



A NEW MODEL FOR ORGANISATIONS

**ARDANTA'S EMPLOYEE-OWNED
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

COLOPHON

This is an updated version of a 2016 case study written by author and coach Alison Maitland, with most photography by Frank van Driel, both of whom are alumni of PresenceAtWork's Collective Leadership programme. The updates made by the PresenceAtWork team reflect their recent developments and insights. Design by Robert Oomen and Jorn Wolfs.

www.alisonmaitland.com

www.frankvandriel.com



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verzekeringen

A NEW MODEL FOR ORGANISATIONS

**ARDANTA'S EMPLOYEE-OWNED
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS A NON-HIERARCHICAL MODEL

Many organisations say they would like to improve their results by empowering their people to innovate and take responsibility for better solutions, but this often proves elusive. A new approach, pioneered in the Netherlands to meet the challenges of a complex and fast-changing world, has been achieving remarkable outcomes for over a decade now. It is called Collective Leadership. This case study tells the story of one company's experience of Collective Leadership, and the profound cultural shift it generated.

THE COMPANY

Ardanta is a medium-sized Dutch insurance company, part of the large a.s.r. Netherlands insurance group, which specialises in funeral policies.

THE PROGRAMME

It has been over a decade since Ardanta started their Collective Leadership journey. Collective Leadership is a non-hierarchical model developed by Roelien Boksem, founder of the consultancy PresenceAtWork. In this experiential programme, participants learn to understand and value their own and each other's strengths, discovering when to step into leadership and when to follow, capitalising on the collective intelligence of the team.

BEFORE

In the turbulent period after the 2008 global financial crisis, Ardanta faced big challenges: mistrust of the financial sector; growing competition from new channels; and increased price transparency. Employees were afraid of taking responsibility and pushed decisions upwards. Ardanta's business portfolio and distribution network were outdated.

AFTER

After the executive team had gone through the programme, they became more collaborative and willing to ask each other for help. Communication was more open and there was less conflict. Another turning point came when all employees were trained in Collective Leadership by the management team themselves. People started to speak up, propose solutions and take responsibility for decisions.

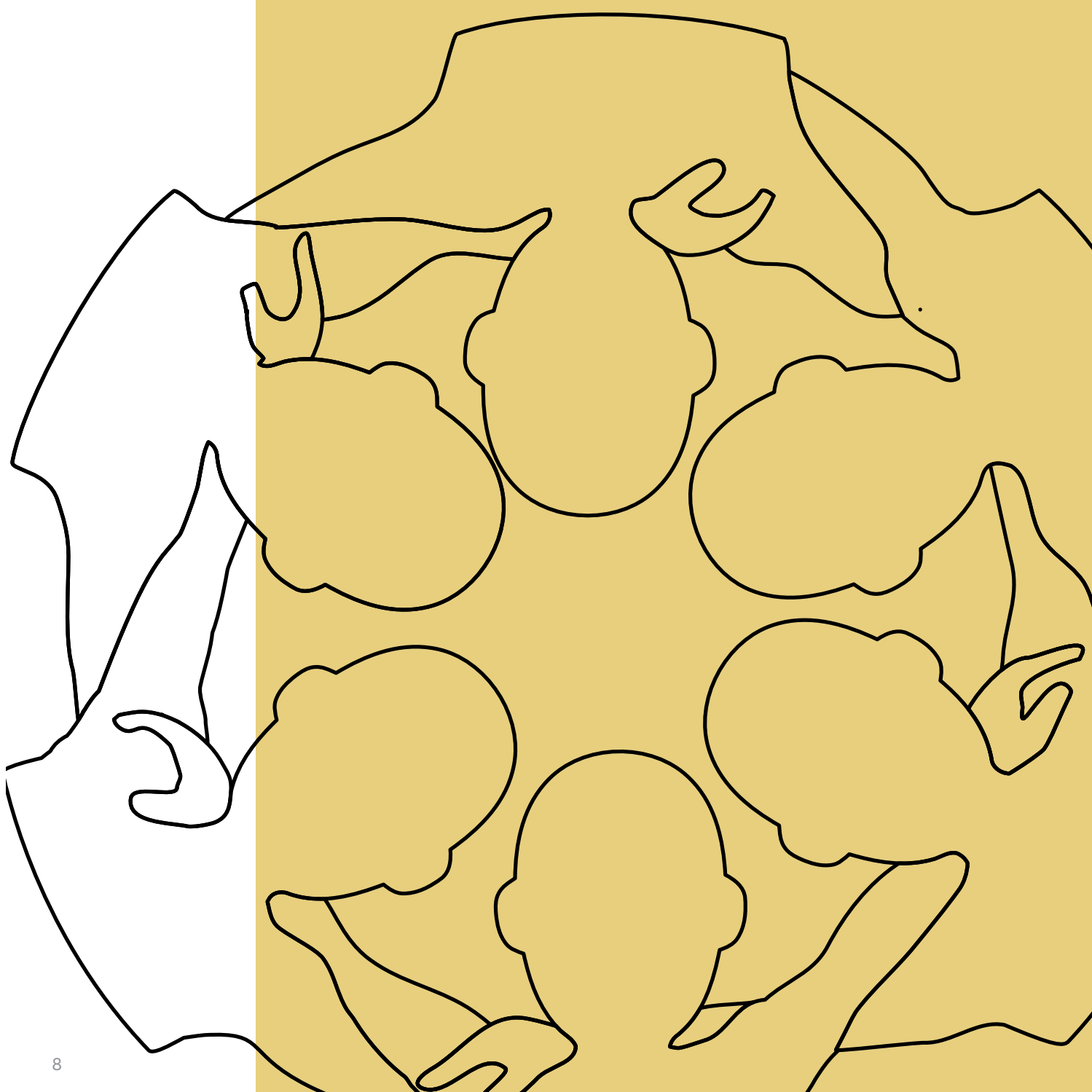
NOW

Now, in the midst of another global crisis, we revisit Ardanta's story. Guido Horst, Ardanta's current CEO, updates us on how Collective Leadership has continued to evolve over all these years. What changed for the better? What has been the impact of this ongoing journey?

BUSINESS RESULTS

The Collective Leadership approach, combined with LEAN Six Sigma operational process improvements, leads to innovations generated by greater collaboration between departments. People, regardless of their position or level of expertise, contribute to business areas outside their immediate scope. IT and business projects flourish with this approach, consequently having a positive impact on the bottom line. Collective Leadership is a strong foundation from which to excel.

PREFACE



It is the end of October 2021 when I talk to Guido Horst, who has been Ardanta's CEO for seven years now. I am interviewing him about Collective Leadership and Ardanta's success. This revised publication of the Ardanta case study celebrates 12 years of their Collective Leadership journey, which started in 2009 after the global financial crisis. During this period, three successive CEOs have embraced Collective Leadership and handed it on to each other. This is an incredible thought in itself: that a company can be so steadfast in its commitment.

One thing is clear to everyone who enters Ardanta's offices in Enschede: there is something magical about the place. You cannot put your finger on it – not really – and at the same time the magic is clearly felt as soon as you walk in. Ardanta's people live and breathe Collective Leadership, and consider it to be the foundation on which their success is built. Their unwavering faith in this approach is direct proof of how self-sustaining Collective Leadership is. PresenceAtWork is hardly involved in their journey any longer.

Guido is proud of how Ardanta has successfully navigated through the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. He says: "The fact that we as a company had been practising the basic principles of Collective Leadership for so long, and as second nature, enabled us to adapt quickly to the changing circumstances of the Corona crisis. Even in this extraordinary context, where we had to work from home overnight and for almost a year, we stayed strongly connected, supported by the foundation we built for years. Even though there was a screen in between us, people made sure we would look out for each other and were still focused on how we could give the best of ourselves to each other and our clients."

Looking at the future and what's emerging, Guido says that the digitalisation of our society has become the biggest challenge to keep everyone aligned and on board now. The world we have created is very fast-paced and advanced, and people are struggling to keep up with it. It is an irreversible situation, and we must adapt ourselves further to match the world we have created. As leaders, we have an obligation to invest in our people's readiness for the future, providing them with every opportunity to further develop themselves. We need to show them the way AND at the same time enable them to take ownership for themselves.

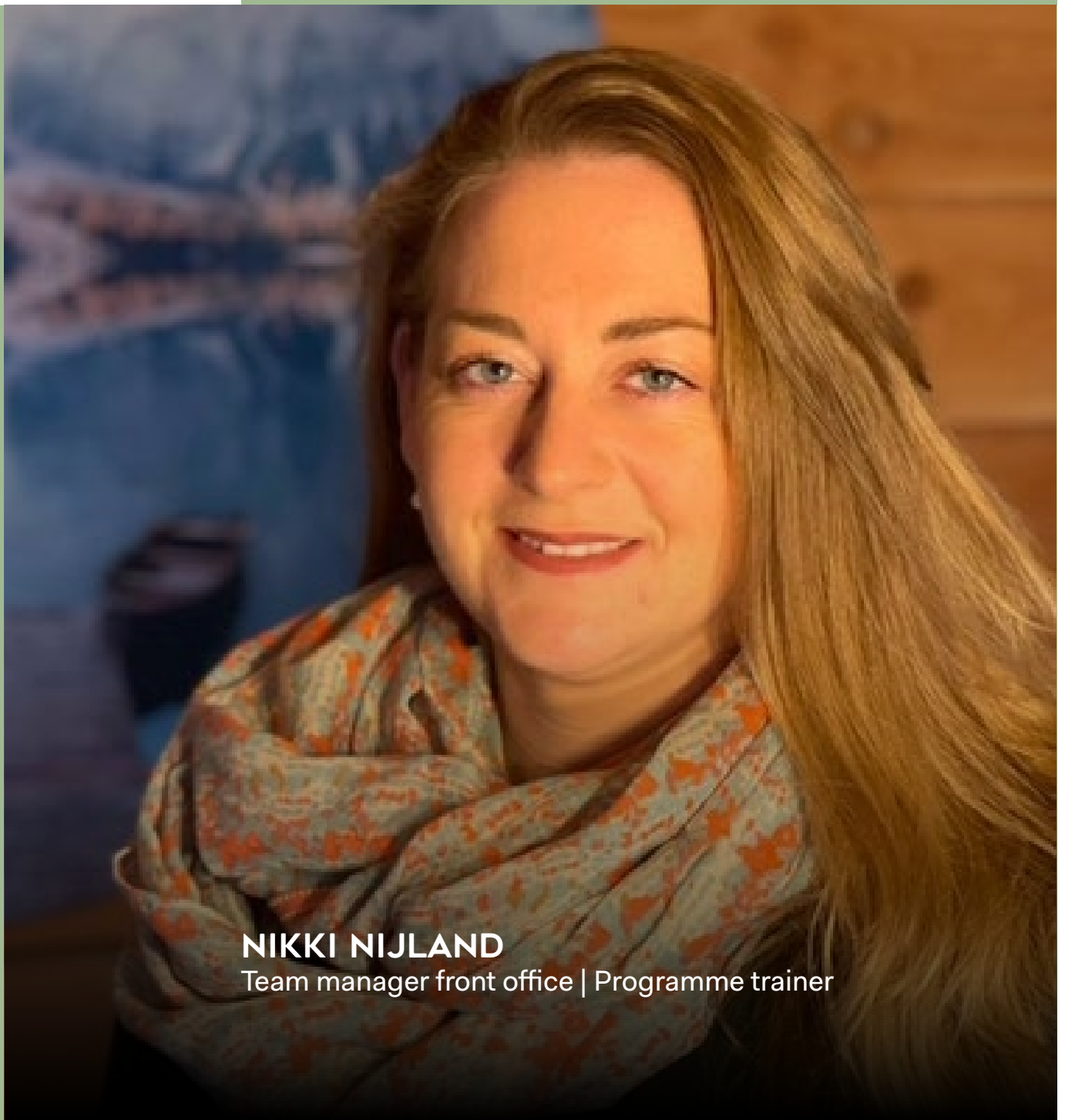
Embarking on the Collective Leadership journey means taking responsibility for where we are now, where we are going, who we are and who we need to become TOGETHER. It is only then that we can adapt to the demands of the emerging future!

It is so simple: when your people prosper, your organisation prospers - that is and will always be a given!



Roelien Bokxem, Founder PresenceAtWork
December 2021

THE ARDANTA STORY



NIKKI NIJLAND

Team manager front office | Programme trainer

IT WAS LIKE COMING HOME

Nikki Nijland knew that a profound change of culture was under way when she joined Ardanta as an employee at the start of 2015. She had been a contractor at the firm for just over a year and noticed that colleagues were much more comfortable than in the past about speaking up.

As soon as she was hired, she went on a programme in Collective Leadership and discovered what was behind the transformation in behaviour. This programme was not just for Ardanta's leaders. It was for everyone, and all employees had gone through it. At every level, people were taking responsibility and stepping up as leaders when the situation required.

Through the programme, Nijland learned how to make best use of her own combination of strengths, chief of which is creativity. "I've never worked in a company that allows you to express your own ideas so much," she explains. "You can say anything you want to say and it's OK, even if it's been tried before. It was like coming home. I can be who I am."

Nijland was a recent recruit to a groundbreaking model of leadership training that had been unrolled at Ardanta over the previous five years. On the surface, the company was an unlikely candidate for such innovation. It was – and still is today – part of a large insurance group, a.s.r. Nederland N.V., and specialises in funeral policies. It is located in Enschede, on the Dutch border with Germany, where people are known for a down-to-earth, no-nonsense attitude to life.

Yet it is here, as both leaders and employees attest, that a remarkable experiment has shifted the organisational culture from one of hierarchy and top-down control to empowerment and co-creation. Central to this shift is the Collective Leadership programme developed by Roelien Boksem, founder of PresenceAtWork.

Her programme emphasises the 'being' rather than the 'doing' of leadership, deepening participants' awareness of themselves, of the larger system of which they are part and of their impact on others. Through experiential learning - involving head, heart and gut - it encourages authentic self-expression, which creates trust within the group. In this environment of trust, the programme pushes people physically and emotionally to explore their limits and potential. By learning more about their own strengths and understanding each other's strengths, participants discover when to lead and when to follow, harnessing the collective intelligence of the group.

"The value of it is in the way people have changed - the way they think and behave together," says Guido Horst, current CEO. "We felt that, if we didn't make the change, we wouldn't be here 10 years from now."

POST-FINANCIAL CRISIS BEGINNINGS

As Horst makes clear, there was urgency behind the decision to embark on the programme. Ardanta and its parent a.s.r. had been part of Fortis, the financial group that collapsed in 2008. The Dutch state took over all of Fortis' Dutch operations. Ardanta, along with Europeesche, a leisure insurance business, continued as distinct brands within a.s.r. Nederland N.V.

Insurers faced big challenges: digital technology and the fallout from the global financial crisis were transforming the market. There was increased competition from new channels, growing price transparency through comparison websites, and general mistrust of the financial sector.

Three successive CEOs have steered Ardanta through this turbulent period. Each of them has played a key role in the development of Collective Leadership, taking the company to the next level.



“ *The value of it is in the way people have changed - the way they think and behave together. We felt that, if we didn't make the change, we wouldn't be here 10 years from now.* ”

GUIDO HORST
Ardanta CEO 2014-Present



A portrait of Robert Van der Schaaf, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit, a white shirt, and a blue tie with white polka dots. He has his arms crossed and is wearing a gold watch on his left wrist. The background is dark. A yellow vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

“

I saw the changes in the management team meetings. We started working together and asking each other for help.

”

ROBERT VAN DER SCHAAF
Ardanta CEO 2008-2012

CHANGING COURSE

When Robert van der Schaaf came in as CEO in 2008, he knew Ardanta had to change. “The business was pretty successful, but it had an outdated portfolio, it was sitting in a very outdated building, and it had an outdated distribution network,” he says. “We had to transform from a shareholder-only model to a multi-stakeholder model in which employees, shareholders and customers were in balance.”

Van der Schaaf, who now heads the non-life insurance business of a.s.r. Nederland N.V. in Utrecht, noticed that the management team at Ardanta were so busy spinning plates in the air that they could not see the changes in the marketplace. Something else was missing - the voice of employees, many of them with decades of service to the company. “We only ever discussed business topics, never ‘what do you feel?’ or ‘what’s your opinion?’ Everyone just followed the leader.”

He contacted Boksem, who had successfully coached a team for him at Fortis ASR, and asked if she could run a programme for Ardanta’s executives. Boksem came from the financial sector, having worked at Fortis, but had quit in 2007 because she could not see a future for herself in a combined Fortis-ABN Amro group. She knew that her strength lay in mobilising teams behind a shared purpose and she was keen to turn this into a business.

Most leadership programmes at the time focused on individual leadership - “who I need to be personally in order to have an impact and make a difference in the world,” explains Boksem. “My world view of systems-aware leadership had not, to my knowledge, been explored or implemented.”

Boksem saw the request from Ardanta as an opportunity to try out new ways of working, rather than to wait and hope that ‘the old normal’ of the pre-crisis era would return. Talking on a long drive from the south of the Netherlands to Enschede, she says: “In this remote part of the country, we’re prototyping the next phase for organisations.”

Collective Leadership is part of a wave of new thinking that is gathering force in response to the challenges of a complex, uncertain and fast-changing world. The initial approach combines both modern and ancient philosophies. Its intellectual core is influenced by the work of Peter Senge and colleagues (Presence), Joseph Jaworski (Synchronicity), Otto Scharmer (Theory U) and the Arbinger Institute (Leadership and Self-Deception).

Central to the training is PresenceAtWork’s Leader Being Strength Indicator® (LBSI), a proprietary assessment methodology that profiles an individual’s strongest combination of four body-based strengths, out of a possible nine, drawing on the disciplines of physical therapy and the martial arts.

Between late 2009 and early 2012, the Ardanta leadership team took part in a series of retreats with PresenceAtWork at carefully timed intervals, interspersed with individual and group coaching and integration sessions. The retreats progressed from understanding their personal strengths and impact to knowing their collective strengths and how to lead and innovate together.

"I saw the changes in the management team meetings," says Van der Schaaf. "We started working together and asking each other for help. I thought we were much more open and enthusiastic about the things we had to do in Ardanta. We were prouder of ourselves and the company."


He began to involve employees by asking them individually for their views on his actions as CEO. "At first they were afraid. The conditioning was that when you had to speak to the director, there's a problem. People would stand in the hallway waiting to be called in.

By the time I left the company, they were already in there, sitting at the table. The impact on the business was that we got much more relevant and detailed information about our customers from the employees who speak to them directly."

The physical workplace also changed. The management team moved into a room together instead of having separate offices. Out went the uniform grey, to be replaced by glass and bright colours. In the foyer, dining area and meeting spaces, there are yellow chairs and orange and red walls. On the walls are large posters with photos of individual employees and quotes from them. "Yesterday we were honest but a bit vague," says one. "From today, we're honest and always clear."





A portrait of Philippe Wits, a man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a dark blue blazer. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

“ *The impact of this programme was profound. I was touched to the core. I realised that I am OK, rather than ‘not sufficient’. It changed fundamentally the way I look at myself.*

”

PHILIPPE WITS

Ardanta CEO 2012-2014

GOING DEEPER AND WIDER

The temptation for new bosses is to make their mark by jettisoning the innovations of their predecessor. That did not happen at Ardanta. When Van der Schaaf handed over to Philippe Wits in 2012, he signed him up for the next Collective Leadership retreat. He knew that abandoning the programme would be very disruptive. “If Philippe had stopped it, the Management Team would have rebelled because they saw what it brought to them and to the company.”

Wits is very different from his predecessor, as their LBSI profiles show. Where Van der Schaaf is an analyst and decisive pioneer, Wits is a thinker and an inspiring transformer.

Impressed by the strong foundations already in place, Wits nonetheless felt that the company needed a greater understanding of what it stood for and why it existed. He also thought the management team were not yet ‘living’ Collective Leadership. There was not enough dialogue within the team and between managers and employees. “People were afraid of taking responsibility and pushed a lot of decision-making upwards.”

He arrived as a.s.r. was centralising all the group's funeral policies at Ardanta, increasing the number it handled sixfold to 4.2 million policies. The business was not prepared operationally to process them. Wits also saw that the model of growth based on selling new policies was out of date because younger people were less interested in funeral insurance. Ardanta needed to find new ways of connecting with customers. There was much to do.

At first, Wits was sceptical about Collective Leadership and, as a thinker, sought academic evidence of its effectiveness. Then he experienced it for himself. “Most leadership programmes I've done were geared to being smarter and more aware of leadership in a cognitive way,” he says. “When you return to the working environment, you immediately lose it. The impact of this programme was profound.

I was touched to the core. I realised that I am ok, rather than ‘not sufficient’. It changed fundamentally the way I look at myself. I am now also faster at seeing others for who they are, not what they are.”

He was so convinced that he decided to drive the concepts deep into the company. Every employee would go through the programme. Even more daringly, the people leading it would not be PresenceAtWork but the Management Team members themselves.

This ‘train-the-trainer’ approach is what PresenceAtWork now recommends as the best way to embed the concepts deeply inside an organisation.

This marked the turning point when the culture really began to change. For many, the prospect of the programme was unsettling. “There was a lot of anxiety, but also curiosity,” says Wits. “For some it was their first training of any kind. They would not be sleeping at home. They were told: Bring your sports shoes. There was fear about not knowing what it would be like.”

The Management Team, even those most committed to the programme, were equally nervous about becoming programme facilitators. Wits, too, had moments of doubt, but decided to follow his heart's intuition. “I said to them: I fully trust that you're able to do it. It's going to be bigger than we ever thought.”

Peter Slaghekke, head of operations, explains how he felt at the time. "My first reaction was: 'Can I do this? I haven't done this before!' But it was so exciting in the end that we couldn't wait to co-lead the next retreat. Teaching it helped me to get to know the programme better myself."

Slaghekke and his colleague Gerard van Zuilekom, head of sales and marketing, are still part of Ardanta's Management Team today. They talk about how it changed their perceptions of themselves and each other. Previously, Slaghekke had felt isolated in the executive team, wondering why his colleagues did not listen to his warnings about the likely impact of decisions. From their point of view, it seemed that he was always holding things up.

"My primary LBSI strength is 'thinking'," he says. "I felt better when my colleagues and I knew that, because previously we had had conflict. I use it all the time now. I ask for time to investigate, or I tell them: 'You're going too fast - help me look into this first.' It has enabled us to reach better decisions in the team."

Van Zuilekom agrees. His primary LBSI strength is 'sense of direction' - sensing what is coming and often taking split-second decisions. "My slogan from the programme is 'The slower you go, the faster you'll get there'," he says. "I'm more focused now, less fragmented, less stretched and more in the here-and-now than the past or future. I know the LBSI profiles of my colleagues and have more insight into the whole."

On top of his role at Ardanta, Van Zuilekom had been assigned to manage operations at Axent, an insurance company it recently acquired. In the past, he says, he was always in a hurry, and by the evening he felt drained of energy. "Now I was doing two jobs, but it did not feel pressured."

The impact on employees was similarly transformational, according to Wits. When they came back from the retreats, there was a very strong connection between them and a sense of calm. "They opened up with me in a good way, with a lot of emotion. They began to look at the management team as individual people. It put us all on a par with each other. People stepped up when needed. Almost 100% of decisions used to come to me. At the end of my tour, it was down to 20-30%."

Wits moved on to be director of the a.s.r. Life Insurance business and afterwards Chief of Digital & Disruption. He left a.s.r. in February 2019 to become CEO of the Lifetri Group. In all his new Management teams since Ardanta, Wits has been collaborating with PresenceAtWork on introducing Collective Leadership. "It is such a magical thing that happens when people really step into it," he says. "I'm proud that Ardanta is still living it. When I left, a lot of people cried. I said, 'I truly believe in you. You guys can do it on your own.' People were wondering if the new CEO would stop the programme. I told them they were responsible for bringing him into the system and he would have to adapt to it."



“ I’m more focused now. It makes me less fragmented, less stretched and more in the here-and-now than the past or future.

GERARD VAN ZUILEKOM
Head of sales and marketing

“ Teaching it together with my colleagues helped me to get to know the programme better myself.

PETER SLAGHEKKE
Head of operations



“ I’m keen to have everyone in, and I try to persuade people to be part of the process. Together we can do much more than we usually think we can.

”

GUIDO HORST
Ardanta CEO 2014-Present

MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM

He was right, although Guido Horst, who arrived as CEO in March 2014, did not need much persuading. He had spoken with Wits and Bokxem and was keen to explore further. Almost immediately he attended a retreat for 'Allies' of the Collective Leadership approach, in a forest setting in the heart of the Netherlands.

He had already been on many leadership courses, but most had not left positive memories. "You were supposed to brag about the size of your lease car, how many people you are leading, what your turnover is. It was a conquering-the-world approach," he says. "It never came near to my core, not the way this programme did."

For someone used to being 'in charge', the revelations for Horst were that there is nothing wrong with letting others step in and lead, and that co-creation is very valuable. He discovered that his primary LBSI strength is 'integration', bringing harmony and inclusiveness. "I'm keen to have everyone in, and I try to persuade people to be part of the process. Together we can do much more than we usually think we can."

This does not mean that everyone survived the changes. In the past, Ardanta represented a job for life. But there have been a few departures in recent years. "You have to recognise that not every employee is able to meet the new standards," Horst says.

His role has been to keep up the momentum, especially as Ardanta grows. "There's a risk that somewhere on the road we lose what we learned. We discuss this a lot. You need to reinforce the message. This is an opportunity for me."

To this day, retreats are organised to onboard new employees and team managers have been trained to lead them through the programme and integrate it in daily practice.

Horst and Bokxem took everyone away on a 'Travel Day' in June 2015, where they experienced each department as if it were a country, with its own struggles and challenges. This exercise led to ideas for improvements, including 'knowledge lunches', where departments take it in turns to explain to the rest of the company what they do.

Employees and managers also use the language of Collective Leadership in their daily activities to remind each other 'to be present', 'to co-create' and 'to step in' or 'step out'.

HOW THE BUSINESS HAS BENEFITED



LOOKING BACK: 2009-2021

It has been over a decade since the Collective Leadership programme was first introduced in Ardanta.. After all that time, what has been the benefit for Ardanta? What has been the measurable impact of this ongoing journey? We asked Guido Horst about it in the fall of 2021, seven years into his role as CEO.

"Collective Leadership still is an incredible part of our culture. Even now, 12 years down the line," says Horst. To illustrate this, he adds: "It is our aim to support our employees to really be self-assured. To us, this means that each employee knows what they are good at and what they have to contribute. Our focus is to encourage each and every one to step forward with their talent. And at the same time, to recognise when you need to step back, when someone else's talent is required. This is the basis of Collective Leadership: knowing when to lead and when to follow."

Initially, the programme was focused on the Management Team. The positive change in the business climate generated by the leaders was already palpable but it gained momentum when all of the Ardanta employees went through the Collective Leadership programme in 2014. The impact of the programme became more tangible when everyone started taking responsibility for initiating solutions themselves.

Horst continues: "What we found right from the start is that PresenceAtWork's Collective Leadership programme – supported by the LBSI profiles – is such an easy way to provide insights about the talent you have on board and how to leverage it. Collective Leadership underscores that we are in it together and that everyone's contribution and input is valuable. And that shows: I would say employees at Ardanta are more confident to step forward and take responsibility. For example, when it comes to taking on a new role in a project. They feel safe to step forward, because we know we are in it together and that we've got each other's back. It is safe for everyone to take a risk."

Horst explains that overall employee engagement is the way for him to measure the impact of collective leadership, and whether the company is on track with it or not. "Positive employee engagement is a good predictor of how well we will do at the bottom line. When employees are happy, they are doing well in their job and it is then that they are performing at their best. Obviously, that has an impact on the bottom line of the organisation. We measure employee engagement with a yearly Denison scan.

"For years in a row now, our scan has been the highest within a.s.r., our parent company. Our scores are incredible and, as I have been told by Denison themselves, our results are the highest also in comparison with their worldwide database of thousands of companies: our staff are simply super engaged! I am very proud of that. While Ardanta has not dispensed with hierarchy altogether, implementing Collective Leadership has led to the emergence of self-managing teams and that really shows in the results of the Denison scan. All in all, Ardanta's approach is very much in line with the principles outlined in Frederic Laloux's book, Reinventing Organizations, on self-managed teams."

One example of self-managed teams is how employees from account management, customer service and marketing departments, all of whom deal with external insurance brokers, worked together without input from the Management Team to create an 'intermediary desk', providing these brokers with a better service.

Another measurable result that Horst connects to the success of their Collective Leadership journey is the low rate of unwanted staff turnover. He elaborates: "Part of our Collective Leadership strategy is that we really invest a lot in attracting and retaining employees. The Collective Leadership principles are always an important part of our onboarding programme and people immediately love the approach and want to be a part of it."

One unexpected outcome of the programme may be the number of people who are investing in their education by attending all sorts of trainings – work-related, or something that simply inspires them. Collective Leadership promotes taking care of your own career and life path. This requires continuous development and it is an employee's responsibility to make sure that that they are able to contribute with their talent and expertise. The number of employees attending some sort of education is increasing year by year. Also, the percentage of people who get promoted within the company is growing.

"These sorts of developments make me very proud as they show how our people are behind the wheel of their own career and future readiness," says Horst. "Collective Leadership is not a free ride in that respect: everyone has to add value. This is your responsibility and no one else's. If you don't add value, we cannot keep you. In that regard, Collective Leadership is also very real, and can be tough. You need to keep up with the pace and stay aligned with the whole."

Another success factor is that Collective Leadership perfectly complements LEAN Six Sigma's approach for continuous improvements. While Collective Leadership emphasises the 'being' side of leadership, LEAN Six Sigma focuses on the 'doing'. LEAN requires people to step back and look at their work, to generate a broader view of where improvements can be made, which then strengthens the whole. Under the LEAN approach, employees are encouraged to speak up about blockages in the system, and in Collective Leadership they are encouraged to collaborate better and leverage strengths, in service of more efficient processes to which everyone has to commit themselves. Both LEAN and Collective Leadership place responsibility as low as possible in the organization. You need both, and applying them in parallel makes the success groundbreaking!

"The other thing that is important is that at Ardanta we expect you to make mistakes and that sometimes things fail or fall into a heap," Horst continues. "We consider employees too risk-averse if they are not making any mistakes. Our IT and Business projects are flourishing because of this approach. On top of that we expect people, regardless of their position or level of expertise, to contribute to business areas outside their immediate work scope. This is when front office and finance departments start working together, for example, to analyse client behaviour and come up with new ideas to retain policies, such as closer contact with customers and easier ways for them to pay. Collective Leadership and LEAN build on each other. There wasn't one single person who could bring the solution; we needed everyone to step in."

MEASUREMENT: KEY BUSINESS DRIVERS

Over the years things changed dramatically at Ardanta through the Collective Leadership programme and approach. Many parameters demonstrate the success.

Horst says that the following business drivers are examples of how to measure the positive effect of the approach:

- Productivity;
- Number of complaint calls from customers;
- Achieving targets on responding to incoming calls;
- Staff absenteeism;
- Number of employees promoted;
- Employee engagement;
- Net promotor score (NPS); and
- Recruitment costs/savings.

CAN COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP WORK ANYWHERE?

Ardanta today is a medium-sized company with about 200 people. Its size has made it easier to impact every employee relatively quickly. Could the Collective Leadership approach work in larger companies, or in businesses with bigger egos at the top?

Horst thinks it could. "The concepts in Collective Leadership are important for big companies as well. If the board feels an urge for change, it can be rolled out in a large corporate environment. But there are some risks. The bigger the company, the more non-believers need to be motivated to take part."

Bokxem says the first step, for organisations of any size, is to work individually with the most senior leader in the leadership team. That may be the top executive or the managing director of a business unit, which can be very similar to working with the CEO of a company. "The most senior leaders need to stand solidly like a tree, in all their magnificence, to truly lead their people into the future." PresenceAtWork offers a specific fast-track programme called Conscious Evolution Leadership to start the journey.

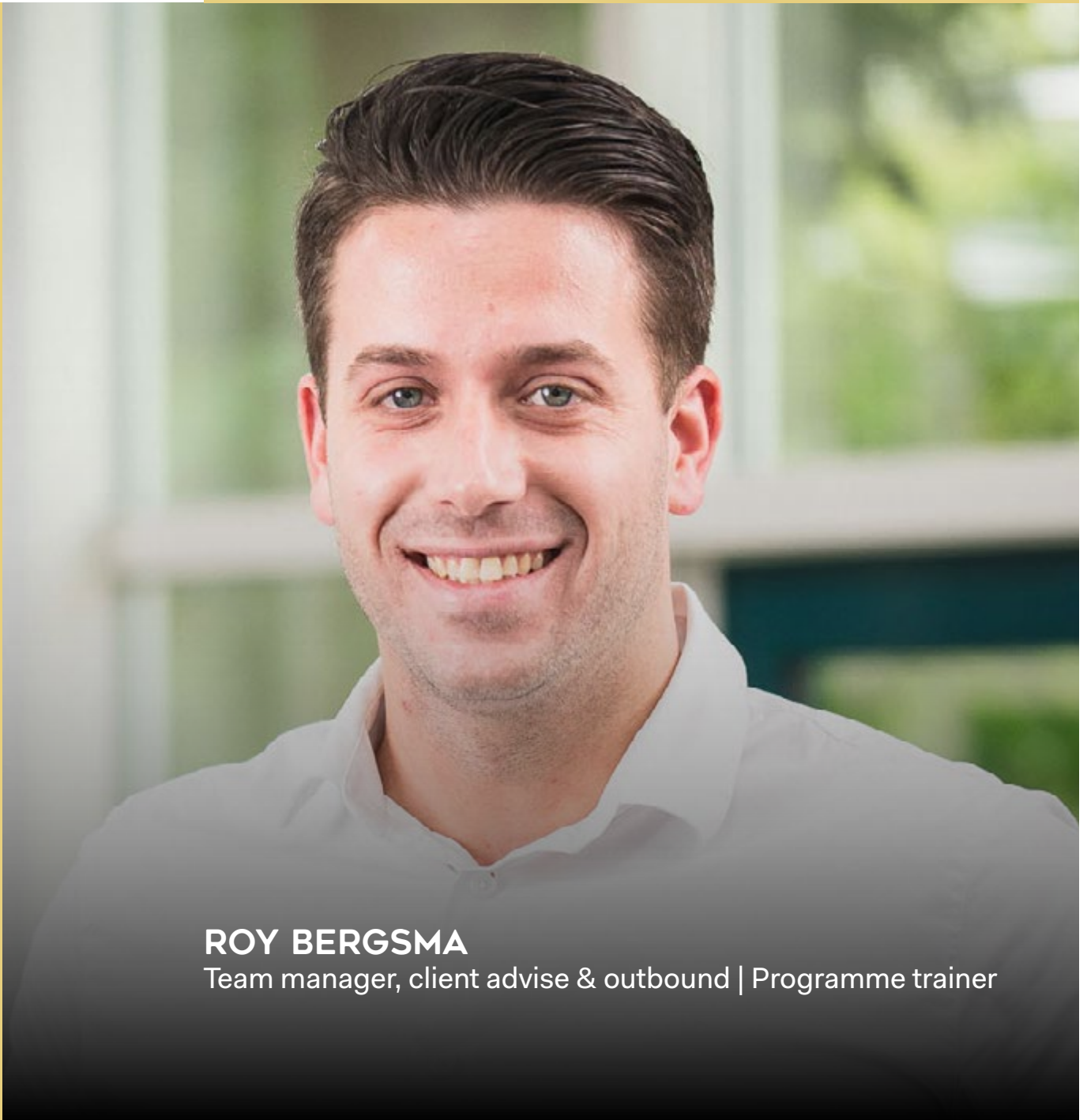
The human impact of this work was very clear to Nikki Nijland from the start. In her front-office role, she not only enjoyed the increased collaboration with other teams, but also knew better where her own boundaries were. "When people ask me to do things, I can say: No, this is not the moment."

Aware of her own impact on colleagues and the business, she was ambitious for a more senior role. "Knowing my strengths makes me more effective in searching for new possibilities," she says. "And I think my way of listening more to the customer and thinking of the possibilities for increasing satisfaction makes our service at Ardanta more effective."

Today, Nikki is one of the team managers of the front-office department and a trainer of the Collective Leadership programme for new employees.

She concludes: "Being a facilitator for a few years now made me understand my own profile better and makes it easier to coach other employees. It gives more value to the essence of Collective Leadership and my own team at Ardanta. Being a team manager in an environment of collective leaders gives me strength. We are in it together and are creating a pleasant space."

WHAT IT MEANS TO ME AS A LEADER



ROY BERGSMA

Team manager, client advise & outbound | Programme trainer

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As a facilitator, it is cool for me to see that the programme is very impactful and gives people insights into each other's strengths. The retreat setting is inspiring, as it takes people away from the daily workplace, out of their comfort zone and into nature. It is powerful to see how the programme creates strong connections among participants. In daily practice, I see themes emerging from the programme. What is your strength? And how does that strength fit into the team? How do we ensure that we function as well as possible as a team? By knowing each other's strengths, you also know how to respond to this, as a team and as a manager.

”

ROY BERGSMA

I used to feel insecurity about whether I was a good leader of my team. I got more confidence to be who I am and that that is good enough. My primary role as a leader is to be there for people and make sure they have the space to develop themselves.

MARJOLEIN TABOIS | Former team manager, front office (2014-2020)

Being a team manager in an environment of collective leaders gives me strength. We are in it together and are creating a pleasant space.

NIKKI NIJLAND | Team manager, front office | Programme trainer

When we were in the woods on the retreat, I realised how long it took for me to ask for help. I like to help others but I don't let people help me. It was a light bulb moment.

ROBERT VAN DER SCHAAF | Former CEO (2008-2012)

It gave me more ambition. We had the coaching and afterwards I became a team leader. Knowing more about my team's LBSI profiles helps me to coach them and look at what they want to reach. I use my story as an example.

MARJAN TEN HOVE | Campaign manager | Programme trainer

I've learned that an idea is not important because it's attached to me, and that it's always better to co-create. I don't spend so much time now thinking about where my career is going. When the output is good, the career follows."

GERARD VAN ZUILEKOM | Head of sales and marketing

I never had any heroes. I respect a lot of people. I don't want to be a hero. People become very dependent, and I believe they can do it by themselves.

PHILIPPE WITS | Former CEO (2012-2014)



ABOUT COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

ROELIEN BOKXEM
Founder of PresenceAtWork

LOOKING BACK: 2009-2021

Roelien Boksem is the founder of PresenceAtWork, the consulting firm based in the Netherlands that developed Collective Leadership. Boksem previously worked in the financial sector at Fortis Bank. She leverages many years of experience as a certified coach and experiential facilitator, combined with leading-edge research and insights into embodied and systemic leadership. Time to look back at more than a decade of Collective Leadership and ask her some questions!

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

Collective Leadership can be defined as an embodied, systemic and agile way of leading together. It refers to individuals having a primary focus on the shared goals of the organisation, while still maintaining full accountability for their own functional responsibilities.



We use the metaphor of a flock of geese. Geese fly in a V-formation, which protects them from the wind. There is no hierarchy. Each takes it in turn to be the leader, to be in the middle, or to take up the rear, and they shift and re-pattern their system according to the needs of the moment. The whole flock is connected and stays in formation, even as individual positions change. They sense collectively when to move, when to change direction, or when to stop, in tune with the wider system around them. They all stay focused, and encourage each other by honking. Like them, we need the whole system in order to be at our full potential. We are only as strong as our weakest link.

In the Collective Leadership approach, the (team) members recognise that they each have a key role to play in contributing their personal talents, strengths and insights to the collective task. This requires the ability to think and behave with systems awareness, knowing one's own particular strengths, what every other member of the team can contribute, and how to leverage all the different talents together to maximise performance.

There is no room for ego or hierarchy in true Collective Leadership. Connecting together around shared purpose, each team member holds the organisation's goals as the most important and maintains a disciplined focus on achieving those goals together.

WHAT LED YOU TO DEVELOP THIS APPROACH?

The global financial crisis caused so much suffering in organisations that it propelled me into action. I had left Fortis Bank a year before the actual crisis kicked in, but I was still in touch with all that fear from a distance, and it activated me. I had a huge sense of urgency and with great determination prepared myself to lead a cultural transformation with them.

From my experience of working in corporate for so long, I knew that leaders at all levels long for their true selves to come out. My source of inspiration was a personal dream of how things could be different. If only people knew how to connect to who they are and what they are here for. And from this place, to start collaborating in service of the whole. At the time of this dream, there was no evidence of how this could be accomplished at the level of a whole organisation. Something else was needed. Solutions from a deeper place of awareness than leaders were able to bring forth at that time and with more focus on their ability to feel and handle their emotions in a different way.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO DEVISE THE PROGRAMME? AND HAS IT EVOLVED?

It took two years to develop, design, prototype and test the first deployments of the core four-retreat programme with our early clients. We are deepening our understanding all the time and taking it in new directions in response to client requests: for example, employee programmes, train-the-trainer solutions and additional retreats to support leaders in maintaining Collective Leadership, especially through periods of disruptive change.

WHAT ARE THE KEY FEATURES OF THE PROGRAMME?

Three principles are the foundation of everything we do. The first is balancing appropriately between the 'being' of leadership and the 'doing' of leadership. The second is leading from a whole systems perspective, harnessing the collective intelligence, instead of trying to be a heroic 'leader on the rock'. The third is leading by sensing the emerging future rather than relying only on past experience.

We create experiential, body-based learning, bypassing the head wherever possible. Our Leader Being Strength Indicator® ("LBSI") proprietary assessment method brings in body intelligence from the start. Using physical energy, people rapidly gain a sense of how we are all different, with different strengths, and of when we need to step forward, and when to step back. We don't teach or lecture. We use dialogue and participation. We assume a lot of knowledge within the group that we can all build on. This creates involvement and confidence. We need confidence for people to step forward and take ownership.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME PRINCIPLES

Three principles underpin PresenceAtWork's systems approach to leadership:

- 1 Focus on the 'Being' as Opposed to the 'Doing' of Leadership**
The emphasis is on exploring the authentic being that we are at our core, versus the traditional focus on what leaders are supposed to be doing.
- 2 Leading by Capitalising on Collective Intelligence**
It is no longer possible for one person to know everything: leaders need to be able to tap into the wisdom of the larger system and lead from there.
- 3 Learning from the Emerging Future as Opposed to Learning from the Past**
Leaders need to grasp the power of being fully present in order to see with fresh eyes, read the signals of change and discover the 'emerging future'.

LEADER BEING STRENGTH INDICATOR (LBSI)®

It is time to make a shift from our primary focus on the brain: recent findings in neuroscience inform us that we actually have three intelligence centres in our body: the one in the head that we are all familiar with, one in the heart and one in the gut. Awakening our awareness of these three centres gives us the potential to access the power of our full body intelligence. PresenceAtWork's Leader Being Strength Indicator (LBSI)® develops this awareness. Working with head, heart and gut, leaders gain insight into their personal strengths and where to focus for contribution and personal growth. Alignment between these intelligence centres results in increased awareness and sharper thinking. For the system as a whole, LBSI provides a common framework within which team members can understand and appreciate one another, and gain insight into their combined strengths and challenges. LBSI supports each person to be at his or her most effective and most fulfilled, better able to collaborate within the system to achieve shared goals.

IS THIS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME VERY DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS?

As far as we understand it, yes. In 2011, the Center for Creative Leadership in Colorado already positioned Collective Leadership as a future trend and suggested that no one yet knew how to train these complex competencies. By 2012, we had already trained three executive teams in our full four-retreat programme. These organisations actively practised Collective Leadership and were engaged in planning to roll it out to all their employees. When we contacted CCL about this, they expressed amazement and indicated that, in their experience, our work was breaking new ground in the marketplace. They have since interviewed us and cited our work.

Now, looking back at these quotes, it may seem an awful long time ago and you might think they are outdated. Much to my regret I must say that, even though companies have reinvented themselves hugely, – with the help of LEAN Six Sigma, Agile, Scrum and other practices – their ability to transform themselves from within and to grow the BEING side of their leadership is still grossly underdeveloped. The Collective Leadership programme as it stands today is as leading-edge as it was over a decade ago, with still little to no competition in the marketplace. There is not much out there that compares.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT INSIGHT FROM A DECADE OF IMPLEMENTING COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

My most significant insight is that we demonstrated again and again that we can dramatically change the corporate climate with our approach within a year. Once you know what you are doing, even people transformation is easy. Things are complicated until someone makes it simple and leads the way with it. This is what I've heard repeatedly over the past decade: that people cannot believe how simple yet powerful our practices are. And how fulfilling and easy it is to then sustain the approach. Leadership teams are hungry for relationships based on respect, appreciation, honesty, openness and authenticity. It is far more joyful and fulfilling to be part of achieving whole-organisation success than to enjoy personal ('hero') success. People are able and willing to be far more creative and innovative, and to take risks when there is full permission in the system for breakthrough thinking and honest, open communication.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN ON YOUR PROGRAMME OFTEN SOUND AS IF THEY HAVE TAKEN A DOSE OF HAPPY PILLS. HOW COME?

Our approach touches on the deepest and most urgent quest of our times, the search for meaning and sustainability. That is what makes this journey so impressively beautiful. The programme is personally very fulfilling and empowering. People experience for themselves how they can overcome limiting beliefs and achieve things that they previously thought impossible. In addition to their greatly increased confidence, people grow in their self-awareness, make exciting discoveries about themselves, and experience the pleasure of being acknowledged by others for their qualities. They discover the joy of co-creating and co-leading with others, and what a relief that is from thinking that you have to know everything and be able to do everything by yourself.

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a blue button-down shirt and black-rimmed glasses, is smiling and adjusting his glasses with both hands. He is standing in front of a light-colored, textured wall. The text 'ABOUT COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP' is overlaid in large white letters.

ABOUT COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

JORN WOLFS
Partner at PresenceAtWork

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022 AND BEYOND

Jorn Wolfs, partner at PresenceAtWork, is responsible for the daily operations. Wolfs, also based in the Netherlands, finished a Tax Law degree in 2010 and worked as an international tax advisor for a number of years. He participated in the programme in 2011 and was profoundly impacted by the experience. He decided on a full career change in 2018, also becoming a partner.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

To me, Collective Leadership is a new way of leading and co-creating in organisations that enables people to step into their confidence and power. When people discover and connect to their talents and strengths, they naturally want to step forward and contribute to the collective whole.

Using our whole-body intelligence, head, heart and gut, it increases our systems awareness and helps people connect to themselves and each other in a meaningful way. It helps to feel your potential through your body, experience how to be energised, and know when to lead or follow.

It is about creating the ideal circumstances for the collective whole – so that each individual can flourish, and people transformation happens. Collective Leadership is a proven methodology to support people and organisations on their journey to long-term culture change. It empowers people to let go of old ways, reinvent themselves, raise consciousness and adopt crucial new qualities: leading from our hearts and increasing our systems awareness.

HOW DOES COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP HELP WITH LETTING GO OF CONTROL AND TRANSITIONING POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

Collective Leadership contributes in a significant way to a company culture where everyone is seen and heard for their being and contribution to the collective whole. This might be our most significant need as human beings: the need to belong and to be seen and heard for who you are and appreciated for it.

Once this need is fulfilled, people feel safe and encouraged to step forward and to start to lead. It is the way to delegate responsibilities to lower levels in the organisation, challenging people to contribute in their own way with their unique talents and passion.

HOW IS COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP ANOTHER WORD FOR INCLUSION?

Collective Leadership helps leaders to become more inclusive. As they open up to who they are, learning to really appreciate themselves, they start to appreciate others for who they are as well. You need to know yourself, to see how others are different. It is then that you learn to see the value in that, understanding when you need to step in or to enable someone else to step in.

Ardanta's story features in a book published in February 2020 about creating inclusive organisations, titled INdivisible. In an interview in the book, Ardanta's current CEO Guido Horst explains it beautifully: "When you are OK with who you are, others feel safe to open up as well. It creates a tremendous amount of trust when people feel they can be authentic in their expression. This is how you build an organisation based on unity and inclusion."



INdivisible

Radically rethinking inclusion for
sustainable business results
ALISON MAITLAND & REBEKAH STEELE

WHAT'S NEXT FOR COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP?

Our recently developed programme, Conscious Evolution Leadership, will function as an umbrella overarching all our Collective Leadership work. In our format for people transformation as shown in the visual on the next page, it will be an important pre-requisite for implementing Collective Leadership in organisations. It is the ideal starting point to pioneer a new way of being and ensure transformation happens in the right soil.

Conscious Evolution Leadership is focused on senior leaders in organisations, to raise their consciousness and install what we call Love-OS - to stand like a magnificent tree, radiant and well rooted, whatever the weather. With their actions initiated from a purer source, they create the ideal climate - the 'safe holding container' - for their people to follow. Nourished by senior leaders who have made the head-heart integration, corporate soil becomes very fruitful for Collective Leadership to flourish.

Collective Leadership will remain our core offering to enable large-scale, long-term people transformation and culture change in the 'ecosystem' of organisations at all levels. The programme is being implemented in client organisations through our 'pay it forward' approach, with the key leaders co-leading the transformation, based on train-the-trainer modules and licensing models. We will increase focus on paying it forward beyond your own organisation, for cross-industry inspiration and synergies.

Our proprietary embodied LBSI assessment methodology is at the root of everything we do. It will remain the foundation under all our people transformation work, making sure that people at all levels of the organisation are solid and comfortable in their own skin, well grounded, learning to access their whole-body intelligence and able to leverage their talents with others.



CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION LEADERSHIP **OVERARCHING UMBRELLA**

Senior leaders installing *LOVE-OS* to stand like a tree
and create a safe holding container & perfect climate

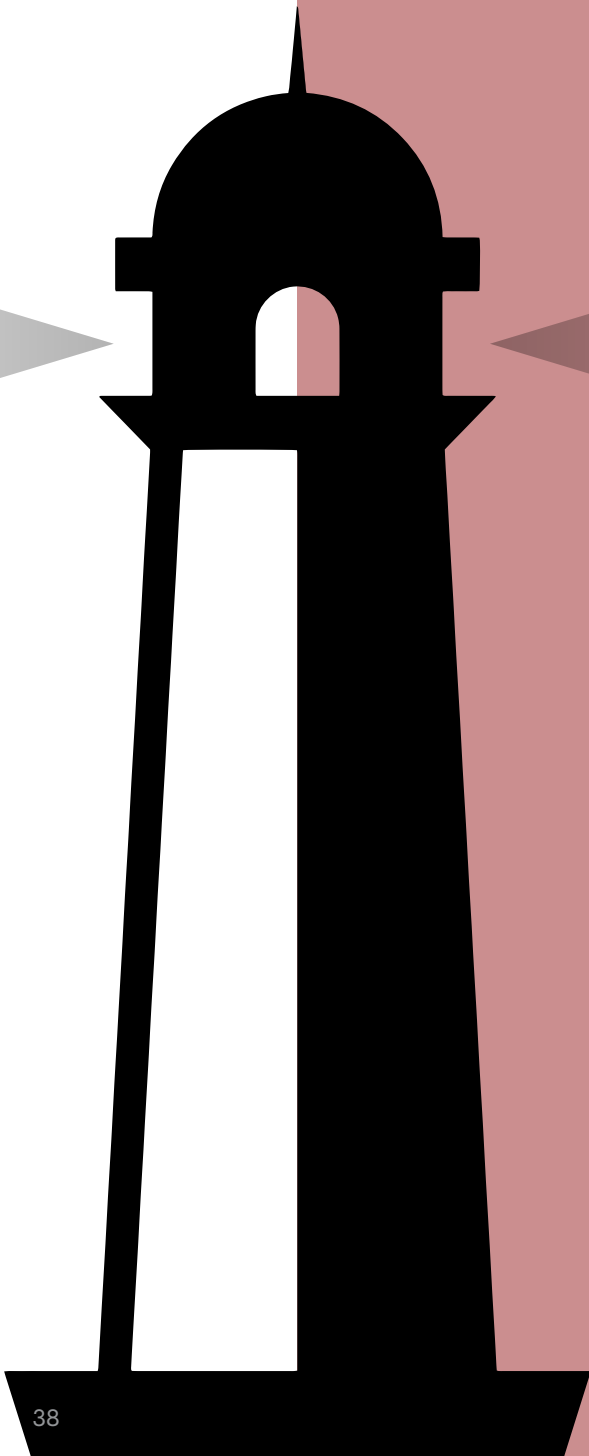
COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP **CORE PROGRAMME**

Ensuring large-scale people transformation
& culture change in the 'ecosystem'

LEADER BEING STRENGTH INDICATOR **UNDERLYING FOUNDATION**

Providing roots for a solid basis for people at all levels

THE FUTURE IS NOW



THE TIME FOR THIS HAS COME

Wherever we look, we see organisations whose employees are unhappy or just plain disengaged. In these conditions it is not possible for people to perform at their full potential. We longed for something else, something more fulfilling. It sparked us on our journey. This passion is as alive as it was then.

More than a decade on, we have intentionally invested in an approach where our trainers, coaches, mentors and facilitators are active within our client base. We believe in 'paying it forward' and being strongly embedded within our client base, as partners and co-creators.

Our leaders have jobs to do, and they are living and breathing Collective Leadership on a daily basis: ready to teach it, role model it and take it forward with us across their organisations and industries.

We believe this approach has been essential to create the solid foundations needed to support and role model these processes of change in communities of work and life. For us not to be the external 'expert' – NO! On the contrary, to be the catalyst that empowers you to become the expert yourself, ready to take it forward and sustain it yourself. Like Ardanta has been doing.

We do not pretend that Collective Leadership is easy. As PresenceAtWork has developed, we have sought to practise systems-aware leadership behaviours in our own organisation at all times. We have seen and experienced for ourselves how integrating systems thinking and behaviour with embodied leadership practices opens the door for new levels of innovation and creativity. This is both exhilarating and humbling.

For a while now, and accelerated by Covid-19, the world has been moving from a sole focus on rational thinking, knowledge and chronology to a more dynamic setting where the need to rationalize everything has become secondary.

We have moved from the information era (head brain) into the transformation era (heart brain). Traditionally, the heart and its emotional aspect are seen and valued more as a feminine quality, where the practical mind is seen as more masculine. Having entered the transformation era means that we are making way for a higher state, a more harmonious version of reality that is more feminine.

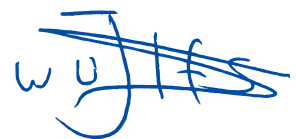
Companies have the biggest leap to make in this new era, as they have been and still are very focused on linear "left-brain" thinking. At the same time, since corporate is so well embedded in society and touches the lives of many people, it also has a crucial role in guiding the way for humanity.

With over a decade of experience of implementing our concepts, we can say that we have developed a methodology that will support an organisation to transform itself in two to three years. The key question for leaders today is how to grasp this opportunity and what would be the right first step for their organisation.

As this case study demonstrates, there is a way of changing how people feel - and therefore how they perform. The time for this has truly come!



Roelien Bokxem



Jorn Wolfs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



PresenceAtWork would like to acknowledge the many people whose vision and inspiration have supported us from the early days and for many years now. We appreciate your encouragement and faith in us. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the following people:

All the pioneers who agreed to be interviewed for this case study. These leaders have become important ambassadors of our work, and for that we express our appreciation.

Robert van der Schaaf, a pioneering CEO who knew that a different way of leading was needed and was willing to commit himself and his teams to an as yet untried and untested leadership approach that would demand his investment over a period of 12 months.

Philippe Wits and Guido Horst, who took our work forward from its prototyping stages and who decided that Collective Leadership needed to be taken down the line to all employees. They worked with us tirelessly in the deployment of our first employee programmes.

Ardanta's current Management Team members who intentionally choose to continue with Collective Leadership, committing over and over to it each year. Thank you Gerard van Zuilekom, Peter Slaghekke, Ralph Verploegh, Evelien Greven. And thank you again, Guido Horst.

Alison Maitland, who dedicated time to taking a deep dive into our work, experiencing the programme and writing the initial version of this paper.

Our early partners, who saw the potential of Collective Leadership right from the start and pioneered with us for many years. Their commitment led them to invest significant personal time and resources stepping into something entirely new.

My initial co-founder Jane Weber in Australia, who has been an important mentor and a real inspiration for me in becoming the strategic leader that I have grown into these days. I am also appreciative and thankful to Jane for the large body of work we developed together.

Mark Schipper in the Netherlands, who has been an important partner and was for a long time the single independent LBSI practitioner, besides initial co-founders Jane and myself.

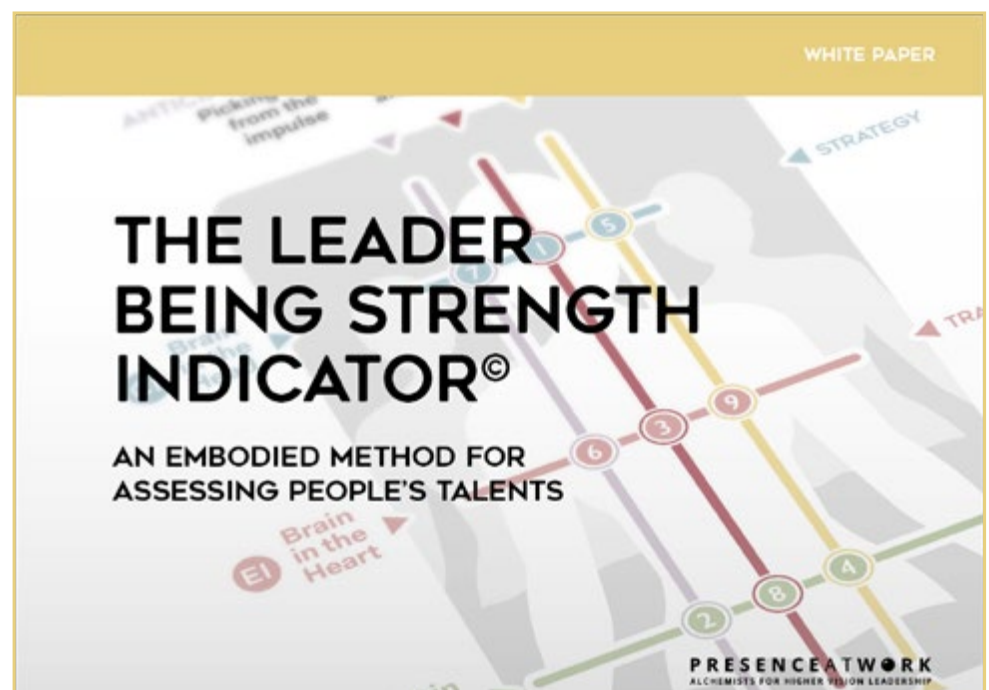
Melissa O'Mara in the USA, who has been a dedicated partner for many years. Right from the start in 2009, she shared our vision and was very committed to introducing LBSI in corporate America at a time when concepts of embodied leadership were new and little understood.

Roelien Bokxem
Founder PresenceAtWork



PRESENCEATWORK
ALCHEMISTS FOR HIGHER VISION LEADERSHIP

OTHER PUBLICATIONS



A NEW MODEL FOR ORGANISATIONS

Ardanta's employee-owned Collective Leadership

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www.presenceatwork.com

PresenceAtWork B.V.

Smalle Haven 161
5211 TK 's-Hertogenbosch
The Netherlands
+31 (0)6 20 36 14 45
+31 (0)7 38 00 00 31
info@presenceatwork.com