

The Person of the Leader

Every HR manager wrestles with questions such as “What leadership do we need in the future? How can a leadership pipeline be filled with new talent? What course of development exists?” These questions reflect on the search for leadership development.

“When your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.”

John Quincy Adams 1767-1848.

Ton Voogt

In order to focus clearly, I consider literature on leadership development. What is the dominant factor? ‘Inspiration’ often comes up: a leader should inspire. This appeals to me: a leader being nourished by his own values, thoughts, dreams, goals, people who are important to him. From this standpoint, he can undertake organizational objectives, which may only be reached with others. He will need to connect with them, so that they are also connected to a common goal through their own dreams and values.

Kouze and Posner (2012) make positive suggestions for skills such as stories, laughter, illustrative speaking, always displaying optimistic perspectives. The Centre for Creative Leadership and the Institute for the Future has compiled a list of ten key skills in a leader: creative instinct, seeing the future beyond daily confusion, ability to solve dilemmas, learning possibilities, bio-empathy, bringing together seemingly far-flung objects, calm transparency, quick to experiment with prototypes, can easily organize groups and create ordinary things that are useful for everyone. Others see the most successful organization created influence is spread among many. In practice, many people are involved in achieving goals;

innovation is always encouraged. The Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2012 mentions leadership skills for the future: inspiration, vision, influence, decision-making power, retaining the connection between goals and actions. These all belong to a leadership development programme. In the person of the leader, I am looking for the inspired leader, and the leader who inspires.

An anchorpoint?

In a twenty-year study led by Robert J. House, and incorporated into ‘Global Studies on Culture, Leadership and Organizations (2004), a coherence emerges between leadership style, organizational culture and success. It is good to see that the work of Hofstede, Trompenaars and Mastebroek inspired the choice of cultural characteristics such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation.

This is well summarized in the following diagram:

Leadership	Culture of the organisation	Succes of the organisation
value oriented	strong future orientation	high economie prosperity
team orientation	high performance orientation	top in science and technology
	connect personal goals with goals in society	high standards of living
	small power distances	
	low tendency to avoid uncertainty	

One example of value orientation is to be found in the ‘value statements’ of the engineering company ABB. Formerly, ‘legal compliance’ was a guideline. Now there is the statement ‘integrity as an experienced personal value’.

All useful, but not sufficient.

Where is the person of the leader?

A great deal of attention is paid to the person of the leader in biographies, as in, for example, the numerous books about the life of Steve Jobs. They are inspiring, and give examples to follow, for those who wish it. They are important sources of inspiration. Kets de Vries (2007) highlighted in his studies the influence of different personality types on the development of an entire organization. This can sometimes be to the detriment of the organization, as in the case of a narcissistic leader, whose great charismatic skill brings together large groups of followers, only to the greater honour and glory of himself; not to the success of everybody in the organization. If a leader experiences a 'burnout', the market value of a company can sometimes fall by 10%.

How can the person of the leader be well-equipped for his great responsibilities? He needs solid mental, psychological equipment, good for both him and the company.

Since the financial crisis (2008), values such as 'integrity' and 'transparency' have become important. The leader must be value-oriented, connecting and acting from the deepest level. Around me, I see stacks of books with regulations and values to which a leader must adhere. Many sources of inspiration, therefore, but how can a leader make these his own? I would like to recommend my own field of psychology. Constructive psychology is one area that has been investigating the structure of the unique person for thirty years. Can this provide useful knowledge and methodology?

What is there to learn from constructive psychology?

The trend for constructive psychology poses the question, 'How can the unique person be scientifically studied?' This is an important question, because it is clear from every-day life, that everyone, from birth, builds an entirely different picture of themselves. This raises a new question,

because so far, only general characteristics have been sought, such as IQ, MBTI profile and Big Five score. The idea of someone's 'self-construction' serving as a mental cockpit from where life and work can be directed, seems to me to be the way forward.

A person's own research chair.

To use a metaphor, you live as if pushed by the force of two basic motives: 'the drive for self-realisation' and 'the drive to connect with others', together with focus on future goals. As in a canoe, you must paddle in your chosen direction. Professor Hubert Hermans developed a tool which enables self-construction, called the Self-construction Method. How does this work? You ask yourself a series of questions, such as 'Who are important in the past, present and future? What important events are there in the past, present and future?'

There are also specific questions concerned with research inquiries. In this quest for leadership, we ask, 'Who have been exemplary leaders for me in my past? Who have not been? What values do I see in a leader? What do I think of myself? What do I think of my life now? How do I consider my future?' There is room for more questions, and every answer is called 'a value area'. How important are these for me? Intuition indicates how I value something, whether positive or negative. A standard list consists of 24 'feelings'. Feelings about each area are measured on a scale of 0 – 5. Analysis of this data offers a view of personal structural characteristics. Which areas are related? Which are opposites? Is one more dominant? What is the emotional charge of these areas? What colours the 'general experience now'? This is often new information for someone about himself. He gains insight into his own construction. Confronting these self-structures is very energizing, and can achieve great change – sometimes immediate, sometimes not.

I notice one method which enables leaders and future leaders to examine themselves even more profoundly. An inquiring attitude with a desire to be fair provides much insight and energy to effect change.

Practice: Structured self-examination with managers.

September 2010. Twelve managers aged about forty – men, women, Asians, Europeans and Americans from several organisations – all share a desire for further investigation, during a single day in Singapore. They identify eight areas:

- The most important person to have led them.
- An important person in the present.
- Someone they view as a personal example.
- What leadership means for them.
- Their main source of inspiration.
- Someone or something they react strongly against.
- Their overall experience now.
- The significance of their lives.

They then estimate how much they feel in each area. The result is a matrix of 24 times 8, filled with numbers from 0-5.

The managers examine the dominant ‘colour’ of their feelings, the differences in emotional colour of their areas as positive or negative. They seek the area most related to their experience now. They examine the different clusters in their structure. Nobody finds it unusual to measure the strength of their emotions in numbers. A financial manager says, “I have never looked so carefully at a series of numbers.” Another says, “I must address what I normally avoid, as I did not realize how important it was.” One individual wants to employ the method more extensively for himself, and still another said, “It is clear to me now that management is much less important than my professional development. I will set myself new objectives.”

This structured approach is very thorough. Further comprehensive application and structural analysis requires more than is possible from just the framework of the eight areas. More personal time is needed to develop these areas, to enter into a software program that performs calculations and makes confronting analysis possible. Moreover, further study on the self brings new insights, which make new applications possible. My studies continue.

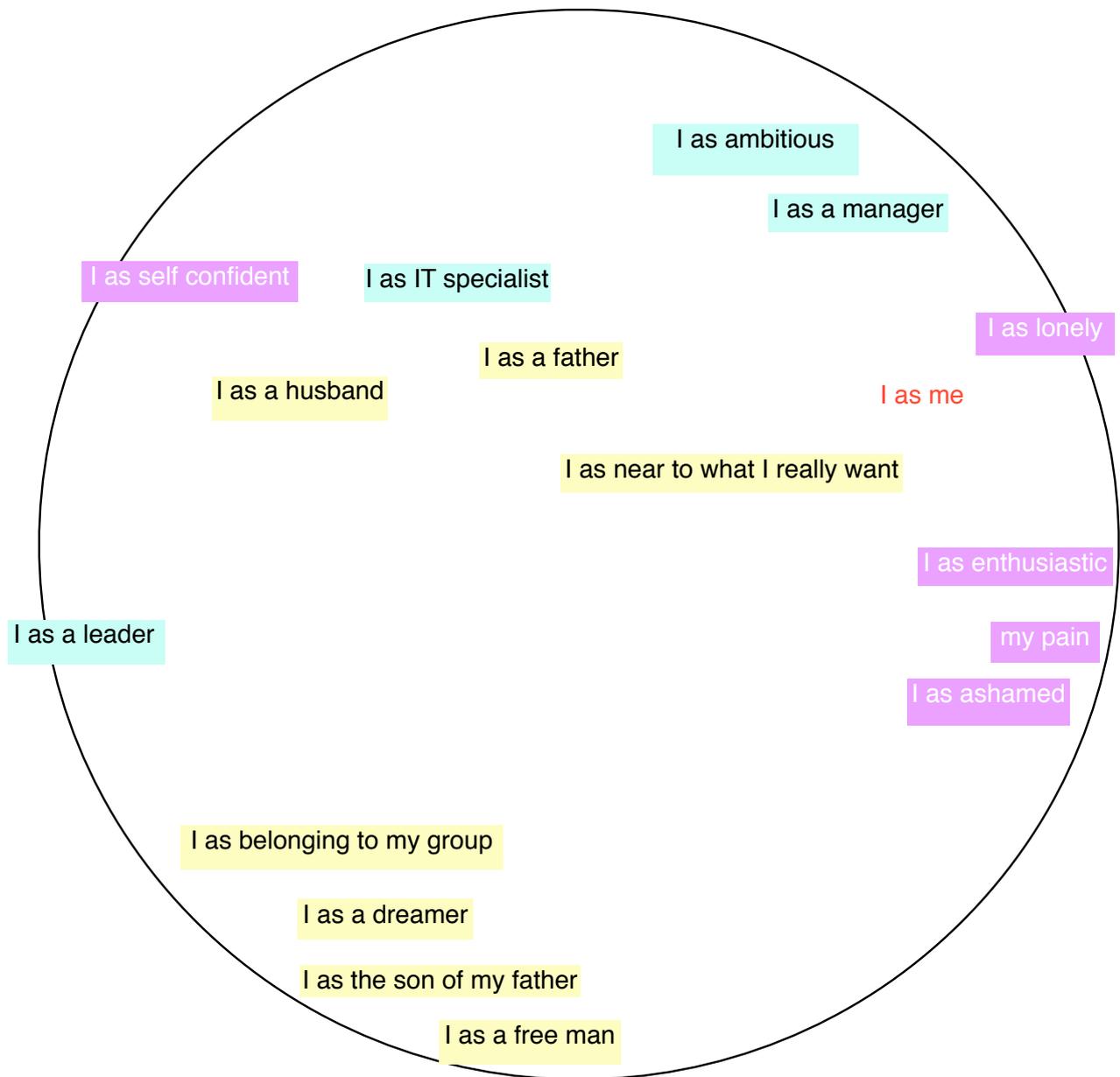
The ‘Self’ is constructed and in continuous dialogue.

Hubert Hermans (2012) passes on his absorption with the study of the self. The concept of the ‘Self’ is shifting from a container with all its contents (feelings, thoughts, experiences) to multiple ‘I-positions’. No longer an ‘I’ or ‘self’ with many properties, but a plurality of ‘I-positions’, which are then referred to as ‘I as...’ Moreover, research shows that the Self is not an isolated developing Something from an unfolding nucleus or power, but from an early age, it arises from a dialogue with someone else – a meaningful event. An example of such a dialogical ‘I-position’ is ‘I as my pain, the son of my mother, disappointed that my career has not progressed as desired.’ A ‘Self’ is imagining a space with different ‘I as...’ within. This concept provides new possibilities for leadership development.

The space of the Self of a manager.

October 2010: The example of a young manager, Jonathan Li (35), at the beginning of his management career, and also studying for an MBA. AT the same time, he wants to investigate what leadership means, will mean or should mean to him. He uses the same set of questions, more focused on his future, and chooses ‘I-positions’, all of which contain dialogue as in the example above, ‘I as my pain’. On a large piece of paper is a circle, ‘the space for yourself’. The idea is ‘to put everything you now

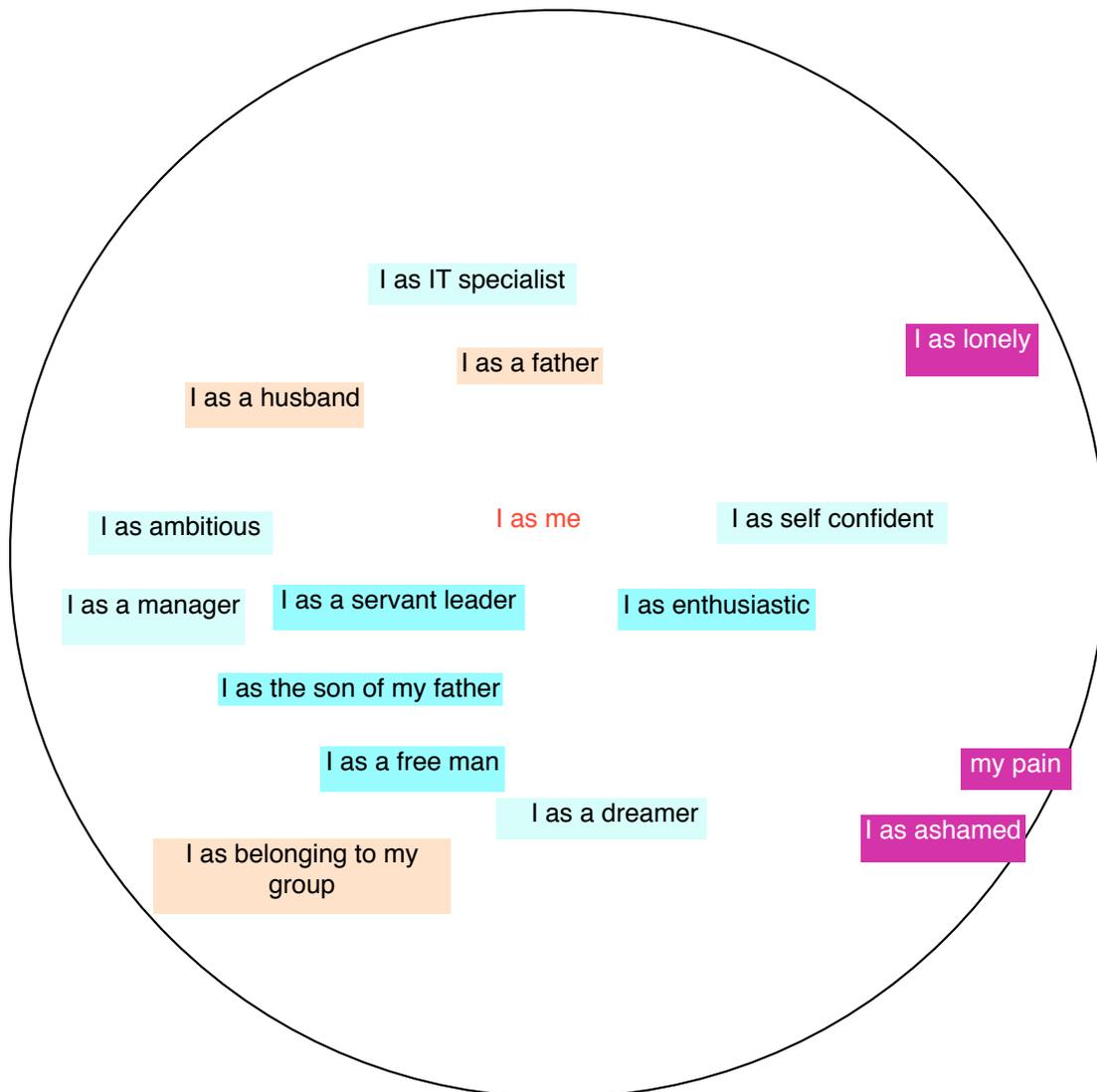
examine about yourself in this space. You choose where to place your thoughts'. Jonathan Li's 'Self-construction' looks like this:



Jonathan puts what he considers important for himself somewhere in the self-space area, mostly around the edge. His speciality and fatherhood are the areas which give him energy. The light yellow areas are vaguely linked together, and are actual energy sources.. The purple areas cost him energy, and he would like to place the light yellow areas more centrally, but fails because the strong purple areas predominate. He is not happy with this

self-construction. He wants more connection with ‘I as the son of my father’, and examine how ‘I as leader’ can also become connected. However, he does not know how to connect with his greatest source of inspiration – his speciality.

A year later, he builds a new self-construction, a simplified version of which is shown below:



He has added a new central area (serving leadership) which leads him and gives energetic colour to many of the other major areas. The draining effect of ‘I as my pain’ has gone. His self-confidence and enthusiasm have increased. However, later, the ‘I as serving leader’ was discovered to be

wishful thinking. His specialism and ambitions proved to be more centrally placed.

Enrichment of the ‘Self’ concept of leaders.

March 2012. ‘Empower women in leadership’ – this question was addressed by Dr. Wang Feng, director of the Training Centre of Psychology Faculty of East China Normal University, Shanghai. In the counselling practice which supports this university, this question arises more and more, now that a greater number of Chinese women occupy leadership positions. Thirty-two women, supervisors, counsellors, university professors, psychologists, trainers and students participate in a one-day workshop. Strengthening the ‘composite of the self’ is a term first used by Agnieszka Konopka. I apply two methods: inspirational sources , anchor points, adding self-construction, and development of a new ‘I-position’, which greatly affects the other ‘I-positions’. A committed position can also remain flexible, and this is called the ‘promoter position’.

The group of women first build their self-image as they see it now. They receive a sheet of recognized ‘I-positions’ which they can choose and add to, based on such previously-mentioned questions as, “What do you think of yourself as a leader? What does the man you think of as a good leader actually do? What did the man you learnt a lot from in the past actually do? What does a male colleague do that you might have difficulty with?”

They address these questions, and wonder where the tensions in their own compositions lie, where the energy sources and the drains are. They busily compare notes. One of them explains to me, “Three people exchanging ideas offers more to learn.” After this, they search for new anchor points based on questions such as, “ What single sentence of your grandparents do you still repeat to yourself today? Which sentence from major writings inspires you? What will be your motto once you become

influential?” They compare notes again, with much hilarity and openness, finding enrichment in each others’ ideas.

They imagine a point seven years from now, where they can look back from a successful social position with a message. They integrate this message into their own composition. The ‘I-position’ changes, and they write all in the space of their self. To ‘embody’ all get up from their chairs and walk in the large space. They show how they feel and think now. Strong voices, fierce walking, new gestures. I expected hesitating expressions, searching attitudes. No, new stronger persons with new stories. A women, just confronted with having a cancer, wishes to be a lot better of in one year and meet them again. A lecturer at a Management Business school admit she realises the importance of emotions. She never did. A participants wishes not to make children herself but to adopt and raise orphans. One imagines herself in the position of the leader of the institute and build on the strong fundamentals. Confrontations with are full of tension. Some practice new actions on the spot. They enjoy sharing in detail all they felt and thought.

What are characteristics of the working process that created these impressive experiences? In a reflection with Agnieszka Konopka we recognise as characteristics.

- the working process is ‘all inclusive’ ,positive and negative’ all contradictions
- integration of dreams and responsibilities
- acceptance of differences
- the enriching experience of sharing ideas and feelings
- the dynamics of the future perspective
- acknowledging inner freedom
- endorse everyones uniqueness and accept being different from others
- new ideas were put into practice on the spot.

August 2012. A one day conference on ‘women leadership’ 10 women participated in a similar learning journey. Ton Voogt and Erica Gasseling

acted as facilitators. Participants expressed after the session: “it is evident to me. I have to make the move. Now”. She took her cellphone and made the call. “I never before created an overview of my self and life. Impressive”. “Now I realize what is more important and what to change”. “I can make the move now: being a manager is not that important for me then being a scientist”.

Young Management need Self awareness

September 2012. The HR director of an international engineering company has a wish. Engineers certainly want to learn methodologies and skills, but they do not seek more self-insight. Twelve top-talented managers have a week of eight-hour daily lessons in logistics and finance. This prepares them for their future responsibilities. The HR director knows to add two extra hours from 6 - 8p.m. These are engineers, so I explain things briefly and clearly. A leader can only lead his organization when he inspires from within. He can only connect others if they too work for the common good. Therefore the first task is to strengthen his own inspiration. I start my presentation with a variety of voice and gesture. Five minutes later, some focus is lost. I need more drama and firmer statements to achieve a fast-paced and well-structured self-examination – large sheets, markers and post-it notes. Inviting and friendly, yet they still have questions during the up-tempo instruction of the day. “What is the significance of the results of your personality tests? What inspires you? Who? Who is important to you from the past? Which single sentence do you use as a guide? Where does it come from? What does your leadership mean to you? Your career? Your responsibilities? What causes pain? What does inspiring others mean to you?”

And their responsibilities: “Expectations of others, inside and outside the organization.”

One individual looks around to see what the others are doing. There is widespread activity amongst the group. I suggest no exchange of ideas, as

that is up to them. They can make their own statements. The compositions on the sheets are constantly changing, with different factions moving from the centre of the circle to the edge. Some quickly find a satisfactory arrangement, others are still busy. They add and replace stickers on each area. I also add the five basic life-questions: “What does ‘time’ mean to you? What significance is there in the fact that something exists for you? What significance does death hold for you? What do other people mean to you? How do you see yourself? In addition, I focus on family, leadership, business, job, dream. Someone withdraws temporarily – showing emotions in a group is simply not done.

Questions arise quickly. Everyone works fast and silently. They do not know each other yet. This is the first day of the week, and they have flown into Beijing from all over the world – Germany, Norway, Switzerland, England, Brazil, India, Saudi Arabia, China and Japan. A Belgian teacher has been dealing with financial issues on this same day.

They step back from their compositions, and search for coherence, contradiction and emotional differences. What energizes me, what drains me? Is there a clear coherent and central ‘I-position’? Then they look into the future, to send themselves a message to rearrange their composition, which becomes frozen in time. They make action lists on separate sheets. It is time, the bus is waiting, but they are still in penetrating conversation. “I feel everything is in order.” “This is very intense.” I am such a complicated yet beautiful puzzle.” “I would never have believed that there was so much to think about in myself!” “I wanted to talk further” “I cannot deny the impact of this exercise.” “in a year’s time.” “ I now have more questions than answers about myself.”

Preliminary conclusion and further challenge.

This research into the application of the theory of the *Dialogical Self* in leadership development leads to useful applications during long or short meetings within a group. Leaders reinforce connections with what inspire

them. They resolve contradictions and accept various emotional colours, so that they are better able to perform their responsibilities in a 'healthy' manner.

My research continues. Indeed, leaders are expected to inspire others to connect to the common objective.

Making connections with others. How?

March 2013. The SIM Professional Development in Singapore organizes a presentation of an innovative international project. Dr. Siow Choon-Neo states that customer satisfaction with certain business transactions is very high, but that the overall satisfaction is low. The call-centre is the link between company and customer. She takes time to reflect. We suspect that the call-centre employees pay too much robotic attention to instructions. There is no human contact. How do we achieve an attitude between the employees and their bosses that says "I am dealing with a person"?

The top management spend two days investigating this issue. They use self-compositions to examine how they stand within the business. They include several clients – the complaining client, the frightened client, the angry client, the needy client, the neutral client, the aggressive client, the satisfied client. They have an interview with each client, and they make a list of 'difficult clients', with whom they feel uncomfortable, despite treating them according to the rules. Then they are able to act with more empathy and emotional mimicry. Senior management sends an email the next day: "Despite our temporary travel ban, this training is so goods and important that all sites must participate."

How do you inspire others?

March 2013. The Dutch section of the world organization Women in Energy wants a workshop during its annual conference on the strengths of inspiring leadership. I seize this chance with the idea of 'giving

inspirational leadership through self-construction and dialogue'. In total, 45 women take part in a very structured 90-minute workshop. The basic thesis is 'if you want to inspire others, be inspired from within yourself.' During this workshop, I make a list of unique 'I-positions', recording both inspiring and uninspiring values. An inspiring person from the past, and the present. An inspiring event, an uninspiring person. Energizing values, your CV, psychological test scores, your company, your greatest dream, any hidden failure, your vulnerability, your strengths, your willingness to give, your urge to realize plans, your pain, your leadership, you as a woman, your responsibilities, you as someone who inspires others. Everyone works for themselves. They are relieved not to be invited to compare ideas. They write the meanings of their 'value-areas' on post-it notes, and they reflect upon construction. I think it is important for them to understand what basically drives them to realize their activities. After explaining these drives, 'self-realisation' and 'belonging with others', they begin to value these areas. For self-realisation, we mean self-esteem, strength, self-confidence and pride. For 'connection with others', we mean thoughtfulness, love, tenderness and intimacy. They consider various interpretations of these last words for a work situation. They find their own vocabulary effortlessly.

Then comes the next step: accepting leadership from others in one's own space. "How would you like to be recorded?" "Which areas is this person connected to?" "Write the dialogue which you perform with this person." And still one more person – to be really connected with someone, you must also be in the same space. How are you present for the other person? What do you talk about together? Everyone is very busy thinking and writing.

Finally, I invite them to write a letter to themselves. Pens run silently over paper – one, two sheets. Folded, placed in handbags, and on time for the closing general meeting. "Wow, what an impact", says one lady. We say our farewells with warm handshakes.

The search continues.

I am brimming with questions about inspiration and collaboration.

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Ton Voogt published the book COWERING in June 2013.

www.uitgeverijparthenon.nl/parthenon_voogt.html

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