facilitators need, in a certain sense, to remain beginners themselves, by continuing to investigate and examine work and life and not getting lost in fixed convictions and judgments. This requires being comfortable with silence and with breathing exercises.

### *3.5 What do participants experience during this process?*

The quotations below come from twelve in-depth interviews held in the first quarter of 2008 with participants in 2007, 2004 and 1999 (out of 42 participants in total). Four participants were selected at random from each programme. At the time of their participation all respondents worked as project leaders or managers for the Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands.

#### *a. Confusing concepts: What is creating result from 'being possibility'?*

The concepts which are presented to the participants during the training sessions are easily recognized but, at the same time, difficult to explain. This results in some confusion and resistance.

*"You do have the search for what it's really all about. You don't know exactly what the terminology means, you have to create a meaning yourself. It's like you're blind and then suddenly you can see, but because you lack a frame of reference, you do see something*

*but you can't interpret it. So you don't really know what you're supposed to see."*  
(Participant in 2007)

*"There are training programmes which you are dragged through, but that's not the case with this training. You receive a map but you have to find your own way. You get occasional tips and actually those were sufficient to allow you to follow the route, which was also the objective of the training. ... You weren't taken by the hand, in any case."*  
(Participant in 2004)

*b. Examining without assumptions: Weekly training through coaching*

In due course, it becomes clear to participants what a 'way of being' is all about, and participants learn what it is to act from possibility. During the coaching, experiences are connected to the concepts and participants begin to understand what was effective, and why. The coaching is a weekly exercise in exploring the relationship between the 'way of being' and results.

*"And the coaching sessions as well ... you were bound in a sort of straitjacket, but I found it to be very positive to have contact with your coach every week. You got into a certain rhythm and that provided structure, and as a result many things started to work. You were also confronted hard if you had not done something and you couldn't get away with it. See, if you for example have just one coaching session a month then you feel much less pressure. But this was a weekly cycle, and that did help me to decide that I was really going to do something with it."* (Participant in 2004)

*c. A different way of collaborating*

The participants experience surprising effects in the way in which people collaborate or work together in organizations.

*"One of my project team members has really surprised me in the context of the project during the last months. He has shown a great deal of initiative. I really didn't expect it of*

*him. He certainly wouldn't have done that a half year ago. He's a good example of someone who has changed, because you've been doing things differently yourself."* (Participant in 2007)

*"People work together more. Within my group there were actually a number of islands and everyone was very focused on his own work and less inclined to look at the big picture. And that has changed. A lot more concrete agreements were made, which were also kept, and we support each other when necessary."* (Participant in 2004)

*"It made me somewhat more people-oriented. I look at people much more, I'm more patient, I apply less pressure to get things done. My husband always says I've become a lot nicer since the programme. By nature I'm very task-oriented, the work needs to be done you'd better take care of it. But now I find the people behind the work much more interesting."* (Participant in 1999)

#### *d. Other surprising outcomes*

The programme also result in participants creating different sorts of outcomes in their projects. Often these outcomes exceed expectations or they are surprisingly different than expected.

*"You want to realize something, it doesn't work, then you look at the limitations and at what is possible. It's not the final objective, say, but we make a start and something is realized. Then you start to see steady progress. What we had wanted to realize within a half year is now, three years later, still in development, but it is stable and growing."* (Participant in 2004)

*"Then there were situations when together you thought, wow, we're really involved in something quite beautiful. We are creating something which is quite different, which stands out above the average. And as soon as that possibility became apparent I literally formulated that as our new objective in the team; guys, we're going to go for this extra*

*result. This is not an ordinary project, no, we want to make something extra great of it.”*  
(Participant in 1999)

*“What comes back is the ‘result-plus’. That’s the fun part, that you’re still seeking this. I applied that in my time at Justice as well, and it led to unbelievable success. For example, two very large audits of 850 hours, with a large number of people. There were no firm guidelines, just a kickoff, pointing in a certain direction, people started to come forward with ideas. ... that you turn out to be so successful that people ask themselves, how was it possible? Actually I provided very little leadership to the project, and something really good came of it. And that is ‘result-plus’. Not only the report but also that afterwards people in the project said: that was a great audit, it was fun to do. That’s what I call that ‘plus’.”*  
(Participant in 2004)

*e. A tough trajectory: Experiencing something of essential value*

Participants experience the programme as confronting. The process they go through is not easy and requires a great deal of effort. It cannot be otherwise when you’re dealing with an essential theme like ‘way of being.’

*“Yes, you compare it of course with previous courses you’ve had. Usually courses consist partly of theory and partly of practice, and the practice is usually about skills and sometimes you master those, sometimes not. It’s pretty safe. This programme was much more intensive, went a lot further into your self.”* (Participant in 1999)

*“I have a feeling that all those other courses which were about gaining knowledge and learning behaviour are starting to fall into place now. Things like dealing with resistance, giving feedback, negotiating, those are all aspects which I have seen in previous courses, in technical courses. One way or another I have the feeling that it all appears more logical and has become more a part of myself, because it is built into a programme which is much more focused on your own behaviour. It’s less about ‘tools and tricks’.”* (Participant in 2007)

*f. The beginning of an ongoing process: A lasting change*

Participants also indicate that the programme marks the beginning of an on-going process. It takes time to understand what it is about.

*“I realize that I have to take the time for this. A sort of realization that this is not a course from which I can expect immediate result, but that it is probably something, I imagine, which will create more and more result over the coming half year or years.”* (Participant in 2007)

*“What the trainers in any case meant for me, is that they made all this material come alive. In my view they provided the kick-off for something you have to finish yourself. What I find particularly impressive is that they apparently planted the concepts in my mind in such a way that it has come out.”* (Participant in 2007)

#### **4 Leadership based on imagination**

The programme we described in this article has a lasting impact on the way in which participants approach their work. We attribute this to the fact that for half a year they are offered concepts which they can use directly in their own projects. On top of that, they are stimulated to reflect every week on their own trial-and-error application of the new insights during the weekly (telephone) coaching sessions. We designed a sort of double ‘rooting:’ direct application and weekly cognitive reflection. In addition, the programme concepts deal with essential issues: about ‘being’ or: the relationship between one’s ‘way of being’ and the results which you produce. It offers insight into repetitive ineffective behavioural patterns as well into the attitudinal issues which concern making choices and the way you deal with the ups and downs of life and work. This gives the leadership training a solid basis which ‘sticks’ to the participants.

As an answer to our central question ‘What are the ‘working ingredients’ of this leadership programme?’ our research has revealed four related ‘working ingredients’ within the programme ‘Providing Leadership,’ contributing to providing leadership from imagination:

- 1) Offering essential concepts such as: the relationship between 'way of being' and result; 'being possibility'; creating possibilities; leading through attitudinal aspects,
- 2) Developing an investigative approach in dialogues (the enquiring dialogue),
- 3) Practical application of the concepts in an organizational project, and
- 4) A disciplined coaching structure.

Researching the programme made it clear that in order to create insights and an ongoing investigation in one's own 'way of being,' it is more effective to look at the project and project result, at what is being created, than to start with investigating the 'never-ending game.' This programme is not about solving a problem (something is wrong, fix it), but about creating and, during this process, stumbling across one's 'scripts', across 'never-ending games' and experiencing how to handle these in the order to create new, valuable organizational result.

During the programme participants learn to look at the possibilities which their projects offer, to future results to which they wish to contribute. In this way they become aware of values and of the greater whole of which they are a part. This way of providing leadership can contribute to the solving of problems which require multidisciplinary cooperation, in which different parties have diverging interests. This is because leaders learn to distinguish between their own individual interests and the overarching possibilities. Being aware of the relationship between result and 'way of being,' being able to deal with 'difference,' examining this without prejudice and subsequently creating result from the future: this way of providing leadership offers the potential for addressing complex issues in a creative manner.

This initial exploratory research does raise new questions:

- What is included in the programme's concepts, so that they stay with the participants, even after many years? What kind of 'need' or 'question' do they address?
- If several projects drawn from a single organisation's strategic agenda are highlighted in the course of a single programme, how does this approach to providing leadership impact the way people collaborate or work together in the whole organisation? Might there be a proliferation of this kind of leadership?

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