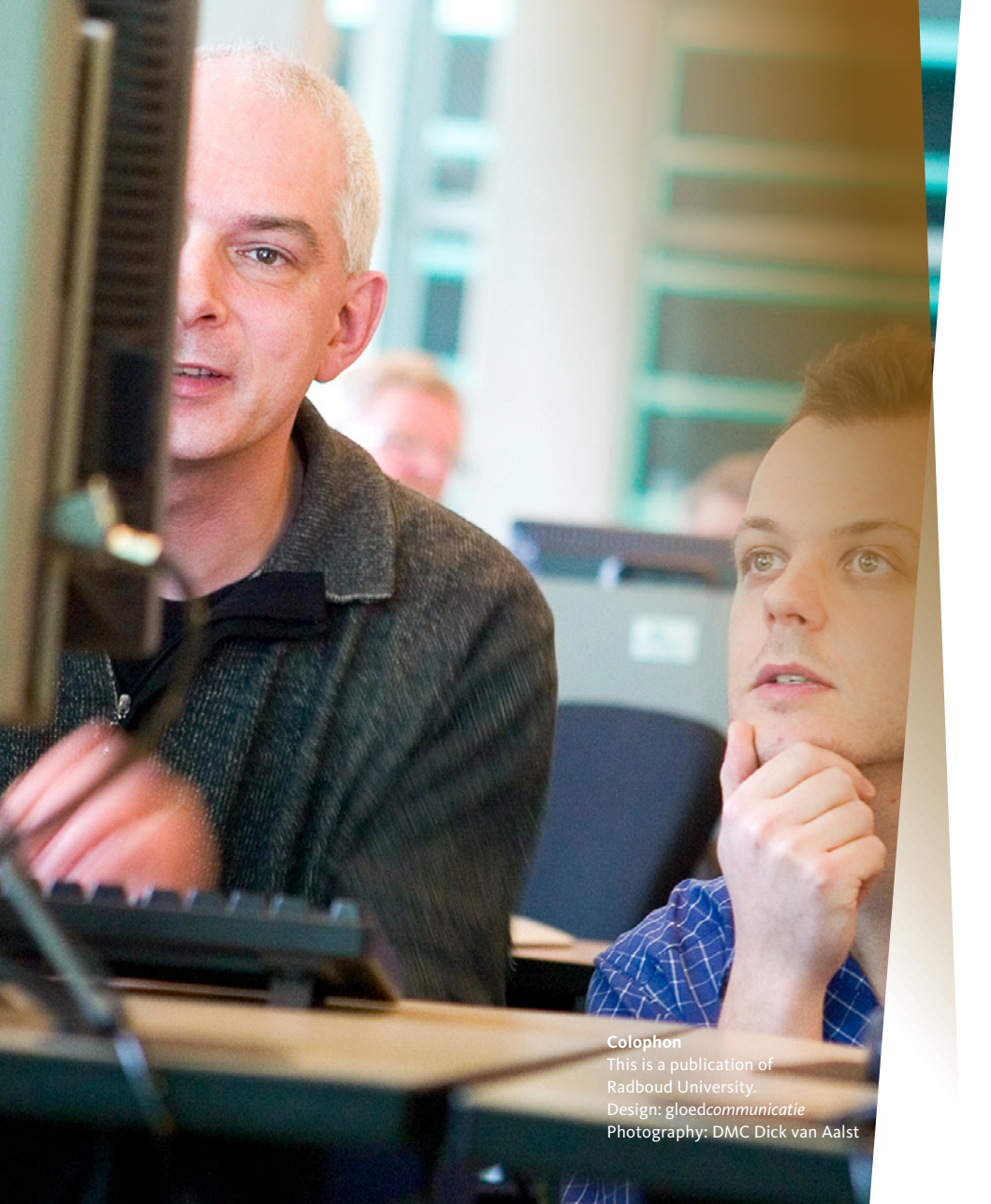


Courage, connection and openness

Towards a challenging vision of leadership
for Radboud University

Radboud University





Colophon

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Introduction

Leadership reflects on the organisation. When the *Human Resources programme council*¹ was thinking about the central themes of the HR policy for the years to come, leadership found its way to the top of the agenda. Good leadership forms the basis for a good HR policy and the realisation of the university mission. Based on the idea that leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it, the programme board held eight meetings² regarding the “core values of leadership”.

¹ The programme council consists of Wilma de Koning, the Vice President of the Executive Board; Daniël Wigboldus, Chair of the Executive Board; Anneriek de Heer, HR Director; and Iwan Holleman, Administrative Director of the Faculty of Science. They were assisted in this process by Marcel Becker and Jeannette Heldens.

² Ten people participated in each meeting. During four of the meetings, the participants consisted of a cross-section of the academic community. The participants in the four subsequent meetings were members of the Executive Board, deans, faculty directors, Radboud Services directors, and members of participational bodies.

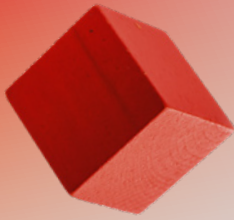
While discussing images, audio-visual fragments, and lists of values,³ RU leadership patterns were formed. The meetings not only shed light on the existing leadership culture, but improvements and new objectives were also discussed. From these meetings, the programme council wrote this memorandum in consultation with the Executive Board, in which the current situation and ambitions for the future have been summarised. This text is a stimulus for further discussion within RU.

An important lesson from the discussions is that good leadership cannot be described with a handful of key words. Rather, leadership is a balancing act involving divergent qualities. Therefore, the memorandum

has also been constructed around a number of “fields of tension” that leadership moves within. At different levels in the organisation, the focus differs. That means that discussion of this memorandum will differ in each area of the organisation. However, in all cases, leadership is not reserved solely for “the leaders” in the organisation. First and foremost, a kind of personal leadership applies to all—a concept that we discuss in the first section. Moreover, every notion of leadership creates expectations for the actions of staff members. Good leadership is a reciprocal process. This will be a recurring theme in every section.

‘Good leadership is a reciprocal process.’

³ The included word cloud (page 18-19) reflects the lists of values that were developed during the meetings.



Personal leadership

Every staff member is given an individual space within which he can develop his qualities. Sometimes that is literally a physical space, such as with a porter who manages a space or a staff member from audiovisual services. Other times, the space is metaphorical: a PhD student manages his⁴ PhD track or a researcher makes decisions about his line of research.

Within this space, humans are autonomous: they take initiative and make decisions. The dialogue with managers and the team determines where the boundaries lie. In doing so, people are responsible and accountable for how they fill

that space. Functioning within that space is not always easy; sometimes resistances are raised. It then requires courage for a staff member to realise his personal goal.

⁴ In this document, the male and female pronouns are alternated per section.

Supervising a team: the tension between being relationship focused and task focused

There are two sides to supervising people, which can be described as “relationship focused” and “task focused”. Both are necessary. They differ in nature and they are not mutually exclusive. It is up to the supervisor to provide the connection and to emphasise the appropriate concept at various times. Ultimately, the focus on the task has priority.

Let the employee shine in his work

The organisational structures of the university are typically top down, but, during the meetings, there was rarely talk of a hierarchical organisational model. The era of unilateral control is far behind us. For example, more and more work is being done in a team in science. Autonomy usually does not mean that a person works in isolation, but that he or she becomes stronger through team impulses.

Individual responsibility plays a role within joint responsibility. Sometimes the individual focus on a career impedes the team or the organisation. It is then up to the manager to mediate. In the meetings, it was stressed that a good supervisor is open to criticism and her decisions are supported by the group. The mutual giving and receiving of critical feedback is not always easy; listening to criticism

sometimes requires courage. But openness is an absolute condition. In some situations, the supervisor is primarily a member of a team: an academic among academics, both a fellow thinker and a staff member. Other times, the distance between the team and the supervisor is greater, but even then, concepts such as leadership through mentoring and connecting are at the heart of the matter.

⁵ The quotes have been taken from the meetings.



In all situations, the supervisor is charged with the task to motivate: she “empowers people”, “she enables the staff member to shine”. This can take many forms, but the

“change perspective” ideal is always present in the background when encouraging people to explore their limits, discover their qualities, and to develop these further.

Decisiveness and clarity

Within the RU culture, it happens too often that no decisions are made in spite of much discussion and everyone ends up doing their own thing. That causes at least two different problems. Indecision allows everyone to have their cake, but nobody gets to eat it. “Stop compromising and start making decisions” are better words to live by. But once a choice has been made, everyone has to abide by it whether he agreed or not. That is rarely the case. “We rarely act like a deal is a deal”. The supervisor has a significant responsibility when it comes to re-shaping this culture. Decisiveness

demands courage—including the courage to stop and change things that do not work.

Clarity means communicating clearly and openly. Clarity does not mean that a supervisor should be an open book. It has a significant connection to trust. If we trust a supervisor, then we accept that she will keep things to herself. If she handles that well, then that trust will grow. The growth of trust between supervisor and staff members cannot be forced from only one party; it is a reciprocal process.

‘She enables the staff member to shine.’



The staff member

For the staff member, this means being a loyal member of the team and knowing when to seek out a supervisor during a problem. She takes on the mentoring and stimulating initiatives of the supervisor. An employee can certainly criticise a supervisor, but if she falls victim to cynicism, then there is an issue. Every staff member has their own responsibility in the dynamic of trust. “A deal is a deal” applies just as much to the staff member as it does to the supervisor. If a decision has been made, even if it contrary to a staff member’s desires, she must still respect it.

The challenge for the RU supervisor

The supervisor has to display extremely different qualities, which belong to the “relationship focused” side of leadership without neglecting the “task focused” side of things.

The supervisor must contribute to connection:

- › She must ensure that the team runs well, so that the group is more than a cluster of individuals. The supervisor must contribute to every member feeling connected to the team, and ensure that bridges are built between islands. In mutual relationships, there is also a level of involvement between people:
- › The need to motivate, inspire, and stimulate. This includes setting an example and encouraging staff members to take on innovations and challenges at a university where “*change perspective*” is the motto.
- › It entails giving people space and freedom, so that they can allow their abilities to develop. It also means not being too bothered if they butt heads with you every now and again. Making mistakes is necessary to learn.

However, the supervisor should also distinctly stand out from the team: they have to make decisions, communicate these clearly and openly, and then be resolute in how they enact them. This demands the courage to confront resistance (from the team).

RU Organisation: the tension between informal and formal

Every organisation has formal and informal relationships. They are both of great importance, but must also be positioned well in relation to one another. This is a substantial challenge for every supervisor. At RU, this is no different.

Informal

The supervisor who takes team accountability and desire for clarity seriously faces some unique challenges in the current organisational culture. These are characterised by strong cohesiveness and powerful informal relationships. That has substantial advantages: good treatment of the staff member and strong sense of loyalty from the staff members to the organisation. Good research, education, and social service are built on good mutual relationships. However, too much

emphasis on good relationships can also have negative effects. RU is not a family. The relationship is at the heart of the family, whereas, in an organisation such as RU, the relationship is only a part of the bigger picture, in which good research, good education, and social service are the primary objectives. If the relationship were raised to the highest position at RU, inappropriate arguments could arise. In this way, it must be possible to tell the truth to a staff member who

is not performing as well as others. An informal culture is also detrimental to diversity and we develop the importance of this at p13. Such a culture is opaque and difficult to understand for employees who 'come from outside'. Another problem that can arise from informal relationships is that they can lead to those involved talking behind each other's backs. The supervisor must contribute to open and direct communication and ensure that people are not kept out informally.



‘Informal decision making leads to problems in the long term.’

Formal

In the organisational scheme of RU, which has stood the test of time, responsibilities are clearly demarcated. However, strict compliance to this regularly buckles under the informal decision-making culture. This is something we inherit from the past, when the lines of communication

within the academic community and compartmentalised society were extremely short. The short lines of communication can certainly be efficient, for instance, during the process of preparing for decision making. They can also contribute to support. Nevertheless, during the decision-making process itself, the formal road has to be travelled so that everyone has access to it. No matter how tempting it may be, informal decision making leads to problems in the long term: unbalanced decisions and the frustrated feeling that a small, isolated group determines everything. Following this line of thought, it is also undesirable to make informal commitments with people.



The staff member

The staff member invests in good relationships with colleagues and the team. A firm fixation on self-interest does not work: solidarity and loyalty represent a significant part of the organisation. At the same time, the employee knows that he cannot accomplish something purely on the basis of good relationships. Ultimately, decision making always takes place by means of the formal route.

The challenge for the RU supervisor

Informal

- > The supervisor works towards good, friendly relationships, with the understanding that this serves the purpose of yielding good education, research, and social service;
- > The supervisor ensures that “talking about each other” does not overshadow “talking with each other”.

Formal

The supervisor ensures that the informal relationships do not develop into issues that affect the formal decision-making structure.



*‘The supervisor
plays an essential
role in equal
opportunities
and diversity.’*

Equal opportunities and diversity are areas which require additional effort

The identity of an institution means that you know where you are coming from and what you are doing with it.

Radboud University aims to be an inclusive university. This demands effort in the fields of equal opportunity and diversity. These are two related, but not identical themes.

Equal opportunity entails providing disadvantaged groups with equal standing. Diversity involves properly engaging with this pluriform and multi-coloured world.

Radboud University was founded as an equal opportunity university. It needed to contribute to the removal of the disadvantages suffered by the Catholic population. This time is now behind us. However, the university has carried both this philosophical background and equal-opportunity mindset with it into the 21st century. This means that it stays aware of disadvantaged groups and makes a contribution to strengthening their position. In this way, the

university is making an effort to improve its male-to-female ratio, which is undergoing an (all too cautious) catch-up period. The position of vulnerable minorities is also a point of concern in education, research, and social service. Additionally, the university has ambitions with respect to the topic of diversity, in which it is important to offer a wide variety. The statement, “RU can certainly be more diverse”, should be perceived more broadly. In this way, RU is educating many first-generation immigrant students. The internationalisation ambition of the university has given rise to people from very different cultures contributing to academic life. The presence of diverse groups makes interculturality a theme on campus. But the diversity theme is very broad. In addition to differences in character, there

are major differences in career and age structure. A good diversity policy ensures that the diverse people can also use their talents for the organisation. In addition to administrative impulses, it requires a climate of openness, understanding and tolerance. The differences certainly also occur in a team, in which differences in approaches and ways of working are not equalised, appreciated, and used. The supervisor plays an essential role in equal opportunities and diversity. Her behaviour is at least as important as the implementation of measures to increase diversity. In this way, her position is important in that she sets an example for how to interact with others. Diversity is not just a matter of numbers during application procedures: it is ingrained in all kinds of everyday decisions.

The staff member

The staff member should also consider equal opportunities and diversity as themes that directly affect her. Unequal opportunity, historically imbedded or otherwise, also poses an issue in the workplace. Equal opportunities only truly take shape through the way that colleagues interact with students and each other. Diversity can also only be properly realised through daily working relationships. This is where the broad range of backgrounds becomes tangible and where the challenge materialises of encouraging people from different backgrounds/cultures to treat each other with openness, respect, and understanding.



The challenge for the RU supervisor

The supervisor has an eye for the differences between staff members and values them. She provides guidance in the challenge of striving to be an equal-opportunity university. This is expressed in:

- > Interactions with colleagues and students. The supervisor sets a good example and prevents stereotyping as well as remarks based on stereotypes;
- > Gives employees with various background the room to breathe and provides the necessary space for a range of careers for staff members;
- > Uses instruments and measures to encourage equal opportunities and diversity (e.g. from the academic offer).

The bigger picture: connecting employees and the organisation as a challenge

The team being led is always connected to a bigger picture. This applies, first and foremost, in the formal sense: department, research and educational institute, and the organisation as a whole. However, this also holds true in the metaphorical sense. The team members work from the perspective of contexts, motivations, and orientations that transcend RU and are present throughout society.

The organisation

The team is a part of larger entities. First, in the formal sense: the research and/or educational institute, the faculty, and RU as a whole, which all represent good research, education, and social service. The ambivalent relationship with bureaucracy, which characterises many professional organisations, is at least as strong at

RU as it is elsewhere. Even those who understand the need for regulations do not typically experience them as beneficial to job satisfaction. During the meetings, the concepts of “excellence” and “performance measurement” came up infrequently, terms which, when it comes to the academic quality in the documents from the institutes,

often take centre stage. Within the organisation, many supervisors stand between a group of staff members and that bigger picture. The role of being a connecting link can take many different forms. The goals ‘good research, education and social services’ are concretised in documents that focus on mission and vision.

A manager must be able to convey a vision, and he must translate the general language of these documents in consultation with employees. When they disagree on (the interpretation of) these goals, this should come to the fore. The supervisor is often charged with the task of implementing what has been decided, potentially after it has been translated to the workplace. Sometimes, he has to mediate, e.g. when

employees complain about requirements set by the management boards. "It is not the right attitude to think, 'how can I experience as little trouble from the organisation as possible and how can I follow my own rules?'" The supervisor is often the link between different parts of the organisation. Academics must understand the support method. On the other hand, it is up to the support team to look at how

to use their expertise to contribute to the primary processes. Ultimately, there is a collective responsibility for the total process.

It is also up to the supervisor to make sure that the staff member does not become too focused on the individual organisation. He must encourage people to sometimes look beyond it.

The academic community as a whole

The scientific supervisor provides substantive direction. He has been appointed because he has exceptional skills in his field. The staff members often look to him for intellectual guidance. He is superior in disseminating the academic ethos and sets an example in doing so. If he does not take academic standards (such as "scientific integrity") seriously, then

who will? From this broad perspective of the academic community as a whole, he is also aware that loyalty to the RU can take very different forms.

The support supervisor promotes education, research, and social service from his personal field of expertise. However, he also looks beyond just the interests of the individual organisation.

With his expertise also come certain standards and responsibilities. For example, people who work in HR, communication, and audio-visual services must take into account social perceptions that express common values and standards as well as legislation.

The staff member

The staff member is also aware that he is a part of the bigger picture of the university and the academic community. He is loyal to the organisation, understands that it must set certain requirements, and cannot address all his issues and needs in the way he would like. As a member of the greater academic community, the staff member is inspired by many colleagues both inside and outside of the organisation, but he knows that even this broader community sets requirements for his work (e.g. in field of scientific integrity).

For the support staff member, the motivation is that he contributes to the primary process that is always present in the background. He takes the standards in his field and social perceptions into account.

The challenge for the RU supervisor

The supervisor looks beyond the borders of his own team and towards the organisation as a whole. He excels at acting as a link between the team and other parts of the organisation. The supervisor in supporting services monitors the proper coordination between the scientific and educational trajectories.

The supervisor is also aware of broader academic, organisational, and social ties.

- > The scientific supervisor “stands for” science and conveys the standards for good science in an exemplary fashion;
- > The support supervisor is focused on the standards in his field and the social context.



Brave Professionalism Critical Freedom Integrity **Trust**

Communicative Innovative Authentic Enthusiasm

Decisiveness Flexibility Support **Courage** Well-considered

Responsability Inspiring **Openness** Self-consciousness

Team spirit Involved **Helicopterview** Bonding Transparency

Political commitment Integration **Dare** Motivator Clarity

Significance Collaboration Approachability **Passion** Proud

Visionary Joy Honesty Representative Diversity Respect Facilitator

Vigour Confident Role model Uniqueness Credibility Dedication

Vulnerability Improvement **Social Independent** Quality Modesty

Persistent **Self-assured** Innovation Meaningful **Creativity**