



# Factsheet

## Vision of Public Leadership

### *The Netherlands Senior Civil Service*

#### Vision of Public Leadership

Public leadership is focused on achieving social results in connection with society, the administrative organization and political governance. In a political-administrative context public leaders face a social task in a time that has become incredibly complex, in which changes occur rapidly en where government is put under a magnifying glass.

That is why public leaders are needed who can literally shape leadership by cooperation, who are connected to the capillaries of society, who are particularly suited to ethically serve the interests of society and who are able in this turbulent context to continue to reflect and to ask the right questions. Leaders who use these qualities to guide, inspire and who take a position.

And... will these efforts achieve or further the higher social purpose? What will change?

Public leadership then always requires the ability to give direction to the organization as a figurehead and value driver, to inspire and to take position (courage) in a political-administrative context with many uncertainties.

This presupposes the ability to overcome paradoxes, to be able to quickly react by means of various types of interventions and to create calmness. The type of leadership needed for an organization is also determined by the context and the purpose of the organization as well as the diversity in the composition of the team, to promote reflection, contradiction and ultimately quality. Administrative craftsmanship and knowledge of the domain within the team are preconditions.

The Dutch government is committed to maintaining and strengthening its leading position in an international comparative perspective, in terms of quality and integrity of the Dutch government. Public leadership is characterized by this and the state of leadership is thus a permanent subject of reflection.

There is not one single ideal type of leader; there are qualities every public leader should show:

#### *Integrity*

The public leader works sincerely and consciously in the public interest, addresses the social issues and demonstrates this in his/her daily actions.

#### *Cooperation*

The public leader puts shared leadership into practice, is focused on the broader context and not exclusively his/her "own" domain, actively seeks collaboration and co-creation and is able to understand various perspectives.

#### *Reflection*

The public leader has self-awareness and organizes reflection in the field based on knowledge and practice, asks the right questions and accordingly determines the course and position.

## Explanation of the Vision of Public Leadership

### Playing chess on several boards

The environment of the civil service is characterized by complexity, interdependence and continuous change; aptly phrased by Paul 't Hart as a dynamic world with turbulent developments. Social changes - international and national - and technological innovations have consequences for (relations between) society, politics and administrative organizations. We witness a shift of power centers, worldwide and in the Netherlands; from existing institutions to a variety of new power centers. In addition, we witness more participation and collaboration in new relationships, within and outside existing structures.

Our society is empowered, complex, multifaceted and enterprising. Civil society occupies a more central place with a greater involvement of citizens. There is more co-creation, with the government in the role of network partner in the "participation society".

Citizens want to be approached and want to be involved differently by the civil service: not by a traditional civil service devising and implementing goals and solutions from their ivory tower but by a civil service that seriously collaborates with citizens.

There are many examples of developments in society directly involving the government where the government has to manoeuvre flexibly: the financial sector after the financial crisis, the refugee issue, the climate and energy issues, the tension in the Middle East and how this affects Europe, the decrease in trust in and authority of the government, an increasing polarization in society and new initiatives such as Uber, AirBnb and the emergence of drones that cause current policy and legislation to age rapidly. Communication, information, technology and big data increasingly penetrate our society and personal lives.

ICT applications and possibilities are important for the way the civil service deals with social challenges. The civil service will have to act increasingly faster and more transparent. By means of virtual communities and dynamic alliances an individual citizen can increasingly and faster exert influence on the agenda-setting of social themes. (Social) media are both a source of information and communication and a medium for exerting influence. Social commitment increasingly finds its way outside existing structures and institutions and the authority of, and the confidence in, the government is no longer a given.

Politicians and civil servants are continuously followed, influenced, inspected, assessed and taken to account by society, also by the increasing role of the media and the attention given to incidents. This has created a political trend: the wish to gain apparent political merits by swiftly achieving tangible results that can be communicated. In this situation, (senior) civil servants must be able to foresee the long-term effects and must stand for a consistent and reliable government organization that at the same time meets the requirements of a changing

society. The policy dynamics must remain (or become,) manageable for 'implementation'. This requires flexibility in combination with firmness, while political accountability emphasizes the vertical lines of responsibility.

The changing social reality and the initiatives of society therefore demand a different role from the civil service. The implementation of government policy is rarely effected by one organization but often in a chain or network of organizations. The changes and turbulence in society and the continuous movement in the relationships between stakeholders from within and outside the civil service and politics demand different leadership from the (central) government.

## Developments in public leadership

The "New Public Leadership" report by Nikol Hopman provides a clear insight and overview of the developments in the field of public leadership. This paragraph contains a brief description of the report.

Until the mid-20th century focus was mainly on leaders, on persons and positions and on competences and skills ('the who'). In addition, there was increasing focus on leadership in relationship to others and in relation to the context ('the what and how'). Since the beginning of the century there is a strong (renewed) focus on 'leadership for what', a common goal, a shared direction.

The civil service acts more and more as a network partner in many ever-changing coalitions and alliances. This requires the public leader to have a wide network, to be able to operate in various contexts and to be able to connect these. This dynamic contains "shared leadership": there are changing roles and changing individuals and collectives that assume the role of leader, depending on the circumstances and the requirements. This type of leadership requires transparency from both politicians and the civil servants. Knowledge is more important in the sense that the public manager in particular must be able to collect, interpret and give meaning to knowledge from various perspectives, to offer

inspiration on the issue and to smarter use knowledge available within the chain.

In essence, it is about "purpose", a common goal, a common direction and focus on a result with social impact. The influence and impact a public leader may have to achieve this social purpose is to be found in the collective.

And finally, the changing position of the civil servant referred to in the preceding paragraph, as a chess player on several boards, has a clear impact on public leadership in respect of politics and society.

## From context to leadership

A versatile repertoire of actions goes with the complex socio-political-administrative arena described and the changing role of the central government. In addition to the more classical instruments other interventions, methods and conduct are required, in view of achieving the social purposes in an ever-changing playing field.

Leadership by senior civil servants demands the continual removal of paradoxes. It is basically about taking positions, in every situation, with every paradox. A senior civil servant has to face:

- A malleable society and an open movement as well.
- Being a civil professional, social partner and also a political adviser.
- The disquiet of not knowing and also the need to decide.
- Acting from personal values and also based on the actual instruction.
- The time needed for a high-quality strong and also fast result (mistakes must be made but are not allowed, in a hurry to perform).
- Dealing with the bustle of the day and also creating calm for the medium and the long term.
- Professional elbow room of the employees and also controlling the results (control versus trust).

These tasks imply an integration of the roles of the political adviser, civil professional and social

partner. Collective leadership must be combined, while working from public values, with learning leadership by the senior civil servant.

The general qualities all senior civil servants require seem to be, taking into account all the studies and experiences: integrity (works sincerely in the general interest and shows it in their daily performance), cooperative (focused on the broader context and not only their "own" domain, actively seeks collaboration and co-creation) and possesses self-awareness and reflection.

### **Taking position**

The senior civil servant must continuously assess situations and take credible positions based on the core qualities of integrity, collaboration and (self-) reflection. Continuously and consciously taking position is the common thread in new public leadership. Top management is being challenged to implement continuously varying process interventions, focused, future-oriented and careful, and to create and seize opportunities that may occur. This means a different custom-made tactic depending on the subject and the timing, consisting of a combination of management according to general guidelines, letting go, establishing frameworks and possibly directly intervening in issues. Such interventions are not easy to choose and not easy to implement.

#### *Taking position:*

- Flexible and correct handling of the roles of societal partner, political adviser and civil professional
- Consistently making room for the perspectives of legislation, policy, implementation and supervision
- Delegating
- Dealing with an ever more rapidly changing and ever more complex environment
- Future-oriented leadership
- Style flexibility
- Situational leadership
- Implementing various process interventions and tactics, depending on the context, the situation and whatever is necessary

- Even in the event of setbacks and persistent problems the public leader must be present, take position ("take the lead in a thick fog").

### **Leadership based on public values**

It is essential that a public leader keeps wondering about: what is my role and my task and what is expected of me in the social field? It requires (top-level) leaders to behave in the same manner towards the organization en employees as towards social actors, to be aware of their own role, public task and added value. They can interpret the social complexity and manage the organization, the human resources, processes and financial resources. The public leader sets an example, works sincerely and consciously in the public interest, addresses the social issues and reflects this in their daily actions.

#### *Integrity:*

- The public task is key
- Public value driver; sets the example and is a role model
- Transparent and imitable
- Based on their own moral compass
- Independent behaviour, be yourself
- Take a position, keep your back straight, exercise authority through content and process, authority also means being able to say "no"; authority by radiating administrative calm
- Autonomous
- Show courage and daring

### **Shared leadership**

There is increasing awareness of the interconnectedness and the complexity of social issues (the 'wicked problems' of Grint). In addition, social trends and the associated knowledge and information move with unprecedented speed and the information is no longer foreclosed ("open house").

Therefore, leaders are needed who can shape the shared or collective leadership, who are good at collaboration, who are connected to the capillaries of society and who are also able to give their employees elbow room and to enable them to

handle issues and to take decisions. Organizing and directing networks and relevant information then becomes crucial as well as development of staff because these developments ask for a rethinking of the role of employees. Given the high-tech developments it is important that people are in a position to - are able to - offer added value in view of the social issues.

Part of shared leadership and learning/reflective leadership is organizing opposition; it is important to ensure *back-up* from people 'in the know', with practice in the field; a continuous network of critical people with practical experience. Knowledge, science and practice act as a counterweight and provide interpretation in these complex and fast-moving times. The public leader must provide substantive direction and then make room for the input of these people.

It is about the ability to promote initiatives through networks - coalitions and alliances - and to focus these initiatives and make them productive, with the aim of achieving social results. Shared leadership therefore requires from public leaders that they not only commit to the goals of the part they are formally responsible for but also that of colleagues and the organization as a whole. This implies a broad network, being able to operate in various contexts and to connect these. Teamwork, attention to complementarity and listening to each other are crucial. This form of leadership requires transparent operations of both politicians and civil servants. Future public leadership is a collective quality.

#### **Collaboration-oriented**

- Connector between social organizations, political governance and the administrative organization
- Bring together people with different backgrounds, gender and various disciplines, cultures and organizations
- Use the complementarity of others; the ability to understand various perspectives
- Adaptive capacity
- Vertical and horizontal management
- Having an overview of context of and connections between the subject-matter
- Active in networks

- Stimulate initiatives in networks, co-creation
- Managing decompartmentalization and managing networks
- Breaking down boundaries
- Interpreting complexity of content and context
- Inspiring others on the matter and offering comfort
- Giving employees elbow room and encouraging them to be creative and assertive
- Goal-oriented, aiming for results with social impact

#### **Learning leadership**

Senior civil servants must be able to oversee the effects in the long term and must represent a consistent and reliable government organization which simultaneously meets the requirements of a changing society and politics. The policy dynamics must remain, or become manageable for 'implementation' and practice.

A senior civil servant leader must be able to provide a counter-voice when needed. This requires flexibility combined with firmness. Since the social trends will continue by definition, senior managers periodically will change positions and new insights will emerge on all aspects of the job of a senior civil servant; reflection and development are strict preconditions for a learning and excellent government.

Every senior manager will actively have to seek this out, in order to be able to operate successfully in, and on behalf of, the government. The idea behind reflection is that necessary questions will be discussed that are directly related to the DRRRA-model (Direction, Room, Relationship, Results and Accountability). Questions like: is my organization still on course? Is it future-oriented in view of all technological developments? Is my organization still sufficiently connected to society and have I instigated the right process? Am I still doing a good job as a manager?

#### **Self-awareness and reflection**

- Development-oriented

- Creating together with other leaders, collective leadership development, daring to be vulnerable
- Creating space for learning, continuous investment in development
- Self-reflection by organizing reflection and asking for feedback
- Authentic
- Show courage and daring
- Handling highly variable situations
- Daring to treat unequal cases unequally
- Dealing with insecurities and not knowing
- Organizing opposition, posing questions, being curious

## Qualities for a leadership team

The profile of a senior civil servant consists of the key qualities of leadership by senior civil servants plus requirements arising from the specific context of the position, the current task and also the composition of the current leadership team. This is increasingly important given the knowledge that the influence and the impact a public leader may have to achieve the social purpose is grounded in the collective.

For a team to be successful the following is also important:

- A good distribution among the team members of knowledge of the domain and new experience and insights.
- Focus on results, meeting the political mandate and the social dynamics as well.
- A meaningful goal for the organization.
- Possessing administrative craftsmanship in respect of management of operations, in particular staff (including the DRRRA-model), IT, finances and the policy cycle (emphases depending on the role) and new ways of working (co-creation, transparency and communication).
- Diversity and versatility of the team composition. In particular in the field of cultural diversity there is much to be gained by the central government which is necessary given the social challenges and the fact that more perspectives in a well-managed team may lead to better results.

This is a publication by:

Bureau for the Senior Civil Service  
**Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations**  
PO-Box 20011 | 2500 EA The Hague

April 2017