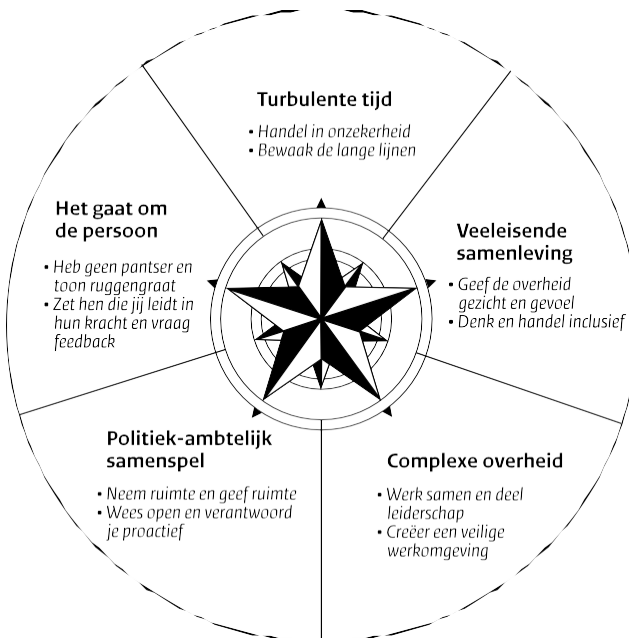




# Compass for public leadership - vision on desirable leadership strategies



# Colophon

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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction: a compass for setting the course of public leadership</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II. Summary</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>III. What is the starting position in setting a course?</b>	<b>12</b>
a. Stormy weather	13
b. It is all about public values	14
c. Public leadership is not an oxymoron	14
d. Leadership is about managing change	15
e. Leadership is possible anywhere but is essential at the top	16
f. The Netherlands is not an island	16
g. It is a movement with no fixed finishing point	17
h. It is a matter of dilemmas, paradoxes and wicked problems	17
i. Optimism	18
j. Government is a many-headed phenomenon	18
k. There is no clear vision on what is expected of government	19
l. Society demands more and accepts less	20
m. Digitalisation is a given	21
<b>IV. The desirable directions for public leadership</b>	<b>22</b>
1. Act in the face of uncertainty	24
2. Monitor the long lines	25
3. Give the government a face and feelings	26
4. Think and act inclusively	28
5. Work together and share leadership	30
6. Create a safe environment in which mistakes are allowed	32
7. Take space and give space	33
8. Be open and proactively accountable	35
9. Do not build fences and show backbone	37
10. Empower the people you lead and demand feedback	39

<b>V. Conclusion: being and staying on the move</b>	<b>41</b>
a. No finishing point	42
b. Follow up	42
c. The history of the Compass	43
d. Connections to research	44
<b>VI. A few suggestions for immediate action</b>	<b>47</b>

I.

# **Introduction: a compass for setting the course of public leadership**

Public leadership is urgently needed. Societal challenges demand different kinds of leadership, the same desire is shared by citizens and businesses, people working in the public sector recognise a lack of leadership and top managers feel they are forced to operate within a glass bell. It is therefore extremely desirable that at least the top management set a course for and demonstrate **more leadership**. And that other civil servants demonstrate leadership as well: leadership is not exclusive to top management.

The obvious question then is how to set the course towards ‘more leadership’. Finding the right pathway requires **setting a course**. Leadership is not a simplified objective or a cheerful catchphrase; instead it is a sustained movement that demands considerable dedication. Leadership is all about constant guidance and fine tuning. In the knowledge that the most important policy law suggests that the source of many current problems lies in solutions chosen in the past, it is a matter of maintaining course stability while still preserving manoeuvrability, in other words: the art of navigation.

With this in mind, I have developed a **Compass** and outlined ten **main directions** that can be pursued. The Compass ensures that leaders can consistently focus on five core dimensions of leadership: the context of society, the context of time, the complexity of government, political-administrative interplay and the personal aspects of leadership. The ten directions are a selection of routes that can be pursued as a means of actually demonstrating leadership.

The reason for developing this Compass and proposing a set of directions lies in the urgency that is broadly perceived. The background to preparing this Compass also lies in the request I received from the Senior Civil Service (SCS) to renew the **vision on public leadership**. It was time to review the previous vision developed in 2016. In renewing that vision I was given and indeed took the liberty to enter into a dialogue with many stakeholders, both inside and outside government, about the most important tasks of any leader. I described this as the ‘**quest for public leadership**’. In March 2021, I produced a Travel Journal describing that quest, which was shared widely on the SCS site and much discussed during meetings and follow-up interviews. On the basis of the reactions I received, I drew up a draft Compass in June 2021. That document was also published and widely discussed both inside and outside government. I then used all these contributions in drawing up this vision on the directions I believe leadership should follow. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter V contains a more detailed description of the creative process.

The Compass is intended for public leadership. Generally speaking, in academic literature, **public leadership** is used in the context of administrative leadership (*Dutch: ambtelijk leiderschap*).<sup>2</sup> Occasionally a broader definition is employed to study political, administrative and societal leadership and the way they interact. For this Compass, however, I have taken public leadership in the context of public leadership. In this document, public leadership and **administrative leadership** share the same meaning.

This Compass is intended for anyone within government wishing to show leadership. In other words, it is not reserved exclusively for senior civil servants. As I myself already indicated, many in government are able to show leadership. In such cases this may be informal leadership, but that makes it no less important, given the huge challenges facing government. Nonetheless, this Compass certainly is also intended for (top) management. After all, management without showing leadership is inherently flawed. My aim is to see that the Compass is used **government wide**. In other words not only within national government but also by municipalities, provinces and water authorities, at all levels, within implementation, policy making, supervision and at operational level too. As part of my search, I visited many places and I have used all the experiences I gathered in drawing up this proposal.

The intention is that the Compass should be used everywhere. Of course there are differences between **government organisations**. The same challenges do not feature at the top of every to-do list. It all depends on the experience accrued in the past or still to be accrued and on the choices made in the field of organisation development. It is up to each of the organisations to decide which directions they choose to follow. And the same can be said of the **formal and informal leaders** themselves. They too can opt for particular choices or accents. In all the discussions and meetings I attended, I have come to recognise that the leadership challenge is certainly as broad as I have chosen to present it in this Compass, and that there is much common ground between the various directions that need to be pursued.

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<sup>2</sup> Groeneveld, S., Kuipers, B., van der Voet, J., Kolvoort, S. (2021). Sub-report Literature Review. Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) commissioned by the DG for the Senior Civil Service, p. 6.

The proposal consists of **three components: the compass, the directions and the starting position**. In my judgement, all three are needed in order to set a clear course for public leadership. The Compass is an essential navigation tool: in determining the style and content of leadership, the five dimensions of orientation must be constantly referred to. The purpose of the directions is to provide a repertoire for administrative leaders in actually taking the necessary steps. As far as possible, each direction has been formulated as a 'call to arms'. Given the serious dilemmas, paradoxes and complex puzzles that have to be overcome, this proved no easy task. In setting a course, it is also important to be familiar with the starting situation. For that reason I paid particular attention to this aspect at the beginning.

At the end of this proposal, I take time to consider the process. Both the process of creating the Compass and the follow-up. I specifically mention the follow-up, because public leadership is all about perpetual movement. In the process of creation, a clear connection was made to **academic insights**. Starting with the Travel Journal, the Leiden Leadership Centre of Leiden University (LLC) conducted both a large-scale literature review and an empirical study with focus groups and large-scale survey research among managers and employees working for the Dutch central government. The findings from these studies are integrated in this proposal. In the conclusion in chapter V and in respect of following up on the vision from 2016, I consider those findings in more detail.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone involved in this journey of discovery into public leadership. The contribution of many has made this Compass possible.

The heated arguments and passionate contribution of ideas have together formed the basis for the Compass. I would particularly like to thank the DG for the Senior Civil Service. Throughout they have kept me on track and their support was overwhelming. I would also like to thank Prof. Sandra Groeneveld and other colleagues from the Leiden Leadership Centre for the academic insights they were able to provide. Their knowledge has formed a solid foundation for this Compass.

**Mark Frequin**

Commissioned by the Senior Civil Service

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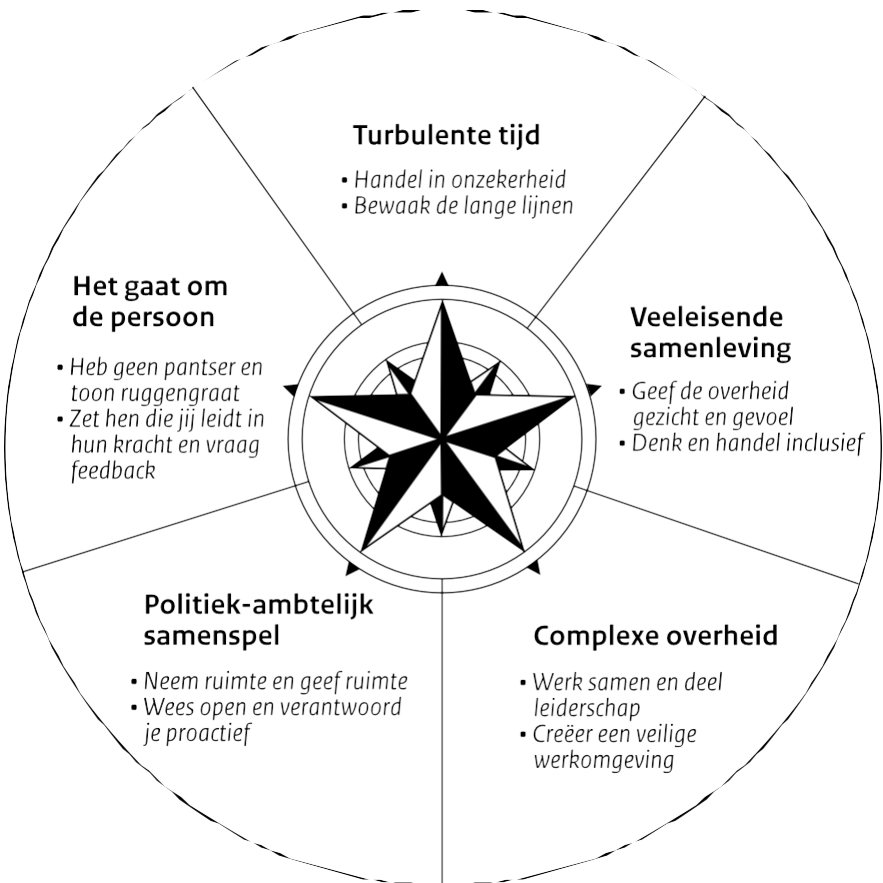


II.

# Executive summary

## Compass

In setting a course for public leadership, it is essential to have a clear vision of five dimensions of leadership. Literature generally refers to an ordering of four: context, organisation, relationship network and the (individual) person. I, however, have divided the element context into the context of time and the context of society. Compared with the traditional compass, that has only the north as its orientation point, this Compass is atypical. However, given the huge complexity of public leadership, I have opted for a Compass that features five magnetic fields. Thanks to these magnetic fields, this Compass exercises a pulling force on all aspects of public leadership.



## Starting position

Before determining the directions to be pursued, it is important to understand the starting position for public leadership. Thirteen key aspects were determined.

We are in stormy weather; we are facing the 'perfect storm'.  
It is all about public values.  
Public leadership is not an oxymoron.  
Leadership is about managing change.  
Leadership is possible anywhere, but it is essential at the top.  
The Netherlands is not an island.  
It is a movement with no fixed end point.  
It is a matter of dilemma's, paradoxes and wicked problems.  
There is optimism about strength in government.  
Government is a many-headed phenomenon.  
There is no clear vision on what is expected of government.  
Society expects a great deal and will not accept everything.  
Digitalisation is a given.

## Ten main directions

The ten main directions for public leadership are characterised by a combination of civil service professionalism (*Dutch: ambtelijk vakmanschap*) and administrative autonomy. These directions are specifically and clearly intertwined. As far as possible, they are described in the form of a perspective for action, in relation to the five dimensions of the Compass.

Dimensions	Directions
I These are turbulent times	1 Act in the face of uncertainty
	2 Guard the long lines
II Society is demanding	3 Give the government a face and feelings
	4 Think and act inclusively
III Government is complex	5 Work together and share leadership
	6 Create a safe working environment
IV Political-administrative interplay is essential	7 Take space and give space
	8 Be open and proactively accountable
V It is all about people	9 Do not build fences and show backbone
	10 Empower the people you lead and ask for feedback

III

**What is the  
starting position in  
setting a course?**

Setting a course is not possible without identifying the starting position. This starting position can be defined as follows:

- a. Stormy weather
- b. It is all about public values
- c. Public leadership is not an oxymoron
- d. Leadership is about managing change
- e. Leadership is possible anywhere, but is essential at the top
- f. The Netherlands is not an island
- g. It is a movement with no fixed finishing point
- h. It is a matter of dilemmas, paradoxes and wicked problems
- i. Optimism
- j. Government is a many-headed phenomenon
- k. There is no clear vision on what is expected of government
- l. Society expects a great deal and will not accept everything
- m. Digitalisation is a given

What follows is a brief description of each starting position.

### **a. Stormy weather**

We are facing a 'perfect storm'. This (meteorological) term refers to the situation in which a series of problematic developments occur at the same time. We in government certainly have a sense of that concurrence of events. There is a considerable sense of tumult in and around government, and that fact is also felt as a body blow within the civil service. Much of the unrest is aimed at the political arena, but the administrative organisation is also closely involved and clearly affected.

To some extent these are developments that have simply happened to the government, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing power of mainly American and Chinese businesses and the vast flows of migrants as a consequence of wars, persecution and poverty. Partly, however, the effects are caused by the actions of the government itself, such as the dismay surrounding the childcare benefits scandal, the restrictions due to nitrogen and the earthquakes caused by gas extraction in Groningen. The government is facing stormy weather and that calls for appropriate leadership. The urgency of the response is perceived both inside and outside government.

Setting a course in stormy weather is no easy task. Visibility is often limited. There is a risk that all attention will be focused on 'escaping the bad weather'. And yet, leadership must be demonstrated 'full steam ahead', here and now. At the same time, public leadership means not concentrating all your attention on the misery of here and now, but also on the long-term forecast. A great deal of the unpleasant sum of disturbing

developments affects the role and functioning of the administrative organisation. Setting a course for change in the face of all this turbulence itself calls for public leadership. At the same time, we are experiencing the interesting paradox that whereas people wish to be led and are calling for leadership, they do not always actually like their leaders. To be entirely clear, leadership may not about the character of an individual person, but personality does matter.

### **b. It is all about public values**

Administrative leaders are required to deal with multiple loyalties. Loyalty to society, loyalty to the political administration, to their own organisation, to the future, to their 'own' people and even loyalty to themselves. There is not necessarily an area of tension between these loyalties, but there certainly can be. Loyalty for example to a political leader can be perfectly aligned with loyalty to society. But that need not always be the case, and it can be something of a struggle. The overall guiding principle is public values. That is what government is all about. It is up to politics to make choices, but it is the task of administrative leaders to make the relevant proposals and to protect the public values. The central element of public leadership is service to society and hence public service. It is all about citizens and businesses. The challenge for public leaders is to serve with value. In that sense, the term employed for administrative staff in the UK 'public servants' is eminently appropriate.

### **c. Public leadership is not an oxymoron**

An oxymoron refers to a combination of two words that appear to contradict one another. Inherent in the word civil servant is the element of doing service and in that connection, leadership appears incongruous. However, public leadership can perhaps best be demonstrated in giving service to society. Public leadership may not allow itself to hide behind the face of the political primate. Although administrative leaders are dependent on the space and possibilities allowed by politics, with the political primate that exists within our democratic legal order, administrative leaders must also be able to operate independently of politics. In the Netherlands, (senior) civil servants are not politically appointed. Just like all civil servants, administrative leaders are expected to be unimpeachable and reliable, independent and impartial. The Code of Integrity creates a framework for honesty and integrity in performance. The same is demanded in the official oath or promise sworn by all civil servants.

This means that administrative leaders must create the conditions for contributing the administrative knowledge and experience needed for providing answers to the tough societal challenges, even if that contribution may be politically undesirable. Of course, they must act legally: administrative leaders operate within the possibilities, restrictions and intentions of 'the law'.

#### d. Leadership is about managing change

Public leadership means: taking the lead in both preparing and implementing the desired societal changes, even if it results in the remarkable paradox that nothing is in fact changed. The key is to find a sound balance between retaining what is good and the need for renewal. It is entirely conceivable that the decision is in fact taken to not allow government to determine the nature of change; that task should instead be left to (actors in) society. 'Sitting back and waiting for things to happen' can in fact be an entirely relevant response from civil servants. Government is not the answer to all problems. Indeed, government is in fact often part of the problem. Whatever the case may be, there is a need for management, even though as Einstein has taught us 'we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them'.

Management can follow different routes: vertical, horizontal and possibly even diagonal. In their empirical study, the LLC observed that there is tension between vertical management and accountability processes on the one hand and horizontal collaboration processes on the other. Vertical management in the hierarchy collides with horizontal change from society. The question presented to managers by the LCC clearly reveals the perceived tension.

Whole libraries of books have been written about leadership. When you look up the word leadership on the Internet, you receive at least a million hits. In that sense, leadership appears a somewhat intangible phenomenon. There is no single answer. Fundamentally, it is personal and situational. The LLC produced a wonderful compilation of all scientific literature about public leadership. In both LLC studies, leadership is defined as '*a social process of exercising influence on others to arrive at consensus on what needs to be done and how it should be achieved, together with facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve the common goals*'.<sup>3</sup> The management of change comes in many different shapes and sizes, depending on the context in which it appears, the interplay that is demanded or the person displaying it.

An interesting fact is that leadership becomes visible when absent. It may sound '*Cruiffiaans*', but everyone sees it when it's not there. As former EU Commission President Van Rompuy suggested: '*it is difficult to define, but everyone recognises when it happens; when leadership is present.*'

<sup>3</sup> Groeneveld, S., Kuipers, B., van der Voet, J., Kolvoort, S. (2021). Sub-report Literature Review. Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) commissioned by the DG for the Senior Civil Service, p. 7 and Groeneveld, S., Kuipers, B., van der Voet, J., Herms, S. (2021). Sub-report Empirical Research. Leiden Leadership Centre (Leiden University) commissioned by the DG for the Senior Civil Service, p. 6.

### **e. Leadership is possible anywhere, but is essential at the top.**

Leadership and management go hand in hand. They are not the same and they need each other. Without leadership, management is meaningless and without management, leadership loses touch with reality. Leadership is about what should be possible and what ought to be done. Management deals with how it can be done and what already is. When Noah saw that the deluge was about to strike, he decided to build an ark on which all the animals could be saved, two by two; that was leadership. Once all the animals had taken up their place on the ark, he made sure that the elephants could not see what the rabbits were doing; that was management.

Management without leadership is not desirable. Certainly not in the upper echelons of government. The importance of leadership becomes visible when management is lacking. The empirical study by the LLC revealed that the ideas of managers in national government about their leadership do not always match the experiences of their staff.

Leadership can be equally successfully demonstrated by young employees or experienced experts. This then is informal leadership, which can be very powerful. As government becomes 'flatter', there is increased space and increased reason for leadership from different 'members' of the entire administrative 'family'. It became clear to me during my quest that government is simultaneously becoming more hierarchical and flatter. Leadership in government is therefore very much a mix of formal and informal leadership. This too is clearly reflected in the academic studies by the LLC, in which the importance of interaction between formal and informal leadership is underlined. By instilling trust further down the organisation, there is a greater likelihood that the experiences of citizens will be reflected within the organisation. This process takes place from inside out and bottom up, rather than from outside in (the media) and top down (politics).

### **f. The Netherlands is not an island**

The Netherlands is not an island. It is part of the European Union, it is a member of various associations including NATO and the Benelux, and it has cooperation agreements with many countries. Many issues reach us from beyond our borders. And indeed, many solutions must be sought in an international context. Leadership does not start or finish at our national boundaries. Nonetheless, we continue to see many issues through one-dimensional national spectacles. And it starts with setting targets.

Most targets come with a purely national interest or a national success factor. We thereby run the risk of investing insufficiently in shared interests. We look to see how we can benefit the most. We then invest insufficiently in forming coalitions. International cooperation is in essence a matter of understanding what other countries or other parties want, before investigating how 1 and 1 can make at least 2, and



preferably 3. With regard to the Brexit question, we were perfectly able to explain what the British were doing wrong, but we are almost incapable of reflecting on our own limitations. It is worthwhile recognising in that context that Brussels is not a hostile power that aims to attack us in our flanks. Instead, we ourselves are Europe. As we are required to work within the numerous rules drawn up within the EU, it makes sense to actively contribute to ensuring the good quality of those rules, at the earliest possible stage. That international dimension must be ever present in the thinking of every administrative leader. It is also important to realise that in terms of the performance of our administrative organisation, we believe that we are world leaders. That belief is a pleasant combination of justified self-awareness and serious arrogance. The skill lies in successfully combining the 'desire to be a world leader' with 'learning a great deal from and in other countries'. If we wish to be and remain a world leading country, then we must invest permanently in 'being good'. After all, the challenges facing us are not exclusively Dutch in nature. We can also learn a great deal from 'our neighbours'.

#### **g. It is a movement with no fixed finishing point.**

Public leadership is not about reaching a single fixed finishing point, but it is a question of perpetual movement. It can be useful to designate orientation points or mark out a development horizon. However, we must be aware that that horizon is also constantly moving and that things can change as we move forward. Public leadership calls for constant management and fine tuning. It is a question of manoeuvrability and course stability. It is about consistency and predictability in the process of change. The capacity to make that possible is a prerequisite for public leadership. The leadership journey is a long one. Partly because of the huge scale of the challenges and partly because new challenges constantly emerge. This quickly leads to comparisons with the Odyssey, or perhaps more aptly the search for the Holy Grail. After all, there is no fixed finishing point. And there will be hardships along the way. Public leadership is not for the faint-hearted.

#### **h. It is a matter of dilemmas, paradoxes and wicked problems.**

Public leadership is not a question of simple slogans or brave mottos, but of dilemmas with no single simple answer, paradoxes that appear incomprehensible and complex issues that appear more like mysteries. There is huge complexity. The climate challenge is multifaceted and was certainly not born overnight, and as for water management, that has been our bread and butter, for centuries. Against that background, the studies by the LLC reveal the importance of a more horizontal approach to leadership. The essence lies in working towards achieving our objectives, beyond the boundaries of individual organisations, while paying sufficient attention to face-to-face meetings with citizens and businesses.

Complexity cannot be overcome by simplification. And dilemmas cannot be flattened until they become mono-dimensional tasks. It is time for us to recognise that there are

often multiple answers to the issues facing us, and that difficult choices are inherent in all dilemmas, often exacerbated by opposing interests. The skill lies in both accepting the complexity and simultaneously identifying ways to manage it. Public leadership is all about recognising and understanding the 'labyrinth' of dilemmas, paradoxes and major issues as well as pointing out the 'entrances and passageways' for the people responsible for managing the process. And because in that process, leaders are constantly forced to confront themselves, the image of the labyrinth as a 'hall of mirrors' is perfectly appropriate.

### **i. Optimism**

The government delivers considerable clout. The government is not a collection of buildings, but is made up of a large number of expert, intelligent and energetic individuals. In other words, government comprises considerable human capital. The art lies in making the best possible use of that capital. Administrative leaders must get the best out of their people or, even better, put them in a position to get the best out of themselves. Not by telling them what they should not be doing, but by inviting them to act. This approach is extremely effective. There are numerous examples of things going well in government. But they receive little attention. There seems to be more interest in focusing on what goes wrong. Nevertheless, the staff and managers within the Dutch government deliver excellent performance and show how things can be done. The result is a widely shared feeling of optimism in respect of the major tasks of leadership. And they involve a number of marvellous challenges. As I once said to a Minister, *'What a privilege that we are allowed to do this!'* To which he replied dryly that it is insane that we are even paid for doing it.

### **j. Government is a many-headed phenomenon.**

There is no such thing as *THE* government. In the same way that *THE* society does not exist. Government is made up of a wide diversity of layers, organisations, roles, positions and sets of expertise. And all those elements of government seem to be in a constant state of renovation; municipalities are merged and Ministries split up or combined. Both inside and outside government, there is a widely shared desire for more cooperation in government and for more uniformity. Nevertheless, there is no such thing as one government. In determining the direction for leadership behaviour, the challenge lies in identifying the shared elements of leadership in which every leader in government feels reflected. At the same time, different routes will be taken, depending on whether the people taking those routes are top managers in implementing organisations or middle managers at inspectorates, or heads of legal directorates, or directors at Provinces, or key figures in HRM policy, or municipal secretaries of small municipalities, or the team leaders of bridge keepers or secretary-generals of government departments, or ... The Compass is all about shared values in public leadership. At least that is what it aims to be.

The empirical study by the LLC shows that this is actually achievable. There is much common ground in the field of public leadership. While still recognising that there are differences between implementation and policy, for example, and between small municipalities and large provinces. It is important to recognise that even within government organisations there can be differences, such as the difference between staff units and operational teams within large implementing organisations. During my quest, it became clear to me that at all these different places in government, not everyone speaks the same language so that we do not always fully understand one another. Nevertheless, there is still much common ground within the leadership tasks of government. It is of course possible to differentiate in terms of the choice of routes and pathways to be followed, depending on the affected target group within the administrative organisations, or the current stage of development at organisations; or between individual administrative leaders. And not everything has to happen at the same time. As the saying goes, the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

#### **k. There is no clear vision on what is expected of government**

One thing that emerged from the numerous interviews is that there is no clear consensus on where the government stands and what it stands for. There is also no clear vision on what is expected of government. There is currently much discussion about the role and position of the government. Both in terms of expectation and robust criticism. The government is expected to be proactive in dealing with all the major issues. Along the lines of 'leave that to government to solve'. At the same time, however, there is a realisation that there are many problems that government cannot solve. This raises the question whether it is clear what ought to be placed on the government's plate. The question 'more or less government' represents a digital approach to this complex issue, which over the course of time generates different answers. This fact is reflected in the recent sharp criticism of the government response for example to the childcare benefits scandal. If it is unclear what can be expected of government, then it is very difficult to show leadership.

That having been said, the government appears to be overdue for a 'reassessment'. That at least is the trend that is currently emerging. That same trend is reflected in (election) programmes and in opinion pieces. The process seems have been considerably accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time however, it seems to be following a constant pendulum movement, in which the market is placed in opposition to the government. With for the time being 'a little bit more government'. Ignoring the fact that the market cannot and indeed has never been able to function without the government, and the fact that the government is unable to live up to all the great expectations placed upon it, it is essential to not swing too far 'in the other direction'. The art lies in constantly seeking to maintain a balance between a visible government and a government that does not take up the mantle of a makeable society.

## **I. Society demands more and accepts less**

It is one of the more interesting areas of tension in relation to the leadership of government that while more and more is demanded of government, less and less is actually accepted. The typical Dutch citizen can be described as someone who is perfectly aware he or she is able to drive, but who wants the government to clamp down on the tailgater on his or her bumper. In other words, someone who demands protection under the rules but who does not always accept them when they are imposed on themselves.

Actors in society demand a great deal from the government. It must however be realised that not everyone wants the same things. The interests and values in society are varied and often contradictory. That society demands a great deal from the government is perfectly understandable. The government should after all 'just do it'. Particularly given the growing unpredictability of developments, what people want is a government that stands up to be counted and that is on hand to help us weather the storms of uncertainty. But that does not mean that everything the government says or does will be accepted. The trend is in fact a decline in acceptance. And experiences such as those relating to nitrogen or the earthquakes in Groningen have made that acceptance all the more vulnerable. The government is regularly seen as a party in the question and not as the body positioned above all the other parties, whose task is to try and establish connections between sometimes opposing interests. Even though that is in fact the most desirable and ideal role for government.

There is much external criticism of government in terms of predictability and consistency. Predictability and consistency are elements of the reliability of government. In comparison with many other countries, trust in government is at a relatively high level but there remains an obligation upon government to work hard on its predictability and consistency. This is ultimately the task of the administrative leaders since it is specifically the administrative organisation that must stand up for traceable consistency. Administrative leaders must make sure that the government's strategic agenda is not hijacked by every passing crisis.

## **m. Digitalisation is a given**

Digitalisation has become an inescapable element of the administrative world. Civil servants are almost swamped by its presence. It impacts on our everyday performance and to a considerable degree determines which information is available. It forms opinions, it harms officials, it helps accelerate the pace of development and it makes government even more dependent on Tech giants... All in all, it represents more and greater problems and yet also more and greater opportunities. For administrative leaders, it means that there are both limits to and opportunities in the regulation of digitalisation, in introducing knowledge and information, in sharing expertise, in being

prepared for attacks on social media, in recognising threats to privacy... As a consequence of digitalisation, administrative leaders must be digitally literate and digitally conscious, in our information society.

In their literature study, the LLC has however noted that there is a woeful lack of academic knowledge on the relationship between digitalisation and public leadership. Digitalisation unavoidably means that administrative leaders must be able to think and act quickly. That in turn makes knowledge of the platform society and experience with social media essential. It also changes the context in which the administrative organisations are required to operate. On the one hand, the platform society appears to be a parallel world that operates in isolation from the 'ordinary' world, but that is at the same time closely intertwined with the 'ordinary' world. It shares both new challenges and ties with 'old' issues in a world in which public values such as transparency, security, inclusivity and equality are becoming increasingly significant. At the same time, digitalisation gives rise to the paradox that because we are dealing with such major, long-term changes, we believe that everything will automatically take longer, while we in fact have ever less time because everything is happening so fast.

IV.

# **The desirable directions for public leadership**

Public leadership has no fixed starting point and no fixed finishing point. Leadership is already among us, and will continue to be necessary. It is constantly moving forwards. That fact demands both manoeuvrability and course stability, while recognising the importance of making real advances. In a world that is so full of complex challenges, it is all the more important to constantly set the course.

That indeed is the purpose of the *Compass for public leadership*. Using this orientation tool, steps can and must be taken in the 10 most relevant directions. Those directions can be seen as a coherent set of pathways that can and must be followed. Naturally, this cannot be achieved simultaneously in every situation, but viewed together, they sum up the broad task facing public leadership.

The 10 directions that set the course for public leadership:

1. Act in the face of uncertainty
2. Monitor the long lines
3. Give the government a face and feelings
4. Think and act inclusively
5. Work together and share leadership
6. Create a safe environment in which mistakes are allowed
7. Take space and give space
8. Be open and proactively accountable
9. Do not build fences and show backbone
10. Empower the people you lead and demand feedback

Because what we need are real actions, ‘not words but deeds’, as far as possible these directions have been formulated as ‘calls to arms’. To paraphrase the words of the Belgian poet Willem Elsschot, ‘*Between dream and deed stands the civil service*’; in other words, we could view the administrative organisation as the solution to the wishes of society. At the end of the day, the essence is not to express the words of the dream, but to demonstrate the desired deeds, through administrative means. In other words, leadership is not demonstrated with words but with deeds. Leadership is about behaviour. And if the words, no matter how important they may be, are not followed up by the desired behaviour, every leadership ambition will collapse, like so much hot air.

The numerous interviews and discussions in the framework of the quest on which the Travel Journal and draft Compass are based reveal that there is a deeply felt need for practical advice in giving form and content to public leadership. For that reason, the directions have been formulated as far as possible in the active form. In outlining the prospects for action, I deliberately take stock of the difficulties that accompany every direction, and the dilemmas and paradoxes that emerge, and the tension that is

perceived. No smooth-talking targets, but recognition of the issues that (can) emerge in taking action.

## 1. Act in the face of uncertainty

We are facing considerable turbulence. More accurately a whole series of individual turbulences: societal turbulence, political turbulence, agenda turbulence, temporal turbulence, electoral turbulence, administrative turbulence, international turbulence, (health-related) anxiety turbulence, conspiracy theory turbulence, media turbulence... Added together, these sources of turbulence result in huge uncertainty and ambiguity. They are also taking place against a background of fast-paced change and huge complexity. Specifically in that situation, leadership is both desirable and necessary. It calls for an active administrative response. And even though administrative leaders are also faced by ambiguity, this cannot mean that they fail to act. Public leadership is in fact nothing less than acting in the face of uncertainty. This is certainly true during crises, as demonstrated by the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This conclusion is also underlined by the insights in crisis leadership identified in the LLC literature study. It is a matter of *'getting the dots connected'*, even though it feels like **steering through the fog**. In that sense, public leadership demands advanced steersmanship.

It must not be permitted to become a sort of false machismo. That after all is doomed to go wrong. The paradox is to be clear about that which is unclear. The 'slogan' from the COVID-19 crisis *'taking 100% decisions on the basis of 50% of the knowledge'* is extremely apt, even outside the crisis period. However, it demands considerable openness about that which is unknown. **Be clear about the unclear**. Be clear about the unclear. Explain what your dilemmas are. Explain why challenges are such complex puzzles. It of course remains crucial for administrative leaders to continue to gather as much knowledge as possible, as a means of retaining an overview in the face of managing uncertainty. Considerable administrative knowledge and experience are crucial (see also direction 9), specifically in uncertain times. They are the basis for the much needed intuition.

Gathering knowledge includes **learning the lessons from 'crisis theory'**; the logic of crises. This certainly applies while we remain in the grasp of the COVID-19 crisis, but it is anything but self-evident. One of the lessons of crisis logic is that generally speaking we want to forget the crisis, as quickly as possible, and leave the associated misery far behind us. However, that wish leaves us open to the risk of repeatedly stubbing our toe on the same rock. The phrase famously employed by Churchill, *'never waste a good crisis'* still applies. In times of crisis, it often turns out that we are able to be far more decisive than in times of peace. Less of the endless 'poldering' and more decisive action; not first asking permission for everything we do, but taking responsibility; not thinking that a single leader can solve all our problems, but working in shared leadership; despite a



lack of information, still taking decisions and trusting the people who know; making sound use of science. These are all things we should continue to do after the crisis has ended. Specifically during a crisis, the importance of good communication is visible and tangible, in the face of a combination of critical uncertainty and huge pressure. It is also important to avoid overreacting. Overreacting is a feature of almost every 'disaster', be it errors in childcare benefits, becoming bogged down in rules on nitrogen emissions or nuclear disasters elsewhere. Major crises are often multi-layered, and can be ambiguous. As a rule this is not the case with sudden disasters, but does apply to what we call '*creeping crises*'. Take for example the growing number of elderly people, the advance of organised crime, the growing demand for healthcare and inequality in the world that gives rise to growing flows of migrants. Often things have been bubbling beneath the surface for some time. Crises are often the consequence of systemic issues. And it is specifically the task of administrative leaders to see those issues (coming). It is their **task to be better prepared for crises**. Another task is to end the crisis management measures on time, with clear conclusions about what happens next. And then there is the crisis beyond the crisis. And of course the importance of accountability in the wave of enthusiasm for 'who made the mistake', against the background of a growing blame culture. Crises indeed cast long shadows.

## 2. Monitor the long lines

Administrative leaders must set their course to follow the long lines. Even when skating on thin ice, it is a matter of staying the distance. If we focus only on the here and now, our situation will become all the more precarious. However, such short-term thinking has become increasingly dominant in both the political environment and the media world, and these two 'worlds' seem to reinforce each other in precisely that respect. Today image and incidentalism often hold sway.

It is the role of administrative leaders to ensure continuity: **linking the past with the present and the future**. It is the role of civil servants to take the long view and to monitor the long lines. This ties in with the importance society attaches to predictability. The government must be consistent and reliable, sound and clear. Therein lies the task for the civil service and for the way it is managed. Administrative leaders suit the analogy of the gardener whose role is to ensure that seeds are sown on time and that the garden is not filled only with briefly flowering varieties. Equally essential tasks are maintaining the soil and ensuring a good match between all the plants and shrubs, and constantly weeding and mowing to keep the garden looking green, fertile and well cared for. Perhaps the most difficult task is **creating a link between ; 'monitoring the long lines' and the 'short-term thinking'**, that is often dominant in the political arena. This difficult challenge is also reflected in the two studies by the LLC. It becomes an even more difficult challenge when short-term thinking takes the form of making quick promises, and taking quick decisions,

sometimes without thinking through their consequences. We must avoid a pendulum response. Instead, we need to **tweak**.

In radio terms, if administrative leaders represent the 'long wave' and political leaders more the 'short wave', then what we need to recover is the 'medium wave'. In other words, it is the task of administrative leaders to bring the long term and the short term closer together. That may involve tweaking the long line, but it can equally involve saying no to political promises and releasing 'short-term ideas'.

Public leadership must **form a counterbalance to the running board culture** in the media and consequently in politics. It is time to turn away from the trend of jumping on every bandwagon, in which every incident threatens to become a '*Chefsache*' which percolates into the organisation, unfiltered. As a result, whole divisions of administrative organisations are constantly working to tackle local incidents. It is time to say no to the administrative culture in which 'everything has to be done immediately - right now'. It could mean that instead of saying 'yes, on condition that' we say 'no, unless', as a way of making it clear that fulfilling political wishes comes with non-negotiable conditions. The skill for administrative leaders lies in being able to slow things down, rather than constantly jumping on the running board in an attempt to keep pace. Every senior civil servant must have access to breathing apparatus for the out-of-breath political leaders with whom they work together. The heart of that apparatus is the ability to monitor the long lines. They must be able to form a counterbalance to the (social) media world, in which they are forced to operate, with its unbalanced focus on scandal mongering. Public leadership must be demonstrated in a world populated by keyboard terrorists, gossip mongers and TV oracles. The out-of-breath and simplistic mutterings of twitter and other media must be more effectively gainsaid. Or even better overcome by the independent expressions of administrative leaders, that reflect acquired knowledge and understanding. It is not merely a question of 'reason' versus 'emotion'. Even more essential is understanding the reason behind the emotion. And that too is part of public leadership.

### **3. Give the government a face and feelings**

In the most recent social and political debate, the question has emerged whether the government is still in touch with what is happening in society, in terms of both desires and opinions. Public debates resound with calls for a more human scale, a new social contract and less bureaucracy. It is up to administrative organisations and their leaders to achieve closer ties with society. It is a matter of **both understanding society and, as government, being understandable for society**.

Administrative leaders must make sure that the administrative organisation has an understanding of and feeling for society. A society which often quite rightly imposes

high demands on government, against a background of the perceived tension that although much is demanded, little is accepted. This calls for considerable practical knowledge and a receptive attitude. It calls for clarity about the possible and the impossible. It calls for **the implementation of policy and supervision not from behind a desk** but instead by making your presence felt in schools, hospitals, neighbourhoods, businesses, civil society organisations and (if necessary) even in pubs and bars. It demands knowledge of ‘practice’ combined with ‘ambidexterity’ in bringing knowledge from outside in, and delivering knowledge from inside out. The administrative organisation must be equipped with ‘antennae’ to feel out what is happening in society. Administrative leaders must encourage their civil servants to ‘step outside’. The civil servants themselves must see the world through the ‘spectacles’ of citizens and businesses, instead of reasoning (exclusively) from the position of government. Given the diversity of opinions and ideas, it goes without saying that those ‘spectacles’ must be equally diverse. For therein lies the task of public leadership, **namely navigating successfully against the background of the many interests prevalent in society** and the many values that underpin those interests. It also means having a sound sense of the risks and opportunities of involving interest groups and lobbyists. Using a wide diversity of interest-specific knowledge demands a sound sense of judgement and clear rules of play in applying them. At the same time, it can be a meaningful addition to the knowledge of the leading opinions in society. In that sense, public leadership involves balancing different and often opposing interests and values.

It calls for the ability to achieve harmony with ‘stakeholders’, to organise networks and to make it possible to reach common solutions (see also direction 5). This in itself entails a (re) assessment of public-private partnership. It calls for a consideration of what government should or should not be doing and what can or cannot better be left to civil society partners. After all, the government is not the answer to all questions or all challenges facing society.

At the same time, administrative leaders must make sure that government remains nearby, and is understandable. It calls for the organisation of transparent ‘service desks’ and wherever possible a single clear ‘service desk’. And behind the counter, smart connections to the ‘back office’. No more complex, impenetrable government, but a single, clear point of contact. A government with a face and a name. No referring to others in government, no more sending from pillar to post... In other words, actually standing up and being counted, as one government. **No more anonymous civil servants but approachable people, with feelings and empathy.** That calls for clear language, delivered with the appropriate tone. No more impenetrable legalese, but complete clarity. On occasion, that clarity can in fact be a ‘no’. After all, government is not a game of lucky dip.

The most direct contact between citizens and businesses and government takes place at the level of municipalities and national implementing authorities. It goes without saying that policy and supervision must also be linked to society, and that applies equally to water authorities and provinces. But the most direct contact takes place at the level of municipalities and implementing authorities. Just how important this contact is needs to be evaluated, and perhaps re-evaluated. As indicated in recent reports about the implementing services, this can be achieved in several different ways.

In brief, the key points for improvement are: less complex, confusing regulations and legislation; not introducing new rules of play for every new issue; prune back the tangle of rules and regulations; improve the digital basis; create more space for staff in direct contact with citizens and businesses, thereby creating space for customisation; ensure consistency in delivering sound implementation; stop dumping austerity measures over the 'policy fence'; allow sufficient time to deliver good-quality implementation; ensure administrative attention for implementation issues. In essence, the goal is to **reinforce the role and position of implementation in municipalities and at national authorities**. The key lies in enhancing the stature and quality of implementation. Perhaps we should move away from the term 'implementation' and instead refer to 'public service', or in some other way explain the underlying purpose; perhaps as 'a counter for public values'. In many respects, the key issue is a reassessment of implementation.

Encouraging national government organisations to pay working visits to municipalities who in this respect set an excellent example of direct contact with citizens and businesses could do no harm. All government organisations can learn from each other. The working agenda for public services (WaU = Working on Implementation) offers the perfect vehicle.

#### 4. Think and act inclusively

Society consists of a diversity of people with (sometimes considerable) differences in position, background, opportunities, experience, wishes and assumptions. If 'each to his own' is the (given) operating principle, thinking and working exclusively on the basis of standards is neither desirable nor logical in all cases. Nonetheless, government rules, government systems and 'government thinking' are for the most part uniform. Mainly based on the idea that *'equal treatment demands uniformity'*. Although it is true that **'like cases'** should be treated **equally**, **unlike cases** must be **treated unequally**. This applies to people, regions and organisations. The tasks for example on Bonaire and Saba or in Northeast Groningen or Zeeuws-Vlaanderen differ from those in the Randstad. And the tasks of single-parent families in densely populated inner-city neighbourhoods differ from those of well-educated parents in more expansive suburbs. Specific situations of individuals or regions demand special attention. That too

is contained in the principle of equal treatment.

In the same way that the proportionality principle says that the consequences of a decision for a citizen or business must be proportionate to what you wish to achieve through these decisions. Something that has played and continues to play an excessive role in uniformity thinking is that government responses have become more uniform as a result of sometimes out-of-control efficiency rules, economies and IT logic, but also as a result of the scale of the problem. This becomes a cause for concern if within the uniform approach there is evidence of (prejudicial) judgement or even discrimination, for example through algorithms. Using Artificial Intelligence, it is possible to introduce a great deal of diversity in government action. In turn, however, designing this intelligence requires a considerable degree of diversity caution. At the end of the day, discrimination is absolutely not permissible.

The challenge for administrative leaders is to **find a new balance between the interest of more 'human customisation' and the interest of uniformity**. Equal treatment need not necessarily mean that everything is uniform. Proper administration specifically requires consideration of circumstances in arriving at decisions. It can mean that differentiation is introduced on the basis of specific knowledge. It is up to administrative leaders to ensure that decisions for citizens and businesses are just and bearable. Standardisation is not illogical, but when working with standards, agreements must also be reached on when special considerations are appropriate so that it is not machines that determine what is desirable but people who determine when human action is needed. If enforcing standard rules results in 'professional stomach ache', administrative leaders must create space for specific solutions. Of course, with the **appropriate 'checks and balances'**, for ensuring that random decision-taking and nepotism are prevented. There must be a recognition that customisation can also engender a risk of inequality, additional reproaches or positions that create a precedent. The motivation for a special decision must be visible. It calls for public leadership to make this possible and to create the space for competent civil servants. The administrative organisation consists of people who are capable of thought and reaching balanced decisions. After all, civil servants are not appointed to work with blinkers on. If that were the case, their work could just as well be done by robots.

A government that acts and thinks 'more diversely' is not a noble objective, but a precondition for a smoothly functioning government. Wishing to remain in touch with society calls for a diversity in government in terms of the background and experience of its civil servants. That diversity must be made self-evident by administrative leaders, but has proven difficult to achieve, in practice. It is a long-term process that demands dedication and perseverance from administrative leaders. It must also be remembered that diversity includes a whole raft of differences, for example in education, origin,

cultural background, work styles, personality, suffering from an 'impairment', age, career, gender, expertise, opinions, etc. **The task for administrative leaders is not to appoint clones of themselves**, but to specifically opt for other colours from the palette. In other words, it is not desirable for administrative leaders to gather people around them, who are of a similar ilk.

Government can never be a precise reflection of society, but government can be far more diverse than is currently the case. The government must actively work at achieving diversity, and because organising diversity takes time, administrative leaders must at least operate a management style that encourages inclusive thought and actions. By **acting and thinking inclusively**, you create a working diversity. This sounds like a perfect circular argument: diversity creates more inclusivity and inclusive thinking delivers a working diversity. The art lies in entering into this circle. **Working on your own (prejudicial) judgements** can be an excellent starting point. It is important that the public leadership is aware of its own potentially subconscious prejudices.

## 5. Work together and share leadership

Modern public leadership is 'spread' and 'shared' leadership. The complexity of public leadership has increased considerably, over time, and we have let go of the adage *It's your business or it isn't*. Old Weberian values must be combined with tasks from the digital world in which we must operate, today. Over time, rather than being dropped, new tasks have been added. Throughout that period, on the one hand government has remained strictly hierarchical but at the same time, with the influx of a younger generation and under the influence of social media, it has also become 'flatter'. As observed in the literature study by the LLC, this can result in tensions between the vertical line and the horizontal line. The situation demands a **broader repertoire of skills**, which must be demonstrated rapidly and under considerable pressure. The repertoire has become so broad that it is almost impossible for it to be represented by a single person. In terms of public leadership, therefore, the focus must be shifted towards teams of complementary competences. In other words, administrative leaders must no longer exclusively be skilled, elderly males, but also young female leaders who may not yet satisfy all the requirements. In this scenario, more risks can be taken and not all potential leaders need necessarily be tried and tested in advance, before being appointed. Young talent need not first achieve the maturity of an experienced fifty-year-old. In every respect, leadership teams must increasingly represent a broad mix of competences, experience and background. The complex challenges facing administrative leaders call for intensive cooperation with partners from within and outside government. By definition this **means sharing leadership with others**.

There is considerable consensus about the importance of cooperating with partners inside and outside government, but this does not mean that structuring that cooperation is easy. Cooperation, it turns out, is not self-evident. It calls for giving space to others; it calls for working together in tackling issues and the willingness to leave things to other organisations, and trusting that they will bring them to a successful conclusion; in other words, it calls for putting others in place. **Cooperation** is not a matter of wanting others to do what you want for your manager or organisation, but is about **ensuring that all other aspects also benefit**. It is about (also) granting someone else success.

Cooperation means having confidence in others, and not needing to be constantly present at every meeting. We suffer from 'meetingitis'. We have the tendency to want to be involved in everything. At the same time, we know that if 30 people insist on driving the bus, then the bus will have to travel sideways and that is not an option; in the Netherlands, this is known as a **Belgian bus** (apologies to our southern neighbours). It is a phenomenon that we also see in young football players who all chase after the ball, in a bunch.

Public leadership must invite cooperation across boundaries, both within and outside government. It must encourage precisely that form of cooperation, and attribute value to it. The importance and necessity of external cooperation therefore requires political space and administrative daring and not too much red tape. In the same way, the challenges that are often broader than each of the individual organisations, call for cooperation beyond organisation boundaries. You need others, because the problem is bigger than you can tackle alone. The problem is not the 'containerisation' of organisations in so-called silos; that can in fact deliver focus and clarity with regard to the roles to be played. However, the 'boundaries' of the organisations must not be allowed to get in the way of cooperation. Implementation is not possible without supervision, and municipalities cannot operate without national government. Nothing is more hopeless for citizens and businesses than encountering government organisations and bodies that undermine each other. The key is in the sum of the forces, while focusing on 'the task'. Crucial to cooperation is the interest of equality between organisations and bodies. Sadly that equality is not self-evident. There is for example a clear imbalance of power between municipalities, provinces and national government, and between policy and implementation. Herein lies a task for public leadership, for example by creating **better conditions for implementation or more space for municipalities and provinces**.

The thing that makes cooperation in the world of government more complex and at the same time more intrinsically exciting is the constant creation of new forms of cooperation. These new groups and programmes emerge while the existing

organisation forms are retained. Administrative life today is richly endowed with numerous new coalitions, a situation that can both encourage and disrupt cooperation. There are positive examples of boundary-transcending programmes and projects, but the world of government is becoming ever more congested.

It is a well-known fact that steering committee do not steer and that working groups do not work. Nonetheless, new steering committees and working groups are constantly cheerfully being established. For every new problem, a new committee is appointed. Calling upon administrative leaders to critically evaluate whether a new form needs to be found for every new challenge and which coalitions can be disbanded could no do no harm. **The ever expanding jungle of discussion and consultation could do with some serious pruning.**

## 6. Create a safe environment in which mistakes are allowed

If government wishes to be a learning organisation, there must be room to make mistakes. This is not an invitation to sloppiness or incompetence. However, in an environment in which people work, mistakes are bound to be made. A balance must be found between performance and learning. In that environment, employees must feel protected if they do make mistakes and in the event of an error must not be strung from the highest tree. It is time for a **pushback against the culture of judgment** that is gradually seeping into the administrative organisation, from the media and the political arena. The 'democracy of the inquisition' is spreading. Scores are settled by the mafia but not by the government. Otherwise, government employees will become even more cautious and consequently less effective in providing answers to citizens and businesses. A culture of score settling will also restrict the transparency of action, which is specifically demanded of our civil servants. A more serious consequence is that it is also felt by young employees who themselves have never made a mistake, but exercise caution, preventively.

A socially and psychologically safe government environment is crucial for a smoothly functioning government, as reflected in the empirical study by the LLC. Leadership is not a question of personal courage on the part of administrative leaders, although that too can prove highly effective. The aim should be a secure government environment that offers such protection that heroics are not necessary. **Administrative leaders should stand up to protect their people when the punches are thrown** (and should step aside when compliments are paid).

Although extremely desirable, a safe environment guaranteed by political administrators is sadly far from self-evident, in practice. It is up to administrative leaders to call political administrators to account. It is also incumbent upon administrative leaders to themselves take action in respect of their own organisation and their colleagues who find themselves 'under fire'.



It means working on a greater administrative *'esprit de corps'* and agreements between political administration and administrative organisation about what they expect from each other (a sort of code of conduct). Nevertheless, there is always room for demonstrating courage and for occasionally placing good leaders in the spotlight.

Along similar lines, **innovation must be encouraged and protected**, too. Making errors is inherent in any innovative process but government employees are expected to make no mistakes. Innovation also means giving the freedom to push the boundaries, and to colour outside the lines, rather than excessive risk avoidance or excessive caution. Not always asking permission for everything, in advance; instead apologise afterwards, if necessary. Innovation is essential in order to deliver better public answers to the complex issues facing our society. And innovative thinking and acting is hindered by the prevailing *'better safe than sorry'* attitude. As a rule, innovation is expected in advance to deliver guaranteed success. At the same time, we all know that if you keep giving the 'old' answers, you will never do real justice to the new challenges. In other words, innovation is essential and it is up to administrative leaders to make it more self-evident. Leadership is a question of organising learning, and mistakes are excellent learning opportunities. At the same time the field of tension must be recognized because as a rule, society does not appreciate risks, and is quick to judge mistakes. This at the same time calls for openness about your own mistakes or failures.

## 7. Take space and give space

The heart of civil service professionalism lies in being a **professional authority**. Professional authority automatically includes **professional autonomy**. This is not a matter of 'sitting on the seat of the political administrators', but it is the art of 'taking and giving space' to demonstrate the desired professionalism, even if it proves politically unpopular. That is not the same as acting like a bull in a political china shop. What it is, however, is identifying how a political wish can be achieved, as well as identifying the unachievable. Political sensitivity is not telling Ministers what they want to hear, but it also not protecting them, no matter what. Recently, however, this is precisely what seems to be happening, more often. In that situation, the definition of political sensitivity is too one-sided. An undesirable development. The essence lies in a professional administrative contribution. Important to that contribution is **delivering counterarguments on the basis of administrative knowledge and experience**. Certainly, this is not an easy task. Historically this was ideally the role of the court jester. The court jester was able to tell the sovereign the truth, without risking beheading. We should try to be more like the court jester of yesteryear. The essence, after all, is *speaking truth to power*. And that is far from easy. There is a narrow dividing line between being an original thinker and being perceived by others as an objectionist. Without rubbing, there can be no shine, but you run the risk of rubbing a person up the wrong way whose decisions can determine your future. Moreover, it often seems more beneficial to avoid being too critical, and civil servants like to be liked. However, it is in

fact the duty of all civil servants to contradict the administration (see also direction 9). It is an essential element of civil service professionalism. Political administrators must give the necessary space, and administrative leaders must take it, while upholding the credo: 'inwardly delivering the maximum of criticism, while outwardly demonstrating maximum loyalty'.

The skill lies in both maintaining a strong relationship and close proximity to political administrators, while at the same time maintaining sufficient distance from politics. Administrative leaders should not be exclusively or even primarily *the assistant to the Minister*. **It is not the primary task of administrative leaders to 'keep the Minister standing'**. Ministers are in fact specifically appointed to catch the wind. Administrative leaders have an independent role and a responsibility to society. We must prevent senior civil servants being drawn into the political 'incident maelstrom' and as a consequence becoming more political in their thoughts and actions. The risk then is that the combination of senior politicians and senior civil servants will take on the appearance of a (naturally non-alcoholic) beer bike, in which everyone sits with their back to the surroundings, engrossed only with each other, and getting almost nowhere. It is time to **put the beer bike back in the bike shed**.

Giving and taking the space in which to demonstrate civil service professionalism is currently somewhat under lock and key, enclosed by a historically erected ring fence. It is time to **remove this fence of caution**. There is a huge elephant in the administrative room. The now 'somewhat relaxed' Kok Proclamation (the Ukaze Kok), despite a number of changes, is still an example of such an elephant. It is of course logical that a political ring fence is established. After all, civil servants work under political authority. However, even following the implemented relaxations, the Ukaze is still perceived as an overly tightened straightjacket. It may not even represent a regulated restriction of civil service professionalism but in fact a restriction on their activities, introduced by the administrative leaders themselves. Whatever the case it is time to shift towards more space. The excessive caution is a hindrance to an active response. In any sound political-administrative interplay, the essence is mutual respect between political administrators and (senior) civil servants for their role, their tasks, their knowledge and experience. Ministers benefit from robust, sometimes wilful civil servants. For their part, civil servants benefit from strong-willed decisive political leaders. It is the **art of the two-way street**. It is all about reciprocity. Each party contributes their own tasks and skills, motivations, knowledge, background and considerations. Adding value to both angles of approach results in sound government. This may mean forcing civil servants to understand that compromises sometimes have to be made in the political arena. Equally, political leaders need to recognise that not all political wishes can be implemented tomorrow.

(Senior) civil servants are not appointed for political reasons but because of their skills, knowledge and experience. This is one of the real strengths of the Dutch civil service. It is then up to these (top) civil servants to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and experience. Important with regard to the direction taken by public leadership is that the interest of professional authority be challenged and stimulated. Knowledge, skills and experience form the justification for (top) civil servants. For example in understanding how implementing organisations function, what legislation means, what has been done in the past, how the state governed by the rule of law operates, what is financially responsible, which scenarios may apply in the future and what police officers or primary school teachers actually need.

That then is the realm of the civil service professionalism. And that professionalism in turn is the basis for their authority. Precisely this civil service professionalism, that has clearly been in place for a considerable amount of time, once again **needs to be demonstrated as professional authority.**

**Space** must also be created for the **employees**. It is odd to recruit or to have competent employees and to then tell them what they are not permitted to do. A police officer on a city beat or a serviceman or woman in a combat zone must be able to act independently. Of course only after having undergone sound training and subject to clear agreements. They are nevertheless expected to make their own judgements and take their own decisions. Within set frameworks they are given the space to act. And leaders must provide those same frameworks and that same space to all their employees. For some cases, strict frameworks are more effective while others thrive when offered ample freedom of movement. It depends on the context and the person receiving the instructions. It is along those same lines that we must **be more inviting for our new young employees**. It is they who can bring about renewal and change. We must help prevent them entirely adapting to old patterns of behaviour in next to no time. In the same way that canaries were traditionally used in the mines to send out warning signals, young people today can be our 'antennae' in recognising hazards and new (escape) routes. Looking at the composition of the whole of government, the strength of government lies in having so many good people in positions of implementation, supervision and policy making. All those people must feel invited by the administrative leaders to take the space they need and to push the boundaries, wherever possible. Here, too, the setting of boundaries by the leaders may well not be a formal process but there is a feeling amongst employees that it is forbidden to cross boundaries, even those they themselves may have assumed to exist.

The gift of **colouring outside the lines** is at risk of being lost forever. And yet we know that old ideas will never lead to new solutions. There is a considerable degree of caution within government. In that sense, given the negative nature of obstacles, it is the task of administrative leaders to help overcome those obstacles.

## 8. Be open and proactively accountable

Civil servants form the backbone of public administration. And an essential element of public administration is **openness**. Administrative leaders must create space for openness. Both in being open to what is happening in society and creating openness about how we as civil servants operate. Remaining available to citizens and businesses is essential in order to maintain close ties with society (see direction 3). In essence, the majority of applications under the Freedom of Information Act (Wet Openbaar Bestuur WOB) relate to what amounts to postponed openness. Civil service professionalism includes explaining how policy decisions and policy implementation are arrived at. This must all be made comprehensible.

Civil service professionalism also involves **confidence in approaching the outside world**. It is both possible and necessary to talk more about the profession of the civil servant. Society is permitted to know what its civil servants do. And also what issues are introduced, what knowledge is embedded in decisions and what experience has led to the implementation of executive measures. Civil servants, and in particular administrative leaders, may not play a political game. They must indeed remain far from politics. However, it is both possible and necessary that their knowledge and experience be discussed, as must the way in which their profession is exercised. Certainly in respect of 'implementation', this may be more self-evident, while also taking into account the needs of political responsibility. But not with the Uzake desperation that is still prevalent in the world of government. At present, the saying *'we suffer most sorely from dreading aches and pains'* is still broadly applicable. It is time to move away from that fear of what frightens us most. Administrative leaders must set a good example and speak proudly of the civil service profession. Their task is to ensure that spokesmen and women promote an outward view rather than keeping the doors firmly closed.

There is however a paradox within openness, whereby **openness is not the same as 'everything out in the open'**. It relates closely to the Internet effect of having access to a huge fountain of facts, without a single context or point of reference. The consequence of that situation is that the 'wood of understanding' becomes increasingly impenetrable due to the presence of so many 'information trees'. It is up to the administrative leaders to provide that insight. In other words, instead of a huge quantity of unfilled facts and opinions, a clear sense of order, leading to knowledge and understanding. And that includes providing an explanation with recommendations, clarification of the considerations that have led to decisions, and talking about difficulties experienced in implementation or inspection. Instead of concealing facts in huge volumes of information, in fact clarifying them. Not facts taken out of context, an area in which certain media seem to have acquired the patent, but delivering context. Fortunately, often unsolicited, administrative leaders are offered help by many, such as the (social) media, watchdogs, researchers, consultants, self-appointed detectives,

amateur detectives and inspectors. They keep the leaders sharp and on the ball. Administrative leaders must **ensure that the administrative system is open to criticism, in relation to openness**. It is in that respect that administrative leaders must also be concerned about the downside of 'everything out in the open'. Precisely that can result in caution and reticence. Which in turn can lead to no longer making written records of sensitive issues, but opting to exchange them in spoken word alone, like in *'All the President's Men'*, the messages whispered in the underground carpark by *'Deep Throat'* encased in trenchcoat and fedora. Just as which the privacy so cherished by citizens, a certain degree of prudence must also be maintained in the public administration. In certain situations, secrets are meaningful but that is not the same as acting secretly.

Openness also includes the aspect of **active accountability**. Accountability for civil service professionalism and how professional autonomy is utilised.

Administrative responsibility must not seek to hide behind political direction.

Accountability can be owed to the political arena. The parliamentary wish for greater openness on administrative advice and administrative implementation offers a perfect opportunity. Municipalities are already setting a good example. Municipal councils, for example, are able to pose their questions directly to their civil servants. Also within the EU, senior civil servants are directly accountable to (or in) the European Parliament. This should also be possible at national government level.

Not by becoming bogged down in the restrictions imposed during a single technical briefing, but creating openness more often and more directly; not by sitting back and waiting but proactively. Administrative leaders must escape from the upsetting notion of *'oh no, another Parliamentary inquiry, oh no, Questions in Parliament or Parliamentary motions and oh no, more Freedom of Information applications*. Offering explanations in advance about what has been done, and how it was done needs, to become more of a celebration; after all, you learn from your mistakes. At the very least, instead of accounting for your actions after the event (with the knowledge of hindsight) there should be value in offering explanations while working on solutions (with the knowledge of foresight). And that may even lead to compliments.

**Accountability can also be achieved along pathways outside the political arena.**

And specifically those pathways could prove extremely relevant as an option for civil servants. In other words, accountability to stakeholders in society, responding to direct questions from citizens and businesses, participating in research by scientists or detailed investigations by ombudsmen and women and visitation committees, as well as independently offering accountability to their own environment and organisation. But instead of being reactive, it is important that they are proactive in inviting ombudsmen and women, auditors, scientists, regulators and colleagues from

neighbouring countries or citizens' panels, to reflect on the thoughts and deeds of the civil service. **Don't sit back and wait but actively go in search of critical questions.**

## 9. Do not build fences and show backbone

Leadership exists by the grace of **connections**. Connections both with the people you lead and the people of the Netherlands. It is very simple. If there are no people to be led, leadership exists in a vacuum. And then there is the word 'want', as in 'wanting to be led'. Calling out '*onwards and upwards, follow me*', sounds somewhat pathetic if when you look back you see that no one is following you. Leadership can only be displayed if you have a clear connection with those who want to be led. And at the same time, a connection with society as a whole is crucial. After all, administrative leaders are also 'public servants'. Public service calls for a spirit of 'openness' and not 'building fences', while at the same time clearly explaining what you stand for as an administrative leader and showing personal 'backbone'. Both to those who you lead and to the people of the Netherlands as a whole.

**The core of the administrative backbone lies in professional competency.** Having knowledge and social skills are crucial elements. Administrative leaders must invest permanently in their professional knowledge. And that knowledge must also be put on display. According to Aristotle, it is a matter of '*ethos, pathos and logos*', whereby *ethos* stands for substantive expertise and integrity, that form the basis for administrative authority. *Pathos* stands for an awareness of the emotions around you as a starting point for the power of conviction, and *Logos* stands for the way to present expertise, and putting knowledge into words. In other words, it is the sum of knowledge, experience, attitude, energy and passion.

Neither within nor outside government is there any dispute about **the importance of knowledge of the facts**. A full knowledge of the facts is indeed essential for advising political leaders, for managing one's own organisation and for cooperation with stakeholders in civil society. It should however be noted that in this day and age, it is no longer a mono-dimensional definition of knowledge. In the world of government, it is still occasionally argued that the Ministry of Justice needs to be headed by someone with a legal background, or that a doctor should be in charge of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. However, demonstrating public leadership in positions of this kind today demands a far broader and **multidimensional definition of knowledge**. Among others it calls for an understanding of the functioning of the public sector, insight into the complexity of societal issues, knowledge of the transition challenges, knowledge of the overall domain in which you operate, knowledge of the political context, administrative understanding, knowledge of government in the broadest sense, experience of leadership, financial, IT and legal knowledge, etc. etc. All this must be seen against the peculiar paradox that demonstrating knowledge is essential, in a society in which facts are increasingly often considered irrelevant.

When selecting new leaders and assessing performance, a broad knowledge base seems self-evident. It is after all the basis for the professionalism that must be displayed. One possible consequence is that not all top management positions must in fact end within a 7 year term of office, because in certain positions, acquiring the necessary knowledge and experience take longer than that. Indeed, a letter from the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, written in October 2021, recognises the risk of a decline in specialist knowledge in the event of rapid changes in the senior civil service. For that reason, space has been created to allow positions to be held for more than 7 years. To achieve the desired quality and expertise in the upper echelons of the civil service, this may mean that careers will have to be structured around even more substantial logic, and that an even sounder knowledge base and specific subject skills will be made preconditions for certain appointments. It may also mean that each new Cabinet will not necessarily be accompanied by a complete government reshuffle, because that process too leads to a considerable loss of continuity in terms of knowledge and experience.

**Social skills** are equally important. And that does not mean tree hugging or talking to dolphins. Instead it refers to qualities like: the capacity to learn, the ability to listen, the willingness to demonstrate vulnerability, having a moral compass, having a sense of timing, honesty, the ability to cooperate, the capacity for bravery, daring to colour outside the lines, the ability to create space for others, paying compliments, the capacity to act intuitively and the ability to reflect.

**This backbone must be displayed.** It is a matter of showing what you stand for as a leader, not in lofty rhetoric but in deeds. It must be clear what you are in favour of and what you stand for but equally what you do not support and what you do not stand for. It is also the basis for tendering contradictions. The challenge, where necessary, is to say, *'no unless'* despite the preference among civil servants to say *'yes, on condition that'* and indeed, those are words that politics and society also prefer to hear. Because this is far from easy, having a solid backbone is all the more important. Showing backbone without the necessary knowledge or a solid base of experience can never be effective. At the same time, having expertise but never using it or showing it is a sign of weakness. Administrative leaders must demonstrate a welcoming attitude to **'contradiction please'** both **when contradicting** political leaders and **when facing contradictions themselves** from the people they lead (see also direction 7).

**'Build no fences'** stands for remaining in touch with the people you lead, and in touch with society as a whole. Maintaining that contact means entering into dialogue with them about what they need; being there for them when they need it; instilling confidence so that they come to their leader in good time; recognising the diversity of

the people within the organisation and within society...: ‘not building fences’ **but demonstrating openness, attention and concern, and listening with respect and empathy.**

## 10. Empower the people you lead and demand feedback

Leadership is all about the individual, both the individual who is led and the individual who is leading. Leadership is a fundamentally personal and situational phenomenon. Style, work approach, knowledge, energy and experience of the leader are decisive factors for the success of leadership. At the same time, an administrative leader must be aware of his or her strengths as a leader in a specific context. That in turn means paying close attention to those who wish to be led. By asking open-ended questions to the people they lead. **Reflection on one’s own strength** is a pathway that must be constantly followed, even though experience has shown that most administrative leaders seem to have little time and therefore do not take the time for such reflection.

Another pathway that must be followed in the process of reflection is that of **understanding one’s own weaknesses**. Every leader must be aware of the risks of tunnel vision, the erosion of standards, force (majeure), blinkered vision, tunnel vision, a lack of openness to the new and personal judgements and prejudices. Leadership requires a considerable dose of self-awareness, and preferably also self-criticism. If these are not your strengths, then you must surround yourself with others who will make up for your shortcomings. Preferably involve people who are not overly dependent on you.

This makes **learning a permanent pathway** that must be trodden. A learning capacity also includes recognising mistakes. Administrative leaders may be expected to set a good example. Public leadership stands for *“learning to lead and leading to learn”*. It also means **constantly asking what the people who want to be led actually need.**

The greatest challenge lies in empowering those you lead, and the most appealing aspect is helping others to grow. The key is to encourage the growth of enthusiasm, motivation, energy and competences among those you lead. To do that, you must establish an active and attentive bond with them. That process involves: active listening, in other words listening closely and describing what you do or do not intend to do with what you have heard; having and showing empathy for what is happening around you and the concerns of others; instilling confidence and gaining confidence, offering attention and concern where needed and taking the time to do so seriously and substantively. Listening closely to truly critical people is no simple task and calls for attention in management training. You must work hard at maintaining a listening attitude even if you feel that you have heard people say the same thing 10 times before. Our experiences with whistle blowers have taught us that they may have reason for



repeating themselves so often. Cherish the whistle blowers and protect them from harm. Critical employees must not feel like lone voices crying in the wilderness.

Public leadership also requires courage; courage in the sense that it can mean that you risk losing something; for example your position or your career prospects. A willingness to fail is a key characteristic of a leader. Leadership and suffering are sometimes not far apart. You must be willing to sacrifice yourself. It is not about your personal ego, but the public good and the people who must (help) achieve it. It can require personal courage. If necessary, administrative leaders must stand up and protect their people. The challenge is in demonstrating a combination of heated passion and cool judgement. Against that background, leadership is not about pretty words but about behaviour and attitude. **Leadership must be visible and tangible.**

v.

**Conclusion: being  
and staying on the  
move**

### a. No finishing point

This Compass and the suggested directions are not a finishing point, but require **follow-up steps**. This may take the form of identifying competences for job vacancy profiles; drafting training programmes with the new leadership styles as their starting point; developing theories within government organisations about the leadership course to follow or to be followed but also reviewed by third parties; studies into the dilemmas presented; reflection within governing boards and boards of directors; discussions with employees at the coffee table or at the coffee machine. May aim in this document has been to include the wishes, ideas and experiences I picked up during my Quest and in the many discussions and sessions organised on the basis of my suggestions, in a proposal for public leadership. I also included the outcomes of two academic studies by the LLC. However, as outlined in chapters I and III, this is a movement that must be permanent. As such, the proposal is not a finishing point, but an important stimulus for more course setting and more course stability in the task of changing public leadership. One crucial element is that **the discussion and development of ideas on public leadership** must be a permanent process.

During the first half of 2022, commissioned by the DG for the Senior Civil Service, the LLC started developing a **leadership scan**. This instrument might enable organisations to evaluate the progress of the movement towards public leadership. The scan will make it possible to monitor developments in leadership. It is further crucial that the Compass ties in with the development of organisations and individuals in the field of public leadership. The Compass may not be used in isolation from the phase/development of organisations and individuals in leadership. Indeed, it is desirable to specifically **establish ties with** activities and thinking processes that are already taking place or that are due to take place in organisations or by individuals.

Over the course of time, it is also possible to update this Compass and where necessary adapt and supplement it. Specifically because it is **not a static document**, but a vision that is capable of moving forward without becoming or being inconsistent.

The Compass also seeks to tie in with programmes in government, such as 'boundless cooperation', 'civil service professionalism', 'political administrative relationships' and 'Work on Implementation' (the Working Agenda for public service).

### b. Follow up

The Compass is a **follow-up to the vision** on public leadership published in 2016 by the Senior Civil Service. Following sound and thorough analysis, the 2016 vision revealed three qualities that every public leader must display: cooperation, integrity and reflection. I have nothing against these qualities. Indeed, they are indisputably evident in the same way as saying, *'I am very much in favour of world peace'*. However,

in my judgement, they demonstrate insufficient connection with the hard, often abrasive reality, in which public leadership must be demonstrated in these turbulent times. For that reason, I went in search of the major challenges and the problematic dilemmas and paradoxes and mysteries confronting our administrative leaders. I gave all these issues a central role in this Compass.

This may sound disappointing because in the world of government, what everyone really wants are conclusions and clarity. Nonetheless, these challenges and dilemmas are not mono-dimensional. In arriving at the Compass, I allowed myself to be guided by Einstein who once argued that ‘if I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions’.

It is important to understand why issues are issues. Sadly, in the world of government, it is all too common to quickly draw conclusions while spending little time on analysis; **all too often it is a matter of ‘jumping to a solution’.**

The vision from 2016 includes many interpretations of trends I also describe in this Compass such as: major turbulence, shrinking government authority, social media, growing incidents, problematic paradoxes and an outspoken society. On the basis of those trends, conclusions were drawn in the vision from 2016, that I also draw in this Compass. These include: the importance of cooperation, shared leadership, learning capacity, flexibility and constancy, the importance of knowledge and co-creation. The **difference** between my Compass and the vision of 2016 lies in **placing the challenges in the spotlight and thinking in a movement** rather than identifying the individual qualities of administrative leaders. I have chosen to place a **number of challenges further in the foreground.**

In brief: greater connection with society by giving government a face, by thinking and acting inclusively and by enabling a more customised approach. Furthermore, having and demonstrating greater civil service professionalism by mastering tasks and skills and demonstrating backbone; remaining in touch with political leaders but not jumping too much on the political bandwagon, and being able to maintain a distance, in other words not being one-direction politically sensitive. Another key is to take more administrative autonomy by being personally accountable, preferably proactively and by taking space and tendering contradictions. It is also essential to listen carefully to the questions of those you lead. Finally, the art of organising self-criticism must be practised while at the same time realising that the key lies ‘not in words but in actions’.

### **c. The history of the Compass**

In the autumn of 2019, as a special advisor to the national government, I was asked by the SCS to draft a vision for public leadership. I immediately agreed, as the functioning

of government is close to my heart. Not only have I been privileged to occupy management roles in government, mostly within national government, for almost forty years. For more than 10 years, I have also been chairman of the Association for Government Management (Vereniging voor OverheidsManagement), for more than 10 years have been responsible for organising the lively series of Reuring! debates about government, and have been writing books and columns about the interplay between politics and administration.

Against that background, the **assignment** to draft a vision on public leadership was grist to my mill. Nevertheless, at the start of the assignment, I reached an agreement with the SCS that I would need to start by seeking out the challenges, and that I was uncertain whether I would be able to actually draw up a vision, since the word vision comes with so many serious connotations. At the end of the day, it is in fact up to others to say whether or not what I have produced is a vision. I also made it clear that leadership is not exclusive to the top civil servants in national government, but that leadership can also be demonstrated by many others, in the form of informal leadership. I further expressed my desire to go in search of leadership at municipalities, in provinces and at water authorities.

In carrying out this assignment, I was given and experienced that freedom. In that sense, my **search** turned into a journey of discovery and a quest for public leadership. On that journey, I interviewed more than 300 people, and introduced and attended a whole raft of meetings. My discussion partners were stakeholders from inside and outside government, from low to high, from national government to municipal authorities, from science to practice, from critics to 'believers', and from young to old. In March 2021, I prepared a Travel Journal describing my quest. I then shared this **Travel Journal** with everyone involved and had it placed on the SCS website, with a request for reactions and comments.

Numerous meetings were dedicated to the findings outlined in the Travel Journal, including the SCS seminar on 13 April 2021. In total, I attended and introduced more than 50 seminars, training courses and sessions to discuss the experience I gained during my journey. On the basis of all the reactions and discussions, I then went on to draw up the **draft Compass for public leadership**, in June 2021. This draft itself has been the subject of discussion at more than 75 meetings, and numerous stakeholders have added their comments and suggestions. I eventually used all these reflections in drafting **this Compass**. All in all, the proposed directions are very much the result of heated interaction with many stakeholders. Nevertheless, full responsibility for the text of this Compass lies with me.

#### d. Connections to research

The LLC conducted an analysis of the available **academic literature** in the field of public leadership. In September 2021, the LLC drafted a report of the current state of knowledge in the field of public leadership. This became a study of 168 publications from the Netherlands and abroad. The overall conclusion is that this particular field of study is anything but transparent; it certainly does not represent a uniform subject area that describes the content and scope of public leadership. Much of the literature concentrates more on management than on leadership. The LLC report has in fact turned out to be an extensive collection of specialist academic insights. Those insights proved extremely useful in concluding this Compass. However, more than anything, it has become a review and a resource that can be used by anyone wishing to further develop or investigate insights into public leadership. It also provides an excellent starting point for reaching agreements on further, **preferably long-term research into public leadership**. It is interesting to note that the LLC has identified quite a number of remaining blind spots in academic literature. For example, almost no link has been made to the societal challenges, such as leadership in the face of climate change; there is only limited interpretation of leadership on public issues and the possibilities of digitalisation. Moreover, almost all the literature focuses on the positive aspects of leadership, with only limited attention for the dark side of leadership; almost all literature is leader-centric and fails to consider specifically how to encourage leadership among others. In other words, an excellent starting point for further research **also in this barely touched-upon field of study**.

The LLC also took the findings from my Travel Journal as a substantive starting point for an **empirical study**. This study investigated the effect of leadership, the presence of (the elements of) leadership and the need for public leadership.

This study was conducted with **focus groups** and **questionnaire research** among both managers and employees. In August and September 2021, the LLC presented their statements and questions to a number of focus groups, and distributed questions among managers and staff in the domains policy, supervision, implementation and operations. Particular attention was paid to the dilemmas and challenges facing leadership, as described in my Travel Journal. Both the outcomes of this study and the literature study are individually available on the websites of the SCS and the LLC. I also used the outcomes of this study in my proposal for the Compass.

**Notably**, the current environment for public leadership truly is perceived as extremely turbulent, in particular in political terms. The focus on the latest fads and crazes and the ever growing field of tension between accountability and management are perceived as especially troubling. There is also a high level of perceived pressure. Equally notable is the importance of an open attitude to society, and remaining in touch

with residents, businesses and institutions. According to the respondents, these elements are currently inherent in the role of government. External cooperation is also important.

In recognising shared interests and shared needs. That in turn calls for political room for manoeuvre and administrative courage, for giving and taking space. Administrative leaders must not seek to hide behind political decisions. The final notable element is that the essence of public leadership must be to add value to society, in the public interest.

For employees, this is a greater source of inspiration than (verbal) rewards. However, given the organisation structures, hierarchy, long lead times, fragmentation and political proximity, it is no easy task to maintain focus on this intention. Focusing attention on social intentions sometimes appears to be diametrically opposed to existing systems. This in turn can influence the sense of security. It becomes clear from the empirical study that public leadership relates to multiple directions in leadership, a multifaceted perspective and a broad leadership repertoire. It is meaningful to observe that leadership is more about interaction and relationships than the unique characteristics of leaders; and that leadership is not reserved exclusively to the upper echelons. Depending on the type of organisation, the position of leaders in the government hierarchy and whether they are operating internally or externally, there are clear differences in the leadership findings. However, the differences between policy, implementation, supervision and operations are not as great as you may first think. On the other hand, there are differences between the leadership intended (by managers) and the leadership perceived (by employees). Employees are calling for more leadership, in a playing field where more space is provided to be responsive to society. Sadly, the necessary parameters are not always present, a fact that underlines the importance of social safety.

VI.

# **A few suggestions for immediate action**



As far as possible, I have written the Compass in an active form, for the most part based on a description of dilemmas, puzzles and problematic issues and paradoxes. The discussion of the Compass, both within administrative circles and in the political arena, will demand time and attention. Nonetheless, there are a number of actions that could be taken immediately. Both in this text and in the Travel Journal I produced earlier, there are number of suggestions. According to the motto '*Not words but actions*', as a final conclusion, I have listed a few possible suggestions:

Monitor closely whether the recently adjusted Kok Proclamation (Oekaze Kok) actually offers the desired space to the civil service; prepare a code of conduct for the interplay between administrative leaders and political leaders; use the 3-5-7 HRM model more specifically as a line of thought rather than as a deadline, as interpreted in the letter from the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of 15 October 2021; start now on long-term research into public leadership; launch an initiative for a renewal of the (shared) '*esprit de corps*' among (senior) civil servants; reflect on the historical role of the court jester and use it for training purposes; breathe new life into the position of court jester and start an appropriate study programme; recognise the importance of good listening skills, in all study programmes; create a 'Wall of Fame' for whistle blowers; further investigate potential discrepancies between what leaders think they are offering and what their employees experience; exchange experiences in leadership between businesses/civil society organisations and government organisations; enter far more into dialogue about the opportunities and risks of openness; organise regular dialogue between administrative leaders and members of parliament; increase the good judgement of administrative leaders in using the knowledge provided by lobbyists; prepare rules for the administrative use of lobby-based knowledge; exchange experiences in public leadership with other countries; focus specific attention on public leadership in distant overseas islands (Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten); stop making overdecorated legislation that frustrates space in implementation, by making laws less complex, and by scrapping superfluous laws on a regular basis; appoint more young people to senior civil service positions, even if they have not yet jumped through all the 'competence hoops'; create better balance in salary between implementation and policy making; regularly prune back the jungle of consultation; work on a vision for expectations of government.

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